



# Dear Grumpy Boss

**Author:** *Sonia Saint*

**Category:** Romance, Billionaire Romance, Adult

**Description:** I've been in love with my boss for five years. And he's never once looked at me.

Zayn Grayson is brilliant, powerful, and way out of my league—not to mention my brother's best friend. But after half a decade of being invisible to the man I crave, I quit.

Except the second I hand in my notice, Zayn finally sees me.

He demands to know why I'm leaving. Won't let it go until I tell him the truth.

So I do. I ask him for a goodbye kiss.

I don't expect him to actually say yes.

I definitely don't expect a storm to trap us in a hotel suite.

But Zayn doesn't see a blackout. He sees an opportunity.

One night to make my fantasies come true.

When morning comes, I have a choice to make—walk away like I planned... or let my grumpy, possessive boss convince me to stay forever.

Dear Grumpy Boss is a steamy, instalove, age-gap, office romance featuring a curvy heroine, a forced proximity blackout, and a billionaire who refuses to let her go.

**Total Pages (Source):** 47

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

Sasha

Deciding to quit my job is the hardest decision I've ever made.

The uncharacteristically sunny February day teases me as I walk around the deserted Seattle downtown after picking up burritos from a food truck. As if the city's granting me a sunny day, tempting me to stay.

I love this city and my job and having to quit makes tears prickle behind my eyes.

But I also love my boss.

Not like I love the cherry blossoms that take over UW campus in spring or my grandmother's crispy potato fries or even the smoky, dark donuts that are my only sin. No, this love is all-consuming.

I'm head over heels in love with my boss.

Zayn Grayson, yes, that famous tech billionaire and adventure-sports dude is my older brother's best friend, my first and only crush, and my boss.

I've been working for him since I was a pimply-faced eighteen-year-old. The acne is gone, thank God.

Now, five years later, with my world limited to one best friend, one cat, one carefully curated e-book library—which includes a million book boyfriends—the crush from my teens has bloomed.

Into a boatload of pining after a man who still sees me as his best friend's shy, bookish, ugly-ass younger sister who he gave a job to. Out of loyalty toward his friend.

Oh, did I mention I'm known as Ugly Shetty around the office? Given my last name is Shetty, it works, I guess. The first time I heard it, I googled the show Ugly Betty, then binge-watched it.

Betty's hardly ugly and neither am I.

It doesn't help that I wear thick glasses—anything remotely near my eyes freaks my tear ducts out. Add in my thick, frizzy hair I throw into a ponytail and my gap-toothed smile, you get the picture.

Oh, and thanks to my love for jelly-filled donuts, I'm round everywhere.

The problem is that I work at a tech millionaire's adventure-sports magazine. The staff thinks it's a capital crime to take the elevator. Or God forbid, eat a carb occasionally.

I shake my head as I walk into the open layout and hand out the little burrito bowls with no rice or sour cream or cheese to a few of them. Just lettuce and meat, looking lonely and sad together.

So how does a plain, curvy, shy bookworm fallout of love with her six-foot-three-inch boss who's been described as a modern god, in looks and wealth by the media?

She can't.

And so, I have to quit. Even if it's irresponsible. Not like I have another cushy job lined up. Nor does my brother have more than one billionaire friend to hand out pity

jobs.

But being in love with a man who doesn't see past my frizzy hair, thick glasses, and round face is hard and I've had enough.

My fingers cramp as I type my resignation email. As if my body's rebelling against the act. The screen blurs, but I forge on.

I type "Dear Grumpy Billionaire Boss," and then delete it.

A bit cowardly to send my two weeks' notice when he's out of town and the annual work party is tonight. But I can hardly get a word out when he's in front of me, all brooding eyes and sharp angles. What if, in my misery, I blurt out why I'm quitting?

No thank you, more humiliation.

My glasses steam up as I check my grammar and hit send.

Sniffing, I walk to the small kitchenette. This day needs two burritos, and I don't care who sees it or how my tights cut off my belly. But first I need a pick-me-up.

Grabbing the chocolate-jelly filled donut, I chomp down with relish. Flavors explode on my tongue and I moan.

The jelly drips down my mouth and onto my pink sweater. Cursing inwardly, I dab at it and lick the remnants from my fingers. But the damn thing only spreads and I groan.

Could this day get any worse?

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

A sudden hush falls over the office and I realize it's been like that for a few minutes now. My spine goes rigid as I realize the universe has answered my question.

Not only can it get worse, it just has.

Standing right in front of me, watching me suck my finger like my life depends on it, is none other than my grumpy billionaire boss, Zayn Grayson.

I wait for that twitch of his mouth that says "Oh Mouse! You've made another mess," without actually saying it.

Instead, he simply strides past me, leaving me staring after him.

Still sucking my fingertip.

The freeze-state I'm thrown into at his sudden arrival lasts a whole minute.

"Sasha!" Zayn calls out, the door to his office half open.

I flinch, nearly choke on the donut. After a couple of croaking attempts, I manage to keep it down. At the sink, I fill my glass and take a quick sip as he bellows again.

"In my office. Now!"

It rings around the open layout, creeping into every nook and corner. This is as much a ritual as the call I make to him every evening at six, no matter what time zone he's in.

But now, the way he summons me grates on me.

In the background, the radio station is belting out classic love songs, continuing its theme for Valentine's Day, oblivious to my misery.

Heads turn toward me as if I'm a car-crash they can't look away from. There are even a couple of gleeful smiles. "What'd you do, Ugly Shetty?" someone whispers.

I'm shy, not stupid.

Through the years, I've sensed a certain... envy toward me in the office. My alleged relationship with Zayn being the source. Thanks to my brother Adam dropping in whenever he likes to shoot shit with Zayn and then doing something silly like ruffling my hair or teasing me in front of Zayn, the staff thinks I have a certain leeway with him.

If anything, I have only ever worked harder than anyone else to prove, to myself and to him, that I deserve this job. Though fair-minded, Zayn is notorious for his exacting standards and grouchy demeanor.

Knees quaking, I wipe my mouth, check my teeth in the chrome face of the coffeemaker, and start the trek to his office.

"Close the door," he barks as I drag myself in.

And yet, there's that current pulsing through me, coalescing in the place I shouldn't think about at work. It's the deep timbre of his voice and the strange, feverish vibrations it always sends through me.

I can't bear to look at him. Not when his room, with three walls made of glass from floor to ceiling, is drenched in sunlight and everything in my eyes could be seen.

Presenting my back to him, I close the door and count down from ten, forcing myself to breathe in between each number.

“If you’re done hyperventilating, maybe turn around and face me?”

He’s really bringing the grump and the snark this evening. Usually, I at least get a chin nod.

I turn around and am instantly pinned to the spot by his catlike eyes. He glowers at me from under devilish eyebrows. His short hair is and ruffled, the kind of thickness that really makes you want to sink your fingers in.

Really, how is it fair that he gets the best of everything from his Arab mother and Italian American father?

The thought brings instant shame to coil in my chest. For all that he has inherited beautiful genes from his parents, it’s not like he had a happy childhood with them.

“Hello, Zayn,” I finally say, straightening my shoulders to match my stiff tone. “Mira said you weren’t returning until the end of the month.” Mira’s his second assistant, responsible for scheduling his trips and overseas meetings.

“And miss your grandparents’ anniversary dinner tomorrow?” he says, raising a brow.

Worry coils through me and I rub my hands over my thighs. For as long as I remember, we celebrated my grandparents’ wedding anniversary dinner grandly. After our parents passed away, Adam and I continued the tradition. And Zayn was always a part of any family celebration. “Didn’t Adam tell you that they’re traveling? Grandpa found a cheap fare like two days ago, and they finally decided to go on that cruise.”

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

“Oh,” he says, and I see the flash of disappointment before he covers it up.

How could I forget that Zayn has attended nearly every annual family dinner at our house, including celebrating our grandparents’ wedding anniversary, for almost fifteen years? From that first year since Adam brought him home.

Because all I could think of in the last week was my decision. Even factoring in that I would have an empty house to wallow in, in my unemployed state and unrequited love.

“Don’t worry,” I say, instantly wanting to soothe the dark shadows in his eyes. “I told Adam we should—”

“The arrangements for tonight’s party?” he says, switching gears.

“Everything’s been double- and triple-checked,” I say, confidence and excitement filling my voice.

The annual company party is my baby through and through, and I love organizing it. Despite Mira trying to hone in on it in the past couple of years. “Music, food, gifts. There will be three childminders for the eight kids. I ordered pizza, a bunch of coloring books & crayons, and there will be cookie decorating with Miriam from accounting. I even got one of those balloon guys into the budget. You know the ones who make balloons in fun shapes—”

“Mira said you canceled the DJ she recommended?” He’s skimming through whatever is on his laptop.



“I...” Words lock in my throat. I fidget with the octopus shaped squishy I got him as a gag gift for his birthday last year. Not that he used it much.

He looks up, and just for a second, I feel his gaze snag on my breasts filling out the pink cardigan.

Not a chance he’s ogling my rack. My excitement fizzes like bubbles out of a soda can. He’s clearly looking at the yogurt stain near my left boob.

“Yes?” he says, raising that imperious eyebrow.

“He charges an exorbitant amount for two hours. Plus, he expected us to rent all the equipment he needs. The one I found, she’s an up-and-coming artist who’s open to requests and brings her equipment in.”

“Your choice has nothing to do with the fact that she’s your best friend from middle school? I’m running a business here, Sasha. Not a charity co-op.”

Anger rises through me as I hear Mira’s words reverberate in his. Ever since she started eighteen months ago as his second assistant, I had this sense of being pushed aside.

Zayn even looks at me less, if that’s possible.

Luckily for me, the anger contains the stupid tears. “Did you know that I actually had her come in and audition in front of Nathaniel?” I say, mentioning Zayn’s half brother, who knows his music.

Nathaniel is older, co-owns the Grayson empire, and is generally a lot more approachable. Really, the brothers complement each other perfectly. The only similarity they share, with different fathers and coloring, is that they are both entirely

too good-looking and have the world arranged to cater to their every whim.

Every time they visit the premises together—which only happens a handful of times each year, thank God—the entire office goes into a hormonal, swoony frenzy.

Zayn leans back and considers me. “Why?”

“Why what?” I say belligerently. The act of writing that email and sending it off has filled me with a certain recklessness that seeps into my tone now.

Something flashes across those catlike eyes. “Why did you have her audition with Nathaniel?”

“I wanted the best DJ within our budget and Nathan’s opinion of her would be objective and weighty. Also, because you’ve trained me, and all your staff, to seek a second opinion when one’s not the subject expert.”

A sudden smile spreads those lips wider. The sheer sparkle of his smile strikes me deep in my chest as if it’s Cupid’s arrow. My heart thuds, as if it has been shocked by one of the defibrillator things I keep seeing in medical dramas. “Feeling grumpy today, are we?” he says, that smile carving a dimple in his left cheek.

“I take offense at your comment that I abused the little power I have in my position and also your belief in Mira’s spurious claim.”

That smile still lingers, but something else touches its edges. Something...hot. I want to both smack it off his lips and lick it for myself. But as urgent and all-consuming as the urge is, I refuse to hide myself away like I used to.

“Little power, Mouse?” he says. “I didn’t know you wanted more.”

Shock, both his and mine, fills the room. I loathe the pet name my brother coined for me when I was four and terrified of cats. That Zayn uses it warms me and provokes me to no end.

“We both know that ever since you hired Mira, without telling me where I have fallen short in my duties, she’s been trying to take over more and more of my work. But don’t worry,” I say, tears coating my throat. “I’m mature enough to make this easier on both of us.”

The handle to his door turns in my hand just as he says, “Why the hell are you sending me a resignation email?”

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

Two

Zayn

I can't believe the email I'm reading.

Resignation. Two weeks. Grateful for the opportunity.

The formal words mock my growing disbelief.

Sasha's quitting, my brain screeches on loudspeaker. And then slowly, it hits the rest of my body, like a slow-motion scene in action movies.

Sasha's quitting... Why? How dare she?

I almost stomp my foot, like the irritable, high-strung child I used to be, upset by the slightest change to his schedule. But this isn't a small change, that man-child whispers now.

This is like being told that you're going to lose a limb. No, a much more vital organ.

"What nonsense is this?" I bark at her, hitting delete on the email. As if that one click could right my world. That thought is another shock, but I shove it aside for the moment.

The woman staring at me through thick glasses, brown eyes full of righteous anger and something else I can't define, is anything but the easygoing girl I'm used to.

In the landscape of dizzying shades of brown—hair, eyes, glasses, leather skirt and shoes, my gaze snags on her pink cardigan with the stain on it. Or rather, how well the fabric clings to her curvy figure.

Then to her plump lips. The image of her licking the jelly from her lower lip is seared into my brain. How Mouse enjoys her food with such wanton sensuality has always piqued my curiosity and now...

Focus, Zayn.

“It’s my resignation,” she says, her voice steady in contrast to the ripples she’s sending through me. “I’ll work through the end of the month, which covers my two-weeks’ notice.” Her fingers play with the hem of the cardigan, and she swipes her tongue against her lower lip.

The last button has popped open with her twitching and the lush curve of her belly winks at me.

I get a peek at smooth, silky golden skin that I want to lick. Higher, pull it higher, I want to say. Let me look at those glorious tits. Let me lick—

“Zayn?”

My head jerks up and I bite down a curse. Bad enough that I’ve been thirsting after her lush little body like a randy dog for months now. Reminding myself that she’s my assistant, and my best friend’s younger sister, is the only thing that put brakes on me.

Forbidden...that’s what Sasha is.

She says my name again and I say, “What?”

“I mean, if you really need me,” she swallows nervously, “I can give you an extra week, train my replacement.”

She thinks my fractured focus is fueled only by inconvenience.

“Like hell you’re leaving,” I say, pushing to my feet.

Sasha doesn’t shrink so much as blanches. Her feet do that side step she’s always doing around me. When I was twenty-five and she was a curious, shy thirteen-year-old, it was amusing.

Now at thirty-six, it is...annoying as fuck. Although I’ve never admitted that to myself. When it comes to internal reflection, I’m not the brightest bulb on the street.

However, I do know that I have a fearsome glower, and I use it against her now, ruthlessly.

My oversized desk separates us, and I fight the caveman urge to jump over it and corner her. It’s not the most insane, or the most inappropriate, urge that has overtaken me in her presence.

But with her words of resignation ringing in my ears, the feral attraction I’ve been keeping a lid on grabs my throat in a chokehold. In parallel channels, my mind blares warnings loudly, like disclaimers before a heart-thumping, knee-shaking, stomach-heaving amusement park ride.

Danger of uncontrollable lust.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

Might cause too much emotion.

Frozen heart might jump-start.

Rough handling and jostling might break object of desire.

“You do know that declaring things in that grumpy voice doesn’t make it all just fall into place, right?” she demands.

As if she could read my mind, or my body language or both. Not a surprise after five years of working for me. As assistants go, she’s perfect—loyal, dependable and cool in a crisis. And she knows me inside out, knows my near-manic need for structure and order.

“Who turned your head? For how much?”

Her thick lashes blink. The movement, exaggerated by her glasses, makes her look like a large bug. A pretty bug, but one nonetheless. “What?”

“My competitor who stole you, who is it? And what’s he offering? Is there a big sign-on bonus?” Suddenly, her wide smile two months ago when some skinny app-writer came in to meet Nathan flashes in my head. “Or is there another reason you’re leaving me?”

“I’m not...No one’s...” Her mouth falls open, pulling my attention to the drops of sweat over the bow-like curve of her upper lip. “Are you asking me if I’m leaving the company because someone else offered me a higher-paying job?” Her chest rises as

she says this. As if this is an outrageous concept.

For her, it is, I remind myself.

She is a Shetty through and through. They put stock in things like loyalty and family and love.

A flicker of tenderness streaks through me and I try to crush it like a pesky bug. Try and fail.

“Yes, that’s what I’m asking.”

Her thick brows tie into a scowl. “I don’t have anything lined up,” she says in a small voice.

Anger sidles in and shoves tenderness to the side. Really, it’s a cocktail of feelings inside me now.

Then, there’s that deafening roar in my head, like I used to get when I was a child. When the reality of my parents became too much for me. Somehow, I blink and shove the roar aside. Although, it’s easier to do so with her large eyes staring at me with concern.

And this too, I notice, is not new. Just previously unacknowledged. All these realizations—I wasn’t made to feel this much emotion—make my words unflinchingly sharp. “You’re quitting a cushy job with great benefits without anything lined up. And there’s Adam thinking his little sister’s finally learned practicality. Clearly, you still exist in your own fantasyland, Mouse.”

She opens her mouth and closes it, breaths coming through those lips like rough pants. “Don’t bring Adam into this. And don’t...”



“What?” I ask, my entire fucking universe waiting for the answer.

“Nothing.”

“Sasha—”

“The HR handbook doesn’t require me to give you a reason for quitting.” The words are stiff and stilted. “Neither does it require your acceptance.”

Now she’s spewing my own handbook at me?

I tether my temper just in time. But still, the mocking words slip out. Apparently, there’s no filter on my mouth today. “So, it’s not a guy you’re leaving me for.”

Why my brain is choosing to hyper-focus on this now is beyond me.

I’ve been called a supercomputer but suddenly, my best friend’s little sister, my adolescent champion, my assistant of five years, my sturdy little anchor in a shifting world, is beyond my understanding.

“What? A guy?” She slides her glasses up on the bridge of her nose in that adorable way of hers. Then, something clicks in that her brain.

A rush of pink fills her golden cheeks and she swallows.

I watch, fascinated, my brain falling over itself to create a thousand new pathways to understand this woman. Apparently, I made a huge mistake in assuming I know her.

“No, I’m not leaving you over a guy,” she says, and I hear the truth. But it’s not the whole truth.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

“Is this a strategy to get a raise?” I’m already picking up the phone to call HR and give her whatever she wants when a half growl, half snort comes from her general direction.

Nostrils flaring, chest rising, cheeks all flushed, she’s furious. And stunning. I don’t think I’ve ever seen Mouse angry. “You think I’m that underhanded?”

“Give me a reason then,” I say, out of all reasonable, rational options. And this scares me because I’m king of logic and sense, and a pauper when it comes to other matters. “Not because company policy demands it or because you’re a model employee. But because I’m me, Sasha.” Inside, a part of me backs away, even as the words come easily. “We’ve known each other for nearly two decades. I deserve better.” A load of bullshit because Sasha doesn’t owe me anything.

She flinches and hesitates.

I hold my breath in. It pricks me, like a sharp thorn, the waiting. The wondering. And the...wanting. The sudden, mystifying wanting that’s been twisting me inside out for months now. Feels like I’m covered in thorns and yet it’s not all painful. If I were an RPG avatar, I would say I’d broken into a new level of awareness. That I didn’t know existed.

“I’m not happy here,” she says, looking as miserable as I feel. Not a lie. “I’m actively unhappy here, Zayn. And you’re always telling us that life’s too short to stay where you’re unhappy.”

Then she leaves with a quiet clicking sound that feels like a death knell.

My bright, enormous office is crushingly silent and painfully empty without her. My head is reeling and the headache that threatened during the flight is back with a vengeance.

What am I missing?

It dawns on me, the compound misery she's dealt me in a matter of fifteen minutes.

No monthly dinner with the Shettys where I could pretend like I belonged to their family.

No pretending in my fucked-up head that she's mine.

And no Mouse outside my office with her wide-brown gaze, her shy smile, and her plump lips anymore.

Grabbing my car keys and wallet, I'm almost out the door when I halt.

The glass window is refreshingly cool against my forehead. Logic and sense return, beating the emotions crowding me into one small corner.

Why was I accepting Sasha's resignation?

All my life, I survived, no thrived, against all the odds stacked against me. Against parents and friends and teachers and tutors telling me I wouldn't make it. I made millions. Found a normal, happy life. Well, relatively normal at least.

Whatever this is on Sasha's part— a snit, or a tantrum or some other real shit, I'll figure it out.

She'll stay with me until we both grow old and challenge each other over word games

and pluck each other's gross nose hairs.

The shakiness recedes under the resolve.

Now I just have to figure out what it is Mouse wants and give it to her.

And for that, I need advice from either my best friend or my brother. The former is out since this involves his sister. While Adam loves me, he can get a little over-the-top protective about Sasha. Not that I blame him.

I'm clicking on my big brother Nathaniel's number as I walk out of my office and press the button to the penthouse. Without looking for my little offender.

There are only three people in my life I care about, and more importantly, can stand to be around. And no way am I losing the most important of the three.

Three

Zayn

What I'm doing is wrong.

Maybe skirting the line into unethical even. But I didn't come up in a world that wasn't built for people like me without maneuvering people and situations.

Rifling through Sasha's giant tote bag in the privacy of my office is definitely not...right. I mean, I just want a little extra information on how to woo her into staying.

I place the bag on my desk and take a peek.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

A smile pulls at my lips. No wonder the woman needs a tote bigger than her.

There are three paperbacks—all weathered and lovingly worn, neatly standing to a side. All romance novels.

As long as I've known Sasha, she's knee-deep in a book.

When I flip through each title, I see handwritten annotations in the margins in colorful gel pens. For just a second, I consider canceling the company annual party so that I can read through her notes.

Suddenly, I'm curious to know everything about her. But I can't afford for her to come back and catch me in the act.

There's a small cosmetic case with a new toothbrush, painkillers, noise-canceling earbuds, gum and a particular kind of floss that I like. All are things I need on my trips.

I turn the pouch to see "Fragile Boss TLC" written on it, with a devil emoji drawn in.

Laughter bursts out of me, from deep within my stomach. I find two more pouches—one with specialty snacks, and one with various stress-relieving/calming toys.

Aside from the romance novels, is there anything in the bag that's not about me?

After pushing aside lip gloss, a bunch of loose hair bands, and a sheaf of clipped

coupons—most of which are for Devil’s Donuts— I find two things.

Her e-reader and her journal.

For as long back as I can remember, Sasha has been writing in her journal, morning, noon and night. I rub my finger over the leather grain of the journal cover.

Olive green and worn-out. The journal is thick, with crinkled paper. Colorful Post-it flags emerge from the pages and a donut charm hangs from the pen-loop.

On the right bottom corner are her initials, carved into the leather. The tactile sensation as I run my fingers all over it is as pleasant as if I were touching her skin.

I lift the journal to my nose and inhale the scent of the faded leather.

Just exploring her bag is a feast for my senses. And if I could get my hands on those lush curves...I would feast on her, too. Make it worth her while.

All her secrets enfolded within those pages...

Something sticks in my throat. I want to know her deepest secrets, but I can’t cross that line.

Shaking my head, I put the journal back into the bag and pick up the e-reader.

It sits in a plum-colored cover, once again nearly worn off, with stickers all over it. “Smut-Slut,” “HEA for All,” and one that says, “Curvy girls are horny girls too.”

A spark zips down my spine. My horny little assistant has quite the delicious ring to it. But who is she horny for? My hands shake at the thought of Mouse lusting after some asshole who wouldn’t be good enough for her and I turn on the e-reader accidentally.

The cover's old but the device is brand-spanking-new, with a colored-ink display.

It's one of the models Nathaniel and I invested in a couple of years ago. When I announced in the staff meeting that the company had sent me a complimentary device ahead of market availability, Sasha's eyes glowed with suppressed excitement. Later that evening, I quietly left it on her desk.

Her smile when she saw it next morning is etched into my brain.

The memory reminds me how easy it is to please Sasha.

I run my finger along the bottom edge just as the man-chest covers and the titles catch my eye.

I know Sasha is a hardcore romance reader. Adam has teased her enough about it. Once, when he went too far, she lectured him about respecting her agency and her way of exploring her sexuality. And just like that, I'm off again, thinking of ways I can be part of that exploration. Sighing, I look at the screen.

I'm not surprised by the gleaming pectorals. The titles are another matter.

There's variety here—paranormal and sci-fi and aliens and historical—but the theme is constant.

Boss and employee. Boss and assistant. Boss and nanny. Boss and chauffeur. Boss and housekeeper. Boss and maid.

My assistant has very specific...taste in her romance novels.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

I freeze as a new thought strikes me. In a blink, my body goes from freezing to a full-body flush. Heat zings through my veins and I feel like that avatar again. Unlocking a new level in my quest to understand Sasha.

I'm her boss and she gluts herself on that particular theme in romance. I squint at one of the subtitles and then another.

I'm actively unhappy here, she said. Now that I mull it over, it's such a specific statement to make. And she's definitely not leaving for another man. I'm sure of that.

Is she quitting because of what she feels for me? What type of feelings are they?

Is my shy, bookish, curvy—and apparently very horny—assistant attracted to me? My heart makes a leap.

The idea of figuring out what Mouse wants from me makes my cock thicken painfully in my trousers.

Four

Sasha

The party starts in three hours.

I should be overseeing things at the ballroom of the luxury hotel across the street from our office, checking the arrangements are in place and the caterers have everything they need.



But here I am, standing at the sink in the luxurious bathroom attached to the penthouse apartment that is exclusively for Zayn or Nathaniel's use, scrubbing jelly from my cardigan. As if to match my mood, the sun has disappeared in a matter of minutes and a fierce downpour has begun.

I feel wired, and it's not the good kind of wired, like from sugar.

I knew Zayn would feel inconvenienced by my resignation notice.

He's a man who thrives on order and structure and doesn't like any deviations. But his interrogation about my reasons—the pointed “was I leaving him for another guy”—twists my belly.

Did I imagine the near-possessive glint in his eye? Have I fallen completely off this plane of reality and into fantasyland, like my friend Mariska is constantly warning me?

Then there's the way his gaze drifted over the stain I'm now scrubbing from the cardigan. Lingered on my chest area.

With a sigh, I hang the cardigan on the towel rack and grab the hair dryer from under the counter. I turn it on. Regrets fill me, as loud as the whirring buzz of the dryer.

Maybe I should've waited until the summer. Maybe I...

The door slams open, nearly hitting me in the butt, and is caught by a corded forearm, preventing it from slamming back again.

“There you are,” says Zayn, his short, wavy hair disheveled.

His V-necked henley sticks to his chest, and there's coiled tension in his lean body,

even though he's clearly worked out in the state-of-the-art gym on the ground floor.

He pushes his body to the extreme when he's feeling unsettled or is unable to calm his brain.

Clearly, he's more than just bothered by my leaving. He's upset. And that I'm causing him pain messes with my resolve.

"Zayn?" I whisper his name, desperate to remove that harassed look from his eyes.

His wild amber gaze barely meets mine before sliding down my neck and my torso.

My half-naked torso.

Okay, maybe not half-naked, given I'm wearing my favorite bra. A blush-pink lacy thing that's merely window dressing because nothing this flimsy can restrain my boobs.

Which are straining, and even jiggling slightly, with my rushed breaths.

My skin heats at his continued perusal. I feel the blush climbing up my chest, as if it's his fingers drawing patterns there. For a second, his gaze sweeps down, over the thick curve of my belly, my belly button ring, and then down to my hips, where my leather skirt sits snugly.

Then it comes back up, hitches for a second on the ring, and lands on my chest again.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

A deafening roar fills my ears.

To make the whole situation worse, a mysterious draft of cool air releases from the ceiling and teases my skin. My nipples pull and tighten into hard peaks, pushing merrily against the lace cups.

I'm mortified. But he holds me hostage. There's a celebratory flush beneath my skin, pulsing hungrily at how the black of his eyes eats up the amber gold. I arch my spine without meaning to.

He likes what he sees, a voice sings in my head. Deep between my thighs, as far as possible from my brain and its rational warnings, a throbbing awakens. I squeeze my thighs together to hold the delicious feeling there, and my leather skirt ripples with the movement.

Our gazes meet and it's like I'm in that alternate fantasyland again where time stills. All his brooding energy is focused on me, heating up my skin.

For some reason though, my left arm is super warm and getting progressively hot. There's a sudden burn on the back of my left hand and I gasp in pain.

Before my shorted-out brain can figure out what's happening, Zayn's there. His big body crowds me and the loud whir finally stops.

I look down, tears shimmering in my eyes, and realize he's unplugged the dryer.

"Give me your hand," he says, voice all deep and husky.

I react automatically to the command. My hand is small and soft and doughy in his large one. The contrast and the contact are erotic.

His long, elegant fingers press around the slightly red area. Then he tugs me to the sink and turns the tap on.

Water gushes forth with too much force, splashing us both. He curses and reduces the flow. The drops sizzle on my skin, like butter on a pan, with how hot I am.

I can't look away from his elegant fingers bracketing my wrist or how his other hand rests at the small of my back. On bare skin. Even his broad frame rounds around me protectively.

The sensory overload is too much and I'm drowning. That throb at my core is constant now and I need relief.

I seek his gaze in the mirror and it's another kind of assault. The acres of skin I have on display gleam under the bright lights over the sink. And his gaze is still drinking it in.

Then he looks up and our gazes lock once again.

Can he hear my heart thundering in my chest?

Outside the bathroom, the radio station suddenly switches to a weather report. The tension wrapping around us is broken.

I jerk my hand from his and turn around. The stupid cardigan is still wet in the front, but I have no choice.

I'm halfway through sliding my arms into it when a hand falls on my shoulder. The

skin-to-skin contact is electrifying. This is what happens when you spend your days buried in steamy romance novels and your nights plugging your grumpy, reclusive boss into all those steamy scenarios.

“Here, I got you my sweatshirt,” he says.

I turn and stare at his offering.

It’s his Stanford sweatshirt. Shock steals my instant refusal. His university sweatshirt is akin to an infant’s favorite blanket for him. There’s only a particular dry-cleaner that is allowed to wash it and he hates traveling without it.

If I look at it one way, he’s a big, bossy, brainy baby.

A giggle slips from my mouth.

“What’s funny?” he says.

“I just realized what you are.”

“What am I?”

I shake my head and grab the sweatshirt before he changes his mind. Pulling my glasses off, I hand them to him.

Then I grab all of my wild, messy hair with one hand, push it to the side, and then put the sweatshirt on. All the while, I’m aware of him filling the small space with the scent of his soap and sweat, taking me in. His earlier irritation and anger are gone, replaced by something else. What though?

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

He's in a playful mood. Which is like...never.

I shiver.

The sweatshirt's loose on the shoulders and snug at my chest. Something hot and wild streaks through me as the scent of him engulfs me. "I'll get it dry-cleaned—"

"Keep it," he says, shocking me yet again.

I jerk my head up. Without my glasses, the sharp angles of him are a little blurred. And his lush mouth looks smudged, as if someone kissed the hell out of him. By someone, I mean me. "It's your safety blanket."

My vision is really fuzzy without my glasses, but I think he smiles at that. "But you look good in my sweatshirt, Mouse. Really good."

My mouth falls open but no words come out.

"My glasses," I finally manage to say, reaching out a hand.

Holding them, he covers the little distance between us. The heat from his body strokes me in a coiling wave. His chest is so close to mine that if I take a full breath, my breasts would brush it and...

"Your eyes." He sounds entranced. "I've never seen them this close, without glasses. They are gorgeous."

“I...they aren’t...” When he raises a brow, I sigh. He’s still a vague outline to me.  
“Thank you.”

“They’re really sensitive, right?”

I nod.

“What happened to the retinal surgery?”

“How do you know about that?”

“Adam mentioned it like...four or five years ago.”

“It didn’t work out,” I say, and shuffle in place. Signaling for him to move back or let me pass.

He does neither. “Why?”

“It just didn’t.”

“And I’m asking why.”

I sigh. When he asks questions in that tone, he won’t give up until he gets answers. The right ones, at that. “It’s still in experimental stage and only two doctors can perform the surgery in the entire country.”

“So?”

“So, it’s prohibitively expensive,” I snap. “Like I’d have to sell a kidney to get it done, but since I’m saving that for granny, I can’t.”

Something like warmth fills his eyes and he hands the glasses back to me.

I slide them on and the world should feel right again. Except Zayn is watching me with a strange expression. My world stays tilted, if not upside down.

“Did you need something? You rushed in here,” I say. “Is it the caterers?”

“No. I had some questions for you.”

He sounds so serious that I straighten my shoulders. “Okay, let me get a pot of coffee going and I’ll meet you in your office.”

“I gave myself the afternoon off. Let’s talk here.”

“Off?” Shock stuns me. This day just won’t end. “You’re like...Scrooge. You even work on Christmas morning.”



*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

He shrugs, calling my attention to the bunched slopes of his shoulders. “I’m too distracted.”

I half snort, half scoff. “You’re the one who insisted we finish the fiscal—”

“That was before my dependable little assistant decided to quit on me. Now, it’s all-hands-on-deck for Project Mouse.”

The sound that comes out of my mouth this time is a full growl. It echoes in the empty bathroom.

It’s not enough that he’s never taken notice of me. Now that I’m quitting, he’s needling me with that ridiculous pet name and following me around like some lost puppy. Or a ferocious pit bull, actually.

Beneath the annoyance though, there’s a thread of excitement in my veins I can’t shake off.

This is the most he’s interacted with me in the past two years. God, I’m a pushover, but there’s a pep in my step as I follow him out.

What’s wrong with eking out a little pleasure from these last few hours with him?

It’s not like this is anything more than his temper tantrum, and my decision’s not changing.

Five

Zayn

My little Mouse is into me.

I have no doubt now. Sasha's imprinting me into those filthy romance novels, and the thought lights me up as if there's a furnace inside me.

And fuck, that body of hers, those glorious tits with their fat nipples, like milk-chocolate chips...my little assistant's body is as delicious and ripe as the peach I caught her biting into last week.

I should fire my imagination immediately because it did a shoddy job of picturing Sasha for me.

All I want to do is lean in and bend down and pull that proud, taunting nipple into my mouth, lace and all. I'd suck so hard, alternating between both nipples, that she'd do that jiggle-squeeze with her thighs that she thought I didn't notice. If she's sensitive enough there, I'd make her come by just licking and lapping those fat nipples.

The slow, soft burn I've been ignoring for months now is a persistent, needy beat in my blood. Acres of smooth, golden skin that I could leave marks on with my fingers and teeth. That lush cleavage begging to be painted with ropes of my cum.

And that belly-button ring, I'd roll it around with my tongue before going down to the treasure below.

I want her. And she wants me. There's nothing in the world that will stop me now.

Except...she's leaving.Me.

She's leaving me.

A sudden flash of lighting paints the sky, dark clouds visible through the floor-to-ceiling glass walls in the penthouse. The thunder that booms next couldn't match the feral ferocity of my heart now.

Think, Zayn.

I could take a chance and make my move. I want to kiss her so badly anyway, and that could turn the tide. But I'm not playing to win the battle, but the war.

I want her to want to stay with me. I want her to realize that she belongs with me. And not just for a day or one fantasy.

"Zayn?"

A notepad and pen in hand, she sits across from me on the couch, her knees neatly tucked together. Over her shoulder, her thick braid dangles like a rope, a silly pink string tied at the end. It would come in handy, twisted around my hand while I pin her down with my hips.

"Zayn!"

"What?" I retort. Damn, but those tits make my sweatshirt look better than it ever did on me. Like an ownership tag. She just doesn't know it yet.

Her eyes are so earnest in her round face. She's got no idea how filthy my thoughts are. "Are you getting one of your migraines?"

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

My hand goes to my temple. “No.”

“What did you—”

“I don’t want you to leave.”

She puts the pen down with a calmness that scrapes against my temper. “It’s not up for discussion.”

My pointless retort is cut off by another flash of lightning and boom of thunder.

Sasha chews on her lower lip, eyes wide as she glances outside. “Are you worried about the weather?”

“No. I’m not worried about the freaking weather.”

“Well, I am. The party’s in like three hours. And this downpour...” She checks her phone and looks up. “What if the staff—”

“The hotel is like... across the street. If any of the staff can’t make it, then they don’t deserve to celebrate with a party.”

She gasps. “That’s...awful, Zayn.”

“I stand corrected, Mouse.” I press my hand to my chest, feigning repentance. And I can see the edges of the smile already curving her mouth. “They don’t actually deserve to work at my company.”

She sighs. Her tits rise and fall.

I'm fascinated by everything to do with them. I want to fall asleep with my face tucked in between them. And for a midnight snack, I could suck on them and get her off. And because I know it will make me hungry, I'd eat her out. Then I'd feed her my—

“They’re not all bad.”

My wet daydream is fractured by something in her voice. Something like...pain. I jerk into a seated position, glad for the cover of the throw pillow on my lap. “What do you mean not all bad?”

She pushes her glasses up the bridge of her nose, and clicks the pen. I know all her nervous tics and that’s a major one. “I meant they’re all mostly nice, Zayn.”

Lie.

“Nice or kind?”

“What?” Her eyes widen.

“Gramps taught me the distinction years ago. Are they nice to you, Mouse?”

Her eyes shine brightly at the mention of her grandfather. Another thread of connection that tugs us together and binds us.

For a lauded genius, I’m such a fool. All I’ve ever wanted in life has been sitting outside my office.

“You remember everything he said to you after all these years?” she asks, leaning

forward.

“Of course I do. Now,” I say, leaning forward too, “is the staff here kind to you?”

Her mouth wobbles and her shoulders bow inward. As if she’s trying to make herself smaller. “Not really.”

My chest tightens so hard that I can’t breathe for a second. Her ache whips around me, mocking me. How many things did I not know about Mouse except that she’s a fantastic assistant and all-around wonderful human being?

“Tell me.”

She shakes her head.

“Please, Mouse,” I whisper, fighting the urge to jump over the ridiculous coffee table and pull her into my lap.

“I...you’ll get mad and fire them. I...I don’t want that on my conscience.”

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:58 am*

“It won’t be, because it will be on mine. It’s my responsibility to look after you.”

“It’s not,” she says in a sudden burst. She laces her fingers together, unlaces them, then wraps her arms around her midriff. “There’s only so much you can enforce on a group of adults, Zayn.”

“What did they do?”

She won’t even look at me now.

“Look at it this way, Mouse. You’re efficient, disciplined, on time, and you’re one of the kindest people I know. If they can hurt you, even knowing that you and I are close...” Her eyes lift to mine, searching greedily. “They might target that watchman Ibrahim with the lisp or Natasha in marketing for her poor English skills, or even your friend Mariska when she delivers breakfast every Friday.”

A rough breath shudders out of her. I know my girl and I hate that I’m causing her this pain. But she will do things for the people she cares about. “They call me Ugly Shetty. Behind my back,” she adds after a beat. As if that makes it okay.

Fury licks flames through me and I shoot out of my seat. Hands fisted, I walk around the coffee table and I want to smash something. Or someone.

“Zayn...”

I’m so angry that my heart thumps dangerously in my chest. “You should’ve told me.”

She shakes her head. “It’s not worth it. And I got over it after a while. I’ll never be thin enough or tall enough or fashionable enough for some crowds and that’s okay.”

She was sixteen when she started working in this office part-time while I traveled full-time. Young and naive, with a kind of artless innocence that nearly gave me whiplash, even years after I first met her. She shouldn’t have had to put up with that kind of bullying at all. Not under my roof.

Why did I not see it? Why didn’t she tell me?

My legs act for me, and I kneel in front of her.

When I take a deep breath—because I want to say the right thing—I’m hit by her strawberry and vanilla scent. It calms me as much as it excites me. I want to tuck my face into all the contours and corners of her body to find a deeper thread of that scent, warmed by her skin.

This close, I can see the rich brown of her eyes, accented by the thick fringe of her lashes and the bow shape of her pink upper lip. Her nose has this cute little bump at the end, and messy tendrils escape her braid, framing her face.

Everything about her is so...real and sexy in a way I don’t have words for. I want to worship her with my mouth, my fingers, my entire body. And I will. Soon.

“Honestly,” she says, shying her gaze from mine. “I don’t even care anymore that I’m not all those things. And that’s the part that sticks in their craw. My contentment makes them resentful.”

And that’s the magic of this girl—her simple joy in life. I want that quality in mine as much as I want to bury myself in her lushness. It was foolish to think all I wanted from her was her pussy. But then, I’ve never been good at parsing any of this



emotional stuff.

I cup her knees and feel the warm puff of her breath on my mouth.

“I’m sorry they made you feel unsafe here. I should have protected you better—”

She presses a finger to my lips. The contact sends instant tingles through me. I want to open my mouth and lick her up, but this isn’t the moment for that. She needs to know that she’s safe with me. Always.

“Believe it or not, it has made me stronger. And wiser, eventually. It made me realize reality can never stand up to my books.”

“You’ll still give me the names.” Now I’m the one cutting off her protest with a finger against her lips. They are soft and I absently run my fingertip over the upper one. She bows into the touch slightly and the feeling is better than when I made my first million. “Come, Mouse. You know how much I hate bullies.” It’s a miracle that I manage to keep the bitterness that has hardened my heart out of my voice. “This can’t be allowed to go on, especially now that I know of it.”

She taps my finger away. “You can’t mean to—”

I shoot to my feet. “Fire them? Absolutely.”

Her fingers around my wrist arrest me. “Zayn, please don’t—”

I lean down and run a finger over the corner of her mouth. Her surprised gasp is sweet. “You’re beautiful, Mouse. Like those deep, thick-petaled roses Nathan’s nanny grows. At first glance, they look wild and common. Not everyone has the eyes to see that beauty.”

Her gaze holds mine as if searching for mockery. Still holding my hand, she comes to her feet. Goes up on her toes and presses a kiss on my jaw.

It goes straight to my heart, splintering the hard shell around. Her tits rub against my biceps, her scent envelops me, and I let the warmth from different sources drizzle through me.

She isn't just beautiful.

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

She's...more. She's everything. And she's mine.

I can't wait to pluck each petal, until she's unraveled around me.

And it has to be tonight, while this new awareness between us is raw and real.

Six

Sasha

I know the roses that Zayn is talking about. Though it's not his brother Nathan's nanny, but his stepdaughter Sophie's companion/friend Jasmine who grows them in their greenhouse.

Next to the delicate, ethereal beauty of a pink rose, those roses look positively...voluptuous and their fragrance heady. That Zayn thinks I'm like those roses...my heart leaps at the very idea and my body fizzes like a champagne bottle about to be cracked open.

Does he truly think I'm beautiful? Even desirable?

"I'll make some coffee. Feels like it will be a long day," I mumble and walk away.

My palms tingle and so do my lips. Kissing his cheek like that...stupid thing to do. Only I want to do it again and go for those sensuous lips this time.

Suddenly, the prospect of me—bookish, awkward me—kissing my boss seems more

real and possible than ever before. Like fantasy and reality are converging.

Things are changing between Zayn and me. Like the day itself. Sunny and breezy this morning and now it's raging thunderstorms.

If I don't give myself something to do, there's no telling what I might say next. I measure the coffee beans and pour them into the grinder automatically.

Something happened in the bathroom. I mean, yes, Zayn saw my boobs and probably got distracted.

While I sometimes wish they were smaller—bras would be so much cheaper for one thing—they are a great set of boobs. I don't blame him for getting discombobulated at the sight.

But just now, in the living room, what magic did he weave to get me talking like that? Why is he suddenly interested in me when he's ignored me for years? And to share what some of the staff call me...what has driven me?

I'm not the slightest bit embarrassed that he knows it now. But what I didn't anticipate was how good it would feel to trust him with it. The burr of the coffee grinder can't even match my heartbeat rushing in my ears.

He listened. Like he used to, after the summer my parents passed away. He spent hours listening to my fears and worries and dreams. Before he went away to college, and we drifted apart.

This is the Zayn that I remember. The Zayn I don't see much of anymore, especially in the last two years.

I scoop the ground powder into the French press and grab the kettle. There's an ache

in my throat.

It's so unfair that he's showing me this side of him when it's time for me to go.

But then, when has life ever been fair?

I usually dust myself off, eat a donut and move on. That's what I'll do now too.

I'll take this fun, caring Zayn I've suddenly got through this evening as a goodbye gift.

—

We sip our coffees, black for him and a splash of vanilla syrup and cream for me. Outside the French windows, the storm seems to be getting worse. And inside...it's no less tense.

I need to bring this conversation back to something remotely professional. "Did you have something specific to discuss?" I make a point of checking my cellphone. "I have to go over to the hotel to check on the arrangements."

He frowns.

"Earlier, when you came looking for me," I say, even as my cheeks warm at the mere mention of it.

He considers me over the cup, his gaze thoughtful. "What about if I buy a retirement house for your grandparents in Florida? No, even better, Hawaii."

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

“What...do you mean?”

“As an incentive for you to stay.”

I almost choke on the coffee. It spills over my fingers. The mug shakes as I put it down on the table and grab a napkin to wipe them.

Why am I surprised that he hasn't given up on changing my mind?

Zayn is ruthlessly single-minded. And while this...talking and spending time together makes the ache in my heart bearable, I have to remember that this is his campaign to make me stay.

Although, a part of me does wonder why he needs me to stay so badly.

Yes, I'm a damn good assistant. I know his moods and quirks, and a little something about his background. But I'm not indispensable. No one is, in the corporate world.

Is it just a point of pride for him to not lose me? Or is he attached to me because I'm a link to Adam and my grandparents? The thought makes my chest hurt.

“You're serious,” I say. My boss doesn't have much of a sense of humor.

“You'll never have to worry about them living in a house that requires constant repairs. If you prefer, I'll buy something in a retirement community so they have company.”

God, the man is a master strategist and he knows me well.

The thought of my grandparents escaping the relentless rain in some balmy Florida town tempts me to my very soul.

“They won’t accept it,” I say, before I’m tempted to think of ways to make them accept. I can be as diabolical as the man looking at me as if I’m a complex problem he intends to conquer.

His mouth flattens. “Because I’m not family?”

“That’s not true,” I rush to assure him. “You know that, Zayn. They wouldn’t accept it from Adam or me either.”

He nods absently, but I can see his gears turning at sonic speed in his eyes. The thought of him applying that super genius brain toward pleasing me...is stupidly flattering.

“What if I double your salary and get you a company car?”

“No,” I say, laughing. It’s fun to be on the receiving end of his requests than demands.

“What if I—”

“You can’t buy me, Zayn.”

His brows lock in a ferocious scowl. “I’m not trying to.” When I stand up, his fingers chain my wrist. “Give me a little credit here, Mouse.” His thumb pad taps against my pulse. “I know you.”

“Do you, actually?” The question bursts out of me before I can stop it.

Pulling away, I pick up his untouched cup and mine and take them to the sink.

He follows me. My spine tingles because I feel his gaze drift down to my ass.

Or is it wishful thinking? God, I’m going to lose my mind by the end of this day.

I rinse the cups and pile them into the dishwasher. Only then do I look up.

With his forearms on the white quartz island, he leans down, dwarfing the kitchen. In my chest, my heart sputters because it feels like he’s reaching for me.

There’s a twinkle in his eyes and I think, for one crazy second, maybe I’m not that far off in imagining something changing between us.

I fight my body’s instinctive need to bow toward him. “Why all these questions? What are you trying to do?” I clarify because I’m a chicken.

“I want you to stay.”



*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

I sigh. “And I said I’m—”

“Actively unhappy, I remember.” In the blink of an eye, he’s walking around the island, cornering me. Some emotion I’ve never seen before glimmers in his amber gaze. “I’m trying to fix that. I’m trying to make you happy.”

“Oh.”

That gaze drifts to my mouth and stays there. There’s still at least a foot distance between us but he’s leashed me with his scent and his warmth and his look.

I lick my lips and bite into the lower one. “Why?”

“Because I want you to be happy, Mouse. Here, with me.”

Happy with me... The words knock me sideways, because that’s what I want the most in the world. And I want his happiness to be with me too.

“That simple?” I say, past the elephant-sized lump in my throat.

“It should be that simple, yes,” he says, flashing that rare, heart-thumping grin of his. I’m nearly blinded by the sheer voltage of it. “But right now,” he rubs his jaw, his gaze turning thoughtful again, “you’re the most complicated puzzle I’ve ever met.”

A grin, a fierce thrill flooding my body. Everything inside me feels tight and loose. This is how the heroines from the romance novels I read feel. Empowered and sexy and happy to be weak at the knees. “That’s an interesting turn of events.”

A dangerous gleam enters his eyes, and he takes another step toward me. His henley stretches across his taut muscles. “You’re enjoying this.”

Another step and his chest will brush mine.

I don’t know what game he’s playing, but I feel like I’m on a free-fall ride. But I’m sick of standing on the sidelines, of living vicariously through romance novels.

This is the man I’ve wanted for so many years, and I take pride in doing whatever I do well. If I have this chance at showing Zayn that I’m not his mousy assistant, then I’ll own it.

I shoot my hand out to stop him and it lands on his abdomen. I mean, the man climbs mountains for adventure, yes, but this slab of rock-hard abdomen is something else. He’s so hard that the urge to press myself against him and see how it pushes and presses my softness rides me hard. My fingers spread, as if to cover more ground.

I’ve touched him before. A hug at Christmas—which he doles out like scrooge with his coins. Then there was the time we danced two years ago at my grandparents’ wedding anniversary. And when Adam sustained a head injury in a car accident sixteen months ago and Zayn stayed with me at the hospital for four nights.

Of course, he had me running chores for him during the day. Well aware that sitting still would drive me bonkers. When I broke down on the fifth day—for fear of losing my brother too, he pulled me into his lap and stroked my back.

All those touches left a mark on me, making me pine him for worse than before. They hollowed me out because while I had his attention, and him, it was for the wrong reasons.

But this is different. This is me touching him because I want to. Need to. And he’s

allowing it. No, by the way he looks at me, he's encouraging this.

"After five years of your gruff moods and your rude demands," I say, pushing my fingertips into his abdomen. His muscles clench and the pulse between my thighs becomes relentless. "Yes, I'm enjoying your slightest discomfort."

"Yeah?"

"And your requests, not orders." Color floods my cheeks. "It's nice to receive something else from you for a change."

"Oh, I have many things to give you, Mouse. If only you knew to ask for them." A sigh lifts his chest. "But first things first. Is any of this working? Toward making you happy?"

I shudder and sigh and fight the smile that wants to climb to my lips. "Thank you for—"

"You aren't answering my question. Is it working?" Frustration rings through each word.

I shrug.

There's something near manic in his eyes. And I know that look. It's the one he gets when he's hyper-focused on some problem. Usually, resulting in launching some app or tech platform that takes the world by a storm and makes him millions.

He's never once failed after getting that look. And if he figures out why I'm quitting...it's humiliation central.

What if he returns your feelings, Nutty Shetty? What if all this today is because he...

“I’m not playing a game, you know,” I say hurriedly. “I would never do that.”

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

“I don’t think that, Mouse.” A strand of affection coats the words, and then, it slips into me, like a thread of magic, and coils itself around my heart. “But I will know all your secrets before the night’s out. Although I’m not so arrogant that I’d discount any hints you might throw me.”

I laugh then, because this is the man I’ve fallen in love with.

This negotiator who goes from intense to charming in three seconds. This caring man who he rarely lets out but when he does... I feel like I’m the only star in the entire fucking universe and everything orbits around me.

He orbits around me.

“What do you want from me, Mouse? Say one word and—”

“A kiss. I want a goodbye kiss.” The words rush out of me.

Then they drift in the space between us, like there’s no gravity, for what feels like an eternity. His sweat and musk wind around me again, squeezing everything tighter, making me prickle with need.

He smacks my hand from between us and inches closer.

A soft gasp falls from my lips as his chest presses against my breasts, as his hands grip the counter near my hips, and I’m engulfed by him.

His amber gaze drifts to my lips. “Okay,” he says, stunning me into silence.

Wait, what?

“But what if I want more?”

“More?” I repeat, like a bird.

His hand slides to my cheek and cups it. “What if one kiss isn’t enough? Are you game for that, Mouse? Or are you going to scurry away into your hidey-hole again?”

I should be annoyed by his mocking, but I know what he means exactly.

I’ve been hiding myself, for most of my life, in books and fantasies and comfort zones. Maybe it’s the freedom that comes from cutting off your own life support, but suddenly, I don’t care where this leads or the fact that come tomorrow morning, Zayn will regret it.

There’s one thing I need to know for sure before I take the plunge. “Why...why do you want more?”

“Why do I want to kiss you and touch you and lick you and mess you up in ways I shouldn’t be thinking of with my best friend’s younger sister?” He tugs off the pink string at the end of my braid and unravels my hair. It’s such a possessive move that I nearly melt inside. “Why do I want to ruin my naive, innocent, shy assistant in the filthiest of ways? Why have I tried my damndest to keep you at a distance?” He sounds almost angry at the end.

He’s tried his damndest to keep me at a distance...Okay, that explains a lot.

My swallow is audible. Every inch of me is on fire. I know him and he’s dead serious. He wants this. He wants me.

Why, how, when it started...I don't care about that right now.

"I want everything you said," I say, bringing my hands to his stomach. He's warm and solid against them, and slowly, I inch them up his muscled torso.

I trace his thick shoulders, then lace my fingers behind his neck. With each inch I cover between us, my curves push and squeeze against his and that drag is so good that I moan.

Zayn simply stares at me from under those thick lashes, unbending, challenging.

And then I realize another thing.

My very confident, very grumpy boss isn't sure that I won't back away from this. He's just as twisted up about this as I am.

I push onto my toes and press a kiss to the corner of his mouth. "I want a whole night with you, Zayn. One night, please. And I'll play by your rules, do whatever you want me to."

Seven

Zayn

Sasha is the sweetest thing I've ever tasted, and it goes straight to my veins, like some new drug, bringing me under. But instead of calming my dizzying brain, she makes every nerve ending come alive.

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

Already, I'm addicted to her, like she is to the donuts she sinks her teeth into every morning.

With a muted curse, I grip her chin and tilt it up so that I can better ravish her. I rub and slide my lips over hers, her shallow exhales hitting my lips in another assault.

Suddenly, it's not a wonder that I waited so long for my girl. Waited for her to feel the same filthy desires for me as I do for her. Without even knowing it, I bound her to me all those years ago with a job. Survived for years on seeing her face first thing in the morning, then flitting about my office like a busy bee.

She has no idea that she anchors me to the world when my brain would prefer to simply disconnect and disengage.

I lick the tiny divot at the center of her upper lip, and trace the perfect bow shape of it with the tip of my tongue. She clings to me—fingers digging into my shoulder blades, making those soft sounds like the kitten she snuggles with in her bed.

Now all her snuggles and her secrets are mine.

I'm so angry for denying myself—and her, for so long, that I dig my teeth into her lush lower lip. Her soft gasp soothes me and riles me in equal measure. I should take it easy, but I don't want to.

Plus, she needs to get used to this, to me. Needs to know that I'm going to eat her out and fill her up with my cum every chance I get. Needs to understand that I'm going to pleasure her so thoroughly that her every breath is going to be a chant of my name.



Now that she's in my arms, she's not going anywhere.

This need has built up in me for years. Keeping her at arm's length has chipped away any self-control I can even pretend to possess.

I drag her closer, sneak my fingers under her skirt, fill my hands with the sweet globes of her ass. Her flesh here is soft and dimpled and abundant enough to soothe me.

I bury my fingers at the line where her ass meets her thighs and draw lines down. There are so many things I want to, need to, do to her. Her tits feel like heaven crushed against my chest, and every inch of her is so lush and soft that I want to bite her, mark her. Own her.

“Let me in, Mouse,” I say, growling against her locked lips. “I don’t want some half-assed kiss, as if you’re kissing your adolescent crush.”

Her eyes open. The browns are shot through with desire, but she manages to glare at me. “You were my adolescent crush, Zayn.” And then, as if she didn’t mean to say that, she drags her lips down my neck and hides her face there.

The sheer innocence of the gesture twists the knot in my chest while her admission...knocks me out at the knees.

I park my hands over her hips, needing to hold on to her. How did she keep it a secret for so long? Why did she never show me that she needs this?

“And now?” I say, licking the shell of her ear. My tone is teasing, a defense against my heart becoming even more hopeful. Already, it is a heavy, crushing thing in my chest—this hope. This emotion for her. “Is the crush gone? Granted, it’s not been that long since you left adolescence behind.”

She struggles against my embrace, and the slide and graze of her tits is torment. If she thinks I'm letting her go after one short kiss, she's underestimating my madness for her.

Clasping her hips tight, I press into her, letting her feel the thick, hard shape of me.

Her fingers curl around my neck and she gasps.

I lick her lower lip before tugging it between my teeth.

She shudders against me. I sink my fingers into her hair at the back of her neck and pull, until she's forced to face me. "Tell me, Mouse," I demand. "Is the crush gone?"

"No. It's become something else." She opens her eyes and searches mine. Her tone is both husky and needy. "Now it has claws and teeth and wants all kinds of wicked things. I don't know how to make it stop."

"No stopping it, Mouse," I say, turning my head to align my lips with hers. My world is tilted, but with her breath mingling with mine. The tip of her tongue sneaks out and licks my lip in tentative stroke. "No turning back from this. For both of us."

I don't know if she understands the proclamation I just made. Only that she presses closer, deeper into me.

When she finally allows me entry into her mouth with an indignant huff, I lick through the sweet cavern like some conquering marauder. I nip and bite, and when she lets out a keening cry, I soothe with swipes of my tongue.

Air is an inconvenience we both need, so I release her sweet mouth. Only for a few seconds though.

Eyes closed, hands caught between our chests, she exhales in rough pants.

I push her hands away and fist the sweatshirt—my sweatshirt that is so perfect on her—with one hand. Her magnificent tits...I need to see, lick and suck them. Claim them as mine, as I will with every inch of her before the sun rises again.

She stares at my hands as I roll the hem up, past her belly, past her tits that fight against my hold. Her thick, wavy hair gets in the way. I gather it with one hand—like I've seen her do a thousand times, tits thrusting up—and push it out of the way.

## Page 19

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

The sweatshirt is off and her nipples—fuck her fat, juicy nipples—are peaked and hard.

Reaching around her waist, I find the zipper on the leather skirt and pull it down. The rustle of it is loud in the silence. The only other sounds are our harsh breaths and the pounding rain outside. The latter perfectly matches the beat of my heart as I push the skirt past her thick, shapely hips.

I step back for a better look.

Desire punches through me, a tattoo in my blood.

For just a second, her hands come together to cover her sex.

My exhale is so loud that she stills and looks up.

Our gazes hold for an eternity of long seconds and rough breaths stitched together. I don't know what she sees in my eyes. Her hands are shaking, but they fall away to grip the counter behind her.

Holding my gaze, she moves her leg just a little until it's at ninety degrees to the other foot. Her spine straightens, her chest heaves.

There's a cluster of ceiling lights right above the sink and they're all focused on her right now. To say my mind is blown would be an understatement.

Her skin is smooth and golden and her curves are...I have no words. Big tits, thick

belly, a tight waist, and hips that I could grip as I pin her to the bed and pound into her. Thick, toned thighs that I want clamped around my head, nearly blacking me out, while I lap up her pussy.

Her panties are the same blush-pink lace as the bra and just as flimsy. My mouth waters as I see the shape of her folds through them and the little wet patch at the center.

Another B grade for my imagination because she's beyond beautiful and so utterly fuckable. I'm going to glut myself on her.

"Zayn?"

I let my gaze drift over her tits and her belly before I meet her gaze. There's worry there, but something more too.

"Fuck, Mouse." I thrust my hand through my hair because I'm shaking with lust. I'm shaking with the need to mess up all of her and I'm not sure if I can hold back this...intensity. "Fuck! Look at you. All grown-up, huh?"

For all that there's something tentative in her expression, she rolls her eyes. "I've beengrown-upfor a while now, Zayn. You're the one who's late to notice."

Her sass makes my balls tighten up. "That's what you think."

"What?"

I shake my head, refusing to overwhelm her right now with hints of my obsession. For two seemingly intelligent people, our wires have been crossed for a while. And I lock up Adam's name when it floats to my lips.

She doesn't need to know that, once upon a time, I did worry about her brother's reaction to my forbidden desire for her. But it had been only a spark and I hadn't given it much thought.

Only nineteen and her first job and moving in with her grandparents to look after them...she had too many other focuses. But now, she's ready for me and I refuse to settle for anything less than being the center of her world.

"So, you like my body?"

My head jerks up at her question. It skewers me for her hesitation and doubt, like a fist in my chest. The discomfort is painful enough that it reminds me why I don't like feeling anything. Why I have only three people in my life.

And she's one of them—has always been.

"Be a good girl and turn around for me, Mouse."

Her chin lifts, and her eyes are shimmering with the need to please. She wants my approval... Fuck, does she know what a turn-on that is? "You want me to be a good girl for you?"

"Yes," I say, licking my lip. "You're my best friend's baby sister. You're shy, bookish, awkward and incredibly...good. And I...get to be the one who ruins all of that innocence, the one who makes you addicted to all the wicked, filthy things."

"Wow! You have thought about this."

I nod, loathe to betray more.

She dutifully turns around, muttering, "Okay. Here goes."

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

My erection pushes against my sweatpants with a will of its own. Because how is this innocent, sexy siren custom-made for me?

Her ass is round, lush, perfect with dimples and divots I could spend a lifetime exploring. I have to fight the pull of gravity on my knees because all I want to do is bury my face between those ass cheeks. “Turn around,” I say, the harshness from denying myself seeping into my words.

She does.

“How about I show you whether I like your body or not?” I say, skimming my knuckles over her belly. “Would you like that?”

A ripple moves through her. “I...think I will like whatever you do to me, Zayn.”

I grin. “What do you like, though?”

She tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. “I don’t know. I don’t have any experience.”

“What do you mean?”

She takes a long, deep breath, and those tits rise and fall, distracting me. “I’ve only wanted one man since I understood that my body has needs other than food.”

It’s a miracle my head hasn’t swelled to the size of the damn planet. My mouth is dry as I say, “But you read all that...romance stuff. You must know what you like.”

Color flushes her chest and cheeks and it takes me the last ounce of self-control I possess to not lick her up. But if I want to win her over, I need to give her what she wants. What she secretly craves.

I need her to share her filthiest fantasy with me so that I can make it real.

Only me.

“I like it when the hero tells the heroine what to do. When he...” She licks her lower lip, and I feel that stroke on my cock. “Uses her up any way he wants. When he loses control around her because she’s so irresistible.” She searches my eyes, her own wide. “Is that okay?”

I laugh and nod.

Fuck, this girl is my dream come true. She’s going to be the end of me and what a pleasurable end it will be. Instead of answering her question, I press my body into hers and play with the bra strap. Then I pull the cup of her bra down and pinch the plump nipple.

She moans and thrusts her tit into my palm. Grinning, I lean down and lick the peak. And then I lift her tit and push as much as I can into my mouth.

Her moan is so loud that it zings down my spine, going straight to my balls. I lick and tug and suck at the nipple, scratch my cheek against it. Bite the upper curve and then go back to suckling so hard that the sounds I make are filthy to my own ears.

“Do you know how many dreams I’ve had about these fantastic tits?” I ask, swirling my tongue around the peak.

“Unnn...ungg...Unnnnggg.” She’s only capable of sounds while her spine arches into



my touch. Her fingers twist in my hair and my scalp prickles as she pulls hard, as if to steer my mouth closer and deeper.

“Let’s make you come like this,” I say and smile. Cupping both tits in my palms, I continue the same thorough treatment with my tongue, teeth and fingers. I mark every inch of her soft flesh. I squeeze them together and press my face in them. I suck and suck harder when she twitches in tune with the movement.

She’s writhing against me now, her thighs encasing one of mine and squeezing. Using my thigh as her favorite humping toy.

“Look at me, Mouse. See who’s making you come,” I say.

Her mouth falls open and she looks at me.

I blow a puff of air on the swollen nipple and tug it between my teeth, not quite gently. And then I resume sucking as if my life depends on it.

She comes with a loud, keening moan, jerking against my thigh and squeezing it like a vise. The sound buries itself in my cock, in my heart.

I love knowing that this girl goes off at a hair trigger.

Beads of sweat decorate her forehead and her upper lip and she’s still trembling. I lick up her lips, stealing her soft pants. Her thighs are still clamped around mine and there’s a wet patch on my sweatpants.

One lone tear tracks down her cheek and I wipe it away. There’s more tears of pleasure and ecstasy in store for her.

“You come very prettily, Mouse,” I say, running my thumbs over her wet, swollen

nipples.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

Her body shudders around me.

She opens her eyes and they are wet too. Her tongue swipes out to lick her lips. “You...I want to please you. What should I do?”

I step back from her, the image of her like this, ravaged at my hands and mouth, now included in the database of her pics in my head. “You can take your resignation back.”

The bastard in me wants her acquiescence before I give her anymore. Or rather, it’s the self-preservation instinct in me. If I go any further, she’s going to own me before I have anything of her. Not that the first hasn’t already come to pass.

Her entire body stiffens. “That’s not how—”

Her phone and mine chirp loudly, one after the other, cutting her off.

“That show this works,” I say. “If you want more of this, more of me, you stay.”

Picking up the sweatshirt from her feet, I throw it at her without looking back. It kills me to leave her like this, but I have to.

I hear her growl and that too goes to my balls. And I walk out of the penthouse, leaving behind the sexiest creature I’ve ever known. With the most painfully hard cock in the history of erections between my legs.

Eight

Sasha

My boss is a brute, a... bully, and a bit of a bastard.

I rifle through my brain for more bad words to call him as I walk the perimeter of the luxury ballroom, making sure everything is running smoothly.

What happened in the penthouse a couple of hours ago still feels surreal.

Every time I pass a glass wall, I stop and stare at myself. When I stole into the bathroom earlier to change into my “party dress,” I locked the door for a few minutes.

There are stubble marks on my breasts and my nipples feel extra sensitive. I don’t even have to close my eyes to imagine his mouth there, sucking and nibbling away as if I’m his favorite treat.

Shamelessly, I cupped my core with my tights on, just to feel the needy pulse there. Zayn has unlocked something within me—like flipping a switch to my sexuality—and all I want is to explore more with him. I want to do things to him that will make his knees quake like mine did.

My body—my achy, sensitive nipples and the sweet throbbing awareness between my legs—wants to agree to his conditions, however outrageous they are, and just...surrender.

God, the things he said and did to me...

He’s wanted me this whole time. I still can’t wrap my head around it. If I didn’t know that Zayn never lies, I’d call it another ploy to make me stay.

So, if he does want me, why not take what I’m freely offering tonight? This way, he

can ruin me, as he put it, and he won't even have to see me again. Except for some random holidays when Adam forces us together.

I hide behind a potted palm, next to floor-to-ceiling frosted-glass windows. Outside, rain is pounding away, matching my own tumult. Increasingly dire storm warnings have been issued in the last half hour. The last thing I want to do right now is to pretend like I'm having a great time.

But the annual company party's my favorite project and Zayn gave me free rein for four years. While I don't mingle or dance with any of the staff—only Nathan or their other friend Max, or Adam, if he's in town, has ever asked me—tonight I feel extra removed from the festivities. The fact that I'd chosen the theme this year to be centered around Valentine's Day mocks me.

Though I'm glad I booked the ballroom in the hotel with a skyway connected to our office building. At least the staff won't get drenched in their fancy cocktail dresses.

People are filtering into the ballroom—everyone part of a pair, eyes widening at the magical tableau I've created this year.

The floors are polished marble and the layout is open, with a spacious dance floor at the center, surrounded by round tables with white tablecloths, each draped with lace overlays.

The grand chandelier, made of crystal and gold, hangs in the center of the room, casting a soft, romantic glow over the proceedings. Around the perimeter of the ballroom, cascading fairy lights are draped like delicate strands of stars, giving off a soft, enchanting ambiance

Each table has a tall glass vase filled with a mix of deep-red roses, white lilies, and long-stemmed, blush-pink tulips. Around the base of the vase are scattered rose petals

and tiny fairy lights that glow softly in the dim light, along with place cards and gift envelopes that I personally put together for the entire staff.

The DJ's playing popular love ballads from the last two decades, each song twisting me up a little more. Servers are circulating with trays of hors d'oeuvres that I had the most delightful time tasting before ordering—miniature crab cakes, bruschetta with fresh tomato and basil, and delicate smoked salmon canapés.

But the last thing I feel like right now is eating or revealing myself to anyone. What Zayn did to me...I feel it in every inch of my body and wouldn't be surprised if it glows like a neon tattoo on my forehead.

## Page 22

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

My boss sucked my tits and made me come so violently that I still can't stand straight. Or something equally mortifying.

Like the "Mouse" he calls me, I walk the perimeter of the ballroom and cast a glance toward the kids' zone I've had set up in a conference room. Pizza and donuts have arrived and there's already a huge line for the balloon animal guy. For a moment, I consider spending the rest of the evening with them. There, no one with beautiful amber eyes will mock me or drive me out of my own skin.

"You're not thinking of hiding, are you?" says a booming voice behind me.

I turn around to find my brother Adam towering over me, thick brows bunched together. Having not seen him in three months, I throw myself at him like a little girl.

He grunts and hugs me so tight that I feel ridiculous tears piling up my throat. Thirteen years older than me, he's always been my safe space, especially after our parents died.

Keeping my fascination with Zayn a secret from him has always made me feel like I'm lying to him. Or hiding an important truth about myself.

Now, though, I've set things into motion that can never go back. Zayn is mad at me and I'm mad at him and we've crossed a line that might make Adam mad too. And what if Zayn and Adam fight because of this?

All the ways that things can go wrong makes me shudder. I've always been afraid to rock the boat. Now, I've gone and capsized it.

Adam strokes my back as I struggle to keep it all bottled inside. “You’re shaking, Sash.” Then he kisses the crown of my head and laughs. “Already missing Granny and Gramps? I’ll be around for a few weeks this time.”

The hearty affection in his voice cuts through my stupid fears. Having made the decision to quit work, I’d called him in a panic. And now that he flew back from New York just so I’m not alone...I feel awful.

Pushing out of his arms, I kiss his cheek. “I’m sorry. I just...”

“Why are you apologizing to Adam?” says the man who has been MIA over the past two hours.

My face flames instantly and I can’t, for the life of me, make eye-contact with Zayn. I keep my gaze somewhere at his chest. It’s not guilt that weighs on me—we’re two consenting adults. But something else.

Adam squeezes me closer, one arm around my shoulders. “Mouse doesn’t want to be alone over—”

“I think it’s time you stopped calling her that.”

My head jerks up at the confrontational tone Zayn takes. And then it’s stuck on him, because the man is knee-meltingly gorgeous in a black suit. With his hair slicked back, he looks like he walked out of the cover shoot from one of his magazine profiles.

Our gazes hold, his pulling me into his gravity.

Adam, oblivious to our undercurrents, only laughs. “Should I?”



“Yes. That pet name is...asinine. Neither is she incapable of living by herself in that big house. If anything, I’d say she’s more capable than any of us at making big decisions.”

Adam looks like he’s been punched in the throat by his best friend. His laugh slides from his mouth and he gapes at Zayn and then me. “What the hell’s going on?”

“Nothing,” I say, suddenly sweating under my slinky pink sheath dress. “Zayn’s having a tantrum, as usual.”

My boss sidles up to me and thrusts his face into mine, the tips of our noses nearly colliding. “Do you want to tell him or should I?”

“Tell me what?” Adam growls. But his voice sounds far off, as if he’s worlds away.

My breath leaves my body, leaving me shaking. I don’t want Adam to know about us. If the “us” even exists anymore. “Zayn, don’t be—”

“What is he talking about, Sasha?” My brother says again, eyeing us both with suspicion.

“Nothing,” I say, putting my hands on Zayn’s considerable chest and pushing.

He doesn’t budge. God, the man might as well be a sculpted statue. Only he’s not, with warm skin, tensile muscles, and a thumping heart.

He lowers his head even more and his breath drapes my ear shell. I squeeze my thighs together to hold on to the sweet ache there. “Come dance with me and maybe I’ll shut up.”

I look up and there’s that wicked glint in his eyes again. “You’re up to something,” I

say, a hundred shivers claiming me at that look.

He shrugs. “Are you coming or should I tell Adam how you begged me to—”

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

I press my palm to his mouth so that my brother doesn't hear his outrageous threats.

He plucks me from Adam's side like I'm some ripe, low-hanging fruit. "Excuse us, Adam. Your little sister and I have a score to settle. Go hang out with Nate. You and he can bore each other to death with baseball stats."

By the time my panic subsides, and I can breathe normally again, Zayn's got me cornered against an alcove. We're still visible to the guests, lot of heads are craning toward us. Plus, Zayn shows his face for five minutes at these things, usually in a sweatshirt and week-old jeans. Not sexy and suave like tonight.

With his breadth covering me, no one can see my expression at least.

"I like when you get bossy, Mouse," he says, pointing to my fingers wrapped around his wrist.

I drop him like I'm scalded. "Don't do this in front of Adam."

He shrugs, but there's a tight line around his mouth. "He'll know, sooner or later. This way, his break at home won't be boring."

"Learning that his baby sister's horny and wants to be his best friend's little slut is a nice surprise?"

"You've got quite the mouth on you, Mouse. I like it." He rubs his thumb over my lower lip. "Are you a slut for me?"

I nod, because at this point, I've got nothing to lose. "Yes."

"But you don't want your brother to know?"

"What's the point in disrupting your friendship when this is nothing but a game to you? It's not like we're dating." My voice goes low at the end, and I feel small. No, I feel on the verge of getting my heart broken by tomorrow this time. But neither will I back down from whatever this is and however long it lasts.

Maybe I'm finally grown-up.

"I'm not the one hiding behind potted palms and big brothers, Mouse." There's a gentleness to Zayn's tone that ruins me. "Come, dance with me."

I stare at his hand with its long, elegant fingers and rope abrasions on the palm. Every inch of me sways toward him as if he's my true north. "I don't think that's a good idea. Everyone will be watching and I'm not—"

"You love dancing. I've seen your moves when you dance along to the choreography on the Xbox."

"When?"

"That Christmas morning when your gran said you couldn't open presents until I was up too."

"I knew it," I say, slapping his chest. "I knew you were awake but just messing with me. Coming between me and my presents."

He grins and it takes everything I have to not taste it and steal it for myself. But I'm not ready for the world to know that Zayn is entertaining himself with me for one

day. It's too precious and fragile.

"I sat on the steps and watched you for forty-five minutes, Mouse. You dance with your soul." He searches my gaze. "Of course, now I can admit that I was entranced by that heart-shaped ass in purple leggings." He laughs and thrusts a hand through his hair. The gesture is not nervous exactly, but full of self-deprecation. "You'd just turned nineteen and my ogling was barely legal."

Warmth floods my entire being. How does he unravel me so easily? So many little things, he's stored them all away, in that big computer brain of his. And yet, the things he's saying, they don't come from his brain.

He's speaking from his heart and I'm helpless to resist.

I place my hand in his and the touch anchors me like nothing and no one else can.

"And by the way, you look gorgeous in the slinky number. Although, I still think you looked better in my sweatshirt."

I'm grinning like a loon when he drags me toward the dance floor, and for once, I don't care who sees it.

Nine

Zayn

I'm right about Sasha's dancing.

All she needs is a moment in the spotlight to let go of the last of her inhibitions. And me, standing by her, a desperate part of me hopes.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

It's the most ridiculous hope ever because this woman is a whole fucking sun around whom the rest of us should be orbiting.

"You did something different with your hair," I say, fingering the edges of the silky strands battling me to claim the spot over her lush bottom. I'm also jealous of the slinky fabric draping sinfully against curves that belong to me.

Her brown eyes, made up with glittery gold makeup, are stunning. If I look too long into them, I might drown and disappear. Which isn't a bad fate for the rest of my life. I just need my wits about me for this night.

Her hands hang loosely over my shoulder, instead of lacing around my neck.

She's short enough that she'd have to stretch herself to do that and unfortunately for me, I know she's not that comfortable with PDA. Especially among the same staff that has mocked her.

But at least I get to hold her, and that soothes some part of me.

"Mariska came over and did my hair and makeup. I usually don't bother because it's a lot of work. For tonight, I wanted to look beautiful."

"I meant what I said earlier, Mouse. You don't have to straighten your hair or wear contacts or dress differently to look beautiful. You always are."

"You truly think that," she says, mouth slack.

“I do,” I say through a gritted jaw, wishing I could undo years of society’s unfair commentary. “I always thought so.”

She blooms like a sunflower at the simple truth, her smile full of joy. I realize, with a hard swallow, that she’s happy right now. Here, with me.

Every inch of me craves to nurture and protect that happiness.

My hands tighten just a bit on the tight indent of her waist and she presses her cheek to my chest. Our thighs meet and part easily, as if our bodies know each other already. A sultry jazz tune fills the air and the simple truth that I could spend entire nights like this with her floods me.

Around us, the ballroom shines like a pretty snow globe brought to life. In each swirling fairy light and shining decoration, I see my girl’s heart.

As we circle the dance floor slowly, I’m mobbed by my staff—half of whose faces I don’t know—about how fun the party is, how much they appreciate the thoughtful, personalized gift cards, the food, and the best of all—the arrangements for their kids to enjoy the party.

With each compliment, I see a little smile stretch Mouse’s mouth. But not once does she take or ask credit for it. She put in so many hours—negotiated with me like a badass over the budget—because she wants everyone to feel seen and appreciated.

It’s that generous heart of hers that keeps me hooked, year after year. Even before I began thirsting for her in a different way.

Now, as I feel her curvy body sway against me in a tantalizing push-and-pull rhythm, I’m amazed by my own stupidity in not realizing how much she might have been starved for my praise, or even just attention. She’s a girl who thrives when she makes

others happy. And there were so many instances when she pretended herself to please me.

For the first time since this morning, I consider if my company is the right place for her. Like she said, I can't watch over her all day unless I tie her to my desk. Which has its appeal.

I tuck my chin over her head, pull her close and sneak a look at my watch. My heart thunders in my chest at the prospect of stealing her away from this crowd. Neither she nor I are social animals, and all I wanted was to shut up the asses who called her that name, anyway.

It's the only reason I'm on the dance floor.

Ignoring her giant-ass brother waving his arms from near the exit is easy. "You did a phenomenal job with the party, Mouse. Thank you."

She looks up at me and nods.

"I should have shown up more at these events in the last few years, huh?"

"I don't hold it against you. I know how allergic you are to people."

I throw my head back and laugh. She pulls back from my tight hold and her fingers come up to my mouth. Every inch of me stills, anticipation a tight fist in my stomach. With a huffy breath, she begins to pull her hand back.

I circle her wrist with my fingers but don't pull or push.

"Touch me." My words are a whispered demand.



She looks around, shoulders bowing with self-consciousness. “I...I want to keep this between us, Zayn. For tonight at least?” Her gaze pleads with me when it should command. “It feels like my very own delicious secret.”

I nod, slightly mollified.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

“You call me Mouse, but you told Adam he shouldn’t. That’s hypocrisy.”

“Not really,” I say, running my thumbs over the sheer silk panels that cover her hips.

My best friend’s appearance tonight is an obstacle I don’t need. Already, I can feel him glaring at my back, wondering what I’m doing with his sister. But he won’t get in my way tonight.

“I might have picked it up from him, but I have my own reasons for calling you that.”

“And?”

“And what?”

She sighs. “What are the reasons, Zayn?”

Every time she says my name in that possessive, exasperated way, my balls feel a tug. “Can’t tell you, Mouse.”

She bristles against me, and sighs. Her palms drift from my neck to my shoulders to my chest, as if she wants to make dents in me. “Why does everything have to be on your terms?”

“Fine. I’ll make a deal with you. You give me something I want, and I’ll tell you why I have every right to call you Mouse.”

She frowns, as if this is a trap. “Okay, deal. What do you want from me?” A husky

undertone fills her question.

I grin. “I’ll save my more...devious needs for later.” I tuck a strand behind her ear, and she shivers. “If you could do anything in the world, what would it be?”

“I’d own and run a bookshop.” Her answer is instant. A special kind of spark shines in her eyes.

I spread my fingers, needing to touch more of her. “Tell me more.”

Her soft gasp as my fingertips graze the top of her buttocks is only for my ears. “You know my obsession with romance novels, or really all books, right? They’ve been my most generous and constant friends all my life, never judging me or measuring me in any way.” She adjusts my collar, grappling with sudden emotion.

I see the very loneliness in her eyes that I have known all my life. Mine is mostly by choice. It’s a shitty world, though, that doesn’t appreciate this girl for the shining star she is.

“I was a disaster in high school. But I could escape into a happier world. When Mama and Papa died in the car crash...it was the books that saved me. I want to give that same gift to someone else. Create a safe space, you know, for all kinds of book lovers. A haven, an escape from reality.”

Excitement roars through me and it’s hard for me to stand still. “So, when are you opening one?” I say casually.

“You don’t think it’s silly? Although,” she leans in, “I’ve done my market research and have a little folder with the numbers.”

“I bet you do.” Mouse’s ability with numbers is NASA worthy. “And no, of course

it's not silly. In fact, very few people in this world know themselves as well as you do."

Her eyes shimmer with pure joy and she fists the lapels of my jacket. "Thank you for understanding. It's a far-out dream, but it fuels me every day."

"Uh-oh..." I say, as I see Adam and my brother Nathan head toward us. Adam's bulky frame parts the crowd. "Stick to me, Mouse," I whisper just as the lights flicker once and then it's pitch dark.

All hell breaks loose around us, but I don't let her hand go.

"OMG, of all days for the power to go out," she says, looking around us with scrunched eyes. Her fingers cling to mine and her other arm comes around my waist. I grin, like some demented supervillain. "If you lead me out of the crowd, I'll find the manager. They must have a back-up generator—"

"Don't care if they do, Mouse." I pull her with me. But since I know that she will worry, I say, "Nathan will look after them."

"What? Where are we going?"

Then I come to a sudden standstill, right at that alcove where she dragged me earlier. Two steps to the left and we'll collide with Adam's frame. Behind us, the staff is bleating like goats who've lost their shepherd.

"Surprise," I whisper.

Then I clasp her cheeks and claim her sweet mouth again.

Ten

## Page 26

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

Sasha

I can't breathe.

And not just because we're running through the dark corridor like fugitives. Every few steps, Zayn stops, pushes me against the wall and kisses the hell out of me. For a man who rarely touches anyone, his kisses have their own language.

A thrill runs through me as I wonder if this new language is only for me.

Tucked into the alcove, with people blindly milling about, his kiss was soft and tender, an unspoken promise.

At the ballroom's exit, it was biting and hard, a lesson in primal need.

In the darkness that envelops us in the corridor now, it is ragged and desperate and...demanding.

My lips tingle and my heart's playing trampoline inside my chest. I feel punch-drunk, even though I had only one glass of champagne. This feels like a grand adventure and Zayn is the scary ride I've always stared at with longing.

Now, though, I'm so ready to ride him.

A giggle escapes me and he cages me against the wall and takes my mouth again, as if he needs to capture the sound. His lips are cool and I sip at them greedily. With my sight gone, the oak and cedar scent of him hits deeper.

“I love it when you laugh, Mouse,” he says, his hands stroking and cupping me everywhere. “Tell me what brought it on so I can do it again.”

We’re moving again, with me tucked up under his shoulder. His tone sneaks into my heart and coils there. I rarely ever hear him plead for anything. He usually growls and grumbles his way through life.

My face flames but I push the words out. “I...was just thinking that this is my version of extreme adventure and you’re the most thrilling ride I’ve ever encountered and how much I want to...ride you.”

His grip tightens over my waist and his gaze finds mine in the darkness. Beautiful amber eyes pin me as if I were an exotic butterfly. “Soon.”

His promise is silken and sinful.

My heart pounds in my ears, louder than the distant rumble of thunder, as we go up a flight of winding stairs. The metal banister is cool under my fingertips.

Without so much as a missed step, Zayn walks toward the fourth door in another dark corridor. The keycard beeps and glows green and he pushes the door open.

Fresh shock keeps me rooted to the spot as he closes the door behind us. The luxury suite is lit up by candles on every available surface.

It looks like a scene out of a cozy romance novel.

The large crackling fireplace casts a warm glow that flickers against the walls, creating fleeting patterns in the darkness. Beyond the open door of the terrace, the sounds of the storm are comforting, given this cocoon we’re wrapped in. The scent of rain-soaked earth and something like lavender fills the air.

As my eyes adjust to the dimness, I make out the contours of the suite—a stylish velvet sofa, a white marble coffee table gleaming beneath several platters of tiny, colorful desserts and fruits, and a champagne bucket.

And there at the center of the opposite wall is the most luxuriously decadent bed I’ve ever seen, with white sheets and a footstool to climb into it.

“Zayn,” I whisper, my skin hot despite the chilly air breezing in. “What did you do?”

His hands land on my shoulders. I close my eyes to better absorb the feeling of him framing me like this.

He gathers my hair, pulls it to the side. For one wonky breath, I feel him fisting it. My scalp prickles with a new awareness of his need. And finally, God, I’m ready to meet it. To fulfill it.

He throws my hair over my shoulder, his breaths playing with the small hairs on the nape of my neck. “I stole you away, Mouse. Everybody and everything else is taken care of. Tonight, I get to spoil you.”

The raspy slide of the zipper is louder than the stuttering beat of my heart. His fingers are cold—or my skin blazing hot—as he sneaks them under the dress and pushes it off my shoulders.

It slithers down my breasts and settles at my hips. The snap of my bra sends a shuddering shiver through me. It barely falls at our feet when his hands come around to cup my breasts.

With a rough groan, I press back into him. Already my flesh anticipates his special brand of possession.

My moan sounds erotic to my own ears as he pinches and tugs my nipples into plump, needy peaks. Stretching to my toes, I throw my hands around his neck as he strokes my shoulders, my breasts, and then my belly.



*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

His palms are abrasive as he slides the dress off my hips. It catches at my ankles, and I stumble. Zayn catches me and on my next breath, I'm on the high bed, floating on a cool, fluffy cloud.

Hands on my knees, he watches me with that singular intensity. My heart is beating so fast that I'm surprised it's not shooting out of my chest. I want to reach for him, but old fears and new inhibitions keep me passive.

"Is this what you want, Mouse?" he says, leaning down and pressing his palm between my breasts.

I grab his wrist with both hands. "Yes, please. I want..."

"What?"

"Whatever you want."

A frown claims his brow. Already, I feel like I'm failing him. But how do I tell him it's because I've never done this before? That I want to please him so badly that I'm tying myself in knots.

"I want to see more of you," I say, pushing up to my elbows.

Amber eyes gleam in the darkness with a savage kind of satisfaction. So, he likes it when I ask him for stuff? I file the little detail away.

He unbuttons his shirt—his jacket lies discarded somewhere in the corridor—and

pulls it out of the band of his trousers. Candlelight plays with every ridge and plateau of his defined chest and abdomen. His sparse chest hair narrows down to a thick trail on his abdomen that I want to follow with my tongue.

Holding my gaze, he unzips his trousers and pushes his black boxers down. They stay on his tapered hips as he sneaks his hand inside and pulls out his cock.

He is gloriously made, with fat veins running its thick length.

My eyes widen into saucers as he tugs from root to tip a few times. Saliva floods my mouth as if in preparation to take that thickness inside. The restless need in me coils tighter and tighter as he plays with himself, his gaze eating up my expression.

“Is this what you want, Mouse?”

“God, yes,” I say, running my hands over my thighs. I spread them—the move as instinctive as it is wanton.

His gaze lasers toward my core and he strokes faster. Pre-cum beads into a pearl at the tip. I lick my lips but he catches it and wipes it away on the bedsheet. My heart drops to my stomach.

“Touch yourself. See if you’re ready for me.”

“What?” I say with a quiver in my voice. The idea of not only baring myself to him but touching myself in front of him is...both exciting and mortifying.

“You take instructions well in the office, no? Do the same here, Mouse.”

My gaze dips to his erection and then skids back up. “I thought we’d make love. Don’t you want that?” I hate how breathy my voice is, but I can’t help it. I’m dying to

feel him inside me. I want to feel his hard body pressing me down into this bed, that thick cock pinning me until I can't breathe.

Suddenly, I realize I have all these desires and the words for them but I don't know how to communicate them to him without betraying the fact that I love him so much.

He doesn't laugh but his lips twitch. "Make love?" One devilish brow climbs up his forehead. "Step out of the pages of the romance novel into real life, Mouse. You wanted one forbidden night, remember? This is purely sex. Scratching an itch."

He's not being mean, I tell myself. Only giving me what I asked for. I should have known to be careful of what I ask him.

Before I can protest, he leans closer and taps his cock against my lace-covered core. I reach my hand out, eager to pet him. Eager to please him.

He arrests my hand midway. "You're allowed to look, Mouse. Not touch. You haven't earned the right to my cum either, baby girl."

The hurt that pierces me at his declaration is stunning in its intensity. My hand falls to the sheet and I fist it. "That's...unfair."

He shrugs. "That's why you should never offer up carte blanche before the opposite party spells out their terms."

"This isn't a business deal for me."

"What is it then?"

My silence makes his jaw lock up tight. A muffled curse later, he's gone.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

I look up at the dark ceiling and blink back tears. For some reason that I don't understand, he's decided to indulge me tonight. Only to a point, apparently. But I'm so gone for him that I'm willing to take whatever he gives me.

Gathering my hair—it keeps tickling my already heated skin—I spread it around my head.

He returns just as I'm getting antsy, champagne bottle in hand. With his trousers hanging off his hips, the V of his pelvis is a treat I can't look away from. His muscled shoulders and defined pecs gleam, but his tension is as tangible as the cool breeze coming in from outside.

What the hell does he have to be tense about?

“Sit up halfway,” he says in that gruff, grumpy voice. As if I've already displeased him.

And yet, something about that very tone goes straight to my needy, achy core.

I do as he commands, my breasts jiggling with the effort. His cock is at my eye level and it's all I can do to stop myself from leaning over and licking the thick length.

One of his hands grips my shoulder and before I can blink, a splash of cold liquid hits my neck. I gasp and flinch but he doesn't let me jerk away. We watch the liquid slither down my skin, between my breasts.

He bends down and catches it right as it dips into my belly button. Tension coils

inside me. The slurp of his warm lips against the cool liquid...is indescribable.

I sink my fingers into his hair, desperate to keep his mouth on my skin, but he's too fast for me. It doesn't matter that I brace myself for what comes next.

My breath rushes out of me in a whoosh as the champagne hits my left nipple. Before it can drip down, Zayn's mouth is there, catching it, licking it, licking the underside.

Afraid that he won't welcome my touch, my hands seek the bed and grip it tight. He continues this torment over and over on each breast until I'm sticky with champagne and his licking. Stickier still at my core.

"Please, Zayn..." I say, a million wings fluttering under my skin. "Please..."

"Please what, Mouse?" he says, looking up at me, rubbing his stubble against the peak.

"Please suck them. I can't bear it." I grip his hair and pull. "I need it."

"Show me how you want it."

I cup my breast and with one hand still in his hair, I bring it to his lips. "Open," I say, half begging and half sobbing.

He opens, clamps his lips around the bud and then suckles. I twitch and moan and writhe and just when I think I might reach that peak again, he stops.

My growl is loud and ferocious in the silence, as is his following laughter.

"I hate you," I say, every inch of me trembling.

“Battle words, baby girl.” Fingers bracketing my throat, he pushes me back onto the bed.

His mouth leaves open kisses over my pubic line and then he clamps his teeth over my panties. The lace rips loudly. Cold, weighty glass presses against my inner thigh and it takes me a moment to understand.

I splutter incoherently when the champagne hits my folds. And then his mouth is there at the low end, catching it all. Drinking it in with wet, slurpy sounds that make my core gush.

I push onto my elbows, just in time to see him nosing up through my folds, his dark-red lips wet. He looks up and the wicked glint in his eyes floors me. This man could own me so easily, body, mind and soul. If he doesn’t already.

“Do you know how long I’ve been waiting to taste you, Mouse?”

I shake my head, displacing little beads of sweat.

“So long,” he says, almost to himself. “Telling myself it’s wrong. Only to have you leave me?”

“Zayn, I—”

“Did you do this for me too?” he says, tracing the shape of my bare lips with a reverence that I’ve never seen in his eyes before. “All this slick for me, baby girl?”

I nod. Words are beyond me at this point. He could use me like a blow-up doll for all I care. But so far, all he’s done is pleasure me. I’m frowning at that point when he dips in and sucks my clit with his lips.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

Electricity buzzes up and down my spine and I groan a guttural sound. He repeats the motion a few times and I chase his mouth with my pussy. His tongue licks down and then he thrusts the tip into my slit.

Incoherent sounds escape me as he fucks me with his tongue. But it's the overflowing feelings in my heart that elevate this into something else. The sight of this man...my first crush, my grumpy boss, the only man I ever wanted, with his head between my thighs, it's better than any romance novel I've ever read.

My orgasm is a shimmering mirage inching closer and closer. I'm crying fat tears now, desperate to finish, chasing the tail of a star.

He pulls back, his elbows digging into my fleshy thighs. Only when I register the stretch do I realize how indecently I'm splayed out. How his eyes gleam with a near manic desire. His lips are damp with my arousal and the champagne. "Shall I stop, Mouse?"

"Don't you dare stop, Zayn! I did it all for you, okay. Today, and for four years and even before..." I swallow the words. "All I ever wanted was to please you. To gain your approval and attention."

"That's all I need to hear, baby girl." He grins that rakish smile and dives back in.

I barely get used to the assault of his lips on my clit when he thrusts a finger into me. My spine straightens as if someone wedged a fork in there. It pinches a little but I'll be damned if I say anything. There's no place for my twisted nerves to land because his mouth is brutal on my clit.

Another finger thrusts in and he curses. “Fuck, Mouse. So wet and tight and slick...all for me. You’re going to milk me so tight and so good, aren’t you?”

I nod, his words twisting the coiled spring in my belly tighter and tighter.

He adds one more finger and the pinch is a raw, burning stretch now. How are we ever going to fit that monster cock of his into me?

I gasp in a breath but those clever fingers of his are probing some deep, delicious spot I’ve only read about.

“You have such a pretty pussy, Mouse. And it’s mine, isn’t it?”

“All yours, Zayn. All of me...is yours. Only yours,” I cry.

He halts the sucking of my clit and looks up. Possessive need blows the black of his eyes. Then he tugs the thick bundle between his teeth and I’m flying away.

The cork from the champagne bottle has nothing on how high and how far I fly. My thighs clamp his head and I’m shaking and crying and coming. And coming, because the man is relentless. He keeps licking at me as if I’m his last meal.

One orgasm rolls into another one, wrecking me, remaking me, my body nothing but a thousand fragments of pleasure.

Eleven

Sasha

I lie on the bed, my body humming with aftershocks. The sheets are damp and cool against my skin. A cocktail of scents—my own sweat and arousal, damp earth and



oak moss from the man lying behind me—fills my nostrils.

Without realizing it, I breathe in a lungful, afraid that I might never again know this particular combination. Every inhale draws more of him into my senses. I'm not sure if I want the lights back on or not. Although I do want to know what's going on inside his complex mind.

The darkness is deeper than before as the candles gutter, though the flickering glow of the fireplace casts shadows of our lying bodies on the far wall. I like us like this, tangled up in each other, sated. Not him, though. He didn't even get started. That sense of failure takes the edge off of my nearly violent orgasms.

For a moment, I wonder if he will abandon me, if it's all he's going to offer me tonight.

And yet, he's quiet behind me, drawing lazy patterns on my bare skin. His touch is almost reverent, as if he's memorizing every inch of me. It gives me the courage to face him, to let this unfold as it should've from the beginning.

With me grabbing what I want with both hands and my entire soul.

I turn my head and our gazes hold. His is filled with satisfaction and something deeper, something that makes my heart clench.

One abraded hand pushes me to lie on my back. Taut muscles—that I've yet to touch—clench as he props himself up on his elbow.

"You okay?" he asks softly, tracing a finger under my eye.

"I must look a sight, "I say, forcing a laugh.

Zayn shifts closer, his hand moving to cradle my cheek, his thumb brushing over my lips in a feathery caress. “I like you like this. Even better than the polished you from earlier.”

“How?”

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

“Thoroughly ruined. At my hands.”

“Do you?” Apparently, I can sound sarcastic when I’m riled enough. “Because I don’t feel ruined. Expertly played, yes.” I pull back from him, even if it feels as hard as a planet reversing its orbit. I even manage to arrest his hand.

A faint tension emanates from his lean frame. He doesn’t like what I said or that I stop him from touching me.

This last day with him has given me more insight into him as a man with his own needs and flaws and doubts. He’s still the larger-than-life hero of my adolescence—just lying here with him takes my breath away—but it’s also a disservice to the real man beneath.

A man who clearly went to a lot of effort to give me this night.

“You arranged the blackout, had this suite all ready. Why? Did you somehow arrange the storm too?”

He shrugs, his skin gleaming in the faint light. “You asked me for one night.”

“Whatever I ask you for will be mine?” The idea takes wings in my chest. What if that’s all Zayn needs—for me to tell him what I want from him?

When he doesn’t answer, I try rolling away. “Thanks for the two mind-blowing orgasms, boss.”

In the blink of an eye, he pins me under him. “No, Mouse,” he says with a growl.

For one glorious second, his entire weight presses me down into the mattress. My breasts are crushed against his chest and my breath is a choppy pant.

I struggle under him—an instinctive move, because I really don’t want to get away—and he clamps me down with his powerful body. Desire and longing rip through me as his action tells me what he won’t.

He won’t let me get away. He just can’t.

I renew my struggles and I’m rewarded afresh. This is play, yes but God, I love this feeling of getting under his skin.

His trousers are still hanging over his hips but the weight and shape of his cock press at my core and my thighs fall open, making space for him.

Throwing my head back, I arch into him and groan as different sensations skewer me. All the resolve to get him to talk to me is gone in a puff as his open zipper roughly slides against my folds. I go from zero and wrung out to slick and moaning in three seconds. God, I need that thick length inside me.

“I have a very short time to win you over. I didn’t want to share you with people who don’t deserve you. And definitely not your bloody giant of a brother.”

“Hey,” I say, smacking his chest.

My mind is slow to catch up to his words with all these new sensations clamoring for my attention. I clasp his hips, as if I can stop him. Or even want to, fully. Still, he gives me another swivel of his hips before I push up and bite his lip to get him to stop. His skin feels as feverish as I do.

We're both panting when I finally manage to say, "Win me over?" over the loud thump-thump of my heart. "You want to win me over. Why?"

His shoulders and biceps bunch as he lifts his hips and hangs over me. I clasp his cheeks, desperate to read him. My heart beats a frantic tattoo in my chest.

Bending down, he brushes his lips against mine in a featherlight touch that speaks of tenderness and gentle affection. Amber eyes flicker between mine the entire time.

He had his mouth on my most intimate folds earlier, but this kiss and the affection in it...slays me. Owns me. I lace my fingers behind his neck as he trails more kisses along my jawline and neck, licking my pulse.

"Don't leave, Mouse. Please...stay." He whispers the words against my sternum, as if he's speaking directly to my heart.

I swallow at the thread of naked need pulsing in his words. Feeling bold, I push the thick lock of hair from his forehead. Something I've wanted to do for ages. "I...why?"

"Because I can't, Sasha." Tight grooves bracket his mouth. And my name on his lips is both a restraint and a release. "Not without you."

"Then fuck me," I say, a fresh fever claiming me. All my fears and doubts fall away. "Show me how much you need me." This man could ask me to follow him to the ends of earth and I'd do it. I spread my palm on his chest—savor the thundering beat of his heart, and then trail it down, covering as much ground as possible. "I'll stay if you ruin me, properly this time. And I promise never to ask you for anything, ever again."

He growls and catches my lips for a rough, biting kiss. I slip my hands over his

tapered hips, trying to push his pants down. Rolling off of me, he sheds them and his boxers and comes back to me on all fours. His cock plops against his left thigh, thick and veiny and oh so delicious looking.

I scrape my nails over his hairy thighs. Every inch of him is new to me. And that I can touch him like this...is a fever dream. "I want to touch it, please."

A twinkle shines in his eyes. "Touch what?"

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

My cheeks heat up. “Your...cock.”

“Later.” But there’s less pushing me away this time and more urgency in that one word. “Right now,” his fingers trace my pussy lips with a gentle reverence that goes straight to my heart, “I need to claim you so well that you don’t remember anyone who’s touched this pussy before. If you touch me, I’ll get distracted.”

“Zayn...” I lick my lips and clasp his cheek. He meets my eyes. “I’ve never...I mean...I’ve never done this before. Any of this.”

His brows tie into a scowl. But he doesn’t stop touching me. His fingers dip in and out of my slit, like he’s playing peekaboo. As if touching me is like breathing and he can’t just stop. “Mouse, what are you saying?”

“I’ve never wanted to do this with anyone.” Finally, the words come. Easily. “Except with you.”

“So this pussy is all mine?” he growls, thrusting his two fingers in one deep stroke. The heel of his palm rubs deliciously against my clit and he’s hooked those fingers inside me, nudging at that spot.

I’m floating in a sea of sensation with everything he’s doing to me. But I won’t be a passive spectator for another second.

This is the man whose name has been stamped on my sexuality and I want to soak in every second of it, of him. I want this night to be inked into my flesh and bones forever.

“And you?” I say, finally wrapping my hand around his thick length.

“I...what?” His mouth falls slack, the lower lip a deep red. Head thrown back, his shoulders clenched tight, he is the most gorgeous man I’ve ever seen. “Squeeze tighter, Mouse. Stroke harder.”

I follow his instructions to the letter and watch the effect of it play out in his beautiful face. Veins bulge in his temple and his neck is a corded column I want to lick up and down. My attempts at fisting and stroking his cock are clumsy but he doesn’t look like he cares. If anything, the sounds that fall out of his mouth make me all achy and empty.

Just when I think I’ve got a good grip and rhythm going, he pulls my hand away and laces our fingers. His kiss is so tender that it won’t be a surprise if my soul jumps out to reach for him.

“More than a decade, Mouse. So long ago, in fact, that if you squeeze me like that for another second, I’ll erupt all over your hand. And that’s not my priority right now.”

“Years,” I repeat, eyes wide at his gruff admission. Glee blooms inside my chest, spreading to every limb. My nostrils flare as understanding dawns. “It’s almost like you’ve been...” I trail off, scared to finish the sentence, and search his eyes.

But there’s very little space in me to process it further because he taps his cock against my pussy and runs the head up and down in between my folds. The sensation drives me out of my skin. “What’s your priority then?” I say, wrapping my hands behind his neck as he pushes my thighs indecently wide.

“Filling up this pretty cunt,” he says and then pushes the fat head of his cock inside me. “Until you’re stuffed so full of my cum that it leaks down your thigh. Until you forget that you ever planned to leave me.”



“No...no more talk of leaving, Zayn. Please, just...give it to me.”

The visual he paints is just as arousing as the slight pinch as he probes my entrance and plays there. I groan at the multiplenew sensations. The slurp and slosh of our flesh is as raw as other realizations claiming me.

Twelve

Zayn

“It’s going to hurt, Mouse.” I trail soft kisses against her neck, somehow resisting the velvety vise of her sheath pulling me in. “But I promise to make it better. You trust me, yeah?”

She meets my gaze and nods.

“You have to relax for me, baby girl,” I say and inch forward. “You have to want it so bad that—”

“I do, Zayn. It’s all I’ve ever wanted,” she says with a squirm of her jiggly thighs. Then she huffs out a long exhale, and slowly, she softens her muscles around me.

Sweat beads on my forehead and drips down onto her tit. I lick at the drop and then swirl my tongue around the needy bud. Down below, her channel squeezes the head of my cock a little more snugly.

It’s a simple principle I never completely understood, but it’s sunlight bright now. The more I give Mouse, the more she gives me back. And it’s true of her delectable body too.

When she relaxes around me, I feed a little more of my cock into her snug sheath.

She trembles from head to toe, her palms moving over my arms restlessly. The sounds that fall out of her mouth as she stares up at me, her eyes devouring me, go straight to my balls.

I grab her wrist and drag it down to where she will feel me soon. “Feel me here, baby girl.”

“I feel you here,” she says, grabbing my hand and bringing it to her chest. Her heart thunders under my palm. “I feel you everywhere, Zayn.”

Fuck, this girl has so many buttons and I need to discover and push and reprogram every one of them to me. But right now, the sight of her lush, bare pussy lips sucking me in like petals of that damned rose I compared her to...electricity zaps down my spine and collects in my balls.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

Like I told her, it's been forever. But I need to last long enough to feel her clench and milk me in the throes of her climax. I rock my hips and give her a few shallow thrusts, and the way her flesh sucks the fat head of my cock is greedy and erotic to the extreme.

"Oh God, are you in all the way?" she says, clutching my forearms, digging her little nails into the muscle. There's tension in her lush little body now and a trace of panic chasing itself back and forth across those insanely beautiful eyes. "Is it good for you, Zayn?"

Laughter bursts out of me, laced with affection springing from some deep well inside of me. I dip down to catch her mouth. Her taste is addictingly sweet. "No, baby girl. I'm barely even in. I'm giving you a chance to get used to me, Mouse, but this reprieve's not going to last too long, yeah? I need to bury myself balls deep in you."

Because there's no way in hell I'm actually letting go at this point. Not when I've got a taste of how snug and tight and wet her pretty little cunt is.

I push in a little more, and stop.

"Oh," she says, her eyes fighting to focus on my face. One hand reaches to cup my cheek and then she traces the slope of my cheek, my brow and then pushes into my hair. Her grip is tight and I duck my head in surrender. And then, the clever little thing does a wicked jiggle of her hips.

My scalp burns at how tightly she pulls to aid her little thrust.

Her flesh swallows more of me with a wet, sloshing sound and then there's no stopping me. I grip her hip with one hand, and stroke deep into her in a deep thrust. I'm lodged all the way in and my balls slap against her ass.

A curse rolls out of me on a wave of such intense pleasure that I nearly black out. My girl clenches me so tight that I see stars play out at the back of my eyes. "That's it, baby girl. You did it, you took me all the way in like a champ. And Mouse, you feel so fucking good."

"Oh my God, Zayn. You're too big," she says, and then moans because all she's doing is making me bigger. "That stings and aches and...in a good way," she hurries to reassure me. "Although I don't think I can take any more."

I swivel my hips and test the fit, her groan swallowing her own words. "You'll take whatever I give you, Mouse. You promised me that, remember?" I give her another shallow thrust and her teeth dig into my bicep, hard, snapping that last thread of control I'm hanging onto.

I pull out and thrust in, setting a short, fast rhythm. Her tits jiggle and bounce, inviting my mouth. "You're taking me so well. This cunt is made for me, Mouse."

"Yeah?" she says, her breath coming in harsh pants. "It feels good to you then?"

"It feels fucking amazing." I lean down and kiss her temple, my heart full of things I've never felt much less said to anyone. I've never felt so close to anyone before, neither have I wanted to. But this girl...she's snuck into my bloodstream through the years. "Thank you for trusting me."

She squints and then focuses those big eyes on me, the damp sheen of sweat making her face glow. Her hands crawl down my arms with an eager urgency, drum down my hairy thighs and then linger over the root of my cock. Featherlight though her touch

is, it makes me snap my hips and drive into her.

“Come inside me, Zayn. I want to know what it feels like. Please...”

“Hold on to me then,” I say and again, she follows my every command like she was born to do it.

Her fingers inch over my shoulders and lace behind my neck. I sneak a hand under her bountiful ass and pull her up to change the angle so that my every thrust drags over her clit.

Even though she’s never done this before, she’s a natural. She learns the rhythm I’ve set easily enough and goads me with her moans and mewls.

Then, I truly let go. And I know, as I pump my hips with a wildness that owns me now, that it’s so incredibly good because it’s her.

The slosh and slap of our bodies joins our ragged breaths as her snug channel clenches as tightly as her arms around me. On one such serrated breath, I sneak my hand between our pulsating bodies and run it up her thick belly and then cup her tit. “Come again for me, Mouse. Let me feel you clench me,” I say and tug the stiff nipple between two fingers. Ducking down, I pull it between my lips and give it a hard suck. “Be a good girl for me one more time.”

“Oh Zayn,” she whispers and then her back is arching and she’s falling apart around me, milking my cock for all it’s worth. Demanding I give her every drop of me.

I increase the speed of my thrusts, nearly manic in chasing my climax. My name is a chant on her lips as I fuck her hard and fast and filthy deep and then I’m falling over, shooting my seed into her.

The climax is so intense and earth-shattering that I let her take my weight, and wrap my lips around her other nipple. I keep sucking on the tight knot and it kicks her off into another minor orgasm and her snug sheath continues to milk me.

“Zayn,” she says, cradling my head with a gentleness I’ve never known from anyone in my life. As if I didn’t just use her virgin pussy up without the least bit of tenderness, without protection.

I should feel guilty about forgetting the latter, but I don’t. We’re in this together now, whatever the future. If anything, the idea of Mouse growing rounder with my seed only makes me harden inside her again. It’s another tether to bind her to me and I’m enough of a greedy bastard to use everything she hands me.

With her gentle embrace, she has knocked me down that last bit. My eyes feel gritty, and my chest aches, but I can’t look away.

Her eyes are closed and there are tears that she doesn’t bother wiping. I catch one and lick it off.

Sweat-slicked tendrils stick to her temples and she’s huffing as if she’s run a marathon. She rubs a shaky hand over her nose and spreads her snot around. And yet, she’s the most beautiful creature I’ve ever seen.

I’m breathing hard too, but that’s because I know, deep in my gut, that I have reached the destination I didn’t know I have been running toward.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

“That was...” Mouse says, and a half sob, half laugh shakes her shoulders. “Mind-blowing.” She pushes her head up and presses a kiss to my head. “Are you okay, Zayn? Was that...good for you?”

I’m still tucked up inside her snug sheath, and that question makes my dick harden and push against the walls.

“I guess that answers my question,” she says with a giggle I rarely hear anymore.

I blow a puff of air over her nipple and it stands to attention. “You have the sexiest tits I’ve ever seen,” I whisper, my voice still hoarse from how loudly I came.

“Thanks. I grew them all by myself,” she says, sounding drunk.

I look up at her from my neat little perch between them and grin. If it’s not her lush curves, it’s her sass that owns me. Her fingers play with my sweaty hair. The other hand traverses my back as if she’s searching for something. A wary expression enters her eyes.

“Mouse? What is it?”

Her throat moves up and down on a swallow. “Can we stay like this for a little while?”

I pull out of her without thought for her battered pussy.

She grimaces and tries to hide it. Not well, though.

Heartless bastard that I am, I'm arrested by the sight of my cum leaking out of her. My dick lengthens, eager to do more damage.

Just like me, her gaze is caught on the sight too. A soft, satisfied mewl falls from her mouth and sears itself into my dick, my brain and my heart. It's entirely possible that my little mouse is as possessive as I am.

I bend my torso over her and press a kiss at the top of her pubic bone. Sex and sweat and musk, she's such a delicious cocktail of scents that I want it bottled for just me. No other man.

"You're a feisty little thing, aren't you?" I say, giving her my hand.

She shies her gaze from me and shrugs, reminding me of my abruptness. Locking my fingers around her ankles, I pull her down to the edge of the bed. I take her surprised mouth in a rough kiss that makes my cock throb afresh. "We're breaking for a quick shower and snacks and hydration, Mouse. Then I'm going to fall asleep with my cock inside your pussy and my lips wrapped around your tits."

Thirteen

Sasha

The lights come on with a vengeance just as Zayn is toweling me down.

For a second, I'm so badly disoriented that I nearly sway at the sight of my reflection in the mirror.

My eyes are wide, my mouth looks smudged, and my flesh is all shades of pink and honey gold from the thorough rubdown he's given me.



I look different.

I look fucked to within an inch of my life.

I look...beautiful in that raw and real way that Zayn described me this afternoon.

Was it just this morning that I tendered my resignation? That I thought my life with my grumpy boss was over?

I feel like a different Sasha. Not just beautiful, but bold and decisive and sexy. Like a romance novel heroine, I reached for what I wanted and God, the bounty I received in return...

And no, I'm not going to dwell on the ending of this story. Not when Zayn's passion and possession are primal reminders inked into my flesh. There are several dark smudges on my skin—around my breasts and on my hips and near my inner thighs—all thanks to him. Over the arch of my neck, there's a darker bruise from his teeth.

My nipples look puffy and when I shift restlessly for just a second, discombobulated by this version of me, I feel the soreness between my thighs.

No, not soreness, so much as an ache. An emptiness. There's Zayn-shaped emptiness in my pussy and my heart, everywhere. As if he unmade and then remade me, to be even more in love with him.

Remembering where I am, I look back and down over my shoulder. After a quick shower—a feast for my already sensitized senses in the dark—he is on his knees behind me, rubbing body oil into my legs.

Jet-black hair stuck to his scalp, his face is even more angular than usual. And for

some reason, he looks as wrecked as I feel. Even though I haven't left marks on his flesh. I want to.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

Amber eyes hold mine and slowly, he leans forward and digs his teeth into my plump ass cheek.

The bite is sharp enough that I flinch. Only it brings keener awareness to the throbbing pulse between my legs. The sight of him like this, fingers clutching my thighs and face pressed into my ass...my filthiest daydream didn't conjure this.

His gaze sweeps over my body in the bright lights, the irises shining with pleasure. "What a bountiful body you have, Mouse." Hands on my hips, he turns me and presses soft kisses over the curve of my belly.

His fingers trail up and down my folds, with a few detours to my clit, drawing out fresh slick from me. I shiver and grip the marble counter.

"Poor baby girl. Look how puffed up and swollen this pussy looks," he says.

His thick, coarse hair tickles my inner thigh and it's another new sensation to take in.

I barely process it when I feel his warm breaths over those puffy folds. His muscled shoulders wedge between my thighs, nearly knocking me off my feet.

But he doesn't let me fall.

My eyes roll back in my head when he gives a tentative lick over my slit and up toward my clit. "Tart honey...I'm already addicted to this taste, Mouse. How will I find it if you leave me?"

Fingers gripping his hair, I widen my stance. The last thing I want to think of now is tomorrow or the future.

“Zayn...Zayn...” I whimper.

His laughter vibrates through my folds, adding another layer to my arousal. This time, he gets me to the edge with soft, patient, infinite flicks of his tongue. His fingertips do some kind of feral tap dance over my clit. It’s a slow, sweet climb to the peak, but when the orgasm comes for me, it wrenches me apart into so many shards. I shiver and shake violently.

My knees buckle but before I fold onto the floor, he catches me, picks me up and brings me back to the bed.

I sigh as he turns me to my side and pulls the duvet over us.

He made sure to feed me every morsel of the sweet and savory treats from the plate before he pulled me into the shower. My belly is full, and my body is humming with a sweet buzz. And my heart expands to one hundred times its size. The love I feel for him vibrates through every cell in me and I wish this night never would never end.

His chest is still damp. He tugs me close, one forearm planted under my tits, and I can hear his heart’s thundering beat against my back.

I’m grateful he didn’t turn the lights back on. The darkness is my friend as hot tears fill my eyes. I rub my palm over his hair-roughened forearm as his fingers draw loops and swirls over my hip and thigh.

“Zayn?”

“Yes, Mouse?”

“Thank you for...everything.” My voice wobbles and I draw in a deep breath to steady it. The last thing I want is to cling to him or cry all over him. Zayn might be attached to me in some roundabout, twisted way that I don’t understand yet but he’s even more allergic to any kind of emotional drama. He’s had enough to live through in his childhood and teen years with his bullying father. “I’ll never forget this night.”

His laugh as he trails his mouth down my back is gruff and a little...scornful. I frown and try to turn but he keeps me locked against him by throwing a leg over mine.

“Who said it’s over yet, Mouse? I’ll let you know when your gratitude is due.”

Now I know he’s not just angry but fuming.

“Zayn, why are—”

“Enough talking, Mouse. I think I’ve indulged you enough.”

Affection spurts in my chest like warm honey. “You did. More than I ever expected.”

“So, now it’s time for you to shut up and let me sleep.”

“Oh, yeah, sure,” I say, stifling my disappointment. Didn’t he just say he wasn’t done with me? “Goodnight, Zayn.”

His fingers drift aimlessly over my belly and under my breasts, squeezing and pinching and stroking. I sense the restlessness in him before he says, “I’m too wired to fall asleep, Mouse.”

I squirm, wanting to spring into action but he doesn’t let me even budge. “I have a bottle of the OTC sleep pills you take in my bag. Let me just—”

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

His fingers come around my neck and tap on my lips. “You agreed to give me whatever I want tonight, yeah?”

With my tongue wrapped around his fingertips, I give a muffled yes.

He grips my upper thigh and raises it away from my body. My already gooey thigh muscles quake as he commands me in that rough voice to keep it there.

I try my best. “Zayn?” I say, around his fingers. Already, I’m shamelessly damp between my thighs, a soft heat drizzling through my limbs. “I want to suck your cock. Not your fingers,” I beg wantonly.

He chuckles. “Not now, baby girl. I need sleep right now and the only way I can manage it is...” He pauses.

Something velvety probes my entrance and I stiffen. Then I realize his threat earlier and melt from inside out.

He had meant it when he’d said he would stuff me with his cock and then go to sleep? Even my filthiest dreams of him hadn’t conjured this scenario or the closeness I would feel at the prospect.

Every nerve in my body lights up like it’s a fairy light, and I tremble with anticipation.

And then he’s there, nudging inside of me, crooning soft words at my ear, telling me what a good girl I am and how well I’m taking him even though I’m sore, and how

he's going to wake up all warmed up and ready to go.

I'm drowning in the surfeit of sensations, and a host of mewls fall from my mouth.

There's a stretch and a burn and then that feeling of glorious, overwhelming fullness as he feeds me that final inch. And just like that, I'm not empty anymore.

"Fuck, Mouse," he bites out.

It's different in this position but just as good and raw and new as before. I squirm and clench and release around his thick length, needy tingles spreading from inside me. That spot he's so good at probing waiting for pressure and friction.

Restlessness I've never known before slithers under my skin, hungry and needy. I squeeze my thighs and my inner muscles as if my very breath depends on it.

A sharp slap lands on my ass cheek and I squeal and jerk at the sting.

But I'm not allowed to move an inch with his arms and legs locked around me. So the jerking lodges him deeper, if that's possible, and my pussy walls clench him harder.

"Enough, baby girl," he says, giving me a softer smack. Rough and sleep-heavy, his voice sends shivers down my spine. "If you're a good girl and let me sleep, I might use this tight, wet pussy without waking you up. Would you let me do that, Mouse?" Affection and desire are twin spears in his words, pinning me down. "Would you let me slake my lust on you without getting anything in return?"

"Yes, sir. Please, sir," I say, adding a little sass to my words. The idea of Zayn glutting himself on me, of using me as his very own sex doll is...incredibly erotic. The idea of me being enough for him is...powerful and liberating.

Another soft smack lands on my other cheek and to my everlasting wonder, my pussy weeps at the sharp sting. “That’s for mouthing off to me.” And then he groans because his cock is drenched in my juices. “You like that too?”

“I already admitted that I’m a slut for you,” I say, my own lids sleep-heavy.

“Only for me?” he says, doing that wicked swivel with his hips. The crown of his cock hits that spot and backs away, leaving me whimpering.

“Only for you,” I whisper, gasping.

He cups my chin and turns my head to face him. His face hovers over mine, an intensity to that amber gaze I can’t read without my glasses. The coward in me is grateful. But his words when he speaks are full of a joy that I’ve never heard in his voice before. Or so I tell myself. “You’re really quite the filthy girl, aren’t you?”

“Only for you, Zayn,” I say, losing myself in his soft kiss. “Mouse is a slut only for you.”

It’s quite the novel sensation to have his cock inside me but not have him move.

Anticipation makes me jittery enough that I can’t settle down for a while. It’s like the parched earth looking up at thick, fluffy clouds, eagerly waiting for rain. Every inch of me is alert and pulsing with awareness.

It’s when I listen to Zayn’s deep, rhythmic breathing and how his hard body caves around me protectively that my breath evens out.

A sense of pure wonder erupts in my chest, filling my limbs. I know how much he struggles to sleep and that he’s fallen asleep so easily with me makes me swallow.



Within seconds, my limbs feel heavy. And I fall asleep with the man I adore around and inside me.

Fourteen

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

Sasha

When I wake up the second time—the first time was near dawn to Zayn waking me up with soft words and shallow thrusts, high on the brink of his orgasm—bright sunbeams are dancing across my face and bare breasts.

I lick the inside of my mouth and stretch my legs under the heavy duvet. That small movement makes me groan. I'm warm and tingly and sore and a host of other sensations I don't have words for.

With a soft moan, I roll to my side and reach out a hand.

The coolness of the sheets on that side of the bed hits me first. I open my eyes and discover the empty space on the bed. Heart beating an uneven tattoo, I scoot up and nearly cry at how my muscles resist the motion.

Zayn is...gone.

Reaching for my glasses, I push them on and blink. The suite is filled with golden light bursting in from outside. Fierce as it was, the storm left a new and bright world behind. I feel new and different too.

Through the French doors, I can see the small courtyard of the hotel and, in the distance, the proud peak of Mount Rainier. Every leaf looks sun-dappled with dew drops clinging to them.

And while every inch of me groans with remembered pleasure and there's a giddy joy

in my chest, a quiet sadness settles in too.

I shouldn't be surprised that he's gone.

Even if I put the probable awkwardness of waking up together aside—a situation he abhors—he has a very specific morning ritual that I know he doesn't break for anything.

It's better this way, I tell myself, throwing my legs over the bed.

I nearly swoon back into the bed with how my knees quake under me. My body feels used up so thoroughly. Like I'm made of bruises and prickles and deep divots crafted by Zayn's fingerprints.

For a crazy second, I consider not showering because I don't want to wash him off. But that way lies prolonging the ache in my heart.

He promised me one night and oh, how he delivered it.

I promised him that I wouldn't leave him. Doesn't matter that it was in the throes of a mind-bending orgasm and all he admitted was that "He couldn't, without me."

His attachment style has always been different after a rough childhood and teen years, and I know he cares for me in his own way.

So last night—once in a lifetime as it was—has to be enough.

Because I won't break my word to him.

I won't leave him.

Somehow, I need to think of him again as my very grumpy, very demanding boss who's harsh with his words but generous with his actions. Somehow, I need to get over the fact that I know how he kisses and how he holds me through the night and how he pins me down with his delicious weight.

And how much I'll always love him.

My shower ends up being long and luxurious.

It's nearly impossible that I will get another chance to soak in a marble tub like this, so I take full advantage of it.

It comes to me as I'm soaking in the frothy bubble bath and washing my over-sensitive skin that tonight's our family dinner together.

It's my first ever one without my grandparents. My first one as a woman who knows what pleasure her body is capable of. My first one with a heart that's been taken out of its dusty place on the shelf and given a full-throttle bumpy ride.

Now there are footnotes in scrambled handwriting and bent corners and the spine is slightly torn, but it's all the stronger for how well loved it was for one night.

My mind wanders to a hundred different things and pulls away before a thought forms. But one thing comes back after all the detours and delusions.

Zayn might show up tonight for dinner at my grandparents' house despite all the lines we crossed last night. He's a creature of habit and while he won't admit it, I know how attached he is to our family rituals. Wherever he was in the world, he always flew down for Thanksgiving, Christmas, this anniversary dinner, and Adam's birthday.

And while I won't ever ask anything of him that's personal, this is something I want to do for him. And for my brother, who's traveled thousands of miles just so I wouldn't be alone.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

The thought spurs me into action as I pull the drain plug and jump into the shower. Laughter builds up in me as I try to figure out hardware that could belong on a starship.

By the time I towel down, my skin is both prune-y and tingly. I gather the multitude of bottles for moisturizer, shampoo, conditioner—when is the chance I’ll get my hands on a luxury brand like this— and step into the bedroom. Only to realize that I didn’t bring anything with me last night.

Even my phone is MIA.

I do another sweep of the room—the last thing I want is to advertise my fantasy night by walking out wrapped in the hotel towel—when my gaze lands on the cozy armchair in front of the fireplace.

I dump the cosmetics on the bed, curiosity lighting a fire in me. There are several things on the armchair, beginning with Zayn’s sweatshirt that he gave me yesterday, the tote I leave in the staff room foremergencies—which contains a change of clothes and all other necessities, and my phone.

I dress quickly in loose linen pants, skip the bra and put on Zayn’s sweatshirt, and hurriedly switch my phone on. My gaze catches on a box on the coffee table I recognize. There’s also a carafe of coffee, along with fresh fruit and pastries.

Did he wait until the breakfast was delivered for me?

I don’t even need to see the logo on the pink box to know it’s Devil’s Donuts—my

favorite kind.

There's a crisply folded note on top.

My towel nearly slips off my body as I reach for it with shaking fingers. The words are in badly written cursive and it's only because I've worked for him for so many years that I can read them on the first try.

Good morning, Mouse.

I'll miss you at work. We broke too many rules for things to go back to the way they were. Plus, you're wasted on these people and me. Before you say no to this, your dream is way too precious to just stay that. Like you always say, we need more books in the world, and who better than you to get them into people's hands.

If you make a fuss that it's too much, I'll never talk to you again.

Z

My heart beats loudly in my chest as I read the note over and over. Under the box of donuts, there's a white envelope with a pink string tied to it.

For Mouse is scribbled on the front. I nearly rip through the cover to get to the documents. My chest squeezes so tight that it's a miracle I can breathe.

It's a deed in my name to the secondhand bookstore attached to Devil's Donuts, the same store with a For Sale sign hanging on it for the past few months.

Mariska and I make plans about how we would revamp the place and give it new life. Create a haven for people who love books.

I gushed about it only last night and now, he bought me the deed to the place.

My knees give out and I collapse into the armchair. Tears run down my cheeks as I lay my head back and stare at the pretty ceiling.

I don't know if I'm happy or heartbroken. Or both.

On the one hand, he's given me my lifelong dream. Already, a part of my brain is busy coming up with all the things I want to do with the store, starting with painting the walls.

On the other, he's removed me from his life in one fell swoop. The big girl in me knows that it's for the best. At this rate—seeing him once or twice a year, I can get over him by the time I'm fifty.

Straightening in the chair, I tuck my feet under me, pour myself a little coffee and take a bite of a glazed donut.

I read the documents over and over while I polish off the fruit cup, scrambled eggs, and two cups of coffee.

I began yesterday with the idea of breaking free of an obsession that wasn't good for me, of growing up and moving on, of taking strides toward a new me.

Zayn has not only given me immense pleasure and made me see myself in a new way, but also the perfect reason to stick to my original plan.

I tidy the suite, make up the bed, open the French doors just a little bit to air out the sweat/sex cocktail, glad to see that he's already left a generous cash tip. But then, as grumpy as my boss is, he hides the most generous of hearts under that exterior.



Except he's not my boss anymore.

He's not my anything anymore.

## Page 38

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

I sniffle, swallow, pack up all my stuff into the tote bag, and open the door.

To find my brother standing at the end of the corridor, his broad frame filling it up. His face is wreathed in lines of concern but there's no judgement there.

As I walk toward him, fresh tears fall onto my cheeks. I scrub at them roughly, but more come.

His mouth has a tight set to it as I reach him. Brown eyes, so much like our papa's, search mine. "Should I beat him up?"

Color floods my cheeks. "Don't be ridiculous," I manage.

"You hid it well," Adam says.

I shrug.

He takes my tote bag and wraps a beefy arm around my shoulders. "If it helps, he looked worse than you when I saw him earlier."

"It doesn't," I snap at him. Then I sigh. The corridor is empty and bright, exactly how I feel. "I'll get over him, Adam. Don't ruin your friendship over some false macho pride please."

"So, no beating him up?"

"The question you have to ask yourself is why you would want to." My heart sits in

my throat, making words hard. “He gave me the world.”

And removed himself from it. I keep those words to myself. As much as I love my brother, the feelings are too raw and private to discuss with him.

Kind and sensible that he is, Adam doesn’t say anything.

I lean into his frame, knowing that at some point in the distant future, I’ll feel better about this.

Just not today. Or this decade.

Fifteen

Zayn

“Yo! Sleeping beauty! Wake up!”

The voice isn’t loud but it still booms around me.

I groan, shift on the couch where I face-planted earlier and pop open one eyelid.

Three faces greet me, one glaring while the other two are filled with curiosity. That the glaring face is my best friend’s makes me want to disappear.

“Go away,” I mumble, closing my eyes against the shattering golden light.

“Adam here is committed to violence and since the man is an ex-army sniper, I thought it better to be present,” Nathan says, with far too much glee in his voice. I fight the urge to plant my fist in his face. “As your older brother and your business partner, I take your physical well-being seriously. Since Adam is also a beefy

motherfucker, I asked Max for additional support. Also—”

“Oh, just shut up, will you, Nathan?” I say, sitting up.

The pain I’ve been bottling all morning rises to the surface when his sharp silver gaze takes in my current state. Discovering that he was my half brother at the age of sixteen saved my life. Though our mother had been long gone by then.

He took me away from my bullying father and showed me what unconditional love meant. If he probes my mental state now...I’m not sure what I might do. Bawling like a baby wouldn’t be the most embarrassing thing on the list.

“If you truly mean to be useful, go make me a cup of coffee.”

Nathan sighs. “That coffee machine looks like it belongs on Starship Enterprise. I don’t know how to work it.”

“Fuck, you’re a spoiled ass,” I say. “For a confirmed bachelor with a grown-ass stepdaughter, you should know the basic minimum.”

“And who do you think spoils me?” Nathan asks, clearly asking for a fight.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

“Jazz, who else? That girl isn’t just Sophie’s paid companion. She runs your entire household,” I say morosely. Then, because I’m a mean, grouchy bastard, I add, “What will you do when she leaves you, Nathan? They are both going to graduate soon, yeah?”

Suddenly, my older brother’s face is shoved into mine, tension pouring out of him. “Why the fuck would you say something like that?” he bites out. “Neither Sophie nor Jasmine is going anywhere.”

“Don’t be so sure,” I say, seeing the same distress in his eyes as I feel. The fucker doesn’t know what’s coming.

“Why? Did Jasmine say something to you? When the hell did you even talk to her?”

Max, my brother’s other business partner, takes pity on me. “He’s yanking your chain, Nathan. He’s miserable and wants to spread it around.”

I grin.

Nathan curses.

Max shakes his head. “Come on. I know how to work the coffee machine.” With one look at me and Adam, he pulls Nathan away. They whisper like two hens clucking over their chick.

But when the door closes behind them, leaving Adam and me alone, I immediately miss my brother.

It's not that I'm scared of Adam beating me up. The guy is a soft teddy bear beneath all the aggression he puts out on the surface. It's that I've already taken a heart-shattering, soul-destroying risk with one important relationship today and I can't afford to lose one more.

Adam, Nathan and Mouse were it for me, the latter being my entire world.

"Shouldn't you be with her?" I say, belligerence creeping into my tone. I can't bear to say her name. A pathetic part of me hoped she would come looking for me this morning. Demanding I come back to bed. Or at least to throw my gift to her in my face. It seems Mouse has really grown up. "She needs you."

"Mariska's coming to stay with her. When I left, she was still sleeping."

I nod absentmindedly. "After the night we had, she deserves the whole day to—" I cut the words off as Adam's cheeks turn dangerously red. "Sorry, that's stepping over the line," I say, rubbing my hand over my face.

"She's an adult," Adam says, surprising the hell out of me. "If she spends a night with you, that's hardly my business. She's made far tougher decisions for herself."

He sounds as morose as I feel. "But she's your little sister and you adore her and can't tolerate her being hurt," I finish for him.

He nods.

"I tried my best to not hurt her," I say, swallowing the thorns of agony in my throat. "I did, Adam."

Just remembering her face, her body, how she moaned in my arms, messes the little equilibrium I have. At dawn, it felt like a good decision to give her choices.

It was all that bloody honor crap that Nathan taught me when I was an impressionable teenager with an asshole for dad. The haughty bastard would love it that it stuck. “She’s...” I swallow the words that rise to my lips easily. I don’t know if I’ll ever say them. But if I do, she should hear them first. “She’s leaving me.”

His gaze searches mine and understanding dawns. “That’s why she sounded so lost on the phone. Big decision.”

“Yeah, and she blindsided me with it.”

“And what?” he says, leaning his bulk forward. The chair creaks ominously under him. “You’re just letting her go? You’re too much of a stubborn bastard for that, Zayn.”

“I gave her what she asked me for.” I rub my hands over my face, feeling bone-tired. “And then I gave her an even better reason to leave me. I want her to be happy. It would kill me if she settles for being...” I don’t finish the sentence. I can’t.

He’s so big that his broad chest rises and falls ominously when he sighs. Leaning forward from his chair, his cups my shoulder. “You’re the best among us, Z. Always were.”

“Then why do I feel like I have the lost the entire world in one fell swoop?”

My best friend has always understood when I’m in pain. He understands now.

I sit there, with my head in my hands, and he stays with me the whole time.

Sixteen

Zayn

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

I'm nervous as I stand at the familiar dark-red door of the Shettys' house that evening.

A neat bench sits on the tiny porch with shoes tucked up under it. Then there's that small copper bell that hangs at the top. This house is more familiar to me than my own apartment.

I've been here numerous times for holidays, and I could have made the decision to not show up. But my gut said otherwise, and my brain screamed at for even considering breaking the tradition. The weekend after Valentine's Day, I'm supposed to be at Shettys'.

It was as simple as that and at some point, I'll have to face her again. Why not get over the torment as soon as possible?

I smooth my left hand over my jacket lapel and ring the doorbell. A thought comes to me and I turn around to scan the driveway.

Adam's truck isn't here. Like the two evergreens straddling the small property, it's a constant. Shit, is it going to be just her and me tonight?

No, Adam flew all this way to be with her this weekend. He wouldn't just ditch her.

All the back-and-forth in my head is useless because suddenly the door opens.

And there she stands—my girl, my goddess. My reason for breathing.

"Hey," she says, nudging her thick glasses up her nose. There's a little squeak of



shock in that word. Leaning forward, she kisses my cheek like she's been doing since she was nine years old. As if just a few hours ago, I didn't put my tongue in her pussy.

Even the look she gives me after the kiss is all polite and welcoming.

I hand her the bottle of wine wordlessly.

She frowns and moves to the side. "Come in."

I squeeze past her, making sure none of me touches her. It feels as if all my feelings have not only been amplified but laid out for the world to see. Like I put myself on inside out.

"Thanks for this," she says, raising the bottle.

I follow her to the cramped kitchen.

Some of the furor in my heart calms at the familiar sight of the counters bursting with food trays and a variety of new drinks that I love trying every year. But without her bustling grandma and her dry-witted grandpa, the space feels empty and quiet and...tense.

"Where's Adam?" I say, as I pour myself some mango juice and walk to the tree painted on one wall of the living room.

There are pictures and medals and little notes and greeting cards pasted all over, a testament to the love the house has seen for decades. Even my face stares down at me—pics with Adam or her grandparents and a few with her. There are greeting cards I've barely scribbled my name on. Then there are little notes that I put on her birthday and Christmas gifts every year. Wanting to say so much, but not sure what.

Each and every single one of them is here—nearly fifteen years of notes with “Mouse” written on them in colored inks.

She didn’t just save all of them, but she put them out here for everyone to see. How have I not noticed before?

“Adam said he had some errands to run but he should be back anytime. I...”

“What?” I say, turning around. The last thing I want is for her to be nervous around me.

“I didn’t have much time to do any elaborate cooking.” She points to the steaming mac-and-cheese tray. “It’s not going to be as good as Grandma’s cooking.”

“That’s fine,” I say, noting how the navy-blue sheath dress clings to her curves. Her hair falls down her back in thick waves and her mouth glistens pink. I feel this intense twisting urge in my stomach to pull her into my arms and ruin all that innocence all over again.

She opens the wine bottle I brought, pours some for herself and joins me in the living room. I clink my glass against hers. She takes a sip and licks off a lingering drop from her lower lip.

Her gaze dips to the wine. “I wasn’t sure if you would come tonight.”

“You still made my favorite mac and cheese.”

“I hoped you would come and I did promise you a feast. I know that tonight is important to you.”

I nod. Words keep getting stuck in my throat. Suddenly, it’s as if we’re strangers

who've been set up on some dreadful first date.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

I don't understand this. The raw, rough intimacy we shared last night...I've never experienced it with anyone. And I've never wanted it with anyone. I want that back. I want all of her desires and dreams for the rest of our lives.

Now, there's only this tense...awareness arcing between us. Or is that just me?

I sweep my gaze over her, wishing there was no distance between us at all. Wishing I could tell her how I feel. "You look beautiful, Mouse."

Pink dusts her cheeks and she presses a hand to her middle. "Thank you. I..." She upends the wineglass and finishes it. Then wipes her mouth with the back of her hand. "Am I allowed to thank you for the over-the-top generous present?"

"If you accept it gracefully, yes. It's not just a present. It's a bonus for all the work you put in over the years. Not just as my assistant, but by making the company a bright place."

"Oh...that's a sweet thing to say. But, Zayn—"

"I said no discussion, Mouse."

"Not even about how you give me this blinding, giant-ass gift to hide the fact that you're firing me?"

Anger claims me in a scorching fire. "Firing you?" I shoot to my feet, cross the myriad poufs and stools and tables to reach her and glower down at her. "I didn't fire you. You...said you had to leave me."

She comes to her feet too and puts the wineglass down with a such a thump that it's a wonder it doesn't shatter in her hands. "Yes, but in the middle of last night, you said you can't without me....and I said I'll stay."

"I don't want a fucking pity stay, Mouse," I bite out bitterly. "Anyway, when I thought about it this morning, I realized that you're wasted as my assistant. You...you're one of those people who makes the world a safer, kinder, more wonderful place for others. And you can do that best running a bookstore with your best friend."

Tears fill her eyes and she sniffles. "You really think all that? You aren't just saying it to be rid of me?"

I reach her and cup her hip, even though I promised myself I wouldn't touch her tonight. Not unless she asked me to. With my other hand, I catch one lone tear. "I think all that and more."

She licks her lower lip, eyes wide and needy behind those glasses. I know her expressions now and I love that I do. "More? Like what?"

"Eager for praise, huh?"

"From you, yes."

I splay my fingers far and wide, to touch more of her. "You're like a rainbow in the sky, Mouse. Bright and colorful and joyous. With a pot of gold in secret places."

She huffs and turns pink. My other hand loses the fight against the alluring invitation of her curves. Now that I have both hands on her, I'm not sure I can ever let go again. Doing it once this morning nearly broke me.

“And why would I want to get rid of you? You’re the one who’s insisting on leaving me.”

Her eyes flicker between mine. “After last night, things could get sticky between us. And you hate that kind of awkwardness in your every day. Or you could be afraid that I’ll become all clingy and demanding and ask for stuff you don’t want to give?”

I skim my knuckles over the silky soft skin of her jaw. “You’re putting your fears into my reaction, Mouse. Not fair.”

“No?”

I shake my head and pull her closer. “Whatever you ask for, I told you, is yours.”

“I forget that when you say something, you mean it.”

“You know me, baby.” The endearment slips out of my lips, but I’m damned if I take it back.

She wraps one arm around my shoulders and hugs me loosely. Her thick curls dance between us as she bends her head and leans it against my chest. “You make me feel beautiful and brave and bold. So here goes.” Her chest rises and falls, and I’m entirely too distracted by the lush globes of her tits. She presses a palm to my chest and meets my eyes. “I want your heart, Zayn. May I please have it?”

Seventeen

Zayn

Every cell in me comes to attention, every muscle bunches with tension. My breath catches in my throat, blocking my words. Or is that my heart—the thing she so boldly

demands into her keeping—lurching into my throat, rushing toward her?

“Why?” The word is an unmanly croak but I don’t care.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

She pushes onto her toes and rubs her cheek against mine. Call it instinct or wishful thinking, but I didn't shave before I got here. And the soft hiss that falls from her lips as my skin abrades hers goes straight to my dick. I remember how hard she gripped my head when I brushed my scruff against her inner thigh.

Her fingers lace over my neck and she looks into my eyes. My heart stutters at the pure, unfiltered emotion dancing through those large eyes. Fierce in its conviction.

“Because my heart is yours. It's always been yours, Zayn. Now, my body knows your special brand of possession and only wants you more.”

I feel like I'm jumping off a cliff and my parachute won't open. My heart is thumping so painfully in my chest that it's loud in my ears. “Only yesterday, you were ready to leave me,” I say, singing the same annoying song again.

It might be beneath me, this poking and prodding at her when she looks like she's unraveling, but when it comes to her, I'm a needy bastard. I want all of her doubts and delusions about me, about us, turned into rubble. And I need to know how badly she needs this. Needs me.

She drags in a deep breath and there's a spark of anger in her eyes now. “It hurt to stay with you. Day after day watching you, wanting to touch you and hold you and kiss you and getting nothing in return. Some days, especially in the last year, you wouldn't even spare me a glance or make eye contact. I felt extraneous, like that office cabinet you loathe.”

I send my hands on a quest and they land on the treasure that is her plump ass. I



squeeze the taut flesh and pull her closer until she can feel my erection. It prods at her belly, thickening and lengthening at the mere scent of her. “If you came near me, if I breathed in your scent, if I saw you eating a damned fucking donut, this is how I would get.” I grind against her to make my point. “Night or day, tired or distracted, one whiff of your delicious scent, one glimpse of your ass...I would grow painfully hard. And you know how my brain hyper-focuses better than anyone, yeah?”

Lust makes her eyes impossibly bigger. “You did?” There’s less surprise and more glee in that sentence.

“I couldn’t cross that line without knowing where you stood, Mouse. I couldn’t do that to you or to myself. But yesterday,” I swallow and continue, “when you said you were leaving me, my world shattered. And when you asked for a kiss, I hoped we were finally getting to the same fucking page.”

“But you still don’t want me around the office?” Her vulnerability pierces the last standing crust of the shell around my heart. Her neediness is a balm to my own.

I clasp her cheeks and press a kiss to her temple. This girl is so precious to me that I’m afraid to put it into words. “Your dream is too good to just stay a dream, Mouse. When I got the idea to buy that store...I couldn’t sleep all night. I knew that it looked like sending you away. But I’m selfish through and through.”

“How?”

“I wanted you to have everything you ever want in life and still choose me. Want me. I need you to want me when you aren’t attached to the job.”

“You doubt that?”

“I doubt myself,” I say evenly. “I doubt that this is possible for me. This kind

of...love.”

“I do want you, Zayn. In every reality.” Her eyes widen and I can almost see the word float to her lips. “I love you,” she says, the entire world and its wonders dancing in those three words.

“Marry me, Mouse. Be my wife. Come to the office with gossip about your store. Arrange my calendar, my sleep, my dreams as you please. Travel with me wherever I go. Be my slut, my cum squeeze, my wife, and the mother of my children.”

I drop down to my knees and press my face into the cradle of her thighs. My good girl is so damp and ready for me that I can smell her musk through the dress. I can't wait to claim her anymore. I roll the hem of her dress when she sinks her fingers into my hair and she tugs hard.

“Zayn! You can't just say all that and not wait for my answer!”

I groan as I discover that she's got no underwear under the damn dress. My girl's been walking around bare and wet all evening, ready for me.

I look up and meet her eyes even as my fingers sweep through her folds, collecting her juices. Fuck, she's dripping. “What's your answer?” I say, demand and challenge in every word. Fear isn't an emotion I can tolerate, and it makes me an utter bastard. I grab her entire pussy with my palm and squeeze. Make sure to rub up against her clit with the heel. “Do you still plan to leave me and give this pussy to someone else?”

Her eyes roll back and her thighs quake and her breath whistles through her nostrils. “I can't...Oh God...ungg...”

I thrust one, two, and three fingers into her tight hole and start pumping. She bucks and bows, her fingers tighten in my hair, and she thrusts her hips wantonly into my

face. “Zayn...oh God...” And then she comes so violently that my fingers are squeezed tight by her viselike cunt.

I knock her knees until she folds into my arms. She’s soft and warm and entirely too fuckable as she clings to me. I lick my fingers and then kiss her so that she gets a taste of how filthy good she gets for me.

Her brow is sweaty as she looks up at me, her breaths shallow pants.

“So? Will you give me an answer soon or should I fuck it out of you?”

She clasps my cheek, as if to gentle and soothe me. As if she understands the furor in my blood. “Can I give you my answer now but also get fucked so hard that I keep screaming yes?”

I grin, because this good girl is filthy just for me. “Say it then.”

“I want to be your slut and your only cum squeeze and your wife and...” her voice hitches here, “and the mother of your children. You truly want a family? With me?” She pins me with that warm gaze. “You’re not just saying it because you know it’s another of my dreams?”

“I am saying it because it’s one of your dreams,” I say, giving her the truth. “But also, because if it’s your dream, then it’s mine, Mouse. And who knows? You might already be pregnant after last night.”

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

“Oh, I didn’t even think of that. You steal any sense I have.” Her hands drift to her belly. “You truly want children with me?”

“I see we’re talking in multiple numbers.” I nuzzle her nose. “For you, with you, I want all of the stuff I never had. I want you, and everything you want.”

“You know me well,” she says, burying her face against my throat.

“I do,” I say, rolling her onto her belly.

She presses her cheek to the rug like an obedient pupil and raises her ass as I arrange her the way I want. “I want a family to love.”

“And I want it with you. I want to see your belly swell with my child. I want to suck on your tits when you’re all filled up with milk. I want to see my wonderful girl and her sweet generosity and her warmth and her beauty reflected in my children. I want this life, whatever turns it takes, with you, Mouse.”

Her eyes turn dreamy and she sighs. I don’t know if it’s the filthy vows I’m making her or that I’ve spread her knees far apart enough to see her popped clit.

“Please,” she says, wriggling that bountiful, dimpled ass at me.

I unzip my trousers and take my cock out. I tap it on the plump ass cheek and then without warning, I thrust into her in one hard stroke.

I do it with enough force that she nearly slides out of my grip except that her pussy’s

got that death grip on me. Still, I anchor her to me with one hand on her shoulder.

She makes a keening sound from deep in her throat.

Her climax has gotten her all slicked and ready for me but fuck, she's still tight. I gather her hair and fist it like I've dreamed of so many times. Her neck arches back and her spine melts. "Is there something you're forgetting to say, Mouse?"

Her breath puffs out of thick lips, nostrils flaring. "Now? Please, Zayn. If you don't move—"

"If you don't give me an answer, I'm going to pull out."

"Ugh...you meanie." She sighs and rolls her eyes and that gaze pins me right in my heart. It's like she's sticking one of those colorful Post-it notes that says "Mine" with a pushpin into my heart. "I love you, Zayn. I don't remember a moment when I didn't love you. I...I'd love you even more if you filled me up with your cum. The sooner you spill inside me," she says, thrusting her ass back into me.

"The sooner you'll be tied to me forever," I say, pulling almost all the way out and slamming in again.

"I'm...already...tied...to...you...forever," she says, each word punctuated by a rough thrust. Her mouth forms a perfect moue, little beads of sweat dancing above. "But you didn't say it to me."

"I love you, Mouse," I say, setting a brutal pace. My words are nearly drowned out by the slapping sounds of our bodies so I shout it out. "You and this pussy and those tits," I pull her up until she's sitting on my cock, her arms twisted up in my hold, her jostling tits visible in the window glass, "all of you is mine. Forever and ever."

She meets my gaze in the mirror, her dress bunched up in the middle, her glasses making her look like such a good girl.

“All of me is yours, Zayn. Only yours.” She pouts. “You promised to tell me why it’s okay for you to call me Mouse, remember?”

Laughter bursts through me. “You’re cute, and clever, and resourceful. I never saw anything wrong with that name. Plus, when I was a kid, I had a mouse for a pet. I loved it the most in the world.”

“Oh...” she says, her eyes full of understanding about the nightmare that was my childhood. “I get it.”

I turn her head and take her mouth in a rough, grasping kiss. The more I sip of her, the more I want. But also, finally, there’s this flicker of faith in my stomach that she’s mine.

All mine.

Only mine.

And for that, I’ll give her anything she asks for in the world. I’ll give her so much pleasure that she’s as addicted to me as I am to her.

I play with her tits, kneading and squeezing, tugging the thick, jutting nipples. I play with her clit, give her those circular sweeps she loves so much and bring her right to the edge.

Just when she’s chanting my name endlessly, I plunge up into her wet sheath again.

I proceed to show her how much I love her with every swivel of my hips, with every

slap of my balls against her. How much I need her. How filthy and possessed she makes me. How she's the only future I've been running toward all my life.

The next few hours are a haze of fucking and kissing and making our vows to each other.

## Page 44

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

Over and over again, I come inside her. I demand she give me her throat. I demand to eat her out after we demolish the dinner because I'm voracious for her. Only her. I demand she tell me more of her plans for the bookstore. I demand that she move in with me tonight. I demand she marry me as soon as I can procure a license.

She says yes to every craven demand I make of her, except the last. Because she wants her grandparents present for the wedding.

I'm not happy about the waiting, but I say yes because she'll be mine forever.

My Mouse.

My Sasha.

My forever love.

Epilogue

Sasha

Six Weeks Later

I walk through One More Page, my dream come true, as if I'm floating on clouds. The bookstore opens to the public in two hours, and my heart flutters like the pages of an open book in a windstorm.

Two weeks since Zayn left on a trip to China, but it feels like a lifetime. Getting



things ready for the opening kept me busy but now, knowing he's on his way back tonight, makes my heart pound dangerously in my chest.

It's the first time we've been apart and I'm not ashamed to admit that I didn't cope well. Good thing my grandparents are back because I'm so ready to marry him, ready to start our life together.

After the night he proposed, I moved into his penthouse the next morning, packing up as much as I could in the one hour he gave me. But I returned home after he left for Beijing.

Only to discover another bit of life-changing news... a thousand butterflies flutter in my stomach as I wonder how he will react to this last bit.

Sighing, I rub my face against the sleeve of my shirt—his shirt—and drag in a deep breath.

Sweetness drifts in from Devil's Donuts, the donut shop my best friend Mariska runs next door, the sugary warmth curling around me like a hug. A wide archway connects the two spaces, framed by a vintage wooden sign that reads Books & Bites, inviting customers to grab a book and a warm donut in one seamless, cozy experience.

Smiling to myself, I walk around, checking everything one more time.

Shelves line the walls, stacked high with crisp new books and well-loved secondhand finds. Cozy reading nooks, complete with plush armchairs and soft lighting, nestle between the shelves. The best seats in the house, though, are the window alcoves—wide, cushioned benches piled with throw pillows, positioned so they can watch the world outside while they escape into another.

Through the rain-streaked glass, I see downtown Seattle moving in a misty blur.

Traffic lights reflect off the slick pavement, pedestrians huddle under umbrellas, and cherry blossoms tremble in the breeze, their pale pink petals scattering onto the sidewalks.

“You’re glowing.” Mariska leans against one of the shelves, arms crossed, smirking. “Either you’re high on the smell of books, or it’s the thrill of Zayn returning.”

I bite my lip, barely containing my excitement. “Latter,” I whisper, my heart thrumming.

Tonight, I’m going to tell my grumpy, possessive boss that he’s going to be a dad soon. I laugh at how I still call him ‘boss’ in my head. Given how bossy Zayn is, especially when he’s driving me towards the edge, it fits.

Nathan strolls in, with his stepdaughter Sophie and her friend/paid companion Jasmine. The young women’s awed squeals ring through the space as they shake off the drizzle.

“Sasha, this is incredible,” Sophie says, the delicate angles of her face set in wonder. With her blond hair pulled tight, she looks like a doll. “It feels like the kind of place you walk into and never want to leave.”

“That’s exactly what I want the customers to feel,” I say, heart full to bursting.

“And these nooks? Perfection.” Jasmine’s tone is soft as she sinks into one of the cushioned window seats, stretching her legs across the bench. She presses her cheek to the glass—hiding the large dark birthmark from the world. I wonder if she knows how frequently she does it.

“Will you keep me in mind if you need help around the store, Sasha?” Jasmine’s voice lowers into a whisper, her gaze on Nathan standing a few feet away. “I graduate

in June, and it will be lovely to work for you.”

Before Sasha can reply, Sophie reaches her friend, blue eyes confused. “Why do you need another job, Jazz? If dad’s not paying you enough, I’ll talk to him.”

“What? Of course not.” Jasmine grips Sophie’s hand, as if she’s afraid she’ll bring Nathan’s attention to her. “Mr. Grayson’s more than generous.”

I bite a smile at how primly she says Nathan’s name and yet, there’s so much longing in it. Is it only me who can see this?

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

“What is it then?” Sophie demands.

Jasmine sighs. “You keep making all these elaborate plans for what you’re going to do when you graduate, Soph. That means I’ll need a new job.”

Sophie’s eyes widen, as if she didn’t consider how her actions might affect her best friend’s livelihood.

“Of course, I’ll keep you in mind, Jasmine,” I say into the awkward silence. “Pretty sure I’m going to need some help in the future.”

Jasmine nods.

“Stop offering to help people, willy-nilly, Jasmine,” Nathan says, having heard the last bit. “You’re stretched enough as it is, with things you do for Sophie and me at the house.”

When Sophie opens her mouth to correct him, Jasmine shakes her head.

“The bookstore looks great, Sasha.” He shakes his head. “I still can’t believe Zayn bought you a bookstore. Who knew my brother was a closet romantic?”

Before I can respond, the door chimes.

Jet-black hair damp, Zayn stands in the entryway. His amber eyes scan the room restlessly. “Why the hell are you all here?” His deep voice rumbles through the space, laced with irritation.

“We thought you weren’t getting in until later,” Nathan says, used to his brother’s bluster. “Jasmine suggested we should be present for the big opening, keep Sasha company.”

Zayn mutters thanks in the general direction of Jasmine. Then, his gaze locks onto mine, softening for a fraction of a second before he strides toward me with purpose, brushing past everyone else like they don’t exist.

A hundred years with this man and I won’t get used to the sensation of being the only one in his universe.

He stops in front of me, his towering frame blocking out the rest of the world. “I thought you said you’d be working on last-minute changes,” he mutters, his fingers grazing my wrist possessively. “Not throwing a damn social hour.”

I smile up at him, my pulse going haywire under his elegant fingers. God, I want to touch him so badly. “It’s not a social hour, it’s a celebration.”

His gaze flickers over my face, searching. Devouring. “Where can we have privacy?”

“Mari has a storeroom in the back,” I say, pointing to the donut shop.

Without another word, he drags me past the archway, past a grinning Mariska, and closes the door.

The storeroom is warm and sugar-dusted, the air thick with the scent of vanilla, fried dough, and melted chocolate. Tall metal shelves line the walls, stacked with bags of flour, tubs of glossy glazes, and trays of freshly baked pastries cooling under soft linen cloths. At the center of it all, a wide stainless-steel prep counter sits empty, wiped clean.

Stormy eyes dark with wicked intent, Zayn lifts me onto it. The metal is cool to my touch and I'm at the perfect height to wrap my legs around him. His mouth descends on me with a frenzied fervor while his hands are stroking and kneading every inch of me, as if he needs the physical anchor.

I clasp his cheeks, eyes filling up at the decadent sight of him. My heart barely settles into a steady beat before it races again. "I missed you, Zayn." One lone tear runs down my cheek. "Two weeks without you is hard. Next time, will you take me with you?"

"No," he says, nipping my lower lip. "I'm going to travel less. Can't even fucking sleep without you wrapped around me like an octopus, Mouse."

I smile into his kiss, my heart growing too large for my chest. "That's probably a better idea. Especially since it might be—"

His palm covers my mouth. His hiss in my ear is delicious when I lick the center of his hand. "No talking right now. I need you, Mouse," he says, pulling the hem of the long, floral skirt past my knees.

When his rough hands reach my center, immediately, they are gentle. Again and again, I'm awed by the contrast of Zayn's rough need and how he readies me for it. How he makes me learn my own body's needs better and better.

"Fuck! You have nothing beneath this, baby girl." His forehead flops against mine while his fingers delve into my folds. His other hand is busy undoing the buttons of my shirt. "Keeping yourself ready for me?"

"Zayn..." I whimper, as he nudges my clit from side to side as if it's his favorite switch, with his thumb. His other fingers wreak chaos on my folds.

“Answer me, Mouse.”

I grip his wrists and pant, needing more. “Yes. I know how much you like me bare. I thought I would tease you all evening, tell you I have nothing underneath.”

“Such a filthy girl for me.”

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

“Yes, please—”

Before I can say another word, one of my breasts pops out. I arch my neck and torso up just as Zayn wraps his lips around my nipple and sucks. It send electric shocks to my damp pussy, making me clench on emptiness. He nearly swallows the entirety of my breast into his mouth and releases me with a scandalous pop. At the same time, he plunges, one, then two fingers deep inside me.

I squeeze his fingers, harder than ever. Determined to keep him there.

“Fuck, Mouse. You’re drenching me.”

I keep my eyes closed, better to take in the sensations barreling through me. The clank of his belt buckle and the hiss of his zipper are amplified with my eyes closed. And then I feel it, the broad head of his erection nudging up against the entrance to my core.

“Look at how greedily you try to swallow me...Tell me how much you need this, Mouse.”

I fist my hands in his shirt while my hips cant forward, as if to trap him.

Zayn’s laugh is wicked, tightening the knot deep inside me.

“Give me your cock, Zayn. Now.” When he chuckles, I rub my lips against his neck.

“You’ve turned me into a cock-slut whowants to come all the time. And you want to know what else I did?”



“Tell me,” he says, feeding the fat head inside.

After two weeks of an empty pussy, the stretch is a little pain and a lot of pleasure. I sneak my hands under his shirt and dig my nails into the warm muscles of his shoulders. “I read three smutty books and marked up the stuff I liked. For us to try.”

With a guttural groan, he plunges into me all the way. And without giving me a moment to catch my breath or get used to his thick length, he pumps those tapered hips in a rough, slow rhythm. Hits me deep and hard.

There’s nothing for me to do except to hang on for the ride. My arms around his shoulders, I let him take me how he needs me.

I come twice, moaning and keening his name, my body nothing but a doll in his hands.

Zayn erupts with a rough groan, his arm tight around me. “Every time,” he says, breath rasping like a whistle, “I think I know how it will feel. And every time, I’m rocked to the floor.”

I sigh, my face falling into his chest.

His kiss against my temple is a benediction. “No wiping yourself down, Mouse. Walk around the bookstore, welcome your customers, sell your books, all with my cum dripping down your thigh. And when you come home to me this evening, I’ll lick it all up and make you come again.”

“You think I won’t do it?” I say, still trembling.

Challenge shimmers in his gaze. He loves pushing me past my limits. And every time he does, I discover how much of a slut I’m for him, and how there are newer limits to

discover.

I lick that pouty lower lip of his and smile. “It’s on, boss.”

He laughs and kisses me again. But this kiss is soft, reverent. Then he pulls back, as if he needs a wider, better view of me. A frown mars his brow. “You look different.”

I’m not surprised he can see the change in me. I take his hand and bring it to my belly. “All your hard work paid off, Zayn.” A giggle escapes my mouth. It’s clear in the sound that I’m tense. “I’m four weeks pregnant.”

His expression turns wild. Wondrous. He thrusts a shaking hand through his hair. “Fuck, Mouse! You’re such a little hard worker, already growing my bean.”

“You’re happy then?”

He bends low and kisses my belly. “That you squeeze me and milk me for everything I have every single time? Yes. That my baby girl is so fertile for that she’s already grabbed my seed? Hell yes. I can’t wait to see you barefoot and pregnant. Can’t wait for these tits to grow bigger and heavier with milk. Can’t wait to have little girls with thick braids and big eyes to run around me, asking for my attention.”

I laugh and clasp his razor-sharp cheeks. How is the universe so good to me? How is this beautiful man all mine? “And if it’s boys?”

He shrugs, not meeting my eyes. “You know how shitty my dad was? What if I—”

I press a hand to his mouth, tenderness filling me. “What if you are like Nathan with them?”

His eyes widen with fresh excitement. “Nathan’s a damned good role model. I guess I

can ask him a few pointers. Make some notes. I'll feel better if I prepare for it."

I laugh and kiss him again. "That you're willing to do your best means you'll be a good dad, Zayn."

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:59 am*

He kisses my knuckles, one by one, his heart in his eyes. “I love your faith in me, Mouse. I feel like a different man when I’m with you.”

“I love who I’m with you too, Zayn,” I whisper, planting kisses all over his face. “And I love you.”

“Two weeks, Mouse.”

“For what?” I say, delirious with happiness. Although I’m used to Zayn’s time-bound commands now, something tickles at the back of my head about this one.

“For you to make arrangements. Hire a wedding planner. Outsource everything. Keep Mari by your side 24/7. I’m not waiting any longer.”

“But Zayn—”

His kiss is biting and rough and steals my heart all over again. I plunge my hands into his hair and sink into it.

If I get to be Mrs. Zayn Grayson in two weeks, I’ll rearrange the entire world to make it happen. That’s the confidence this man’s love has given me.