



His Forever Girl

Author: *Lucy Darling*

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Description: Zoey Hawthorne has always been my forever. Best friends since we were kids, she and I were meant to be. Until I screwed it all up before we went to high school. I had to step away before I ruined my shot with the girl who held my heart in her hands.

Letting her go was the biggest regret of my life. Making it up to her won't be easy, but I have to show her that I never lost sight of her. I mean that literally and figuratively. Zoey's not just my love, she's my obsession. I worry for her, care for her, and above all, want to protect her. She's too good for me, but that's not going to stop me from having her.

Loving Zoey has never been optional for me. She's the one, and I intend to show her just how much she means to me.

Total Pages (Source): 38

Page 1

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

1

Zoey

I stare down at the giant folder in my hands. I know what it is. I've been waiting for it. I bite my lip, not opening it yet. How can you want something and not want it at the same time? That's how I'm feeling at the moment.

Of course, one of the only reasons something like that could happen to a girl is because of a boy. And my situation is no different. I hold the future I've always dreamed of in my hands. Years ago, it would have included him, but now the thought of him being there only brings me sadness.

Mom is still at work. I've just gotten home from school. Like every day since I sent in my admissions letters to dozens of colleges, I immediately ran to the mailbox to check to see if my letter had come. I've already received a bunch of acceptance letters from a handful of colleges which included a lot of scholarships and perks.

The one in my hands, though, is the one I've really been waiting for. This is the college I've been dreaming about going to since I was a little girl. The same college that Reid Knight will be attending. The boy from next door who got a full ride too after taking our school to the state championship in football and winning. Reid always won.

My cell phone vibrates across my bed. Willow's name lights up. I guess she got her letter today too. We did all of our admissions letters together. It is how we've done everything since the seventh grade. She was there to pick up the pieces when my

childhood best friend, Reid, dropped me and pretended as though I never existed. After all these years, nothing has changed when it comes to Reid. He still acts that way.

I answer the call and put it on speaker. "I got in!" Willow screams through the phone. "My parents are over the moon about it." The sarcasm in her tone can't be missed. There are two different groups of kids in our school. There are the rich kids and then all the other kids.

Willow came from the rich part of town. Her trust alone would have her set for life if she wanted. Both of her parents are workaholics. She spends more time at my house than her own.

"Well?" she asks. "If I got in, there is no way you didn't get it." That's not necessarily true. The Harlow last name carries weight to it. Both Willow and I aced all of our classes, but my test scores were off the charts. We've also done a million and one extracurricular activities. I swear we were in more clubs than I could count. We wanted to make sure to have enough to put on our applications.

"I haven't opened it yet," I tell her.

"My envelope was small, so don't think it might not be an acceptance."

"Mine isn't small."

Willow sucks in a deep breath. "You got a full ride. I know it! Open it, you're killing me here. I'll drive over there and open it myself if you don't hurry up." She would.

I slowly open the envelope, pulling out the papers. My eyes well with tears. All of my hard work has paid off.

“I got in,” I whisper. “A full ride.”

Willow starts screaming. I can see her in my mind over there dancing around. I wanted in so badly but knew that college would cost so much.

I didn't want to put that strain on my mom. It's not that she couldn't pay it; I just know it would be a huge cost. I also know if I'd gotten accepted even without a scholarship that Mom would push me to go. Even if one of the others offered me more perks, she would insist I go to the one I really wanted to.

Now I don't have to. I don't know if I want to laugh or cry. I'm filled with so many emotions. I thought I'd be celebrating this with him, but he's nowhere to be seen. Why do I let my mind take me to that place again? I have to learn to push past that; my future is literally in my hands.

“We're sharing a dorm room. I demand it.” I let out a small laugh. Most people don't get to pick who they dorm with in their freshman year, but I guarantee Willow will somehow make it happen.

“He's going to be there,” I remind her.

“Fuck him.” The words come easily from Willow. They are ones that she's uttered many times before. Needless to say, our school has cliques. The football guys, of course, are one of them. Then there are the cheerleaders and dance squad that follow them around. There is a drama crew and a few others. Willow and I always floated on the outskirts of everyone. Of course, with all the clubs and such for school activities we blended in here and there. Plus, I was in charge of most of the pictures that go in the back of the year book.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

Most of the time it felt like I had the plague. I never got any school crushes or dates. Willow begged me to go to one dance, and I did. Not once did anyone ask me to dance. The only thing I found myself doing was stealing glimpses at Reid that night. He looked so handsome in his suit.

I could never keep up with who was dating who. It shifted around so much that I hadn't ever tried. Still it dings my ego that not once did someone ask me for my number or to one of the dances. Willow went on dates sometimes. Nothing ever stuck for her, but at least she got to experience dating. I'd take a bad date over no date at all.

“We should celebrate.”

“What do you want to do?” I ask. It's Friday night, and I am excited about this. The only thing I'm not excited about is another four years of Reid.

I thought I'd finally be getting away from him when I went off to college. It wasn't only him I wanted to get away from, but his friends too. As much as it broke my heart in middle school when he dropped me like a bad habit, it was the people he chose to be friends with that had really hurt.

I don't care what anyone says. They were a bunch of jerks. I heard how they talked about other girls. I've been on the receiving side of some of their jabs. I think that was what hurt me the most. That he'd not only dropped me but he didn't even bother to stick up for me. The Reid I remember would never have been okay with that. But what did I know? I was thirteen at the time.

It was just hard to believe how wrong I had been about Reid Knight. Reid “It’s going to be fucking weird not to have you throw me the ball anymore,” Jackson says. I’m lying on my bed bored. I throw the football into the air and catch it. I’ve been doing the same thing for the last ten minutes.

“Things change,” I mumble, sitting up when I think I hear the front door open next door. I have my window open. I get up from the bed and watch as Zoey comes running out of her house. She’s got on jean shorts and a hoodie. I take in her toned legs. Zoey might be on the shorter side, but her legs always got my attention. I think it’s because I often wonder if she could wrap them fully around me while I drove my cock deep inside of her.

I watch as she jumps into Willow’s black convertible Lexus before taking off. Where the hell are they going? I know there’s no way she’s going to Megan’s party. She never shows up at any of the parties. I went mainly with the purpose to make sure she didn’t. The other reason I went was I have fuck all to do. There are only so many times one would think you could masturbate in a night thinking of a girl you can’t have.

Lately I’ve been wondering why I couldn’t have her. For years I have denied myself. I haven’t even allowed myself to be friends with her. I cut her off completely, knowing it was the only way I’d be able to control myself. It’s been fucking torture.

“It will be good for you to get away.” Jackson slaps me on my shoulder. I’ve never said out loud what Zoey means to me but I think people have gotten the message to stay the fuck away from her.

Jackson got a front row ticket to the show, though. We worked well together. He caught everything I threw his way. He was who I was closest to on the team. He helped me keep my cool when I started getting worked up.

I'd stooped so low one time that I had him try and date Willow. She's a pretty girl. She's not my type. The only type I have is named Zoey. She's it for me even if she doesn't know it. No one looks hotter than Zoey. Jackson was into the idea of taking Willow out. Unfortunately, he only got one date before she dropped him. She didn't seem to date much either.

"I'm not getting away," I admit. I go back over to my bed and throw the ball into the air and catch it.

"Do not tell me you're going to the same colleges?"

"Kingston University here we come."

He drops his head, shaking it.

"You know my mom is a therapist." I chuckle at his sort of joke. I don't need a therapist, I need Zoey. Thing is, I cut myself out of her life almost completely, and now I don't know how to get back in there. Or if she'll even want me back in it. What I do know is that I'll do anything to make up for what I did to her. She didn't deserve for me to drop out of her life the way I did.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

I'd started to freak the fuck out when my feelings for Zoey started to change. I couldn't control the things I started thinking about her. We'd been friends for so long.

I'll never forget that day. I close my eyes and remember the look on her face when she tried to sit next to me. The words that came out of my mouth haunt me every single day of my life. I sit up quickly, not wanting to think about it again. But it doesn't work. The memory of me telling her to get lost plays over and over in my head.

And she did exactly as I said. She stayed the hell away from me. I rub the area over my heart, hoping the ache I always feel when I think about what happened with her will go away. The only thing that makes me feel better is knowing that I'll have her for another four years at least. I'm not sure I can keep going on like this. I also know that college is a whole new playing field. It will be too fucking big for me to make sure that fuckheads stay the hell away from my girl. Because she is my girl. Always has been and always will be.

"Fuck off," I tell him. "Are you going to the party tonight?"

Jackson shrugs, not caring if we do or don't go. I lie there waiting to hear other sounds from next door. When I hear a car pull into the driveway, I start to get up but stop when I hear the garage door open, knowing her mom is home. I'm on edge. It's the same way every time she goes out.

"I think we should get out of here for your own sanity," Jackson says, looking up from his phone.

“Let’s eat,” I agree. I grab the keys to the truck, making sure I lock the house up behind me, not sure when my pops will be back. His work hours can be all over the place. He owns a mechanic shop. I help out from time to time, but he’s always riding my ass about my grades, saying that school is where my mind should be. I shouldn’t get mad because I know he does it because he wants a better future for me.

He’s likely right, but my mind is always on two things, and those are Zoey and football. Part of me working so hard at football was for Zoey. I figured that if I went all the way to the NFL that our lives would be made. I’m always planning ahead for our future.

Even though Zoey doesn't spare me a glance anymore. Her best friend Willow looks at me like I’m something she scraped off the bottom of her shoe. That’s on a good day. On others she looks at me as if she wants to murder me. It doesn’t upset me in the least. It makes me happy knowing that Zoey has such a good friend.

We drive toward the square. There are a handful of places to eat there. When I spot Willow’s car, I park a few spaces away from it.

“Fucking hell,” Jackson mutters, knowing exactly what I’m doing. I’m torturing myself. I’m a masochist. I want to look at her. I want to know what she’s doing. I can’t help it.

Thing is it’s getting worse by the second. With football I had somewhere to take my aggression out. Right now, I feel as though I’m a caged beast, and there is only one thing that will calm me.

Zoey Hawthorne.³ZoeyI snap a picture of Willow as she takes a bite of her burger. She doesn’t say anything, used to me always snapping random pictures.

We split a cheeseburger and make sure we get an extra order of fries. The Burger

House's burgers are the size of my head. I'm already digging into mine when I see Reid push in the front door. The place isn't packed, so it's not as if he's not going to see us.

The hostess puffs out her chest, wanting to show Reid and Jackson what she has to offer as she talks to them. A few moments later they are sitting in a booth behind me. My back is to Reid. Just freaking great. I put my burger down, losing my appetite.

My stomach grows tight. Or maybe it's all of me that tenses up. Willow fills the air with chatter, trying to distract me. I know what she's doing. She's making it seem as though we don't notice they are even there.

She even goes as far as ordering us apple pie like we aren't in a hurry to get out of there. When the server starts to head back to our booth with the pie, Reid stands.

"That's peach, not apple," I hear him say, blocking the server from me with his broad body when I turn to look.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

“You’re right. Sorry about that,” I hear the server say. I snap my head back around to look at Willow, pretending I didn’t hear a thing. I’ve always been allergic to peaches. It’s not that they would kill me, but I would break out in hives and end up scratching for hours. It’s miserable.

My throat grows tight at the thought of him remembering. “Bathroom.” I give Willow a tight smile. She gives me one back, knowing she can’t follow me. It would draw too much attention. But I need a moment to digest what the hell just happened. I don’t understand my emotions. Why can’t I get over this? Over him?

I take a deep breath when I get into the bathroom, willing myself to get my shit together. When I open the bathroom door, I’m met with Reid’s broad chest.

“Hey,” he says to me. Hey? Really. He hasn’t spoken to me in years. He barely even spared me a glance, and now he wants to act as if he can say hey and I’m just supposed to fall into line? I stand there confused and shocked.

“You can actually see me? Wow. All this time I thought I was invisible.” My words are laced with sarcasm. I really don’t understand what he’s doing. First he stopped the server from bringing me the wrong dessert, and now he’s talking to me. What the hell?

He runs his hand through his short hair, shifting from foot to foot. For the first time in my life, I think Reid is feeling unsure of something. Not my problem. I push past him. Obviously he lets me because he doesn’t have to move.

When I get back to our booth, Willow says she’s got the tip as she stands, and we

head out the door. “Did he say something to you?” she asks the second we push out the door.

“I guess. If hey is really saying something to someone.” We slip into her car, taking off. I’m not sure where we’re going. I think she’s just driving around. “It’s weird. It’s like he followed me to the bathroom.”

“He did,” Willow confirms. “He was coming out right behind you so he never went to the bathroom.” I bite my lip, wondering why. This was going to play on repeat in my head for hours. I’m going to obsess over it. It’s how I am. Especially when it comes to Reid. When he stopped talking to me all those years ago, I had almost driven myself crazy trying to figure out why.

“We should go to Megan’s party,” I suggest when we pull up to a light. She turns her head and gives me a shocked expression. I’m shocked too, but lying in bed all night obsessing over Reid is not something I do anymore, and I’m not letting the habit reform.

“All right,” she agrees. Willow picks up my camera, snapping a picture of me and making me laugh. “Had to catch the moment. I’m still a little shocked.” I am too, but what’s the worst that can happen?

It doesn't take long for us to get there. I think others are as shocked as Willow was about us showing up. It looks as though all of the football team is here. They rule the school.

All of them act like I have the plague, so I won’t have to worry about any of them talking to me. They’ve never really given me an ounce of attention. They are decent to Willow. Not that it mattered much. There isn’t a lot of free time anyway when you’re trying to get into college with scholarships. It was easy to keep my head down. Doesn’t mean it didn’t burn.

Since football season is over, we're pretty much all just seniors now. The cliques have started to disperse a bit with the year coming to an end soon. The one thing that remains the same is that everyone still seems to look to Reid for direction. As if they need his permission to do anything. Willow says hi to a few people as we work our way through the house. I notice that some of the people here aren't from our school.

When we reach the kitchen, someone hands me a wine cooler-looking thing. I give the boy I've never seen a smile as he pops the lid off for me. I pretend to take a drink. Alcohol really isn't my thing.

"Thanks," I say. I watch Willow slip away to allow me to spread my wings a bit. I want to reach out and grab her, but I don't. The boy is cute with his shaggy blond hair. He's tall but not taller than Reid. I chastise myself for making a comparison between them. I complain that no one is ever interested in me. Then when a boy actually does show interest, the first thing I do is compare him to Reid.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

I bite my lip, not knowing what to say since I'm not so great at small talk. He says he's from Raymore, and he earns a point when he says he doesn't play football. He does, however, play baseball. When he asks for my number, I freeze. I feel like a deer caught in headlights. I'm sure I look like one too. I, uncomfortably, ramble off my phone number. I have to admit it feels kind of good just to have someone ask for it.

Suddenly, Willow is back at my side as the boy named Andrew programs my number into his phone. "They're here." Of course they are here. I think I knew that would happen. I casually take a full gulp of the drink. It's sweet but has a weird aftertaste. "Nice to meet you, Andrew," I say as I'm pulled away. I can tell from the look on his face he wanted to chat more.

It felt nice to be hit on for once. I'm not even dressed up. I am in shorts and a hoodie. I don't have any makeup on, and my hair is up in a messy bun. "Wasn't sure if you wanted to stay and chit chat, plus I wanted to let you know that-" She stops talking when my drink is plucked right out of my hand. I'm about to yell at someone, but when I look over my shoulder, my eyes meet Reid's. I swear my mouth goes dry.

I watch as he hands my drink to someone else.

"Why, thank you, Reid," Missy from the cheerleading squad says. She tries to grab at his arm as I try to get away from him. We both lose because, like always, Reid wins.⁴ Reid "Mindy. Knock it off." I guess me handing her a drink made her think she had an opening to grab me. I wasn't even paying attention to who I was handing it to. I was surprised to see Zoey here to begin with, much less with a drink in her hand.

"Missy," she corrects, like I give a fuck. This is one of the reasons I make it a point to

stay away from the cheerleaders in any way possible. They take any opening they can to get handsy. It drives me insane.

I continue to follow Zoey through the crowd of people. She's short, which makes her easy to lose. Thank God I'm taller than most of the people here and spot her dipping out a side door. I'm almost to the door but stop short when Willow stands in front of it to block my way.

I almost smile, but she looks so serious. Her arms are folded over her chest, making it clear she's willing to go toe to toe with me. It makes me happy to know that she's trying to protect Zoey from me.

“What are you doing?” she asks, getting straight to the point. I know Willow isn't someone I get to tell to fuck off. Not if I want to win any points with Zoey. If anything, I'm indebted to her. She was a friend to Zoey when I couldn't be.

“I want to talk to her.”

She stares me down. “Oh. Excuse me. Now you want to talk to her? What the hell is wrong with you?” I don't know how she does it, but she makes me feel two feet tall. “I'm going to give you one chance.” She holds her finger up. “One. Do you understand me? If she tells me that you've done one thing that's hurt her—” She pauses to think for a moment. “Well, you know, I'm rich enough to have you killed, dismembered and buried out on my grandpa's farm.” She smiles as she says it like she is enjoying the idea of me coming to a painful end.

“Deal.” At this point I'm willing to fall on a sword if that's what it takes to get Zoey to forgive me.

“Are you planning on taking her home tonight?”

“Yes.”

“Took you long enough, asshole,” she says before she steps aside. I’d stop and ask what the hell she means, but I want to get to Zoey as fast as possible. Who knows who might be outside with her right now? I think Willow might be rooting for me. I’m not sure.

It doesn't take me long to spot Zoey. She’s leaning up against Willow’s car looking down at her camera. I also see that Mitchell from Raymore High has his eyes locked on her and is heading her way. I know what he’s thinking. Fresh meat. Zoey never comes to parties. I pick up my speed.

“Don’t even think about it, Mitchell,” I call out to him. His head jerks my way. He's been inside half the cheerleaders in our school and his own. No way am I letting him anywhere near Zoey. She’s sweet and deserves the fucking world. I’m not even good enough for her, but I’m not sure I have the will to stay away anymore. Each reason I’ve had has melted away over time.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

“She yours?” the cocky bastard asks me with a smirk. Mitchell is a pass rusher on his team. He never did get the quarterback sack on me that he’s always wanted, but right now we could go. There is no line between us.

“What?” Zoey gives us an adorable, confused look, having no clue as to what's going on. Another reason she shouldn't be alone with someone like Mitchell. I move to stand in front of her so that Mitchell can't even look at her anymore. I can feel the heat of her on my back. It's not long before I feel her hands come to rest on my back. Her touch almost brings me to my knees. I've missed her so damn much. I'll take whatever she'll give me.

“I'm not fucking around.” It must be the look on my face that finally clues him in to how serious I am because he stops walking.

“She's not worth all that.” He shakes his head and turns to head back inside. If I weren't trying to mend things with Zoey, I'd chase him down and make sure he knew that she's worth everything. That's not an option right now because Zoey's hands are on me, and I find I can't move.

“What are you doing?” she asks, dropping her hands from my back. I turn around and stare down at her. There is still a touch of light out, and I'm close enough to see the small freckles that dot her nose and cheeks.

“Taking you home.” I go for her hand, but she shakes me off. I settle for wrapping my hand around her wrist to pull her along to my truck. She tries to pull back. I stop walking and grab her by the hips before I lift her and put her over my shoulder. Her little fists beat into my back, and I wonder if this will get me in trouble with Willow.

“What are you doing? Put me down.”

“I already told you what I was doing.” I open the passenger side door of my truck, placing her inside gently like she's a porcelain doll. I reach up and put her seatbelt on her. I think I've shocked her because the only thing she's doing is staring at me. Her pink lips are parted. I shut the door, rushing around to the driver's side and taking off before she tries to make an escape.

I can feel her eyes on me the whole way home. When I pull up outside of our houses, she's out the door before the truck rolls to a stop. I call after her, but she ignores me. I stand there knowing that I can't rush after her. I want to, but I know her mom would come outside if she heard us.

She stops when she gets to the porch. She turns to stare at me for a moment. “I don't know what you're doing here, Reid, but trust me when I say that I don't trust you.” With that, she enters her house. I drop my head. Her words are like a knife to my heart. I think I would have rather had her say she didn't like me more than she doesn't trust me. It burns deep inside of me. I have no one to blame but myself for any of this.

There was a time when she would have trusted me with anything. When she looked at me as if I hung the moon. It's why I pushed her away. I couldn't trust myself around her anymore. Yet I still managed to break the one thing I'd tried to protect. That isn't going to stop me. I don't care what it takes. I'm going to make her trust me again. Even if it's the last thing I do. I'll never give up. Not on this. Not on her. Zoey is worth the fight. She always has been.⁵Zoey I shove another spoonful of cereal in my mouth as I swipe my finger across the page on my e-reader. My phone buzzes across the table again. I'd turned the chime off. The sound kept distracting me from reading. I was distracted enough with my own thoughts. My mind has been racing ever since Reid dropped me off last night.

“Someone is popular today.” Tell me about it. My phone won't stop going off, and

I'm not sure how I feel about that. Not only is Willow texting me, but so is the boy from last night that I'd given my number to. I pick up my phone to check my messages because ignoring them seems hopeless at this point. I click Willow first.

Willow: So you're going to go, right?

Me: I think so.

Willow: Do it. It will be fun.

Me: Fine, I'll go.

I am really still on the fence about going. I woke up to a text from Andrew. I didn't think he'd text me so soon or at all after how Reid acted. I heard there were rules to this dating thing. That maybe you wait a few days so you seem busy and not too desperate. Personally, I think that's all bullshit, so Andrew gets his second point with me. I decided that I should text him back and tell him that we could meet up.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

Me: Sure. Can I meet you there?

With the way Reid has been acting, I'm not so sure I want Andrew to show up at my house. Plus, I'm not ready for the whole meet your parents thing. It's not that I'll hide what I'm doing from my mom. I'm eighteen, so I can go on a date if I want. I just don't want to introduce him because this will probably be a one-time thing. So what would be the point?

There was no spark between us, if I'm being completely honest. I was more excited that someone actually hit on me than anything else. I worry my lip between my teeth. I don't want to waste the guy's time either if I'm already thinking it won't work. Maybe a spark will grow once we go out? Okay, I know that's not how sparks usually work, but it could happen. If nothing else, I'm hoping a new friendship will blossom from this.

"What are you debating?" my mom asks as she takes a sip of her coffee.

"A guy." Her eyebrows lift in surprise. "I was asked on a date. I'm not sure I'm into him, though. I was going to go, but I don't want to waste his time or..."

"Go," Mom says, cutting me off before I start to ramble more. "Pay for your own stuff and no harm, no foul. You never know what could happen. Don't close yourself off." She shrugs.

"Okay." That does sound like a good idea.

Andrew: See you there at 7?

Me: I'll be there. Seen you then.

I guess that's that. I have a date. That should not feel weird to me, but it does.

"Are you excited?" Mom sits down at the small table we keep in the kitchen. We hardly use the dining room. I do sometimes if I'm doing a cram study session.

"I'm not sure what I am," I admit. Reid is messing with my mind. I keep playing last night over and over in my head. Why is he suddenly giving me the time of day? I should be thinking about Andrew, but nope. All my thoughts lead back to Reid. Why did he give a crap if some guy wanted to talk to me last night? Why did he give a crap about me at all! The more I think about it, the more confusing it gets.

"It's just a date. You remember to be safe and all the things we've talked about."

"I know, Mom. I promise." She stands, giving me a kiss on the head before she heads back out of the kitchen. I love my mom to pieces, and I'm lucky to have a mom like her. It's always been just her and me from the beginning. From my understanding, my father was a one-night stand not looking to be a dad. I've never really asked about him. I know that she'd be more than willing to share whatever information she had about him, but to be honest, I don't really want to know. He made his choice to not be a part of my life.

Mom, on the other hand, took it as a blessing when she found out she was pregnant. She always wanted kids, but there had never been the right time or right guy. Then it just happened. We're kind of our own family.

Even this house was the one my mom had grown up in. She lost her parents a few months before she found out about me. She'd planned to sell the house, but she changed her mind because of me. She said she had so many fond memories of growing up in this house that she wanted me to have that environment too. She

wanted to make new memories here with me. Not that it would have been hard for her to sell it. It is her job, after all, and she is really good at it.

I clean up my mess before lying down on the sofa to watch some TV. I must have passed out at some point because before I know it, Willow is shaking me awake.

“What are you doing?” she asks.

“What the hell does it look like I’m doing?” I rub my eyes, sitting up.

“You have a date to get ready for.”

“That’s not till...” I stop talking when I see the time. I took one hell of a nap. I think I was making up for last night's crappy sleep after the whole Reid thing.

“Let’s get you looking extra hot.”

I look down to see the giant bag she brought with her. “You’re going to make me do hair and makeup, aren't you?”

Willow and I have two very different types of hair and makeup. I’m more laid back when it comes to getting all prettied up. I usually put on a little lip gloss and mascara. That seems to work perfectly for me. To me, leaving my hair down meant it was styled.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

“You’ll give me this.” I nod in agreement. She’s so excited that I can’t say no to her. She grabs my hand, pulling me up from the sofa. I let her do her thing while I talk about Reid and how weird he is being. “Have you ever noticed that you talk about Reid a lot?”

“Do I?”

“Part your lips a little more for me.” I do as she asks. She’s putting lip stain on me. It’s always so hard to get off, but I have to admit it makes your lips look incredible. “Yes, you always make off handed comments about him.” Do I really? I try and think back. “Don’t!” she snaps at me.

“Don’t what?”

“Eat your bottom lip like you always do when you’re thinking too hard.”

“Oh.” I make sure not to because I don’t want lip stain on my teeth. I make a conscious effort to stop talking about Reid and focus more on talking about my date with Andrew.

“You should be more excited. Andrew is not bad on the eyes.”

“He’s been nice,” I admit. He has the whole boy next door look. Not my boy next door but most others. Reid is not yours, I remind myself for the millionth time since he stopped speaking to me all those years ago.

“Nice is good. You only spent a few short minutes together. Give it a chance.”

“I’m not sure we should give anyone a chance at the moment. We’re leaving soon.”

“Kingston might be in another state but it’s only three hours away.” That is true. I’m already making up reasons why I shouldn’t go.

“He might be going somewhere too.” I can’t stop myself.

“Yeah, it could be Kingston. There’s a question you can ask on your date.” I should make a list of things to ask so there won’t be those awkward silences. “Stop making a list of things to ask him.” She smirks, knowing she busted me.

“Are we done yet? I still need to get there.”

“I think so. On that note I’m going to drop you off.”

“I can drive myself.” I stand up, wanting to get a look at myself. I have on black wide leg pants and a cute knitted sweater that keeps falling off one shoulder. “Wow,” I say when my eyes meet the mirror. I still look like myself, but I look older. I would even go as far as saying I look sexy. My freckles are gone, and she made my eyes pop out more. “I look hot.” I should have trusted she wouldn’t overdo it. Willow would never steer me wrong or make me look bad.

“I’m driving,” she insists.

“Okay.” This is not the hill I am going to die on. Willow always wants to drive. I have my own car, it’s a cute sky blue Beetle my mom got me for my sixteenth birthday. Willow always insists on driving, and since we are almost always together, it seems as though I never take it out.

“Should I change my top, though? If you look close enough you can see my bra through it. You can see this bra strap too.” Even as I’m saying the words, the sweater

falls off my shoulder.

“Nope. That’s how it’s supposed to be. It’s sexy without really trying to be sexy, which is totally your thing.”

“By not trying to be sexy I end up making myself sexy?” I have no idea what she is talking about.

“Yes.” She nods her head. “That’s the Zoey appeal. Sweet and smart with this underlying sex appeal. The fact that you don’t know you have it is what makes it even more hot.”

“Okay.” I’m not sure I follow, but I get the drift. I grab my purse and head for the front door. I stop in mom’s office before I go. She’s working but kisses my cheek and tells me to be safe.

“This is going to be wonderful,” Willow says as I follow her out the front door and toward her car. She’s wearing an expression that I can’t quite make out. I can’t help but steal a glance over toward Reid’s house.

“Why are you more excited about my date than me?”

She gives me a smile. One that tells me that she’s up to something. As well as she can read me, I can read her too.

My best friend is definitely up to something. Whatever it is will either be wonderful or a complete disaster. I suppose I will find out soon enough.⁶ Reid I brace my hand against the shower wall. I finally finished washing the grease and grime from the shop off me. I went in with my pops this morning. I help him out most Saturdays. I am thankful for that shit. I needed something to keep my hands busy, and my mind. I’m on edge thinking about Zoey.

She was in my truck last night. The smell of her hadn't lingered long after she left. I'd sat in my truck until I couldn't smell her anymore. Then I dragged my ass into the house so I could shower and ease the tension in my body by jacking off.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

I am once again doing the same thing once I've gotten the shop smell and dirt off me. Even in my made-up fantasies about her, I make sure to be scrubbed clean, never wanting to dirty her up. Not in that way at least.

I close my eyes. I've had Zoey in every position possible and everywhere possible a thousand times in my mind. This time she's on her bed. I haven't been in her bedroom in years, but I still remember every inch of it. I'm sure it's changed over the years. I picture her naked in bed with her legs spread for me. I stroke myself harder. She asks me to join her. She needs me as much as I need her too.

Her cheeks would be pink and her mouth puffy from my kisses. She'd be so turned on I would be able to see her pussy and thighs covered in her need for me. I watch her as she slips her hand between her thighs. She plays with herself, giving me a show. I picture her moaning my name.

That's all it takes and I'm coming. I grit my teeth. The jack-off session did not do much for me as far as relief. I curse, turning the now cold shower off and getting out. I'm going to need to work out or something. There is no way I can lie here all night and not end up going over to her house and knocking on her door.

Since I walked in the door from the shop, I kept going to the window to look over at her house. The garage door at her house is open at the moment, and I can see both cars are home. I dry off before getting dressed quickly. Again, I check to see that both cars are still there. Not that it really matters. Most of the time when she's going somewhere that isn't school, Willow drives.

I try and think of a reason to go over there. The grass isn't long enough to be mowed,

but I could also go over and just ask Quinn if she needs anything taken care of. I started mowing their yard after Dad had taught me. I mow ours and then theirs right after. Same with shoveling the driveways in the winter.

My phone dings. I grab it and check my texts. It's from Jackson. I stare at the picture he took. It's my Zoey. She's laughing while sitting at an outdoor table at The Red Door. How in the fuck? The Red Door is pretty much in the center of the square where people often hang out. There are a few restaurants, a movie place, and a few other random things to do.

What I can't wrap my mind around is why the person sitting with her making her laugh isn't Willow. It's Andrew fucking Jennings.

Me: I'm on my way.

I fire back a text. When I get to my truck I shoot off another.

Me: Keep an eye on them. DO NOT let him touch her.

Jackson: How the hell do you expect me to stop him from touching her?

Me: Break his fingers.

I toss my phone into the passenger seat and haul ass toward The Red Door. When I get there, I see Jackson. He jumps in front of me, blocking my path.

“You sure you want to do this?”

“Move,” I tell him, but he doesn't.

“Take a deep breath. Calm down a second. You can't just walk over there and level

the guy. That's not going to help your situation with Zoey. If you want to be pissed at anyone it should be yourself." He's right. I take a deep breath, knowing if I walk in there and punch the guy it will only make her more mad. I will only push her further away from me than I already have.

"Okay," I agree. I won't punch the guy unless he asks for it. I don't have to go into the restaurant to get to them. The patio is wide open. When I round the corner, I don't have to look for Zoey. My eyes go right to her. You'd think she felt my stare because she lifts those bright blue eyes to meet mine.

They widen when she sees that I'm headed straight for her. I reach into my back pocket, pulling out a couple of twenties.

"Andrew. You must have missed the memo. Or maybe I wasn't clear enough last night." I lock my hands around his wrist. He was about to tuck a piece of Zoey's silky hair that is moving with the wind behind her ear.

"What?" He jerks back, and I release my hold on him.

"Zoey is with me." I drop a couple of twenties on the table. That should cover at least her food. It looks like she's only taken a few bites of it anyway. Did he pick her up from her house? How long has she been on this date? I hold out my hand for Zoey to take. She stares at it.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

“I didn't know you were with Reid,” Andrew says.

“I'm not with him.” She bats my hand away. But I keep it out. She rolls her eyes. “I'm sorry, Andrew,” she tells him. Then to my fucking surprise, she takes my hand. The small touch of her soft skin to mine is unlike anything I've ever felt before. I don't think I'll ever be able to let go of her hand again. I didn't know something could be this freaking soft.

“She's mine.”

She starts to say something again, but I press my mouth against hers to get her to stop. Her eyes widen again. Fuck me, her lips are even softer than her hand. I release her mouth quickly, but it worked. She doesn't say anything else. With her hand still in mine, she follows me when I start to walk toward my car.

I see a few people that I know from school. It's not shocking. It's a Saturday night. Everyone comes to the square to hang out all the time. I'm sure this will be all over the school by Monday morning. I have no doubt about that.

There will probably be videos and pics posted on social media too. That makes me smile. Hopefully everyone will get the point. I had all the guys at my school on lockdown when it came to Zoey. They all knew better than to try to hit on her or ask her out. I'd made sure to make it clear to them that she was off limits. I hadn't thought about guys from other schools, though. This little show should do the trick. When I look down at my Zoey, I notice she's not smiling at all.

It might take my whole fucking life to make her smile again when she sees me

coming, but I sure as fuck will do everything I can to make that happen.⁷ Zoey How the hell am I back in Reid's truck? He ushered me in, and I went without a fight. A fight is the last thing I wanted. It's why I left so easily with Reid. We might not have been close for the past five years, but I can still read some of his looks and moods. I knew he was itching for a fight with Andrew. The only thing I can't understand is why.

I probably should have let him. Andrew turned out to be a dick. He quickly lost the point he gained earlier for not waiting around to call or text me. He wanted into my pants, and he wanted into them tonight. No matter what I said, he would loop it back to something sexual. He also wouldn't stop staring at my chest.

He was really trying to see through the knitted sweater. I was about to pretend to use the bathroom and tell Willow to call me with a fake emergency when Reid showed up. There was no way I was making it through the whole meal and a movie. He was giving off a creepy vibe.

He would have probably tried to cop a feel in a dark movie theater. He wasn't for me. I should have gone with my gut, but I wanted to have the experience of going on a date. He wasn't the type of guy that I could ever trust, and my mom always told me that I needed to trust the guy I was with.

"You look beautiful tonight, babe," Reid says. I hear the words, but I don't understand how this is happening. Why is he doing this? He starts the truck before taking my hand again into his. He holds it as he drives. I close my eyes and try to gather my thoughts. I'd be lying if I said I didn't enjoy the feel of his hand holding mine. No. I can't allow myself to fall down that rabbit hole when it comes to Reid, I remind myself. "Are you still hungry? We can stop at the diner."

"Okay," I say. He gives my hand a small squeeze. I pull, but he doesn't let it go. "I have to text Willow and let her know where I am." He reluctantly lets go of my hand

so that I can use my phone.

Me: Omg! Reid showed up on my horrible date. He told Andrew I was his! Those words actually came out of his mouth.

Willow: Then what happened? I tracked your location. Are you in his truck?

I smile down at the phone. Of course she tracked me. Out of the corner of my eye I see Reid steal a glance over at me. I was agreeing to go eat at the diner because clearly Reid and I need to have a talk. Also, the diner has kick-ass fries.

Me: He called me babe and then asked if I was still hungry.

Me: Oh and he pressed his mouth against mine to get me to stop talking.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

Willow: You mean he kissed you.

Me: No, he just pressed his mouth against mine.

As I send the text I realize she's right. It was a kiss. Reid kissed me. I mull that over in my mind for a minute, coming to the realization that he was my first kiss.

Willow: Okay. We should talk about the birds and the bees later.

Me: Okay, you win, he kissed me.

When I think back on how his lips had felt against mine, butterflies come to life in my stomach.

Willow: I think it's badass he checked if you're hungry. Point for Reid.

Me:

Willow: What? That so gets a point! He's down a 100 so it only makes him -99.

I snort a laugh. I start to text her back, but Reid steals the phone from my hand.

"Hey." I try and grab it back.

"Putting my number in. I'll give it back," he says as he reads the last few texts in our conversation. Why do I feel like he was really trying to make sure it was Willow I was talking to?

“Sure you are.” A second later his phone rings then stops. Okay, he might have been trying to get my number, but he was also being nosy. The way he’s acting right now is making me think back to a time when we were best friends. He has always watched out for me. He also would get grumpy if I didn’t give him the attention he needed.

He once told me I was going to replace him with a girl best friend. He made me promise I wouldn’t. I think we were twelve at the time. He hadn’t really given me much of a choice but to break the promise.

He hands the phone back over to me. “I deleted the texts from Andrew and blocked him.”

I roll my eyes, snatching my phone back. “Let’s eat.” He jumps out of the truck. I glance at my phone to see he’s programmed his name in my phone as All Yours. The passenger door opens a moment later.

I release my seat belt before I turn to hop down out of his truck. Before I can, he’s got his hands on my hips and is helping me down. My body grazes him as my feet find the ground. I lick my bottom lip. His eyes drop there.

Again he leans down, brushing his mouth against mine. “Damn you’re soft everywhere.” He tangles his fingers with mine as we walk into the diner. It’s a first come first serve kind of place as far as seating is concerned. Reid leads us to a table in the back corner.

“You kissed me,” I say as he pulls a chair out for me. I sit down. “Twice,” I add in. I look around and see that Missy is here and giving me an angry stare.

“You might want to get used to it.” Reid is saved by the server.

“I’m Celia. I’ll be your server. What can I get you to drink?” Celia doesn’t waste

time.

“I’ll have water. Zoey wants a Dr. Pepper. Also, we’ll have two orders of fries to start. If you can get that in as soon as possible because my girl is hungry.” Did he just tell the waitress that I was his girl? I swear I feel as though I’m in some sort of dream. And if all of it is a dream, I’m not sure I ever want to wake up from it.

“Yep.” The waitress breaks me from my thoughts. She turns to go put in our order.

“They have the best fries.” He must feel the same. He was fast to order for us. He kind of took the words from my mouth. I stare over at Reid. His eyes are always on me lately.

“What’s happening here?” I want to get to the point. Reid is driving me crazy. “This is weird and is not going to work for me. Can you go back to ignoring me?” I suggest.

“I’ve never in my life ignored you.” He actually says it in a tone like I’m crazy to even suggest such a thing.

We stare at each other until the server is back dropping off our drinks and fries. Reid grabs the ketchup, making a pile before putting some salt on top. Something I always do.

I grab a fry and dip it in before I eat it. “I remember the day you dropped me. Like I was nothing to you. You were supposed to be my best friend.” I let out a humorous laugh. “Ironically, you were always the one worried I would stop being friends with you. Sounds like you had some projection going on even then.”

“That was the problem. I didn’t want to be your friend.”

“What the hell?” I start to stand, but he snags me by the wrist.

“I wanted more. Things that didn’t make us friends, and we were way too young for that then.” My face flushes. I have to turn and look away from him. I know what he’s talking about.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

I remember wanting him to kiss me. I really did think we'd grow up and get married. At that age I never really thought of the ins and outs of marriage. I just knew we would always be together.

“I thought we would grow up and get married,” I tell him. I shake my head. “It was a naïve thing for me to think, but I was young.”

“I didn't think I'd grow up to marry you, Zoey.” His words are like a knife to my heart. I shouldn't feel any which way about Reid not wanting to marry me. My eyes start to burn. “I knew I was going to marry you.”

I sit there in shock. He picks up a fry, dipping it into the ketchup and bringing it to my mouth. I take the bite.

“It doesn't work that way, Reid.” I finally get words out. “I want to go home.” I stand up. He nods his head before dropping some money on the table, and we both head out of the diner together. He keeps his hand on the small of my back as we walk toward his truck.

When we get to his truck, he doesn't open the door. Instead he crowds me from behind. I turn around to look up at him. My hands land on his chest. “I fucked up. I know that. I have to gain your trust back. I understand that. But know this. I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to make you fall in love with me.”⁸Reid I wonder how long it will take Zoey to realize I shared locations with her. When it alerted her phone after I turned it on, I went in and deleted it. It was an asshole thing to do. I know it. But this way I can protect her from other assholes. At least I'm an asshole with good intentions.

I texted her a few times yesterday, but she didn't respond. She could have blocked me, but I saw that she read the messages. One was a good morning and the other was me telling her I'd take her to school tomorrow. I'm taking the nonresponse as a yes. It's why I've parked my truck right in the center of her driveway. Her mom leaves about ten minutes before Zoey does. I watch the garage door open and then hop down out of my truck.

She opens her car door to toss her bag in but stops when she sees me. "When you don't respond I take that as a yes." She is in jeans and a hoodie today. She's got her hair piled high on the top of her head. It is hit or miss around here with weather. One day it could be all sun and the next there could be a blizzard.

"I can drive myself. Now move that truck." She waves her hand toward my truck as she says it. She looks so determined that it's adorable.

"I'm not moving. So you can either get in the truck or we can stand here all day." She rolls her eyes at me as she shuts the door to her car. I walk over to the garage and hit the code to shut the door. She gawks at me.

"It's been the same code since we were little. Your birthday." Her face softens a little.

"Right." She really doesn't need my help to get into the truck. She could do it on her own, but I wanted to touch her and this allowed me to. It isn't until I'm headed toward the school that she says anything again. "Everyone is going to be talking about us."

"I don't give a shit." I shrug. She glares at me. The softness on her face is gone.

"That's because you're the freaking star of the school. Everyone loves you and follows your lead. Part of that lead for all these years has been pretending that I don't exist. Middle school was hell because of that crap. You don't know what it's like to be treated like you have the plague."

“The fuck?” is all I can get out. I have no clue as to what she’s talking about. “People have been mean to you?” My hands on the steering wheel tighten.

“What did you think everyone was going to do, Reid? They follow your lead. Some of your friends are disgusting, by the way. The way they talk about other girls and who they’ve slept with. Oh, and the small jabs they take at me for likely being a virgin.”

“Who said that fucking shit?” I am going to fuck them all up. I told them to stay the fuck away from her, not to be rude and disrespectful toward her. Taking small jabs at her isn't staying away.

“Your. Friends.” She punctuates each word. “You hang out with them. You know what they say about girls. Pigs.”

Page 13

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:18 pm

“I hang out with Jackson.” The football team is always around, but out of school Jackson is the only one I do shit with. Those others are disgusting and gross at times. It’s one of the reasons I don’t hang with them unless it is pretty much forced.

“Whatever. Don’t think you being nice to me for a few days changes anything.” I can see the hurt on her face. I know she would never talk to me this way if I hadn’t hurt her. It’s not who she is.

“I’m so fucking sorry.” I pull the truck over. We’re almost to the school. “I thought I was doing the right thing. I didn’t realize people were doing shit to you.” My throat feels tight. “I’m sorry,” I say again. I’ll say it over and over if I have to. She relaxes some, but the hurt doesn’t leave her eyes.

“I don’t like being late,” she says. I nod and pull back onto the road to school. When my truck stops, she’s out and taking off toward the school before I can stop her. I let her go. Everyone turned to look our way when we pulled into the parking lot.

I run my hand down my face seeing how fucked-up this is. She got picked on because of me. Here my dumbass was thinking I was keeping her safe from me when a whole bunch of others were taking digs at her. Fuck.

There is no going back in time to bitch slap my thirteen-year-old self. Even though I really wish I could. All I can do now is try to make it right. Zoey can keep on running all she wants, but she’s going to quickly learn I’ll never stop chasing her.⁹ZoeyI can hear people whisper and feel their stares as I head into Advanced Chemistry. I rush over to where Willow is sitting. She’s my lab partner, and we share a desk. She looks up from her phone, giving me a smirk.

“I hear Reid brought you to school today.”

“How the hell?”

She shrugs at my response. “You know the gossip runs rampant around here.” That’s true. “So much for ignoring him.”

That was my plan. I told her everything that happened. In fact, after Reid dropped me off at home, I’d told her to get her ass to my house.

“That was the plan,” I mumble. I didn’t know how to deal with the things that kept coming from Reid’s mouth. My feelings are a jumbled mess, and my heart and brain are not connecting. It is messing with my body. I didn’t know if I should be mad or a little turned on. I have no freaking clue where the turned-on thing came from all of a sudden.

That’s kind of a lie. Every time I touched myself over the years my mind would fill with images of Reid. I could never bring myself to orgasm, because I couldn’t stop thinking about him and it turned me on, so I quit.

I see some of my classmates whispering to one another. Their eyes keep flicking toward me, making it overly noticeable they are talking about me. I’m not sure if this is worse or better. It went from no one paying any attention to me, to me now being the talk of the whole high school.

Before I can try and form a new plan, the bell rings, and our teacher, Ms. Webster, starts to talk. My phone buzzes in my back pocket. I pull it out and see a text from Reid.

Reid: Miss you.

Willow reads my text from the corner of her eye. She shakes with silent laughter. Reid is laying it on thick. Since he got my phone number, he's sent me good morning texts. Today he had said he dreamed of what it would be like to see me waking up in bed next to him. I'm sure Willow's eyes didn't miss that text either.

The class seems to drag on with how much the teacher is talking. I have my phone in my lap so that she doesn't see that I'm reading texts.

Reid: How is Advanced Chemistry?

Me: How do you know what class I'm in? Stalking much?

Reid: Always when it comes to you.

The last part of my text is a tease, but the more I think about it, there is some truth to it. All these years he's wanted me. I don't see why he'd lie about this. Unless there is some bet to get into my pants. My stomach drops at the thought.

That's not a far stretch because the football team is known to have a list of girls they've slept with. It was some sort of competition they had last year. Thankfully the school got wind of it and shut it down, saying if they heard another peep about it everyone would be expelled for a week. I wasn't lying when I told him that his friends are assholes.

Page 14

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“What?” Willow elbows me in the side. “You’re chewing on your bottom lip,” she whispers. I let my lip go. I’m going to ask Reid about that.

Finally the bell rings, freeing us all from class. We have block schedule, so there are four long classes every day.

“I’ll see your ass at lunch,” Willow says before we part ways. Our next classes are in different directions. I jump when someone puts their arm around me. It takes me less than a second to realize that someone is Reid. I try and shake it off, but he doesn't budge. I forgot that we have English together. People part the hallway for Reid. I don’t know if it’s because of his size or something else. I glance up at him as we walk.

“The football team—”

Reid cuts me off. “Means nothing to me. Football is over. I barely talk to them and when I do it’s at school.”

“Jackson,” I remind him.

“The only person besides you that I’ll talk to once this school year ends.” I try and read his face but don’t get anything.

“Remember last year when they did that competition about—” He pulls me closer to him as he again cuts me off. This better not be a habit.

“I reported them.” I stop walking, but Reid nudges me. “You hate being late.”

“Did you really?” I hold my breath for a moment, wanting that to be true. That’s the Reid I remember growing up.

“Yes. It was disgusting. Also one of the reasons I told them all to stay the fuck away from you or I’d kick them from the team.”

“Is that even possible?” Isn't that up to the coach or something?

“If I say it's them or me.” Okay, that would work. This school lives and breathes football.

“Is that why no one ever asked me out?” Things start to dawn on me. “You cockblocked.” This time it’s Reid that stops walking.

“I guess I did. None of them are worth your time, babe. I can promise you that.”

“Well, it’s a load of crap that you got to date and I didn't. Now we’re going to college together. Are you going to keep cockblocking me?” A few people turn to look at us.

“Zoey and Reid, get in the classroom now,” Mr. Hope says. We’re standing outside the door. The bell is about to ring. I duck in, freeing myself from Reid to enter the classroom. I head toward my regular seat. Reid follows me.

“Switch with me, Zack,” Reid says to him. Our seats aren't assigned, but people tend to sit in the same place every day.

“Yep” is all Zack says, and he’s out of his seat, letting Reid sit down in his spot.

“Does everyone do what you say?” I shake my head at him.

“Not you,” he says with a smirk. The smirk playing on his lips makes me think he

likes that about me. That I don't just bend to his every whim. The bell rings before either one of us can say anything.

The teacher starts talking, and of course Reid starts texting me.

Reid: In all fairness you cockblocked me too.

I look over at him and glare. How could I have possibly cockblocked him? He leans back in his chair and openly stares at me. This is freaking nuts. I know I shouldn't, but I can't keep myself from asking him how he came up with the idea that I somehow cockblocked him.

Me: How did I cockblock you?

Reid: Because you've made my cock only want you.

Shocked by his response, I drop my phone. It hits my desk, making a loud thud before it slides off and heads for the floor. Reid catches it easily. I look up to see everyone staring at me.

"Sorry."

Mr. Hope gives me a nod and gets back to his lecture. Reid reaches over and sets my phone down on my desk. Is this what it's like to be in shock? I can't even begin to process what he texted me. I must have misunderstood him. That has to be it. Or maybe I'm going crazy.

Me: I know you dated Megan.

Over the years I've heard the small whispers about who Reid was dating. Some of the girls said he didn't date high school girls. That he was more into the college type. It

all contradicted itself so I never knew what was true. I sure as hell never witnessed him walking down the hallways with his arm wrapped around a girl like he did to me today.

Reid: Nope.

His text back is instant. I don't know what to say to that except I'm not sure I believe him. That said, I've never seen him around with other girls. I bite my lip, wanting this day to be over. Thinking about all of this is overwhelming. I need to talk to Willow before I lose my mind. Right now my every thought is wrapped up with Reid and the jealousy I feel over him being with someone besides me.

Page 15

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

Me: If you're really trying to be my friend again, you can't lie to me about things.

Reid: I already told you. I don't want to be your friend.

I put my phone away and try to pay attention to Mr. Hope. When the bell rings, everyone jumps up. I do the same but don't get far because Reid is blocking my way. He grabs me by the hips, pulling me into him. His mouth drops down onto mine as he steals a quick kiss from me.

"I'm not lying to you. Your mouth is the only mouth that's been on mine." He steps to the side and lets me get past him, but I don't get far before he wraps his arm around me. Everyone is giving us looks. I go back to my state of shock as I let him lead me toward the cafeteria.

"You want fries today?" Reid asks. I'm not a giant fan of the food here, but the fries are good. I often only get a plate full of them for my lunch. Of course Reid knows this, again proving his point that he has been watching me.

"I'll get the food while you snag us a table." He drops his arm from around me but not before he presses his mouth against mine again. I hear a few gasps from the people around us, but as quick as his mouth is on me, it's gone. He gives me a little smirk before he wanders off to get our lunch.

It's starting to get irritating and not because I don't want him kissing me. That should be the reason, but it's not. My fingers itch to grab his shirt and pull him back to me, wanting him to give me a real kiss.

“You okay? You’re just standing here,” Willow says, breaking me from my thoughts of Reid. She loops her arm through mine. “I packed lunch.” We head over toward our normal table to sit down. I look around to make sure Reid isn't on his way back. I see he’s still in line. He’s easy to spot because he towers over everyone else.

“You’re not going to believe this,” I say to Willow as I try and tell her everything I can before Reid finds me again.¹⁰ Reid I lean up against the lockers, waiting for the bell to ring. I’ve been doing the same exact thing every day this week. I’m slowly winning my girl over. I don't care if it takes me forever, I'm not going to stop. She also hasn't demanded that I leave her alone. She gives me these cute little huffs and rolls her eyes at me, but I catch the small smirks she tries to hide from me.

I think this might be one of the best weeks of my life. I was stoked when we went to state and then pulled off the win. Yet, that pales in comparison to having Zoey back in my life. She'll always beat everything because the reality is I pushed hard because I wanted a scholarship. I wanted to make sure that I'd be able to support her in the future. I only had one school in mind.

The same school that I listened to Zoey talk about growing up. And fuck me if she hasn't grown up. She filled out over the years. If anyone would notice, it would be me with how much I stare at her. Then I go home, close my eyes, and pretend she's there to get me off.

The summer after ninth grade was the worst. It seemed as though she'd matured overnight. She went from having no tits to being all tits and ass in the blink of an eye. I swear I thought the skin on my dick was going to come off with how much I jacked off thinking about her that summer.

She and Willow loved to sunbathe on the deck. Her swimsuits, if you even could call those barely-there pieces of nothing swimsuits, almost killed me. Thank fuck she never tried to go to some public pool or somewhere else in one of them. I would have

lost my shit.

The bell rings, and I stand up and head straight for the hallway outside of Zoey's class to wait for her to come out, but she doesn't. I step into the classroom to see if she's still in there. Mrs. Petters gives me a smile. She's got her headphones in as she starts to pack up her stuff. I'm sure she wants to get out of here as badly as the rest of us.

When I turn around, my eyes land right on Zoey's ass. She's bent over the table writing in the notebook that's in front of Jake. I think she is helping him with something. Or that's what she thinks she's doing. I think Jake has other ideas, and he's playing dumb because his eyes aren't on the paper. They're on her tits. With the way she's bent over, her shirt falls open a bit and I know he has a nice view of my girl's tits.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

I let out a sound that resembles a growl. Fuck me. I'm growling at people now over her. She turns her head and her blue eyes lock with mine. Her brows raise as she stands. I'm sure my face shows that I'm pissed.

I grab my girl by her hips, easily picking her up and putting her behind me. I grab the back of Jacob's neck, pushing down so he can't get up from his seat. I would deck him in the mouth, but that would get me suspended for a few days. There's no way that I'm missing school because that would mean missing time with Zoey.

I lean down next to his ear. "What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"She was helping me."

I squeeze harder at the lie. "It looked like you were trying to steal a look at something that doesn't belong to you."

"I'm sorry," he rushes to say, putting together that I'm not fucking around with him.

"If I catch you staring at her again, I promise you I'll find your ass and deal with you off of school grounds. Do we have an understanding?" He tries to shake his head up and down, but he can't with the hold I have on him. "I want the words, Jake."

"Yes, we have an understanding."

I give one last hard squeeze. He lets out a yelp and I release him. Zoey is standing there looking at me with her eyes wide. Mrs. Petters has pulled her headphones off and is now looking at us.

“He was staring down your shirt.” I grab Zoey’s bag before my other hand grabs a hold of hers.

“Have a good weekend.” Mrs. Petters gives us a smile before her eyes go back to Jake, and she narrows them on him. Looks like Mrs. Petters is on my side.

I don’t stop walking until we get to my truck. I open her door for her, tossing her bag in before she gets in and I shut the door behind her. I hop in and take off. Finally we’re alone. Her sweet scent fills my truck, and it makes me relax. Having her close has always done that. I’d forgotten how good it felt to be near her.

“Are you hungry?”

She lets out a small laugh. I glance over at her when I pull up to a stop sign. She licks her lips, her cheeks looking a bit pinker. The thought of her being turned on hits me like a Mack truck.

“Are you turned on, babe?” I ask.

Her lips part as she lets out a gasp. “You don’t just ask a girl that.”

I can’t help the smile that pulls at my lips. “Told you, babe. Your non-answer to a question is a yes.”

She rolls her eyes and looks out the window. “Are you hungry?” she asks as she continues to watch the landscape pass by the window.

“Starved.” I can only see her left cheek, but I watch the blush bloom. My jeans grow tight. I swear I’ve had a hard-on for a week straight. I reach over, resting my hand on her thigh as I take off toward the square. She doesn't brush my hand away. In fact, she lays her hand on top of mine. I’ll take it... and I’ll keep on taking each little piece

she gives me until I have all of her.¹¹ Zoey He's driving me insane. Actually I might be driving myself insane. He's worn me down, and it has barely been a week since he came back into my life. The Reid I fell in love with all those years ago is back. He was right when he called me out about being turned on. It was easy to suppress my real feelings for him when I didn't have to see or talk to him on a daily basis. But now it's impossible. His jealousy over me lit me up inside. At one point I'm pretty sure I heard him growl.

I wasn't too shocked by the sound. Sometimes when I catch Reid staring at me I think his eyes almost look feral. That he's ready to pounce on me at any moment. But he never does. He still only gives me one of those kisses that are over before they really begin.

We've already slipped right into a routine. Willow is softly pushing me toward Reid too. I don't know when she changed sides, but her arguments about why I should give this a go are good.

My heart was already stuck on Reid; it's my mind that needs the convincing. Willow keeps insisting that I date him already so that I know if this is some passing childhood crush thing or the real deal. That I deserve to know one way or the other. That maybe I'd built him up in my head into something he's not.

That's the thing. She is right. I did have this idea in my head since I was a little girl that Reid and I would grow up and get married. I pictured the type of husband he would be, but the reality is better than any dream I've ever conjured up.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

Either way, I am already in too deep. If I tried to pull away now, I'd still have a broken heart. I don't have anything to lose from giving this a go—as long as Reid keeps being the man he is to me now. That said, I'm not going to clue him into any of that. I am enjoying being chased by him.

Reid pulls into my favorite diner in town. I know to wait for him to open my door. I learned that last time when I hopped out before he came around to open it, and he smacked me on my ass. Which had caused me to scream and everyone to turn and look at me in the parking lot.

Most of the girls glare at me these days. Before they barely noticed me, but now that I'm with their prized Reid, they stare holes through me. We've been the talk of the high school all week long. I don't care what any of them think of me. High school is almost over.

It's not as though Reid is being subtle about any of this, either. So it's his fault in a way for laying it on so thick in front of everyone. He always has to have his arm around me and is definitely not shy about public displays of affection. I can't blame the girls for being envious. If Reid were acting this way toward one of them and doing anything under the moon for them, I'd be seething with jealousy.

His dotting on me has no bounds. It started out with him bringing me breakfast in the mornings. It wasn't anything elaborate or crazy. It ranged from donuts to bagels, and today I got Pop-Tarts. At school he began to wait around for me and give me little treats throughout the day. I know it's silly to get warm and fuzzy over a chocolate bar that he got from the vending machine, but I can't help it.

It wasn't the candy that gave me the warm and fuzzies, it was the fact that he was thinking about me and wanted to do something for me. It was as sweet as all the chocolate he gave me. I was eating all of his attention up even though I was trying to keep him somewhat at an arm's length.

He opens the door for me, and I head toward a table in the back. "Will you order for me?" I ask as he pulls my coat off and hangs it over a chair.

"Yeah."

I drop my head back, and he presses his mouth against mine. I almost huff out a breath when he quickly pulls away. I know this isn't the place, but I need him to freaking kiss me already!

"Bathroom." I turn, rushing off before I grab him and kiss him not caring who is watching. I grab one of the stalls, shutting the door and locking it behind me.

"Did you see Reid just walked in?" I look through the crack in the stall to see Wendy's long blond hair.

"No! Is he in my section or yours?" I lean over further, trying to see who the other girl is. I see Melissa fluffing her dark hair in the mirror.

"Mine."

"You bitch," Melissa says. I roll my eyes. "Does he have that chubby Zoey girl with him? He's really trying to win this bet." My stomach drops. I shake my head no. Reid wouldn't do that. You also never thought Reid would stop talking to you and break your heart when you were thirteen, that tiny voice in my head annoyingly reminds me.

“What is it with guys wanting virgins? They don’t know how to do shit. I bet she’s terrible at blow jobs.” Both of them start giggling.

“I’m just waiting for them to break up. I mean, he never dates anyone from our school. Then suddenly he’s all over the smart, fat girl,” Melissa says. Her voice is full of disgust. I fight back the lump that forms in my throat, trying not to let them get in my head, but it’s hard.

“She’s not too smart if she’s buying what Reid is selling.” They both burst into laughter again. Thankfully they leave the bathroom. I stand and hurriedly wash my hands, needing to get out of this bathroom as soon as possible. Of course when I come out I see Wendy at our table. She throws her head back and laughs at something Reid says to her. Then she rests her hand on his shoulder.

Wendy glances my way with a smirk on her lips. Did they know I was in the bathroom? Reid reaches up and pushes her hand off his shoulder before handing her back the menus.

“I’ll be right back with your drinks,” I hear her say as I get closer to the table. Reid hops up to pull my chair out for me. I sit down, not feeling hungry anymore. The only thing I want now is to go home. Thankfully my mom is out of town this weekend for a conference. She reads my moods too well. She’d be all over me the moment I walked in the front door. She’s been loving the fact that Reid and I are friends again.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“Didn’t know if you wanted a Dr. Pepper or strawberry shake so I ordered both.”

“Thanks,” I say. He stares at me, his eyes narrowing. “What was so funny?”

“I don’t know. Something about me always ordering the same thing.” He shrugs. “I pushed Mindy’s hand off my shoulder.” He had.

“Her name is Wendy.”

“Mindy, Wendy, Cindy, I don’t know or care what her name is or anything else about her. There’s no need for you to be jealous.” He leans toward me. “I’m all yours, babe.”

Wendy drops my drink down onto the table so hard that some of the soda spills out. Next she places Reid’s water down nicely in front of him.

“Is there a problem?” Reid glances up at Wendy as he snags my hand that’s on the table and begins caressing my fingers.

“No,” Wendy answers quickly. Her eyes drop to our hands. I have no doubt she heard Reid’s comment about him being all mine.

“Where’s my girl’s shake?”

“Are you sure you want one?” Wendy lifts her brows as she looks down at me. “I mean, I think one has four hundred calories.” Reid’s hand slams down on the table. More of my soda splashes out. The whole diner goes quiet, but I can feel everyone’s

eyes on us.

“Mindy, get—”

“Wendy,” I correct him, unable to stop myself.

“Get the fuck away from my table and don’t come back.” Wendy’s face turns red in embarrassment, knowing everyone is looking at us.

“You can’t tell me what to do. You’re in my section,” she huffs.

“Go bus table twelve,” Gary orders her. She gives me a glare before turning and doing as Gary told her. It’s his diner, after all. “Sorry about that, Reid.” Even outside of school, people love Reid. People respect him for taking the football team to state and winning. A lot of people live and breathe football here.

“No worries, but can we get our food to go?” Reid stares at me as he asks the question.

“Sure thing.” Gary heads off toward the kitchen, leaving us alone.

“That’s the kind of shit you’ve had to put up with?”

“A little in middle school.” To be honest, who knows if it was because Reid stopped talking to me or it was just typical middle school bullying. “Not so much in high school until recently. They think I took Reid Knight off the market.”

“I was never on the market.” He runs a hand through his hair. I can tell he’s frustrated.

“They haven’t said anything to me really. I get a lot of glares. It doesn’t matter. High

school is almost over.”

“I’m so fucking sorry.” He still has a hold of my fingers. He laces his own fingers through them so we’re holding hands. It wasn’t her fat comment that hurt. It stung a little, but it was the other crap about the bet. She also wasn’t wrong that I don’t have a clue on how to give a blow job. I’ve never done any of that stuff before.

Before this, I would have thought it wouldn’t matter because according to Reid he never had one before. So I figured he wouldn’t know if it was good or bad anyways. Now doubt has trickled in, and I’m wondering if everything he’s been saying is a lie. Willow didn’t seem shocked when I told her what Reid said about not being with anyone in any way.

Gary comes back a moment later, placing our bags on the table. Reid pulls out his wallet. Gary waves him off. “It’s on the house today.”

“You don’t have to do that. Thank you for boxing it up for us.”

“Anytime,” Gary says, heading off to check on another table.

Reid opens his wallet, dropping the money down on the table before standing and grabbing my coat. He holds it open for me to slip my arms into.

“Thanks,” I mumble. He grabs the bags in one hand, and his other hand grabs mine, lacing our fingers again. I try and tug my hand free, but he doesn’t let me. He leads us back over to his truck that’s parked on the side of the diner.

“Let my hand go,” I say when we’re away from watchful eyes. I don’t want to give anyone more gossip. There is enough already. Reid opens the back passenger door to drop the bag in before he shuts it. “What are you doing?” His hands come down next to my head resting against the side of the truck. He’s got me caged in. Once again I’m

getting turned on when I shouldn't be.

“You’re not only mad about Mindy’s bullshit. There is something else.”

“Wendy,” I correct him again.

“Babe.” His tone is filled with warning. What is he going to do? Besides turn me on more because that’s all that’s happening.

“I heard the girls talking in the bathroom.”

“Okay.” He waits for me to give him more, and I have no doubt he’ll stand here all night until I tell him.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“I heard about the bet.”

“What bet?” He looks at me like he really has no idea what I’m talking about.

“Some bet about sleeping with me.” He throws his head back and laughs. I smack his chest. “It’s not funny.”

“I have no clue what you’re talking about, but if there is some bet about me sleeping with you then we’re going to win.”

“I’m not sleeping with you.” I smack his chest again.

“One day.” He presses his mouth against mine before I can say anything else. I grip his shirt as he pulls back.

“There is no bet.” I should have known. “I’m sorry.” I bite my bottom lip.

“You have reason to doubt me, but I’m going to keep pushing until you see this is real. I’m not going anywhere. You’re mine, and I’m yours. We’re getting married, remember.” He smiles. I roll my eyes, pretending to be annoyed.

Reality is I feel the flutter in my stomach that only he can give me. I pull him down for another kiss. He brushes his mouth against mine. This time he stays there for a moment. I think he’s really going to kiss me this time, but he lifts his mouth from mine.

“Damn it, Reid.” I pull on his shirt, trying to yank him back down. “Are you going to

really kiss me or not?" I barely get the words out of my mouth then he's all over me. He lifts me off my feet. My legs wrap around him as he pins me to the side of the truck, giving me exactly what I asked for.¹² Reid I growl against her mouth. I've been waiting for her, and now she gave me the green light, so I pounced on her. I have no freaking clue how I've made it this long without tasting her fully. Each time I'd pull my mouth from hers my whole body rebelled. She's freed this hunger inside of me now, and I pray that she doesn't ask me to stop.

My fingers dig into her hair. I give it a small tug that makes her gasp. The second her lips part, I slip my tongue into her mouth. She tightens her hold on me, pushing her tits into me. She's trying to get as close to me as she can. I think my girl has some hunger of her own she needs me to take care of.

At first, she lets me take what I want. I had no fucking clue someone's lips could be as soft as hers. Everything about my Zoey is sweet and soft.

"Kiss me back," I order her before my mouth is back on her. I give her ass a squeeze. Her tongue meets mine, and a whimper of need comes from her. Just like her, the whimper is soft and sweet. I want to know what other sounds I can draw from her.

"Gross!" I jerk my head back to see Melissa standing there with a cigarette in her hand. Her face is scrunched up in displeasure.

"Fuck off," Zoey says. She looks as surprised at her words as I am. I burst into laughter as she glares at Melissa, who stomps off. Zoey relaxes back into me, and a smirk pulls at that mouth of hers. "I can't believe I said that."

"I'm sorry, babe, but seeing you jealous because of me makes my dick harder, and it's pretty fucking hard right now." I let her slide down my body so she can feel just how hard I am for her. She sucks in a breath, and even that is hot.

“The feeling is mutual.” I guide her back a few steps so I can open the door for her. She goes to hop in, and I give her a smack on the ass, which gets me a glare from her. She turns her head, trying to hide the smile on her face. I round the truck and hop in.

“Are we going to Megan’s party?” she asks.

“No. Why would I want to go there?”

She shrugs one shoulder as she steals a fry out of the bag.

“I only went to those parties so that I would have something to do and to make sure that you never showed up to them.”

“You’re full of it.”

“I have no shame over the things I’ve done because I know I’m a jealous man when it comes to you. I could have ended up in jail for knocking some fucker on his ass. I’m not into the whole conjugal visits thing.” She snorts an adorable laugh. “Are we eating at your place?”

“Yeah, my mom’s not home.” I nod, not telling her I already knew that. Quinn told me the other day that she’d be gone for the weekend but to keep an eye on Zoey. She even gave me a key.

It’s hard not to speed home, but I control myself. I’m not going to be stupid and risk anything happening to Zoey in order to get home a few minutes faster. It’s a short drive, and her house comes into view pretty quick.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“Why don’t you park in your driveway?” I hop out of the truck, coming around to open the door for her. I take the food bag from her hand, then grab her backpack to follow her inside. I drop the food on the small table in the kitchen. “You want water?” she asks, forgetting that I didn’t answer why I didn’t want to park in my own driveway.

“Water’s good. I’m going to pop next door and grab some stuff that I’ve been meaning to show you.” She gives me a puzzled look but keeps smiling. “You’ll like it.” I try to drop a quick kiss on her lips, but it quickly turns into me lifting her off her feet again and sitting her on the counter. This time it’s her that pulls back, her breathing heavy.

“I didn’t know kisses could be like this.”

“Me either.” I grab her hips, pulling her off the counter. “Get our drinks, babe,” I tell her, giving her a tap on the ass. She rolls her eyes like she always does when I smack her ass. “I’ll be right back.” She nods, pulling out a couple of glasses.

I head out the front door and into my house. I dart upstairs to my bedroom, grabbing my overnight bag and the box of presents I’ve had stashed in my closet for years now. I’ve added something to it each year. When I get back to her place, she’s sitting down to eat. I drop my bag on the ground. Her eyes go from my overnight bag to the box in my hand filled with gifts. Some have Christmas wrapping and others say happy birthday. I set it down.

“Is that an overnight bag?”

“Yep.” I smirk. “I’m staying over. You can let me sleep in your bed, or I’ll sleep on the sofa. I don’t care. Either way, my pants are staying on this whole weekend. We aren’t having sex.” It’s hard to say the words, but I get them out.

“Why aren’t we having sex?” She picks up a fry, taking a bite.

“I don’t want you to think that’s what this is about. I also don’t want that hanging over us this weekend. We’re going to relax and hang out.” I don’t mention that I said my pants were staying on. I didn’t say anything about hers.

“Like old times?” She gives me a big smile.

“Like old times except I get to put my mouth on you.”

“Eat before your food gets cold,” she orders, her eyes now fixed on the box of presents. “Are you going to tell me what this is about?” she asks before taking a giant bite of her cheeseburger.

I don’t know what the hell Mindy was talking about when she was trying to poke Zoey about her weight. It damn near killed me watching Zoey’s curves fill out over the years. I know I’ve never had sex before, but thinking about Mindy’s straight as a board body does nothing for me. She looks as if someone could snap her in half. Fuck that shit. My girl is soft with hips to grab on to. And I have been grabbing her hips whenever I can. I come up behind her and grip them and pull her body into mine.

“Earth to Reid.” Zoey snaps her fingers. “What the hell are you thinking about?”

“Your hips.”

“My hips?” Her face scrunches like she doesn’t like her hips.

“How soft they are when I grip them and pull you into me. Perfect fit.” My cock presses into my jeans, but I ignore it like always.

“Whatever.” She gives me her normal eyeroll, but she’s smiling.

“These are your gifts.” She gives me a confused look. I reach into the box and pull one of them out. “I got this one for your fourteenth birthday.”

She looks so surprised by my revelation. “Reid?” She pushes back her chair to stand.

“Open it,” I urge her. “It’s nothing crazy. Remember I was on a fourteen-year-old’s budget.” She takes it from my hand and begins to unwrap it. She holds up the shirt and laughs before turning it around for me.

“My blood type is Dr. Pepper.” She smiles wide, holding it up to her chest. “Seems accurate. What else is in that box?”

“Go ahead and look. They’re all yours.” She reaches into the box to grab another. Wrapping paper starts to fly as she opens some notepads, pens, and a bracelet that I’d made for her. The bracelet has those little block letters that spell out the word forever. I should be embarrassed by how corny it is, but I’m not.

“I can’t believe you were still buying me gifts.”

“I couldn’t help myself. I made the bracelet.” I shrug. She walks over to me. I grab her hips as she falls into my lap.

“Can you put it on me?” She holds her wrist out to me. I slip it onto her wrist and tighten it. I watch as she runs her finger over it. “I love it.” I want to tell her that I love her, but I don’t want to push her too fast. I keep reminding myself that I have to take it slow. “This week has been crazy. I never would have thought you were next

door wishing I was yours.”

Page 21

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“You always were mine.” I reach up and tuck her hair behind her ear. “Now I just have to get you to forgive me. I never knew that people were picking on you because of me. If I’d known...”

“Reid.” She cuts me off. “I’m not 100 percent sure that they picked on me because of you.”

“Yeah, but if I was with you they wouldn’t have said shit.” I grit my teeth, getting pissed thinking about it.

“I don’t know. Some of the girls around school are pretty pissed you’re mine.”

“Zoey.” Those two words hit me hard. She shifts so that she’s now straddling me.

“You’re mine, aren’t you?” she teases.

“All yours.” She leans in and kisses me this time. I close my eyes and get lost in her.¹³ZoeyI slowly open my eyes, not remembering falling asleep. The television is muted but still lights up my bedroom. I tilt my head up to look at Reid. At some point I must have passed out while cuddling with him. His fingers are playing with my hair as he stares at me.

“Are you watching me sleep?” I ask before a yawn gets me.

“Go back to sleep if you’re tired.”

“I don’t want to sleep.” I kept thinking all through the movie that Reid was going to

make a move on me or something. But he didn't. The only thing he did was wrap his arms around me to hold me close. He'd made me feel so comfortable I passed right out.

"Want me to start another movie?" I shake my head no. "Are you hungry?" I untangle myself from him. His hand slips away but not before he gets a handful of my ass.

"Bathroom." I say. He sits up in the bed. We both changed before we started the movie. He's in gray sweats and a white shirt. Reid has the body of a Viking or something you'd see on a screen and not real life. I guess being a star quarterback keeps you in good shape.

I stare at myself in the mirror. I have on fuzzy socks, sleep shorts and my Dr. Pepper shirt he'd gotten me. It's still hard to believe that Reid has always been mine. Even when I didn't know it. That's the thing, and I should really talk to him about it. He can't keep things like that from me again. Or go over my head because he thinks it's for the best. It caused me so much unnecessary hurt in the past, and I don't want us to make that mistake again in the future.

That was a conversation for another day. Tonight I'm trying to get Reid to make a move on me. I know he said he was keeping his pants on, but what about mine? I guess I don't scream sex appeal the same way some of the other girls do from school. I turn around and glance in the mirror to look at my ass. The shorts go halfway down my thighs. Maybe I need booty shorts? I think I might have too much booty for those shorts, though. It would probably fall out all over the place.

I bend down, pulling off my socks and shorts, leaving me in plain white panties that have little bows on the sides. I am really not prepared to seduce someone. Next I take off my shirt, followed by the thin sleep bra I wear to bed most nights. I poke my curves, remembering what Reid said about them.

“You want something to drink? I’m going to find us another movie.” I hear him moving around in my bedroom. “How about Drop Dead Fred? That takes me back. Is that still your favorite?”

“Yes,” I answer as I pull my hair down. “But I don’t want to watch a movie.” You can do this, Zoey. I give myself a little pep talk. I’m eighteen, and ever since Reid came stomping back into my life it feels as if my body has awoken from a deep slumber and my hormones are out of control. And he’s going to fix it, or I’m going to start thinking he’s only feeding me lines about loving my curves. Though I don’t think you can fake that look he gets in his eyes. The one that always has me thinking he’s going to pounce on me at any second. But he never does. Also I don’t really think you can fake a hard-on, and he is always hard.

“Do you want to go back to sleep? I was enjoying being your pillow. What kind of shampoo are you using these days? I’m going to get hard every time I smell apples for the rest of my life.” I snort out a laugh. “What are you doing in there? I miss you.” My insides melt at his sweet words.

“Then these last few years must have been hell for you,” I toss back.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“You have no fucking idea. I had to take my aggression out on the field so that I wouldn’t crawl into your bedroom window one night and claim you.”

I suck in a breath. My nipples tighten so much it’s almost painful. “What if I told you that turns me on? That it causes an ache between my thighs.” I hear something hit the floor.

“I don’t need you encouraging the beast that lives inside of me that wants you so badly. If you knew half of the dirty things I’ve thought about you while I lie in bed at night, you’d be running.” I flip off the bathroom light before I open the door. His back is to me, and he’s straightening up my bed.

“I’m not running.”

“I’m begging you...” His words trail off as he turns around. I bite the inside of my cheek. He closes his eyes, his hand rubbing over them before he opens them again. “I need to make sure that I’m not dreaming this.” He looks back to the bed like he’s going to see himself sleeping there.

“Reid—” All I get out is his name. He’s on me before I even see him move. I guess everyone was right; the man really is quick on his feet. His mouth is on mine before I can say another word. He lifts me from my feet, carrying me to the bed. “You’re going to kill me.” My back meets the mattress.

“The feeling is mutual. You’ve been driving me insane.” His nose flares while he gives me a smile.

“Are you hurting?”

“Yes.” I lift my hips, feeling his erection. I rub myself against him. He closes his eyes for a moment. He looks like he’s having an inner fight with himself. “Reid.” I snap his name out, causing his eyes to fly open. “Don’t do that. Try and hide whatever part of you that you’re trying to get under control. History says that doesn't work too well for us.”

“I’m here.” He thrusts against me, giving me a cocky smirk.

“You know what?” I start to push on his chest, but he doesn't move. He clenches his jaw.

“Yeah, I know what,” he growls before his mouth is on mine. His kiss is wild and possessive. So many emotions and feelings rush through my whole body. I dig my fingers into his back, wanting to pull him closer.

He pulls his mouth from mine. My heavy breathing fills the room as I try to get it under control. Reid doesn't seem to have the same problem as me. His mouth is still going, traveling down my neck toward my breasts. I suck in a breath. I’m almost naked in my bed with Reid. My heart is beating so fast that I can feel it pulsing in my ears.

“Shirt, Reid. I want to see more of you.” He leans up, only taking his mouth off me for a moment to pull it over his head and toss it away. His mouth goes back to my breast. He sucks my nipple into his mouth before swirling his tongue. I groan out his name as he moves to the other.

I dig my fingers into his hair, holding on. “Fuck me. You’re so needy for me.” His words are thick. “You need me,” he repeats.

“I do.” He looks up at me, his eyes locking with mine.

“Nothing will ever take you from me again.” From the look in his eyes, I know Reid would do whatever it took to keep me close to him. He leans down again, his mouth trailing down my stomach till he gets to my panties.

He pauses for a moment, staring down at them. I have no doubt that my desire is showing through the thin white material. I can feel them stuck against me. I had no idea you could get this turned on, but my clit throbs, needing his attention.

“I know they aren't sexy panties but—”

“They're perfect. They're you.” He kisses the wet spot on them before he hooks his fingers into them, pulling them down my legs and off my body. His hands grab my thighs, spreading me wider for him. “So fucking wet for me.” He licks his lips, making me whimper. “You know how many times I lay in bed imagining how you'd taste? How many times I stroked myself to orgasm thinking about you coming from my mouth alone?”

“Why don't you find out then?” I'm about to shove his head down, but Reid doesn't move unless he wants to move, so it would be pointless.

“Ask me. I want to hear the words come from your mouth.” I feel my already warm face grow hotter.

“I want you to.” I lift my hips in silent invitation.

“Baby, say it and put both of us out of our misery.”

“Reid, will you please make me come?”

Page 23

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“And how exactly would I do that?” I sigh heavily, knowing he’s not going to let me off easy on this one.

“I’m going to murder you if you don’t eat me out soon.”

He shakes with laughter. “One day I’m going to get you to say the word pussy. Right now I’m going to take care of my girl.” Another whimper leaves me. I love when he calls me his girl.

His mouth brushes against my sex as he sucks in a deep breath. And then he’s there. The mere brush of his tongue against my clit has me exploding. I call out his name as my hands find his hair. I’m both pissed at myself for coming too fast and insanely happy. I didn't know an orgasm could be like this. It rolls through my whole body. My back arches off the bed, and my legs shake with pleasure.

Reid’s hand comes to my stomach, and he pushes me back down, pinning me to the bed. He keeps going. I jerk a few times, trying to wiggle away from him. I’m too sensitive. I’m not sure I can take much more.

“It’s too much,” I tell him. As I say the words, I’m trying to lift my hips to push into him more.

“It’s never too much when it comes to us.” His tongue slides down and presses inside of me. He thrusts it in and out of me before he replaces it with his finger. That tongue of his goes back to my clit as he slowly eases another finger inside of me. This time I get to feel what he’s really doing to me. His mouth continues to bring me the greatest pleasure I’ve ever known.

The orgasm starts to build again. He sucks my clit into his mouth this time before sliding his tongue back and forth on my clit. His finger hooks inside of me. I gasp at the unfamiliar feeling. It sends me over into another orgasm. One that leaves me boneless on the bed. My whole body hums with pleasure.

When Reid shifts, my eyes flutter open. He stands up at the end of the bed, and I watch him pull his hand out from inside his sweatpants. I see a wet spot.

“Did you...” I trail off, making him smile at my shyness of some words.

“Did I come while eating your pussy? Yeah, I did.” He walks around to the side of the bed. He leans down to kiss me. I taste myself on him, and I love it. He stands, and I watch him as he grabs another pair of pants and strolls into my bathroom. I sit up looking for my panties but don’t see them anywhere.

Where the hell did he toss them? I grab his shirt, pulling it on, and watch as he comes back out of the bathroom. I forget what I was doing to stare at him. His sweatpants hang low on his hips and show off his perfect V.

“Like what you see? If not, you’re shit out of luck 'cause it’s only me you’ll be seeing for the rest of our lives.”

“No complaints here.” I laugh. “Do you see my underwear anywhere?” I ask as he crawls onto the bed. He hits play with the remote before grabbing me and wrapping himself around me. His hand glides up my shirt until he reaches my breast and cups it. The other slides between my thighs as he cups my sex.

“You don’t need underwear.”

“I can honestly say I never thought in the million times we watched Drop Dead Fred that we’d one day watch it like this.”

“That makes one of us,” he says dryly, making me burst into laughter. He buries his head in my hair, his hold on me tightening as the movie starts. I don’t think we make it even ten minutes into the movie before Reid’s mouth is on me again.¹⁴ Reid My eyes scan across the pictures that are pressed to the board. They are all of Willow, Zoey and her mom. Once upon a time, it was Zoey and me that filled up her photo boards. I hear the blow dryer turn off, and Zoey walks out of her bathroom a moment later. I don’t know if her cheeks are flushed because of what I’d done to her in the shower or the heat of the blow dryer.

I haven't been able to keep my hands and mouth off her. She didn't try to stop me, either. I was starved for her, and she let me try to get my fill. I quickly realized that I would never get enough. I could only sate my hunger. She'd pushed a few times for us to go further, but I stood firm. It was fucking hard, but I needed her to know this wasn't about me getting off. It was about me loving her and being what she needed for the rest of our lives.

Page 24

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

She walks over to me, and I pull her into my arms. The last forty-eight hours have been the best of my life. I'm not looking forward to heading home soon. I bury my face in her hair, breathing her in, trying to get my fill before I have to go back to spending nights without her.

“Are you going to add some new pictures to your board?” I try to sound casual and keep the jealousy out of my tone. It's my fault Willow slid into my place. Willow is good for her, and I know that. I would never even think about coming between them, nor is there any reason to. Doesn't mean I'm not a jealous bastard.

“I don't replace pictures. I get new boards.” She turns in my arms. After we untangled ourselves from each other Saturday morning, Zoey made us breakfast before I took her out to Lake Ortero. As kids we'd spend so much time out there swimming and fishing. Zoey would bring her camera and capture it all.

Zoey was always the dreamer of the two of us, declaring that we'd have our own lake house one day. There was never a we should try or I want with Zoey. When she had her mind set on something she was going to do it. Just like getting into Kingston. She did that too.

“I'm going to show you something, but you better not get cocky about it.” I smile, unable to help myself. I give her ass a squeeze before I let her go. She walks over to her closet, and I see her shuffle through a few boards before she turns around with one in her hand. “I told myself at first I was taking the pictures for the yearbook. Then when I started putting them on a board I thought maybe it could be a gift to your dad. He's always been good to Mom and me.”

I nod in understanding. We always watched out for them, even mowing their lawn and shoveling their drive when it snowed. I know Dad has done some work on both of their cars. To be honest, I've seen my dad staring over here a few times. I think he might have a thing for Zoey's mom.

She turns the board around, showing me all the pictures she's taken. Most of them are of me on the football field. There are a few others of me not in uniform. One of them is me asleep in class and another in the cafeteria. She's been watching me too. I don't know much about all that soul mates crap, but that has to be what we are. Even though she thought I'd dropped her, deep down inside she still didn't let go of me. We were always meant to be.

"There should be so many of you and me together," I get out, my throat feeling tight.

"Maybe." She shrugs. "But we're young and full of hormones. It might actually have been good for us. Plus, I found Willow." I only nod in agreement. I'm over the moon that she feels that way. I don't, but that's my shit to bear because I was the reason we weren't together. My head had been so messed up trying to understand what the hell was happening. And trying to convince myself that I shouldn't be having those sorts of thoughts about my best friend. I thought I had a handle on it until the dreams about her started. No matter what I did, I couldn't get them to stop. That was my breaking point. It's when I decided that I needed to let her go for a while for her own good. I was such an idiot.

"Stop." She smacks my arm. "Let it go. You're not going to beat yourself up over this for the rest of our lives. I think you did enough of that on your own over the years." She places the board on her bed. "I always wanted to ask you why you never smiled." She runs her fingers over one of the pictures where everyone is celebrating our state win. "You never show much emotion in any of them, but you always gave a little nod."

“Another one down,” I say. Her eyebrows pull together, and I want to lean down and kiss her there. “One step closer to getting what I want.”

“Scholarship?”

“Part of it, but I needed a scholarship to the right place.”

Her lips part, a small gasp leaving them. “Oh, Reid.” She turns and puts her hand on my chest. Her eyes are filled with unshed tears. “You have to follow your own dreams. We don’t have to go to the same college, we’ll make it work.” Yeah, no fucking way am I losing her again.

“I am following my dreams.”

“Who knew Reid Knight would be such a sweetheart?”

Page 25

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“Don’t cry. You’re killing me here. Besides, do you really want to do the long-distance thing? I can play football anywhere. I don’t give a shit.”

“They’re happy tears. I promise.”

I pull her into me, wrapping my arms around her. I don’t know how long I hold her. When I hear the garage door open, I know our time is up for tonight. I kiss the top of her head.

“Zoey.” Her mom taps on the door before opening it. “I’m home.” Zoey lifts her head from my chest, but she doesn’t pull away from me. “Hi, Reid.” Quinn gives me a smile.

“Quinn.” Zoey drops her arms. “How was the convention?” she asks.

“Good, but I’m tired.”

“You want me to make you something? Reid and I are going for burgers. I could bring something back for you.”

“No, you two go have fun. It’s nice see you over here again, Reid. Can’t say I’m surprised.”

“Glad to be back here.”

Zoey goes and gives her mom a hug. “You’re not going to tell me to be back at a certain time and that I have school tomorrow or to leave the bedroom door open if

Reid's here?" Zoey teases her mom.

"Nope, you're eighteen, Zoey. You can come and go as you please."

"Really?"

"Have I ever told you no when you've asked to do something?" Quinn laughs. "Sweetheart, you got into a university with scholarships. I think you'll make the right decisions."

"I love you."

Quinn kisses Zoey's cheek. "I love you too, sweetheart. I would enjoy it if Reid did come over for dinner one night this week."

"I'll be there," I answer. I didn't think things would go back to normal with Quinn, but I also didn't know it would go that smooth either. I feel a sense of relief because I not only missed Zoey but Quinn too. She'd been like a mom to me when we were growing up, and I know I hurt her too.

"Have fun," she says before she turns, leaving us alone.

"That felt a little too easy." I look down at Zoey. She's got a giant smile on her face.

"I think she's happy I'm dating." She huffs a breath. "And we all know my mom loves you with all the ass kissing you did even when you weren't talking to me." I give her ass a smack. She jumps, letting out an adorable squeal.

"Let's feed you." I take her hand, heading out of the house. We still get some looks from people when we're out. It doesn't bother me, but Zoey fidgets some. It makes me worry a little about college. I have no idea what it will be like there. I don't think

it will be a far stretch that I'll have attention on me. It's something we'll need to talk about. I want us to be beyond solid when we start school in the fall. I need to make sure there is no doubt in Zoey's head about what we are. She is it for me, and the same goes for her; making sure she understands that I've never nor will I ever want another will help us both breathe easier.

The night goes by too fast, and before I know it, I'm kissing Zoey goodnight before leaving her at her doorstep. That shit is going to get old fast. I enter the side door of my house and see my dad standing in the kitchen eating a piece of pizza. He's freshly showered, but he's got jeans and a shirt on as if he's going somewhere. He never goes anywhere but work or to my games.

"Want some?" he offers.

"Nah. Zoey and I went to dinner."

His eyebrows lift. "You finally pulled your head out of your ass?" He smiles before he sits down at the table in the kitchen.

"I guess my acting skills are shit." I open the fridge and grab a bottle of water.

"You're going to the same college. I'm not dumb." That's true. There were a few better choices I could have gone with where football was concerned, but I would have played like shit even if Zoey was still my girl but lived states away. I was better off this way, being at the same school where I could see her every day. I've gone long enough being without her and I'm not willing to do it for another day.

"Yeah." I take a swig of my water.

"I get it. Probably for the best you two broke apart a few years." I'm still not sure if it was the right thing to do or not. It doesn't matter now. What's done is done, and Zoey

is mine now. That's all that matters.

"I'm going to head up."

He holds his fist out, and I bump the side as I pass him, heading up to my room. I fall back onto my bed and wait. When eleven o'clock hits, I'm slipping out my backdoor. I freeze, ducking behind the air conditioner when I think I hear a female voice.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“He’s in bed,” my dad says. “You’re coming over here. You’ve been gone two days.” I peek over the air conditioner to see my dad grabbing Quinn. She lets out a giggle that is the exact same one as my Zoey. I sit there shocked for a minute. He kisses her for a long moment before pulling her toward our house. I’ll be damned. The old man still has game.

I easily jump the fence before I grab on to the roof of the shed and pull myself up. I jump onto the roof over the garage, crossing back to Zoey’s window. I push it open so that I can slip right in. I lock it before kicking off my shoes and pulling my hoodie off. I fall back onto her bed, putting my hands behind my head.

That was easier than I thought it would be. I’d mapped that plan out years ago. It was nice to finally get to use it. I hear the sink faucet go on and off a few seconds later. Zoey opens the door and flips off the bathroom light. She lets out a gasp but quickly cuts it off.

“What are you doing?” She looks over at her bedroom door. She walks over to it and clicks the lock into place.

“I think you know what I’m doing.” I pull the blanket back for her to get into bed. She climbs in and flicks the lamp. She cuddles into me, laying her head on my shoulder and throwing her leg over mine.

“Wonder what Mom will say if we get caught.” Zoey lets out a laugh, not sounding too worried. I think she’d get a pass, to be honest. Based on what her mom said earlier, anyway. Zoey was never one to break the rules. Hell, I’m not sure what the rules even are at this point. Especially not after what I saw outside a few minutes ago.

“I’ll be gone before anyone knows it.” She kisses my neck. “A few years and we’ll have a place of our own. I have to live on campus. Some frat house, I think.” Unless your family lives close to the university, all freshmen on the team have to live on campus the first year.

“A frat house?” I know what she’s thinking. It’s the same shit I’m thinking too. All the crap you see on TV with wild parties and so on. I won’t be partaking in any of that shit. “Are you going to be okay with us when we get out there?” She traces hearts over and over on my chest with her fingers. “You didn’t seem to like the people that were stealing glances our way during dinner earlier.”

“It worries me a little, to tell you the truth. I think they look at us now, and they don’t understand why all of a sudden Reid Knight is all over a girl, for one thing. The other reason I think they’re so curious is because they can’t believe it’s me you fell for and not a cheerleader or something.” I shift, moving Zoey over. I flip on the nightstand light, coming back over her. I want her to see my face.

“I have never cheated on you. I’ve never even come fucking close to it.” I told her this pretty much when I said I’d never kissed anyone but her. I think she gets it, but she wants it spelled out, which I’m happy to do if it makes her feel better.

“We’ve been together—”

“Since the moment I moved in next door.” She gives me a small smile. “I’m not trying to be sweet here, Zoey. I’m giving you the truth. Not one time have I ever thought it would be anyone but you. If anything, that should probably scare you a little bit. It’s safe to say I’m obsessed with you. When you took those pictures of me, you said I never smiled. I only nodded when we scored or I won a game. I considered all of those moments to be another step in the direction of my future. That future always has and always will be you. I got my ass into Kingston University because I knew you were going to be there. Not to go to some frat party or to hook up with

cheerleaders. Everything I've done has been for you, for our future."

"Reid." My name leaves her lips in a soft breath.

"Yeah, babe?" I lean down more. My heart pounds in my chest.

"The weekend is over." I nod. She wraps her legs around me. "Make love to me." I close my eyes, dropping my forehead to hers. "You clearly love me, and I know I love you. Even when I try to hide it, somehow my camera always finds you."

"Say it again." I open my eyes. She wraps her arms around my neck.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“I love you, Reid Knight.”

“I love you too, Zoey Hawthorne. One day to be Zoey Knight.” She lets out a giggle.

“I’m holding you to that.”

“Okay,” she agrees. “Now why don’t you show me exactly how much you love me?” She pulls me down for a kiss. What my girl wants she gets. Somehow I’m the lucky bastard that stole her heart, and I’ll never let it go again.¹⁵ Zoey Reid kisses me, taking his time. My heart still pounds from his words. I think he was scared to tell me about some of his feelings. It’s clear they scared him on some level. It’s why he all but pushed me out of his life before, but he never stopped loving and wanting me. I think that would be harder to deal with than thinking he was going to move on with his life. There is no moving on for Reid, and reality is I never moved on either. On some level I never truly let go of him. Deep down inside I always loved him but was too hurt by his actions to admit it.

His mouth leaves mine, traveling down my neck. “Clothes.” I want to feel us skin to skin. He sits up to pull his shirt over his head. I do the same. I only have on a long sleep shirt with panties. I reach for my panties, pulling them down my legs and tossing them away. Reid stands, pulling his pants and boxers down. I allow my eyes to roam over every inch of him. I swear the man's body is a work of art.

I saw him naked when we showered together. Reid is big all over, but I’m not scared for some reason. I trust that he’ll take care of me. I think the pain would be worse if he doesn't take me. My whole body has been aching for him since he put his mouth between my legs, exploring what other pleasures he could give me.

He grabs his cock, stroking himself a few times before he climbs back onto the bed. My hands got to his face, cupping it before kissing him as I lie back down on the bed. He slides between my thighs. I spread my legs wide in order to accommodate his big body. He takes his mouth from mine and begins to trail kisses down my body. The warmth of his mouth sets my whole body on fire. The need for him to give me more grows to the point of being unbearable.

“Reid,” I huff. I want him inside of me now.

“In bed I decide what’s best for you. Got it?” He lifts his head, his eyes locking with mine, letting me know that he’ll decide when the time is right to take me. I shake my head yes. “You do as I tell you.” My sex clenches at his order. “If I want to lick your pussy until you're coming on my tongue, you're going to let me.”

“Okay,” I agree. The throb between my thighs seems to be growing worse by the second. I swear the anticipation is going to be the death of me.

“Good girl.” He kisses me again, nipping at my bottom lip before I feel his warm mouth on my nipple. My body arches off the bed as he licks and sucks my breast. His hand travels down between my legs. I’m so wet that it takes nothing for him to slide one finger inside of me and then another. He thrusts them in and out of me as that expert mouth of his continues to work my nipple. My breathing picks up. I need more.

“Now you want my mouth, don’t you? Did you think I was going to take you fully without tasting your sweet pussy first? Never going to happen.” My thighs spread more, making room for him. He keeps pumping his fingers in and out of me. He stares at my sex, and I think he’s trying to kill me. I start to clench around his fingers over and over again. “Now your pussy is begging for my mouth too.” I lift my hips.

“Please, Reid. I need you.” He closes his eyes like he’s savoring my words. I grip the

sheets in my hands so I don't grab him and push him into me. He pushes my hips back down, reminding me he's in control. Still my body keeps trying to move with the motion of his fingers. The dark hungry look in his eyes has me sucking in a breath.

“I need you too, Zoey. More than you'll ever understand. But I'm not going to give you what you want until you tell me exactly where you want my mouth.” I swear he's going to pay for this torture one day, but for now I tell him exactly what he wants to hear and what I need.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“I need your mouth on my pussy.” I swear the words have barely finished leaving my lips and his mouth is on me, sucking my clit into his mouth. I put my hand over my lips as I start to come. Reid doesn't hold back as he devours me. One orgasm blends into another. The last orgasm hits me hard. Before I realize what's happening, he thrusts fully inside of me. His mouth covers mine as my body keeps on riding the high. I can feel the sharp stab of pain, but the orgasm overrides it.

Reid doesn't stop kissing me. I lie still under him, my body and mind trying to catch up to everything that I'm feeling. Reid is fully inside me. His body is over mine. I dig my fingers into his back as I start to kiss him again. I wrap my legs around him.

“I love you.” He pulls his mouth from mine and places kisses all over my face. “Fuck. Did I hurt you?” His nose flares, and I see the angry look in his eyes at himself.

“You didn't hurt me.” I run my fingers up and down his back, trying to soothe him.

“You're crying.” He kisses my cheek again and then the other.

“I'm happy. They're happy tears,” I tell him. “I love how close I feel to you right now. That this connection is something we'll only have together.”

“Damn straight it will only be ours together,” he growls, making me laugh.

“I love you.” I pull him down to me. Mr. In Control In Bed lets me steal a kiss, but he takes over quickly. He pulls out and thrusts back inside of me. I gasp, and he freezes. “Don't stop.”

“I’ll never stop,” he says as he picks up his speed. My pleasure starts to build all over again. I watch his face, wanting to see everything he feels. “I need you to come with me.” He shifts, still thrusting in and out of me as his hands slip between us to my clit. It’s all too much. It doesn’t take long for me to come again.

Reid buries his face in my neck, groaning my name. It’s the most erotic sound I’ve ever heard in my life. His warm release spills inside of me as he thrusts a few more times, milking his own release out.

He rolls, going to his back and taking me with him so that I’m draped across his chest. He’s still inside of me. I feel his cock jerk. It makes me gasp. I wiggle a little. Reid grabs my ass, stopping me.

“You’re going to hurt yourself.”

“This is far from painful.” I giggle and shift again. He gives my ass a small smack.

“Trust me. It will hurt tomorrow.” I know he’s likely right.

“How would you know?” I lift my head to look up at him. God, he’s so damn hot and he’s all mine.

“I read about it,” he admits, making me giggle more. This time it’s him that groans as his cock jerks inside of me. Clearly the two of them aren’t on the same page.

“Of course you did.” I lay my head back down on his chest. He flips the light off. I should have known. He already made sure we had the birth control talk. He was happy to find out that I had an insert in my arm that protects me.

“When it comes to you, I try and make sure I’m doing what’s best.” I let out a deep breath.

“You need to let me be a part of those decisions. You can’t decide things on your own that you think are best for me.”

“I’ll try.” I turn my head and bite him. He jerks, then lets out a laugh that shakes my whole body. “I’m not going to lie. Sometimes I have knee-jerk reactions when it comes to things that concern your well-being, but I swear I’ll try. Everything I ever do is because I think it’s what’s best for you.”

“I want you to do what’s best for you too.” I don’t want everything to be about me.

“I already have what’s best for me. Now I just have to keep it.” His hands roam up and down my body. I turn my head again, and this time I kiss him.

“I love you,” I tell him, closing my eyes.

“I love you too,” he says, holding me tight. I know Reid will never let me go. Any fears I have about the future wash away. Reid will always belong to me.¹⁶ Reid I stand in the kitchen watching the time. I slipped out of Zoey’s window an hour ago to go home and get ready for school. When the s’mores Pop-Tart pops from the toaster, I wrap it in a paper towel. I hear Dad coming down the stairs, so I reach over and hit the button on the coffee pot to get it started for him. He comes strolling in a few moments later.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“Thanks,” he says, grabbing a mug. “You set off one of my sensors last night.” I look up from my phone as he pours himself a coffee.

“They weren't on.” I checked before I left. I was going to turn them off and back on. Besides he'd been outside when I'd slipped out. Why I'm guessing they weren't on to begin with.

“The ones I have next door.” He takes a sip of his coffee, and I shake my head.

“How long has next door been going on?” I ask, slipping my phone into my pocket.

“For me? Since I laid eyes on her, but she wasn't ready. I've worn her down over the years. Now she wants to wait for Zoey to graduate before making anything official.”

“Zoey won't care. She likes you. It was me she didn't like.” I smirk.

“Don't fuck this up for either of us.”

“Does Quinn know you have sensors in her backyard?” I ask. Now I'm starting to wonder about all the late nights he works. I bet a few of those are spent with Quinn. Good. I thought he was just a workaholic. It makes me happy to know that he has someone. Plus, I love Quinn. She's always been good to me.

“It gives me peace of mind. Two pretty girls like them living alone need protecting.” I smile, staring at my dad. He's the only parent I've ever known. Mom was a one-night stand. I'm starting to think we have a lot more in common than I thought if he's putting sensors on their backyard to make sure they're safe. I guess the apple doesn't

fall far from the tree.

“Well, I’ll be setting them off a lot more often.” I give him a heads-up before I grab my bag off the table. We bump fists before I’m out the door. I pull my truck back and over into Zoey’s driveway. She comes skipping out the front door. Her hair is piled on top of her head. She has a pair of overalls that are shorts on. She doesn't even have to try to be hot. She just is.

A smile lights up her whole face when she sees me. It hits me right in the stomach. God, it feels good to see that smile back on her face, and the fact that it’s directed at me makes it even better.

I lean over and open her door. She jumps in and right onto me, kissing me.

“Morning,” she says.

“Missed you.” I steal one more kiss before she drops back in her seat, pulling the seatbelt on.

“I saw you an hour ago.” She laughs. I hand her the Pop-Tart. It’s her favorite. She loves anything and everything s'mores related. She looks at it and smiles bigger before taking a bite.

“An hour and four minutes ago, to be exact.” I back out of the driveway, taking off toward school. Things should be calm by now. Everyone knows we’re a thing. It seems as though things have started to quiet down, and we’re not the center of attention anymore.

Not that any of that shit matters. It won’t be long until we’re out of here. I glance over to see Zoey typing away on her phone. When she lets out a small laugh, I know she’s texting with Willow. Those two are trouble together.

My suspicions are confirmed when we pull in, and I see Willow is waiting for us. I park the car and watch as Zoey hops out and heads over to talk to her. I take my time getting out, allowing them a few moments to catch up before I head their way.

“I was about to call the cops and report her missing,” Willow says with a big smile on her face as I approach them. Zoey giggles and smacks her friend's arm. “You’re going to have to learn how to share.”

“It’s not one of my strong points, but I’ll try.” I want Zoey all to myself every minute of every day, but I know that’s not possible. I want to make up for lost time, but I know that I also have to let her live her life.

“Well, we have the next class together.” Willow shrugs, looping her arm around Zoey’s. She pulls her along, making Zoey laugh. I watch them walk away, and it’s not long before Zoey turns her head to look back at me. She puckers her lips, reaches her hand up and blows a kiss my way. I catch it and give her a look that lets her know that her kisses are only mine. I hear her laugh as I follow behind them. I hope I didn't wear her out too much last night. I’d woken up in the middle of the night with Zoey on top of me moaning my name in her sleep while she wiggled her hips. Why let her have a sex dream if she could have the real thing?

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

Afterward, we stayed up talking. I loved those moments with her. They felt so intimate, and I was looking forward to having a lifetime of them. It was no surprise to me when she told me that she was going for her fine arts degree with a minor in photography. When we were younger, she'd pull out magazines saying that one day they'd write articles about her pictures. That was my Zoey. She never approached anything saying she hoped it would happen. She would make things happen.

I follow them all the way to the classroom. I snag Zoey before she can enter and drop a kiss on her lips. "I'll meet you for lunch."

"Mm-kay."

"Get a room," Missy says as she passes us. The group of girls she's with start laughing. I don't miss the catty shit they say about Zoey, commenting on how her overalls make her look like a preteen. I don't think preteens have tits like hers. I am in to the overalls. It would be so easy to slip my hand into the side of them.

"Fuck off..." I pause.

"Missy," Zoey supplies for me. Her body shakes with silent laughter.

"She's a bitch. I still don't get why half the team wanted to be inside of her."

"Gross." Zoey scrunches her nose. "She doesn't bother me. I'm winning, and she's salty about it. I got Reid Knight all to myself."

"Damn straight." I drop another kiss on her before she turns to walk into her

classroom but not before I give her ass a soft smack. She glares over her shoulder at me, but I know she's fighting a smile.

I turn to head toward my class until I hear Coach Billings call out my name. "Someone is here to see you."

"I already picked a college," I remind him as I walk over toward him. There have been scouts that have popped up here and there, but I thought that shit was done with. It was pointless, to be honest. I know what college I'm going to. There isn't anything or anyone that could convince me to leave Zoey again.

"It's Grayson." I pause. Grayson. Holy shit, he was one of the best centers in the NFL when he used to play. The man isn't only built like a beast, but he's fucking smart too. It's always been speculated that he made the calls for his team when they were on the field. That's abnormal. He is just that good at reading people. But then he went and shocked the shit out of everyone when he retired after only six years in the league.

"He's the new coach at Kingston University." I stand there for a moment in shock. "Yeah," Coach says with a laugh. "Use my office." He gives me a clap on my shoulder before heading down the hallway. I make my way to his office to see Grayson there. I'll be damned. I would be lying if I didn't admit to being a little starstruck. The man is a living legend.

"Reid Knight." He stands, offering me his hand. "I thought I should come introduce myself. I'm Theodore Grayson. I'll be your coach next year."

"What happened to Meeks?" I ask. "Not that I'm not happy about this change."

"He retired."

“I thought you retired too.”

“I was done taking hits to my body. I did what I loved and got out before I got too hurt to enjoy the rest of my life. But enough about me. I’m here to talk about you.” He drops back down in the chair. I sit down across from him. He immediately launches into asking me questions and telling me the plans he wants to put into place. When I look at my phone, I’m surprised to see it’s almost lunch time.

“I should get going. I told my girl I’d meet her for lunch.” I stand.

“About that. I heard when you were offered the scholarship that you requested that Zoey Hawthorne get accepted into the university. That if she wasn’t there, then you weren’t going to be there.” I had done exactly that.

“Your point?” I ask. “She’s already been accepted, so does it really matter now?” I made the request to be on the safe side. She hasn’t just been accepted without my help; she’s gotten a full ride too. I felt like an asshole for second guessing that, but when it comes to Zoey, I’d rather be safe than sorry. There isn’t much I wouldn’t do to try and make sure her dreams come true.

“Is she going to be a distraction for you?”

“Yes.” His jaw clenches and I know he doesn’t like my answer. “Did you want me to lie? My girl comes first and then football. I love football, but I also love that with it I’m going to have the money I need for the life I’m going to build for her. I’m not on the field to fuck around. It’s my job.”

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“All right.” He lets out a breath as he stands, pulling a card out and giving it to me. “If you need anything or something comes up, you call me.” I put the card in my back pocket. “See you in a few months.” He shakes my hand again before he’s out the door.

I take a deep breath, realizing that even though these past few years have been tough that everything is finally falling into place. I exit the office and head to the lunchroom to meet up with my girl. She’s the reason that my life is so good. She’s the one thing that has always kept me grounded.¹⁷ Zoey “Look at this.” Willow hands me her phone.

“What am I looking at here?” I start swiping through the pictures of a nice-looking condo.

“Where we’re going to live.”

I look up from the phone to her. “Aren’t we going to live on campus?” That’s what I thought the plan was.

“Nope. This is only a five-minute walk to the school. It’s got a gated entrance and even a doorman. Plus there is a gym, pool, and game room. It has everything we could want, and the best part is my parents are footing the bill.”

“You’re nuts.” I hand her back her phone.

“No, I’m brilliant. It’s the least my parents could do. Plus, you won’t have to worry about your man coming over.” She wiggles her eyebrows at me.

“He’s going to live in a frat house.” I scrunch my face, still not loving that idea, but it is what it is.

“He just has to have a room there. I’m sure he’ll crash with us most of the time.”

“Is this really what you want to do?”

“Yep. I already emailed my father’s assistant about it. She said she’d handle it.”

“Did you even ask?” I let out a small laugh.

“No.” I stop laughing. I’m not sure if that’s funny or terrible. “It is what it is. At least we’re going to have a nice place to crash. It’s fair. I’ve practically lived at your house over the years.” She did, but Mom and I love having her there. I think Willow enjoys that my mom treats her the same as she does me, giving Willow something she doesn't get at home.

“Okay,” I agree as class finally lets out. All the teachers and students are on autopilot. The seniors are ready to get out of here at this point. I check my phone to see if there are any texts from Reid when I don’t see him outside my classroom. He’s usually there waiting to walk with me to lunch.

“You want to wait or go to the lunchroom?” Willow asks, looking around for Reid too. He’s hard to miss since he’s taller than everyone else, but I don’t see him anywhere.

“Looking for Reid?” I glance over to see Missy, who has a smug look on her face.

“Fuck off,” Willow says, rolling her eyes.

“You two always walk around here like you’re so much better than all of us. When

the truth is Zoey here fucked her way into Kingston University.”

“What?” I give her a dirty look. “Don’t you have somewhere else to be?”

“A dick to suck?” Willow chimes in.

“Don’t be jealous that no one will let you touch their dick, Will.”

“Let’s go.” I grab Willow’s arm. She’s worked up more than usual, or maybe she’s just over their shit too. Missy steps in front of us.

“Reid is the only reason you got into Kingston, you know. So you should get that nose of yours out of the air. I know for a fact that he told them if you weren't there that he wasn't going to be there either.” I want to smack that evil smile off of her face. Instead, I stand there in shock for a moment, knowing that what she said is not out of the realm of something Reid would do. “I don’t get why he’s so stuck on you.”

“Maybe because she’s not a bitch.” Willow pulls me along with her as she body checks Missy, making her fall on her ass.

“Zoey.” Willow says my name. I pull out my phone and call Reid. He answers after one ring.

“Sorry, babe. I got stuck at—” I cut him off.

“Did you request that I be accepted into Kingston? Did you tell them that you wouldn’t commit if I weren’t accepted?”

“Zoey.” He says my name softly, and in that moment I know what Missy said was true. I end the call, powering my phone off. I’m not sure what hurts me more, that once again he made a decision without even consulting me or that he didn’t believe I

had what it took to get in on my own.

“Let’s go.” Willow is again pulling me down the hallway toward the doors that lead outside.

“Go as in skip school?”

“Why not?” Yeah. Why not? I always do everything by the rules.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“Let’s go,” I agree. I know Reid will be all over me if I stay. I need time to think. I’m still not sure how to handle this. It isn’t until we’re pulling into Willow’s garage that I finally speak again. “I didn’t get in on my own.” I wipe the tear that escapes.

“You deserve to be there more than anyone else. You busted your ass.” I did, but it doesn’t mean I made it. “I mean, come on. Your grades are better than mine, and you tested off the freaking charts. There is no way I got in and you didn’t. You would have at least been given an acceptance letter.”

“That’s not necessarily true. Your family name carries a lot of weight.” I get out of the car and Willow follows me into the house. When we get to her room, I fall back onto her bed. I suddenly feel exhausted.

Willow’s phone starts to ring over and over again. I watch as she turns it off before falling back next to me on the bed. “You can only outrun him for so long.”

“I know.” I take a deep breath. “I’m not even sure if I can be mad at him or not. I’m pissed that he didn’t have faith in me to get in, but at the same time it’s just Reid doing what he thinks is best for me even if it pisses me off.”

I close my eyes. Willow grabs my hand. “Are you still going to go?” she asks.

“Yes,” I admit. “Is that terrible of me? It’s where you’ll be. We’re in this together. We have made plans for our future and not only college. I’m not going to toss that aside because of my pride.”

“It’s where Reid will be too.” My heart aches hearing his name. I’m upset, and yet I

want nothing more than to crawl into his lap even though he's part of the reason why I'm so upset. She rolls over onto her side, propping her head up with her hand. "Men are stupid." Her words make me smile. Willow always knows how to cheer me up.

"They really are." I sigh heavily as I try to get my thoughts together. Deep down inside, I know that Reid only had my best interests at heart. Missy's words shocked me was all. But I know that Reid would never do something to hurt me or diminish my accomplishments in any way.

The doorbell chimes through the house before loud knocking starts on Willow's front door. I already know that it's Reid and that I'm going to forgive him.

"Well, that didn't take him long," Willow says as she gets up to go and answer the door. I remain in her room, knowing that it will only be a few seconds until Reid finds me.

He sounds like a freight train coming up the stairs. I sit up as he bursts into the room. His eyes look panicked. He comes over to the side of the bed where I'm sitting with my legs draped over the side. He drops down to his knees, wrapping his arms around my waist and laying his head in my lap. Unable to stop myself, I reach out to run my fingers through his short hair.

"I love you," he says. He looks up at me. "You can be mad at me, but I'm not letting you go. You're mine. I don't care if you're too good for me."

"I am not too good for you." I give his hair a pull. "You're not even going to say sorry?"

"I'm not going to lie to you." He turns his head, kissing my thigh. "It was stupid to request it. It's not that I thought you couldn't get in on your own, but when it comes to you, I don't take any chances." I know. It's why I can't really be pissed. My man's

biggest fault is that he is trying to make my life perfect for me? How the hell could I stay mad about that?

“It just hurt hearing that I didn't get in on my own.” He jerks up, pulling his head out of my lap. My hands go to his forearms.

“What? I requested it, and they told me you already got in with scholarships so the point was moot.”

“I knew it!” I hear Willow shout from out in the hallway. My heart jumps.

“Oh.” Reid shakes his head, dropping his forehead to mine. “It's good for you to chase me sometimes.” I pat his arm. He kisses me. I moan into his mouth, the kiss going from sweet to hot within seconds. The next thing I know I'm over Reid's shoulder, with my ass in the air.

“Now you find out what happens when I catch you.” I wiggle, and he slaps my ass. I let out a scream.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“Bye!” I hear Willow shout as he carries me out of her bedroom. I’m pretty sure Reid and I are about to have another first. Make-up sex.¹⁸ Many months later the music blares through the frat house. It’s become a typical thing that occurs on Saturday nights after the game. I would say they have parties win or lose, but I wouldn’t know because we’ve never lost. I don’t see that happening any time soon either. Not with Coach Grayson. The man is insanely smart when it comes to playing football. I’ve learned more from him than anyone.

I lie on my bed staring up at the ceiling while I wait for my girl to get here. We don’t really hang here much, but Willow and Zoey had to wrap up some blog posts they were doing, and do one of their live videos. I wanted to just go over to her place, but she mentioned something about Willow wanting to actually hang tonight. Hell, if they both want to hang here and let loose, they should. With me standing right there watching every fucking move.

They described a night of fun. A night of fun for me is being anywhere near Zoey and ending with me inside of her. The two of them have been killing it as much as I have been on the field. When we hit campus you would have thought we were some famous couple. Zoey said we went viral. The small blog she and Willow made has blown up. They talk about anything and everything under the sun. They both write in it, but Willow handles the internet shit and Zoey does all of the pictures. A handful of her pictures were bought to use for some of the games.

People have started giving them money to advertise on their blog. I was shocked at the amount of money companies will pay to have their logo slipped into a picture. Like I said, it’s insane, and I love every fucking second of it. Okay, not the social media shit with men watching them or making comments. Everyone knows better

than to do that shit with me in earshot. It only took a few brawls to make shit real fucking clear around Kingston University, but everyone has gotten the memo.

I love it because Zoey is doing what she's always wanted to do: sharing her words and pictures with the world. My phone dings, and it's Zoey letting me know she'll be here in five minutes. I smirk, thinking about the time Zoey found it weird that I didn't have any social media.

I guess I don't anymore, but at one time I had. Once upon a time I was Ava Smith. Ava, of course, was friends with one of Zoey's accounts. It had been my only option at a time when I couldn't trust myself to be around her. I needed a way to still be a part of her life. When I realized you couldn't see people's shit if you weren't friends with them and if they have some privacy crap up, that's when I became Ava Smith. When I let Zoey in on my little secret, she'd only glared at me, but the way her lips twitched, I knew she liked that I'd been keeping an eye on her. For some reason she is okay with my caveman obsessive tendencies.

I get up, putting my shoes on, wanting to be downstairs before they get here. People might have gotten the memo about Zoey, but drunk assholes can be unpredictable. My phone rings. I stare at it, seeing Coach Grayson's name light up my screen.

"Yo," I say, answering it as I swipe a hoodie from the closet that has my last name on the back. It's getting cold, and Zoey always forgets a damn jacket. Plus the hoodie swallows all her curves.

"You at the party tonight?" he asks. Why the hell is he asking me that? He knows I don't go to any of these parties. I don't care for drinking. I enjoy being in control. Plus, I need my body in tip top shape in order to give my best on the field.

"About to go down there now to meet my girl."

“Is Willow with her?”

I pause. “Why?” Willow has become a little sister to me. How is she even on Coach’s radar to ask about?

“Answer the damn question.”

“Yeah.” I give, heading out of my room but not before I lock it and descend the stairs. I’m about to push him for an answer about why he’s inquiring about Willow, but I stop when he lets out a string of curses.

“Keep those frat boys away from her.” His words surprise me, but before I can respond, he hangs up. I pocket my phone when I see Zoey and Willow walking up the sidewalk. Willow is all done up for the party. Zoey is in jeans and one of our school’s shirts.

Page 34

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

When she sees me, her face lights up. She runs toward me, and I catch her. My hands go to her ass as she drops a kiss on me.

“Well, well, well. Who do we have here? If it isn’t Reid Knight. The most loved man on campus who has women jumping into his arms.” She smirks at me thinking she’s being fucking cute by teasing me. Knowing that there will never be another woman besides her that will ever be in my arms. When Zoey and I became an us—or I guess when I informed her we were an us—she had some lingering fears. I got it. In fact, I got it too fucking much.

That shit drove me nuts. Not only because I know the only reason these other girls want me is because of football. It isn’t for my charming personality, which includes my two-word responses or simple grunts. I can’t stand that they are trying to fuck with my Zoey because fucking with her is fucking with me. I’ll put anyone on their ass that tries to threaten what we have.

“You done?” I ask her.

“Nope.” She smiles bigger, dropping another kiss on me.

“How is the party?” Willow asks. She glances towards the front door, not looking like she wants to go in.

“Same shit.” I try to stay away from this place as much as possible. Sometimes I’ll stop in between classes to work on shit because it’s close by, but I always end up over at Zoey and Willow’s place. One day I’ll buy my girl her dream house. She tells me to stop thinking that far ahead. We have our whole lives. We’ll do the college thing

and then we'll do whatever is next.

“You want to go, don't you?” Zoey wiggles in my arms. I let her go, putting her on her feet.

“Yep. I need to get out. Date?” She says it like she's asking us if she should date.

“If you want.” I shrug. Dating sounds painful. “Hey, do you have any clue why Coach Grayson was asking if you were coming here tonight?” Her head jerks up from her phone.

“He what?” She looks around.

“He called me about five minutes ago and asked if you were coming to the party.”

“Actually, I think I'm going to go to the coffee shop instead.” She turns and starts to walk off.

“Right now?” Zoey shouts after her.

“You two kids have fun.” She walks faster.

“What the hell is that about?” Zoey gives me a puzzled look.

“All I care about is that it means we don't have to go to the party.” Thank fuck.

“Whatever will we do with our time?” She bats her lashes at me. I waste no time throwing her over my shoulder. No one says shit as I walk across campus with Zoey laughing as she bats her little fists on my back, and I smack her ass in return.

They're all used to seeing this; it's nothing new. If you asked anyone on campus, they

would shrug it off and say it's just Reid being Reid when it comes to Zoey. They're all right. It's only me showing everyone that Zoey is mine. She always has been and always will be the love of my life. Epilogue Many years later How long have I been dreaming about this wedding? I've planned everything down to the smallest detail, and now I went and lost the bride. Actually, I think it's more like she might be hiding from me. This is a bunch of bullshit. I think these two get off on hiding or something. I guess it's their thing. I have to admit that they are pretty good at it.

"Why are you frowning?" Reid moves my hair off my neck. I drop my head to the side as he nuzzles my neck. I let myself melt into him and relax. I need to chill out, but I want this to be perfect for them. They deserve their happy ending. Both Reid's dad and my mom gave so much of their lives to us. Even thinking they had to hide that they were in love. I want to celebrate this. I want the day to be all about them for once.

"I want today to be perfect." I let out a sigh.

"It will be perfect. This place could burn down, and all you'd have to do is blurt out the fact that you're knocked up and it will be the best day of your mom's and my dad's life." I spin around in his arms, putting my hand over his mouth. He licks the band on my wedding ring. I drop my hand and give him my most serious look.

"This is her day. I don't want to make it about us. Everything is always about us." From Willow and me writing a book about the importance of friendships and hitting the New York Times Bestseller List (I think most people wanted to get the inside details on our somewhat public love lives), to college graduations, weddings, NFL drafts and a million other small things along the way. It's always about us. Today needs to be about our parents. The ones that guided us through our lives, cheering us along every step of the way.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“I get what you’re saying, and I agree. Thing is, they enjoy the hell out of the shit we do. I’m sure we’ll be the same.” We will. I put my hand on my stomach. I only took the test this morning. No one knows but Reid. Okay, Willow knows, but that goes without saying. When I hear a crash in the kitchen, I turn around, taking off.

“Find them!” I shout. I come to a sliding halt in the kitchen and let out a sigh of relief when I see it’s only a couple of broken glasses.

“Sorry,” a girl with a black apron says.

“It’s fine. I’m just glad no one is hurt.” I turn, almost running into a man wearing all black. His name badge lets me know he’s the bartender. Do we really need a bartender with a small wedding of thirty people? Probably not, but when it came to this wedding I’ve pretty much been a “yes” person to ninety percent of the wedding planner’s suggestions.

“Zoey.” He smirks down at me. He looks like he’s barely old enough to drink let alone make cocktails.

“Hello, Landon.” I give him a smile. “People should start showing up in an hour. Can you have champagne ready?”

“I can do anything you want, sugar.” A dimple forms in his cheek. I think he’s hitting on me, but maybe he’s just being nice.

“Two broken glasses is enough damage for today.” Our parents’ house is brand new and we’re having the wedding here. It took about four months to build once all the

plans had been agreed on. The house looks ordinary from the outside, but the inside is another story. The kitchen is breathtaking and has all the small details that make a house look grand. You'd think you were in a mansion and not a medium-sized house.

Our parents didn't want some giant house. They only wanted to be close to us. With Reid's first contract on the heels of some very nice endorsements, we bought our house on a giant plot of land and started building this place for them. It's not even a half a mile away. We wanted to do something for them, and Reid loved the idea of them being close when he did have to travel for a game. Now Reid is in the process of building a giant garage for his dad.

“What?” His eyebrows pull together as a confused look takes over his face.

“Champagne.” I start to step around him, needing to find my mom. He reaches out, snagging me by my arm.

“How about we have a glass together? Have a drink before everyone gets here.” He looks right down the top of my dress. Before I can say a word, Landon is gone.

“Did you find them?” Reid gives me a look that would kill many. “Don't kill him. I don't have time for police reports.”

“Hey, man, aren't you Reid Knight?” Landon starts to get up from the floor. The shock of seeing Reid Knight in person makes him forget he was just tossed across the room like a ragdoll. Men.

“Run.” I grab my husband's arm before he can go for the kid again. Landon finally understands the danger he's in and takes off. “You're going to be bartending for the night if you murder him,” I inform him, letting go of his arm. I try to make my way upstairs, but I'm snagged around the waist and pulled off into the office. “Reid. We don't have—” My words trail off when he pins me to the wall, dropping to his knees

in front of me.

“There is always time to make my wife come and remind her she’s mine.”

“Trust me. I know I’m yours.” He’s got my dress up around my hips already. The man has quick hands on and off the field.

“Hold the dress,” he orders me. “I want to see your cunt.” His nose flares, and I realize he really is worked up. You’d think over time this crazy need Reid has to always know I belong to him, and for everyone else to know it as well, would fade some, but I think it’s only gotten worse. Not that I care. Not when he looks at me like I’m his everything. “Zoey. Don’t make me ask to see what belongs to me again.” I’d be lying if I didn’t admit that when he gets this way that it turns me on more than anything.

If we had more time, I would resist a little longer to give him a hard time. But I know the clock is ticking down until our parents walk down the aisle, so I lift my dress up, revealing myself to him.

“No fucking panties.” He growls against my clit before he sucks it into his mouth.

“Reid!” I let out a small scream. He isn’t messing around. He works my clit. Reid knows my body better than I do. My Reid is soft and sweet with me, but when we’re like this, everything goes by Reid’s rules. Reid’s control. He can make me come in seconds, minutes, or hours.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“I want it now.” He growls, and my body does as he commands. I let go as pleasure hits me. The orgasm is so fast it knocks the air right out of my lungs. When I open my eyes, Reid is lifting me and thrusting deep inside of me. He’s relentless. “Mine. Mine. Mine,” he chants over and over as he thrusts in and out of me. My second orgasm is already pushing down on me.

“Yours,” I agree as my nails dig into his shoulders. He lets out a loud groan, my name on his lips that are still covered in me. I go over the edge with him. When Reid lifts his head to look at me, I kiss him.

“You calm?” he asks me. I nod my head. I am calm. He slowly puts me on my feet. I feel his cum all over the inside of my thighs. From the look on Reid's face, that was the whole point. Also to get us both to calm the hell down. This man always knows what I need.

“Let’s go give our parents the happily ever after they deserve.” I say as Reid fixes my dress for me. He pulls me into his side.

“I love you,” I tell him as we walk, causing him to lean down and give me a quick kiss.

“I love you too. Forever.”

We may have had some small bumps in the road on the journey to our happily ever after, but I always knew I was meant to be his. Epilogue Many many years later I sit at my desk, staring at my computer screen but not really comprehending anything that’s on it. I had a restless night of sleep. I took Zoey so many times throughout the night,

trying to calm myself down by getting lost in my wife, not sure I'm ready for life to change. Until she kicked me out of bed and said I needed to just accept that our little girl is growing up. I've been sitting in my office ever since.

I figured work would be the best way to take my mind off of everything. After I retired from the NFL, I volunteered at the local high school, coaching the football team. They insisted on paying me, so I donated the salary every year to improve the school. I wanted to give back since I have been so fortunate in life. Fine, I wanted to keep an eye on Izzy and make sure no little punks tried anything out of line. Having two girls hasn't been easy. I know what kind of fuckheads are out there.

I try to concentrate on the running plays for this weekend's game, but every time I glance up, I see the picture of Izzy that sits on the corner of my desk. She's probably five years old in it. We're in the field out back, the sun is shining, and I'm twirling her around in a cloud full of bubbles that I'd blown for her. She's laughing and looking at me as if I'm the only man she'll ever love. I was until that little asshole showed up.

"He's not an asshole." I look up to see Zoey standing in the doorway of my office. I must have said the last words out loud. "You love Noah."

"Love is a pretty strong word." That gets me a giggle from Zoey. I watch as she walks over toward my desk. She's more beautiful today than she was all those years ago when I fell in love with her. I turn around in my chair so that she can crawl into my lap. She does without hesitation. A sense of calm comes over me as it always has whenever she's around. She nuzzles into my neck. "I'm not ready to let her go."

"You're not losing her. She's a grown-up, Reid. She's starting her life the same way you and I started ours. They're in love." She lifts her head to look into my eyes. Her fingers trace the hard line of my jaw. I know she's right. Noah loves Izzy. He reminds me a lot of myself when I was younger. Always putting Izzy's needs before his own.

In saying that, I still don't want to give him permission to marry my little girl.

"Feels as though I'm losing her."

"You can't think of it that way. You have to think of it as our family growing." I know she's right, but that doesn't mean that I have to like it. "Don't you want our little girl to have a love like ours?" That knocks me right on my fucking ass. I do want that. In fact, I know I want that so badly for her that I want to make sure that's what this will be.

The alarm dings, letting me know that Noah is coming up the driveway now. The kid reminds me a little too much of myself sometimes. I do love the little shit. He and Izzy have been together since middle school. At least I think that's when he got her to stop calling him her friend.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 2:19 pm

“Noah’s here.” My other daughter Riley says as she comes into my office. She drops down in the chair in front of my desk, kicking her feet up while staring at her phone. The thing is always glued to her freaking hand.

“I’ll get the door.” I stand, putting Zoey in my seat. When I make it to the top of the stairs I see Izzy has already let him in. I take a few steps down. Izzy is extra animated with her hands as she speaks with him.

“There is no reason to tell him,” I hear her say as I take a couple more steps down.

“I’m not lying to your father or anyone for that matter. He’ll find out anyways.”

“Find what out?” They both turn to look my way.

“Yeah, what?” Of course Riley is behind me. Riley is a brilliant girl, the top of her class, and gets test scores like her mother, but she’s nosy as shit. Sometimes I love that shit and sometimes I hate it. “You pregnant?”

“Riley!” Izzy shouts at her. “No,” she quickly adds.

“Not today,” Noah puts in. My body grows tight thinking about my little girl having a little one herself. I relax when my wife's hand rests on my back.

“Hi, Noah,” she says to him.

“Morning, Zoey,” he greets her. “Reid.” He gives me a nod before answering my question. “Find out that Izzy is moving in with me.” I’m actually a little surprised this

hasn't happened sooner, but Noah kept his word when he promised me that he'd let her get through her freshman year in college. It might have been wrong for me to ask that of him because of my own history, but I did it anyway. Everyone knows that while Zoey and I both technically had our own places freshman year of college, we never spent a night apart. Freshman year is now over for Izzy, and it looks as though Noah is not willing to wait another second to be with her.

“Why don't we move this conversation into the kitchen? I could use some coffee.” I put my hand on Zoey's back to guide her down the stairs with me. Everyone heads toward the kitchen but not before I get Noah's attention and motion toward the sitting room.

“I love her,” he says before I can say anything.

“I know that.” It's all over his face. A look that has always been there when it comes to Izzy. It's one I know well because I've seen the same one every day for most of my life when I'm in front of a mirror.

“I kept my word.”

“You did.” I'm being hard on the kid, but it's good for him. Me too, as a matter of fact. No matter how much I'm sure he wanted to tell me to go fuck myself last year when I made the request he do it, because more than wanting Izzy all to himself, he wanted her happy and put her first. Not wanting to start a fight with me that would hurt her. He puts her first and does what he thinks is best for her even if she gets pissed about it. Story of my life.

“You know I'm not here about the moving in shit, right?”

He shifts on his feet.

“Yeah, and it’s why I need another promise. One that tells me you’re in this forever. And that you’re going to love her until the end of time.”

“That is a promise I can keep.” He stands up a little straighter. “The only life I want is one with Izzy.”

“You have our blessing.” Noah lets out a breath, and I can see the tension leave his body. He asked me out of respect. Noah isn't letting Izzy go. He’d fight me on it—as he should if he truly wants to marry her. I pull him in for a hug, patting him on the back.

“Are you guys...” Izzy stops when she sees us. A smile lights up her whole face, making her look more like Zoey than usual.

“We’re coming.” I walk over to her, dropping a kiss on top of her head before heading into the kitchen. They linger behind.

“What’s up?” Riley asks when I enter the kitchen. Zoey hands me a mug of coffee. I take a sip before putting it down. “No one is dying or something, right?”

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“Not today,” I say as Zoey leans into me. I look down at her, and with only my eyes I tell her what happened. She gives me that same smile Izzy gave me moments ago. I grab Zoey and sit her on the kitchen island, retrieving her mug she left by the sink.

Noah and Izzy join us a few minutes later. Everyone starts arguing over what we should eat, which rolls into another fight about if this is breakfast or lunch. I drink my coffee, enjoying every second of it. Again my wife’s eyes meet mine, telling me she’s enjoying it too. Our girls might be growing up, but as Zoey said, our family is growing too.

“Love you,” Zoey says next to my ear. I turn my head to look at her.

“I love you too. Forever.” I drop my mouth to hers.* * *