



# In the Works

**Author:** *Cara Porter*

**Category:** Romance, New Adult, Lesbian Romance

**Description:** Before the divorce, an attraction to other women had never crossed my mind. But now that it had, I couldn't back away.

When tech billionaire Victoria Bradley hired me to renovate her crumbling lake house, I knew it was the opportunity of a lifetime with a paycheck to match. But what I hadn't anticipated was that her interests extended beyond the professional realm.

And once she begged my ex-best friend Brianne Shaw to custom build a table for the waterfront view, my job only grew more complicated. While learning to work together, long-dead sparks were rekindled, making me wonder if our friendship had ever truly been platonic.

As both of these women swept me up in their whirlwinds, I found myself torn between the millionaire who could give me the world and the lumberjack who stole my heart.

New Winford was the last place I expected to settle down.

It was a slower lifestyle than I was used to. But I'd gotten sick of endless partying and supermodel one-night-stands.

And finding an interior designer as stunning and talented as Sarah Greenwood was a definite perk.

Working together was easy, and our visions for the lake house melded together perfectly.

I just hadn't anticipated how quickly she would make this place feel like home.

Even after all these years, I was never able to get Sarah Greenwood out of my mind.

So when she showed up on my doorstep, asking me to come out of retirement, I was stunned.

But who was I to turn such an incredible woman down? And besides, I wouldn't mind spending some extra time with her.

**Total Pages (Source):** 84

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

1

SARAH

“If you don’t get your butts in the car right now, I’m going to take your games.” I winced as soon as the words left my mouth. It was such a stupid threat, one I had sworn I’d never make when I first had Derek.

But as he rolled his eyes, barely bothering to turn his head toward me, I couldn’t find any more fucks to give.

Standing in the foyer, I put my hands on my hips. Leila brushed past me, her backpack slung over her shoulder as she marched diligently to the car. I gently flattened the flyaways on her head. “Thank you, sweetheart.”

The loud gunfire emanating from the TV rattled my brain.

I marched over to the living room, standing in front of the screen. “Derek, do not make me punish you.”

“Mom!” He cried out as he chucked his controller into the couch cushions. Crossing his arms, he sunk back into the plush sofa.

From the corner of my eye, Ava toddled toward the front door, following the sound of her big sister out near the car.

Once she was out of earshot, I turned my attention back to Derek, who still hadn’t

relented. After a minute of silent staring, he gave in.

“I don’t like having to go to his apartment,” Derek confessed.

I kneeled down, intercepting his gaze. “I know, bud. But your dad told me he has a lot of cool stuff planned for this week.”

Shrugging, Derek reluctantly met my eyes. The glowing hazel reminded me of his dad. I’d spent nearly fifteen years looking into Jason’s warm gaze. And now, we spent most of our time in polite hugs when we swapped the kids’s custody each week.

“He doesn’t even have a Playstation.” Derek flopped forward.

I opened my arms to him, letting his little ten year old body rest on mine. “I know, baby. He’s still getting his place situated, but he’ll get one soon. And if you want, I’ll help you bring this one.”

Derek giggled. “No, mom. Only Auntie Robin knows how to do it.” Realizing he didn’t have much choice, Derek stood from the couch. He grabbed the black duffel bag sitting at his feet and headed for the front door.

Once he was outside, I locked the door behind us and let out a sigh. Leila had helped Ava get into her carseat and was waiting in the back seat with her hands folded.

“Thank you, guys.” I winked at them as I tossed my bag into the backseat between the two little kids.

I slid into the driver’s seat while Derek piled into the front passenger seat, tossing his bags down at his feet.

Turning the ignition with one hand, I texted Jason with the other:

Heading to you now. Sorry we're late.

Before I could even put the car into drive, my phone dinged with a reply.

No worries, excited to see everyone.

I pulled out of the smooth driveway, freshly paved at the start of spring. Jason's new place was just across town, a quick five-minute drive through New Winford's Main Street. We made good time despite the swarm of high schoolers grabbing coffee from Dirty Dee's before homeroom.

Before I knew it, I was making the left on Jason's street: a quiet residential block with a few small homes. As the car crunched down his gravel driveway, the front door of the house swung open.

Jason waved at the car from his porch, jogging down each step.

I threw the car into park. "Alright, kids. We're here."

Derek groaned from the passenger's seat, shoving his handheld console into his bag.

I placed my hand on his shoulder. "I'm just down the road. If you need anything from me or the house, I'll be right there."

I let the engine idle as I hopped out of the car and swung open Ava's side of the minivan. At the same time, Jason opened Leila's. Through the car, he smiled at me. "Hey, Sarah. Thanks for bringing them."

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I grinned. “It was my honor.”

My mind wandered as I unbuckled Ava’s car seat. I’d been with Jason since I was fifteen, uninterested in anyone else. But the giddiness that once rose in my chest at the sight of those warm eyes had cooled down, replaced by the calm comfort of a budding friendship.

I shook the feeling off and helped Ava jump out of the car, slinging her green, cartoon turtle backpack over my shoulder.

Derek collected his stuff from the front seat and trudged out of the car.

“Hey, bud.” Jason ruffled the shaggy hair on the top of Derek’s head.

Derek leaned into his dad for a hug, not bothering to say a word as he walked into the house.

Before he could get out of my sight, I shouted. “Der, I love you!”

“Love you too.” He called back over his shoulder.

Lifting his head, Jason looked at me. His brow furrowed in confusion. “Did I do something?”

I waved my hand to ease his worry. “He’s upset that there’s no PS5 here. I told him you and I would try to get him one for both places.”

“Got it. I’ll take a look at the budget once they’re at school and see if there’s room.” Jason held Leila’s hand as they walked down the driveway.

I filed in next to them, letting Ava run ahead of me. I hollered after her, “I love you!”

She turned and waved to me before disappearing inside the house.

Jason pat Leila’s back. “Sweetie, go set your stuff in your room and get ready for school. I’ll be right in.”

She nodded, striding toward the door with a hand on each strap of her bag.

“Love you, baby.” I waved at her.

Once she was out of earshot, Jason turned toward me and lowered his voice. “You’re sure it’s okay if Liv hangs out here?”

I nodded. “Yeah, of course. The kids love her.”

Jason tried to hide his blush as he kicked some gravel with his steel-toed boot. “Thanks, Sar.”

“No need to thank me. I’ll see you later this week.” I opened my arms to hug Jason and passed him Ava’s bag before heading back to the minivan.

A part of me thought I should miss him, that his smell should send me spiraling. But it had been over a year since we split, and everything had been easier since.

I hopped back into the car and waved to Jason before pulling out of the driveway. Making my way back toward Main Street, I took a deep breath. I need a coffee.

When I peeked at the empty back seat through the rearview mirror, my heart twinged. The strangest thing about our divorce was still leaving my babies somewhere. Even though Jason was a more-than-competent co-parent, it felt odd to have the kids out of my sight for so long.

Before I could get too lost in the thought, I pulled into a parking spot on Main Street, turned off the car, and grabbed my purse from the passenger footwell.

As I stepped out of the van, fresh spring air filled my lungs. You could tell the straggling teenagers were growing antsy for summer break. Main Street had calmed in the last twenty minutes, already settling into the day as students headed for their classrooms.

I pushed open the door to Dirty Dee's, comforted by the familiar tinkle of a bell overhead. The cashier was wiping the counters, finally catching up after a couple brutal hours.

"Hi, Sarah," she smiled at me.

Walking closer, I gave a little wave. "Hey, Ashley. How's your morning?"

She shrugged, scanning the chaotic counters behind her and chuckling. "Not too bad. Your usual?"

I rubbed my chin, scanning the menu. "Actually, could I grab the lavender latte? I feel like I should try something new."

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

“Of course.” Ashley smiled, writing the order on a paper cup. She got to work on the drink.

My eyes wandered around the shop. I had designed the renovation for the owner, Diana, a year ago. We’d made a point to avoid anything too trendy, not wanting her to have to remodel in a year. So far, it held up.

It was a great mix of industrial, trendy, and cozy. A few plants lined tall shelves throughout the store, creating the illusion of a dense canopy.

“Did you hear about the lake house?” Ashley hollered over the grinding espresso machine.

I shook my head. “No, what about it? Some asshole tearing it down?”

Laughing, Ashley steamed milk. “Not quite. My mentor told me someone finally bought the place. Some tech billionaire who wants to restore it.”

“Huh. Really?” My brows furrowed. At this point, the entire town had resigned to seeing the gorgeous, lakefront farmhouse torn down.

Ashley brought the cup over and set it on the counter. “What’s my newly minted realtor’s license good for if not to snoop?”

I laughed and took a sip from the cup as Ashley rang me up. “Your career and wellbeing.” A slight moan escaped my lips as I tasted the delicious concoction. “Wow, this is awesome.”



“Oh good, I’m glad.” Ashley smiled.

I tapped my card against the machine. “What do we know about the buyer?”

Ashley shrugged. “Not much. She seems like a big shot from Silicon Valley who got tired of the lifestyle.”

I tried to hide my surprise at the word “she.” But it was still rare to find rich and powerful women, especially around these parts.

I drummed my fingers along the counter. “Hopefully, she doesn’t turn it into a tacky mess.”

Crossing her fingers, Ashley shrugged. “We can dream.”

“Alright, I’ll see you around. Thanks, Ash.” I waved and headed out of the shop.

But the conversation had set wheels turning in my head. I needed to head to my studio and do some research on this mysterious billionaire. A new sale meant a potential client. And a tech genius would be quite the paycheck.

2

VICTORIA

I hated the sound of my Porsche's tires crunching gravel. Each bump made me fear they might pop. But this is what you wanted, V.

The passenger seat held a thick stack of papers. From the front page, the heading “Real Estate Purchase Agreement” stared back at me.

I gently pulled the Carrera in front of the two-car garage, the stunning lakefront shimmering to my left. Shutting off the engine, I hopped out of the driver's seat and surveyed the place with a massive sigh.

Past the stunning lake and my beautiful car towered the crumbling farmhouse. Even from the ground, the slant of the roof was apparent. Biting my lip, I couldn't help but wonder if this was all some massive mistake.

At least I can sell it if I hate it.

It was a luxury I was still adjusting to, knowing that whatever money I spent could easily be returned to me.

I shook my head as I walked toward the house, crossing the driveway to reach the overgrown flagstone path to the front door.

Behind me, the black wrought iron gate swung open for the pickup trucks. I looked over my shoulder, waving at them as they filed into the driveway. While they parked, I tucked in my button-down, careful to seem put together.

After a moment, a truck door slammed behind me. But instead of turning to look, I stared off at the water. The water reflected sparkling diamonds back at me.

"It's quite the catch." A voice hollered from behind.

As Robin sidled up to me, I nodded. "It is."

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Robin sighed. “I begged the town to let me have it for over a decade, and they wouldn’t budge.”

Turning to look at my contractor, I smirked. “Did you try throwing five million at them?”

“No, obviously not.” Robin laughed, nudging my shoulder with her fist. “So, Ms. Bradley, want to walk through your new place?”

Nodding, I headed toward the front door. It only took a few strides, my red-bottomed heels clicking against the stone. The wood decking bent under my feet as I pulled the key from my pocket.

“I’m surprised they even bothered to lock the door.” Robin teased.

I shrugged. “They had to stop vagrants like you from trying to claim squatter’s rights.”

As the door swung open, Robin’s jaw dropped. Even in this horrendous shape, the house was stunning. The ceilings were surprisingly high for a nineteenth century home.

I crossed the threshold, letting the floorboards creak as I walked into the house for the first time. My shoulders relaxed at the sound. It had been a long time since I’d heard an old house. Every place I’d lived in since the app took off was newly built.

Robin’s head tilted back as she looked up at the exposed beams. “Wow, those things

look incredible.”

I nodded. “Ideally, we keep as much of the original material as possible.”

“I’ve got the architect’s plans in my truck. And you know I’m not going to toss anything we don’t absolutely have to.” Robin wandered through the entryway.

Walking through the foyer and into the smaller living room, I looked at the crumbling sheetrock. “You’re sure you can have it done in time?”

Robin nodded, taking notes as she looked at the outlets. “Victoria, if I couldn’t do it, I wouldn’t have taken the job. But you are going to need a stellar interior designer. Someone who can work fast.”

The words brought me back to earth. I hadn’t selected a designer yet. Everyone I’d worked with in the past had far too modern taste. This house needed... something else.

I stared out of the front windows, overlooking the water. Beyond the lake was over a hundred acres of untouched forest. It was the perfect sanctuary for me to figure out what was next. But only after the big, end-of-summer Labor Day party.

“Have anyone in mind?” I looked over my shoulder at Robin.

Robin shrugged. “My sister-in-law is great. She’s local. We’ve worked together on the places of mine you’ve seen.”

I raised an eyebrow at her. “And do you work with her because Zoey insists on it?” If anyone knew how pushy Zoey could be, it was me. I’d hired her to plan a massive launch party for Pop.

Rolling her eyes, Robin groaned. “No, rude. I worked with Sarah long before me and Zoey were together.”

“Is that how you two met? Through Zoey’s sister?”

Robin shifted, and a light blush crept onto her cheeks. “No...”

From the way she shifted her weight, I could tell there was something she wasn’t saying. “When we’re not in the middle of renovating what should be a tear down, I want to hear that story.” Then, after a minute of debating in my mind, I nodded. “Where can I find her?”

Robin looked at her watch. “She should be at her studio now, or I can give you her number.”

A group of workers came in through the front door, decked out in demolition gear.

Biting my lip, I nodded. “Text me both.”

Robin opened her phone and sent over the information.

As I checked the message, I couldn’t avoid the string of unanswered texts from my friends. An old college roommate said:

Heard you’re living in the boonies now. Ran through all the women in LA?

I rolled my eyes. The rest were congratulations on the sale and a few wondering when they could visit.

Turning back to Robin, I tapped my phone against my palm. “And Zoey is like... not going to plan this party for me, right?”

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Robin's head dropped. "Damnit, Vic. I was hoping you wouldn't ask that."

"Why?" I grinned.

Sighing, Robin put her hands on my shoulders. "Because, now that you've asked, I have to tell her. And then, my pregnant partner is going to insist on working up to her due date."

A laugh erupted from my chest, as I shrugged. "That's what you get for being in such a blissful marriage."

"I'll mention it to her." Robin relented.

With a nod, I turned back to the lake as Robin began directing her crew. It was a big task: renovating a falling down building in a matter of months. But I needed to make it work. Otherwise, I wasn't sure what the fuck I was doing in New Winford.

3

SARAH

I lifted my half-empty coffee cup to my lips, chugging the still warm latte as soon as I sat down at my desk.

Bright light streamed in through the studio's windows, illuminating the small storefront. It had felt silly at first to rent a place for my design work – so much of it was mobile and digital – but I wasn't getting any work done at home with the kids

underfoot.

I booted up my computer and opened up my most recent project folder. It was divided into a few folders, including “inspo”, “locate”, and “paint”. I opened the inspiration folder, hoping to immerse myself in the vibe of the multi-family rental I’d be renovating next.

Just as I was digging into the material, the front door bell dinged.

I jolted up from my screen, craning to see who had come to visit. Even though the space was an actual storefront on Main Street, it served as more of an office than an actual sales space.

But the light shining in cast the figure in shadows, a halo tracing the tall, suited figure.

“Sarah Greenwood?” A low sultry voice called out from the door. The rumble sent a shiver down my spine, a pulsing excitement to my core.

“Yes?” I shaded my eyes with my hand, allowing me a glimpse at the gorgeous woman striding toward me in stunning pumps.

The woman stuck out her hand. “I’m Victoria Bradley. I’ve just purchased the lakefront home on Spring Road.”

Clumsily, I stood from my swivel chair. I was tripping over myself to stand up and take her hand. “Oh, great.” When our hands met, I could already tell how clammy mine were. But hers were soft and her grip was firm. A jolt of electricity coursed through my body. Jesus, I’m touch starved.

“How did you...”

Before I could even get the words out, Victoria wandered toward the walls which were lined with photographs of my work. “Robin gave me your number. I recruited her to help me renovate the place.”

I nodded. “I see. And you met through my sister?”

Victoria smirked, memories of good times coming back to her mind. “Yep, when she lived in the city. She planned the launch party for my app.”

“So, you really are a billionaire.” I scoffed as I watched her examine my work. The prints on the wall displayed a wide array of styles. The projects ranged from small family homes to restaurants to designer mansions.

Victoria spun on her heels. “I would hope the outfit alone would have made that clear.”

I walked closer to her, eyeing her slender arms leaned against my work table. Cut out scraps littered the wood top. Something in my throat tightened. This is a new feeling.

But I narrowed my eyes at her. “Anyone can buy a nice suit and a pair of red bottoms.”

Victoria’s chin lifted, exposing her elegant neck. “If that’s the case, why hasn’t anyone gotten you some?”

Shrugging, I licked my lips. “Maybe someone should.”

A cheeky smile took over Victoria’s face as her eyes wandered down my body. I suddenly felt underdressed, unprepared, and vulnerable.

Victoria clapped her hands. “So, what do you think?”



## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I looked around the studio. “Of what?”

“Working for me?” Victoria crossed her arms, keeping her amber eyes on me.

“I haven’t even seen the house.” I shook my head, a light chuckle escaping my lips.

Victoria smirked at me. “I’ll show it to you whenever you’d like. Besides, given your portfolio, I don’t think you need to see it to know it’ll be a good project.”

Sucking in my cheeks, my mind switched to negotiation mode. “Ms. Bradley, reno projects are time consuming. They’re ever-changing and wildly unpredictable. I have other clients already waiting for my recommendations, and a project like this could get in the way.”

“I’m willing to double your rate, and I’ll buy out your other clients.” Victoria licked her teeth, loving the game.

Something about that smile of hers pulled me in. I walked closer, crossing my arms as I left just a couple of feet between us. “I’ll think about it.”

Victoria smiled, standing straight from her leaned position. She was tall in her pumps. Looking down at me, Victoria nodded. “Good. Call me if you have any questions.” I hadn’t even seen her reach into her pocket to grab a business card. But somehow, a slick, slate card was being thrust toward me, sandwiched between her long fingers.

“Thanks.” I snatched the card out of her hand, turned back toward my desk, and let her see herself out. But once I heard her heels clicking away from me, I looked over

my shoulder. Her hips swayed from side to side with an ease I'd never seen in my life.

I shook my head, unsure what exactly was taking over me.

Instead of questioning it, I pulled out my phone and typed out a text.

4

SARAH

Within an hour of sending the text, I was grabbing an orange cart from the corral of the home improvement store. The wheels rattled as they crossed the threshold of the automatic doors.

"Wait for me." Zoey hollered from behind me.

I looked over my shoulder to see my little sister waddling closer. "Speed up."

Rolling her eyes, Zoey picked up the pace. "You're not supposed to be rude to pregnant ladies." She cradled her baby bump as she got closer.

I leaned onto the cart handle and winked at her. "I mean, you weren't around for any of my pregnancies, so this is your payback." Zoey had been back home for a little over two years, and as much as I liked to give her shit over leaving, it was nice to see her finally settling into the slower pace of New Winford.

"What do you even need?" Zoey brushed off my snark and started scanning the aisle labels.

I was already guiding us toward the decor section. "I'm just looking for final touches

on the Scanlon house.”

Doing her best to keep up, Zoey nodded. “Cool, I’m going to have to use the bathroom in a matter of minutes.”

Pointing toward the back of the store, I laughed. “It’s back there.”

Zoey shot me a glare as she groaned, “Yeah, smartass, I know that. Robin and I are here practically every other day.”

I scanned the shelves, hunting for the perfect plant hanger. “How’s Robin feeling?”

Instantly, her sour attitude was gone. Talking about Robin always had that effect on her. “Good, she’s trying to hide how anxious she is by obsessing over the nursery. I’ve told her a million times that it’s beautiful and that she’s going to be a great parent, but I don’t think she’ll believe it until the baby’s finally here.”

“That sounds like Robin.” I laughed, taking a pillow off the shelf and turning it around in my hands.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” Zoey raised her index finger. “She got hired as the general contractor for that lake house restoration.”

I sucked in my cheeks and nodded. “I heard.” I regretted the words as soon as they left my mouth.

Zoey tilted her head. “From who?”

Letting my head fall back, I sighed. “The millionaire. She came to my studio and asked – no, she actually kind of demanded – that I design the interior.”

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

“Really? Vic is so picky.”

I raised an eyebrow and narrowed my gaze. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Zoey waved me off. “Not like that. I’m just surprised she didn’t want some Architectural Digest snob.”

Giggling, I shrugged. “I was surprised too.” I had forgotten that Zoey knew her back in the city, that they had run in the same circles.

“Are you going to do it?” Zoey watched me carefully. I could tell from the look on her face that she knew something was up, but I wasn’t ready to explain something I didn’t quite understand myself. Especially not when it involved one of her former clients.

I leaned on the cart handle and pushed forward, heading toward the tiles at the back of the store. “I have no idea. The rate is great but I’d have to cut all my other clients to get it done.”

Zoey opened her mouth to reply...

But I cut her off before the words could leave her lips. “On the other hand, it’s a really cool project. I haven’t gotten to work on something like that since I helped Robin with your house.”

Shrugging, Zoey sighed. “I mean, it could really elevate your career. Surely, the attention wouldn’t hurt?”

The thought of having Victoria's attention made me blush, though I couldn't explain why. A warm rush moved down my body as the memory of her in my studio came rushing back.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I pushed the cart forward and made a wide turn into the next aisle. "Maybe..."

But as I rounded the corner, a shopper popped up out of nowhere. I ground the cart to a halt, narrowly avoiding a collision. "Sorry!" I blurted out before recognizing the familiar face in the worn Carhartt coveralls.

Turning to look at me, Brianne Shaw's eyes lit up. "Sarah and Zoey Greenwood. Funny seeing you here." Her cheeky smile left me speechless.

"Long time, no see." Zoey smiled and stuck out her hand for Bri to shake.

She gave Zoey's hand a hardy shake, and I could see how calloused Bri's hands had grown. But while her hand was with Zoey, her eyes stayed locked on me. "Yeah, for both of you. Been avoiding me?"

I rubbed my forehead and smiled, guilt flushing my cheeks. "I'm so sorry, I've been swamped with the kids and work."

Bri waved me off. "Sarah, seriously, nothing to worry about. I was messing with you. I just miss my friend, that's all."

My shoulders relaxed as my eyes wandered down from her face to her arms. She wore a dirt-covered, sleeveless flannel and carried a brand new ax. It looked heavy. Her biceps tensed as she adjusted her grip on the tool. Nodding toward it, I asked, "Broke the old one?"

“Something like that.” Bri looked down at the blade shining in her hands.

Zoey leaned against the cart. “You know, Bri, me and Robin need a crib for our nursery...”

When Bri laughed, a charming smile took over her face. “Nice try, Zoe. But you know I don’t do carpentry anymore. Not even for friends.”

I sighed. “And that’s a real shame.”

Turning to look at me, Bri tilted her head. “Is that right?”

I shrugged as I met her eyes, the green in them popping with the flannel. “Yeah it is.” A blush started to creep onto my cheeks. And as it did, I could feel Zoey’s forehead wrinkle beside me.

Letting a big breath escape her lungs, Bri nodded. “Well, I should let y’all go. Don’t want to keep a pregnant woman standing around.”

“It was good to see you.” I smiled at her, our eyes meeting again.

Bri nodded, and turned to leave.

The cart rattled as Zoey pushed it forward, startling me from my daze. I knew that if I wanted to do more than design standard, small town houses, I needed to take a risk.

Pulling out my phone, I opened Victoria’s contact and started typing out a message. Zoey peered over my shoulder, trying and failing to pretend like she wasn’t spying on me.

I ignored her prying eyes, rereading the message one more time:

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I'll do it. But I'm keeping my other clients on and taking your advanced rate.

It was the boldest negotiation I'd ever done. But it was the only way to make it work. I'd need to hire more babysitters and buy more takeout. The higher rate was the only way that would be possible.

Before I could second guess myself, I hit send. The familiarwhooshtold me the text was gone, out in the ether for Vic to read.

My chest tightened. A large part of me worried this was a huge mistake. A client like Vic would have immense expectations for a designer, and I'd never taken on a project for a billionaire with such extravagant taste.

Shaking the thought, I let the air trapped in my lungs escape through pursed lips. If I wasn't willing to take a risk, my business wasn't ever going to grow.I have to bet on me.

5

BRI

My heart was poundingin my chest as I walked away from Sarah. It had been a few years since I last spoke to her, and that was by design.

Heading toward the checkout, I tried not to look back over my shoulder at her. She was somehow more beautiful than I remembered. Of course, I'd seen her briefly at town events. And as soon as I did, I would turn on my heels and basically sprint out

of there.

I set my purchases on the self-checkout station and started to scan them. The ax felt heavier in my hand, like my wrists had gone weak.

“Need any help today?” A cashier smiled as she paced from station to station.

I shook my head and offered a gentle smile. “No, thanks.”

After I paid, I grabbed my ax – and the new wedge I had thrown in – and walked stiffly

through the sliding doors. Once I was out of the store, I nearly sprinted to my truck. Unlocking the door, I slid into the driver’s seat.

I didn’t feel like I could breathe until the door slammed behind me.

“Fuck.” I hissed as I caught my breath.

It felt ridiculous. Sarah and I had been friends for over two decades. But somehow, seeing her made me feel like I was drowning.

I tried to shake the feeling as I turned the truck’s key, the click of the ignition eventually giving way to the engine’s roar. I put the car in drive and sailed out of the parking lot toward home.

The winding roads always helped clear my mind. I submitted myself to the meditative nature of the drive, trying to stop my anxious excitement from taking the wheel. New Winford’s suburbs gave way to the backwoods in a matter of minutes.

But as my truck chugged up the curves of the mountain, my mind was flooded with



memories of teenage Sarah. We used to drive these same roads to the overlook all the time. I could still picture her in the passenger seat, belting out the lyrics to Alanis Morissette.

She was pretty then... and desperately in love with Jason, the football team's star line-backer. It was all she'd talk about, how badly she wanted to be with him. And all I could think about was how badly I wanted to kiss her.

Shaking my head, I made a right onto Harding Road, a one-lane street pretending to be two-way. The driveways became few and far between as I scanned the edge of the road for critters that might jump onto the asphalt.

Before I knew it, I was turning down my long, potholed driveway. It was a bumpy ride, but I had no intention of ever filling the pits – with massive lumber trucks coming up and down nearly every day, the holes would just form again anyway.

Along the trees lining the sides were a few wood sculptures. Most of them were abstract, not distinctly any one thing. But a few of them were recreations of things like my childhood dog or a local waterfall.

At the fork in the driveway, I kept left and headed up the small hill to my house.

Turning off the car and flinging open the door, I was greeted by the singing birds and the rustling leaves.

My body relaxed at the noise. It was easy to forget just how bustling New Winford had become in the last couple of years. But the quiet of these woods was constant.

My boots crunched the loose gravel as I grabbed my gear from the backseat and walked toward the house. At the door, I was greeted by a loud meow.

“Hey, Oakkie.” I bent down, careful to keep the ax blade away from the calico’s head. Petting him, I shut the door behind me. When I stood upright, he stretched toward me. He reached his paws up toward my hands, begging for more neck pets.

I leaned the new ax against the doorframe and caved, giving him the attention he so desperately needed.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

“You’re a goofball.” I laughed at him. After a moment, I walked over to the dining room table and set the wedge on it. The table wobbled slightly as I set it down.

Shit. I’m gonna have to take that down to the shop.

Upside of building all my furniture myself: I don’t have to buy anything. Downside: I have to fix everything.

I popped open some windows, letting the fresh air fill the stale house. The wind brought in a fresh floral scent, maybe a lilac blooming somewhere on the property. But it also brought Sarah back to my mind.

Did she really think I should go back to carpentry?

Looking around, my house was full of handcrafted art. I started whittling in trade school, a joke amongst my hometown friends. Sarah used to say my work should be in museums, and everyone would giggle.

Of course, it was lucrative for a while. But it required a commitment I wasn’t ready to make. The firewood industry was booming in New Winford. The market for handcrafted wood sculptures? Not so much.

I took a seat on an old rocking chair on my porch. Sarah had been a bit disappointed when I stopped making stuff, but she was too distracted by screaming toddlers to have a strong opinion on it. All her energy went to that, not to convincing me of the importance of art.

But now, Sarah seemed to feel differently.

I grabbed my phone and opened our old text chain. It had been untouched for a couple years. Ava's birth had been the final straw in Sarah's attention span. And who could blame her?

I typed out a message and left my finger hovering over the send button. It would be so easy to hit send, to let all of the hurt feelings disappear. At least for now.

But instead, I closed the messages app and set my phone on the table.

I brewed myself a cup of coffee and stared at the forest outside my windows. The sun had moved into its early evening position, casting longer shadows over the property.

If she's serious about catching up, she'll find the time.

6

SARAH

After a few days of texting, Vic finally invited me to the lake house for a tour. We had gone back and forth with style inspiration and some vague ideas. But without seeing the place myself, there was only so much I could offer.

I blasted the air conditioning in my minivan, hoping it would keep my light makeup from running in the late spring warmth.

My stomach flipped as I turned down Winford Valley Road. The steep hill was hard for the van to handle.

As the hunk of metal chugged along, I bit my lip, praying the engine would hold out.

Luckily, I reached the wrought-iron fence just as the car was starting to thud. Before I could type anything into the keycode panel, the gate swung open with a low, mechanized hum.

“I guess she’s expecting me.” I shrugged as I pulled into the driveway.

A line of trees covered the first few hundred feet of the driveway, blocking the view beyond the fence from outsiders. But once the minivan rolled past the treeline, my mouth dropped open.

“Holy shit.”

Before me, a dreamy landscape unfolded. The picturesque, farm-style house sat perfectly on the shore of a lightly ebbing lake. The water glimmered as the late spring sun met its surface. Even the old, worn-down windows of the house seemed to reflect that sparkle.

The view was so stunning I had to remind myself to keep my eyes on the drive. Spotting Robin’s work truck at the top of the hill, I pulled up next to it and put the car in park. By the time I turned off the engine and collected my bags, Victoria was stepping out onto the front porch.

The way she waved down at my car, everything about her radiated grace.

I swallowed my nerves, forcing the lump in my throat back down into my chest. This is a business meeting, and I’m a competent business woman. But as soon as I opened the car door, a reflexive apology escaped my lips. “Sorry, I’m late!”

Vic looked down at me, a sly smile taking over her face. “It’s easy to be on time when you live at the destination.”

“True.” I secured my purse to my shoulder and walked up the creaking porch steps.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Victoria stretched out her hand. “Welcome to the lake house.”

Gripping her soft palm, I smiled. “Thanks for having me.”

Even from the porch, I could tell how much work the place needed. The sagging of the roof was enough to make my stomach drop, like the whole thing might just cave in with a wrong glance.

Once we crossed the threshold, Vic lifted a finger to stop me. Reaching to a table by the front, she passed me a bright orange hardhat.

Vic winked. “Don’t want to get in trouble with the county.”

Reluctantly, Sarah put the hat on her head. “I don’t think it goes with my outfit.”

Before the words even left my mouth, Vic’s eyes were scanning my body. “And yet, you’re making it work.”

I felt a flush of red hit my cheeks, nerves suddenly taking over my entire body. “Thanks.” I met her eyes, the amber burning with the reflection of the warm sun. What is wrong with me right now? Am I just terribly touch starved?

Trying to get a hold of myself, I clasped my hands together. “Are you going to show me what we’re working with, or not?”

Victoria smirked. “Follow me.” She launched into a tour, guiding me from room to room. If she hadn’t been so put together generally, I would have guessed that she’d

rehearsed the entire thing. It felt like there wasn't a single detail she would miss.

As we walked through the site, I could already see the number Robin had done on the place. Every inch of drywall had been pulled from the studs, leaving behind thick wood beams and dangling electrical boxes. Sun seeped through the gaps between each post, soaking the entire floor in a golden glow.

"My dream is for the living room table to line up with the dock. When you sit on the couch, I want it to feel like you could just wander out to the water." Victoria gazed out of the windows.

I nodded. "You have such a clear vision. I'm not entirely sure what good I'll be for you."

Victoria walked closer, notes of citrus and leather wafting off of her. My body tingled as the rich scent of her cologne filled my nose.

"Well, I need you to double check me. And to help me find the perfect pieces." Vic smiled down, her heels giving her a few inches on me.

Feeling a lump growing in my throat, I knew I needed to toughen up. Vic didn't need to know about this apparent weak spot I was apparently developing so quickly. Instead, I looked up, letting my blue eyes meet her hazel. "I can definitely do that."

Vic broke the moment with a deep breath. "There is one other thing that I need your help with."

"Robin needs a beat down?" I teased.

"Not yet," Vic laughed as she guided me into a gutted room. The sound struck a chord in me, filling my chest with warmth.



Gesturing to the open space in the room's center, she explained, "But I do need a dining room table."

I raised my eyebrows at her. "And that's the one thing you don't have a vision for?"

She scoffed at me, a light chuckle rising from her chest. "I do, Ms. Greenwood. But I believe you have an in with a local carpenter whose work I admire. Brianne Shaw?"

Stopping myself from laughing, I stammered for words. "Bri? How do you know about her?"

"So you do know her?" An eager smile played at Vic's cheeks.

I shrugged. "Yeah, we've been really close friends for a long time. But how do you know her?"

Or were we? It was a partial lie. But to get a client what they wanted, a little omission wasn't a huge deal.

Victoria leaned against a stud, letting the wood take her weight. "I saw one of her pieces at a gallery in New York. It must have been a decade ago. But I never stopped thinking about it. And then the lake house came on the market. And I knew Shaw had disappeared somewhere into the Hudson Valley."

"So you've been following her?" Narrowing my eyes, I watched Vic get flustered.

"I wouldn't go that far." Victoria rolled her eyes. "No, I just think it might be kismet."

I turned toward the window, shaking my head. "Unfortunately, Bri stopped doing carpentry work. But if you need some firewood, she's your girl."

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Vic crossed the room, reaching me in a matter of seconds. She squared her shoulders with mine. Lowering her head, Victoria let her hands rest on my soft biceps. “And this is why I need your help. Convince her to make me a custom dining table, and I’ll make it worth both of your time.”

I opened my mouth to fight her. “Victoria...”

She raised her finger, letting it gently rest against my lips. “I beg you not to give me bad news.”

The moment her finger met my lips, a jolt of electricity pulsed through my body.

Before I could reply, she smiled at me. “I hired you because you know people around here, and you’re damn good at your job. Do me a favor, just ask her if she’ll do it, and show her this.” She pulled a folded envelope from her trouser pocket and passed it to me.

I opened it and gawked at the number written in the contract. “Fuck.”

“It’s a hard offer to refuse.” Vic smirked.

“No kidding.”

Victoria took in a deep breath. “Hopefully, it’s proof to both of you that I’m willing to pay for the things I really want. No price is too high. Whatever she asks, I’ll answer it.”

I couldn't stop my eyebrow from raising. Surely it was an exaggeration. But with a figure like that on the table... maybe it wasn't.

7

SARAH

After I putaway the envelope, Victoria gave me a copy of the house's blueprints and a lookbook of design inspiration. I flipped through the lookbook as I waited in the parking lot of Cricket's. The bar was quiet, but the Friday crowd was just starting to arrive.

The pages of the book were thick, printed at a professional shop with true color match. Victoria's vision had been honed by years of immense wealth: nothing was out of her reach.

Except, maybe, Brianne Shaw.

I knew – probably better than anyone – that Bri could have made it big in the sculpting world. But she was determined to leave it all behind. And who was I to stop her?

Before I could get too lost in thought, Robin's truck rolled up next to my minivan. She waved at me through the car window as she turned off the ignition and hopped out of the truck.

Getting out of my own car, I greeted Robin with a hug. "Zo didn't want to come?"

Shaking her head, Robin laughed. "No, the last thing the pregnant lady wants is to be full of pee, unable to drink, and surrounded by drunk assholes."

“I can’t argue with that.” I laughed, picturing my sister’s annoyed face.

We tossed open the thin door to Cricket’s, letting a flood of country music pour onto the street. Despite all of New Winford’s recent changes, Cricket’s was still the only bar in town.

Robin waltzed up to the bar and waved down Kyle as we took our usual seats by the door. It kept us cool as the night wore on and meant an easy escape if either of us had met our threshold.

Kyle made his way over, wiping the bar down as he approached. “Good to see y’all. What can I do you for?” Chewing on a piece of gum, he eyed us while we considered our options.

I tried not to laugh at his douchey affect, knowing that he was a sweet guy at his core. “Just a pint of whatever you have on tap will do.”

“Same here.” Robin nodded.

I slid my card to Kyle for him to open a tab. Grabbing the card, he made his way back to the taps and started getting our drinks.

Robin leaned back in the stool, looking at me through the mirror behind the bar. “So, what’d you think of the house?”

I sighed. “Just as pretty as I’d imagined.”

“It’s a real charmer.” Robin shook her head. “Just wish I’d gotten my hands on it first.”

“Like you don’t have enough going on.” I laughed at her. She and Zoey were always

looking for a new project, but parenthood was going to hit them like a freight train. A wonderful, rewarding freight train, but a freight train nonetheless.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I leaned back in my seat with a smirk.

It was kind of fun, knowing that they had no idea what was coming just yet.

Kyle came back, setting two foaming pints on the bar. “Let me know if you need anything.”

“Thanks,” Robin and I hollered in unison.

I took a sip, letting the cold, bitter beer wash down my throat.

“And she told you about the table?” Robin looked over at me.

My shoulders dropped at the word. “Yep.” I licked my lips as I thought about the whole situation. “What do you think?”

Robin shrugged. “I already told Victoria that Zoey tried to pull Bri out of retirement during the Town Hall renovation. But she wouldn’t do it.”

“Really?” My head whipped around to look at Robin. “No one told me that.”

Chuckling, Robin took another drink. “Well, it wasn’t relevant.”

I crossed my arms. “I could have helped.”

Robin waved me off. “No, Zoey didn’t want your help. She wanted to feel like she could pull the contact herself. Remember, she was still trying to convince herself that

everyone here hadn't noticed her decade-long disappearance."

We both laughed at the thought. To her credit, though, Zoey had become such a big part of the community since her return that her life in the city felt a million years away.

My mind went back to Victoria and the piece of paper she had shown me. "If it's any consolation to Zo, Vic is offering far more money than Zoey could have afforded."

Robin raised her eyebrow. "Like how much more?"

I waved her off. "You don't want to know."

Rolling her eyes, Robin crossed her arms. "Still, even with that much, it was never about the money for Bri."

I shrugged. "I mean, it was a little bit. It's hard to make that kind of cash from a craft like that. Maybe it will be enough."

"So, you're gonna ask?" Robin bit her lip.

I looked down at the cold beer in my hands, letting the condensation cool my palms. A smirk teased my cheeks. "I mean I have an obligation to my client..."

Before I could get the words out, Robin was laughing. "Yeah, yeah. Good luck."

Of course it was going to be a long shot, but what choice did I have? I certainly couldn't go back to Victoria without even trying to get the table commissioned. Besides, maybe my history with Bri would be enough to convince her.

## SARAH

The sun was shining as my minivan pulled onto Harding Road. Coffee on an empty stomach had been a terrible idea – my body was tingling with anxiety as I searched for Bri's mailbox.

I hope she's even home.

I hadn't bothered calling – it was a sure way to get rejected. Knowing Bri, I understood this conversation had to happen face to face. If I could catch her off guard, there was a chance that she'd agree.

As I drove down Harding, the van crawling at ten miles an hour, I spotted the simple, metal mailbox that marked the end of Bri's driveway. Turning down the lane, I drove a few hundred feet before spotting the wood sculptures lining the entrance.

Every ten feet or so, an intricate wood carving faced the gravel.

"Wow." I couldn't stop the word from leaving my lips. It had been a long time since I saw Bri's work in person. After Cricket's, I had pulled up some searches of Bri's old pieces, the ones that had been sold from art galleries.



*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

But in person, the sculptures were even more impressive.

I pressed my foot on the break, trying to stop myself from speeding past the work. Or worse: hitting one of them because I was too distracted by the others.

After a moment examining the wood grain of an abstract piece, I shook my head and turned my attention back to the road. I was on a mission.

Within a few seconds, I broke through the treeline to the small yard. A sense of calm washed over me as I scanned the property. The koi pond near the porch gurgled fresh water down a small, rocky waterfall. A small, raised-bed garden rustled in the late spring air. Bri had managed to create something so peaceful.

My eyes landed on her, standing across the property in her wheat-colored, steel-toed boots. She held the new ax over her head, the muscles of her biceps flexing as she swung it down. A loudcrackechoed through the woods as a log split in half.

I put the car in park, trying not to get distracted by the sweat glistening on her body. God, why can't I look away from her? She lifted her head to squint at the car, unsure who had just pulled into her driveway.

When I opened the driver's side door, I waved to her. "Hey there."

Bri laughed as she tried to catch her breath, resting the ax on her shoulder. "Ma'am, have we met before?"

I shrugged as I walked closer, my eyes scanning her body. She wore an old flannel

with ripped-off sleeves – also known as a country muscle tee. Her arms were bulging from the strain of chopping wood.

“Surely you have machines for that? Your services are wildly underpriced if you’re chopping all of New Winford’s firewood by hand.” I teased, now within swinging range.

Bri set the ax against the stump and brought me in for a quick hug. “Sorry, I’m filthy.”

Her scent washed over me, a natural musk that smelled like hard work and pine. I wasn’t sure what was happening to me, but my body felt like it was on fire. Our skin stuck together for a brief moment as we hugged, a dirty image flashing in my mind before I pulled away.

Once we separated, Bri rubbed the back of her neck. “For the record, the stuff we deliver is machine cut. But I prefer to chop my own.”

I let my gaze meet her green eyes, which reflected the newly unfurled leaves of the foliage around us. “Why is that?”

“It’s a little silly.”

I shrugged. “It’s a good thing I’ve known you since... basically forever.”

Bri wiped the sweat from her brow. “The machine cuts are too uniform. You end up with a bunch of medium logs, which is fine for fireplaces or campfires. But I use a wood stove.”

Nodding, I finished her line of thought. “And wood stoves work better with thin wood to start and massive logs to maintain.”

A massive grin took over Bri's face. "Sometimes I forget how much of a country girl you are."

It was true; Zoey and I had grown up with a construction worker father on a massive plot of farmland. We spend our summers helping our mother in the garden and our dad in the shed. Dorothy and William made sure that their two daughters were self-sufficient.

"It comes in handy." I blushed, enjoying how it felt to have Bri smile at me like that. I loved making Bri smile. It made my chest ache in a good but unfamiliar way. It had been years since I'd seen that grin, and I was just now realizing how much I'd missed it.

Bri clapped her calloused hands together. "So, to what do I owe the pleasure?"

Sarah swallowed her nerves. "Why does there have to be a reason?"

Stepping a little closer, Bri raised an eyebrow. "After ten years of hardly speaking, you show up at my house asking questions about the way I chop wood? I know you have an agenda, Sarah Greenwood."

9

BRI

"Fine, you got me." Sarah rolled her eyes, letting her shoulders drop.

I smiled at her, trying to pretend that standing this close to her didn't still electrify every part of me. "Do you want some lemonade?"

Sarah smirked at me. "That's a dumb question."

“You always want lemonade.” I chuckled and nodded toward the house.

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

We walked alongside each other for a few charged strides. Suddenly, I had no idea what to do with my hands. When we reached the side door, I pulled it open for Sarah and let her walk inside. She stood in the entrance, unsure where she was supposed to go.

“Kitchen’s to the left,” I cleared my throat, following her in.

Once we were in the kitchen, I brushed past her toward the fridge to grab a cold pitcher of lemonade. “Don’t you remember the layout from when we were kids?”

Sarah rolled her eyes. “I mean, vaguely. But not enough to let myself into your house.”

When we were in school, Sarah and I spent almost every weekend at each other’s houses. I basically lived with the Greenwoods the summer of sophomore year. It was the last summer we did that, the last summer before Sarah started dating Jason.

“Fair enough.” I rubbed the back of my neck. Placing two glasses on a serving tray, I gripped the metal in my hands and started to carry it toward the screened-in porch on the opposite side of the house. We passed through the small living room, where a small TV sat next to the woodstove.

I could feel Sarah’s eyes scanning the place. “What’s your professional opinion?”

Sarah chuckled. “You’ve done a good job making it your own. It’s cozy but not too kitschy. I think your parents would be proud.”

Swallowing hard, I nodded and led us onto the porch. I set the tray down on a wicker table and took a seat in the glider hanging from the ceiling.

Stopping in her tracks, Sarah's jaw dropped. "Who is this handsome fellow?" She cooed at Oakkie, who was lounging on a stack of wood by the screened windows. Hearing her voice, he turned his head from his outdoor kingdom to investigate the newcomer.

"That's Oakkie. He's a good dude, but not used to company." I stretched my hand out to him, hoping to get his guard down a little bit.

But instead of trying to pet him, Sarah sat down on the glider and looked at him. There was a soft glint in her eye, and after a moment, Oakkie went back to his bird watching.

Once Sarah was settled, I let out a deep breath. "Okay, so what's your agenda?"

"Agenda is a strong word." She tucked her hair behind her ear.

Is she nervous? I couldn't remember ever seeing Sarah nervous. Except maybe at prom, when she thought Jason might not ask her to the dance.

Sarah shrugged. "Did you hear about the lake house?"

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah, some billionaire is probably going to tear the whole thing down."

Lifting her finger, Sarah stopped me. "Well, the billionaire actually wants to keep it standing. She hired Robin to restore the place." Her words lingered in the air.

Since Zoey and LAWSON had come home, bringing a slew of city folk and tourists

with them, New Winford had seen an insane influx of wealthy homeowners – most of whom were tearing down historic beauties to clear space for modern nightmares.

I was still trying to piece together how exactly this involved me, when Sarah continued, “And Ms. Bradley hired me to do the interior.”

Sarah kept her eyes on me, scanning my face for recognition. When I saw her blue eyes, I felt my heart sink. “No.”

Sarah scoffed, her jaw dropping at my harshness. “You haven’t even heard my pitch.”

“I don’t need to.”

Biting the inside of her cheek, Sarah recognized a challenge. “Want to go for a walk?”

I sighed, unable to turn down more time with her... even if it meant facing a hard sell. “Sure.”

Twenty minutes later and we were strolling down a winding trail leading up the mountain.

“You’ve done a great job maintaining the paths alone.” Sarah ran her hand through the ferns that sprouted at the edge of the path.

I nodded. “It was always my favorite part of the house. It’s like having a national park in your backyard.”

As we walked, I looked down at Sarah’s flat shoes. The basic pair of Converse weren’t exactly fit for this kind of walk. But yet, here she was: hiking up a mountain with me.

I couldn't help but relent for her. "Okay, what do you really want?"



*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

“Seriously?” Her face lit up as she whipped her head around to look at me.

Trying to calm my blush, I shrugged. “You came all this way. You get one pitch, and that’s it.”

A cheeky grin took over Sarah’s face. It was like looking at her teenage self all over again. And she was just as stunning now as she was then.

Sarah took in a deep breath as she considered her most effective pitch. “Look, you are the most talented sculptor and carpenter I’ve ever seen. This is a once in a lifetime project. You’ll be supplied with two hundred year old wood from the lakefront property. Ms. Bradley is asking that you design and build a custom dining table for the house. It’s going to overlook the lake.”

She paused for a second, stopping in her tracks and grabbing my hand. I had no choice but to meet her gaze as she continued. “I know you’ll say ‘I’m retired.’ But I’ve been looking in these eyes since second grade, and I can read them like a book. And deep down, I know you want another shot.”

I bit the inside of my check as I looked into her blue eyes.

Sarah stepped closer, the smell of her delicate perfume washing over me. “It’s a one time job. You build this one table, and if you hate it, you’ve made enough money to not have to work for a few years and quietly return to your hermit lifestyle.” She flicked her head back toward my cabin.

Letting the trapped air out of my lungs, I tried to avoid her eyes. I knew if I looked at

her, I'd have no choice but to confess.

And Sarah seemed to know that too, ducking her head to catch my line of sight.

"It wasn't just about the money." I clenched my jaw.

Sarah nodded, lowering her voice to a whisper. "I know that."

The warmth of our friendship filled the woods around us. I let myself melt into her eyes. "I don't know..."

Sarah smirked. "Vic has been following your work for years. She'll just be honored to have something you created."

Groaning, I started walking again. A part of me hoped that if I got my body moving, my mind would follow.

After a moment of crunching leaves under our feet, I turned to look at Sarah. "How much is it?"

Sarah smirked. "Half a million."

I nearly retched at the figure. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

"It's all monopoly money to her." Sarah giggled, a slight blush flushing her cheeks.

My body tensed at her blush. Is there something going on between them? As far as I knew, Sarah was only interested in men. At least, that was the assumption I had made when she chose Jason despite our palpable chemistry.

Sensing my distance, Sarah looked back at me. "What do you think?"

## SARAH

Even as we broke through the woods back into the clearing of Bri's house, all I could get from her was a "maybe."

She walked me over to my car, jaw still clenched. I couldn't stop myself from staring at the sharp, muscular line there. She had always been gorgeous, but her masculine era suited her well.

Stopping next to the driver's side door, I unlocked the car and looked at Bri. "You promise you'll actually think about it? Because if it's just a no, that's totally okay. I just want to know now so I can do something about it."

As I blabbered on, Bri stepped closer to me. She grabbed my hand from my side and held it tightly. Her voice rumbled out of her chest. "I'll actually think about it. But only because it's you asking."

"Thank you." I smiled, fighting down the lump in my throat.

What is that about? I'd known Bri my entire life, and I'd only ever felt at ease with her. But something was different. Maybe it was the smell of her sweat or the comfort of her voice, but I felt myself wanting to be wrapped up in her.

Bri's gaze flicked from my lips to my eyes. Leaning a little closer, she confessed, "It was really nice to see you. I missed spending time just us."

I couldn't stop my chest from rising and falling faster, from watching the way her lips moved as she spoke. My mind scrambled to think of the last time we'd been able to be together like this. Hell, it might have been when I started seeing Jason all those

years ago.

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I forced words out of my throat. “Yeah, maybe we should do it again sometime?”

“Please.” Bri nodded, “You know I’ll answer your calls day or night.” With that, Bri grabbed the handle of the car door and opened it for me.

Blushing, I hopped into the minivan. “Thanks again. Text or call me when you have an answer.”

Bri shook her head, a charming smile teasing her cheeks as she shut the door behind me. She backed away from the car as the ignition turned on.

A part of me didn’t want to pull away. A part of me wanted to stay right there, have some more lemonade, and watch the sun sink in the sky.

But instead, I put my foot on the gas and made my way back down the mountain. I had a meeting that I couldn’t miss.

Ten minutes later, my car rolled to a stop in the back parking lot of my studio. Victoria’s bright red Carrera waited in the visitor spot to the left.

As soon as I opened my minivan door, Victoria climbed out of her sports car. She looked fresh and put together. Her tailored jeans swayed around her ankles while hugging her thighs as she walked toward me.

“Hey.” I smiled at her, balancing my keys in my hand along with my metal water bottle.

Vic's eyes pierced mine. "Good to see you."

It took everything in me to keep my smile at a normal wattage. "You too."

As I led us to the front of the studio, I struggled to juggle the mess of items in my arms. Smirking, Vic reached into the jumble and pulled the keys. With one guess, she grabbed the correct key and unlocked the shop's doors, holding the door for me.

I brushed past her, her cologne filling my nose again. Once the door was closed, I reached my free hand back to flip the shop sign to "Open". But before I could, Victoria's soft, slender hand gently pulled mine back.

"Leave that. I don't want any interruptions." Vic looked down at me, a few inches taller in her heels.

Without thinking too hard, I nodded and dropped my hand. After all, she was paying far more for my time. If she didn't want anyone walking in on our session, who was I to argue?

I cleared my throat and headed to my desk, booting up my computer as Victoria wandered around the studio. Every few feet, she stopped to look at one of the photos of my work. Despite knowing that she was intimately aware of my portfolio, I felt my body tense under her gaze.

As she moved, her tucked in blouse flowed. She was elegant. I couldn't be sure I'd ever seen a woman so captivating.

Just as I was getting lost in the thought, Victoria whipped around and smirked at me. "So, what do you have for me?"

## VICTORIA

I watched closely as Sarah tucked a loose strand of blonde hair behind her ear. She grabbed a thick binder from her desk drawer that thudded when she set it on the worktable at the studio's center.

Taking a seat at the high table, she gestured toward the stool next to her.

It would be easy to take directions from such a beautiful woman.

I sauntered toward her. But instead of sitting, I rested my palms against the wood countertop and leaned forward, feeling a light stretch in the muscles of my forearms. I watched Sarah swallow hard, trying to let her nerves go.

She opened the binder. "I made a physical copy so you have it while moving through the house, but I've already emailed you a digital version."

"Thank you." I tried to stop the corners of my lips from rising as I watched her fiddle with the page's edge.

Flipping to the first section, Sarah pointed to a paint swatch at the top of the laminated sheet. "I've picked some bold colors. The last thing we want is to renovate this gorgeous house and end up with a thousand white walls. The foyer opens up to a deep blue that immediately calms."

I nodded as I looked at the color. It wouldn't have been my first choice, but she was right: it was inviting and brought a sense of calm to a chaotic space. "I like it."

"Great." Sarah chuckled. Warming at my encouragement, she moved through her plan room by room with a bit more confidence in her voice. In a matter of moments, she'd painted a beautiful picture of my future home, taking inspiration from my taste

to create professional designs that were entirely her own. Each room had its own distinct identity, but all of them tied back into the overall style of the house.

Most surprisingly of all, it was somewhere I was truly excited to live. Since I created Pop, everything moved so quickly. Suddenly, I was making millions a year. It was easy to get carried away with the expensive purchases and fast lifestyle. But all of this felt... easy.



## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Licking my lips, I looked down at her. “You’ve done a great job incorporating the building’s history. It’s modern without removing what makes the house special.”

I flipped through each page for a minute before swallowing my nerves. “Any movement on Shaw?”

Sarah sighed. “I was hoping you’d forgotten about that idea entirely.”

“That bad, huh?” I chuckled, pulling away from her a little bit.

Shrugging, Sarah looked around the studio. “Not bad. She said she’d think about it.”

It wasn’t exactly what I wanted to hear, but it wasn’t a no.

“And you showed her the number?” It was hard to imagine anyone turning down half a million. Not unheard of, but unusual.

Sarah nodded. “Yeah, she was impressed by it. I think between that and my connection to her, she’ll do it. But I can’t know for sure.”

I let a wave of air out of my lungs. “Got it. Any idea when you’ll hear?”

Checking the date on her smart watch, Sarah sucked her teeth. “I’m hoping over the weekend she’ll make her choice. Maybe by Monday?”

That would have to do. With a nod, I went back to the binder. I turned each page slowly, taking the time to truly envision each piece in the space. Robin had made

great progress on the house since the sale had gone through a week ago, but I knew Sarah's designs would make Robin's work shine. I felt like I'd stumbled upon a design dream team and I could hardly wait to see how they worked together.

Sarah smiled, gazing up at me with those blue eyes. "What do you think about the kitchen?"

"My chef will love it." I winked. Of course, it was only half a joke.

Letting out a heavy sigh, Sarah rested her chin in her hand while the other rested on the table. "I'm jealous. I'd give anything to have someone cook a meal for me."

My hand went gently toward hers, lightly squeezing her soft hand. Guided by my grip, Sarah's eyes came back to mine. "Then you'll have to come over and let my chef cook for you."

Sarah giggled, shaking her head. "I can't do that."

"Why not?" I clenched my jaw. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't look away from her.

Turning in her stool, Sarah turned to face me. "Because, you don't have a kitchen yet." She grinned up at me and licked her teeth.

I couldn't stop myself from laughing. "Very funny, Ms. Greenwood."

For a moment, silence fell over the studio as we looked at each other.

Is she flirting with me? It felt silly to even consider. She had far bigger priorities than me. A thriving business, her kids, a house to manage, family to see. As far as I was concerned, I was a small fry in Sarah's bucket. A rich fry, maybe, but a small one

nonetheless.

I lowered myself onto my elbows. My ass stuck out as I leaned on the counter and tried to recenter myself. But my eyes were drawn back to Sarah, who hadn't looked away.

Her gaze drifted down to my lips, quickly flicking back up to my eyes. I searched her face for a signal, something to tell me that I should move closer. Our faces drifted closer. From a few inches away, I could see her chest rising and falling rapidly.

Just as I was about to make my move, a loud ringing came from Sarah's pocket. The sharp noise shattered the charged silence.

"Sorry." Sarah gulped as she pulled the phone from her pocket.

The screen read: "Jason". Not that I was trying to look.

Sarah swiped on the call and put the phone to her ear. "Hey." Before I could hear much, she stood from the counter and looked panicked. "Oh fuck. I'll be right there."

Hanging up the phone, Sarah moved back to her desk and grabbed her purse. "I'm so sorry, I have to run out."

"Is everything alright?" I stood up straight, ready to move.

Sarah nodded her head and waved me toward the front door. "I just need to lock up. Can we pick this up later?"

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

With the binder in hand, I nodded and followed her out of the studio. “Of course.”

Over her shoulder, Sarah looked at me. “Sorry to rush out, I just forgot I was on school pickup duty today.”

“That’s okay, family first.”

Once the door was locked, Sarah sped toward the parking lot. Even in the panic, she looked incredible. I couldn’t stop myself from looking at her plump ass as she jogged toward her minivan.

She stopped as she unlocked her car and turned to me. “Maybe we can set up a time to meet soon?”

Hesitating, I tried to visualize my schedule in my head. “I’ll be in Italy over the weekend and into early next week. But after that, I’d love to.”

Sarah smirked. “Perfect.”

Before I could say anything else, she disappeared into the van and was speeding off toward the school.

Left in the dust, I tried to settle my breathing. It was hard to tell what was the rush of being hustled out of the studio and what was just Sarah’s presence. Either way, I had to find a way to keep my cool. Even if she was one of the most stunning women I’d seen. I had hired her to do a job and I wasn’t sure that a boundary she wanted crossed.

SARAH

“Shit. Shit. Shit.” I muttered under my breath as I whipped the minivan into the school parking lot. Over an hour after dismissal, it was a desolate wasteland. All that remained were the cars of a few dedicated teachers who had stayed late – probably to keep an eye on my forgotten kids.

I pulled into the fire lane, left my hazards on, and leapt out of the car.

Just as I did, the front doors of the school opened. Stopping in my tracks, my shoulders dropped with relief.

“Mommy!” Ava yelled as she saw me, breaking off from her dad. Her little feet pattered toward me, smacking the sidewalk. Without any regard for her speed or force, she collided into me with a hug.

I wrapped my arms around her. “I’m sorry I was late, honey.”

Ava shrugged. “That’s okay, Mr. Finch let me play with the Legos in his room while we waited.”

“That sounds fun.” I gave her a pat on the head, smoothing the frizz of her hair. “Why don’t you ask Leila for help with your car seat?”

Jason and Leila stopped in front of me just as the words left my lips. Before she could take off after Ava, I gave Leila a hug.

As Derek trudged up behind Jason, I searched for his eyes. “Hey, hon. Sorry I’m late.”

He shrugged, staring at his feet. Under his breath, he murmured, “It’s fine.”

Brushing past me, Derek loaded himself into the car. I sighed as I looked at Jason, who stood in front of me with an innocent smile. Even now, as all the romantic feelings from our marriage evaporated, I could see why I found him so charming for all those years.

“I’m sor—” I started.

“Don’t be.” He winked. “It’s the benefit of both of us living so close. What happened?”

My mouth opened to speak, but words didn’t quite come out. Nothing had “happened” so to speak. But it wasn’t like me to get so caught up with clients and vendors. I wasn’t sure how the time had escaped me, and I especially wasn’t sure how to explain it to my ex-husband.

“I was held up in a couple meetings. It won’t happen again.” I sighed.

Jason waved me off. “It can happen again, they’re fine.”

Turning to look at the minivan, Ava and Leila had gotten themselves into their seats. In the front, Derek sat staring at the dashboard with crossed arms.

My eyebrow raised. “Are they?”

“He’s been struggling with all of it. It’s not about either of us.” Jason met my eyes. “He just hates change.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

“I know.” Biting the inside of the cheek, I shook my head.

Jason shrugged. “I think this is so much nicer for them than before. We can laugh together, and they aren’t listening to screaming matches.”

I couldn’t stop a laugh from rising in my chest. We had been at each other’s throats for years. Finally letting go of our romantic relationship had felt like lifting the Earth off Atlas’s back. And Jason was right: being friends again was really nice.

He nodded to me and started to walk past, knowing I’d gotten the message.

But before he left, I stopped him. “Can I ask you something?” A part of me regretted the words as soon as they left my lips, but I didn’t know who else to ask about something like this.

“Of course you can.” Jason chuckled, trying to hide the slight concern on his face.

A light breeze blew through the air as I nervously tucked a strand of blonde behind my ear. “How was it for you... to start dating?”

Unable to stop himself, a huge grin took over his face. “Wow, really? You’re going to ask your ex-husband for dating advice?”

All I could do was shrug. “Maybe I am. You’re the only other person I know who’s gone through it. So, that’s my question.”

Jason sighed, letting the inquiry really sink in. I assumed his answer would be

complicated, and maybe a part of me wasn't ready to hear it.

Eventually, he met my eyes. "It's not easy. It kind of feels wrong, even if you know it's not."

You can say that again.

"So what did you do about that?"

He sucked in a deep breath. "Honestly? Kind of just listened to my gut. If my gut told me someone wasn't right, I backed off. And Liv felt right." Stopping for a moment, he looked around at the newly budding trees. "We didn't get to date around. You and I just found each other so young. So I guess I'm trying to say, don't be afraid to make up for that now."

I nodded. "Thanks, Jay."

He smiled at me and started to walk toward his truck in the lot. But he stopped and turned on his heels. "Sarah, you're just going to have to rip the band-aid off. Because you deserve someone great, and they're out there somewhere."

"Right." I shot a finger gun his way and walked to the minivan. We piled into our separate cars, and Jason sped off.

Opening my phone, I pulled up a text chain with Bri. I knew that she probably needed the weekend to think, but I wanted to make sure she didn't forget to actually think about it. So I typed out a quick message that read:

Hey, stranger. Any thoughts yet?

Before I could second guess myself too hard, I hit the send button. The



resultingwhooshwas one of the least comforting sounds I'd heard in awhile.

I let the air I'd trapped in my lungs out and turned to look at my exhausted kids. "What do we think: should we take some Chinese food to your grandparents?"

Ava and Leila lit up, excited squeals filling the backseat.

Resting my hand on Derek's shoulder, I lowered my head into his gaze. "Der?"

He shrugged. "Okay." As much as he wanted to be down in the dumps, a light smile played on his cheeks.

"Perfect." I put the car in drive and got us rolling.

My mom was already waiting outside by the time I turned down the long driveway. Even from the car, I could see how giddy she was to see her grandbabies. Despite the fact that I brought themover nearly every week, Dorothy always acted like it was the first time in ages.

Once the car was parked, I opened the passenger doors and helped Ava out of her car seat. Derek was already trodding toward the front steps of the house.

"Hello, darlins." Dorothy wrapped Derek in a huge hug, one that Leila got absorbed into once she was in hugging range.

I couldn't help but laugh as I held Ava's hand. Derek and Leila pried themselves from their grandma's grip and headed inside, racing to find their grandpa. Once Ava was close enough, Dorothy opened up her arms for Ava.

She dropped my hand in nanoseconds to be taken in by her grandma.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Once Ava was done and heading to find William too, Dorothy turned her attention to me. She smiled at me and pulled me in just the same. She hugged like a bear, with hidden muscles reserved for squeezing her loved ones in her arms.

“How are you, sweetheart?” She gently rubbed my back.

I broke away from her hug and sighed. “I’m just fine.”

Stealing the plastic bag of takeout from my grip, she ushered me inside.

The house was alive with the sound of my father wrestling his grandchildren. I poked my head into the living room, where William’s goofy grin was lighting up the entire house.

Looking up from his roughhousing, Dad winked at me. “Hi, Sarah Bear.”

Before I could even respond, Derek was launching a full-frontal attack on him, with Ava and Leila following diligently behind.

I shook my head as I made my way down the long hallway to the kitchen. Robin had been slowly updating the kitchen for Dorothy. I’d tried to offer my own help, but I was quickly shot down by my mom’s very strong design opinions.

As I walked into the open room, Dorothy had peeled open the takeout containers and placed large spoons in each plastic tupperware. A stack of bowls and plates waited neatly on the island. Dorothy always managed to turn something as small as takeout dinner into an entire production.

“So, just fine?” Dorothy pursed her lips at me.

Taking a seat in a rustic bar stool on the island, I leaned on the countertop. “It’s just complicated.”

Dorothy stared me down, trying to read between the lines. “Jason’s still behaving?”

“Of course.” I nodded. “We actually had a nice chat today. I was late to pick up the kids.”

Raising an eyebrow at me, Dorothy scoffed. “You were late to pick up? How did that happen?”

For a moment, I considered how to answer that. There was the truth: I was being relentlessly flirted with by two stunning women who both wanted my attention. And there was what I wanted my mom to know.

So I settled on a shrug. “Work distracted me a bit. I have a new project.”

“I’ve heard, on the lake house.” Dorothy smirked down into the food she was arranging. “I’ve heard Victoria Bradley is just stunning.”

Before I could stop myself, the words were coming out of my mouth. “She really is. And just commands a room.”

Dorothy lifted her head and nodded, a sly smile on her face. “That’s what I’ve heard. So, what did Jason have to say?”

Meeting her gaze, I knew I was busted. Any attempt to hide what was going on in my brain was completely useless around my mom. She could read me like a book, especially since the divorce forced me to open up to her more.

I tapped my finger against the counter. A cold jolt shooting through my fingertip with each touch. “He thinks that at some point I have to rip the bandaid off.”

“Good man.” Dorothy let her hand rest on the island. Clearing her throat, Dorothy looked at me. “I would’ve thought you’d be more hesitant to tell me something like that.”

I tried not to laugh but a giggle erupted from my throat. Pointing to the mounted picture of Zoey and Robin on the wall, I teased my mom. “Well, I think Zoey already broke that ice.”

Before Dorothy could say anything else, the kids burst into the room. Sweat dripped down their faces from their wrestling session. Without an invitation, they followed their grandma’s protocol and dished themselves food.

When there was a break in the chaos, Dorothy reached across the counter and grabbed my hand. She winked. “Good for you, darling.”

Then a huge hand clapped against my back, almost knocking the wind out of me. “Did you see Zoe’s latest scan?” William grinned as he leaned in, showing off a blurry picture on his phone.

“No, I haven’t.” I grabbed his phone and looked at the sonogram. “Doctors are happy?”

William nodded, unable to tear his eyes from the picture. “Thrilled. Everything is perfect.”

Rolling her eyes, Dorothy chuckled. “We’re all very glad to see that your father’s enthusiasm for new babies in the family was not limited to the first three.”

The stack of plates clattered as William grabbed his own. “And I’ll be this excited for every one, even if we end up with a hundred grandbabies.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I could tell from the look on his face that even a hundred wouldn't ever be enough for him. Being a grandparent suited both of them really well. Seeing them with my kids like this, beaming smiles plastered to their faces, was enough to make me teary eyed. They hadn't been perfect parents – dad, a little quick to anger; and Dorothy, a bit neurotic. But watching them so carefree now felt healing.

As everyone else finished dishing their food, I thought I felt my phone buzz in my pocket. Maybe Bri finally has an answer. The thought alone, of getting to work with Bri, made my heart race. I would've taken any excuse to see her more often.

But when I unlocked the device, it was just an email alert.

To be safe, I opened my text chain with Bri, hoping she'd have said something by now. But there was still nothing.

13

BRI

The morning dew was a thick blanket over the fresh, spring grass. Most of the team was already out on the field, tossing softballs back and forth to warm up. I set my bag in the dugout, kicking off the wet sand that had already settled into the grooves of my cleats.

“What's up, Shaw?” Cleo nodded from the other end of the bench.

I looked over at them and shook my head. “Begging for these games to be scheduled

later in the day.” Knowing I was past my youth, I stretched out my tight legs and bent in half. My aching back pulled tight, sending a guttural groan to my throat. Maybe I did go a little hard on the wood chopping yesterday.

Once my legs were good and loose, I grabbed my glove and a worn, yellow ball before heading out of the dugout. As I passed Cleo, they pulled me in for a rough hug, patting my back as they teased, “Not happening. The rest of us have lives.”

Giving them a playful shove, I jogged out onto the wet grass toward the rest of the team. Cleo stayed by the dugout entrance, waiting for me to get into position. After waving hello to all of my other teammates, I took a spot across from Cleo and stretched out my arms. Humid air filled my lungs as I breathed through my tense muscles. I was well past the age where I could just run out onto the field and play without fear of injuries.

And I couldn’t afford an injury this early into the season. For a recreational softball league made up of teams across the Hudson Valley, these women and enby’s took each game seriously. So much so, that we often had practices during the week to bolster our roster by increasing our collective play time.

Once I was ready, I chunked the ball toward Cleo. Letting the wind carry the yellow leather across the distance, I didn’t worry too much about adding spin to the throw.

The ball met Cleo’s glove with a satisfying clap. As they tossed the ball back, I asked, “Anything new with you?”

Cleo shrugged. “Not really. The shop has been really slow lately.”

“That’s a shame.” With each sentence, our volley continued, the ball methodically passing between us like a talking stick – ensuring each person got a fair amount of speaking time.

“What about you?” Cleo asked, waiting for my throw.

I couldn’t stop the sigh from escaping my lungs, accidentally veering the ball off course. Cleo jumped for it, a grunt escaping their chest as they caught it. “Sorry!” I winced as I watched them land.

“Bastard!” Cleo teased as they jogged back to position. “I hear Sarah Greenwood’s been all up in your shit.”

I rolled my eyes. “And how would you have heard that?”

Shrugging, Cleo turned the ball in their hand for a moment before throwing it back. “Book club can be very eye opening.”

“Fucking Zoey.” It was always the sister. After a moment, I relented. “Yeah, she asked if I would make a custom piece for a client of hers.”

Cleo’s eyebrows lifted, standing up straighter as their glove closed around the ball. “Really? But you haven’t done that in years.”

I was suddenly conscious of the pairs around us pausing their conversations. The deafening silence was not subtle – if there was one thing I knew about this town, it was that everyone was a gossip, and I wasn’t sure I wanted to be the subject of everyone’s conversations this week.

Luckily, before I had to come up with a response, the coach called everyone back into the dugout. Jogging over to Cleo, I wrapped an arm around their shoulder as we headed back. Their hair was up in a tight bun, but the loose hairs at the base of it tickled my arm as we walked.

Safe from prying ears, I continued in a hushed voice. “She wants to turn a tree from



the property into a massive dining table for the lake house renovation on Spring Road.” I sat down on the bench and took a sip of water. “Apparently, this rich lady, Victoria, requested me specifically. From what I can gather, it was part of the reason she chose Sarah to be her designer.”

Cleo’s forehead wrinkled as they sat next to me. “Wait, Victoria... Bradley? The app developer?”

Watching the opposing team take their positions on the field, I nodded. “Yeah. Google says Pop was the app store's most downloaded app for like a month or something.”

Cleo held up their phone to me. Sure enough, on their home screen, the pink and lavender app had a home. “This shit is awesome. It’s everything sapphics could ever want. There’s a dating function, news, community events, message boards – it’s basically an online, sapphic headquarters.”

“So I’ve heard.” I leaned back in my chair. Victoria’s power and influence was inescapable.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

A gruff call of “Batter up!” ripped through the air, momentarily pausing our conversation. I took a deep breath as our first batter headed onto the field. We were likely going to get creamed out there, but I tried to remind myself that this was supposed to be for fun.

Punching my arm, Cleo pulled me back into our conversation. “This is great news. She has crazy connections. She could probably get your work in front of any art dealer in the world. You have to do it.”

I laughed. “Cleo, that’s not the problem. I’m retired.”

“But wasn’t the lack of money part of it?” Cleo stood from the bench as the coach gestured that their turn at bat was coming.

Shaking my head, I stood, moving to the fence while they practiced their swing just outside the dugout. “I mean that was a part of it, but that’s not all of it. And I don’t know that I want my comeback to be some rich lady’s table.”

“Cleo, get a move on. You’re on deck.” The coach rolled her eyes.

Nodding, Cleo started moving toward the dugout exit. But they called back to me. “Maybe it’s not really about Bradley. Maybe it’s more about what you can do for Sarah.”

Before I could argue with them, Cleo walked out onto the field.

Our conversation continued like that for the rest of the game, one of us dragged out

onto the field while the other anxiously awaited more details.

They had a point. Sarah had been a great friend to me over the years – putting aside her very fair absence while raising three kids.

After a sprint from third base to home plate, Cleo returned to the dugout out of breath and wiping sweat from their forehead. I passed them their bottle so they could chug some water.

“You know what else is weird?” I blurted out as soon as Cleo sat down.

Cleo whipped their head around to look at me. “Really? Not even ‘Nice run, you may have won us the game’?”

Laughing, I patted Cleo on the back. “Well done.”

“What else is weird?” Cleo said between gasps for air.

“I felt like she was... checking me out.” The words felt silly coming out of my lips in a low whisper. I’d only ever heard Sarah talk about guys. But the way she looked at me felt hot.

Cleo’s eyebrows lifted. “Really?”

With a shrug, I looked out on the field where one of our teammates got out. “I couldn’t really explain it. But it just felt like she had wanted me all of those years and was just now figuring it out.

Cleo could sense my confusion. They’d known Sarah almost as long as I had. We’d all seen her relentless adoration of Jason over the last decade.

Eventually, they leaned back onto the bench and laughed. “I mean, maybe she’s opened her mind up to somenewoptions? She got married to her quarterback boyfriend right out of high school. Most of us didn’t figure out our queerness until college at the earliest.”

They weren’t wrong. Even I struggled to understand my feelings for Sarah back then. I knew I loved her and wanted the very best for her. Despite Jason being a nice guy, I knew someone – maybe even I – could be better. To some extent, Sarah withdrawing from the friendship had felt like a reset for me: a chance to let those feelings fade so our friendship could survive.

But just the thought of her being interested in me brought all of those old hopes back.

I pulled out my phone and looked at her text again as Cleo got up to refill their water. Looking at the texts, I knew I owed her an answer. But I still hadn’t figured out where my mind was.

Maybe another chat will help.

I typed out a message and hit send:

Hey. I think I need to talk it through one more time. When can I see you?

I set my phone in my lap and waited patiently. The field was switching over, and the New Winford team was about to play the field. Just as I was about to set it on the bench, a buzz radiated from my phone. It was a speedy response from Sarah:

Kids are out of the house tonight, if that works. We could do pizza?

A blush immediately took over my face. I quickly sent a text confirming and ran out onto the field. Each stride felt lighter. A part of me knew she would convince me to

make the piece. And most of me liked that.

SARAH

I scooped up piles of kids' clothes as I ran from one end of the house to the other.

“Why did I offer tonight? This place is a fucking disaster.” Rubbing my forehead, I checked the time. With just a few minutes to go, I needed to find a way to make it seem like I wasn’t living in constant squalor.

I was about to ask myself why I thought Bri would care when the front door rang.

“Shit.” I muttered.

Throwing open the entryway closet, I tossed the clothes on the floor and slammed the door shut.

I stood next to the door, fixing my flyaways in the mirror and taking a deep breath. With a nod at my harried reflection, I swung open the door to a smiling Brianne Shaw. “Hi there.”

“Hello,” she ducked her head, almost looking bashful. Why did that sheepish grin make my stomach turn?

Swallowing my nerves, I tucked a piece of hair behind my ear and stepped to the side, gesturing for her to enter. “Come on in.”

As she walked in, Bri looked around curiously. It was a pretty generic house for an interior designer: a McMansion built just before the 2008 financial crisis, just like

every other house on the block. It was also one of the only places Jason and I could afford when we first found out I was pregnant.

“It’s beautiful.” Bri hugged me as she came inside, her earthy scent strong under the smell of fresh body soap.

I shrugged. “I wouldn’t say that. But it works, and it’s fairly kid-proof.”

Smiling at me, Bri nodded. “And that’s a beautiful thing.”

Not wanting her to see my blush, I walked her through the house toward the kitchen where steaming boxes of pizza waited for us. “I’m so sorry for the mess.”

“Sarah, please. I saw your room in your parents’ house. This is a vast improvement.” Bri couldn’t hold back her hardy laugh. Licking her lips, she walked up to the pizza boxes and lifted the lids.

I watched her face closely, trying to sense if I’d picked something she’d like.

Rubbing her hands together, Bri smirked. “This is quite the selection, Sarah. Two pies, four types.”

I walked closer to her and peeked inside. “I never get to order fun flavors because the kids always want cheese and pepperoni. So I just kind of committed.”

“I love it.” Bri turned to look at me, our faces just a few inches apart as the steam from the boxes rose around us.

Nervous about what would come next, I grabbed a plate and handed it to Bri more roughly than I meant to. “Help yourself.”

She broke our eye contact and happily dished out a couple slices. She picked one veggie slice and one buffalo chicken to start, rinsing her hands in the kitchen sink before taking her plate over to the table.

As I started to dish my own slices, Bri turned back to look at me. “Where should we sit?”

I smiled. “Living room. The dining table is weirdly sticky no matter how many times I wipe it.”

“I guess that’s what kids are for.” Bri chuckled as she set her plate down on the mid century modern coffee table.

Pulling apart the cheesy pizza, I took a slice of buffalo chicken and an absolutely loaded sausage and pepper. My mouth watered at the sight. I could barely take my eyes off the steaming hot food to navigate toward the living room.

Bri was stationed on the floor, her legs spread out under the coffee table. Like a well-mannered country girl, she hadn’t touched her plate.

“You didn’t have to wait.” I teased as I slipped onto the floor next to her.

Bri shrugged. “When was the last time someone waited for you?”

The question made my chest hurt. The answer was even worse. Honestly... I couldn’t remember. And to be fair, since the divorce, I didn’t bother making the kids wait for me. There was always too much to do and not enough time.

“A while.” I finally managed.



*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Once I was settled, Bri lifted her veggie slice to mine, and we cheersed. “To getting closer.”

I giggled as our slices collided. “I wouldn’t expect you to start with a veggie slice.”

“Well, then the boring bit is out of the way. I can indulge in the savory and know that I ate my vegetables.” Bri winked.

We both knew the small amount of veggies piled on top of a pizza hardly met the FDA’s recommended portions. But life was for living.

I took a bite of my own slice, digging into the sausage and peppers first. It was steaming hot, so much so that I almost burned my tongue. But it felt like heaven: hot food and peaceful quiet. I could still see the steam drifting off the pie.

A moan escaped my lips as I chewed. “Fuck, that’s good.”

Bri laughed. “This is genuinely so fun to watch.”

Suddenly self-conscious, I could feel her eyes watching my lips. I tossed down my slice on the plate and grabbed a napkin, wiping the grease from my mouth.

Bri put her hand on my forearm and lowered her voice to a low rumble. “You don’t need to clean up for me. I like you just as you are.”

A lump the size of Texas filled my throat, making it hard to breathe. Has Bri always been this charming?

I set down my food and smiled, trying to stop the pulse of excitement running through my body. “So, you wanted to talk about the table.”

“Boring.” Bri teased as she wiped her own hands. “I honestly don’t even know what I want to ask.”

Giggling, I finished chewing my bite of pizza. “Well, what’re your hesitations?”

Bri looked away from me, her eyes scanning the room. I could tell that she was taking in the family pictures on the walls, the thrifted art, and the mess buried under every piece of furniture.

I tried not to get self-conscious as she looked around.

Eventually, Bri broke the silence. “What if it’s not what she wants?”

“It will be.” I had to stop myself from laughing. Bri was oblivious to how desperately Victoria wanted a custom piece.

Rolling her eyes, Bri nudged me. “But how can you know that?”

I looked up at the ceiling, trying to find the words. I knew if I looked at her, I wouldn’t ever figure out what to say. “Because she’s obsessed with your work. She likes the unattainable. Even if it sucks, she’ll like knowing that she got you. Honestly, if she hates it, she’ll just buy a new one.”

As soon as the words left my lips, my brain was connecting the dots. Is that why Vic wants me?

“But I haven’t made a piece in so long. What if I can’t?” Bri bit the inside of her cheek, an unusual insecurity washing over her.

Resting my head on my hands, I chuckled. “I don’t think you know how to fail.”

Silence fell over us.

After a minute, I turned toward her. “Why did you really quit before?”

Bri smirked, her dimples creating stunning caverns on her perfect face. After licking her lips, she caved. “Only Sarah Greenwood can make me confess.”

I winked at her. “It’s my specialty.” Shifting my body closer to hers, I watched her carefully.

Meeting my eyes, Bri sighed. “Honestly, it was exhausting. I felt like no matter how well I did, there was always something more to strive for. Sculpture was competitive. The galleries had incredibly limited space for floor pieces. It was too much. And somewhere along the way, I lost my drive to do it.”

I scoffed. “Hard to imagine that you would have struggled to find a muse.” Just looking at her, it felt impossible that anyone would turn her down. Hell, I wouldn’t.

Shrugging, Bri broke our eye contact. She grabbed both of our plates and walked to the sink. “None of them were what I was looking for.”

Before I could get to it, she started to pack up the pizza into baggies, stacking them neatly on the counter. I stood and sauntered after her, unable to keep my eyes off how good her ass looked in those jeans. Have I ever looked at an ass like this? My throat tightened at the thought of how it would feel pressed against me.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I tried to shake the idea. “You don’t need to do that.”

“I know, but I want to.” As she waited for the faucet to warm up, she sighed. “I’ll make the table. But that’s it. I won’t let you convince me to make anything else.”

A nervous smile played on my cheeks. “Really?”

She nodded and rolled her eyes. “Yes, really. Only because it’s you.”

“I’m flattered.” I swallowed hard as I watched Bri move.

She placed the bags in the fridge and moved to the sink where she sudsed up a sponge and got to washing. As she washed, her eyes wandered around the kitchen. “It’s weird to be here.”

My face scrunched up. “How so?”

“I don’t know... hanging out in the house you lived in with Jason.” Bri swallowed hard, avoiding what she really meant.

A part of me knew exactly what she meant. But I wasn’t prepared to make any assumptions about how she felt. Maybe she did just mean that she saw us as teenagers and this is all so adult.

I walked closer to her, not wanting to shout over running water and the clanking of dishes. “Why, Brianne?”

Bri set the plate down in the sink, her chest rising and falling rapidly as she considered her words. With her chin low, she turned her head toward me. “You know why, Sarah.”

Duh. I always knew. I never wanted to be that cringey girl who assumed her queer friend was flirting with her. But the connection I felt with Bri always felt different. I just couldn’t figure out how.

Until now.

I knew she had felt the same. And maybe even still did.

My body gravitated toward hers, my arms wrapping around her waist as she faced the sink. I felt like my heart was in my throat, leaping from my chest to hers.

Feeling my heat pressed to her back, Bri turned off the water, resting her hands on the edge of the porcelain. I clasped my own over her toned stomach, feeling her tight abs underneath the loose t-shirt. My head rested against her back, just as strong as her core. It rose and fell with each of her breaths.

Bri’s body relaxed, her shoulders dropping as her head tilted back to rest on mine. “Sarah...”

“Yes, Bri?” I muttered into her shirt.

Turning in my arms, she faced me. She placed her hands on my face and lifted my chin toward her lips.

For a moment, she paused. I opened my eyes just enough to show her how badly I wanted to kiss her. And before she could ask, I moved my head in and closed the inch-wide gap between us, letting our lips finally meet.

SARAH

I pulled back to meet her eyes. Did I really just kiss my high school best friend?

It felt insane, and yet all I wanted to do was go back to Bri's lush lips.

A fire burned in her green eyes, one I hadn't seen in a very long time. I hoped she saw the same in mine. Because I had no idea what I was doing, but I wasn't about to stop.

Nodding to Bri, I pressed my lips into hers again. Part of me wondered if the spark would fade on a second kiss, but I was wildly wrong. A jolt of excitement pulsed through my body, heading straight to my center.

It was unlike anything I'd ever felt before.

I let my hands grip Bri's waist, pulling her hips into mine as a light moan escaped her lips.

Between kisses, Bri spoke, "Sarah, are you sure?"

I nodded, my hand drifting down toward the belt loops on her worn jeans. "I've never been more sure of anything." Moving forward, I backed Bri into the counter where the soapy dishes clinked together as we pressed against the cold stone. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't seem to get close enough to her.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Bri let out a groan of pleasure as she gripped the back of my neck, teasing my lips with her tongue. She was being coy, still unsure if her “straight” best friend was actually making out with her.

So I responded the only way I knew how: by letting my own tongue explore her lips and then her mouth. She tasted sweet, her breath somehow fresh even after two slices of pizza.

We stayed like that for what felt like an eternity before I pulled away and gripped the nape of her neck. “Do you want to see my bedroom?”

Bri couldn’t stop a deep laugh from erupting in her chest. “What is this, a sleepover?”

“Would you like that?” I whispered, leaning in and grazing her ear with my lips.

A desperate whimper escaped her lips as she nodded.

I brought my hand to where hers rested on my neck and intertwined our fingers. Holding her hand, I led her through the house toward the stairs in the foyer.

As we ascended the staircase, I could feel her eyes on my ass, so I made a point to sway my hips a bit wider. I just wanted to tease her more. When I looked over my shoulder at her, she was licking her lips.

Good to know how well that works.

By the time we reached the top of the stairs, Bri was chomping at the bit.

We walked to the end of a narrow hallway toward the primary bedroom. When we reached it, Bri stopped in the doorway to look around.

“Cute,” she said as her gaze flicked around the room. The walls were a boring white but covered with colorful art. She slowly stepped into the room, trying to take in her surroundings.

But I wasn’t willing to wait. After that kiss, it felt like I’d already waited too long to bring her up here.

I grabbed the belt loops of her jeans and pulled her close to me, a moan rising in Bri’s throat as our bodies pressed together. Our lips met again, like two magnets that had been separated for... two decades.

With each kiss, we drifted closer to my king bed. Bri turned so my back was to the mattress. She stepped closer, forcing my knees to buckle and sending my body down to the bed. I looked up at her, desperation in my eyes.

Her eyes darted down to my breasts. But she lifted her head and met my eyes. “Is this...” Gesturing toward the bed, I could fill in the blanks.

“No,” I shook my head. “I sold that bed as soon as he moved out.” I leaned back, resting on my elbows as I looked into her emerald eyes. “This one still needs to be broken in.”

It was far more forward than I had intended, but clearly somewhere deep down, I knew exactly what I wanted. And that was Bri... all of her.

A cheeky smirk took over Bri’s face. She gripped my thighs with rough hands and lifted them off the ground. In one fluid motion, she pulled my center to hers.



I whimpered. “Fuck, you’re strong.”

Bri chuckled and leaned down, pressing her body between my legs. “You asked why I hand chop my wood. This is the real answer.”

If I could have laughed, I would have. But instead, all I could manage was a desperate moan as my hands found her biceps. She pressed her lips against mine as I squeezed the bulging muscles. With each caress of her tongue, Bri pressed her core into mine.

She hadn’t even touched my folds, and I was already dripping wet for her.

After a moment, Bri stood up straight and ripped off her t-shirt. I watched the fabric lift, following the hem as it exposed dripping abs and a sexy, black sports bra. Her shoulders were broad. And although I could tell how strong she was, all I really wanted was to rest my head on her soft chest.

Bri clenched her jaw as she looked down at me in the bed. “I desperately want to take off your clothes.”

“Then do it.” I bit my lip.

Like an uncaged beast, Bri sprung into action. Her hands made swift work of the buttons on my jeans, pulling the denim over my wide hips. Despite her ferocity, she was careful to make sure the fabric didn’t snag on the panties underneath.

She peeled the jeans off my soft legs and threw them to the ground. Pausing for a brief moment, Bri ran her fingers from my ankles up my tensed calves, past my knees, and over my trembling thighs.

“God.” Bri whispered as she shook her head.

Licking her lips, she went back to her work. She leaned back toward my body, tracing lush kisses up my stomach. Sliding her hands under my shirt, Bri found my hips and gripped them as she pressed her mouth into the healed scar that lay between the lace panties and my stomach.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

After a moment, she brought her mouth to the hem of my blouse. Using her teeth, Bri slowly lifted the shirt off my body. I arched my back to help her until she got to my chest.

Dropping the fabric from her mouth, Bri released her grip on my hips and used her calloused hands to pull the shirt over my head. Without taking her attention off of me for even a second, Bri tossed the shirt to the ground and kissed my neck.

“You’re so stunning.” She mumbled as she kissed from my neck to my collarbone, making her way down to my breasts. Her warm hands cupped them as she planted her lips against my sensitive nipple.

I put my hand in her short, brown hair, gripping it slightly as she teased me. “Oh god.”

Bri looked up from her work and smirked at me. “You have no idea how long I’ve wanted you.”

And although that was technically true, from the way she was touching me, it felt pretty obvious. She’d wanted me like this for as long as she’d known what desire was.

But I pulled her face toward mine, our skin pressing together as her torso shifted over mine. Gazing straight into her eyes, I challenged, “Then show me.”

It was all Brianne needed to hear. She kissed me, pressing her tongue against mine as her hand drifted from my waist down toward my lace panties.

Her fingers played with the fabric for a moment, lifting the edges to skim the sensitive skin just below my stomach. But rather than sneaking her hand inside, she grazed over the fabric, feeling for the top of my slit. Once she found it, she pressed her fingers against my folds, freeing a moan from my throat.

“Fuck, that was fast.” My eyes flashed with excitement, stunned how quickly she seemed to understand my body.

Bri smiled up at me, her fingers carefully massaging over the lace. With each stroke, I could feel my pleasure soaking the fabric, making Bri’s every movement easier.

My hips grinded along her hand, searching for more pleasure.

Pulling her hand away, Bri licked her lips as she began to pull my panties down. “Can I take these off?”

I nodded, faster than I meant to. But I was undeniably eager. I needed to feel her close to me, inside me, everywhere that she could be.

With a giddy smirk, Bri drew the lace down my body. When she got it over my ass and began to pull it down my leg, a string of pleasure clung from my folds to the panties. I let out a soft whimper.

“Someone’s excited.” Bri’s eyes burned like an emerald forest fire, hungry for me.

Biting my lip, I tried to remember how to breathe. “I’ve never felt like this before.”

Once the underwear was off my body and in Bri’s hand, she ran her finger through the slick lace. Her calloused fingers were a stark contrast to the delicate weave of my panties. But watching her gently play with the fabric, my throat breathing escalated. She brought her now slick finger to her mouth and sucked the bead of my pleasure off

of it, a primal grunt erupting from her chest as she tasted me.

The sound of her excitement sent a jolt of electricity through my entire body. I couldn't be sure I'd ever felt this desired.

"I want to taste more of you." Bri clenched her jaw as she stood over me.

Even from the bed, I could see her chest heaving with anticipation. I bit my lip. "You can have as much of me as you'd like."

A giddy smile flashed across her face as she fell down to her knees. Looping her arms around my legs, she pulled my body to the edge of the bed.

"Oh fuck." I whimpered as she put me into position, my clit throbbing at her strength.

Bri flashed me her signature grin one more time before she started kissing up my thighs.

With each movement, my mind jumped to all the things I didn't do to prepare. I hadn't even considered our pizza night would have turned into steamy sex. But then again, I decided to wear the red panties for a reason – one that I was just putting my finger on.

Just before Bri's face lowered into my slit, I sat up on my elbows. "Sorry I didn't shave, I didn't think..."

Bri rested her forehead against my leg and laughed, the rumbling in her chest sending a vibration through my whole body. "Don't you dare apologize, Sarah. I like all of you, exactly as you are." Without another word, she buried her face in me. It started with a gentle kiss, her tongue slowly pressing against my hood.

I fell back into the mattress, my elbows beginning to tremble.

Wrapping her arms around my legs and resting her hands on my hips, Bri let her mouth take over. With wide strokes, her tongue explored my center. She started near my clit, pressing her tongue into the throbbing bead. But with each lick, she would venture lower – getting closer and closer to my dripping entrance.

A part of me was shocked by how quickly she found the right spot, by just how well she already knew my body. But it was Bri, so I should've known this would be another thing she was excellent at.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

She moaned as she bobbed her head.

It was impossible to stop squirming under her touch. I wanted her everywhere. Rocking my hips, I tried to lift my center closer to her tongue. But she wasn't going to indulge me until she was ready.

She opened her eyes, a sultry look as she watched my body grind against her mouth. Watching me closer, she brought a hand down to her own center and began massaging her folds.

A grunt escaped Bri's lips, vibrating my clit in her mouth. I groaned at the feeling.

The thrust of her tongue grew more intense as she touched herself. All I wanted was to watch her.

"Bri, get on the bed." I said as I moved away from the edge of the bed, clearing space for her. "Being on your knees can't be comfortable."

Following orders, Bri climbed into the bed and laid on her stomach. Before she put her mouth back on my slit, she smirked. "I'd kneel on miles of spikes for you, Sarah."

I couldn't even respond before her tongue was back to my clit. The slight break and the sexy grumble of her voice brought me closer and closer to my peak. And now, I could watch Bri as her hips pressed into her own hand.

As she slipped her tongue inside me, I felt myself open for her. I needed more of her. She thrust her tongue in and out of my entrance, taking my pleasure with her. I felt

her swallow my slickness, the thought sending another jolt of anticipation through my body.

Bri's own rubbing grew more fervent, moans escaping her lips every few seconds. As she pressed her face deeper into my center, I couldn't stop my thighs from squeezing together.

I was worried about her being able to breathe until I watched her hand speed up on her own slit. Her grip tightened on my hip, pulling me closer. I wasn't sure how someone could have such a strong tongue.

Her licking had grown so pointed and firm that I had no choice but to grip her thick hair. Under my fingers, I could feel how hard I was holding her head. But she liked it, pressing into me with equal force.

My body began to tremble, the pleasure taking over my entire being. The heat of her ragged breath sent me over, a wave of excitement making my body seize.

"Oh fuck, don't stop." I commanded her. My thighs wanted to close desperately, but Bri's face made it impossible. Instead, I wrapped my legs around her head and intertwined my ankles. It relieved enough pressure for my body to let go.

I let out a scream as Bri pressed her mouth against my clit. As I stopped grinding against her, she flicked her tongue into my folds.

With a whimper, my body tensed and froze as the final waves of pleasure washed over me.

"Fuck." I groaned, tightening my grip in Bri's hair. With a final shudder and moan, my legs fell limply to the bed.



Bri lifted her head, smirking at me as I tried to catch my breath.

My heart raced as I met her green eyes. “You’re fucking incredible.”

“You’re one to talk.” Watching me closely as my breathing slowly normalized, Bri laughed.

“What’s so funny?” I raised an eyebrow.

With a shrug, Bri teased me. “After this many years waiting for you, I didn’t think you’d be so easy.”

Rolling my eyes, I nudged her with my hand. I can’t believe I made her wait so long.

16

BRI

I couldn’t stop looking at her. Watching Sarah come while I ate her out was a holy experience.

I wiped my mouth with my hands and made my way toward her face.

Her chest heaved as she caught her breath. I laid next to her, resting my hand on her chest as I settled in.

She opened her eyes to meet mine, holding my wrist in her hands. Feeling her heartbeat, my center continued to throb. But first and foremost, I wanted to check in on her.. I had no idea if Sarah knew what the night had in store when I knocked on her door. But as far as I was aware, she’d never been with anyone beside Jason... especially not a woman.

I rested my head on her shoulder. “Are you okay?”

## Page 29

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Licking her lips, Sarah nodded. “I’m more than okay. How did you learn to do that?”

I couldn’t help the chuckle that rose in my chest. “Practice, I guess. And just listening to your body.”

The words made Sarah’s eyebrows lift. Just as her breathing started to level, she sniffed the air. “Is that... your hand?”

A sudden wave of nervousness washed over me, my cheeks flushed pink. “I think so, sorry. I can move it.”

As I started to shift, Sarah gripped my hand hard and brought my fingers to her face. Meeting my eyes, she smirked. “Don’t you dare. I want some for myself.”

“Really?” I grinned at her, not expecting her to be so eager.

Sarah turned onto her side, facing me. “I’ve waited two decades to figure out what that feeling was. Of course I want you.”

Before I could even try to reassure her, Sarah’s hand was exploring down my body. She ran her fingers over my stomach and toward my boy shorts.

“Do you want to take those off?” Her voice came out as a low rumble, sexy and a little sleepy.

Nodding, I worked the underwear off of my body and tossed them onto the ground. Face to face, I let my hand rest on the space where Sarah’s jaw met her neck. She was

stunning. And a part of me still couldn't believe we were laying naked together in bed.

She put her hand back to my hips, slowly grazing the trimmed hair near my center.

Already sensitive, I whimpered at her light touch. Goosebumps rose from my skin as I squirmed along the mattress. She looked down at her hand, watching herself as she moved closer to my folds.

A giddy smile took over her face as her fingers delicately slid between my folds. She rubbed my clit in wide strokes, letting her fingertips peel back my hood with each motion.

I groaned as I felt her. Laid on my side, I watched Sarah's face as she touched me. There was excitement, nerves, and some very obvious desire plastered all over her face. It seemed like the orgasm I gave her wasn't quiet enough to satiate her.

"Oh god, I like how you feel." Sarah whispered, letting her head fall into my chest as she continued to play with my clit. Her fingers pushed and massaged it with a firm pressure.

A part of me was surprised by how quickly she found it, but then again Sarah was a grown woman who knew what she wanted. She listened to my movements, following my body's cues as I squirmed under her touch.

Sarah bit her lip after a minute. "I want to be inside you." It came out as more of a whimper than a sentence.

I met her blue eyes and nodded. "I'd love that."

Eager, Sarah's fingers worked their way down my slit. I lifted my leg for her,

allowing her to move between my thighs. As soon as she parted my folds, a hidden trove of pleasure soaked her fingers. She gasped, the breath stolen from her lungs “How long have you been that excited?”

I smirked as I looked at her, letting my hand grasp the back of her neck. My fingers buried in her hair as she explored me.

Taking her sweet time, Sarah teased my entrance with a giggle. “I thought that’d be a little harder to find.”

I laughed too. “It’s surprisingly obvious.”

Before she continued, Sarah brought her lips to mine. As our tongues pressed against one another, a game of push and pull, I could feel Sarah’s breath quicken. The shallow rise and fall of her chest, knowing just how badly she wanted me, was enough to make my slit throb for her fingers as they hovered just outside of me.

She pulled her lips from mine and, at the same time, let her elegant index finger slip back my folds and press inside.

“Oh fuck.” Sarah’s head fell down, bumping against my chest as she thrust her finger inside me. “Why didn’t anyone tell me it would feel like that?”

A hearty laugh escaped my chest as I held her head against my breasts. My hips began to rock against her light, steady pushing. She had already found my G-spot, pressing into it as she dipped her finger in and out of my channel.

“Tell me how I feel.” I whispered in between moans.

Sarah grinned, her forehead furrowed as she thought. She stammered through her words. “God. I can... feel you all around me. You’re so wet, I’m just... fuck. Bri, you

feel so good.”

Licking my lips, I nodded and tangled my hand in her hair. It was unbelievably sexy, knowing I could make her feel like that.

I lifted her chin with my free hand. “Do you want to put another finger inside?”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

She was nodding before I even finished my sentence.

Gently, she pulled her hand out of my center. I couldn't stop the whimper from escaping my lips in her absence. But it was her finger lingering just at my entrance that really teased me. My body begged to feel her inside again, rocking my hips toward her fingers. Feeling me chase her touch, Sarah kept her finger just out of my channel.

Just when my body had tensed enough, she added a second finger and slipped back inside.

I took the two of them easily; I probably could have taken all of her. But just two would be more than enough for now.

Sarah shook her head and moaned as she pressed her index and middle fingers all the way inside. Folded against her palm, the knuckles of her remaining fingers massaged my clit as she thrust. "I can feel you everywhere."

"Good." I whispered in her ear, grinding my hips along her fingers. She felt better inside me than I ever could have imagined... and I imagined it plenty. With each thrust, Sarah found her rhythm. Our bodies fell into perfect sync.

My hand fell to her ass, gripping the skin and pulling her toward me. Her hips began to grind along with her fingers. She was fucking me with everything she had.

A desperate moan rose in my throat as I neared my peak. Her fingers were strong, pressing on my G-spot and slipping back out of me at the perfect cadence. "Keep

going, Sarah. Please.”

Her voice grew low as she brought her lips to my ear. “Say my name again.”

The rumble of her chest against mine and her warm breath tickling my neck sent my body careening toward orgasm. It took a moment to catch my breath enough to speak, enough to even open my mouth.

But I looked her in the eyes, gripping her ass in my hands as our bodies pressed together. It came out as a primal grunt more than words. “Sarah, please. I need you, Sarah.”

As soon as the words left my mouth, my body began to shudder. Sarah’s did too, the words seeming to excite her just as much as they did me.

My forehead fell against her, desperately pressing closer as Sarah kept her perfect movements steady. My muscular thighs clenched her hand. A part of me worried I’d hurt her, but Sarah kept going.

“Bri, I want to watch you come.” Sarah licked her lips.

All I could do was nod as the pleasure took over me. Every muscle in my body tensed and my channel gripped at Sarah’s long fingers. Within a few seconds, a scream ripped out of my chest, and my body gave in to her.

“Fuck.” I released, my body shaking to a halt.

Once I stopped, Sarah slowly pulled her fingers out of me. Each knuckle sent a pulse of pleasure through me, making me shudder. I let out one last whimper as she slipped out of my sensitive body. “God.”



Sarah grinned down at me. Using her clean hand, she stroked my face. Her fingers traced from my temples down to my jawline before landing on my chin. Her eyes flicked between my eyes and her pleasure-soaked fingers resting on the pillow next to me.

After a moment, she licked her lips and whispered. "Can I taste you?"

I nodded. "Please."

Sarah brought her fingers to her lips and pressed them into her mouth. Rolling her eyes back, she moaned, sucking both of them into her mouth. Her lips pursed around them as she drew them in.

As I watched her, I felt my throat tighten. "God, you're pretty."

She smiled at me, pulling her fingers from her mouth. They were licked clean. "So are you." Smirking, she looked down at the sheets. "And you taste good."

"Come here." I whispered as I pulled her into my arms. Laying on my back, I held her to my chest. She wrapped her leg over my stomach.

Delicately, I smoothed her hair and planted a kiss on her head. Our chests rose and fell in sync as we each tried to catch our breath.

After a moment, Sarah lifted her head and looked at me, a giddy smile taking over her cheeks. "Do you think next time we could try more things?"

Next time. So she thought this was more than a hookup? I tried to hide my excitement, not wanting to scare her off.

Instead, I grinned down at her. "What kind of things?"

Sarah shrugged. “Anything. You’re the expert.”

“Expert is a strong word.” I scoffed.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Licking her lips, Sarah winked at me. “You felt like an expert.”

We laughed together as she brought her head back to my chest. Somehow, it had gotten dark outside. As our bodies settled together, my eyes grew heavy. When they would stay open, I caught glimpses of Sarah drifting to sleep. Her body twitched slightly as her limbs grew heavy.

And I followed close behind, falling asleep in Sarah Greenwood’s bed.

17

SARAH

I couldn’t be sure what Bri did to make me sleep well past sunrise, but by the time my eyes peeled open the next morning, it was well past nine. The birds chirped outside, and the weekend lawnmowers were already chugging along.

I sighed as I turned over, expecting to find Bri next to me. But she wasn’t.

My forehead wrinkled as I peeked over the edge of the bed, expecting to find a pile of her clothes. But they were gone.

I rolled back to my side of the bed, where my phone sat on the nightstand. It had gotten plugged in at some point in the night. But there was no text from Bri waiting on my lockscreen.

Shit. I scared her off. I rubbed my face, trying to wake up.

I stumbled out of bed and threw on an oversized t-shirt that lay rumpled at the foot of the bed. When I threw it over my head and onto my body, a waft of Bri's scent swallowed me. It was sweaty, earthy, and it made my center throb.

An excited smile took over my face. She couldn't have left without her shirt.

I grabbed a pair of simple cotton underwear from the drawer and made a note to buy myself something sexier soon.

As I quickly made the bed, flashes of the night before came back to me. Bri's hands on my body, her lips on mine, her moans of pleasure. I really hope this wasn't a mistake. I pulled the duvet over the top of the mattress.

Shaking my head, I tried to get the thought out of my mind. I hadn't planned to cross our friendship line quite like that. But I couldn't help but think about Jason's advice: sometimes, you just have to rip the bandaid off.

I made my way downstairs, knowing that Bri was somewhere in my house. As I sauntered through the long hallway, my brow furrowed. It looked less cluttered than I remembered last night.

Maybe I had done a better job preparing for my guest than I remembered. Trying not to think about it too hard, I kept moving. As soon as I hit the landing at the top of the stairs, I could hear a sizzling pan and some soft music.

A smile crept onto my cheeks as I descended the staircase. It took everything in me to keep from running into the kitchen to see what Bri was up to. Instead, I took a deep breath and slowly strolled toward the kitchen.

Play it cool, Sarah, I reminded myself, fixing my face as I turned the corner. But met by Bri's beaming smile and the smell of frying bacon, the small smile I had

suppressed came back in full force.

Bri looked up from the dishes she was setting on the drying rack and grinned at me. “Hi, darlin’.” Her slight country twang came out stronger than usual.

“Hi.” I scanned the house, looking toward the living room where a folded blanket draped over the back of the couch and the kids' toys were neatly put away into the coordinated buckets. “Did you do all of that?”

Nodding, Bri set her final clean dish on the rack and shut off the water. “I did.” She grabbed a hand towel from the stove and dried her hands, the straining veins drawing my eyes to her strong, calloused fingers.

“You didn’t need to do that.” I shook my head at her, warmth growing on my cheeks.

Looking me up and down, Bri turned to face the stove and shrugged. “You deserved it.”

As the shock of her cleaning half my house set in, my eyes were drawn to her muscular back, which strained against the white tank top she wore. She didn’t bother putting a bra underneath, letting the deep pink skin of her nipples shade the white fabric.

The thought alone sent a jolt of excitement through my tired body.

Bri turned off the stove, plating the bacon strips she had fried up. “I hope you don’t mind about the cleaning. I don’t want to be invasive, but it just seemed like a lot to keep track of.”

Taking a seat on a stool, I laughed. “Of course I don’t mind. I just feel bad.”

Smirking, Bri set down the plate and came around the island and looked down at me. She put her body between my legs, making the tired muscles move for her. Bringing her fingers to my chin, she directed my eyes to hers. “I don’t want you to ever feel bad around me. You’re juggling a lot, and you deserve some relief.”

I sighed. A part of me knew she was right, that I needed to let someone help. But I had just reconnected with Bri, and I still wasn’t sure what the night before meant for us going forward.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Instead of getting into all of that, I looked into her green eyes and settled on: “Thank you.”

Bri nodded and finished setting up her spread. A plate of delicately cut and arranged fruit was laid out next to fresh eggs, bacon, and some pastries.

“Where did the pastries come from?” I gawked.

A mischievous smile took over Bri’s face. “I just drove to Dee’s and grabbed some. You’d been sleeping for a bit, and it rounds out a brunch.”

I peeked up at the clock over the stove: it was nearing 10:30. In a couple hours, I’d have to go pick up the kids from Jason’s house and start another week.

But for now, it was just me and Bri in my freshly cleaned house.

She passed me a dish and gestured for me to build a plate for myself. So I stood from my stool and started dishing. It was hard not to take all of it.

As I walked down the line of food, I could feel the fabric of Bri’s flannel grazing my ass. When I peeked over my shoulder, Bri’s eyes were glued to the spot where my cheeks poked out from underneath her shirt. She licked her lips, somehow still not satiated.

“Do you like it?” I teased, knowing full-well what the answer was.

Bri shrugged. “My high school crush in my shirt with her ass hanging out... yeah, I’d

say I like it.” With a flat palm, she gave my cheeks a light slap. Luckily, I managed to hold back the light whimper that rose to my lips.

By the time I passed through the entire spread, my plate was overflowing.

Just as I was starting to feel self-conscious about how much I took, Bri pressed her hand against my back. The firm pressure immediately sent a wave of relief through my body.

She lowered her voice to a sultry whisper. “I’ll cook you more if you’re still hungry.”

It shouldn’t have been as hot as it was. But I could feel my center pulse with anticipation.

Taking her hand from my back, she walked over to the dining room table and set her own plate down. “I see you found my shirt.”

“I thought it was mine.” I tucked a strand of hair behind my ear.

Bri looked up at me. “It can be.”

Shaking my head, I looked at my plate of food and started in on the fresh fruit. It was cold, fresh from the fridge. Everything Bri was doing felt just right. I wasn’t sure what I had done to deserve so much attention, but I wasn’t about to turn it down.

After a few bites, Bri set her fork down and smiled at me. “So, I just wanted to say, I don’t want you to feel any sort of pressure from me to like... date. I obviously would like to keep seeing you. But I know you’ve not really been able to date around, well, ever. I just don’t want you to feel pressured if this was just for fun, or if it wasn’t just fun but you still want to explore.”



I couldn't stop myself from smiling at her. "Are you sure? Because I don't want to string you along."

Bri reached out her hand and grabbed mine, lightly rubbing her thumb against the back of it. "Sarah, I've watched you put everyone else's needs before yours since we were kids. I'll be here for you as long as you'll have me."

"It's weird, isn't it?" I put more pastry in my mouth.

"What?" Bri smiled.

Shrugging, I looked around. "That you've been there for all of it, and now here you are: sitting in my house, making me breakfast after spending the night in my bed."

A part of me couldn't believe it, but I also felt like I was exactly where I was supposed to be.

Bri chuckled. "It is. But, Sarah, I've been waiting for this since the day I first laid eyes on you."

Meeting her gaze, I knew she was right. And deep down, I knew I had been waiting for her too, even if I hadn't known it yet. I still wasn't sure what it all meant but sitting here with her felt more right than I could explain.

We kept eating, chatting between bites. Somehow after all these years, I'd forgotten just how funny Bri was and how easy it was for her to make me cackle. It wasn't a sexy laugh but it was a real one.

After a while Bri stood up and cleaned up the last few dishes from brunch. I insisted that she didn't need to, but she replied, "I'm not going to cook you breakfast and then leave a mess for you to handle."

And that was the end of my argument.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

After she had cleaned up, Bri grabbed her things and headed for the door. I followed behind, waiting to lock up behind her. But before she left, Bri stood on the threshold, resting her arm against the frame over my head. She leaned closer to me. “When can I see you again?”

I swallowed hard, trying not to invite her back upstairs right that second. “Can I check my calendar and get back to you?”

“Of course you can, darlin’.” Bri smiled down at me. Our eyes locked for a moment before I brought my hand to her neck and pulled her in for another kiss.

Teasing each other with our tongues, I felt my body begging for her to come back inside. But instead, I pulled away and squeezed her hand. “I’ll see you soon.”

She nodded and kissed my cheek. “Yes, you will.”

I watched her walk to her truck, still in her jeans and a wife pleaser. My mind swam as she waved at me.

What have I gotten myself into?

18

SARAH

I held the tiny onesie up to show Zoey. “Pretty cute.”

Zoey laughed. “It is, but we’re here for a crib. And weren’t you the one that told me buying newborn clothes is pointless because they grow out of it in, like, a couple days?”

My eyes flicked to the stacks and stacks of adorable, teeny tiny, folded onesies. Shrugging, I looked back at Zoey. “I said you shouldn’t bother. But I will buy whatever I want.”

Zoey gripped the cart and started to push it along the aisles of August and Co. As she walked, her belly bumped into the handles of the cart. She let out a groan and brought one hand to her sore back.

“No one warned me about how heavy babies are.”

Stopping in my tracks, I whipped my head around and narrowed my eyes. “You weren’t really around to warn. You were a Disneyland Aunt for a few years there.”

Zoey bit her lip and chuckled. “Oops.”

We kept strolling, soft pop from the store’s speakers setting the tone for our browsing. Combing the racks, I caught sight of a tiny flannel shirt, with blue jeans, and beige work boots. It was undeniably adorable. But my mind automatically flashed with images of what Bri’s little country children would look like.

My chest tightened just at the thought of her. I could still feel her lingering all over my body.

Zoey walked up next to me. “Okay, seriously, what’s going on with you?”

Trying to recover, I shook my head. “Nothing, I just think it’s cute.

Raising an eyebrow, Zoey crossed her arms. “Don’t lie to me.”

“You’re so annoying.” I groaned.

With a wide grin, Zoey nudged me as she kept walking down the aisle.

After a second, I bit my lip and confessed, “I slept with Bri?”

“Like, she came over and hung out?” Zoey kept scanning the shelves, not bothering to look away from her shopping.

I swallowed hard and shook my head. Even though I’d just spoken, I suddenly couldn’t find the words to say it again.

Zoey stopped in her tracks as the pieces fell into place. Her mouth dropped open as she met my gaze. “Wait, seriously?”

Nodding, I smoothed my hair. “Yeah.”

“Huh.” Zoey’s forehead wrinkled. “So are you...?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know yet. I don’t think I ever, like, faked anything with Jason. I’m still trying to figure that part out. But it feels nice to just listen to my body.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

We continued down the aisle, stopping in front of the bottle section. A massive array was spread out before us.

“How did it happen?” Zoey smirked.

Rolling my eyes, I grabbed a set of bottles. “She came over the other night for pizza so we could talk about the table. And we just got to talking about how long we’d known each other and how much had changed over the years. The moment just felt right.”

Zoey giggled. “That’s nice.”

I set the bottles back on the shelf. “I thought I was crazy because ever since the run in at the store, I felt like there was something flirtatious in the air.”

“Oh, there was. I was massively confused.” Shaking her head, Zoey finally stopped in front of the cribs. “I just thought you might be a straight girl who didn’t realize she was accidentally flirting with every sapphic in her life.”

My jaw dropped as I rolled my eyes. “What do you mean every sapphic?”

Raising her hands in surrender, Zoey scoffed. “Just sounds like Victoria Bradley, the founder of a massive queer social app, has a bit of a thing for you.”

“No.” I shook my head and crossed my arms. But did she? I had felt inexplicably drawn to Vic, but I assumed it was just her general allure. She was stunning and unbelievably wealthy. Certainly everyone must feel that way about her.

But then again, maybe they didn't. When she looked at me, I felt like the rest of our worlds faded away. It would explain how she was able to make me late just by looking into my eyes.

Still, despite my own apparent crush on Vic, there was no world in which a woman like her – who had the entire world at her fingertips – would have any interest in a small town, newly out divorcée with three kids. More than anything, I was probably just a fun change of pace from her usual supermodel type that she'd forget about once she left town.

I rubbed the back of my neck. "Maybe."

With a laugh, Zoey patted my back. "Sarah Greenwood, fresh on the dating market, has two interested suitors."

I lightly punched Zoey's arm.

Before I could say anything, Zoey winced. "I'm scared to ask, but as your closest confidante, I must: how was it?"

My face flushed as soon as the words left her lips. I hadn't stopped having flashbacks of my night with Bri for days now. Everytime I blinked, I could see her broad shoulders on top of me, her lips pressed to mine, the slick pleasure between her legs.

The long pause had said enough. "That good?" Zoey's eyebrows shot up.

All I could muster was a nod.

"Jesus." Zoey shook her head. "When are you seeing Victoria next?"

I bit my lip, the thought alone making my chest tight. "Tomorrow. She flies back

from Italy.”

Laughing, Zoey rubbed her hand along the finished wood of a \$4000 crib. “Let me know how good she is, then you can compare.”

I rolled my eyes and shoved her. “You’re such an ass.” Looking up at the cribs, I tilted my head. “What are we doing looking at these? Didn’t Robin already build one?”

Zoey rubbed her forehead. “She’s in the middle of that process, but she’s not a carpenter. She’s a fucking contractor.”

“Remind me of the difference?” I teased my obviously frustrated sister.

With a mocking tone, Zoey rolled her eyes. “Robin knows how to use tools, but her job is telling other people what to make. Not making it herself.”

A laugh escaped my chest. “Well, you could always ask Bri to make sure the thing is safe.”

Zoey nudged my shoulder. “Well since you seem to have such an in with her, maybe you can just get her to build it for me.” She wiggled her eyebrows at me as she continued on to the next aisle.

I followed behind her, taking a look at whatever random item could distract me from the absolutely bizarre situation I found myself in. After the divorce, dating was the last thing on my mind. Even if I’d wanted to put myself out there, I doubted there was anyone out there I’d want to see more than once or twice.

But now, not only was I realizing that the scope of my attraction had expanded, but I’d found two stunning sapphics who embodied my every desire.



Picking up a rattle, I tried to take a deep breath. For all I know, Vic isn't even interested like that. This is probably just business for her.

19

### VICTORIA

By the time the jet touched down, I could hardly wait to go back to my lake house.

The entire week at Lake Como was spent thinking about how the restoration was going. Robin had kept me updated on all of the progress with the renovations.

But Sarah had been shockingly quiet. I couldn't tell if I was anxious for news about my table or if I just wanted to hear from Sarah generally, but either way, I had checked my phone incessantly for the last week.

As I descended the stairs of my private jet to the Ulster County Airport's small landing strip, I let out a laugh.

My bright red Carrera, parking just a few hundred feet from the plane, was a sight for sore eyes. Never in my life would I have guessed I'd be more excited stepping off a plane in upstate New York than I was hopping on a boat in Italy.

When I was just a few feet from the car, the front door popped open. My driver, Tom, stepped out and did it for me. As I walked past, he slipped me the keys. "Good to see you, ma'am."

"Thanks, Tom. Any updates?" I gave him a pat on the back.

Tom shrugged. "Yankees are looking good for the World Series."

I sucked my teeth and slid into the driver's seat. "And that's all that really matters." With a wink, I grabbed the door handle. "See you soon."

Nodding, Tom stepped away from the car and headed to his own ride, which was waiting just outside the chain link fence that surrounded the tiny local airport.

Once I slammed the door shut, a comforting silence fell over me. Free from the roar of jet engines, I let out a deep breath.

The car was well air-conditioned; Tom left it blasting for me. I checked the clock on the dashboard and put my hand on the stick. My meeting with Sarah was supposed to start in just over an hour, which gave me enough time to drive back to the lake house, get an update from Robin, and wait patiently for my shockingly gorgeous, infamously tardy interior designer.

I put the car into drive and sped off the tarmac, letting the road clear my mind of worry.

A quick thirty minutes later, and the wrought iron gates to my home were swinging open. Robin's trucks were still in the driveway. Teams of construction workers hauled pieces of drywall in through the front door, where a new deck had already been built.

I parked the car a few dozen feet away from the trucks. Of course I could afford to fix a scratch, but it would've been more of a pain in my ass than walking a few extra feet.

As soon as I climbed out of the driver's seat, the powerful engine now still, the front door swung open. Robin's chipper face greeted me as she waved. "Good to see you, boss."

“You too, Robin.” I shook my head as I walked closer. She was a lot goofier than she looked. Externally, she projected a kind of tough, masculine contractor vibe. But the more she talked about her expectant wife and their plans for the nursery, the more I realized Robin was just a gentle bear.

I stopped just before the porch steps, where freshly stained wood popped out against the dim, old siding.

Robin cleared her throat. “Obviously the new paint on the siding will help a lot.”

“I can see the vision.” I nudged her shoulder. I’d been surprised by the camaraderie I felt for Robin and her team. During the renovations of my other houses, the contractors had felt like strangers. But Robin had brought me in, embraced me as a local, and was just as invested in turning the lake house into my dream home as I was.

I climbed up the steps, my Gucci sneakers thudding softly on each piece of wood.

Leading me inside, Robin walked me through what had been done in my absence. “So, we got all of the plumbing and electric done. The entire house has been rewired to exceed modern standards. Right now, we’re hanging drywall on the second floor. And then the team is going to roll through the first and second floor with joint compound before the end of the day so that we can get sanding tomorrow.”

I nodded. “What happens after that?”

Robin smirked. “We handle molding and trim. Then Sarah gives us paint selections for each room, and we get moving on that.”

Letting a sigh out of my tight lungs, I walked toward the stairs. Before I could go any further, Robin shoved a bright yellow hard hat into my hands. “Safety first.”

I couldn't stop myself from rolling my eyes. The helmets made sense when we were tearing the place down to the studs. But at this stage, there weren't any falling hazards.

Reluctantly, I placed the hardhat over my perfectly wind-swept hair. A sports car was a better investment than an on-call stylist for that reason alone.

I climbed the creaking wood stairs in the foyer, letting the winding handrail guide me. It was one of the original features I had fought the town to keep. They had claimed the stairs were unsafe and had to be replaced, but I set Robin's charm on them. With enough reinforcement to the steps, the town council eventually left me alone.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Even as I climbed the stairs, I could see just how incredible the light pouring in was.

“These new windows make such a huge difference.” I gawked at them as I reached the second-floor landing. Crossing to the lake-front view, I stared out at the glimmering water.

Distorted by the brand sticker protecting the glass, it wasn’t a pristine view just yet. The landscapers were just getting started on the yard, which mostly meant tearing out all of the overgrown mess that had festered over the last two decades.

“So, what do you think?” Robin cleared her throat.

Nodding, I took a deep breath. “You’ve done a good job. We’re still on schedule?”

Robin took a look at the small spiral notebook that usually hid in her back pocket. “I don’t want to jinx us, but we’re technically ahead. As long as Sarah’s ready to go, we’ll be ready for the Labor Day party.”

A smirk took over my face. The invites had already gone out with a scenic picture of the lake front. But actually finishing the project on time would all depend on a smooth collaboration with Sarah.

The gold band of my Rolex jostled as I checked the time. Sarah was supposed to arrive at the house in about half an hour for lunch out on the dock.

“Thanks, Robin. I’m going to check on my lunch plans. If you need anything, shoot me a text.”

With a nod, Robin tucked her notebook back into her work pants. “You got it, boss.”

I strutted past her and back down the stairs. The drywall made the entire house feel brighter. My mind started to run wild with design ideas as I looked at the place. Hopefully, Sarah would be open to a few slight changes. If she was as good at her job as I knew she was, it shouldn’t cause any problems with our timeline.

But my nerves weren’t really about the change in plans. No, it was much more about the fact that I hadn’t seen Sarah in over a week; that I had been thinking about her soft, stunning face every time I closed my eyes. Lake Como had nothing on a woman like Sarah.

But I had to keep my cool. I was a tech billionaire for god’s sake. I’d had everyone and everything I’d ever wanted. And still, Sarah felt different.

Shaking myself out of it, I sauntered outside toward the guest house.

I needed to make sure everything was exactly right before Sarah arrived.

Just as the clock struck 3 pm, I took a seat at the small bistro table my staff had set up on the dock. Leaning back in the upholstered, oatmeal-colored chair, I tapped my fingers against the pristine, white table cloth.

A small charcuterie board sat at the center, untouched.

I looked over to the gate as the minutes started to tick by. Nothing.

Did she forget? The thought made my stomach turn, disappointment bubbling to the service.

From the corner of my eye, I could see my wait staff on hold. A bottle of champagne

sat on ice just inside the guest house, ready to be carried out the moment Sarah settled in.

But thirty minutes later, my head was in my hands. It was time to give up.

I pulled out my phone, drafting a text that read:

Hi, shall we reschedule our lunch for another day?

My finger hovered over the blue arrow. Just as I was about to let my finger drop on the button, I heard rubber tires on asphalt.

I whipped my head to the gate where I saw her minivan rolling into place. Through her very untinted windows, I could see Sarah scrambling to collect herself. A giggle rose in my chest as I watched her. Even in a panic, she looked unbelievably gorgeous.

She threw open the driver's side door and waved down at me. Over the front yard, she hollered, "I'm so sorry!"

Standing from my chair, I shook my head. "No need." She was basically running down the dock to meet me.

"I hope you weren't waiting long." Sarah sighed.

I waved her off, swallowing the truth. "Not at all, I was running late too."

Chuckling, Sarah came in for a hug. "It's hard to imagine you being late for anything."



## Page 37

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I wrapped my arm around her waist, pulling her closer than I meant to. Without thinking about it, I gave her a peck on the cheek.

As Sarah pulled away, she tucked a hair behind her ear. It was impossible to tell if the pink rising in her cheeks was from the jog down the dock or a faint blush. “Used to the Italians now, huh?”

Leave it to Sarah to give me a convenient excuse for pressing my lips against her gentle cheeks. I nodded. “I guess so.”

Before I sat down, I walked around the table and pulled out her chair.

“Oh, thank you.” Sarah gulped as she sat down, suddenly avoiding my eyes.

I tucked her chair in. Something inside me felt daring, letting my hand graze her back as I moved back to my own seat. My voice dropped to a low rumble, “You’re welcome.”

After I sat across from her, a caterer made their way down the long dock and placed the stainless steel ice bucket in the matching stand next to the table.

“Cheers.” I nodded to the well-dressed gentleman.

Sarah’s eyebrows lifted. “Wow.”

A bottle of Dom Pérignon stuck out of the top of the bucket. Once the waiter had cleared the dock, I reached in, grabbed the perfectly chilled glass, and started to twist

the muselet off the top.

Sarah watched my hands closely, a part of her clearly expecting the bottle to explode and spray champagne all over the dock.

“You’re a pro,” she teased.

Looking up from the bottle, I set the metal cage in the bucket. I couldn’t stop myself from smirking as I pulled at the cork. “You’ll get used to it.”

Sarah’s lips parted with a small gasp just as the pop of the cork echoed off of the lake

I reached across the table and grabbed her champagne flute, pouring the bubbly into it. Pouring just to the ideal two thirds mark, I filled both of our glasses. Even as I tried to keep my cool, I wasn’t sure what was coming over me. I was being bold, far bolder than I was with most women.

Sarah took a sip from her glass and groaned. “Wow, that tastes good.”

“Thank god for that.” I winked as I took a sip of my own. I’d bought an entire case and took up far too much cargo space bringing that back for it to be anything less than good.

A silence settled over the table as we dug into the board of food in front of us.

After a moment, Sarah wiped hands. “I’m really sorry about being late. It’s so unprofessional.”

I waved her off. “Please, I know you’re a busy woman.”

“That’s not an excuse. I hope you know how much I value this project.” She paused,

letting her blue eyes fall, “And you.”

My jaw clenched at the words. I never wanted to put her in a strange position. After all, I was paying her to work for me. But she was a free agent, and so was I. And I had an idea what might help Sarah Greenwood to relax.

I narrowed my eyes. “Let me take you to dinner.”

20

SARAH

I almost spit out the champagne I had sipped. What?

A part of me thought I had hallucinated the offer. Or maybe I just misinterpreted. Either way, I broke away from her intense gaze, trying not to think about the way her hazel eyes glowed in the evening light.

Instead, I distracted myself with the shimmering lake. A smile teased my cheeks. “Dinner?”

From my periphery, Vic nodded. “Yes. Out of town and not on some rocky, old dock.”

I caved, letting my eyes meet hers again. “Business or a date?”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I winced as soon as I said it. There was no way this gorgeous billionaire wanted to take a single mom on some extravagant date. She'd just come back from Italy for god's sake. She'd probably dined with models and actresses all week.

Victoria shrugged, licking her lips as a cheeky smile took over her face. "Whatever you're most comfortable with, Ms. Greenwood. But I'll admit: I'm more partial to one than the other."

Fuck. My throat tightened with excitement as my mind struggled through the logistics. Jason wasn't supposed to have the kids for at least another week. Am I a terrible mother if I leave them with a sitter for a night when I only see them a week at a time? Vic's proposition was a complicated one.

Splitting custody meant splitting family time too. When the kids were with Jason, they would see his parents and his siblings. When they were with me, they'd spend time with my parents and Zoey.

As I was trying to work through it, Victoria reached her hand across the table, her gaze turning serious. My nerves calmed the instant her palm rested on mine. "Sarah, you are allowed to take time for yourself... if you'd like it."

I swallowed hard. It wasn't something I was used to hearing. I took in a deep breath. The air was a shock to my system, fresh from the lake. I let the slight rocking of the dock calm my body.

It would be fun.

After a moment, I nodded. “Okay, a date.”

Victoria smiled. “Perfect. I’ll arrange everything.”

Once she sat back in her chair, two plates of salad came out to the dock. They were beautiful, lush bowls full of fresh vegetables with juicy, baked salmon on top.

Letting my shoulders relax, I smiled. “So, now that we’ve dealt with that, I have some big ideas.”

As we dug in, we got to talking business. I had plenty to report after a full week apart. It felt nice to switch between personal and business so easily.

But when I couldn't take my eyes off of her, my body tensed again. This is about to get complicated.

A few days later, I was standing in my en suite bathroom, tousling my hair until it fell just right. It took a lot more work than seemed fair to get the blonde waves to look both sexy and effortless.

Part of me wondered if this being explicitly a date made it easier or harder to get ready. Either way, I was a little desperate to wow her. Just the thought of making the enigmatic woman speechless made the hair on my arms stand up with excitement.

Victoria still hadn't sent me any details about where we were going or what we would get up to. I tried not to let the uncertainty of it all make me anxious as I turned up the ringer on my phone and refocused on the mirror in front of me.

My makeup was simple: some mascara, light eyeliner, and a touch of concealer. I hadn't done my makeup in years, and wasn't exactly sure what was popular these days. But I decided to err on the side of caution and keep everything simple. I

finished it off with a tinted lip balm, not wanting to discourage Victoria from making a move with heavy lipstick.

Assuming she even wanted to make a move.

I shook my head, immediately checking the thought. Why wouldn't she? In a dress like this, I was a goddamn prize.

Taking a look in the mirror, I made sure I still liked how it fit. The sun still streamed in through the second floor windows despite it nearing eight o'clock. Just as I'd hoped, the outfit was exactly what I wanted.

It had been at least a decade since I'd dressed this salaciously. I'd had to dig the red dress out of the back of my closet and clear off quite a few cobwebs. Originally, I'd bought it for a Valentine's Day date with Jason after Ava was born. But it never managed to make its debut.

The deep cowl neck showed off my cleavage and figure to any curious eyes, but the real star of the show was its fit. It came in tight at my waist, accentuating my hips and ass.

A smirk took over my face as I admired my reflection. It was hard not to feel confident in a dress like this.

I grabbed my bag off the edge of the bed where Bri and I had our tryst just a week ago. I almost felt guilty going on a date with another woman while I was still desperately trying to see Bri. But she had told me to explore the single life. And who was I to tell a charming billionaire she couldn't take me on a date?

Placing my chapstick, mascara, and some powder into the bag, I took a deep breath. I let the air sit in my lungs for a moment before pushing it out of my mouth.

My nerves settled long enough to get me down the stairs. I was still barefoot, not wanting to scuff the hardwood floors with my tall heels. The soft patter of my feet on the stairs wasn't quite a grand entrance, but Robin noticed nonetheless.

She poked her head out from the living room, her eyes bulging. "Jesus, Sarah."

My face flushed pink as I tousled my hair. "Is that a good thing?"

Robin nodded, lowering her voice so the kids didn't hear. "You look hot."

Rolling my eyes, I took the last step and gave her a light flick on the head. "Why do you sound surprised?"

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

“Because you never get dressed up like that.” Robin laughed.

Zoey heard us chatting and waddled over. The kids stayed in the living room, distracted by Derek’s new game.

When she turned the corner, Zoey’s jaw dropped. “Holy shit. Talk about a ‘fuck me’ dress.”

I slapped her arm and shushed her. “My kids are in the other room, asshole.”

Waving me off, Zoey peeked back into the living room. She watched them for a moment to ensure that they were truly not listening before turning back to me smugly. “See? Nothing to worry about. Where are you headed?”

“Somewhere across the river. She just told me to wear something nice and that she’d take care of the details.” I swallowed hard. This certainly felt more like a date than a business dinner.

Robin scoffed and raised a suspicious eyebrow. “Should we expect to stay overnight?”

Hesitating, I tried to be realistic. I had no idea what Vic had in mind, but I knew it would be a drive. The sun was already low in the sky, and I couldn’t imagine getting home before my pregnant sister passed out.

“Just make yourselves comfortable; if you fall asleep, you can just stay the night.” I settled on that.



Zoey giggled and winked at me. “Someone plans to get laid.”

Shaking my head, I pushed past her to the living room. Moving around the couch, careful not to step in front of the TV, I gave each of my kids a kiss. “I love you guys. I’ll probably miss bedtime, but I’ll come check on you when I get home. Okay?”

Ava and Leila nodded, each throwing their small arms around my neck. Distracted by his game, Derek took one hand off the controller and hugged my shoulders.

“Love you,” they all said in unison as I walked out of the living room.

I padded over the foyer, strapping on the red heels I’d kept since prom. They were far too big for me back then, but after three pregnancies, they fit just right. Just as I finished buckling the delicate leather straps, my phone dinged with a text:

Victoria Bradley dropped a pin

My forehead wrinkled at the words. Was she already waiting for me? I quickly opened the text to see where she was. But when the location loaded on my maps, it just showed my street.

“What?” Zoey asked, striding across the foyer to snatch the phone out of my hand.

I gawked at her as she held the device. “Excuse you.” If nothing else, I knew I could always count on Zoey to be a pushy older sister.

Peeking over her partner’s shoulder, Robin tilted her head. “She’s outside?”

The words felt surreal. Surely it was a mistake. I glanced outside through the glass that framed the front door. Sure enough, a familiar red car sat outside with Victoria Bradley leaning patiently against its hood.

“I guess so.” Zoey excitedly squealed, trying not to alert the kids. Putting her hands on my shoulders, Zoey smiled. “Have fun, okay?”

I exhaled and nodded. “Okay. Love you both.” Wrapping my arms around them, I pulled them in for a hug. Once I felt my anxiety melt away, I pulled back and fixed my hair. “Don’t watch out of the window.” I winked at them as I opened the front door and left the house.

The door had hardly shut behind me before I stopped in my tracks; Victoria’s grin stunned me still. She wore a slate gray button-down with the top three buttons undone. The fabric draped gracefully down her chest, showing off her collarbone and skimming just over the swell of her breasts.

My dirty mind filled in the blanks quickly; the low v of her shirt meant she wasn’t wearing a bra. The bottom of the button-down tucked perfectly into a pair of matching trousers. Both of Vic’s elegant hands tucked into her pockets as she watched me.

“Hi.” Her voice was low, already sultry despite the summer sun still beaming down.

I swallowed hard, reminding my feet to keep moving. “Hi.” Just as I approached the front steps, Vic peeled herself off the car and rushed to the porch, offering her hand as I descended. With each movement, I could feel her eyes on my body.

My hips swayed as I walked, the dress flowing behind me. “I didn’t mean to match your car.”

Victoria nodded, lightly licking her lips. “I like it. A match made in heaven.” As we approached the car, she dropped my arm and pulled open the passenger side door. “After you.”

Smiling, I ducked into the car. I snuck one last look at the door, where I could see Zoey and Robin clearly watching us. Bastards. I rolled my eyes as I situated myself in the seat.

Once I was in, Vic gently closed the door and jogged around the front of the car.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Unlike the humid, June air outside, the Carrera was perfectly air conditioned. My fears of sweating off my makeup melted away.

Vic slid into the driver's seat with ease, turning to look at me as the engine purred. "You look incredible."

Every insecurity I had melted away as her eyes poured over me. I let myself look at her the same way – hungrily. Her willowy figure looked custom made for the black leather interior.

"So do you." I smirked.

A devious grin took over Vic's face at the compliment. "Ready?"

21

SARAH

Am I ready to be whisked away on a mystery date by some ultra-hot billionaire in her fancy sports car?

Swallowing my nerves, I nodded. "Yep."

Without another word, Vic's long fingers wrapped around the stick shift and put the car into reverse. Once we left my short driveway, she pressed her foot on the break and took one more look at me.

Her jaw clenched as her eyes dipped over the plunging cowl of my dress and down to my legs. The slit on the left leg exposed my entire thigh for her.

I could tell from the heat of her gaze that she wanted to touch me there, to sink her elegant fingers into the soft skin of my thighs, and perhaps other places.

But instead, Vic bit her lip, threw the car into drive, and took off down the road.

A light gasp escaped my lips as the car accelerated. I felt like I was in a rocketship with the hottest pilot I'd ever seen. My heart raced as she took the backroads smoother than an F1 driver.

"Where did you learn to drive like this?" I managed.

Vic smirked. "I've had my share of accidents. After the third, I asked a professional to teach me."

A part of me wanted to ask her how much it cost, to have a real race car driver teach her something like that. But I didn't want to offend her.

"\$500k." She read my mind, without taking her eyes off the road.

Jesus. I didn't even make that much in three years. When I turned to look at her, Vic wore a proud smile.

"Quite the brag." I teased her, a playful giggle passing my lips.

Victoria licked her lips, trying to keep her eyes on the road while a cheeky grin took over her face. "Listen, I worked for it. I do my best to give back to the communities that have lifted me up. But the rest... that's for play."

Of course, I knew about her philanthropic efforts. She didn't mention it herself, not wanting to come off as a savior. But a quick search of her name brought up multiple foundations and personal interest stories about the people whose charities received massive, anonymous donations.

She had every right to brag about her earnings. And I couldn't help but find myself pulled closer to her as she spoiled me.

Before I knew it, we were turning onto the empty highway toward the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge. The distant lights of the bridge grew brighter by the second as the car hurtled through the desolate lanes.

Coasting, Vic tore her eyes from the road. I felt her gaze wandering down my neck to my exposed cleavage, down my soft center to my thighs.

My heart raced under her attention. I would've paid millions just to have her look at me like that.

She checked the road again, making sure she was on track, before she took her hand off the stick and rested it on my thigh.

It took everything in me not to moan. But her hands were warm against my skin, and she pressed into my lush thighs with a comforting weight. She wasn't gripping me, but the veins in her hands still bulged all the same.

As the car sped up, Vic's foot resting heavily on the pedal, her hand drifted up my leg.

A whispered "fuck" escaped my throat. All I could do was hope that the purr of the engine was loud enough to obscure my pathetic whimper.

## Page 41

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

But when I turned to look at Vic, she was biting her lip eagerly. She met my eyes. “Do you like it?”

My heart skipped a beat as I nodded. “Yes.”

Smirking, she let her hand travel even higher. It rested just a few inches from the edge of my panties. I was certain she would be able to feel the heat radiating from the slit. A part of me worried my slickness might spread to her hand.

Her fingers pressed into the soft flesh of my inner thigh as she peeled off the highway, now across the bridge. The car gently slowed as we drifted into the town of Beacon.

Vic returned her hand to the wheel as she rolled the car into an open spot on Main Street. It felt like the spot had been left for us. And knowing Victoria, it probably was.

She put the car in park and killed the engine. As she got out, I waited patiently for her to walk around to open my door. I fixed my hair and dress, the fabric tickling the spot where Vic’s hand had rested. I felt like her grip had left an unseeable mark on my flesh, branding me.

The door opening cut off my thought. I swung my feet out of the car and grabbed the hand Vic was offering me. As she helped me stand, I could feel her scanning the dress once more.

She was far more eager than I had expected. A part of me assumed it might be harder

to get past our professional politeness. But it already seemed like that part of our connection was in the rearview.

Once I was standing solidly on the asphalt, Vic closed the passenger door, looped her arm with mine, and escorted me to the sidewalk.

The town was starting to empty at this time of night; there were just a few stragglers hanging around the closing restaurants on the main strip.

A pink glow washed over the old brick buildings as the sun set behind the distant mountains. Vic walked me to a storefront, pulling open that door too. “Will I have to open a single door for myself this entire night?”

Vic laughed. “You might never touch a doorknob again if I had my way.”

As I slipped past her, Victoria wrapped her arm around my waist. The moment the door closed behind, a suited hostess swept in to greet us. “Welcome, Ms. Bradley and Ms. Greenwood. Your table is ready for you.”

“Thank you, Laura.” Vic nodded and followed the hostess through the empty restaurant. Soft jazz played as we made our way to an empty table at the center of the intimate restaurant.

Laura gestured to the small wood table with a pristine, white table cloth. My mind started to swim at the thought of my legs brushing Victoria’s under the wood top. Vic pulled out my chair and pushed me in before taking her own seat.

“Your server will be right with you.” Laura nodded as she headed back to her post.

Scanning the table, I took note of the dried flower bouquet at the center, which was short enough to not interrupt our eyeline. My face wrinkled as I realized she hadn’t



left us with any menus.

Before I could say anything, Vic smiled at me. “The chef only makes one, five-course meal. So there’s no need to select anything.”

I didn’t even know places did that.

Sensing my hesitation, Vic reached her hand across the table. “I figured you make enough decisions in a day to have earned a break.”

My shoulders dropped. Somehow, she was exactly right. “Thank you.”

After a moment, a server appeared with a bottle of red wine and a towel draped over his arm. “Welcome, ladies. My name is Angel and I’ll be serving you this evening. This Romanee-Conti has been selected by our sommelier to pair perfectly with the chef’s menu.”

Already uncorked, the waiter poured the rich red wine into each glass. Under the dim light, the liquid almost looked completely black. But as Vic raised her glass to mine, the candle at the center of the table illuminated the deep crimson.

The waiter disappeared as our glasses gently clinked together.

Vic’s hazel eyes held mine. “To Sarah Greenwood: designer extraordinaire.”

Shaking my head, I giggled.

I followed Vic’s lead, giving the wine a light swirl before taking a sip. It was rich, with notes of fruits, florals, and nuts.

“Wow.” I raised my brows as I set the glass on the table. “That’s the best wine I’ve

ever had.”

Vic smirked. “Good.”

I licked my teeth. “So, tell me how you found out about... this.” I gestured to the room around us.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

“A friend from long ago.” Chuckling, Vic shrugged as a plate of perfectly fried calamari appeared in front of us.

She gestured for me to take the first dish.

Bringing a few pieces onto my appetizer plate, I sprinkled some lemon juice on them and bit in. They were crispy on the outside and soft inside, the light bite of the lemon juice puckering my lips as it hit my tongue. I wasn’t sure I’d tasted seafood so fresh and bounding with flavor.

After I swallowed the decadent seafood, I shook my head. “You’re gonna have to give me more than that.”

Victoria nodded. “The chef was a friend when I was in my party-girl days after selling the app. She vacations up here in the summers. And when she does, she opens little pop-up restaurants to test new items for her actual place in Manhattan.”

My eyebrows lifted. “So, this is a sneak peek?”

With an eager smile, Vic nodded. “Of one of the most exclusive restaurants in the city, yeah.”

I didn’t really know what to say. I still felt like Red Lobster was a fancy night out. This... was something otherworldly. The food so far was immaculate, the waitstaff pampered us, and I was ready to enjoy every moment of it.

It was like being whisked away on a superb vacation. As we ate course after course,

Victoria asked me about my life, the kids, my work. And in turn, she revealed slightly more about her illustrious past.

She had founded Pop just after graduating college. Ironically, her degree wasn't even remotely relevant to the tech sector.

"I went for Art History. And while I was there, I felt like I couldn't find my queer community as easily as I'd hoped. So that's when I started working on the idea." Vic finished off her wine.

The waiter brought over two gorgeous plates of ravioli, steam falling off the dish as the plates were set down in front of our respective place settings. I wasn't sure which looked more appetizing: the homemade noodles or the white truffle sauce they sat in.

I cut into a piece, revealing mushrooms and ricotta at the center. A strong truffle aroma wafted through the air as I delicately lifted the fork into my mouth. The flavor overwhelmed my every taste bud – I let the ravioli sit on my tongue for a moment as I tried to take it all in.

"Holy fuck." I moaned. Setting the fork down, I closed my eyes and began to chew.

Once I swallowed, I opened my eyes to see Vic watching me with a smile as I ate.

I shook my head. "Sorry, that was probably so cringey. I just don't think I've ever eaten anything this delicious in my life."

Victoria's jaw tensed as she held her fork just below her mouth. Instead of placing the food in her own mouth, Vic brought her fork to my lips. My mouth fell open for her, taking in the small bite of pasta.

My eyes rolled back as I tasted more of the truffle sauce on my tongue. As I

swallowed, I could feel Vic's eyes on me. I could feel my center starting to pulse with excitement again."

"Why'd you do that?" I raised an eyebrow.

Vic's temples tightened as she looked at my lips. "I like watching you enjoy yourself."

My heart leapt out of my chest. Jesus. It felt impossible that someone could be so suave. But here she was, eating this Michelin-grade meal like it was a nice diner and inviting me to do the same.

A part of me didn't understand how someone could ever get so used to this sort of luxury and offer it so generously to someone else. But another part of me understood it completely. As my eyes trailed from Victoria's clenched jaw down the edge of her unbuttoned shirt, all I could imagine was pushing this meal aside and tasting her instead.

After I composed myself, I giggled. "Maybe you should do it more than."

Nodding, Victoria laughed and took her bite. "Maybe I should."

It took thirty minutes just for us to finish the main course. Between every bite, I sat back in my chair and chewed as if it was my last meal.

The meal ended with two pieces of rich chocolate cake, hand-delivered by the chef. Once she set the plates down, Vic shook her hand. "Good to see you."

"How was the food?"

Vic shrugged. "I don't know, Carrie. You could have tried a bit harder."

Rolling her eyes, Carrie punched Vic on the shoulder. She turned her attention to me, meeting my eyes with a sharp gaze. “What did you think, my dear?”

I was startled by her beauty. She was tall, close to six feet if I was guessing correctly. Just as I felt myself getting carried away, I shook my head. Two is plenty for now.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Reaching across the table, I grabbed the woman's cool hand. "You are a genius. This was the best meal I've ever eaten."

Carrie grinned. "See, that's how you compliment someone." Releasing my hand with a squeeze, Carrie grabbed the two dinner plates from in front of us. "If Vic bores you to death, there's more cake with your name on it."

But before her old friend could slip away, Victoria slid a black steel card across the table. "Give your crew a really nice tip, please. Hundred percent, at least."

Raising an eyebrow, Carrie scoffed. "They just give these out to anyone, huh?" Before Vic could respond, Carrie took the card and headed to the back.

I watched Vic closely as she surveyed the place. It was dimly lit, brick walls surrounding us and touches of warm wood throughout the room to absorb the amber light. Vic looked pleased as she reached for the slice of cake in front of her. Delicately, her fork pierced the sponge.

No one could ever accuse Victoria Bradley of being selfish. From the research I had done before signing on to work with her, she had sworn to donate all of her wealth before she died. The only exception was that she wanted her family – and eventual spouse – to be set for life.

Vic raised the fork toward my mouth, using her free hand to cup under the cake. "Here."

Doing as I was told, I opened my lips and let the dessert slide onto my tongue. I

wrapped my lips around the cold metal prongs and pulled the chocolate into my mouth. It was unbelievably rich, nearly melting on my tongue.

Victoria watched me closely as I ate. Once I chewed, she took a bite for herself and sighed as she tasted it.

We ate the rest of our slices in silence, taking in the last of the meal. After the card had been returned and the plates cleared, I smiled at Victoria. “So, what’s next?”

“Next?” She laughed. “Was that not enough?”

Feeling bold, I shrugged. “What if it wasn’t?”

A cheeky smirk took over Victoria’s face. “Then I won’t stop until you’re satisfied.” She stood from her chair and pulled mine out before I could argue with her. She wrapped her arm around my waist, pulling me into her.

Under her button-up, I could feel the lean muscle she carried.

After a quick goodbye to Carrie, we walked out of the restaurant, and into the breezy night. The streets were quieter now, most of the regulars already at home.

Victoria opened my door and watched as I slid inside the Carrera, her eyes obviously lingering on my ass in the sleek red dress.

“Where are you taking me Ms. Bradley?” I bit my lip as I looked up at her.

Without answering, Vic closed the door and walked around to the driver’s side. I was in her hands now, but for once in my life, I didn’t mind giving up control. I knew she’d take good care of me.



SARAH

Victoria drove a few minutes to the edge of town. There, a warehouse towered over the other buildings.

“Did you bring me here to murder me?” I teased her.

Rolling her eyes, Victoria turned off the engine and guided me toward the entrance. “Well, I know how much you love design. And as much as it can be work, it’s also one of your passions. So I thought I’d show you my favorite hidden gem in the area.”

I stopped in my tracks. “After a dinner like that, you want to end this in some weird warehouse?”

Turning on her heels, Vic grabbed my hand with a grin. “Who said anything about ending it here?”

As she walked forward, I followed her lead. The outside of the building gave very few clues as to what was housed inside. But I had a feeling what it might be.

Victoria pushed open the heavy metal door and held it open for me. Motion-activated lights flickered on overhead, illuminating the massive warehouse.

My jaw dropped as I registered aisles upon aisles of tile. Above each stack of labeled boxes sat a small sample of each tile. I gawked, slowly walking forward to scan the display. “A private tile collection? How did I not know this was here?”

Vic shrugged. “I have no idea. But it turns out I have connections here that you don’t.”

As I whipped around to glare at her, Vic winked and gestured for me to keep walking. Most people probably would have thought tile shopping after a first date was strange or unromantic, but that couldn't have been further from the truth. To me, it felt like a love language I didn't know I had.

## Page 44

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

We strolled a few aisles in silence, only breaking to point out tiles we liked.

But after a moment of perusing, Vic sidled up next to me. “Any thoughts?”

Shaking my head, I giggled. “It’s your bathroom. I’m more interested in what intrigues you.”

We kept walking as she spoke. “Like we discussed, I’m a fan of mid-century modern bathrooms. Something funky.”

“No white subway tile.”

Vic clicked her tongue and chuckled. “Exactly.”

When we arrived back at the main walkway, I scanned the top of the massive warehouse storage shelves for the oversized organizational key on each aisle. After reading it for a moment, I knew where to head. I grabbed Vic’s hand and led her toward the aisle I was looking for.

As I jogged through the maze of shelves, Vic trailed slightly behind me. My dress flowed around me, swept up in the light wind of my movements. I could feel Vic’s eyes on my body, lingering on my ass as I moved.

I slowed when we reached the spot: aisle 37G. There, I started scanning for the right tile. It needed to be something unique, not just in color but in shape too.

We passed dozens of interesting arrangements, and I could see Victoria tilt her head

with curiosity at a few of the options. But none made her eyes light up, and I wasn't letting her go home without that look.

"A-ha!" I cheered as we found the ceramic piece I had been envisioning. "What about this?"

Keeping her grip on my hand, Victoria examined the display. It was a jade green tile with a diamond shape. Vic used her free hand to pick up a sample piece and twist it in her hand, letting the light play off of the gleaming surface.

I started to paint the picture for her. "It's a special shape, one you rarely see in a modern bathroom, but it creates clean lines. The shade of green will brighten in the sunlight and darken in the night. I picture it with brushed gold hardware and hanging plants. We could use a wood-top double vanity to bring some warmth."

As I spoke, a smile crept onto Victoria's face. "I love it." She turned to look at me, her breathing steady and calm. Her gaze flicked from my eyes to my lips. If I was honest, I was shocked I hadn't kissed her yet. But there was nothing stopping us now.

Taking a deep breath, Vic closed the distance between us. She wrapped her arm around my waist and pulled me closer as her lips met mine. It took everything in me to hold back the moan that begged to escape my throat.

As we kissed, our tongues played at each other's mouths. I opened my lips slightly, inviting her in. She found my tongue and teased it before receding and letting mine chase hers. I threw my arms over her neck as I pulled her closer, her long fingers pressing into my hips. With each kiss, we grew more desperate.

"Sarah," Vic said when our lips parted. "Are you sure about this?"

Nodding, I met her hazel eyes. The bright lights behind her head created a small halo

around her. “Yeah, I’m sure.”

Vic smirked and led me back to the main aisle. As we walked, I made a mental note of the tile number for tomorrow once this lusty haze wore off.

At the front of the warehouse, a counter housing a glass display case presided over a small waiting area. Vic turned me toward her, pressing my back into the counter. A moan slipped out of my mouth as the cold of the glass crept through my dress. It was a stark contrast to the warmth of my already soaked panties.

Our mouths hardly parted as Vic placed her arms on the counter behind me, pinning me between them.

I opened my eyes, meeting the fierce yearning in hers.

With a cocky smile, Vic grabbed my thighs and lifted me onto the counter. I whimpered as I landed, not expecting her strength.

“Do you always have this easy of a time getting what you want?” I groaned as she started to kiss my neck. The skin tingled under her touch, a shiver running from my neck down my spine.

Vic lifted her eyes to meet mine. “I don’t usually have to be so patient. But you’re more than worth the wait.” Burying her head back into the crook of my neck, her teeth started to play at my flesh. Light bites sent pulses of anticipation to my center as Vic slid herself between my legs.

As she did, I felt my center tighten under her touch. I needed to feel her inside me, to see what those elegant fingers could do.

She brought her hand to my neck instead and pulled my lips to hers. As we kissed,

she lightly thrust her hips into me. There was nothing there, not a strap-on or fingers. But I swore to all that is holy that I could still feel her pressing into me. With each thrust, my breathing grew more shallow.

All I wanted was to feel her. I brought my hand from her back to her center, slowly unbuttoning the trousers. Once I had them open, I slid my fingers up to her chest. The skin was soft and tender. I brought my other hand to the shirt and undid those buttons too, wanting as much of her available to me as possible. Once the dark gray shirt was open, I pushed the fabric off of her chest.

My jaw dropped at the sight of her small, perky breasts. Her nipples were already hard. I cupped each mound and lowered my head, kissing down her chest. My lips teased the puckered flesh, drawing them slowly into my mouth.

“Fuck.” Vic moaned as I sucked on her. With her arm around my back, her fingers dug into my soft skin. The fabric of my dress dulled the sting only slightly, but a part of me yearned to feel her full force.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

As my mouth worked at her chest, Victoria moved the fabric of my dress off of my legs, letting the leg slit expose my center. Sliding her hands into the opening, she grabbed the sleek black thong that rested on my hips and pulled it out from under the dress.

I whimpered as my pleasure clung to the panties separating from my folds.

Vic laughed from deep in her chest. “I had no idea you’d be this excited.” She got down on her knees to guide the fabric over my heels, kissing my feet as she worked.

My head tilted back at the light touch. I was desperately sensitive for her.

Standing back up, Vic brought me in for another kiss. My center pulsed for her, my excitement dripping down the red fabric of my dress. I brought my hand down to her center, grazing over her stomach and past the well-groomed hair just above her slit. Letting my fingers massage her, I was shocked by how hard her clit was.

“Speaking of excited.” I groaned as I rubbed her in wide, broad circles.

Vic growled in my ear. “Of course I am, fucking look at you.”

The rumble in her chest sent a shiver straight down my spine. As I played with her, Vic cupped my ass with her left hand, gripping the cheek harder as she moaned.

Under my touch, I could feel Victoria’s body tensing. Her hips grinded along with my fingers, finding a rhythm as she moaned.

After a moment, Vic took her right hand off the counter and grazed my thighs before settling in the space between them. She found my wet center quickly, not wasting time teasing me. Instead, she sunk her slender fingers into my folds, mirroring the motions my own hand made. But I was denied the satisfaction of her filling me completely.

My ass rubbed against the hard counter Vic had propped me up on, my forehead resting against hers. As she massaged my clit, I could feel her fingers growing slicker.

“Fuck.” Vic moaned as she felt how wet she had made me.

I looked down at her muscles as they tensed, her veiny forearms flexing against the rolled sleeves of her button-up. Just the sight of her was enough to make me finish, but I wasn’t willing to give in to her that easily.

Vic looked up and met my gaze, taking her hand off my ass and cradling my chin. “Do you like watching me fuck you?”

I nodded, moaning through a giggle. “Yes, god, yes.”

With a cheeky smirk, Vic slipped two fingers through my folds, pressing them against my entrance. She used my pleasure to sink deep inside me. My channel tensed around her, squeezing as she thrust.

My head rolled back. But as it did, Vic’s hand slipped behind my neck to support the weight.

I forced my eyes open to meet her gaze. Her hazel eyes burned amber as she groaned. “Don’t hide from me. I want to see you.”



I nodded, not one to argue with such a gorgeous woman. I applied more pressure, pressing my fingers into her hard clit.

From my neck, her hand slipped into my hair, gripping the blonde strands with her elegant fingers.

A moan rose in my throat as she pushed my head toward hers. “Oh god, Vic.” She pressed her lips into mine before the words could fully escape my lips. A feverish desire filled the air; she was desperate for me.

I slipped farther into her folds, hoping to feel her excitement. But her entrance was just out of my reach.

“Take me to your car.” I whispered into her mouth as our lips parted.

Nodding, Victoria slowly pulled her fingers from inside me and gripped my hips to pull me off the counter. I let her take some of my weight as my ass slipped off the glass. She set me gently on my feet, keeping a hand on my hip to help steady me. If she hadn’t been there, I probably would’ve broken an ankle in the far-too-tall heels.

Once I straightened my dress, Vic grabbed my hand and led me out of the store. She was eager, nearly jogging out of the warehouse. The metal door slammed behind us as we headed toward the Carrera.

“Did you start the car already?” I laughed as the headlights lit up the lot.

Vic turned around, her stunning smile taking my breath away. “As soon as you got off the counter: remote start.”

With a giggle, I tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear. The smell of her center wafted into my nose as my fingers neared my face.

Vic only dropped my hand to open the backseat for me, holding the door open as she watched me duck into the red sports car. Her gaze made my throat tighten.

Sat in the middle, I waited achingly as Vic got in and closed the door behind her. What should have been an awkward movement was somehow smooth and confident. Victoria had that ability with everything she did. She looked hungry now, despite our massive meal. Before I could say a word, she brought her lips to mine.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I pulled away for a second. “Wait, where did my underwear go?”

Licking her lips, Vic grabbed my hand and placed it on the bulge of her trouser pocket. At her prompting, I reached inside, letting my fingers graze her thighs more than they needed to, and I pulled out the silky, black fabric.

I raised an eyebrow at her.

“You won’t miss it.” Victoria winked as she snatched the thong out of my hands. “I wanted a piece of you for when I was lonely.”

She leaned into my neck, kissing and nipping as I eyed the damp fabric. I moaned. “Are you lonely often?”

Nodding, Vic mumbled into my skin. “Any time you’re not next to me.”

I pushed her shoulders, forcing her back playfully. Tossing my leg over her lap, I straddled her and let my hair drape in front of her face. “Well, then I guess you couldn’t be lonely now.”

23

VICTORIA

I could feel the heat from Sarah’s center as she climbed on top of me in the back of the Carrera. My hips thrust into her as she kissed me. With each press of her lips against mine, my body craved her more.

I let my hand travel up her exposed thigh, the soft skin sending a wave of excitement toward my throbbing slit. As my hand moved higher, Sarah's pleasure quickly coated it. I had only touched her upper thigh, and my fingers were already wet enough to slip inside her again.

A moan escaped my lips. "Fuck, you're so ready for me."

Sarah's head rolled back as I teased her folds with light, broad touches. "You've spoiled me all night. And I want you."

"You deserve to be spoiled." I growled as my other hand pressed into her back, pushing her into me.

I couldn't wait any longer. I slipped my fingers between her slick folds and found her entrance. Beads of excitement lined her slit, just waiting to be used. Pressing my index and middle fingers together, I gently slid inside her.

"God." Sarah groaned, her shoulders dropping as the ecstasy took over.

The grin on my face grew wider as I watched her eyelids flicker closed. With each rub of my fingers against her G-spot, Sarah's body rocked in rhythm. After a few moments, her hands started to explore my body.

She undid the few remaining buttons on my shirt and pushed the fabric back. Exposing my tits and stomach, Sarah bit her lips. "You're so hot."

I laughed, pressing my fingers right against her G-spot. "You're one to talk."

The extra pressure made Sarah whimper, her desperate eyes meeting mine. Her hand drifted down my body as I fucked her, slowly wandering to the top of my trousers. She made quick work of the haphazardly buttoned pants, slipping her hand past the

zipper and under the purple panties in one fluid motion.

I could only assume this was one of her first times with a woman since she'd been married to a man for the last decade, and yet she knew exactly what she was doing. There was a confidence in her movements that I hadn't expected. But maybe I'm being naive.

As she went back to massaging my clit, I kept my pace inside her. With each thrust, Sarah lifted her hips slightly and set them down on my hand. Her breasts bounced under her dress with the motion. I used my flat hand on her back to press her closer to me, burying my face in her full chest.

I moaned at the feeling as Sarah kept rubbing my clit.

"I want more." Sarah whimpered, a bead of sweat dripping down her forehead.

Grinning up at her, I shrugged. "Do you want to try a toy?"

Sarah bit her lip. "What kind of toy could you possibly have inside such a small car?"

I wiggled my eyebrows at her as I reached around her body to the center console. At the top, my favorite toy waited for me. I grabbed the egg-shaped vibrator and held it in my palm for Sarah to look at.

"What could that possibly do?" She laughed, licking her lips.

Stifling a small giggle, I tilted my head toward her. "Sarah, do you not own any toys?" It was endearing, she had been so sheltered from what the rest of us vagrants had been up to, that she'd missed the fun.

Blushing, Sarah shrugged. "Maybe I don't."

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I was already eager to show her what they had to offer. Biting my lip, I asked, “Do you want me to show you?” Once she nodded, I slid off the plastic cover, exposing the small, round silicone opening. “You place it over your clit, and it sends pulses of air to vibrate it.”

Raising her eyebrows, Sarah giggled. “Why would you have this in your car?”

With a shrug, I kissed her chest. “I travel a lot, and my car is almost always with me. Plus, sometimes it comes in handy on a long drive. Want to try it?”

Sarah nodded, grabbing the toy from my palm. Gingerly, she turned it on and placed it on her clit as I pushed my fingers back inside her.

Her jaw dropped as the air pulses met her already sensitive clit. “Fuck.”

“See? It’s a good one.” I pressed my fingers against her G-spot as she grinded along with my movements, holding the vibrator to her center. Between our bodies, the toy gave off a residual vibration on my clit.

Within a few seconds, Sarah was shaking under my touch. Her movements grew erratic as her pussy clenched around my fingers. I kept my palm flat to her back, keeping her steady against me as her body lost control.

In a matter of seconds, Sarah was screaming her pleasure. She threw her head back, the blonde hair falling off her shoulder and exposing her collarbone.

Just as her whole body seized, I kissed the sensitive spot between her neck and that

delicate bone. She whimpered as her body caved in on itself, hunching over me as she came.

“Fuck.” She growled as she gripped the leather seats.

After a moment, her body stilled. She took in a deep breath before pulling the toy from her clit and chuckling. “Well shit.”

I smirked up at her. “Is it your favorite now, too?”

With a shrug, Sarah laughed. “I think I need to see how you like it before I decide.”

Once I nodded, Sarah brought the toy – damp from her own folds – down to my clit. She massaged the toy into my slit, letting the air pulses envelop my bead. When I whimpered with pleasure, Sarah bit her lip and kept the toy pressed to the perfect spot.

She grinded her hips into mine, gently increasing the toy’s pressure against my sensitive clit. My body filled with anticipation, the vibration making me gasp. I leaned back in the seat, watching Sarah’s stunning figure as she took care of me. Through her dress, I saw her nipples harden.

My throat tilted open to her as I leaned against the headrest, my eyes rolling back with pleasure. Despite the air conditioner blasting in the car, the rear windshield was starting to fog behind me.

Trying to steady herself, Sarah pressed her hand against the steamy back window.

Before I could slow myself down, my body hurtled toward my peak.

Sarah lifted her hand off of the glass, leaving a perfect print of her hand, and grabbed

my chin. Pulling me toward her, she smiled. “I want you to look at me.”

Nodding, I forced my eyes open. Just gazing into her perfect blue eyes sent me over the edge. A growl turned into a pathetic whimper as my body gave into her.

“Fuck.” I slammed my fist into the leather. My body released under Sarah’s touch. As my muscles loosened, she pulled the toy away and turned it off, tossing it on the seat next to us.

Catching my breath, I wrapped my arms around Sarah’s waist and pulled her closer. She threw her hands over my shoulders and cradled my head. Sitting there in each other’s arms, our breathing synced.

After a minute, I kissed her cheek. “Are you okay?”

Sarah nodded, smiling as she buried her head in my neck. “More than. That was amazing. Are you?”

“Of course I am. You’re unbelievable.” I confessed into her hair.

She pulled back after a second, meeting my eyes before checking the clock on the dashboard. “Shit. It’s late.”

Resting my hands on her hips, I nodded. “Ready to go home?”

“I didn’t say that. But I should relieve my babysitter.” Sarah bit her lip, nervous to mention her kids.

I planted a kiss on her lips. “You got it. Can I pitch in for the babysitter?”

Raising her eyebrows, Sarah giggled. “No, but only because it’s my sister and her



partner, so it's free labor."

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

It made me laugh, especially after she winked at me. I gave her legs a squeeze, and Sarah took her cue, hopping off my lap and onto the seat next to me. I could watch her move all night; just the way she held herself made my heart swell.

A part of me wished this could last forever. That we could stay in this car, in this desolate parking lot, and just hold each other.

But reality was just across the river, and there was no running from it.

So I reached for the door handle, seeing Sarah's handprint on foggy glass.

"Sorry about that." She bit her lip, a blush rising to her cheeks.

Shaking my head, I squeezed her thigh. "No need. I might never wash my car again."

Sarah rolled her eyes and shoved me out of the backseat before climbing out herself. Once we looped back around to the front of the car, I watched as she put her seatbelt on and settled into the passenger seat. When she was ready, I put the car in drive and pulled us out of the parking lot.

Beacon was a ghost town this time of night; it was nearly two in the morning. Sarah leaned her head against the window and watched the blocks pass silently as we neared the bridge. Resting my hand on her thigh, I got us on the highway, willing the roads to grow longer as we soared along.

But Sarah's exhaustion couldn't be held off any longer. It only took a few miles of the car's gentle purr to rock her to sleep. The way her eyelids fluttered shut reminded

me somehow of falling snow. And each gentle breath she took only made my heart ache for her even more.

I wasn't sure exactly how I'd managed to get Sarah Greenwood in my car, but here she was. We'd broken the seal on whatever was happening between us, and now all we could do is let it ride.

24

SARAH

I wasn't sure how much time had passed, but when my eyes opened again, Vic's car was already over the bridge, slowing as she pulled off the highway. Sucking in a deep breath, I sat up straighter. Vic pulled her hand from my thigh and smiled at me.

"Sorry I fell asleep." I blinked the sleep out of my eyes.

Vic shook her head, a sweet smile on her lips. "That's okay, I'm glad you got to rest a little. We're a couple minutes away."

Nodding, I sat up and smoothed the top of my hair. I knew the house would be quiet when Victoria dropped me off, but just in case my nosy sister had stayed up to see what I got up to, I wanted to have some plausible deniability about what happened between Vic and I.

I cleared my throat as Vic turned down my road and slowly rolled down my driveway. Before I could say anything, Vic was hopping out of the car to open my door. Even this late at night, her chivalry was undeniable.

As my door swung open, I gripped Vic's elegant hand and stood on my tired feet. She closed the door behind me and leaned up against the car.

Looking at the house, I could tell all the lights were out. So I positioned myself between Vic's legs, wrapping my arms around her neck. I leaned in, pressing my lips to hers.

Vic let out a relieved sigh as we kissed. The kiss was slow and sweet, our movements a bit sloppy as exhaustion set in. Pulling away, Vic smiled at me, her eyes barely open. "Thanks for coming tonight."

"You're welcome." I couldn't stop myself from smirking at the double entendre.

Vic rested her forehead against mine, her brows furrowed. "And listen... If you don't want to keep this going, I won't be offended."

Giggling, I pulled back to look at her. I could see her genuine worry, real concern washing over her face. I put my hands on her biceps and gave them a light squeeze. "Why would that be the case?"

"Because you work for me, and you have a lot going on." Vic shrugged.

Biting my lip, I sighed. "Well I don't know what I'm looking for right now, but I know I like spending time with you. So as long as you're okay with this being casual and open, I would like to see you again."

It felt strange to admit I was seeing someone else. That Bri had managed to get in my bed just last week. But I hoped Vic would read between the lines for now, until I could work up the courage to say it outright.

With a knowing nod, Vic smiled. "That's fine. I'll be here whenever you want me." She pulled me close for another kiss, and her shoulders dropped as her anxiety eased.

"Well, okay then." I grinned as we separated. Resting my hand on her chest, I

whispered, “Enjoy my dirty underwear.”

Her face flushed as I pulled away and headed up the pathway toward the front door. I quietly dug out my keys from the small red purse that had followed me around all night. When I peeked over my shoulder, sliding the key into the door, Vic was still waiting right where I’d left her.

She watched my every move, unable to tear her eyes away. But she didn’t just watch my ass or the peek of my legs that slipped out of the high slit in my dress. Her eyes moved with my arms and my hair, like she was trying to memorize every detail of me.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

The lock clicked open as I turned the key. Before I pushed open the door, I looked back at Victoria and her bright red car one more time. She smiled at me, lifting her hand to wave goodbye.

I didn't want to shout and risk waking anyone up. So instead, I mouthed: See you soon.

A smile crept onto her face as she nodded.

Pushing open the door, I stepped into the dark entryway. Then, as quietly as I could, I eased the door shut behind me and leaned against it for a moment, the night finally washing over me in the silence of my home.

Letting a sigh seep from my lungs, I took off my heels and headed upstairs. From the brief glimpse I caught from the doorway, I could already tell the kitchen was a mess. But I shook it off and plodded along; that was a problem for tomorrow.

The closer I got to my bedroom, the more evidence of a fun night I encountered: toys on the stairs, stained kids' clothes draped over the railing, crayons littered across the floor.

I giggled as I pictured Robin and Zoey managing my mongrels.

When I reached the landing, heels in hands, I shifted onto my tippy toes and slowly crept down the hallway, poking my head into each doorway as I passed by.

First: Derek's room. It was dark, his baseball shaped night light no longer illuminated

to keep the monsters away. He'd outgrown it in just the last couple weeks. Every time I put him in bed, I wanted to flick it on. Just once more, for old time's sake.

But now, he slept like a starfish across the full-sized bed.

I kept my giggle to myself and blew him a silent kiss before moving down to Ava's room. But the orange glow of her Minecraft light showed me that the room was empty. Which meant there was only one place she could be.

So I moved to the last door in the hallway, where four pairs of feet stuck out from the tiny twin mattress: Leila's at the center of the bed; Ava's cuddled up on top of her; and Robin and Zoey on either side, hands intertwined over the kids' heads.

My eyes welled up. A couple years ago, I wasn't sure Zoey was completely unreachable, too wrapped up with her big city life to spend much time in New Winford. Back then, I feared she would ever be as close to my babies as I'd wanted. But now, here she was with the love of her life, snuggling with my two sweeties.

I watched them like that for just a few minutes before I could hardly stand upright. Blowing them four silent kisses, I left the doorway and finally stepped into my room.

Closing the door almost entirely, I let out a loud breath. I dropped the heels on my area rug, letting the fabric dampen the clatter. With tired hands, I peeled the tight dress off of my body and let it fall to the ground. I didn't bother to hang it up, saving the little energy I had left to wipe off whatever makeup was left on my face and throw myself into bed.

In a matter of seconds, my eyes were drifting closed, and I was fading into sleep. Every time I breathed, I pictured a different woman in my bed. First, it was Vic. Then, it was Bri. Then, it was both of them.

I tried to shake them off as sleep took over my mind.

These two are going to ruin me.

25

BRI

My phone buzzed across the shop. As safely as I could, I turned off the circular saw and jogged across the room. I knew exactly who it was even before the screen lit up with the words.

How's it going over there? Would love a picture.

A blush rose to my cheeks at just her name. Sarah had some kind of insane grip on me that I still couldn't explain. But this was the fourth table update she'd asked for in a few days. She was getting desperate to see what I'd done so far.

But I couldn't just send a picture. It still needed to be sanded, stained, and sealed. And until then, the piece wouldn't look how I wanted it to.

I typed out a message before heading back to my work.

No pics. Going well. It'll be done on time. I miss you.

The whirl of the circular saw was the soundtrack to my day as I cut out small detail pieces. They had to be added before the sanding and the staining but would be intricate and require a delicate hand.

My mind was swimming with images of Sarah. When I told Cleo about our rendezvous, they were thrilled to hear all of the gory details. But when it came to



what this looked like long term, they were a lot more hesitant. Cleo had seen me fawn over Sarah listlessly for over a decade and didn't want to see me get hurt again. They reminded me how badly it had hurt when Sarah and Jason got together and urged me to protect my heart if I felt like she wasn't ready.

Of course I would try to. But Sarah was something otherworldly. I would've waited a hundred lifetimes for her. And then a few thousand more.

After cutting out a few dozen inch-sized pieces of white ash, I set them in a stack across from the table. It was already getting late in the day, and I was far too exhausted to work on something so fragile.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Instead, I peeled back the tarp covering the tabletop and lifted the safety glasses from my eyes. The glasses slicked my hair back against my head as I squatted to examine the bottom of the table. From below, the dovetail joints looked well-integrated. Once everything was sanded and stained, they would hardly be noticeable.

The goal was to end up with a table to look like it had been carved straight from the trunk, with as few visible seams as possible. It was a little more natural than my old sculpture used to be, but it was the design that spoke to me.

More than anything, I hoped it would fit in with Sarah's vision for the space. She had shown me her ideas for the house, just enough to jog my imagination. But this felt a bit more rustic than the rest of the place.

I didn't want to let her down on such a big job.

Just as I was getting lost in the thought, a loud knock came from the door.

Shit, it's probably one of my lumber guys.

Tossing the tarp back over the table, I wiped the sweat from my forehead with the hem of my gray workout shirt.

"Just a second," I called out toward the workshop's old, metal door.

Jogging across the shop, I swung open the rickety door to meet Sarah's plumb face and excited smile. "Hi."

I shook my head as I met her blue eyes. “Hi.”

“You said you missed me.” She bit her lip as she leaned against the doorframe.

My jaw dropped at her boldness. “And I’m supposed to believe this isn’t a ploy to see what I’ve been up to?”

Shrugging, Sarah pushed past me. A fresh floral scent wafted into my nose as her body brushed against mine. She planted a gentle kiss on my cheek; the warmth radiated straight to my stomach. “All I’m saying is that Bri Shaw was a chronic procrastinator in my experience. So I just wanted to check on you.”

As she tried to move away, I put my hands on her hips and pulled her ass against my hips. I lowered my voice and leaned into her ear. “So you didn’t miss me?”

Sarah leaned her head back, resting it on my shoulder. Her throat strained as she spoke, “Did I say that?” Jokingly, she shoved me off and headed into the shop. I watched her every move: the way her hips swayed, her lush thighs brushing together under her jeans.

In a matter of seconds, my entire body was pulsing with excitement.

She got to the tarp and ran her finger along it. Lifting her eyes, she wiggled her eyebrows at me. “How’s it going?”

I crossed my arms, flexing my forearms for Sarah to see. “Good. Like I said, it’ll be done on time.”

“Is that true?” Sarah narrowed her eyes at me as she held up the freshly cut pieces of detailing, still warm from the saw.

Crossing the room, I nodded and stood in front of her. “Yes, ma’am.”

Sarah’s gaze flicked between my eyes, my lips, and the bead of sweat trailing down my neck. “How are you working here without air conditioning? It’s so hot out.”

I pointed to the tiny unit in the back corner of the shop. “It does the trick.”

Rolling her eyes, Sarah shook her head and leaned her ass against the tarp. “That thing must be from 1992. I think you just like this disheveled, sweaty look. It probably pulls all the ladies.”

A smirk took over my face. I placed my hands on the table behind her and met her gaze. “Is it working?”

26

## SARAH

My entire body tense as Bri surrounded me. I was supposed to be here on a mission. A fact finding mission to report back to my client what progress had been made.

“Maybe.” I confessed, unable to stop the words from leaving my lips. It had always felt impossible to lie to Bri, but that had gotten even harder after our night together... and the dozens of flirty texts that had been exchanged since.

The kids had spent a lot of time at home the last couple weeks, making it wildly difficult to see Bri. But today, they were at a water park with Jason and Liv. So I found myself with a little extra time to see what Bri had been up to.

Licking my lips, I brought my hands to her chest. I let them linger there just long enough to feel her chest starting to rise and fall faster before I pushed her off and

walked closer to the table. “It’s about to be August. We don’t have a lot of time left.”

## Page 51

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Bri nodded, following behind me as I walked. I could feel her hungry eyes on my body. It made my throat tighten.

Her voice was a low rumble. “I know the deadline, darlin’.”

Whipping my head around, I grinned. “Who exactly is your darling?”

Bri smirked back, licking her lips. “You know exactly who.” When I stopped to lean on the table – trying to gauge where exactly in the building process Bri was – Bri sidled up behind me. She leaned into my ear, “I promise it will be done, Sarah.”

“Good.” Before I could walk away, Bri grabbed my belt loops and pulled me back. Her hands gripped my hips and pushed me into her. As she did, I bit my lip. A pulse of pleasure rushed through my body. “How do I know if it’s really coming along?”

Bri strode across the room, meeting me next to the table. “You might have to learn to have a little faith in me.”

As soon as she got close to me, her signature scent wafted into my nose. It made me melt, a jolt of excitement heading straight to my clit. You’d think after the last couple of weeks with Bri and Vic that I would’ve gotten my fill. But they’d unlocked something in me that had lay dormant for over a decade.

Standing in front of me, Bri looked down at my shirt. It was a simple, floral blouse. But it did my boobs a favor, making them hard to avoid.

I put my hand on Bri’s chin and lifted her gaze to mine. “I’ve always had faith in

you.” Licking my lips, I shrugged. “But how can we know if the table is sturdy enough to function?”

A devious grin played at the corners of Bri’s mouth. In one fluid motion, she wrapped her arms around my waist and kissed me. “I could show you.”

“Please.” A breathy plea escaped my lungs as her strong arms squeezed the air from my lungs.

Bri swept up my legs and lifted me onto the top. My ass made a solid thud against the tarped table. The sensation sent a wave of pleasure to my clit. We’d only been in the same room together for a few minutes and my body already craved her.

Lowering her head, Bri kissed my neck. She cupped the back of my head as she let her tongue draw shapes on the sensitive skin.

I spread my legs for her, letting her body between them. Hungry, Bri gripped my hips and pulled me closer. The force of our bodies clashing made my slit clench with excitement. A moan rose in my chest as I looked at Bri.

She pulled away long enough to smile at me before she let her hand explore my chest. Her calloused hands grabbed at my breasts, squeezing them gently as she whimpered. “God, you’re unbelievable.”

My hips started to rock against her body, the table not budging an inch under the pressure.

As if she could read my mind, Bri teased, “I told you: sturdy.”

I laughed, a low rumble. “I’ll never doubt you again.”

She went back to touching me, her hands taking their time exploring my figure. Lingering on my soft stomach, Bri's hands turned to light, tempting touches.

I wanted to live in that moment forever, but I knew I should be honest with Bri. So I forced myself to grab her face again, pulling her from her ecstasy filled haze.

I opened my eyes, trying to wake myself from the dream of being touched by her. "There is one other thing."

Bri leaned back enough to put my face into focus, letting her hands rest on the tarped table. Her biceps and forearms flexed as she stood. They glistened with sweat. The mere image was enough to set me off track again but I needed to focus.

"Go on," Bri prompted in a gentle grumble.

My mouth opened but words refused to come out. The rattling of the old air conditioning suddenly took over my entire brain. Clearing my throat, I tried again. "I've been seeing Victoria. Outside of work stuff."

Bri chuckled and smiled. Her green eyes were warm, like falling asleep in a hammock as the sun streamed between the forest canopy.

"That's okay."

"Really?" I swallowed hard, my nerves starting to drain from my body.

Bri nodded, standing up straighter and lifting her hands from the table. But she stayed firmly planted between my legs. "Of course. I wanted you to explore." She lifted her hands and gestured. "I'll admit, I'd love to have you all to myself. But I don't want to rob you of this. Because most of us got to have it, and as far as I know, you didn't."



She was right. Jason and I started dating in high school and we never bothered to see other people. We went to the same college and had kids right after graduation.

A sigh let my shoulders drop. I wouldn't change any of it, it gave me my babies. But at this moment, I wished I was ready to just lock myself down again. Even if I knew my heart wasn't sure exactly who I wanted yet.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

“Thank you. You’re sure you’re okay with it?” I bit my lip, nervous she would change her mind.

With a smile, Bri kissed my cheek. “Yep. I’m just going to win. So, enjoy your time with her.”

I rolled my eyes. “Brianne Shaw, you are a ridiculous person.”

“A ridiculous person who’s been obsessed with you since the first time I laid eyes on you.” She winked back at me and helped me hop off the table.

There was no denying that it was well built. Even without the finishing touches, it felt like it could weather a tornado no problem. Once I was back on my feet, I put my arms around Bri’s waist. “That’s a long time.”

Taking in a deep breath, Bri shrugged. “It was worth every second.”

I pulled her in for a kiss, our lips fitting together perfectly. My heart skipped a beat as I squeezed her ass.

Bri giggled before pulling away and walking across the shop. “Before I kick you out, I did want to ask: can I take you on a proper date? Something a little more formal than pizza at your house?”

The thought of our first tryst made me blush. But it would be nice to be out in the real world with Bri. I hated having to squeeze her into the small free hours I had.

Waving me off, Bri lifted her finger. “Not that I don’t love seeing you whenever you have time for me. I just want to spoil you.” I could see the gears turning in her brain as she tried desperately not to blow her shot.

I leaned on one of the workbenches. “You’re very cute when you’re overexplaining.”

Bri rubbed the back of her neck, a nervousness washing over her face.

“But yes. I’d love that. I’ll send you my schedule for the next few days.” Crossing the room, I placed a kiss on her cheek. “Also, you couldn’t kick me out if you wanted to.”

She rolled her eyes, gripping my neck as she brought her lips to mine. “That is probably true, Sarah Greenwood. I think I’d follow you into a black hole.”

Our lips pressed together as my eyes closed. I felt the corners welling with a tear at the thought. I wasn’t quite sure what I’d done to deserve such a dedicated friend and now lover. But I wasn’t interested in playing with Bri’s heart. I’d already done that plenty over the years.

My lips peeled away from hers with a gentle smack. “Okay. I’m going to let you get back to work.”

“Thank you,” her voice was hardly even a whisper as she watched me turn to leave. As I walked away, I felt a string tie around my heart and latch onto hers. Even as I closed the dinky metal door, I felt the rope tug on my chest.

I wasn’t sure that cord would ever be cut. But I needed to figure out what the fuck I was doing before someone got hurt.

SARAH

I bit my lip as I watched Derek step up to home plate. His bat was starting to fit his proportions, growing faster than I ever could have imagined.

“Come on, Der! You got this!” Robin clapped from beside me.

It startled me out of the haze Bri had put me a few days earlier. The summer was flying by, baseball games and pool days blending into work meetings and dates with my two very hot ladies.

Zoey shook her head at Robin’s enthusiasm. “I just can’t imagine how much crazier you’re going to be about our kids.”

Shrugging, Robin sat down. “I think about the same. I don’t want to give them a complex.”

I snorted a laugh. “No matter how hard you try, you’re going to give them a complex.” As I watched on, Derek lifted his bat and got into the form his dad had taught him as soon as he was able to hold a plastic version.

Even now, Jason stood near third base and clapped for our son.

I turned to look at Robin and Zoey, my sister’s hand draped over her partner’s knee. Shaking my head, I tried to be more present as I felt my mind drifting off.

But it didn’t help much, all I could think about was the two women I had trying to sweep me off of my feet. Both of them were undeniably incredible. And I felt my stomach tighten at the thought of each of their faces.

Nudging me, Zoey smiled. “What’s going on with you?”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I stammered for words, looking around for the girls before speaking. Once I saw them playing Dragons in the corner with the other little siblings, I nodded. “Dating is like... so mean.”

“Yeah, kind of.” Zoey giggled. “Anything in particular?”

As I thought, Robin leaned over and looked at me. It was a little unusual for me to tell Robin everything. Even when Jason and I first decided to separate, I texted her before my own sister and parents.

All of this – with Bri and Victoria – felt too big to talk about.

I bit the inside of my cheek. “I told Bri that I was seeing Vic and it was just weird.”

Robin’s forehead wrinkled. “Did she take it okay?”

“Of course.” The thought of Bri taking anything poorly was almost laughable. She was steady and calm. And seeing other people was her idea to begin with. I paused, watching as a pitch came hurtling toward Derek.

He let his arms swing the bat, trusting his instincts.

A loud bang rang out across the field as the metal met the leather covering of a baseball.

Robin leapt up, cheering already as my son took off toward first base. I watched closely as his small legs pushed his body forward. The short stop flung the ball from

third base over to first. Just in time, Derek's foot slammed against the base.

"Yes!" I yelped, pumping my fist.

Once the crowd finished clapping, I sat back down and sighed. "I don't know, isn't it weird in such a small town to be dating both of them?"

Zoey shook her head. "No. Like, I get why you feel that way. But it's the nature of all of this shit. Hell, when I started seeing Robin, Claire was still hanging around."

Rolling her eyes, Robin groaned. "God, that was a pain in the ass."

I still remembered that relationship. Just how poorly suited Robin was to her. Most of us knew that Zoey and Robin's love was written in the stars, that someday they'd put all of that angst aside and just admit they were in love with each other.

"But how long can that last?" Leaning onto my knees, I crossed my arms and stared at the field.

Zoey sighed as she gave her belly a light rub. "That is a tough question. Probably not as long as you want."

We clapped for the next hitter who got on first as Derek shuttled along to second.

With a goofy grin, Robin wiggled her eyebrows. "Do you have any idea who you're feeling more?"

The worst part was: I really couldn't say. They were both great and offered so much.

After a minute, I shook my head. "I have no idea."

Groaning, Zoey leaned back onto the bleachers. “Boring. I wanted gossip.”

I laughed at her, dramatic as always. We went back to watching the game and my mind kept swimming.

As I drifted off into thought, my phone buzzed with a text from Bri:

Hiya, how do you feel about a hike on Sunday? I could use some inspiration.

My heart fluttered at the thought of alone time with Bri. We had some unfinished business after testing out that table’s sturdiness. And I hadn’t been able to get her out of my mind since.

Zoey peeked over my shoulder and raised her eyebrows.

Ignoring her, I typed a response.

Perfect. Kids leave for Jason’s on Saturday so I’m around any time.

Once I hit send, I tucked my phone back into my pocket. It was hard to stay off it with so many work texts coming in at any moment. Vic was not afraid to reach out if she needed anything... or if she just wanted to flirt.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

But with Derek on third base, I couldn't afford any distractions. Every parent on the bleachers was on the edge of their metal seat, ready to see how the next play would turn out.

As we watched the pitcher wind up, a woman in loose but well-fitted jeans, a baggy t-shirt, and a black baseball cap approached the fence. She intertwined her fingers with the chainlink and watched the pitch.

The ball hurtled toward the batter who swung with all his might. Smashing the ball into the outfield, the kid took off toward first as Derek watched the ball arch in the sky. Once he knew it was going far enough out, he sprinted toward home.

"Go, baby!" I hollered as he hustled down the baseline. Jason clapped with pride as his players rounded the bases. Before the outfielder could hurl the ball to home plate, Derek sprinted across it.

The bleachers erupted with excitement as the team scored.

Once the excitement died down, Robin's eyes followed my gaze to the mysterious woman. Her face scrunched up as she nudged Zoey and nodded toward them.

"Is that...?" Zoey tilted her head.

"Who?" I turned to Robin.

Widening her eyes, Robin scoffed. "Yeah it is."



Pressing, I gestured for more information. “Who?”

“That’s Cat Collins.”

I rolled my eyes. “Am I supposed to know who that is?”

With an exaggerated groan, Robin lowered her voice to a whisper. “She’s a pro softball player from New Winford.”

Zoey turned to me and nodded. “She got injured last season and then kind of...”

“Spiraled into a crazy alcohol-fueled bender.” Robin shook her head. “No one’s seen her for months. I think everyone assumed she was done with softball forever.”

My eyebrows lifted with surprise. I felt like I knew everyone in town but somehow, I’d missed this bit of town gossip entirely. It was certainly strange but New Winford seemed to be a hotbed for people looking for an escape.

Zoey sighed as she met Robin’s gaze. “I wonder if Cleo knows.”

Shrugging, Robin tried to turn her attention back to the game as Zoey pulled out her phone.

I looked onto the field, my foot shaking as I tried to remind myself that I had as much time as I needed. Even if I wanted an answer sooner rather than later.

28

BRI

I tossed the picnic basket into the back of the truck, next to the rolled up blanket and

my hiking bag. With a slam, I closed up the bed and waltzed inside to do a final check of the house. I didn't want to miss anything for mine and Sarah's first real date.

When I pushed open the side door, Oakkie meowed at me from the counter.

"I know, sweetie. I'll be back soon. Lock down the fort for me." I gave him a pet under his soft chin. A gentle purr rumbled against my hand as I said goodbye to my companion.

Locking the door behind me, I checked my pockets for my phone and my wallet.

I hopped into my truck and sent Sarah a text that I was on my way. Once I hit send, I took a deep breath and tried to settle my nerves. It felt silly to be nervous to spend time with her. But it was an actual date.

I turned the key in the ignition and pulled my car out of the driveway, barreling down the mountain toward New Winford. My stomach turned as the truck gained speed on the downward slope. It felt just like my heart felt: a hunk of metal hurtling toward the woman I loved and hoping I wouldn't need to pull the brakes.

Knowing I was about to spin myself out, I tried to enjoy the August scenery instead. It was one of the last few weeks that would feel like true Summer. Once the month rolled on, the leaves would start to crisp and the wind would start to blow cooler.

By the time I'd settled my breathing, my truck was pulling onto Sarah's street and into her freshly paved driveway.

When I put the car in park, I checked my hair in the visor mirror and made sure it was laying nicely in the ponytail.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I hopped out of the truck and headed to her front door. The last time I made this walk, I wasn't sure if Sarah was even into me like that. And now, I was more certain of that than I'd ever been. Even if I wasn't entirely sure she'd choose me in the end.

Clearing my throat, I knocked on the front door and waited. I could hear the patter of her hiking boots on the engineered wood floors from the otherside of the door.

The door flung open to reveal Sarah's smiling face. "Hi." She crossed the threshold and put her hand on my neck, pulling me in for a kiss. As soon as our lips met, I wanted to melt. I was tempted to skip the hike entirely and just stand in that doorway with our tongues teasing each other.

But instead, I pulled back and grinned. "It's good to see you. How was your week with the kids?" I took a look at her, her pink workout shirt loosely draping over the black hiking shorts. Even from head on, I could tell just how incredible her ass looked. Her toned but sturdy legs made my mouth water.

She sighed, a mix of disappointment and relief crossing her face. "Wonderful as always. I miss them a lot but I'm happy to see you."

"Shall we?" I gestured toward the car. Sarah grabbed a small backpack from inside and locked the door behind her.

With a nod and the bag slung over her shoulder, Sarah started toward the stone steps. I offered her my hand as we descended the steps. Once we reached the pathway, I jogged ahead and popped open the truck door.

I held out my hand to grab her bag. Without making me beg, Sarah passed the backpack to me and hopped inside. Once she was inside the truck, I closed the door and brought her bag to the bed of the truck.

I slammed the back closed and climbed into the driver's seat. Turning the car back on, I nodded to Sarah. "Ready?"

A grin took over her face as she looked at her house. "Ready."

I let the car slide back out of the driveway and into the street. Without any navigation, I started us toward the mountains. We passed my house quickly, going deeper into the woods. Sarah reached toward the dashboard and put on the radio, finding an indie country channel.

It fit the vibe of our drive perfectly.

"Did you already pick a trail?" She turned to look at me, crossing her legs in the passenger seat.

It took an extraordinary amount of effort to keep my eyes on the road and off her soft thighs. I felt like I could feel the muscular legs pressing my head between them as I buried myself in her center.

But I swallowed hard and watched the curves of the mountain roads. "I did. I think you'll like it."

Even from across the truck, I could see the blush rise in her cheeks.

As the roads grew more and more remote, no longer painted with lane lines, we got to talking about our weeks. We avoided discussing the lake house. Instead, Sarah told me about Ava's latest obsession with getting a chicken coop.

“Where does something like that even come from?” I laughed.

Sarah shrugged. “No idea. I think Robin has something to do with it. Or maybe Daryl and Leah. But it certainly wasn’t me or her dad.”

Shaking my head, I lightly hit the brakes as we approached the state park entrance. It was quiet for a Sunday, and the park waived the parking fees for the upper lots. Most people weren’t willing to park that high up, knowing the hike itself would be brutal.

We pulled into a spot near the trailhead and grabbed our gear from the back. Clipping the picnic basket and blanket to the back of my pack, I could feel Sarah’s eyes on me.

“Can I carry something?” She shook her head as she looked me up and down. My shorts were longer than hers, cutting off halfway down my thigh but leaving the toned muscles exposed. Her eyes scanned my wide shoulders as I put the bag on.

I scoffed. “Absolutely not.” Even if I was willing to let her handle some of it, the extra weight would make my muscles bulge more. And I was far more interested in letting her ogle me than give up a few pounds of luggage.

Once I was suited up, I walked us toward the trailhead where a metal gate kept out large vehicles.

We walked around it and headed down an unkept path.

“Oh, so we’re off roading?” Sarah teased as she followed behind me.

Turning around, I winked at her. “Maybe. Do you trust me?”

Sarah nodded. “Of course I do.”

It was all I needed to trudge ahead. Mossy Glen wasn't a hard trail but it was a little more rugged. We walked along the narrow path of but brush, the light trickle of a stream filling the woods.

Quickly, the brush turned to a dense forest of evergreens. The path widened and the forest floor cleared of shrubbery.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

I slowed down and walked alongside Sarah. Grabbing her hand, I intertwined my fingers with hers. My throat tightened as I held her hand. I'd dreamt of this for decades. The sun warmed my face and the light breeze breaking through the canopy kept me from sweating too hard.

Sarah smoothed her ponytail as a blush rose in her cheeks. "I'm surprised I haven't done this one yet."

Shrugging, I smiled at her. "I don't think it was cut yet when we were in high school."

"How often do you come here?" Sarah asked, watching my face.

I frowned as I considered the question. "Honestly, now as often as I should. Maybe once or twice a season. I did it as a winter hike once. It was so quiet with a blanket of snow over it."

A sigh escaped Sarah's lungs as her shoulders dropped. "God that sounds so calming."

"Maybe I can take you sometime." The words left my lips before I could stop them. It was bold, planning to spend time with her six months from now. I hoped it would be more than friends. But if Sarah ended up choosing Vic, I was determined to keep her in my life – even if it was just as old pals.

Sarah smiled at me. "That'd be nice."

Before long, we approached the stream that had been trickling in our ears for the last half hour. A quaint wood bridge stretched across it. As we approached, I ducked my head and tried to avoid her gaze.

But her eyes flicked between the railing of the bridge and my face. Her jaw dropped as she stopped in her tracks. “You have to be kidding me?”

29

SARAH

“Did you build this?” I gawked at the rudimentary bridge.

Bri shrugged. “State parks don’t get a lot of funding. I offered to build a new one a few years back. It’s probably due for replacement again, honestly.”

Nudging her, I pushed ahead and started to examine the bridge. The railing was made of lightly shaved down logs, soft and round in their edges. I ran my hand along the rough wood, not flinching away at the scratchy finish left from years of wear.

I stepped onto the bridge, climbing the steep steps and onto the deck of the actual structure. Looking at my feet, I knelt down and rubbed my fingers along the thick planks.

Bri’s feet crunched under the brush behind me, climbing up next to me. “Like it?”

“What is this? Where did all this writing come from?” I let my hands trace the etched words, which were mostly names with a few dates.

Smirking, Bri knelt down next to me. “I got the wood from an old dock on the water that was being ripped up. I didn’t bother refinishing it other than removing the moss



and barnacles. Pretty sure it's a bunch of sailors' handwriting. They'd etch their names into the docks they visited."

I shook my head, blown away by the creativity. "That's amazing."

Walking ahead of me and across the bridge, Bri shrugged. "I told you I needed some inspiration."

I rolled my eyes as I stood up and crossed the bridge. Halfway, I peeked down the stream and watched the water cascade down the path. If I was right, it would lead to the waterfall off the main trail.

A memory flashed in my mind of Bri and I swimming there as teenagers. We weren't allowed to but we did anyway. The water was frigid but the air was almost boiling so we were happy to take the relief.

Bri's fingers slipped back into mine, pulling me back to the present. We kept walking, descending the bridge on the opposite side and trudging through the woods as we walked a few yards from the creek. It disappeared from view for just a moment before reappearing, this time the water was surrounded by smooth, white boulders.

The surface of the rocks had been eroded by decades of running stream. The trail diverted to the rocks, letting hikers walk along the water and rocks instead.

"Wow." I shook my head as I stared at the rushing water. Peeking into the stream, I found the water glowing amber from the sediment.

Bri smirked. "Right?"

We followed the stream until the trail forced us back into the woods. But before we disappeared into the treeline, I stood still and closed my eyes. The sound of the

flowing water stilled my mind as I took in a breath of fresh air.

New Winford's air was shockingly clean. But there were still cars and businesses and farms. There was nothing quite like escaping into the untouched mountains and taking in the breeze off of the hidden streams.

Once my lungs felt full of cool air, I nodded and headed back onto the trail. Bri smiled as she watched me taking it all in.

## Page 57

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

As we walked, now moving uphill, I peeked at Bri. “So, if you’ve already built the table, what is this trip for?”

Blushing, Bri tried to find cover. “Well I hadn’t settled on a finish yet.”

I rolled my eyes. “I find that hard to believe.”

“Would it be so bad if I just wanted to get you alone?” Bri smirked at me, her eyes burning for me.

“No,” I shook my head as I swallowed hard, “it wouldn’t be.”

We reached the top of a steep hill and the forest began to part into an open field with low shrubs. My eyes drew down to them, where small blue dots lined the bushes. “What is this?”

Reaching into her bag, Bri pulled out an empty tupperware. “Those are wild blueberries, open for picking. And this is their season.”

“Really?” My eyes light up. “I love picking fruit myself.”

Bri giggled. “I know. We used to run around your parents' property and pick the wild mulberries. And the apples from the tree that would never ripen.”

I felt my throat tighten as the memory rushed back to me. Flashes of the two of us running through the uncut fields and hunting for fruit while we giggled played in my mind. I could hardly believe she remembered all of that.

I shook my head, letting some of that fresh air and a joke out of my lungs. “Did you build this path just for me?”

“I wish I had.” Bri clenched her jaw as she passed me a tupperware to collect my berries. Her gaze was intense, sending a jolt of excitement through my body that was hard to ignore. If I wasn’t so worried about getting caught, I would’ve pinned her against a tree and touched her right there.

Bri reached into the bush and plucked a ripe blueberry off the stem, popping it into her mouth. “Oh my god, that’s so good.” Before I could reply, she was already reaching down and grabbing another. But this time, she brought it to my lips and waited for them to part.

I opened my mouth, letting her finger put the berry on my tongue. But before she could pull away, I wrapped my lips around her finger and pulled it deeper into my mouth.

“Fuck.” Bri moaned as she felt my plump lips around her.

Grabbing her wrist, I pulled the finger out of my mouth and started to chew on the berry. Bri swallowed hard enough for me to see.

I laughed as I tasted the berry, trying to ignore the pulsing in my folds. The berry was sweet, perfectly ripe. “Wow.”

Bri nodded, trying to steady herself. “Right?” But her eyes watched my lips, wanting more of me.

While she watched, I started pulling berries off the bushes and popping them into the plastic container. Careful not to over harvest, we made sure to leave plenty of fruit for the next hikers. But given how full the bushes were already, I assumed no one else

would bother coming here to take them.

Once our tupperware was almost full, Bri tucked it into her bag and kept us moving along the trail. Her broad shoulders strained under the weight of her backpack. A light glisten of sweat covered her exposed skin, the muscles of her arms bulging as she hiked.

We trudged back into the woods, leaving the dozens of berry bushes behind.

“This is the worst part, the path narrows on a cliff. Just stay close to me.” Bri looked over her shoulder at me.

I nodded. “Easy enough.” All my body wanted was to be glued to her.

Sure enough, the trail narrowed, forcing me behind Bri’s strong body. A large cliff towered over us on the left as a steep drop fell off to our right. I peeked over the edge. My stomach dropped at the sight.

“Jesus.”

Bri laughed as she kept us chugging along. “It’s no joke. But the view is worth it.”

My eyebrows lifted in surprise. There was a view too? It was like this trail was custom built to hit everything I wanted on a hike.

We stayed tucked to the wall for a few minutes before the path leveled out and another steep cliff took the place of the harsh drop, sandwiching us between two towering rocks.

A cool breeze ran through the cavern. The sweat that had started to cake my skin started to dry as the sun was blocked out.

Bri looked over her shoulder to make sure I was okay. But when she saw my face, a smile took over hers. “You’re gorgeous, do you know that?”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

“Oh my god, you’re ridiculous. I’m a mess.” I looked away from her, trying to get my composure back as she looked at me.

“So you don’t know?” Bri shook her head.

Just from the look in her eyes, I knew she was about to make it her life’s mission to show me how she saw me. And if I knew anything about Bri, it’s that she would die trying.

The path widened enough for us to walk side by side as the cliffs hovering above us slowly dropped back to our level. Once they did, the ground turned to the same weathered boulders that lined the stream. The trees grew sparse as they started having to grow between the rocks.

I stopped in my tracks as the canopy parted enough for the view to come into sight. “Wow.” It came out as a whisper, hardly loud enough for Bri to hear.

But she nodded and wrapped her arm around my shoulders. “Right?”

Stepping forward, the panoramic view of the valley unfolded before me. It wrapped around the mountain, ending where the mountain towered over us. The flat rocks created a perfect ledge just long enough to walk out onto and take a seat.

I walked toward the edge, keeping a few feet between me and the lip as my stomach dropped into my ass. “That’s a big drop.”

Bri nodded, holding onto my shorts from behind. “No kidding.”

There was nothing in the sprawling valley. It looked like not even a single house was down there for as far as my eyes could see.

Resting her chin on my shoulder, Bri lowered her voice to a rumble. “Why don’t you sit on one of those rocks back there while I set up lunch?”

I raised my eyebrows. “Lunch?”

“Of course, lunch.” Bri giggled and guided me back toward the boulders a few yards from the cliff face.

Once I was settled, Bri set down her backpack and methodically set up a little picnic sight. She laid out an outdoor blanket, thick with padding for rough surfaces, and laid out dozens of containers of food on it.

Opening the wicker basket, she pulled out some plates and cups along with a bottle of prosecco.

By the time she was done setting the whole thing up, her backpack was an empty sack.

“Did you bring anything that wasn’t for this picnic?” I teased, resting my chin on my palm.

Bri shook her head, a tired, goofy grin taking over her face. “Nope. I wanted you to have everything you wanted.”

Crossing the few feet between us, Bri stretched out her hand and helped me off the rock. She guided me to the blanket and knelt down on the blanket.

I followed suit, taking my place next to her. The endless New York mountains and



valets stretched out in front of us. Before me, an insane array of food waited. Glass tupperware was full of fresh fruit. From the freezer bag, Bri had packed an entire charcuterie board and laid it out perfectly.

I shook my head. “I don’t know what I did to deserve all of this.”

With a shrug, Bri licked her lips. “You were you.”

30

BRI

I reached down and grabbed a ripe strawberry, bringing the fruit to Sarah’s lips. Her throat rippled as she swallowed, before opening her mouth for my fruit.

She bit into it, juice dripping off of the berry and into my hand. A moan escaped her lips as she tasted the fruit. “Fuck, I’m hungry.”

“Good.” I smiled, gesturing to the huge array of food I’d brought with us. As she watched me, I licked the strawberry juice off my hand. The sweet red juice mixed with the sweat that glistened on my hand.

Sarah dug in, grabbing some prosciutto off the charcuterie board and layering it with sliced brie and a cracker. For a minute, I just watched her enjoy the food. Her eyes rolled back as she ate, the hike making her ravenous.

My heart pounded in my chest, wanting nothing more than to hold her.

“How did you even carry all of this?” Sarah covered her mouth as she spoke.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:40 pm*

Shrugging, I chuckled. “I tried not to think about it too much.” I reached across the picnic blanket to the bottle of prosecco just past her legs. Just a few inches apart, I could feel the heat of our bodies begging to collide.

But I swallowed my desire and popped the top off the bubbly. I grabbed her cup and poured some in, giving myself a smaller serving.

“Thanks.” She smiled as she took a sip, peeking at me over the rim of the cup. After a minute, Sarah tapped her finger against the plastic. “Do you remember picking berries at my house?”

Before she even finished the question, I was giggling as the memories came rushing back. “Of course I do. Your mom used to be so mad because we never had room left for dinner.”

“Dorothy hates when someone spoils dinner.” Sarah bit her lip.

I looked out over the valley. “How is Dorothy? I feel like I haven’t seen her in ages.”

Shaking her head, Sarah shrugged. “She’s... good. Getting older, which is weird to watch. But she loves the kids and has been very supportive of us since the divorce.”

It was the question I’d been wanting to ask but avoiding like the plague. I genuinely liked Sarah. And even though this was supposed to be casual, I knew I wanted to build something longterm with her.

So I took a sip of liquid courage and asked, “How does the whole dating people thing

work with the kids?”

Sarah sucked her teeth and wiggled her eyebrows. “Great question.” Taking a long moment, Sarah let out a sigh. “Well, when Jason first started seeing someone seriously, we had a coffee and talked about her. Like brutally honest. He told me the nitty gritty of how they met, how long they’d been seeing each other, how serious it was. The whole nine yards.”

“How did that feel?” The words left my mouth before I could stop them.

Sarah was surprised for a second before shrugging. “It was more weird than anything else. Our romantic relationship was dead long before we actually separated.”

I turned toward her, ignoring the view. “Then what?”

“Then I talked to the kids and asked them when they would be comfortable meeting her. They set their own boundaries and Jason and I respected that. When they were ready, we all hung out together.” Sarah took another drink and met my eyes.

Unable to hide my surprise, I wiped my hands on a napkin and leaned closer. “Together?”

“Yep.”

“Why?” I chuckled.

Sarah broke our eye contact and watched the leaves rustle in the valley. “Neither of us wanted the kids to feel like this new person was an invader. Like they couldn’t have their dad without her or have me with her.”

“Right.” Nodding, I reached out to grab Sarah’s hand. It was a little sweaty, maybe

from the hike or from the nerves. “How do you feel about...?”

Sarah smiled as she intertwined her fingers with mine. “Olivia. She’s sweet. She cares about my babies and she loves Jay. I was surprised by how willing she was to follow our lead. But she fits in perfectly. Even if it’s a little odd sometimes.”

I couldn’t stop myself from smiling. It was everything Sarah deserved: something simple and supportive. The wind blew over the cliffside, the tree branches swaying in the breeze. I felt the sweat on the back of my neck cooling as the air came through.

Biting the inside of my cheek, there was one more thing I wanted to ask. But I wasn't sure now was the time.

Like she could read my mind, Sarah rolled her eyes. “What do you want to ask, Bri?”

I clenched my jaw before getting the words out. “Is that something you want for yourself?”

Her face flushed pink as she thought about the question. She tilted her head toward the sky, which felt like it was just an arms reach away.

“You’re such a troublemaker.” Sarah licked her lips as a smirk took over her face.

Letting my fingers find her chin, I tilted her face toward mine. “So, that’s a yes?” I grinned looking into her blue eyes.

Sarah shrugged. “For the right person.”

“Enough said.” I pulled her lips to mine, pressing them together as I took in a deep breath. After a few seconds of light pecks, our lips started to move around each other. I let my tongue tease hers.

Sarah pulled back, meeting my eyes for a second before going back to kissing me. She tried to calm her smile enough to makeout with me. Her hands lifted toward my stomach, resting on the toned ab that were covered by a thin layer of sweaty fabric.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

A moan escaped my throat as she touched me. I had been desperate for her for weeks now, daydreaming of the next time I'd get to touch her. Unable to wait any longer, I moved my body toward hers as we kissed, throwing my leg over her lap as she leaned back onto the blanket.

Our lips didn't part once as we maneuvered, our bodies in perfect sync.

On top of her, I felt my hips start to rock against hers. She hadn't laid a finger on my center and yet my entire body was anticipating her. Beneath me, Sarah's hips started to gently thrust into me.

My chest rose and fell rapidly, desire burning in my lungs. I could tell she wanted me too, her breath growing quick against my face.

"Get me off this fucking mountain." Sarah groaned into my mouth as her own excitement took over.

Without needing any more assurance, I rolled off of her lap and started packing up the picnic. The sun was lowering in the sky but it would be a few hours before it really set.

It only took a few minutes for the two of us to throw everything back into its respective packs and start heading down the path. This loop took us down the mountain, not retracing any of the original ground we covered.

Holding my hand, Sarah followed the trail markers. She was basically running down the slope to get back to the parking lot.

The way down went way faster, approaching the car just thirty minutes after we left our cliffside rest spot.

“Someone’s eager.” I teased as Sarah charged ahead toward the truck.

Whipping her head around, Sarah narrowed her eyes at me. “Is that a problem?”

I shook my head quickly. “God, no.” Unlocking the car, I tossed our gear in the bed and threw open the driver’s side door in what felt like milliseconds.

Already buckled in, Sarah’s knees clasped together as she faced me in her seat.

“Whose house?” I asked as I put the car in drive.

“Yours.” She had the answer locked and loaded. When I turned to her confused, she shrugged as she tried to catch her breath. “It’s closer.”

I didn’t need more of an explanation than that as I whipped the truck out of the parking lot and back onto the mountain road. Once we were cruising down the road, Sarah reached her hand across the console and set it on my thigh.

It took everything in me to keep my whimper to myself, not wanting to seem too desperate.

When I could, I peeked over at her in the passenger seat. Her eyes were craving me, looking famished as she kept her focus on me. Every time I turned back to the road, her hand would travel a few inches higher on my leg.

The lump in my throat grew with every movement. She hovered just a few centimeters away from the heat of my slit. My clit throbbed at the thought.

But surely, Sarah Greenwood isn't about to start trying to fuck me while I drive?

It was a crazy thought, one I'd never even let myself consider. But as I took the mountain curves with ease, Sarah let her fingers press between my legs. She applied pressure to her fingers, right along where my clit was aching for her.

"Sarah," I warned.

Eyeing me, she giggled. "Brianne."

I moaned as she rubbed me over the hiking shorts. "This is dangerous."

"Can't handle it?" She teased.

Shaking my head, I kept my eyes on the road. "Did I say that?"

Sarah's teeth peeked out of her lips as she sunk them into her lip. Applying more pressure, she let her hand rub against my folds. The fabric was already slick with excitement from our makeout session on the mountain. My body tried to grind along with her movements without taking my attention off the road.

When the truck careened down a slope, I let my mind focus on Sarah's hands for a breath moment. Even over the clothes, she had found my clit quickly. But to make up for the extra layers, she applied a more pointed pressure.

"God, Sarah." I moaned as I tightened my grip on the wheel. A part of me thought I might rip off the leather under my hands.

We were only fifteen minutes from my house. All I have to do is hold out for a little longer.



## Page 61

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Watching my eyes flick from the road to the clock, Sarah giggled. “Counting down?”

I nodded. “To when I can fuck you.” My words turned to a whimper as Sarah teased me more.

She leaned across the console, straining her seatbelt, and planted a soft kiss on my cheek. Even against my flushed skin, her lips were soft and warm.

Sarah lowered her voice to a low, seductive whisper. “Why don’t you tell me how you want me?”

Licking my lips, I nodded. “I want to put you in the shower, wash all of that sweat off your body and get you dirty all over again.”

“I’d like that.” Sarah giggled. Her hand lifted from my center and toward the band of my shorts. Letting her fingers lift the fabric slightly, her soft skin met mine. It sent a shiver down my spine, my sensitive lower stomach not expecting to feel her so soon.

Just as Sarah was about to let her hand slip underneath the fabric toward my wet center, she pulled away and grinned at me. “I’ll just let you think about that.”

My jaw dropped as desperation set in. “You’re so mean to me.” I let my foot lay on the gas a little heavier, hoping to get us home as quickly as possible.

But we were only a few minutes away now. I slowed the truck down as our turn approached. Now that we were back on my street, I let myself look at the gorgeous woman in my passenger seat.

Her thick thighs were shaking with anticipation, just as desperate for me as I was for her. I swallowed my excitement as I turned down the driveway.

I didn't even bother parking the car in its spot, instead pulling up as close to the front door as I could and tossing the car into Park. I wasn't even sure if the gears had shifted when I turned off the ignition and jogged to Sarah's side.

Throwing open the door, I reached across her chest and unbuckled the seat belt.

"Jesus." Sarah moaned as she watched me move.

I gripped her thighs and turned her in her seat, pulling her hips into my center. "Put your legs around me."

Following my orders, Sarah nodded and wrapped herself around me. She threw her hands over my neck as I lifted her off of the seat.

As I held her, she reached behind us to shut the truck door. She snuck a feel of my bulging biceps as she brought her hand back to my neck. Planting her lips on my neck, she kissed my neck as I held her in the air.

I fumbled with the keys and unlocked the door. Sarah used her hands to shove it open, a meow from Oakkie sounding as soon as the wood parted from the frame.

"Hi there," Sarah giggled as she reached a hand down to pet the sweet cat.

Oakkie lifted his head into her hand, rubbing her forehead on her palm.

But Sarah brought her hand back to my neck and planted her teeth in them. "I heard something about a shower?"

## SARAH

Bri grinned as the words left my lips. Lifting one of her hands from the string grip on my thighs, Bri threw the house door closed and walked toward the stairs.

I was still stunned by her strength; she moved as if I weighed a whole three points. As we moved, my center rubbed against hers with each step. The slick panties under my tiny shorts were already ruined by her.

Nearing the stairs, I loosened my legs's grip on her waist. But she gripped my thighs tighter. "No," she demanded. Not one to argue with a ripped lesbian, I nodded and squeezed the muscles together.

She let out one grunt as she took the first step. The grunt made a moan rise in my throat, my clit throbbing at the familiar sound.

But after that, Bri carried me up the stairs without any struggle.

At the top of the stairs, Bri took us into her bedroom. The vaulted ceilings with exposed wood beams made the room feel massive. At the end of the primary, a door was open to an ensuite bathroom. Only once we were in the room did Bri slap my ass to get me to hop off.

I lowered myself down, grunting as I hit the floor. My legs were already weak from the long hike but that exercise in thigh strength made my knees wobble.

Bri swung open the doors to her closet, grabbing two fresh towels from inside and nodding toward the bathroom. "Do you still need help cleaning up?"

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Swallowing, I nodded. “Yes, please.”

A smirk took over her face as she grabbed my hand and led me to the bathroom. My jaw dropped when I saw it. A walk-in shower with a glass door took up nearly half of the room. With two shower heads and pristine white subway tile, the bathroom looked brand new.

Bri reached past me, opening the shower door and putting on the water.

“When did you have this done?” I looked at the vintage vanity, running my hand along the cold porcelain.

Leaning against the cool tiles, Bri shrugged. “I did it myself a year or two ago. I’m sure your sister-in-law would have thoughts on my methods but it does the trick.”

I couldn’t help but giggle at the thought of Robin’s critiques. But as a designer, she’d done a great job. A few prints lined the walls near the sink and toilet and a pothos hung in the shower, enjoying the humidity of the room.

Bri came up behind me, kissing my neck and gripping my hips. “Can I take all of this off?” Her fingers played with the band of my shorts and the hem of my shirt.

Nodding, my throat tightened. “Please.”

She grabbed the bottom of my sweaty top and lifted it over my head, careful to keep the neck hole away from my face as it passed over my face. The humidity from the steaming shower had already warmed the room.

Bri got down on her knees, taking the shorts with her as she did. Her face was just a few inches from my ass, my slick, purple panties waiting for her to take them off.

I licked my lips as I felt her gaze exploring my body. While she was distracted, I pulled off the sweat-soaked sports bra and tossed it into a pile with my shirt.

Bri's hands gripped my hips, holding my ass in place as she looked at it. My panties weren't anything particularly sexy, just a cotton pair from the bottom of my drawer. But the way Bri looked at them, I would've thought I was wearing a g-string.

But she let her fingers slip under the top seam of the fabric and start to pull them down. She brought her lips to the spot where my ass met the edge of the cotton. Lightly, she sank her teeth into the flesh.

I whimpered at her touch. "Shit."

Once she pulled the underwear past my round cheeks, they basically fell to the floor. Just as Bri was about to go in for more, I stepped forward and into the shower.

"Rude." Bri growled.

From the ground, she watched me walk into the water. It was the perfect temperature; warm enough to relax my tense muscles but not so hot that I would start to sweat again.

I watched her, my eyes telling her to join me. "Why don't you get your favorite toys and bring them for me?"

Standing up, Bri licked her lips and walked out of the room. She was only gone for a few seconds, returning with an r-shaped dildo and a wand.

I bit my lip, excited by the options. Setting the toys of the shower caddy near the glass door, Bri stepped back and pulled her shirt over her head. She tossed it into my pile and slipped off her shorts too.

Her green eyes met mine as she ripped off her sports bra and the small boy-shorts she wore. Once she was naked – her perkynipples hardened with excitement – Bri walked into the shower and under the water. My hair was already slicked back from the water. Running her hand through her hair, the water soaked Bri's brown locks and smoothed them to her head.

Despite the shower having two heads, we stood under one, holding each other close as our lips met. She tasted like sweat and prosecco as she started to breathe heavily.

I swallowed hard as I pulled Bri's hips into mine. My hand grazed her sides, feeling her bulging abs and the sloping obliques at her side.

“How do you even look like this?” I moaned as I broke away from her lips.

Bri laughed. “I have free time.”

Her laugh made my center throb, my slick excitement mixing with the water running down my legs.

Having waited patiently enough, Bri brought her hand between my legs. She moaned as soon as her fingers met my wet folds. “Holy fuck. I didn't know you werethisexcited.”

“What would you have done if you did?” My giggle turned to a groan as her hands explored my slit.

Bri licked her lips. “I wouldn't have wasted time driving home. I would've fucked

you in the middle of the woods like you needed.”

Rolling my head back, I whimpered. Bri buried her hands in my wetness, using her strong fingers to tease my entrance.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

I slipped my hand into her hair and pulled it back, making her meet my gaze. “I want to taste you.”

“You’re going to make me wait even longer?” Bri complained as she shook her head.

With a shrug, I laughed. “It’s not as bad as last time. It’s more like fifteen minutes instead of fifteen years.”

A sexy grin took over her face. “I guess I can deal with that.”

“Good.” I bit my lip and lowered down to my knees. The tiles were hard on them but it was a relief for my legs to not have to stand anymore. And a part of me liked the dull pain.

Bri nodded to the tiled bench against the wall before she sat down on it, spreading her legs for me. Instead of standing, I crawled a few feet toward her. Bri’s eyes watched my ass sway as I moved.

“Sarah Greenwood on her hands and knees is a view I could get used to.” Bri gawked at me, unable to figure out what to do with herself. Her fingers gripped the edge of the bench, her knuckles turning white.

When I got close enough, I sat up and spread her legs apart for my face. My hands dragged up her thighs, the wet skin moving easily under my grip.

Bri leaned back against the tile, moaning as I teased her. I let my lips explore up her legs, kissing from her knees to her inner thighs. Every few inches, I sucked in the



skin and held it in my mouth.

Once I was near her center, smelling the sweat and pleasure hiding in her folds, I met her emerald eyes.

“Please.” Bri begged, putting her hand on my damp ponytail.

Smirking, I nodded and pressed my face into her. All of my nerves disappeared as I let my tongue slip into her. I needed her so desperately I almost wasn't thinking about what I was supposed to do.

Wrapping my arms under her legs, I pulled her hips into my face. I used my mouth to part the slit, letting the pleasure seep onto my tongue.

I moaned as I tasted her. “Fuck. I didn't know it could taste this good.”

Bri laughed between her gasps. “Have as much as you want.”

Not one to argue, I went back to my feast. Bri grinded along with my movements, guiding my tongue to the spot she wanted licked. She continued to lift her hips, telling me to press myself inside her.

Dropping my tongue down, I searched for her entrance and circled it once I found it. When she seemed like she might explode with excitement, I thrust my tongue inside her. I tasted every drop of her and felt her channel around me.

I moaned into her folds, the vibration gently vibrating her clit. Warm water dripped onto my back from the shower head above me, relieving the aching in my sore body.

We stayed like that for a moment. As Bri started to lose control, her grip on my ponytail grew tighter. Just before she completely gave herself over to me, she tugged

on it and pulled my face away from her center.

“I need to fuck you.” She growled as she used her hand to wipe the pleasure off of my mouth.

I raised an eyebrow. “Right now?”

Licking her lips, Bri nodded. “I can’t wait any longer.” She stood up from the bench, towering over me and walking across the steamy shower to grab the r-shaped dildo from the edge of the tile. “Do you want to try this?”

A little embarrassed, I got onto my feet from my knees and swallowed hard. “What exactly is that?”

“It’s a double-ended dildo. I can fuck you while it’s inside both of us.” Bri watched my face, careful to read it for any signs of hesitation.

But I didn’t need any convincing. “Please.”

An eager grin took over Bri’s face as she walked closer to me, the pink silicone in her hands. She threw her leg up onto the bench and started to rub the shorter end of the curved dildo against her clit. A few moans erupted from her chest as she played with herself.

Fumbling, she grabbed the silicone wand from the tile ledge and passed it to me. “You can touch yourself while I get ready.”

I nodded as I let the tiled wall take my weight, pressing the wand into my clit. My eyes flicked between her soaked folds and her open mouth.

After getting the toy wet with her pleasure, Bri let it drop down toward her entrance

and gently pressed it inside. Her jaw dropped as she felt the toy spread her pussy.

I couldn't stop a moan from rising in my throat either.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

She thrust the toy in and out a few times, making sure it was sitting comfortably, before she slowly dropped her lifted leg back to the floor. Looking up at me, she smirked.

It was hard to believe how sexy she looked. I certainly wouldn't have guessed that the sight of Bri with a silicone strap would make my body buzz like that. But I felt like I could live in that shower.

Walking closer to me, she grabbed the wand from hand and turned it off. She set it on the bench and pressed her naked body against mine. Her skin was hot from the water and glistening under the overhead light.

She brought her lips to mine, the silicone toy parting my legs and rubbing against my clit as we made out. Her tongue licked mine. Groaning, Bri got a taste of herself on my lips.

“I want you.”

I grabbed the back of her head and brought her ear to my lips. “Then take me.”

It was all the motivation Bri needed to move her hands to my hips and to turn me around. She guided me toward the bench, running her palm up my spine. Once it hovered over my shoulder blades, she applied a gentle but forceful pressure.

Caving to her will, I bent over and leaned my hands against the bench. I pressed my ass into the air and toward Bri's center. As she stepped up behind me, I felt the toy rub against my inner thighs.

“Fuck.” I giggled as I felt the warm silicone.

Bri smirked as she looked down at me. Using one of her hands, she guided the toy to my folds and found my entrance. The toy circled my entrance a few times. But once I moaned, Bri thrust the toy inside.

“God.” Bri grunted as she pressed against my ass.

A pathetic whimper clawed its way out of my throat as I felt her inside me. Knowing that each thrust felt just as good for her as it did for me made my entire body light up with pleasure.

Bri brought her hands to my hips, knowing the toy was going to stay in place. I wasn’t sure how her grip could be so strong without causing me any pain but she guided my ass back and forth.

The sound of my wet ass cheeks clapping together echoed off of the tile. Bri’s hands explored up my sides, releasing her grip on the soft skin that rounded out my hips and instead letting her hands grow closer together as she hesitated on my waist.

“I don’t think a person can look like this.” Bri scoffed between groans and thrusts. “I think you must be a goddess.”

I would’ve rolled my eyes if she wasn’t deep inside me and making me whimper with every thrust. All I could manage was, “You’re one to talk.” I turned my head just enough to see her rippling muscles. She had the definition of an ancient Greek athlete, something most movie stars worked seven days a week for. And yet, just some wood chopping was enough for Brianne Shaw.

The compliment invigorated her, tightening her grip on me as she pressed somehow deeper. I felt my channel tighten around her as I neared my peak.

Bri's legs tensed as she pushed inside me. The toy inside her must have hit her g-spot, making her entire body desperate to give in to me.

"I want you to come with me. I'll wait until you're ready." I grunted at her.

Nodding, Bri laughed. "You won't have to wait long." She barely got the words out before another moan came out.

Letting my head fall, my body started to grow limp. I could only manage to keep myself upright, my head dangling between my shoulders and Bri took all of me.

Her grip tightened on my body, she let one of her hands slip around to my front and hold my breasts in her hand. Her front pressed into my back, the warmth making my body shudder.

Just wait a little longer, I begged my body.

Bri's groans grew louder, her rhythm starting to break just as she found the perfect angle to hit my g-spot. She slowed her movement as she neared her own climax. With each gentle thrust, I felt my body shuddering under her.

Within a few moments, we both exploded into a loud grunt. Our bodies glued together as we shook in sync.

"Oh, Bri." I released, letting go of the tension in my center. My ass slammed back into Bri's strap. The thud made Bri groan, her body shaking as she reached her climax just as I did.

Our bodies slowed as we shook against each other. Once I was finished, my body shot forward, the silicone toy sliding out of me.

Bri moaned as the toy came out. “God.” She sighed as she pulled it out of herself, placing the dirty dildo on the bench. Stuck in place, Bri used her hands to help me stand straight. Her arms wrapped around me as she nuzzled her face into my neck.

“Are you okay?”

I nodded. “More than. That was amazing.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Her breath met my skin with a warm shiver. “Good.”

We stood like that under the water for quite a while. Eventually, we pulled ourselves apart and showered. When we were done, Bri wrapped me in a towel and we made our way to bed.

As my head rested on Bri’s soft chest, my hand cradling her ribs, I sighed. Between the hike and the shower, my body was completely worn out.

Bri ran her hand through my hair, gently massaging my scalp every time she came back to the top. My eyelids grew heavy with each touch. Before long, all I could see was Bri’s gentle face behind my eyelids.

32

SARAH

I woke up before Bri the next morning, giving her a gentle kiss on the forehead before saying goodbye and heading back to my house.

There was work to be done on the lakehouse and much to my disappointment, our date couldn’t last forever. Bri insisted I take one of her flannels since our clothes never made it into the wash the night before.

But I knew deep down that she wanted to mark her territory... just a little bit.

I went downstairs, said goodbye to Oakkie with a soft pet and a little kiss between his



ears. The drive home felt like a dream, honestly I wasn't even sure that I had woken up. At least not until I pulled into my driveway.

Slinging my backpack over my shoulders, I headed toward the porch.

But my forehead wrinkled. What is that?

Sitting neatly in front of my door, a black box with a pristine gold ribbon waited for me. Only one person would have left something like this. A blush rose in my cheeks as I bent down to grab the box.

I unlocked the front door and rushed inside. Checking the clock above the stove, I realized I had a little over an hour before I needed to be at the lake house.

But I couldn't go see Vic without seeing exactly what she had gotten me.

So I set the box on the counter, tossing my bag on the ground next to the island.

Biting my lip, I tugged at the end of the ribbon. With little resistance, it came undone, falling off the box like an elegant dress to the floor. My finger worked its way around the edge of the box, pulling off the lid.

Even the box felt expensive, the slick black paper shimmering as it moved.

Inside, a red notecard sat on top of black tissue paper. My heart was racing in my chest, nervous at what my other lover could have to say in such a mysterious way.

I flipped open the note. It read:

Sarah,

I thought you might need a replacement

for the pair I stole the other night. Hopefully,

this will suffice. I hope to see how it fits soon.

V.

God. Even her note was sexy. I read it in her low, sultry voice.

Now, I knew what was inside.

I peeled open the paper with a delicate hand and shook my head as I saw the red mesh. Pulling the piece from the tissue paper nest, I held it up. It was an intricate teddy, one with a deep, low v-neck to show my cleavage. My fingers explored the fabric, rubbing the fabric that would lay over my center. It parted under the friction, creating easy access for Vic.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Dirty dog. I bit my lip at the thought of what she might do with me in it.

It almost looked custom made, like Vic had paid someone to make her exactly what she envisioned. I was tempted to put it on now but I didn't have time for that.

Instead, I ran upstairs and dug through my drawers to find a plain blouse and some simple jeans. Shimmying my body into the tight jeans, I cuffed the bottom and slipped my shirt on.

I walked across the primary bedroom to my en suite bathroom, brushing through my messy hair and tossing it up into a loose bun.

As I walked back downstairs, I raised my eyebrows. The house was oddly clean – the result of Jason having the kids for the week. I let out a sigh, enjoying the silence and knowing the sweeties would be home again in a few days.

I locked up and headed back to my car. Somehow, I managed to get out of the house on time. With any luck, I'd be just on time to meet up with Victoria. I turned on the minivan and got driving.

A quick fifteen minutes later and I was pulling into my spot between Robin's truck and Vic's Porsche. Near the dock, another truck was parked.

I squinted at it, trying to read the decal on the door. But before I could, a familiar figure approached me from the front flower beds.

"Hi, Sarah!" Her chirper voice was enough to make anyone smile.

“Hey, Leah. You and Daryl hard at work?” I shook her hand and peeked behind her.

With a shrug, Leah put her hands on her hips. “We’re getting there. We want to make sure our design matches what you have inside so we’ve been asking for access to your vision boards.”

I nodded. “I can send those over for you. There’s some stuff we’ve even picked out in those folders too.”

“That would be great.” Leah’s shoulders dropped with relief.

An old holler came from behind us. “Hon, are you bothering Sarah? I told you we’d figure it out.”

Leah rolled her eyes at her lover. “Well, it’s a good thing I asked. She’s just going to send it over, no more guesswork.”

Just as the two were about to start playfully bickering, the front door of the lake house swung open. Victoria stepped out and leaned against the new deck railing, a smile taking over her serious face.

I had to stop myself from blushing, not wanting to give us away to anyone else in this very small town. Instead, I waved. “Morning, Vic.” I turned back to Leah and Darly and gave both of them a squeeze on the shoulders. “I’ll send you both the plans once I’m back at my office.”

Before they could argue with me, I brushed past them and toward the porch. Vic watched me closely as I climbed the fresh steps. The stain hadn’t been applied yet. If my guess was right, Robin was waiting until the interior work was finished before sanding down the decking and applying its final coat.

“Hey.” I looked at Vic once I was on her level. My hand craved to grab hers, to let our fingers intertwine. But Daryl and Leah lingered behind us.

Vic put her arm around my waist, guiding me inside. “It’s good to see you. I missed you.”

My eyebrow lifted. “Oh, did you?”

“Of course.” She pushed open the door for me and let me enter first.

“Wow.” My jaw dropped as I stepped inside. I’d only been away from the house for a couple days and so much had changed already. The foyer was painted the deep royal blue I had suggested. It was a return to the original Victorian style of the house’s interior. There was something grand about bold color, something I knew Vic was desperate to recreate.

Vic nodded. “I said the same thing. You did a fantastic job.” She kept walking through the entryway toward the living room. Most of the rooms were just awaiting a fresh sanding on the floors. “Follow me.” She held her hand out behind her body for me to grab.

I reached out, holding her hand in mind as she led me upstairs. At the top of the staircase, Vic guided me into the primary bedroom. Just a week ago, the sheetrock had been hung. Now, the walls were primed for paint.

The room was bright and massive. The original hardwood floors popped under the fresh interior.

“This looks great. You’ll have quite the view in the mornings.” I shook my head as I approached the bay windows with a lake view.

Vic came up behind me, wrapping her arms around my waist and resting her chin on my shoulder. “Maybe you can see it yourself.”

This time, I couldn’t stop the flush from taking over my cheeks. I turned my head just enough to meet her eyes. “Maybe I will.”

We stood like that for a moment, taking in the view together. A vision of what our future would be like flashed in my mind. Returning from a luxurious trip to this quiet oasis just to lounge in bed for a few days.

## Page 67

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Our breath synced as we watched the gentle ebb and flow of the lake's waves.

Vic sighed and guided me toward the bathroom. “But what I really wanted was to show you how this bathroom is shaping up.”

“Oh, please.”

The door was closed, prepared for a grand reveal. Vic wrapped her hand around the knob and pushed the door open.

My jaw dropped. “Holy shit.”

33

VICTORIA

I watched Sarah’s face light up as she saw the soft glow of the green tiles. She gawked at each wall for a good minute.

There was still a lot to be done in the bathroom, plants to hang and prints to find but the whole place felt calming and luxurious.

“It’s perfect.” Sarah covered her mouth.

I smiled at her. “I couldn’t agree more. You picked the perfect tile.”

Shaking her head, she walked up to me and leaned against me. She rested her hand on

my chest and looked up at me. Maybe I was losing my mind, but I smelled something unfamiliar in her hair. My throat tightened at the thought.

Of course I knew she was seeing other people, but it was a strange thing to be confronted by. I tried to shake the feeling, clenching my jaw.

“Sorry I haven’t been over in a minute. I had the kids last week and they would have gotten in Robin’s way.” She smiled up at me and then tapped my chest with her fingers. “But I did find some really great fabrics for the curtains that I want your thoughts on.”

I nodded. “I’ll happily look at anything you have to show me. But you don’t need to apologize for taking care of your family.”

Biting her lip, Sarah narrowed her eyes at me. “Are you sure?”

“Positive.” I laughed, lowering my head to hers and meeting her lips. They were soft and warm. My entire being melted into her. “Something about New Winford has me living a little slower.”

Sarah clicked her tongue and winked. “It does that. But I don’t want the project to slip through the cracks. The party is coming up.”

Trying to help her relax, I held her face in my hands. “It’ll get done. Everything is on track.”

“But...”

As she went to argue with me, I interrupted her with a gentle kiss. She was cute when she was stressed. But even then, it would rip her apart if she wasn’t careful.



Once her shoulders relaxed, she remembered something and pulled away. “I got your gift, buy the way.”

I smirked at her. “I was going to ask about that.”

“It was sweet of you to send.” She bit her lip as she looked up at me with her blue eyes. I felt like I could drown in them.

Shrugging, my eyes flicked to her lips. “I’m just trying to replace what I took.”

I watched as Sarah’s chest rose with a big inhale. “Have those been helpful?”

Pulling her closer, I nodded and brought my lips just a few inches from hers. “Very. I’ve been missing you a lot. It’s cruel of you to be this incredible.”

Sarah giggled, a slight moan in the back of her throat as she closed the distance between us. Teasing me, she bit my lip between kisses.

Just as our lips parted, a vibration came from Sarah’s pocket.

“Sorry.” She reached inside and grabbed her phone. Her forehead wrinkled as she read Jason’s name on the home screen. “I have to take this.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Turning away from me, she looked out of the bathroom window and answered the call. “Hey, everything okay?”

There was a pause as she listened to her ex. My nerves grew by the second, my throat growing tight.

“Right. No, that’s okay. That’s not your fault.” She nodded along to his explanations.

My finger tapped against the skin of my forearm.

With a sigh, Sarah looked up at the painted, white ceiling. “I can be there in like twenty? Stop apologizing, Jay. It’s okay. Alright, bye.” She hung up the call and shoved the phone back into her pocket.

Crossing the room, she rested her head on my chest and let out a loud groan. “I have to go.”

I rubbed her arms. “That’s okay. Is everything alright?”

Sarah grumbled into my chest, “Yeah. Leila doesn’t feel good and is insisting she needs me.”

“Duty calls.” Looking down at her, I lifted her chin to look at me. “I’ll catch up with you later.”

“Are you sure?” She looked up at me, guilt all over her face.

Laughing, I nodded. “Of course. That’s more important. Besides, you’ve made all of us so prepared that we don’t even need you here.”

It wasn’t even a lie, the house was coming along smoothly. All we really needed was a little more artwork. But I had a plan for that.

“But I should be here.” Sarah bit the inside of her cheek.

Shaking my head, I started to guide her out of the bathroom. “Life doesn’t stop for work. Take care of your kids. And then I’d like to take care of you.”

She tilted her head, her brow furrowing as she tried to decipher my meaning.

“I want to take you out again. Someone needs to spoil you. Just let me know when a good time is for you and I’ll handle the rest.” I narrowed my eyes at her, daring Sarah to challenge me.

But instead, she sighed and nodded. “Okay. But it might be a week or so?”

Satisfied, we started walking to the staircase. “Absolutely, just say the word.”

We stopped at the landing at the top of the stairs. I didn’t want to hold her up, instead planting a kiss on her cheek and rubbing her soft arms.

“Thank you, Vic.” Sarah brought her lips to mine, our mouths clicking together before she took off down the stairs.

All I wanted was more time with her. But I knew how busy she was and I wasn’t going to stand in her way. Instead, I’d wait here for her – ready to take care of her whenever she was ready.

The house settled into the churn of the housework. Robin finished up the kitchen, installing the countertops and making sure the rest of the house was on track.

Checking my email, I realized just how many people had RSVP'd "yes" to the party. It was a big deal. Ever since Pop blew up, every event I hosted was like one big networking thing. I wanted it to be perfect.

But I had closed my eyes, taking in a deep breath. I trusted Sarah and knew she wouldn't let any of this go south.

34

## SARAH

The two weeks between Leila's gnarly cold and my date night with Vic flew by. I scrambled to get the last pieces of furniture delivered to the lake house, going over multiple times to make sure nothing got damaged.

The kids had finished up their week at Jason's and were back at the house. I gave each of them a massive hug as I stood in the doorway. With all of the renovations going on, today was the only day I could make work to see Vic again.

As I held Ava in my arms, a wave of guilt washed over me.

Zoey, holding her lower back as her baby bump tried to pull her down to the ground, watched on. I could tell that she knew exactly what I was thinking.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

I kissed the top of my babies' heads and sent them back to their video games. Once they were out of earshot, Zoey shook her head. "Don't even ask. Yes, it's okay. Everything is going to be fine. Besides, after tonight, I will probably have a brand new baby and won't watch yours for a hot minute."

Laughing, my shoulders dropped. "I'll have my phone on me the entire time. And Robin has Vic's number if I don't pick up for some reason."

"I know. Get out of here." Zoey hugged me, her belly keeping our bodies pretty far about.

I let out a sigh and nodded. "Okay, bye. I love you."

Waving me off, Zoey watched from the door as Robin played with the kids. I hopped into the minivan and put the strange address into my phone.

Once the address loaded into my phone, it showed an open field about 35 minutes away.

Where the fuck was this woman taking me?

My heart started to race as my nerves took over. But given Victoria's track record, I had a feeling that this would be something spectacular.

I put the car in drive and got moving. It'd been a while since I'd taken such a long drive by myself. But it felt nice to have a moment of quiet to think. At the start of the summer, I never would've guessed I would be juggling two gorgeous, wonderful

women. But it seemed like I was along for the ride.

I zoned out for most of the quick drive, but came back to myself just as I was processing where I had ended up.

Somewhere deep in the woods of Ulster County, a small Airport for charter planes and light aircrafts to land with a small hanger for the few wealthy jet owners in the area.

“What the fuck are we doing here?” I muttered under my breath as I pulled up to the gate. Before I could roll down my window to try and figure out how to get inside, the automatic door started to open. Letting out a hiss of air, I took my foot off the brake and rolled inside.

My jaw dropped as I looked to the empty tarmac where only a helicopter waited.

No fucking way, she has to be kidding.

But as my car came to a stop, parking next to Victoria’s pristine Porsche, I knew it must be real.

Victoria appeared from inside the hanger and waved me down. Climbing out of the car, I waved back. Even from here she looked incredible. She wore trousers that skimmed her ankles and led into five-inch black, red-bottom heels.

Her blouse, more femme than usual, was a jewel-toned purple with a conservative boat neck. But there was nothing conservative about how incredible her collarbone looked. My mouth watered at the thought of planting delicate kisses along the elegant bone.

I swallowed my excitement and met her halfway between the hangar and the

helicopter. “Miss Bradley, what could you possibly have in store?” Shaking my head, I gave her a kiss on the cheek.

Shrugging, Victoria laughed. “Have you ever been on a helicopter before?”

Despite knowing it was rude, I couldn’t stop myself from scoffing in her face. “Do I look like the kind of person who’s been on a helicopter before?”

A cheeky grin took over Victoria’s level face. “You look like the type of woman who deserves one all to herself, if you ask me.”

My face flushed at the compliment, tucking a loose strand of hair behind my ear as I tried to hide it. I still hadn’t gotten used to being spoiled the way a billionaire app developer could.

Putting her hand around my waist Victoria turned me toward the helicopter while planting a delicate, but assured kiss on my cheek. “Your chariot awaits.” She winked as she gestured to the shiny, black aircraft ahead of us.

Once we had turned toward it, the pilot, dressed in an airforce jacket, hopped out of the cockpit and walked toward us. She had a tight crew cut, which certainly met military standards. Something about her face was familiar to me, and in an area as small as New Winford I couldn’t be sure that I didn’t know her.

She extended her hand to me and shook it. “Hi Sarah, how are you feeling?”

Before I could reply, Victoria shook her hand and explained, “This is Lieutenant Hughes. She’s been my heli pilot for a few years now.”

I tried to stop my mouth from falling open, the thought of having a designated helicopter pilot blowing me away. I was still getting used to the idea of riding in one

on a regular basis.

But the last name was familiar to me, and from the look on the lieutenant's face, she knew why.

"What do I know you from?" Gripping her hand firmly, I was still trying to place her.

The pilot nodded, a light chuckle coming from her lungs. "I was a year or two below you at New Winford High. Most people remembered me because I graduated early and enlisted."



*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Now that she filled in the blanks, it all made sense. I remembered her face from Veteran's Day celebrations in town; her family would create banners to celebrate her service.

I smiled and pointed toward the helicopter. "How does flying luxury helicopters compare to the Air Force?"

Hughes shrugged. "I don't mind it when these rich assholes bring nice, small town girls like yourself on board."

Victoria rolled her eyes and nudged the pilot. "Are you trying to come for my woman?"

Before the lieutenant could laugh, I raised an eyebrow to Victoria. "Oh, I'm your woman now?"

Clicking her tongue, Hughes snapped her fingers and headed toward the helicopter. "That's my cue."

Victoria squeezed her hand on my hip and lowered her voice as the engine to the helicopter powered up. "You know I only have eyes for you."

Much to my relief, the roar of the helicopter engine and the sound of spinning blades filled the silence, rescuing me from having to answer the question I'd been putting off for a couple months.

Victoria winked at me, not actually expecting me to answer it right now, and guided

me toward the helicopter. She ducked her head and placed a protective hand over mine as she guided us toward the helicopter's backseat. She stood next to the metal casing and held her hand out to assist me inside.

My heels clicked against the small metal step into the helicopter. As I used Victoria's hand to lift myself up, I realized I still had no idea where this wealthy woman was flying me off to.

But what I did know was: a stunning woman was taking me on a date and an Air Force pilot was at the helm. What else did I need to know?

But as I stepped into the helicopter, I could feel Victoria's eyes on my body. I was surprised it took her this long to notice my outfit. I wore an ankle-length, black gown that I had mysteriously appeared on my doorstep a few days after that first black box arrived, with the note:

S,

I don't want to give away what

I have planned for us. So, instead,

I've taken care of all the details.

Including what attire is expected.

V

Inside was the gown I now wore on my body, a pair of Yves Saint Laurent heels, a small, matching black clutch, and a pair of earrings. The entire outfit was stunning, and exactly my taste, despite Victoria having only known me for a few months.

Maybe it was spending so much time comparing design styles, or maybe she just knew how to read me.

What Victoria couldn't confirm just yet was that I was wearing her first gift underneath the dress as we got settled in the helicopter.

Once we got comfortable, the pilot brought the helicopter up to full speed. I grabbed Victoria's hand and squeezed tightly as I felt the helicopter lift off the tarmac. I felt like the world disappeared under me, and my only safety was Victoria's skin on mine.

Feeling brave I peeked out of the window and watched as we got farther from the asphalt. My stomach had fallen out of my ass. But luckily the cushy, beige leather bench cradled me in place.

Before I knew it, we were towering above the forest canopy of the Hudson Valley and heading, by my calculations, south. I turned to Victoria. "Are you finally going to tell me where you're taking me?"

If I didn't know her so well, I would've thought the grin on her face looked sinister. But in reality, she was pleased with how well she kept the secret.

"I'm taking you to the city." Vic winked.

Rolling my eyes in annoyance, I prodded her for me. "That's all you'll say?"

Vic, tired of shouting over the sound of the spinning blades above our heads, grabbed the two sets of headphones by our legs and passed one to me. She placed a set on her own head and tapped the side to tell me how to use mine.

They were the heaviest headphones I've ever worn. But they made me feel like I was somehow important to keeping this helicopter in the air.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Over the headphones Lieutenant Hughes started to speak, the microphone making her voice sound scratchy. “Ladies if you look ahead on our left, you’ll find the Hudson River which we’ll follow all the way down to Manhattan.”

Vic pointed her long, elegant finger out the front windshield, and sure enough, the Hudson glimmered under the early evening sun.

“God, it’s gorgeous.” I gawked at the scenery.

Vic moved her hand from mine to the top of my knee, which was gracefully covered by the long gown she had bought me. With enough prodding the fabric would have exposed my knee, but Vic seemed happy to leave it over the fabric for now.

Into her microphone, Vic explained, “the helicopter should get us there in 30 minutes. We should arrive just as the sun is setting over the city. “

Nodding, I turned my attention back to the rapidly passing mountains. All these little towns peppering the Hudson seemed so large when you drove through them. But from this distance, it was hard to deny just how tiny they were.

Time flew by as the scenery changed from remote landscapes to highways and suburbs. Just as I was getting used to the aerial perspective, the skyscrapers of Manhattan came into view.

Over the microphone our pilot started to give us some details. “We’ll be landing in the Lower East Side in approximately five minutes.”

A part of me couldn't believe we had traveled what normally would've been a two hour drive in just 30 minutes. It was starting to make sense to me how Vic was able to get so much done, despite having such a busy life.

Resting my head against the glass, I took a look at the bustling streets below. They glowed orange as the sun descended below the island's horizon. Even for a weeknight, the city was alive.

Hughes found a spot to land and lowered the helicopter onto the designated pad. The sinking feeling in my stomach came back just for a moment as we made contact with the concrete below us. As soon as the engine started to quiet, I felt myself exhale.

Vic reached across my lap and unbuckled the seatbelt she had clicked into place when I wasn't paying attention.

The lieutenant spoke one more time through the headphones, "Thanks for joining us this evening. Miss Greenwood. We'll be ready to take you home whenever you please."

Vic popped open the helicopter door and squeezed past me to ensure I had someone to lean on as I got out. She held my hand firmly as I stepped out of the aircraft; my feet were a little wobbly on the new heels. Vic smiled at me as I moved, unable to look away

Once my feet were on the ground, Vic closed the door behind us and walked me toward the rooftop exit. We waved at Lieutenant Hughes before disappearing into the building.

The metal emergency door led to a long staircase and one elevator. But the building itself was immaculate, even this random hallway was crystal clean and newly renovated.

Vic hit the down button on the elevator and waited a few seconds. “Any guesses?”

“Truly, none. I think I’m just along for the ride literally and metaphorically.” I teased, clutching the small purse in my palms. When I turned to look at Vic, her charming smile sent a wave of nerves through my body.

Her smile only grew, knowing her secret was well kept. “You are the ride.”

I nudged her shoulder with a gently closed fist. “Stop being so charming, it’s distracting.

Just as her lips parted for what I was sure would be another witty reply, the elevator dinged and its metal doors slid open. Holding the door for me, Vic watched as I walked inside. I hoped she liked her choice of outfit, I certainly did.

She walked in behind me, clicking the lobby and reaching for my hand. Our fingers laced together as the door slid shut.

“Unfortunately, there was not a helipad on the place we’re headed. So we’ll have to walk a block or two, if you’re okay in the heels?”

Biting my lip, I nodded. “I like city walks anyway.”

Vic’s eyes warmed as the elevator zipped to the first floor. Before I knew it, the pulleys were slowing and the elevator was easing to a halt.

The doors opened to soft jazz and a cozy lobby. A faux fireplace burned at its center, surrounded by chairs for waiting guests. Still holding my hand, Vic led me past the doorman’s desk to the front doors. They swung open automatically.

City air smacked me in the face, the heat from the day slowly releasing from the

concrete underneath our feet. The lights of every building gleamed, neon signs glowing from the exterior of the East Village's bars.

“Do you come down often?” Victoria turned to me as she guided us toward our actual destination.

Shaking my head, I held her hand tighter. “No, I would come see Zoey every once in a while when we were in college. But she didn't want anything to do with me so that only happened a couple times.”

Victoria nodded. “Her loss.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

“True.” I giggled, thinking about my annoying big sister. “What about you?”

A sweet smile took over Vic’s usual cocky grin as she remembered her old days. “I lived here during college and for a few years after while I was developing Pop. But then I moved to L.A. for five years. I came back because the app was headquartered here and it felt ridiculous to be so far from my company.”

What had become clear to me about Victoria Bradley in the time we’d spent together was that I had my three babies and Victoria had one. She was more committed to her work than anyone I knew. It was impressive... and sexy.

A part of me wondered what my business would become if I could give it my all.

But I shook off the thought as Vic slowed our walk. We stopped in front of a small, picturesque city building. It had a red brick facade and only sat at four stories tall.

Vic stepped in front of me and pulled open the glass door ahead of us. I could see her arm strain under the weight. Before I could process where we were, a rush of cold air hit me from inside.

My jaw dropped as my heels clicked onto the polished concrete floors. “Vic, are you serious?”



I giggled at her gawking. “It’s just an art gallery.”

Shaking her head, Sarah looked around. Nerves washed over her immediately as she expected someone else to be there.

“How did you know?” Sarah covered her mouth.

I shrugged and wrapped my arm around her waist. “Well, I didn’t. But what I did know was that you majored in Art History and I’m guessing you haven’t been to a gallery in about ten years.”

Maybe I was crazy, but I could have sworn her eyes were glassy as she looked around the place. The white walls were filled with art. All of which was for sale.

“But it’s so late for a gallery to be open.” Sarah shook her head as she tried to catch up.

Guiding her further inside, I lowered my voice to a whisper. “I paid them to stay open, just for us. The owner is an old friend of mine.”

Sarah whipped her head around to look at me. “Seriously? This is perfect because we can pick a piece for the house.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.” I rubbed the back of my neck. “I wasn’t trying to make it a work date but I do happen to love this artist.”

Giddy, Sarah squeezed me closer. “You know I love a work date. Tell me about the artist.”

Without needing more direction, I started guiding us through the collection. The gallery extended farther back into the building than one would expect from the

outside. And the artist's work looked like it was built for the space.

I stopped us in front of an abstract piece. “One of the things I’ve always really loved about Stella’s work is that she doesn’t let one style define her. Despite hopping around on that front, her work feels cohesive.”

“Oh I like that.” Sarah’s eyes flicked around the canvas, taking in the seemingly random splatters of paint. “How did you meet?”

Vic laughed. “We happened to go to the same party in college and she was funny.”

Before we went any farther, I snapped my fingers and walked over to the desk. A small wine fridge sat next to the gallery-girl’s chair. Inside, I pulled out a bottle of champagne and grabbed the two flutes from the desk.

“Where did that come from?” Sarah shook her head, blushing at me.

“I called ahead.” I winked at her.

Easily, I popped the cork and poured two even glasses. Sarah’s eyes watched my hands flex as I moved. It made my throat tighten, suddenly nervous. I still couldn’t understand how she had that effect on me. She was stunning and talented, but more than anything, she challenged me.

Passing her a glass, I raised mine in a cheer. “To finding the perfect piece.”

“Cheers.” Sarah smirked as she clinked her glass against mine and took a sip.

We got back to looking at the art. My chest warmed with each sip of the gorgeous champagne. Sarah wrapped her arm around my waist, squeezing me closer.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

While she was looking at the art, I looked at her. The dress was unbelievable on her. It fit her figure perfectly, accentuating her lush curves. The deep v-neck of the dress perfectly hid what I suspected was underneath. She shifted on her heels, the dress swaying slightly as she did and exposing just an inch of her cleavage.

A flash of red appeared under the stark black dress, sending a wave of anticipation to my center.

Catching me, Sarah raised her eyebrow and straightened her back. The pop of red disappeared from view. "That's for later."

My center pulsed at the thought of having her again, desperate to touch her. But I tried to control myself, wanting to take her back to the lake house and make love to her on the bed that had been delivered just that morning.

For now, I needed to pick a piece of art.

Sarah moved on, not waiting for me to finish looking at the more expressionist piece in front of me.

Her jaw dropped as she stood in front of the piece. "Wow."

It was enough to pull me away from where I stood. Walking to meet her, I let out a relieved sigh as soon as I saw the piece. "Yeah."

Sarah watched me looking at it, my eyes following the delicate brushstrokes of an abstract expressionist piece. It was the perfect blend of everything in the gallery.

There was something sensual about the way the lines drew me in.

“That’s it.” Sarah nodded, deciding for me. “It’s perfectly your taste and it matches the color scheme in the lake house exactly.”

Turning, Sarah faced me head on and cupped my face in her hands. “That’s exactly how you should look at a piece of art.”

My eyes moved from the piece to her soft face. I swallowed hard as I stared into her blue eyes, an entire ocean contained in them. When she looked back at me, our chests fell into sync as our breathing escalated.

I wrapped my arm around her and pulled her into me, my jaw clenching as I looked at her.

Tightening her grip on my chin, Sarah pulled me into her. Our lips pressed together, the entire world going silent. I let my hand drop lower on her waist, resting at the top of her ass. The delicate touch made Sarah groan, already anticipating my touch.

I scanned the gallery for somewhere more private, obscured from the wall of glass facing the street. But the desk was the only place I could imagine. It was a glorified cubicle, surrounded by thick white barriers to obscure the secretary from view.

Turning Sarah, I slowly moved us toward the walled white desk. Our heads would be visible over the thick barricade but nothing else – and that’s what really mattered. Once we got there, Sarah pressed her tongue between my lips.

I parted my mouth to let her in, letting my tongue tease hers. She tasted like sweet champagne. It was enough to make me desperate, pressing her against the walls surrounding the desk.

Just as encouraged as I was, Sarah wrapped her leg around mine. My hands fell from her shoulders down her back. I brought them to her chest, letting them lift her breasts slightly. I could feel the mesh teddy under the silk fabric of her dress.

Moaning into my mouth, Sarah opened her eyes to look at me. Her hand rested on the back of my neck where she pressed me closer.

As our tongues continued to play with each other, I let my hand explore down her stomach. I gripped her hips, pulling them into my leg which parted hers farther. Lowering herself onto my leg, Sarah rocked against my thigh.

I grunted at the pressure, feeling her warm center slip through the slit of her dress and resting on my trousers. Needing something to grab, I placed a hand against the wall behind Sarah's head. The other gripped her hips and guided her along my leg.

"Fuck." Sarah's head rolled back, slamming into the wall. But she didn't seem phased by it, maybe even moaning a little at the pain. With her eyes closed, she brought her hand to my pants, slowly unbuttoning my pants and sliding her hand inside. She used her fingers to trace my panties.

Moving around to my ass, Sarah giggled. "A thong?"

I nodded as I kept her hips grinding against me. "I thought you'd enjoy that."

"I really do." Sarah peeled the trousers down enough to peek at the soft flesh of my ass, letting her hand grab a handful of skin.

A pathetic whimper came out of my throat as I felt the pressure fill my entire body. I would have been embarrassed by how badly I needed her if I wasn't so enamored with her.

Bringing her hand back to my front, using the thong to guide herself to my center, Sarah slipped underneath the fabric and straight toward my throbbing clit. She was eager, sinking her fingers into my folds without a second of hesitation.

As she began to massage my core, I kept her hips rocking against mine. But with each touch of her pointed fingers, it became harder and harder to keep her pace.

I took my hand off of the wall behind her and let it travel up her exposed thigh toward her warm folds. There, I slid the red teddy I bought to one side of her slit and spread the lips with my fingers.

Her entrance was already soaked, ready to take me. I lifted my gaze to hers and bit my lip before sinking two fingers inside her.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

“Fuck.” She moaned as she felt me inside of her channel.

I couldn’t believe how excited she was, how desperate she was to have me.

We continued like this for a minute, my fingers pressing deeper and deeper as hers massaged my clit. But I pulled back and whispered to her. “I want to take you back to mine and have you in my bed.”

“Okay.” Sarah nodded. Straightening herself up, she prepared to head home.

I raised an eyebrow. “We still have dinner.”

Licking her lips, Sarah’s shoulders dropped as a look of desperation took over her eyes. “I don’t know if I can wait that long.”

I let my hands gently run down her arms from shoulders down to her hands, warm from touching me. “I need you well fed for what I want to do with you.”

With a giggle, Sarah relented. “Dinner it is.”

I intertwined our fingers and guided her back to the door. Pushing it open, I felt Sarah looking back at the gallery. The sounds of the city rushed to our ears as late night diners headed back to their apartments and cars zipped past.

“Do we need to lock up?” Sarah scanned the block, looking to see who else would handle it.

Shaking my head, I squeezed her hand and kept us walking. “The owner lives upstairs, she gets notifications when the doors open so she’ll come down and lock it.”

The answer provided a strange amount of relief for Sarah as her shoulders eased and she followed me down the street.

“So where is this dinner?” Sarah rubbed her chin, suspicious of my plans.

With a wink, I shrugged. “You’ll have to wait and find out.”

36

SARAH

With each block I grew more suspicious of where Vic was taking me. But I tried to trust her, she’d never disappointed on one of our dates before.

It was a longer walk than from the helicopter to the gallery and this walk took us deeper into the Lower East Side where the buildings began to really tower overhead.

Now that the sun had fully set, a relieving breeze blew through the streets. About five blocks later, just as my feet were starting to dislike the very expensive heels on my feet, Victoria slowed and grabbed the door handle to a high rise.

I looked up the length of the building and raised an eyebrow. Part of me expected her to take me to some fancy restaurant, but now I had no idea where dinner was going to be.

Once I brushed past Vic, she put her hand on my waist and guided me toward the elevator. She clicked the up button and the doors swung open. Once we were inside, she clicked “penthouse” and pulled me closer.



As the elevator rocketed up the forty plus floors, Vic lowered her voice and rumbled into my ear, “I’m glad you wore both of my gifts.”

I bit the skin of my lower lip. “I wanted to show you my appreciation.”

Vic’s eyes wandered down my cleavage, sneaking another glance at the deep v-neck of the black gown. Just looking at her eyes, I could see how hungry she was for me. Dinner was a necessity for whatever she had planned for me that night.

Before we could get carried away in each other’s eyes, the elevator doors swung open and a hostess smiled at us. She held her arm over the door as we exited, ensuring the elevator wouldn’t get too eager to close.

My jaw dropped as soon as I saw the view out of the floor-to-ceiling windows. Overlooking all of Manhattan, the penthouse had a panoramic view. The Freedom Tower to the Empire State Building all the way to the end of Central Park could be seen from here.

The hostess smiled gently. “Welcome, Miss Bradley and Miss Greenwood. Can we take you to your table?”

Victoria nodded. “Yes, please.”

While I stared at the incredible view, Vic herded me toward our table. By the time I managed to pull my eyes from the view, I was stunned again. The venue itself was gorgeous. It must have been an old apartment unit that had been turned into a small restaurant for New York’s elite.

A few small dining tables were scattered around what must have been a living and dining room. A fireplace burned in the center, glowing a gentle orange.

## Page 75

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Tuxedoed wait staff slipped between the small openings with plates of food.

Victoria walked around to my side of the table and pulled out my chair. Once I was sitting, she pushed it in and went back to her own seat. But for her, the hostess did the same.

“Thank you.” She nodded.

We settled into our blush chairs and took a look at the one page menu for the night.

After a second, I laughed. “How do you have so many fancy secret restaurants to go to?”

Vic smirked. “Everyone wants me to spend my money. And I like to spoil my woman.”

“Of course.” Turning back to the menu, I selected a steak from the menu. Before we could get bored, the waiter came over and took our orders.

Everything moved so smoothly, I barely had to speak a word.

Finally at the table alone, Vic let out a sigh. “So, Sarah. After the lake house, what’s next for you?”

I clicked my tongue, unsure what the answer was myself. “Well, the kids will be back in school so I’ll have a little more time for myself...”

A buzz from my clutch took my attention.

“Sorry, let me just make sure this isn’t the kids.” I pulled the phone out of my purse and saw a call from Jason. My forehead wrinkled, “Shit.”

Sensing my concern, Victoria waved her hand. “Take it.”

My finger slid across the screen as I answered. “Everything okay?”

Through the phone, Jason spoke, “Hey. Don’t panic, everything is fine. Your sister had to go to the hospital. She started having contractions.”

“Oh my god.” My heart started pounding.

“Before you ask, I’m already there with the kids.” Jason paused. “Everyone’s okay but we thought you’d want to know.”

My eyes flicked up to Victoria, whose face was scrunched up with concern. I shrugged to her. “My sister might be in labor.”

Vic waved over the waiter and started making moves. Once she spoke to the waiter, she pulled out her own phone and sent a couple texts.

“I’ll be there as soon as I can.” I gritted my teeth as I tried to calculate how quickly I could be there. With a brief goodbye, I hung up the phone. Sliding the device back into my purse, Vic was already standing and pulling out my chair.

Shaking my head, I rested my hand on Vic’s forearm. “I’m so sorry.”

Vic laughed, walking us to the elevator and thanking all of the staff. “Don’t apologize, it’s an emergency. I’ve already called a car and Hughes is firing up the

helicopter.”

My shoulders dropped immediately. The relief of knowing there was another adult in the room was enough to make my heart skip a beat. Without question, Vic had figured out exactly what needed to happen to get me to the hospital.

Once the elevator doors closed, I pulled Vic toward me and into a kiss. Our lips pressed together, my body wanting to pick up where we left off in the gallery. But the doors were swinging open before I could get carried away.

Vic held my hand as we sped through the lobby of this amazing high rise. As soon as we pushed through the lobby doors, a black, SUV honked at us.

Jogging ahead, Vic swung open the back passenger door. My heels clicked against the concrete as I heaved myself into the car. As soon as Vic closed the back door, the driver peeled off toward the helipad.

Within a few minutes, Vic and I were riding up another elevator to the helicopter. As soon as we were in that fancy hallway again, I could hear the engine roaring and the blades spinning. When I pushed open the door to the rooftop, my body wanted to flinch away and hide from the twirling blades.

But instead, Victoria ducked me down and jogged us toward the helicopter. As we got closer, I could hear the engine firing up; ready to take off as soon as we climbed inside.

I took my place on the beige leather and buckled myself in, this time throwing on the headphones as soon as I sat.

Vic closed the door behind us and sat close to me, the aircraft lifting off the concrete immediately. Maybe I was too nervous to care, or maybe I was just getting used to

such an extravagant ride, but my stomach didn't drop this time.

## Page 76

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

My sister is having her baby. A smile took over my face.

Over the headset, Hughes spoke, “We’ll be landing at New Winford Regional in about 25 minutes.”

“At the hospital?” I whipped my head to face Vic.

She nodded. “Yeah, no point wasting time by having you drive from the airport to the hospital.”

My brain tried to catch up. “But my car...”

“My driver is already moving it over to the hospital.” Vic squeezed my hand. “Don’t worry about a thing.”

I leaned back in my seat. I only had 25 minutes to calm myself down enough to support my family. And luckily, Vic was trying to make that as easy as possible. As the helicopter put distance between us and the city, I looked out of the window one more time. Soaking in the view that I’d never seen before, I took a deep breath.

Vic leaned closer. “Rain check?”

“Obviously.” I smirked as I met her stunning hazel eyes.

Twenty minutes later the helicopter was descending on one of the helipads at the top of the New Winford Regional Hospital. I looked down at the flashing, red lights of the roof as the aircraft lowered.

I turned to look at Vic, my eyes scanning her face.

Once the plane touched down, she reached across the seats and held my hand. “Tell Zoey I send my best.”

Nodding, I kissed her. “I will. Thank you for all of this.” I gestured to the space around us.

Victoria sighed as she pulled her face away from mine. “I think you know by now that I’ll do anything for you, Sarah Greenwood.”

It was impossible to hit the blush that came to my face. But as the helicopter engine continued to roar, I knew I needed to get downstairs. I gave her one more kiss, pressed our lips together firmly before turning to open the door.

Vic slid across the leather and helped me down while staying in her seat. With the blades spinning violently, I wasn’t able to say anything else to her. Instead, I waved and ducked my head as I headed toward the rooftop door.

Vic watched me until the door closed behind me and I was left in a dingy hospital stairwell. The roar of the helicopter faded as I took each step, the daydream of a date fading just as quickly as reality sank in.

I followed the signs for the waiting room on the maternity ward. Before I knew it, I was pushing open the double doors to a mostly empty room; except of course for the gaggle of Greenwood’s huddled at its center.

“There she is.” My mom pointed as she rose from her chair, rushing toward me with her slight, old lady limp.

Wrapping my arms around her, I sighed. “Hi, mama.”

She held my shoulders and took a look at me, an eyebrow raising at my extravagant outfit. Before she could ask any questions, my babies came running over, swarming my legs.

I gave each of them a kiss on their head. “How are you guys doing?”

With his hands buried in his pockets, Jason smiled. “They were a little spooked by the ambulance but Aunt Robin did a great job keeping them calm.” Behind him, Liv waved at me. They were both in their pajamas, clearly having been woken up by the chaos.

“My brave babies.” I smiled down at each of them. Once they released my hips from their little hands, I looked around. “Can we see her?”

William grumbled from his chair. “Not yet. Robin came out and gave us an update a few minutes ago. Zo’s stable and the baby isn’t coming just yet.”

My shoulders dropped in relief. Thank god she’s okay. Knowing she was safe, my eyes started to well with tears. But I held them back, wanting to stay strong.

Everyone wandered back to their seats. But as they did, one more guest appeared. As soon as I saw her face, my heart started to race.

Noticing me stop in my tracks, Jason followed my gaze. He clicked his tongue. “Zoey insisted she be here.” He narrowed his eyes at me, a playful kind of scolding hiding in the hazel gaze.

Sure enough, there she was: Brianne Shaw in a pair of baggy gray sweats and a green flannel.



SARAH

Her smile lit up the waiting room, sending my heart straight into my throat.

But I turned to Jason, placing a delicate hand on his arm. “I’m really sorry. I didn’t think anything would happen. I shouldn’t have been out when the kids were at my place.”

Laughing, Jason nudged me. “Sar, it’s really okay. The kids can have time with their aunt without you.” His face turned serious. “Now if we were spending money on actual babysitters, that would be different.” With a wink, he patted my arm and was about to walk back to the kids.

But I grabbed his arm. “I’m sorry about Bri. I don’t know why Robin and Zoey thought that was okay.”

Jason shrugged, a nonchalant smirk on his face. “Your sister will always be an enigma to me. But,” he turned my attention to Bri playing with the kids, “they just think it’s more time with Aunt Bri so for now, it’ll be fine.”

I let the air I’d held hostage in my lungs be set free. Bri was coloring in a picture of a zebra, making each strip a different color. Even Derek was smirking as she worked on her art piece.

Biting my lip, I walked over and put my arm around my son’s shoulder. “That thing looks weird.”

Derek giggled. “That’s what I said but Bri doesn’t care.”

“I like it just the way it’s been made.” Bri looked up and met my eyes. When the kids weren’t looking, she whispered and I’m sorry

I waved her off. “Thank you for coming.”

If my eyes weren’t deceiving me, she was already blushing. Her face was gentle and soft, sleep playing at her eyelids as she entertained my kids. Her eyes wandered down my body, her eyebrows lifting at the extravagant outfit plastered to my body.

“Busy night?” Bri teased, one corner of her smile lifting.

I tucked a hair behind my ear. “Picking out art.”

Before she could mess with me any further, the doors to the maternity ward swung open to Robin. I stood up, interrupting her line of sight.

“She wants to see you.” Robin tilted her head toward the room my sister was in.

Petting my kids's heads, I walked toward Robin. “I’ll be right back guys. Try not to torture Bri.”

Robin put her arm around my back as we walked toward the room. Once the doors swung closed behind us, she winced. “Sorry for interrupting your date.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. Thanks for taking care of my kids and my sister.” I smiled at my best friend.

“Well I’m always going to do that.” Robin blushed, her lover for Zoey undeniable. I’m sure it had been a scary few hours for them. But everything was alright now.

She stopped in front of Zo's room and held out her arm for me to follow.

Walking inside, I sighed as I saw Zoey. "You doing okay?"

Zoey's face lit up when she saw me. "Damn, you got here fast."

"Helicopters will do that." With a wink, I leaned over the hospital bed and hugged her.

From behind me, Robin's jaw dropped as she took a seat. Zoey could only shake her head. "You've gotta be kidding me. She took you on a helicopter?"

I nodded. "Apparently, she owns one and has an ex-Air Force pilot on standby."

Zoey laughed. "Well okay then."

Pulling up a chair to the bedside, I rested my hand on Zoey's belly. "How's baby?"

"Safe. Just excited to freak us out." Zoey rolled her eyes as she looked down at her rounded baby bump. "It was just Braxton-Hicks but they want me to stay overnight just in case."

All of the tension in my body released as I leaned back in the chair. I was lucky not to have them, all of my kids were easy pregnancies and uncomplicated births. But Zoey was older than me and they had struggled with IVF for a while.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

As I looked around the room, a knock came from the door. “Delivery,” a nurse smiled.

In her hands, a huge bouquet of flowers was delicately arranged. My eyebrows lifted. “Who even knows you’re here?”

The nurse lowered the flowers into Zoey’s reach, letting her pluck the card from the foliage. On thick card stock, Zoey read the note aloud: “Zoey, hope you’re recovering well and your baby is safe and sound. Thanks for letting me take your sister out. Here’s to better luck next time. - V.B.”

I sucked my lips into my mouth, letting my teeth rest on them.

“Well, that’s thoughtful.” Robin turned to look at me.

Tucking the card back into place, Zoey asked the nurse to set the flowers on the table across the room.

Once the nurse left, a heavy silence fell over the room.

After a second, I caved. “Sorry I wasn’t here.”

“Sar, don’t apologize. You have a right to not be attached to the family by the hip.” Zoey shook her head, taking a sip of the ice water by her bed.

“I know.” I nodded. It was only partially true. My conscious brain knew I had every right to have a life outside of New Winford. But deep down, I doubted it. My kids

were young and still needed their mom. Hell, in emergencies, there were still only a few people to call.

My eyes wandered to the flowers on the table behind me. They were incredible. For such short notice, it was hard to believe Victoria was able to get a bouquet like that at nearly midnight.

“What are you thinking?” Zoey pushed me.

Scoffing, I rolled my eyes. “I feel like I should want to be more detached. To have something outside of this.”

Robin reached from her chair to mine. “But you don’t.”

“I’m starting to think I’m pretty happy where I am.” I bite my lip.

The feeling had been bubbling in my mind for some time. Maybe I didn’t need a helicopter to sweep me off of my feet. Maybe all I needed was what waited for me back in the lobby.

Zoey waggled her eyebrows as she giggled. “I think that might be your answer.”

38

BRI

My mouth stretched into a yawn as I pulled my glove out of my bag. I hadn’t gotten much sleep after my night in the hospital with the gaggle of Greenwoods.

And now, I needed to get my body back online before we started a softball game.

From behind me, Cleo slapped my back. “You look like a bag of shit.”

I shook my head. “I’m starting to think you don’t know how to be nice.”

Wrapping a rough arm around my shoulder, Cleo giggled. “You know I’m fucking with you. But in all seriousness, why are you so wiped?”

“I was at the hospital with Sarah’s family last night.” I rubbed the back of my neck.

Cleo’s forehead wrinkled. “Seriously?”

Nodding, I grabbed my glove and headed out to the outfield. I hadn’t arrived early enough to warm up, so the small stretches I managed in the dugout would have to do.

Cleo and I walked in stride to our positions.

“What were you doing there?” Cleo raised their voice across the field, not willing to relent on their gossip.

Rolling my eyes, I shrugged. “Robin asked me to come help with Sarah’s kids while we waited for her to get there.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Cleo tilted their head, confused. “Where was she?”

“On a date.” I quipped, bending over and into position as we waited for the pitcher to throw the first ball.

“Christ.” Cleo mumbled under their breath as they prepared to catch a ball.

The loudsmack of the ball on the metal bat brought me back to my body. Watching the ball descend in the sky, I ran after it. I opened my glove and used my other hand to brace for impact.

Once I felt the ball fill my glove, I clasped it in my hand and tossed it back to the pitcher.

Cleo moved closer to me. “How do you feel about it?”

Shrugging, I watched the next batter step up to the plate. “What if she’s not ready?”

“For what?” Cleo shook their head.

Another ball moved into play, pausing our conversation.

Back in position, I continued, “I don’t know. Something serious. She’s having fun dating around and seeing what else is out there. I don’t want to tie her to this.” I gestured to the town around us.

Cleo scoffed. “She’s got three kids in the New Winford school district for the next...

eighteen years? I don't think it's you tying her here." After a moment, Cleo sighed. "I just think if she tells you that you're it, you should trust that."

Raising my eyebrows, I laughed. "You're probably right... which is annoying of you."

"That's what I'm here for." Cleo winked.

Before the next batter stepped up to the plate, a figure hopped onto the bleachers just past the fence behind home plate.

Cleo stood up straight, their forehead wrinkling. "No way."

My eyes narrowed at the person, trying to make out who it was. "Is that...?"

"It's fucking Cat." Staring ahead, Cleo swallowed the boulder-sized lump in her throat.

"Well, that's not good." I bit my lip as I bent back down, ready for the next play. I had no idea what Cleo's cheating ex was doing back in town. But it wouldn't help Cleo's confidence to lose this play.

I took in a deep breath, trying to steady myself. No matter what happened, I needed to trust Sarah and her instincts. All that was left was to wait for her decision and finish that goddamn table.

39

VICTORIA

This view is worth every penny. I thought as I started out at the glimmering lake,



leaning against the brand new balcony railing. The double doors off the primary bedroom could finally be opened onto the new decking.

Swaying in the wind, the leaves of the trees were starting to get a light crispy sound to them as the end of August barreled closer.

I gripped the sealed wood and took in the fresh air. Surely the cleaner lifestyle would add a few years back onto my life that the stress of my 20s had taken away.

Before I could get too lost in thought, there was a faint knock on the door frame.

Whipping around, I started to smile before I even saw her. “Hi.”

“Hey.” Sarah nervously smiled back at me. Over her shoulders, she had two massive bags of decor. With just a week until the party, she mostly just had final touches to put in place. Except – of course – the table, which was set to be delivered the morning of the party.

I was a little nervous that I’d hate it. But I had yet to see a piece of Bri’s work that I didn’t like.

Crossing the deck, I placed a kiss on Sarah’s cheek. She pulled back and rested a hand on my bicep. “Can I show you some pieces?”

I nodded as I followed her back inside. The house was quiet, Robin’s work finally concluding over the weekend and leaving the party planners to take over the house.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Sarah led me downstairs to the kitchen.

Despite the house being so old, we hadn't run into any unforeseen delays.

"Okay, so the open shelving has to be carefully arranged. We want this to look lived in, but not like a mess." Sarah set her bag on the brand new, marble countertops. A vein of green ran through the surface, bringing a pop of color to the space.

Watching her move, she pulled out a few pieces; some jars of shelf-stable goods, a few ornamental vases, and a houseplant.

I leaned against the doorframe, becoming more aware of her lack of eye contact by the second.

Hurried, Sarah plopped each piece on the raw-edge wood shelves. "What do you think?" She crossed her arms as she spoke, hardly looking away from the arrangement.

"I like it." Striding across the kitchen to stand next to her, I let my hand rest flat against her back. "These are good." But I pulled my hand away and moved toward the shelf. I shuffled one of the vases to the lower shelf, swapping it with the houseplant.

Sarah sighed, a strange amount of relief coming from the new arrangement. "Thank you."

"Happy to help." I turned on my heels and leaned against the counter. The cold stone

on my hand was a welcome sensation. Feeling bold, I narrowed my eyes. “Are you okay? Zoey’s okay, right?”

Letting out a sharp breath, Sarah nodded. “Yeah, she’s good. Those flowers are still holding on.”

My eyes softened. “So, what is it? I feel like you’re pulling away.”

Sarah’s shoulders dropped as her blue eyes pierced mine. “I don’t know how to…”

“Break up with someone?”

Nodding, Sarah sucked in her lips. “Especially someone I’m working with.”

I felt the wind knock out of my lungs, like I was in a free fall out of my helicopter. But all I could do was shrug. “Can I ask why?”

Looking around the house, Sarah raised her eyebrows. “I think your life is bigger than what I want.”

“The kids. And school.” I couldn’t blame her. My life took me across the globe and as much as I wanted to slow down, work required me to move around a certain amount. And I was always going to be a fan of taking a helicopter ride for fun.

“Yeah.” Sarah uncrossed her arms, letting them fall to her side. “I really appreciate you doing so much for me. It felt… healing in some way.”

With a sigh, I shrugged. “Even if someone doesn’t have my resources, don’t settle for less than that feeling.”

A laugh rose from her chest. “Trust me, those days are past.”

I chuckled along with her, my eyes moving from the kitchen out to the sprawling living room. Shaking my head, I grinned. “Well, at least I let you design my entire house.”

“You’ll never get rid of me.” Sarah winked.

After a moment of processing, I snapped my fingers. “So, what else do you have in your mystery bag?”

I was sure the pain would set in eventually, the slight heartbreak of losing the first woman I’d started to develop feelings for after many years of being single. But I wasn’t about to lose Sarah as a friend. She was far too cool and smart to let slip through my fingers.

Besides, I still needed this house party to go off without a hitch.

40

## SARAH

The lake house was bustling with staff; caterers fixing their ties, gardeners putting the finishing touches on the lawn. Just a couple hours away now, the party was finally here.

I was pretty happy with how everything looked as I walked into the living room. Chopping the throw pillows with my hand, I made sure the place looked lived in.

The last week of lake house preparation flew by. Every piece of furniture was delivered and placed at just the right spot. Taking a step back, I made sure the couch placement was right. It aligned well-enough with the large TV mounted to the wall. But Vic and I agreed that the view of the lake was far more important.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

To my surprise, we'd moved through the last week effortlessly. The final touches on the house came easily. Except that we were still waiting on the delivery of our final piece.

Bri promised me it would be here on time – insisting that the table needed every second we could give it to set.

Rushing through the living room, Vic rested a hand on my shoulder. “It looks great here. I want to know as soon as the table arrives.”

“Obviously.” I winked as she zipped out of the room.

With my arms crossed, I strolled through the house. Robin should be proud of the work she did. The house was just as dilapidated as the house on Oak Lane. But she had a tight deadline for this one. After she'd finished, the house had passed inspection with flying colors.

Taking my time, I paced from room to room. I paused in each space, making sure every item was right. I'd left some backups in my car just in case something didn't feel quite right.

I managed to burn an hour like that, just triple-checking my own work.

Eventually, I strolled up to the primary bedroom. Across from Vic's bed was the piece we'd picked out at her friend's gallery.

Should I think this is strange? I bit my lip as I looked at my work.

Shrugging it off, I crossed the room and looked out the balcony doors. I nervously checked my phone.

Still no text from Bri.

I wanted to see her this week but work had kept us away from each other. And I wasn't about to tell my dream partner that I wanted to be with just her via text. Not after everything we'd been through together.

But I was desperate to see what she thought. Hopefully I hadn't made her wait too long.

Just as my nerves were getting the best of me, my phone buzzed in my hand. It was a text from Bri:

On my way. Driving slow, be there in fifteen.

Nodding to myself, I peeled myself away from the lake view. I would have my answer soon enough. But for now, the most expensive job I'd ever done needed finishing.

I headed downstairs, scanning the house for Vic's scarlett red pantsuit.

But she wasn't anywhere to be found.

Once I got to the deck, I waved to the movers leaning against their trucks. They'd been on call all day, just waiting for this \$500,000 table to arrive. They would be worth every penny. Using her art world contacts, Vic had hired fine art movers to handle the table.

Even as they stood in waiting, they wore white gloves.

“We’ll be ready in about five minutes.” I smiled.

The team nodded and started to stretch out their backs.

Standing on the front porch, I took a deep breath. I needed to keep my cool, I didn’t want to rub anything in Vic’s face. The fresh air filled my lungs, hopefully enough to last me until I could find space to breathe under Bri’s presence.

From the porch, I could hear the mechanized gate swinging open and the smooth rolling of truck tires as a massive box truck rolled onto the property. I could vaguely make out Bri’s face as she squinted against the sun as she pulled the truck in. She left just enough space for the ramp of the truck to descend onto the pavers leading to the front porch.

Just as the door to the box truck flung open and Bri’s familiar arms gripped the handle, a smile took over my face despite my desperate attempt to keep my feelings to myself.

41

BRI

I was already sweating but Sarah’s beaming smile was enough to make my entire body heat up.

Shaking my head, I tried to avoid her gaze. I knew it was a trap, one that ended in her bed. And right now, I needed to deliver a half million dollar table. So I walked to the back of the truck and threw open the roll-up door.

A loud clatter filled the lawn as the door lifted. I grabbed the metal ramp from the truck’s deck and laid it out. My parking job was nearly flawless, the ramp ending

right at the start of the pathway to the front door.



*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Sarah waved over the professional movers who effortlessly climbed inside the truck. With delicate hands, they lifted the table onto a furniture dolly.

I put my hands on my hips and moved out of their way.

From the porch, Sarah admired the wrapping job. “I was hoping to sneak a peek.”

Laughing, I looked back at the table. I had wrapped in more furniture pads and moving tape than was strictly necessary. It almost didn’t even look like a table was inside the insane packing job.

“Didn’t want to risk any damage on such a short drive.” I couldn’t stop myself from smiling as I met her blue eyes. My heart fluttered under her gaze as I looked up at her on the porch.

Sarah stepped to the side as the movers quietly lifted the table up the stairs.

It was like watching water move around a rock. The team hardly bothered speaking to each other, perfectly maneuvering the table through the doorway without so much as making contact with Robin’s pristine paint job.

Once they moved past the lake house's entrance, Sarah and I followed closely behind.

“How are you feeling?” She asked me, her voice just over a whisper.

Letting some air seep out of my lips, I shrugged. “I just hope she likes it. It’s simpler than I expected.”

Sarah nodded. “Simple is good.”

Once the team had the table in place, right at the center of the dining room, they started to peel off the wrapping. My throat tightened, hoping that none of the intricate wood details had fallen off in the process.

My finger tapped nervously against my crossed arm. Standing next to Sarah, worrying about how she really felt about me, certainly wasn’t helping my overwhelming anxiety.

Sarah took a look over at me, and rested her hand on my forearm. Her fingers lightly squeezed the tensed muscles. When my eyes met hers, I felt my shoulders relax. The tender touch made me melt.

The team lifted the final blanket, gathering up all the wrapping in their arms and carrying it out.

“Wow.” Sarah’s jaw dropped. Without another word, she walked toward the piece. She got down on her knees and looked at the wood up close.

The wood was one carved piece rather than two pieces or three pieces glued together.

“Is it all one?” Sarah gawked.

Nodding, I bit my lip. “I wanted to maintain the strength of the original trunk. It’s sturdier but it also felt symbolic. This kind of place can’t be torn apart. It works all together and nothing stitched into place will work.”

With a chuckle, Sarah stood up. “Exactly. That was the vision for the whole place.” She ran one of her fingers along the surface, a perfectly smooth dining table. It was functional but also stunning.

“The stain is perfect. The natural wood is shining through.” Sarah shook her head as she took a step back.

I tried to hide my excitement, for once unsure that I wanted Sarah to know just how much power she had over me. “Good.”

Before we could say more, I felt a figure appear in the doorway. With her body leaned against the frame, Victoria Bradley shook her head. “I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to catch the elusive Brianne Shaw before she disappeared back into the woods.”

Turning around, I laughed and met her outstretched hand. As I shook it, her amber eyes pierced my soul. “I was hoping I’d never find out how you felt about it.”

From across the room, I could feel Sarah’s body tensing. As odd as it must have been for me and Vic to meet, it was likely even more strange for the woman seeing us both.

“Didn’t want me to sing your praises?” Vic laughed as she dropped my hand. Walking past me, she scoffed. “This is unbelievable.” Staring at the table, Vic let out a sigh. “I feel like I’m back in that gallery all those years ago.”

I pursed my lips together, it was exactly what she wanted. Somehow, without ever speaking to her, I’d built her perfect table.

A voice called from deeper inside the house. “Sarah, we need you.” My guess was that the party planner, Bobbi, needed her opinion on something.

But Sarah’s eyes flicked between her two lovers, unsure what would happen if she left us alone.

Without much of a choice, Sarah swallowed hard and headed for the door, leaving

Vic and I in a weighted silence.

42

### VICTORIA

My head followed Sarah leaving the room. But as soon as she left, my eyes flicked back to the gorgeous table in front of me. The piece was everything I'd dreamed it to be.

I walked closer to it, letting my hand run along the surface. It was polished and smooth but not so much so that you'd lose the grain of the wood. My gaze caught on the legs, where small carved wood pieces decorated each support.

Kneeling down, I ran my hands over them. It could've been tacky, the leaves designed on the table. But they had a surrealist quality to them that Bri had nailed.

"How did you know I liked surrealists?" I tilted my head as I examined each detail.

Bri shrugged. "Well I didn't. Sarah mostly showed me your favorite pieces. I just got a sense that you would appreciate it. But really, the leaves are white ash leaves. So in some sense, the cut down tree is still in tact"

With a chuckle, I stood. "Brilliant." Crossing the room, I stopped in front of Bri. "A part of me wants you to stop sculpting forever so this piece stays this special. But I have to be honest: I think the art world misses you."

"It'll always be special because it was made for you and this house. It won't look right in any other space." Bri looked past me and to the table. Buried behind her eyes

was a sense of sadness, like she was leaving her baby at sleepaway camp forever.

For a moment, we both looked at the table. I wasn't sure if Sarah had told her that we ended things or if Sarah would be annoyed if I were to say anything. But as we stood in my dining room together, I felt a sense of connection to this woman.

But tapping my foot against the newly refinished floors, I sighed. "Bri, I don't know if it's weird but..."

"Maybe a tad." Bri smirked.

"Right," I joked before continuing, "But I'm going to say it anyway. Sarah is one of the most special people I've ever met. And I really hope you take good care of her."

Bri's forehead wrinkled with confusion.

Well I guess that answers that question. They must not have spoken yet.

For a moment, Bri's mind scrambled to catch up. But once she did, her chest rose as she took a deep breath.

Nodding, Bri patted my arm. "I will. Thanks for getting her out of town, she deserved all of that."

Shaking hands, we seemed to reach an unspoken understanding. Sarah was always going to be in New Winford, and I wouldn't.

"Well, I should get moving. My guests will be here any moment. Feel free to linger as long as you'd like, I'm sure everyone is going to want to see the incredible artisan of this piece." I patted her back as I walked past her and headed back into the rest of the house.

My chest ached slightly, still trying to let go of Sarah. But before I could get too wrapped up in the feeling, the front door swung open and in walked my agent Tommy.

“It feels like every lesbian from here to the Pacific lives in this town.” Tommy shook her head as she pulled me in for a hug. We’d met once Poptook off and as much as she was my agent, she was also a great friend.

I started to show her around the finally finished house. Each room felt like my vision had been ripped straight from my mind and into this magnificent house. And now I was standing here with my dear friends.

A part of me would always be grateful to Sarah for helping me feel at home here, but it was time for my next chapter. And I had a feeling it would be a good one.

43

SARAH

I’d made my way through the house with Bobbi by my side, making sure what furniture remained in the house – and hadn’t been cleared to make enough room for the party – was arranged just right.

As the guests started to arrive, I tried to blend in and feel a part of the ritzy crowd. Eventually, Bobbi split off to manage the event itself and I roamed from room to room, hunting for Bri.

As lovely as these people were, all I really wanted was to take a nap with Bri in my arms.

“There you are.” Her familiar rumble came from the top of the stairs.

I whipped my head around to look at her. “I was looking for you.”



*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:41 pm*

Bri smiled, her charming grin making my heart race. “I was admiring your work, since you already got to see mine.”

“What do you think?” Biting my lip, I watched as Bri slowly came down to me.

She nodded. “I think you were very generous in your opinion of my house.”

With a laugh, I tilted my head to the door. “Should we get out of here? These don’t seem like our kind of people.”

Nodding, Bri put her arm around my waist and guided me outside. Once the front door closed behind us, the commotion of the brewing party faded. We passed new guests waking up the stone path as we left.

The box truck had been taken away already, the movers handling it. But before we walked to our cars, which suddenly looked schlubby next to the extravagant rides of Vic’s friends, Bri guided me down to the lakefront.

“Are we allowed out here?” I looked back at the house, still filling up with partygoers.

Bri shrugged. “I think we worked enough to enjoy it a little.”

It was hard to argue with that. So I followed behind her as she led us down the dock. The wood boards rocked slightly as a light wave lapped at the lake shore.

Stopping at the end of the deck, Bri let her hand travel down my arm to meet my

fingers. She turned to face me, interlacing our hands. “I just wanted to thank you.”

“For what?” I rolled my eyes, attempting to keep my blush at bay. But just being looked at by Bri was enough to make me melt.

Bri laughed. “Making me go back to carpentry. I don’t know if I’ll keep doing it, but reminding myself that I could was incredible.”

Shrugging, I met her green eyes. “Well thank you.”

“I made something for you.” Bri dug into the pocket of her jeans.

“For me?” Squeezing her hand, I felt myself get nervous.

She pulled out a small, sculpted mountain. For how small it was, fitting in the palm of Bri’s hand, it was incredibly intricate. A small stream flowed down the slope which was lined with a dense forest.

My jaw dropped. “Wow. This is amazing.” Taking it into my own hand, I lifted it closer to my face. “Why did you do this?”

“Because, you’ve always helped me climb every mountain I’ve been at the base of. And I hope I can help you do the same.” Bri’s jaw clenched as she swallowed her nerves.

I shook my head. “God, you’re the sweetest person I’ve ever met.” Looking up at her, I turned toward the shore of the lake where the ugly fence that blocked the view from the street had finally been torn down. “Do you remember sitting over there as kids?”

Wrapping her arm around me, Bri nodded. “Of course. We used to come here after school almost every day when it was warm enough.”

“And you were an expert rock-skipper.” I giggled, still able to picture how her face lit up with excitement when she got anything more than three skips.

Bri’s face wrinkled. “Why are you thinking about that?”

Letting a sigh escape my lungs, I rested my head on her shoulder. “I think I want to do stuff like that with you every day.”

A beaming smile took over Bri’s face. “You know there’s no rush, right? I don’t need anything other than having you in my life.”

I lifted my head, relief washing over me after saying how I really felt. “I know. But I don’t want to climb mountains with anyone else.”

For a moment, Bri looked at me before she brought her hand to my neck and pulled me into a kiss. Our lips pressing together on the lightly rocking deck, my body relaxed. I was still going to have to take my time. But right now, I just wanted to be in Bri’s arms.