



# Love Addicts Anonymous

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**Category:** Erotic, Romance, Adult

**Description:** Kade Wright is an expert in rocking any woman's world. Sexy, rich, and the type you don't bring home to meet your mother, he has broken more hearts than he can remember, and there is no end in sight. Until one mistake lands him in boiling hot waters. When his company orders him to the LOVE ADDICTS ANONYMOUS Rehab Center, he better get his affairs in order or else he loses his seat on the company board.

Love isn't supposed to be addictive. But for Vicky Sullivan it is. A true romantic at heart, she comes with a bit of a stalking tendency, and is completely not adverse to commitment. But who's Kade to judge? As someone who's seeking commitment and afraid of never finding love, she's the type of woman he wouldn't usually hit on. Except, she's hot and keeps avoiding him...yes, even after seeing his private parts naked in all their glory.

Kade isn't known as the tall, dark and ruthless businessman for no reason. Romance isn't in the air, more like wild between the sheets action with no expectations. Vicky's convinced she can resist, but Kade has other plans for her.

Can Vicky stay away from the one man who seems so easy to get and so hard to keep?

**Total Pages (Source):** 39

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

Prologue

VICKY

Jane Austen Fan Club

PO BOX

January 1st

Dear Jane,

For the last hundred years or so, your delightful words have etched their way into every young woman's buoyant heart hoping for a bit of romance in her life. Your books have given us hope. They've made us dream, but after spending years of my life looking for my Mr. Darcy, I've come to realize you were a romantic, just like the rest of us, and the path ahead isn't as fluffy as you made it out to be. For all I know, Mr. Darcy may always remain a beautiful dream (preferably one with lots of sex in it because I'm not getting very much of that lately.) However, I will never give up dreaming because, even if Mr. Darcy doesn't exist, maybe some day, Mr. Darcy's poorer and less sexy brother will trudge along. I'm definitely game for giving him a try.

Lots of love,

Vicky Sullivan

Two months later

Jane Austen Fan Club

PO Box

March 12th

Dear Jane,

I think I've found him—my own Mr. Darcy. Actually, I'm quite sure of it. While we haven't met at some uptight ball, like Elizabeth, Starbucks isn't so bad a place either. He spilled hot coffee on me (I'm sporting a small scar, but who am I to complain when we're talking about true love here) and then he asked me to have a cup of coffee with him the next day. So far, we've only gone on two dates, and no se\*...uhm, lovemaking, but my heart's already confident. He's the one. We might not be Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy in the sense that we don't talk much, but in the silence surrounding us, we say everything.

Lots of love,

Vicky Sullivan

1

VICKY

“Are you fucking kidding me?” I mutter under my breath as soon as the bus pulls into a potholed road. Looking out of the window, the only thing I can make out is a vast space of trees and water, and yet more water. It feels as if I'm part of another world even though that is impossible. We are as deep in North Carolina as one can get.

Throughout our drive, I spied a few shops, the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, and even caught a glimpse of the Fort Raleigh National Historic Site. It sure feels like we're far away from civilization, but the driver keeps assuring me we're only "a stone's throw" away from the buzzing nightlife.

I should have clarified his interpretation of the term "buzzing nightlife."

Roanoke Island is beautiful. I've read tourists are all over this place, but right now it feels more like a death sentence than a blissful oasis. On top of the seclusion, the clouds are as dark and ominous as the feelings inside me and the dread of losing myself.

Okay. I'm not going to panic. I refuse to. I'm going to stay on this tiny island for only six weeks. Six weeks.

Forty-two days.

1001 hours.

It should be as easy as pie. Except, I have the feeling it won't.

It's going to be a fucking disaster, that's what it is.

"What are you in here for?" A voice disrupts my thoughts.

I turn my head.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

A young woman is sitting behind me in the half-empty bus, her expensive fragrance wafting over. Apart from me and her, there are eight other women—all ranging from their mid twenties to their forties, all of them miserable looking. Or maybe that's just reflection, and I'm only seeing what I want to see.

Most of them are dressed in casual clothes like me, except for the one behind me. She's wearing a short dress and high heels—I glimpsed her attire when she asked the driver to stop several times. Something about her having a weak bladder. She's the reason we're late. In fact, very late, which has diminished my hope of figuring out how to file a complaint immediately upon our arrival.

I barely give her another glance as my attention focuses back on the scenery outside the window.

“To be honest, I still have no idea,” I mumble more to myself than to her.

That's half the truth.

Theoretically, I know what I did wrong when the judge court-ordered me to this place.

Theoretically, too, I know they were all exaggerating when they claimed I broke into Bruce's home. What I did was most certainly not breaking and entering.

I lift my hand to the glass and draw an invisible heart, my mind wandering back to the person who's responsible for this.

“I don’t belong here,” I find myself whispering. “It’s all a big misunderstanding.”

“That’s what everyone says before they hit rock bottom.” She lets out a knowing laugh a moment before she slides into the empty seat beside me. A pale hand moves past me, hovering in mid air. “I’m Sylvie, by the way. Sylvie Holton.”

I shake her hand. “Just Vicky.”

“This place is going to be amazing, you know,” the girl continues, oblivious to my wish to be left alone.

“How do you know?” I narrow my eyes to regard her closer. Her long blonde hair looks like a cascade of bright sunshine over her naked shoulders. Her eyes, blue and wide, are staring at me, full of curiosity and something else: knowledge.

As though she’s been here before.

“I just know.” She lets out a laugh, and I instantly know she’s one of those people who seem to laugh and smile all the time. I’ve always admired optimists and their ability to see the positive in the aftermath of drama. That’s a skill I haven’t mastered yet. “That, and my research has dug up a few things.”

“Yeah?” I pull up my brows in interest.

“Yeah,” she replies matter-of-factly.

My curiosity is piqued. “What did you found out?”

“For starters, they’ve just reopened some of the historical centers,” she says with a soft smile, like that’s supposed to tell me something. “This place actually gets a lot of tourist attraction, but since there are going to be renovations in the next few weeks,

the place will be closed to the public before summer, which is why they've turned one of the historical buildings into a temporary rehab center." The words pour out of her like a waterfall. Jesus. She can talk fast without breathing. I can barely keep up with her.

"Uhm—"

I stare at her, unsure what the heck she's talking about.

"Good for us," she says. "I've always wanted to have a whole island to myself." Her eyes light up.

I don't think the renovations plan was included with the info leaflet they sent me as a means of making it look like I had a choice in coming here. And I sure didn't take it upon me to find out much about the place after the hearing.

My eyes narrow as I give her a critical glance. Her eyes are framed by heavy eyeliner. She's wearing fake eyelashes. Her whole posture is relaxed. Too relaxed for someone who is about to enter this kind of facility. She's styled as though she's about to join a party. She wears expensive designer shoes. And isn't she the one with the tons of bags? The driver could barely cram them inside.

Maybe she's one of the counselors?

"Are you working here?" I ask, unable to control the sudden mistrust seeping into my voice.

"I wish." She lets out a hearty laugh. "But no, I'm here to get therapy." She eyes me, amused. "Like you."

I cringe at the word.

She says it like it's not a big deal.

I ponder her words. Finally, I give a sigh, curiosity rising within me.



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

“You don’t seem too bothered by this,” I state. “What are you in here for?”

“I came out of my own free will.”

“Right.” It makes so much sense, and yet it doesn’t. “I didn’t know that was even possible.” I draw my eyebrows up in surprise, then give a short nod. “Well, good for you. So, you can leave anytime, right?”

“Yeah, but who would do that?”

“Yeah, who would do that?” I make a face. How anyone could choose to stay of their own will is beyond me.

“Do you know where you’ll be placed?”

“No idea. And right now, I’m not sure I want to know.” I shrug and turn my head back to the window, eyeing the unknown territory and ignoring the pangs of desperation washing over me.

I wish they had let me keep my phone.

The very phone I had to hand in before we boarded the bus from our meeting point to North Carolina. The only thing that would have kept me connected to the world, my real world. Now it’s gone, a figment of my past. Gone along with pictures of Bruce. His texts. The possibility of checking his updates on Facebook to see if he’s online and what he’s up to.

Bruce.

My heart slams against my ribcage.

Bruce.

If only I could get in touch with him to find out what he's doing right now and if he's thinking of me.

Oh, wait.

A thought hits me.

If Sylvie can leave anytime, maybe she'll send a secret message to Bruce for me. Maybe she'll become a sort of messenger. I'll ask for nothing major. Just to know if he's okay and that he's received the long text I sent right before they confiscated my phone.

The thought makes me giddy with excitement.

"Sylvie, right?" I ask to be sure I got the name right, which earns me a small nod. "You said you could leave anytime?"

"Yeah," she replies and adds quickly, "I hope they'll place us together in the same group so we can support each other."

"That would be great," I say with a sudden rush of excitement. "It would be a lot of fun if we could get to know this place together and help each other out."

For example, by texting certain people, which I don't mention just yet.

“I’m not sure we can roam freely, what with the renovations under way,” she says thoughtfully.

“Of course.” I nod my head. “But maybe they’ll make an exception to ensure we’re not bored to death.”

She lets out a loud, hearty laugh that has everyone turning their heads to us, and I can’t help but realize I like her. Maybe we’ll be friends.

It wouldn’t be so bad to have an ally in a place like this, especially when my new friend is going to help bring Bruce and me together.

“I doubt that’s even possible. My job is already boring as shit,” Sylvie says. “I’m a business strategist. You?”

My stomach relaxes before tightening into knots again. “I’m a nurse...”

“That’s so cool.”

“—in an elderly home.”

“Still cool.”

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

That's how I met him, I want to tell her.

Bruce.

He was visiting his elderly gran after New Year's Eve, and she introduced me to him. A few weeks later, I met him again at Starbucks, and he invited me for coffee.

God, I miss him.

If only I could let him know that I love him like crazy.

I can't wait for the whole thing to be over and get back to my old life.

"Look." Sylvie moves her arm past me and points a long index finger to the window. "We're here."

I follow her line of vision. As I make out the shapes, my smile dies on my lips and my frown deepens.

Ahead of us is a white building. It's expensive and big. And frigging ancient.

It must be at least two hundred years old. At least from the look of it.

Please let it not be it.

Please.

I shudder at the thought of sleeping in an old bed. It's an irrational fear I have. Like the fear of never meeting someone who'll love me and want to grow old together. Or ending up all alone with only a couple of cats as company. Nothing against cats. I love them, but let's face it, they're not always exciting company.

It's the same fear—the fear of losing someone—that got me in trouble with the judge. In my humble opinion, it's nothing reading a self-help book couldn't solve.

They didn't have to send me to rehab.

There, I've just said it.

It's an ugly word.

Rehab.

I associate it with needle marks on arms, yellow-stained faces, and moody alcoholics. To be honest, I'm sure being branded a love addict isn't worse. It's not like I follow Bruce everywhere and have to know what he is doing every minute of the day.

It's enough if I know what he's doing every day.

2

KAIDEN

My life sucks.

I'm not a sex addict. Honestly, I'm not. That word makes me cringe. I'm not even sure why I'm here, but apparently the board thinks my healthy sex life is spiraling out of control...

Well, they're wrong.

It's not an addiction if I enjoy every minute of it.

It's not an addiction if I love what I do.

But tell that to the thick-sculled fatties with no sense of humor on my board.

I'm not even greedy. I like to share. Twosomes, threesomes, but my all-time favorite: no strings attached, and no repetition. I love it wild and versatile, my sheets clean and my private drawers safe, and I love my monthly health checkups.

If you jump between the sheets with me, I can guarantee that I'm groomed, clean, and will ensure you'll have at least one orgasm, or two, or three.

## Page 5

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I'm good with numbers, better in life than on paper.

But obviously, I'm not addicted, because I know when to stop.

Not that it's my intention though.

I enjoy fucking far too much. Like I said, I like the workout, the challenge, and the chase because I'm a man of many aspirations. As long as I have a goal in sight, I like to sweep right in and finish it in one fast ride.

See things through, so to say.

When I came up with the idea of a 365-day non-stop sex calendar, I didn't realize it would be such a rewarding challenge. My best friend, Cash Boyd, owner of the famous Club 69 establishments, couldn't agree more. In fact, he's the one who's been more concerned that I make it than even I am. He's my wingman.

It's not an easy task, let me tell you that.

In a city of one million women, half of them are married. A small percentage is gay, widowed, and doesn't fall between the age of twenty-two and forty years old. That's already a small pool. What I'm looking for is the small percentage (of an already small pool) that actually wants to stay single and enjoys sex without any sort of commitment.

I admit, that's my favorite kind of woman.

Unfortunately, they're not easy to find. The majority are romantics pining for "The One." I call them the "deluded lunatics."

Maybe it's because I don't fall in love.

The only two things I've ever loved are my work and the way my dick always seems to know what to do.

I just don't like the drama, the pleading, having to stifle a woman's hope that someday we'll be in a relationship. For the life of me, I cannot see myself depending on someone to make me happy, to let someone so close to me that I would have to trust her.

Which is why I'm always being upfront with every woman I meet before I invite her back to my place:

The only relationship I have is with my cock.

That's another reason why I started the 365-day sex calendar in the first place.

The way I see it, I'm doing women a favor. They learn from me. I live to please them and treat them well. That's one of the most important rules I set up.

I even love going down on them if I know they're clean.

I'm not doing men though. I'm as straight as a cannon and love to dive into deep places that are warm, moist, and welcoming, like a hot apple pie fresh from the oven.

I said that to the company board. My honesty didn't help my case. They had little understanding for my "sex escapades" as they called my little encounters, after which they came up with the grand idea of setting an ultimatum: retire from my own



company and leave the board or agree to get therapy.

That decision was a no-brainer. I'm far too young and sexy to retire. Besides, they need me because I'm the only one who knows how to run my company the way it should be run. It's not my fault they're thick-skulled brutes, with their only interest being fluffing up their savings accounts rather than expand. Sometimes I wish I didn't have to ask for investors, never sold the shares to start up. Obviously, I have to have some patience and understanding, what with most of them being past sixty and counting.

You can't expect people who have no idea what Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and the likes are to get me.

I'll tell you a secret.

I do actually know what's going on.

They're bored with their lives because nothing ever happens, which makes them jealous of me.

That's right.

They're jealous of me.

Jealous because they're married and stuck in their boring routine.

Jealous because they think they have left their best years behind and miss their old, carefree days.

Divorce is always an option, but not when it's already their second and third marriage.

## Page 6

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They love their mansions, their Botox wives, but they still think the grass is greener on the other side. That's because the grass is greener on my side.

Not my fault though.

You can't have it all. Even I know it, which is why I do have a set of rules. Like:

1. I never do repeats. Ever. I'm fairly proud of that. If you're a prude, don't ask me what my sheet number is because it's only a number. To you, anyway.

2. I don't hire prostitutes or sex workers or strippers. And I don't do married women or religious fanatics or virgins—not because they're not hot, but because I have my own standards. These types of women get too invested in the idea of marrying, and I have no time for healing their broken hearts. I'm not a lifeboat either. I don't save anyone from their mundane lives.

My point is: don't ask me for commitment. Don't tell me you're married, or want kids. Don't ask me how many women I fucked before you just like I won't ask you how many breaths you've taken in this little thing called life.

To me, it doesn't matter.

You may think I'm a manwhore.

I assure you, I'm not.

I just like to give back the enjoyment and learn from experience the same way you

would read a book and savor each and every nuance of it, which brings me to point three.

3. I'm a business strategist and marketing expert who always keeps things uncomplicated. Which is one of the reasons why I often take a break from my hectic work life to enjoy all the benefits of being a VIP member at several clubs.

Club 69 is my favorite, more so because, like I said, I'm friends with the owner. Cash gets me and knows the kind of woman I usually go for.

He even came up with some of the rules to make sure my 365-day non-stop sex calendar challenge turns into a success. Sadly, my 365-day non-stop calendar is what got me in trouble with the board in the first place. See, they don't get it.

Like the guy sitting in front of me, cradling an oversized newspaper in his arms.

"This is a catastrophe for the company," Ben says. "We've already lost two million in revenue." He slaps the paper for effect, then looks up, his gray blue eyes meeting mine. "This cannot go on, Kaiden."

I cringe at the last word. Only my friends and family are allowed to call me Kaiden, and they never do so lightly.

"What do you expect me to say?" I shrug. "That I'll give up my private life to make you happy?"

There is a short silence.

My brother, Chase, leans forward.

Now, let me tell you something about my brother.

He's a kickass attorney. He's proven himself on numerous occasions. Whenever either of us needed to get out of a sticky situation, he always knew what to do.

Except, now I'm not so sure.

There's a frown on his face, and he takes too long to reply. Either he's preparing for a long speech or worse, he agrees with the board.

For the sake of our friendship, I hope it's the first option.

"Chase." My sharp tone conveys a warning I hope he's clever enough to heed.

He turns to me and exhales a long sigh. "Kade, they're right." I stare at him with a mixture of shock and anger. "You've painted the company in a bad light."

"Et tu, Brute?" My mouth tightens in a line.

Again I'm reminded that we thrive on opposites.

I may have been adopted, but growing up in the same household and being closer than real brothers, I would have thought Chase would agree with me for once.

I guess I was wrong.

## Page 7

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“Those are serious accusations,” Chase continues. “As your attorney, I can tell you this could ruin your career. Your life. The woman in question—” Chase waves his hand to Ben. “—what’s her name?”

“Brenda,” Ben says.

“Brenda went to the tabloids,” Chase says, as though I’m not familiar with the outcome of my last sexcapade. “This 365-day nonstop sex calendar of yours is earning serious attention right now—and not in a good way. We can’t afford it to draw any more attention or else we’ll end up losing important deals and clients. If you don’t stop, we’ll soon be facing a crisis.”

“She never asked for money,” I say.

“Yet.” Chase sighs. “She hasn’t asked for money yet. But once she learns that you take photographs of all your conquests, she’ll want a payout. In the meantime, she’ll go to every rag magazine that wants her and earns her media coverage.”

“She won’t.” I let out a chuckle because I know Brenda. I know what she really wants.

Remember the kinds of women you should never go for? Yeah, she falls into one of those categories.

“You can’t know that.” Chase interlinks his fingers as he stares me down. “Did you get her written permission to take photographs?”

I exhale. “No, but it’s not like I’m publishing and selling the snapshot of a face on the

Internet.”

I groan.

What’s the big deal? The snapshots I take are there to help me remember the women I’ve bedded. They aren’t even dirty, unless the woman in question wants them to be.

I always make sure I never photograph below the waist unless I’m asked to.

“For now,” Chase keeps saying. “But the moment your other conquests come forward, that’s the moment your entire life will go downhill.”

I drape my arm over the chair and lean back, thinking. Brenda was into me a bit too much. I gave in and slept with her in a moment of weak judgment. Once she realized we’d never walk down the altar, the claws came out.

At last, I draw a deep breath as I realize maybe that makes her unpredictable. “All right, little brother. What do you recommend we do?”

“You mean what we recommend you to do?” Another board member, Vince, chimes in. He’s the oldest in the room. His hair is streaked with gleaming silver, which kind of reminds me that I’ve no idea what he actually does in the company. Investors and shareholders shouldn’t have the kind of power he has.

“There was a meeting yesterday.” Ben ignores the glances I throw at my brother and continues, “It’s been decided that you’ll attend the LAA center. It’s the only place that will help save your reputation which, as I’m sure you know, is our reputation, too.”

The LAA center?

I snort.

“I’m not a sex addict.”

Ben sighs. “We’ve already discussed all other options. You have no choice. You either attend it or you retire. It’s that simple.”

With that he gets up. “Your choice, Kaiden,” he throws at me in the kind of voice I’d like to punch right out of him. “Your therapy starts tomorrow. If you’re not there, you can kiss your seat goodbye. For the sake of our friendship, we recommend you do as we say.”

I stare at him, my anger flaring up. “May I remind you that I built this company from scratch?” I point my finger to each of the six board members, including my brother. “You wouldn’t be sitting here if it weren’t for me.”

Ben nods his head as if he saw that coming. “We’re all aware of your hard work, Kaiden. But your company wouldn’t exist if it weren’t for our shares, connections, and support. Right now, you’re risking our investment and reputations for a bit of a good old roll in the hay, so to speak.” He stares me down, which doesn’t quite have the threatening effect I’m sure he’s going for.

“It’s still my private life,” I mumble, irritated.

“That may be true, but we won’t let you ruin the very company you and your brother worked so hard to build.” His expression softens. “Your father and I were friends long before you were born. Remember our agreement before we agreed to invest in your business?” He pauses, but not long enough to give me a chance to reply. “We want you to get better.”

Better?

I snort.

Frankly, I've never felt better. The sex is ah-mazing. Like rip-your clothes-off-amazing. Imagine you could have all the food you wanted. Now imagine what you got is so deliciously and mouthwateringly melty you'd instantly lick your fingers, and that's sex to me. Just give me a woman with hips and something to grab onto so that it doesn't feel like I'm fucking a blowup doll. Give me a pair of tits—any size, any shape—I can push my face, or cock, in between, and I'm happy and ready to go.

“I'm doing very well, thanks for asking,” I say.



## Page 8

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He shoots me a hard stare before he gets up, followed by the other board members. Only my brother remains seated.

As soon as the door closes behind them, I stand and walk to the bar.

“It’s not even ten a.m., Kade,” Chase says.

“It probably is...in Australia.”

I grab a bottle of whiskey and two glasses before I return to the table.

My hand’s slightly shaking as I pour the golden liquid into two tumblers, spilling.

My anger flares up again. “It’s a fucking mess.”

“Just do it, Kade,” Chase says quietly. “It’s only for six weeks.”

Smiling coldly, I push a glass across the table toward him. “What about my calendar?”

“What about it?”

I wave my hand. “Don’t tell me it’s all been in vain. I only have a few women left.”

He stares at me with no sense of humor. “How many are we talking about?”

I lift my hand. He stares at my three fingers. “Jesus, dude. I’m surprised you haven’t

caught an STD yet.”

“I’m not stupid. You know how careful I am.” I lean back, lifting the glass to my lips, but I don’t take a sip yet. “I’m even taking a non-hormonal male contraceptive to avoid getting anyone pregnant.”

Chase’s brows shoot up. “You’re taking a male pill?” His expression betrays his shock, which isn’t a surprise given that Chase can be quite old-fashioned. “You know what? Forget I even asked that. I don’t want to know.” He shakes his head and releases a sigh. “Look, I’m not judging you, all right? You’re my brother and no matter what you do, it’s your business and I’ll always have your back. But...” He wets his lips, hesitating, probably choosing his words. “Please, just do the six-week program. After that... resume whatever you were doing before, just be more discreet about it. Fuck, I’ll even be your wingman. Anything, as long as I can keep you out of trouble.”

I give a little snort.

Chase being my wingman would be the worst thing that could happen to me. He’s married and ready to be a father.

“Do you know what you’re asking me to do?” I ask.

“I...”

“No, answer the question, Chase. Do you know what you’re expecting of me?” I ask sharply. “You request that my dick go on hiatus. That’s not human. It’s fucking immoral. Fucking torture. I wouldn’t expect that from my worst enemy.”

“Look, if monks can do it, you can do it.”

“I’m not a monk. I’m an adult with a healthy appetite for sex.”

Chase holds out his hand, a knowing smile playing on his lips. “I get it. You need it.”

I cringe at his choice of words.

He makes me sound like I need sex in a bad way.

“I’m not a sex addict, all right,” I say. “I just enjoy it. That’s all it is. A hobby, if you have to define it.”

“You didn’t go a day without sex in the past year.”

“That’s because I want to reach my goal.”

Chase shakes his head. “You are at the top of the world right now, Kade. The company has never done so well and you want to throw it all away. For what? For some fun?” He regards me for a few seconds, his anger visible in the way his fingers clutch at the glass. “Just do it, bro. How you do it, when you do it, with whom, it’s none of my business. Lie your way through. I don’t care. Honestly, I just want to see your ass at the rehab center tomorrow.”

The door opens.

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We both look up at my new assistant, Miranda, striding in, a folder tucked beneath her arm. Her hair is piled high on her head, and she's wearing a sexy dress.

"Oh, sorry," she says. "I thought the conference room was empty."

Chase gives her a short nod of his head. "That's fine. We were about to finish up anyway."

She drops an easygoing smile. Her entire posture is nervous, as if it was her first day, even though Miranda has been working for me for three months now. I understand her nervousness, but I also think she has a bit of a crush on me.

I wink at her, which earns me a strange glance from Chase.

"Can I bring you anything?" she asks.

"We're fine," Chase says.

"Actually, I'd love some coffee."

Chase shoots me a warning glance, which I shrug off.

"Coming right up." Miranda leaves, closing the door behind her.

"Seriously?" Chase mumbles.

"What?"

“You haven’t even started therapy yet.”

“I never said I would.” I shrug my shoulders. “Jesus. It’s just coffee. I wasn’t planning on fucking her while sipping it.”

He shakes his head again then gets up, grabbing his jacket in the process. He lifts his briefcase, hesitating. “Tomorrow, Kade. You’re taking the private jet tonight.”

With that he storms out, leaving me alone.

I pour myself another glass of whisky, nursing it slowly.

Why can’t the damn therapy start in three days so I get to finish what I’ve been working so hard for a full year?

Would it count if I fucked three ladies today rather than one a day?

I grab my glass and walk over to the window. Below me, people are swarming like ants. I don’t turn around as the door behind me opens, the click clack of high heels following the enticing scent of fresh coffee.

“Is there anything else I can do for you?” Miranda asks.

I turn around and regard her with the kind of smile I know will melt her panties in a heartbeat. “As a matter of fact, there is.”

3

VICKY

If I am to be honest, I know that sneaking into Bruce’s home was wrong. But in my

defense, I had a very good reason. One that comes in the form of a six-foot tall ice hockey player who has a crazy ex and a smile to die for.

When he didn't reply to my messages, I seriously thought he had gone missing and that I'd be doing him a favor by tracking him down. For all I knew, his ex might have killed him and buried him in her backyard. He had told me on several occasions that she was jealous of him dating me, so much so that she even slashed his tires and set his sports equipment on fire.

The judge showed no understanding for any of my reasons.

Zero. Zip. Nada.

She went completely overboard when she called my behavior sort of stalkish and even had the nerve to tell me that I was addicted. The thought that Bruce has turned into a love obsession was so absurd, I laughed in her face, which did not amuse her.

But can you blame me?

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

Addicted to love?

I snort, which earns me a curious glance from the blonde sitting in front of me.

People are addicted to books. They're addicted to caffeine. To alcohol or drugs. But to love? Sweet, tender love?

How can someone love too much?

But apparently when you violate your restraining orders three times, they have no sense of humor. It wasn't even my fault. The first two times, he texted me and wanted to hook up while continuing to keep our relationship a secret. The third time...I thought I was doing him a favor by protecting him from his crazy ex.

If you were to ask me why I went to such great lengths to violate my restraining order knowing that I would get in trouble, I would answer:

I love him.

He needs me.

We belong together even though "forces are standing against us."

The last two points were his words, not mine, right before he broke up with me.

He even defined our love as "star-crossed" and claimed he'd be with me if "the circumstances were ideal."

Point is: I'm not planning on letting a stupid therapy center ruin what we have.

I stare out of the window and realize my life's not as bad as it looks. At least it's not cold out here, and the world hasn't ended.

Located off the northeast coast of North Carolina, this place is still near land. About four hundred years ago, a colony got lost and settled here. Until now, no one knows what happened, but it's all very tragic and mysterious. It's as if Roanoke Island is some kind of undiscovered Bermuda triangle no one knows about. Roads are not marked well, and from what I hear from the driver, the GPS is spotty at best.

Sure I'm going to miss my phone.

All right, I have a confession to make.

Maybe I do have a bit of a stalking tendency. Maybe thoughts about Bruce have been consuming me lately. But I'm sure I don't need therapy to control "those urges," which make me wonder all kinds of things such as whether he's thinking of me.

To me, it's all the more proof that I love him.

As we near the building, the chatter around us increases in volume. At last, the bus halts and a woman holding a microphone in her hand gets up. Her hair, dyed a scarlet red, makes it hard to guess her age. I realize it's the same woman who took my papers when I boarded the bus. She must have traveled with us.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she starts, and I bite on the inside of my cheek. There are no men in the bus, so I assume it's one of the many standardized speeches she is going to hold. "Welcome to the LAA center."

She pauses for effect.



It works.

Everyone is sitting so still you could drop a pin and hear it.

“This is going to be your sanctuary for the next few weeks. It’s a place where we don’t judge you. A place that will offer you redemption. With the help of the finest psychologists and renowned... blah...blah...blah.”

My mind trails off.

Blame it on my attention deficit disorder, if you want.

I’m far away mentally, thinking of Bruce.

What’s he doing right now?

I hope he isn’t back with his ex. I’m pretty sure she’s the one responsible for my restraining order, because I know my Bruce would never do that.

I’ve barely caught fragments of the woman’s long talk when people stand, and I follow suit. Everyone seems excited, like they’re about to go on a trip to the Bahamas.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

Everyone but me.

In my opinion, they're crazy, not me.

I don't belong here, and I can't wait to get the hell out.

Stepping out of the bus, I inhale the humid scent of the earth and the wind ruffling the leaves.

The air is crisp. Clear. It does nothing to improve my opinion of this place.

Holding my handbag in one hand, I drag my suitcase behind me, which I packed lightly because I'm convinced I'm not going to stay for long. The crowd seems to know what to do, so I trudge behind, up the broad path that snakes all the way to what looks like a mansion from the late nineteenth century. I'm not particularly into architecture, but even I can't deny that this place is both scary and imposing.

The large, wooden doors open into a huge reception area.

I stop to stare.

My first impression wasn't wrong.

The building is old, even older than I imagined. The architectural design still looks intact, but the walls smell of paint.

There is hope that we haven't entered the nineteenth century yet. Maybe the

furnishing isn't all old either.

Like a mattress or bed, for example.

Or else I'll be forced to sleep on the floor. Because there's no way I'll sleep on a mattress that's absorbed the sweaty body of a hundred other people.

The redhead has stepped on a small podium in the entrance hall, from where she seems hell bent on continuing her speech, her hand extending toward the rows of brown boxes stacked on a long table.

"Please grab a welcome package," she says. "It contains all the information you'll need as well as your therapy plan. We're giving you the day to explore and acquaint yourself with the premises, so there won't be any lessons. You're expected to drop by your appointed counselor tomorrow at ten a.m. sharp. I wish you all a good time and hope to see everyone again."

She hopes?

What does she think might happen? That we steal the bus and drive back wherever we came from?

On a second thought, that isn't such a bad idea.

A soft tug on my shoulder catches my attention. It's Sylvie again.

"Are you okay?" she asks, her perfectly shaped eyebrows slightly raised. Her hand is clutching at a thick folder, and I realize I was so engrossed in my thoughts that I didn't even notice people are busying themselves with picking up their itinerary.

I shrug. "Yeah. Why?"

“You seem kind of zoned out.” She eyes me amused. “You’re not scheming to break out already, are you?”

My face seems to catch fire. God, I’m such a bad liar, I don’t even try to answer this one. “I’m just tired.”

“Good,” she says. “Because I would strongly advise against it.”

“Out of curiosity, why?”

She shoots me a warning look and lowers her voice conspiratorially, which I’m pretty sure isn’t necessary. “I’ve heard people who aren’t complying are sent to a mental institution abroad. Compared to what’s going on over there, this is heaven.”

She pauses for effect. I don’t want to point out the obvious—that since it’s all hearsay, she can’t know whether people are being sent abroad. And even if they were, maybe that place isn’t worse than this one.

“Yeah.” She pats my arm knowingly, misinterpreting my silence for dread. “It sounds awful, I know. Besides, I would hate to see you leaving so soon. We have to work in teams, and I think we’ll be a perfect match.”

“Don’t worry about me. I wasn’t going to run,” I say, my already bad mood plummeting farther. “I’m looking forward to joining the cult.”

She lets out a laugh. “It’s not that bad.” Her gaze moves to my empty hands, lingering there. “So where are you staying?”

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

“No idea. Time to find out.” As I walk over to the table to find my folder, Sylvie follows closely behind. She’s basically breathing down my neck. I find the one that says “Vicky” and rip off the envelope that’s glued to the box.

Anticipation and fear intermingle as I begin to read.

“Apartment 2B.” I scan the text quickly to absorb as much information as I can. “You?”

“Apartment 4C,” she replies, her voice oozing disappointment. “I guess we’re not staying in the same room after all.”

She sounds so thwarted I actually feel bad for her. “Doesn’t mean we can’t work together.”

“True.” She lifts her suitcase and exhales a small sigh. “Okay. I’ll see you when I see you.” She hesitates, as though there’s more she’d like to say but then decides otherwise. After another sigh, she walks off.

“See you in a bit,” I call out after her.

Sighing, I press my folder against my chest, clutching at it as though it’s my safety net. But the motion does nothing to take away the tension and the dark thoughts at being on my own in this place.

Under different circumstances, I would have asked Sylvie for her number to make sure we keep in touch. I guess she would have done the same.

But these aren't ordinary circumstances.

I'm here because my emotions aren't what people would call "ordinary love" either.

According to the judge, who court-ordered the therapy, I need to be here to learn how to stop my "obsessive compulsive stalking disorder."

I'm going to prove to her that I don't need this BS.

My love for Bruce is real.

It really is—even if people don't understand the depth of my emotions.

Why can't they just see it? I'm Juliet to Romeo. Elizabeth to Fitzwilliam.

Maybe Bruce and I are star-crossed lovers after all, but I know that what I'm feeling is real. And there is no way that I'm going to let them pierce their invisible daggers into my heart and tell me what I can or cannot feel.

I won't let some idiot with a medical certificate declare that I'm addicted to love.

4

Vicky

The building boasts a total of twenty apartments and plenty of space.

According to the leaflet, this used to be a popular attraction with visitors before it was remodeled to fit the needs of the acclaimed LAA center.

My new home is situated in the west wing on the second floor. I find the key in my

box and unlock the door, silently praying that my new roommate is going to be as easygoing as Sylvie. The last thing I need is someone who's difficult to live with.

I close the door behind me with my foot and then drop the box onto the table in the hall, next to a beautiful arrangement of flowers.

The apartment is much bigger than advertised in the brochure. It's clean and the furniture looks fairly new. I kick off my shoes and squeeze out of my jacket, ready to explore the place.

It's seriously not as bad as I thought.

The living room is dominated by a cream leather couch that's covered with pillows. There's no TV, but a bookcase filled to the brim with books adorns one of the walls, and there's even a leather reading chair strategically placed next to a floor-to-ceiling window overlooking the woods outside the window. I plop down to test it and sigh with delight as I realize this is going to be my favorite place. I know I'll spend hours in this chair, immersed in a book, or maybe even daydreaming about a time when Bruce and I will have overcome all obstacles and finally be together.

Reluctantly, I eventually get up to inspect the rest of the apartment.

According to the brochure, the adjacent room is my bedroom. Walking along the hallway, I enter the kitchen, which is barely larger than a cupboard.

Out of curiosity, I open the fridge and find it stocked up on fruit, flavored water, low-fat yogurt—all fresh produce and other healthy stuff, but nothing microwavable and no ready meals.

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

Too bad I can't cook. However, I would definitely learn to if it helped me get Bruce back.

I grab a bottle of flavored water and lean my head against the fridge, closing my eyes for a few seconds.

My heart pounds hard at the thought of Bruce.

What is he doing right now?

Is he missing me already?

Does he regret the situation I'm in?

Is he really back with his ex?

The last thought makes me angry.

I'm sure his ex Natalia is the one who instructed him to get a restraining order against me, which I might or might not have broken three times. But who's counting?

There's simply no way Bruce would ever think I'm suffering from an obsessive compulsive stalking disorder. Not my Bruce. After all, he loves me.

He went to great lengths to keep our relationship secret from his rich family when he could have given up on us and taken an easier path—go for someone his family would have agreed with. That in itself is all the proof I need that Bruce's feelings for



me are indeed real.

We had such a great time together.

The dates were awesome, but I still have no idea why he's not returning any of my calls. He's basically wiped me off the surface of his earth.

In reality, I know his family and friends are the ones to call all the shots and he's not opposing them. I wish there was something I could do to make him realize we'd be happy together.

That we belong together.

That he doesn't need to be afraid to entrust me with his love because I'd never break his heart.

The mere thought of Bruce Wallan has my entire being hurting.

I only arrived at my destination a few minutes ago, and already I'm fighting the urge to talk to him. If he were to step through the door this instant, the first thing I'd probably do is ask him if he loves me. Although theoretically, I know he loves me even if he hasn't said it. He might not be a man of many words, but a woman's gut feeling is never wrong.

You just have to look at a guy's body language.

And facts. Like the fact that he invited me over even after ending things with me, giving the excuse that he's afraid of getting hurt. While I might not understand his motivations, I do believe his proclamation that someday we'll have a future together.

As I return from the kitchen, I get confused in the apartment hallway. I still don't

know which one is my bedroom.

Why can't the leaflet be a little more precise?

I continue down the hallway and try the handle of the next door.

It's unlocked. I push it open.

My heart drops.

A scream escapes my chest.

My feet are frozen to the spot.

This isn't my bedroom.

The person standing before me doesn't look female.

It's a guy.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

A hot guy with his pants gathered in a heap at his feet.

5

KAIDEN

Sex isn't just the oldest form of pleasure in life; it's also part of my success strategy. Not that I'm fucking my clients. I know how to ooze charm without using my entire sex appeal repertoire. Because I live my sex life to the fullest, it translates into my job.

In order to save my position, I'm going to actively participate in this therapy, and maybe I'll add a psychologist to my sex bucket list in the process.

Doing a psychologist hasn't been scratched off yet, but I'm pretty sure I'll make it happen soon.

Anyway, I'm drifting off here.

After another heated debate with my brother, I agreed to therapy to make the board happy, and I intend to play along.

The plan isn't to quit sex altogether.

I love sex, always have and always will.

Every orgasm is different, but it's not just the sex in itself that's hot; it's also the

thought of pleasuring your partner. Some like it wild; some slow and tender; some hard; some are so shy they haven't even discovered their preferences yet.

I love a challenge. And each and every one of them is a challenge.

Just as much as I've never complained about any of them, they've never complained about me. Let's just say: I'm well endowed and great at using the tool I've been given. That's also the reason I'm not planning on spending too much time at the LAA center.

I don't want to sound arrogant, but I actually believe my active sex life benefits more than just me.

Looking out of the window of my new apartment, I'm deeply engrossed in my thoughts on how to get the next woman. Sadly for me, this place is as boring as it could get. It doesn't even have a female cook. But at least, from what I've heard, some female crazies are about to arrive today.

Sorry, that came out wrong.

I'm not supposed to call them crazies, obviously. Not least because someone might throw me into the same category.

In case you've been wondering, yes, I fucked the secretary yesterday. During my flight from Las Vegas to North Carolina, I also hooked up with an air stewardess.

I can still smell her scent on my fingers as they thrust in and out of her tight little pussy.

With today's accomplishment completed, there's only one spot left in my 365-day non-stop sex calendar.

It's such a shame you can't hear the tone of my voice.

The excitement. The fear. The anguish.

I'm so close to fulfilling my goal that I can't let anyone ruin it.

One woman.

I breathe in and out as I press my clammy palms against the windowsill.

Compared to the 364 before her, I want this one to be special.

6

VICKY

"Fucking hell," I mutter, frozen to the spot.

The guy in front of me is standing in front of a bathroom mirror, his naked ass on full display.

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

His back is rippled with muscles; his chest is broad, and even from my sideways position in the doorway, I can see the well-defined six-pack beneath the taut skin.

My gaze skims over his broad biceps and lingers on the tattoo on the back of his neck. It looks like a snake engrossed in a battle with a lion. It's powerful and fascinating in a scary kind of way. As though he's one or the other and fighting his demons that are about to come to life.

His back is sexy as hell, but I think the most beautiful part of him is his ass. It looks like it's been carved out of marble.

Oh, wait.

My eyes widen and my jaw drops open as I realize what he's doing.

His hand is on his dick. There is no denying it. You can see his hard-on, the veins on his shaft, the slow movement as his hand goes back and forth.

Oh. My. God.

He's jerking off, his face drawn in concentration. The shock at the picture before me is short but intense.

But there's more than shock.

A wave of heat travels down my abdomen and settles between my legs. I can feel myself vibrating down there, my lady parts clenching and unclenching with sudden

want.

It's not like I haven't seen a dick before. It's the mixture of it all—his dark hair, muscular body, and the fact that he seems to be enjoying himself way too much—that's turning my insides into jelly, and I don't like it one bit.

He must not have heard me because he neither turns his head, nor does he stop stroking himself.

“Jesus. Get a frigging room,” I call out, my voice a little too breathy.

His hand freezes in its movement. He turns around and shoots me an unfazed smile. “I'm taking care of basic needs here, if you don't mind.”

His gaze meets mine, and my breath catches in my throat. His eyes, a dark shade of blue, are hooded, giving me the kind of bedroom look that screams he's not in the least ashamed to having been found jerking off by a complete stranger.

For a second, I think I see surprise on his face, but the fleeting impression is gone before I can fully grasp it.

His brows shoot up as his eyes pierce through me, shimmering with challenge. “Want join in, or why else are you still staring?”

Heat rushes to my face.

Jerk.

“Why would you think I'd—” My voice breaks as utter humiliation and blinding rage render me speechless.

I peer from his eyes to his cock. His hand is still wrapped around it. Instead of deflating, I think it's just gotten even bigger, the veins pronounced, the crown glimmering with moisture.

The temperature's just increased tenfold.

Either that, or a complete stranger has just made me lose it.

Peeling my gaze away from him, albeit unwillingly, I cover my eyes with my hand to block the image of his glorious cock. "Who says something like that to a stranger?"

His raucous laughter rings behind me as I slam the bathroom door shut and press my back against it, taking slow, labored breaths.

Okay, Sullivan.

This so did not happen.

"Jesus." I rub my eyes hard, as though to wipe off the image of his naked body, but that's not possible.

The harder I try, the clearer I can see his huge dick in his hand. Who has a dick like that? Thick, engorged, and oh, so wet.

The slick sound of his hand moving up and down rings in my ears. Was it as loud before? Or has he just resumed his action?



## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

Pressing my ear against the door, I hold my breath and think I can hear his hard breathing.

God, those low, deep moans are sexy.

I move back down the hall, focused on getting away as fast as possible, and open another door by accident.

It's a bedroom with clothes scattered across the bed.

Men's clothes.

Men's shoes litter the floor.

The scent of aftershave lingers in the air.

“Changed your mind after all?” The voice behind me is deep and husky. For a moment, I'm immobilized as he continues, “I think bedrooms are a bit overrated, but what the hell? If that's your thing, I'm up for it.”

It's the same guy from the bathroom. He must have followed me.

I turn to face him, my gaze strangely drawn south, and find that a thin towel is wrapped around his hips, covering his junk.

I let out an exasperated snort.

It's really tiny. The towel, that is.

Not his tool.

That one's about the biggest I've ever seen, counting TV and Internet pop-ups.

I don't want to gawk, and yet I find my gaze glued to the clearly defined bulge underneath that towel.

In the bright light spilling in through the large bay windows, I can see everything. There's no denying he still has a raging erection, as though pleasuring himself wasn't nearly enough to still his sexual appetite.

"Seriously?" I ask, pointing to the towel. "Can't you put something on?" My voice sounds strangled, breathy, which I attribute to the fact that I'm highly uncomfortable standing in front of a hot guy built like a Greek god and hung like a donkey.

"What's so important that you had to interrupt me back in there?" He points toward the bathroom door.

"I interrupted?" My jaw drops, and white hot flashes of anger begin to cloud my vision. "Oh, you're talking about your date with your right hand. Sorry about that." I smirk. "What are you doing here?"

His brows shoot up. "Here?"

"Yes, here in my apartment."

Ignoring my question, he squeezes past me, his erection coming dangerously close to my abdomen. From up close, he smells of sandalwood and raw manliness.

My breath catches in my throat.

It takes all my willpower not to jump a few steps back to put some distance between us.

He retrieves another white towel from his suitcase and wipes his face with it.

Every fiber of my body is heating up at the sight of his naked back. Bruce is tall and a bit skinny. This guy is built like a boxer: tall with broad shoulders and hard muscles in places I didn't know existed.

As he turns to regard me, I notice the color of his eyes.

Deep brown and broody with long, dark lashes.

They're the sort of eyes that make you feel like you're the only woman in his world.

It's a pity I didn't get the chance to watch him finish the act earlier.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

Why would I think something like that?

I can feel my cheeks burning. I wouldn't be surprised to find that my face has just turned a similar shade to the greeting lady's hair color.

The guy steps in front of me, eyeing me with curiosity. He's standing too close for comfort, sucking the oxygen right out of the air. "What makes you think this is your apartment?" His voice is low and nonchalant, as though we're sitting in a café engaged in small talk about the weather. No sign of nervousness at all that he's just exposed himself to a stranger.

"The form in my folder says so."

"The form?" The corners of his lips twitch. "What does it say?"

"2B." I scan the room again, suddenly uncertain. "What apartment is this?"

"2B." He frowns, but for some reason I think I see amusement in his eyes. "Clearly a mistake."

"No doubt." I stare him down. "Why don't you start packing up again? Because I'm pretty sure this is my place."

"Is that so?" He crosses his arms over his imposing chest. I try not to stare at his bulging biceps, but it's hard. "I'm not leaving."

My anger flares. "This is my apartment. You've made a mistake."

“I assure you I haven’t. I’ve been here since this morning. Even had a counselor stop by to ensure I was comfortable.” His lips twitch again. I don’t know why his statement sounds dirty, but this isn’t the time to probe.

My eyes widen and my legs begin to shake just a little bit. “Are you saying you’re staying here?”

“Yes, that’s what I’m saying.” He cocks his head to the side. “I assume you’re the love addict who’s going to be my roommate? My counselor told me a little bit about you.”

Love addict?

I open my mouth, but no sound comes out.

In all honesty, what could I possibly reply?

The fact that he’s just called me a love addict is too much.

Turning around, I bolt down the hallway as quickly as I can, then grab my luggage and head for the elevator.

It has to be a mistake.

It has to be a fatal mistake. There’s no way anyone would shack me up with a guy.

I can’t live with another guy, not even for therapy purposes.

My heart belongs to Bruce only. He’s the first man I’ll ever move in with.

Bruce with his dark brown eyes and soft smile.

Bruce who loves me and would never be such a jerk to me.

It feels as though it takes me forever to reach the reception area, and twice as long to find my way back to the redhead who's engrossed in small talk with a group of new-arrivals.

As I wait for her to acknowledge my presence, I make out her name:

Marlene Elijah.

"Excuse me?"

She turns her head away from the group and for a moment, confusion crosses her face.

She has no idea who I am.

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

“We met ten minutes ago,” I say to refresh her memory. Her face remains blank. The woman’s clearly overworked. Either that, or her facial recognition abilities suck. “I think you guys made a mistake. I’m supposed to share my apartment with a girl, but there’s a guy in there.”

Her frown deepens as she regards me. I can almost see her brain trying to place me. “What’s your apartment number?”

“2B.”

“And you are?”

“Vicky Sullivan.”

Her manicured finger trails down the names on her list and begins to tap against one row at the bottom of the page. After a short pause, she glances up with a smile.

“Not a mistake, I’m afraid. Your roommate is Kaiden Wright.”

I stare at her, completely dumbfounded. She can’t have said what I think she just said. Someone made a mistake somewhere. After all, this is the LAA center.

Hello?

The Love Addicts Anonymous Center.

“But...” I shake my head. “I’m supposed to be here to get help.”

For...

There, I can't even say the words.

LOVE ADDICTION.

It sounds so ugly. Sickening. Like an infectious disease.

Marlene doesn't look at me full of pity or wrath. She smiles kindly, as if my supposed condition is something she's dealing with on a regular basis.

"I'm pleased to say that we've placed you in our newest therapy program." At my horrified expression, she pats my upper arm. "At first it might seem inconvenient that you've been paired with a male, but don't worry. We know what we're doing. Kade is going to be your partner. You'll make a great team."

"But he is male," I protest.

Doesn't she get the magnitude of it all?

I can't engage with a stranger in the kind of things Bruce and I should be experiencing, like living together and going to therapy.

This is just wrong.

"Correct." She nods her head. Her glance sweeps to the waiting group behind her, and I realize I'm about to lose her. "You're going to help each other. Isn't that great?"

It's immoral and wrong on so many levels, I can't even begin to describe it. "Is that even allowed?"



“If you want to come out of this experience stronger and more independent, you need to triumph over your demons,” she says, her smile fading a little. “Living with him is going to be a test. And yes, I realize that it may seem somewhat unheard of, but this is our newest therapy plan which, without a single doubt, is going to be very successful.” She gives my hand a comforting squeeze. “Don’t worry. You will receive all the support you need.” She pauses for a second, as if unsure whether to throw in more information or not. Eventually, she leans forward, close enough to whisper so no one but me can hear her.

“Personally, I think it’s a bit counterproductive.” She smirks. “But I’m not the one who develops the therapy plans. It might help you to know that you two don’t suffer from the same kind of addiction.”

“Yeah?” The tension falls off a bit. “What is he here for?”

Drugs? Games? Sounds about right.

Maybe he’s one of those people who work too much.

I can deal with a workaholic.

“I’m not supposed to tell, but what the hell?” Marlene laughs. “You’re partners. You’ll find out soon enough, right?”

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*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

Now she's really made me curious.

I nod my head, impatiently waiting for her big revelation.

When nothing comes I prompt, "What is it, Marlene?"

"Kade is our newest sex addict," she says gently, as if he had an addiction to little, furry bunnies.

I stare at her, open-mouthed.

A sex addict?

Figures.

I burst out in laughter.

A sex addiction makes so much sense. Why didn't I think of that? After all, he wasn't exactly stroking little bunnies in that bathroom. Besides, who in their right mind can't control their urge to jerk off in the knowledge that someone could barge in any minute?

"Do you have a problem with that?" Marlene asks. Her smile is gone; her tone is hard, on edge. Maybe this was all a test, which I've just failed, and she'll report back to the judge.

I might never see Bruce again.

“No.” I clear my throat. “Not at all. You can rest assured that I’ll do my best. Is there anything I need to know?”

“Good. You’ll find everything you need to know in your leaflet. Now, if you’ll excuse me.” With that, she turns her attention back to the group, dismissing me.

Heading back to my apartment, I barely notice the blonde bumping into me.

“Sorry.” I look up. It takes me a second or two to remember her name.

“They placed me in the wrong apartment,” Sylvie says.

“Me too.”

Her features relax a little. “No way. Are you saying that—”

“That I’ve been paired with a guy? Yes.”

“Holy shit,” she mutters, then clasps a hand over her mouth. “Have you talked to someone? Are they really okay with this?”

I nod my head. “Apparently, yes.” At her mortified expression, I laugh. “But you haven’t heard the best part yet.”

7

KAIDEN

My grip on the razor tightens as I start to move it down the side of my face, leaving a smooth line behind. I rinse the razor under the cold water and bring it back up to my face, holding it close to my skin.

I stare at myself in the mirror, but it's not me who I see.

It's the vexed stare of my new roommate.

Damn.

It's been at least half an hour since the bathroom incident, but I'm still worked up like a goddamn teenager in heat.

My counselor mentioned her name, but I can't remember. I can't even focus on racking my brain to find that tidbit of information. All I can think about is how hot she is.

My head is pounding, and fuck, my hands are still shaking.

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It's not fear that's squeezing my chest in her clutches. It's pure, raw need and anticipation, all fueled by the knowledge that I'll be seeing a lot of her.

A lot.

I'm not even sure why I'm surprised, but I am.

When I arrived, I was told that I'd be partnered up with a woman. Apparently, sex addicts are now paired with love addicts. I was told something about knowing that a girl is obsessive and clingy being a huge turn-off and usually...I would agree.

As soon as I hear the word commitment, my dick goes all limp. Not limp in the metaphorical sense. But limp like floppy, soft, put on your PJs and go straight under the covers because there's not going to be any action tonight, ma'am.

The only thing worse than obsessive and clingy is doing the same woman twice.

I never do twice. That's almost a relationship.

I do one hook-up per woman; strictly one hook-up only.

And lots of fucking, preferably in all kinds of shades and flavors.

I aim to please, and I aim to return the favor, but I don't do commitment. Not once; not twice. Never. The mere thought of a woman asking for my phone number causes my entire body to break out in a cold sweat.

In my opinion, there's nothing wrong with being different than the rest.

But good gracious...my new roommate is a goddamn nutcase.

And most importantly, she's hot.

If love were a cake, she would be the icing on it.

There is no denying I would fuck her in a heartbeat if the chance presented itself.

Her hair, long and curly, moved down past her breasts. Her breasts bounced as she stormed out. I could instantly tell from the way they moved that they were real. And I'm pretty sure she is a natural redhead, too. Even though I don't really have a type, redheads with their fiery temperament and milky complexions are my weakness.

Secretly, they've always been my favorite kind.

There's a fire burning inside them that can never be stifled.

I bet she's so wild in bed she'd let me continue to fuck her even after the bed breaks, which, judging from the quality of the mattress in my bedroom, won't stand a chance once I get down and dirty.

Something tells me she isn't going to be quite as easy to get, though. She carries an air of dignity and aloofness, as if she's used to keeping guys at arm's length.

It could be my imagination though.

Could she be a nun?

I so would do one, love addict or not. Except...she can't be. She has a confidence

about her that not every woman possesses.

I think of her fiery, hazel eyes and feel my cock hardening again.

Goddammit.

A door opening and closing registers at the periphery of my mind, then footsteps—light and wary.

It's her.

I know it with certainty because of the way my body reacts. Every muscle tenses and my heart begins to pump more blood directly to my crotch.

Maybe she's changed her mind and is about to ask for a little merry welcome party in my bedroom. The possibility gets me excited, makes me realize maybe this place isn't as bad as I initially thought.

The footsteps stop in front of my door. There's a slight pause, as if she's hesitating, plucking up the courage.

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Finally, a knock—strong for a woman her size.

With a grin I jump up, but as I open the door, I know with certainty that our little party will never happen.

The surprise is short, but it wipes my grin right off my face.

Fuck, the angry frown on her face makes her even more beautiful. She doesn't turn her head away. She doesn't glance at my dick either, nor at my chest, two of my best features. Her eyes are focused solely on mine—penetrating and intense, and a hell of a lot challenging.

“Can you please, for the love of God, put something on?” she says with disdain, as if my nakedness is annoying, something to be avoided.

She even sounds bored.

“Why?”

She scowls, her gaze not leaving mine. “Because it's rude to run around naked.”

I cock my head to the side, taking her in from head to toe. I cannot help but smile.

“What are you?”

“What am I?”

“A nun?”



For a moment she seems taken aback. “I’m sorry?”

“Are you a nun?”

She stares at me blankly before her brows shoot upwards. “Wow. You’re a jerk with a capital J. What are you going to ask me next? Whether I’m the maid? Because I bet that’s the fantasy playing right before your eyes now.”

I let out a snort.

She has no idea.

Really, I just can’t help myself. She isn’t just hot; she’s funny too. That’s a sexy combination.

“Well, are you?” I prompt.

She scowls. “No, obviously.”

“That’s too bad.” I cross my arms over my chest as I regard her with the kind of look that’s melted many panties. “I’ve been wondering if you’re—”

“A nun? Into women? Something like that?” She looks at me, her hazel eyes shimmering with anger. “Why? Because I don’t like seeing you naked? Big news flash. I’m none of those things. I’m just not impressed, that’s all.”

“Huh.” Sounds like she’ll be panting my name by the end of the week.

“Yeah.” She nods her head, as though to convince herself of the ridiculous statement she’s just made.

“How come?” I take in her posture, the way she glares at me. Her perfume, a blend of tangerine, jasmine, amber, and sandalwood, wafts past me, and I force myself not to inhale too deeply. In fact, I’m fighting the urge not to lean over and bury my nose into her skin, then lick my way down her neck to her breasts.

“You seriously believe everyone wants to see you naked?” The annoyance is gone, replaced with disbelief.

I cross my arms over my chest, unable to stop the hint of a smile creeping over my face. “Not everyone, no. But I’m sure most want to, you included.”

She lets out a snort. “Well, you’re wrong, buddy. No woman with her head safely screwed on and a bit of self-respect would want to unless she had no choice.”

“I can assure you most of them plead with me to take off my clothes.” I grin at her. “So, why are you here again?”

“I’m here to get treatment, just like you, even though I’m not...I’m not a...” she trails off as she waves her hand at me, “you know, I’m not like you.”

The silence that follows is long and peaceful. Unlike her gaze, which is wild and doubtful and a little rebellious.

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I realize she's waiting for me to say something, but I'm not going to help her out by declaring that she's not a nutcase or that she doesn't belong here. Nor am I willing to declare that I'm a sex addict.

"No, that's not what I meant. Why are you are here right now, standing in front of my bedroom door?"

"I want to talk," she says.

"I'm not going to move out if that's what you're here for."

"I know. And I don't expect you to." She pauses, not returning my smile as she takes a long breath. "As strange as it may sound, apparently, we've been roomed together on purpose. So..." She trails off again, biting her lip as she eyes her hands. For a second, I can't help but wonder if she'd slap me if I sucked that lower lip of hers between my teeth. But the opportunity vanishes the moment she looks up again, her expression softer.

She really has the most beautiful eyes. Almond shaped. Framed by full lashes. Only the slightest hint of eyeliner and mascara. "Look, you can jerk off as much as you want. Honestly, I don't care what you do. But if we're to make this work—"

"Will," I cut in.

She frowns. "Huh?"

"You made it sound like there's a possibility that we might fail. But we're not going

to. We are living together. We will make it work. Just pointing out a fact.”

Not least because there's no chance in Hell I'm losing my chair on the company board.

Her features harden again; her eyes are ablaze with fury. Whatever thought's riding her, it's riding her hard. “Just be finished in ten. I'll be waiting in the living room.”

Her mouth stays open as if to say more, then she closes it, but her gaze lingers on my neck. “You might want to do something about the bleeding,” she says eventually.

“What?”

She spins around, slamming the door behind her.

I reach up to my neck and realize there's blood on my fingers. I must have been so engrossed in my thoughts of her that I cut myself while finishing up shaving and not even realized it.

Fuck.

I didn't even feel the pain.

8

Kaiden

Thinking back, our little conversation was kind of hot.

And she even encouraged me to finish up. At least in my mind she did when she gave me ten minutes.

Maybe I should listen to her and finish what I started.

My hand travels south, and I exhale a sharp breath in surprise. I'm still completely hard. Our little confrontation has turned me on. My grip tightens around my cock, but I can't bring myself to resume the action.

I'm so close to my goal—too close.

One more conquest, and my 365-day non-stop sex calendar is complete.

The truth hits me like a train.

Damn.

Why am I stuck with a sexy nutcase as my roommate? The rules are clear: all other patients are completely off-limits.

I even had to sign a damn admissions sheet that I'd abide by those rules.

Talk about callous and unfair.

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But what if she hasn't signed hers yet?

The rules would be broken by only one of the parties involved in the tryst, so it would be a "glass half-full/half-empty" kind of situation.

It's a possibility, far-fetched, wild, and forbidden, but I decide I like it. Therapy is supposed to start tomorrow. What's one broken rule before treatment has started? You can't break something that she hasn't agreed to yet.

They would understand.

We've already been labeled as addicts so we're not here for the free coffee, right? We're here to get help. I bet they even expect us to have a relapse or two along the way to recovery.

I'm so absorbed in my own thoughts that I barely register the footsteps thudding down the hallway.

The knock on my door startles me.

"Jesus. How long does it take you to get done?" she mutters, probably thinking I can't hear her through the closed door.

More knocking, louder this time.

Good grief.

Is she trying to break down the door?

“Why the fuck can’t you just give me a few moments?” I yell, trying to sound angry, but I can’t help the amusement creeping into my voice.

“Your ten minutes are over.”

I groan, more out of desperation than out of frustration. “Another minute.”

“Don’t keep me waiting.”

Bossy much?

The steps retreat.

I smile and jump up from the bed.

This is going to be interesting.

As soon as I enter the living room, her relaxed expression turns into another frown.

“What took you so long?” She scans my white robe. “Is this is what you call dressed?”

“Which one do you want me to answer first?”

“Sorry?”

“You asked two questions,” I explain patiently. “Which one do you want answered first?”

The slightest hint of a smile tugs at the corners of her luscious lips. “I’m just saying you should put in more effort if you’re sharing your apartment with someone. Wearing proper clothing is one of those things that don’t require much effort on anyone’s part.”

“What’s wrong with my robe?” I glance down, my hand brushing over the white fabric.

“It’s called having manners.”

“Are you implying that I don’t have any?” I wink. “Sweetheart, if you knew me, you wouldn’t make such a statement. This is a major trade up. I’m usually naked.”

“Naked?” She draws out the word. At the same time, her gaze is drawn to my lap.

“Yes. I sleep naked, I cook naked, and I fuck naked, if you have to know.”

“Whoa. Hold your horses.” She holds up a hand to stop me from saying more and lets out another long breath. “Jeez. I knew you were a sex addict, but seriously, there’s no need to go into detail.”



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I cringe at the way she emphasizes the last word. She makes it sound like I'm some kind of perverted fuck who fucks the entire day.

"I'm not a sex addict." The words come out more defensive than intended. Fuck, I hate how weak it makes me sound. But more than that, I'm annoyed by the fact that she just managed to make me want to justify my actions.

I shouldn't feel the need to explain my life, and yet in her presence the word "denial" springs to mind.

"That's not what I've been told," she says.

"Well, they're wrong."

Our gazes lock in a fierce battle.

She isn't afraid of making eye contact, I notice.

She isn't shy, either.

So, why doesn't she want me to touch her in all the good places, like most women do?

"What do you want?" I slump down on the couch, still eyeing her.

"A chat."

“About what?”

“About ground rules.” She shrugs her shoulders. “It won’t take long,” she adds as she catches my alarmed glance. “Now that it’s clear we’re expected to share this apartment, we need to discuss how—”

“The answer is no.” I jump to my feet again. “I didn’t come here to be told by a woman what I can or can’t do.”

“But—” She leans forward and her frown deepens. “—you haven’t heard me out yet.”

“True. But you see, I know what women want from me, hell, from any man, and the answer is no. Are you done?” I make it a point to take a step toward the door.

To be honest, I’m enjoying myself. I enjoy winding her up.

Her face distorts into anger, just as I expected. “That’s so sexist of you. You have no idea what I’ll ask of you.”

“Believe it or not, I do. You’ll want what all other women want.”

“Again, so sexist. But you’re wrong.”

No woman has ever called me a sexist. “What are you saying?”

“You got it all wrong,” she repeats.

I take a step toward her, my gaze buried in her blazing eyes. “Let me prove that I’m right. If I make a correct guess, I want you to go out with me.”

Shock crosses her features. I can see it in the way her eyes widen the moment her mind processes the meaning of my words. At last, she leans back, the shock replaced with surprise. “You want to go out with me?”

Surprise and complete disbelief.

What’s so hard to believe that yes, I’d take her out to dinner and then I’d rock both the bed and her world?

“Yes,” I say slowly.

She frowns. “Why?”

“To get to know you better.” Among many things.

“We barely met half a hour ago.”

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“That’s correct.” I’ve taken out women I knew for less than ten minutes, so half an hour is pretty long for me.

She frowns again, and her confusion deepens. “I don’t get it. Why would you ask me?”

“Because you’d like it.” Not just dinner, but everything else I have to offer.

“You don’t know me well enough to say that I’d like it or you.” She bites down on her lip. “I honestly don’t know why you’d ask me. Besides, there’s nowhere to go really. If you’re familiar with the renovation plans, you surely know that everything within a mile is closed.”

My smile turns into a grin. She hasn’t said no yet.

To be more precise, she’s absolutely not adverse to the idea, and she doesn’t seem to know about the “don’t fuck other patients” rule either.

“Is that the only thing you’re concerned about? That I won’t find a suitable place to take you out?”

“No.” She leans back and flips a strand of hair out of her eyes. “I’ve got another one for you. How about: my boyfriend’s waiting for me at home.”

She’s playing the boyfriend card. Haven’t heard this one in a while.

“A boyfriend I really love and never want to hurt,” she adds, her eyes challenging me.

“I appreciate the offer, though. I’m sure you mean well, but really, no, thanks, I can’t.”

My lips twitch. She eyes me with mistrust. “What’s so funny?”

“I’m just playing with you,” I say. “Even if I wanted to, we couldn’t date. There are way too many rules here. Dating a fellow addict breaks a couple of them.”

She frowns as she processes my words. “Rules?”

“You didn’t know?” My smile widens at her alarmed expression.

“No one mentioned anything to me.”

“You got a folder, right?” I gesture with my hands to outline the size of it. “Big, brown. Probably weighs more than a stack of magazines.”

“Like that one?” She points her finger to the box she must have dropped near the door.

“Exactly. Pretty much like that one. Now, do yourself a favor, roomie, and have a look inside. Better yet, skip all the info and orientation leaflets and get straight to the book. Turn to page ninety and read the second paragraph, which mentions no dating among a few other things.”

She stares at me for a few moments, her eyes narrowed. “Why did you ask me out if you knew that it’s against the rules?”

“I wanted to see your reaction.”

“Right. You did that.” She bites down on her lip. She looks kind of cute when she

does it. Her teeth are white and perfect, but not in that fake veneers kind of way. It makes me want to suck her lower lip into my mouth to get a first taste of her. To feel her teeth on my skin. Press her hips against mine so she can feel that I'm getting hard for her.

"Are you sure you're not a nun?" I ask.

"Do I look like a nun?" Her frown is back in place.

"Maybe."

I don't know why I keep wanting to wind her up, but it sure works.

"Well, I am most certainly not." Her eyebrows rise an inch as she tilts her head. Her posture is rigid. I wonder what it would take to get her to relax. "You know you've asked me twice already? One more time and it'll make you sound kind of creepy."

I shrug my shoulders. "It was just a question. Someone told me something about a nun joining us." That's a little lie, one I want her to believe.

"Well, it's not me."

"Clearly," I say. "So, if you're not a nun, what is it that you do when you're not in rehab?"

There is a short pause before she replies, "I'm a nurse."

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My heart skips a beat.

I've never done a nurse. Or have I? No, I don't think so.

The realization hits me like a soft, relaxing breeze. Iknewthere was going to be some benefit to visiting this place.

9

Kaiden

"Anurse?" I can barely control the enthusiasm seeping into my tone.

"Yes." She draws out the word.

"Cool." I lean back, eyeing her. "Must be interesting to see lots of naked people."

"I don't, really. I work in an elderly home." For the first time, I can see a hint of a smile on her face. "Bet that's not your kind."

"I don't have a kind."

"Right." Her gaze moves away from me as she begins to play with something in her hand.

It's a black Darth Vader keychain.

“Nice accessory,” I say pointing to her hand. “Can I see it?”

She hesitates for a moment before she stretches out her hand, long enough to let me get a better look, but not close enough to let me touch it.

“It was a gift from my little brother,” she says almost apologetically and pulls back again.

“He has a great taste.”

“He’s nine.”

She offers me a soft, almost apologetic smile. Her hand brushes over the length of her skirt. It’s impatience, I assume, but I can’t be sure.

She’s unlike any other woman I’ve met before—cagey, almost hostile.

Judging from her posture—all rigid, her gaze glued to the rug beneath our feet, her perfect teeth gently chewing on that full lower lip of hers—I can sense there’s something she wants to say but doesn’t know how to say it without sounding rude.

“What?” I prompt.

She looks up, and her eyes meet mine again. “Are you really a sex addict?”

“Why are you asking?” I cock my head to the side. “Is it because I asked you out? You know it was a joke, right? Something that people laugh about and don’t take seriously.”

“I know. It’s just...” She takes a deep breath and waves her hand, looking for words. “In spite of your obvious preference to run around naked, you don’t look like a sex



addict to me.”

“You don’t look like a love addict, either, and yet here you are, stuck in this place with me.”

She nods her head. “Fair enough.”

I regard her amused. “Out of interest, how do you think a sex addict should look like?”

She shrugs. “Bald. In his forties, I guess. Maybe someone with a few divorces behind him, because no woman is good enough for him so he feels unloved and has channeled that emptiness into his sex life. Definitely someone older than you.”

“You seem to have a very clear picture of a sex addict. Who’s judgmental now?” I grin at her. “To answer your question, you don’t have to worry that I’ll come running to your bedroom door in the middle of the night and force myself on you. I’m not that kind of guy.”

She looks embarrassed at my insinuation. “I wasn’t worried about that.”

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“Good,” I say. “But just so you know, I’m not a sex addict. People keep insisting that I am, but I’m not. Honestly, I’m not.”

“Why do they insist that you are, then?”

“I don’t know,” I say. “Earnestly, it’s not an addiction if I love what I do. I could stop whenever I wanted, but why would I want to?”

“That makes sense.” Laughter erupts from her throat. And wow. She really has the most beautiful laughter.

Pearly, infectious, coming from the heart.

Everything about her seems real, unlike all the fake women back home that are after my money.

“You’re good.” She laughs again before growing silent. “Look, honestly, I don’t really care what you are or what you do. You could have slept with half of the female population in the world, and I wouldn’t care. I want to go home, meaning all I care about is getting this whole thing over and done with. The only reason I wanted to talk is to ask you not to clog the sink with hair and what not—” she points at my crotch “—and please don’t touch my things, not my food, not my private stuff, and particularly not after you’ve touched yourself.”

Why does her reference to me jerking off make her sound so damn hot?

Ignoring the sudden stirring in my crotch, I grant her an innocent smile. “That’s all?”

“I think so. I’m not looking to hook up with anyone. I’m not interested in getting into more trouble than I’m already in.”

“Done deal, roomie.”

There is a short, heavy silence.

She opens her mouth, then closes it again, surprise apparent in her face. “You’re fine with it? No arguing? No questions? No complaints? Just like that? Because you said—”

“I know what I said, and the answer’s yes.”

She leans back, all tension gone, but I can feel the waves of suspicion wafting from her. “Why?”

“What do you mean why?” I frown in mock annoyance. “Can’t your roommate be friendly with you and agree to your rules for the sake of building a good relationship?”

“Wow. You’re serious then?”

“Absolutely. Now, talking to me wasn’t so hard, was it?”

“No, it wasn’t.” Her skirt rides up a few inches as she crosses her leg. The way she’s leaned back gives me a good view of her breasts straining against the thin fabric of her top. God, it’s hard not to stare at them and imagine all sorts of things I could do to her naked body.

“It’s all settled then,” she continues, completely oblivious to the thoughts I’m harboring this instant. “You stay on your side, and I’ll stay on mine. And if you could

slip into something less discomfoting,” she breaks off as she catches my face, then adds quickly, “or not. That’s totally fine, too.”

“You’re really pushing your luck, you know that?” I say, amused. “But all right, if it helps you feel more at ease around me, I’ll slip into something ‘less discomfoting.’ Even though I’ve got to say, I still don’t get what’s wrong with it.” I consider getting up, then decide against it. For one, I’d rather be in her company than in the confines of my bedroom, unsure what to do with myself outside of my office. And then there’s the tiny inconvenience in my pants. I don’t think she’d appreciate seeing another hard-on—at least, not quite yet.

“It’s called having manners.”

“You keep mentioning that.” I wink. “Let’s not go there again.”

“I don’t know a lot about you.” She shrugs. “So, obviously, I wouldn’t know if you had any or not.”

“Then let’s change that, shall we?” I stretch out my hand over the table. “My name’s Kaiden Wright, but you may call me Kade. Obviously, I’m your new roommate.”

“Victoria Sullivan. Usually no nickname, but you can call me Vicky.” She takes my hand and gives it a firm shake. “Nice to meet you.”

“Likewise, Vicky.”

I let her name roll off my tongue, realizing that it’s both sweet and innocent, and somehow fits her perfectly.

In spite of her firm grip, her hand feels soft inside mine. I marvel at the way it fits like it was made to feel perfect against my skin. She looks into my eyes, and for a

moment I think I can see a sparkle that wasn't there before. Her lips part, and her gaze lowers to my mouth the way it does when women have their own naughty thoughts about me and think they're being discreet about it.

I would have held on much longer if she didn't let go.

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As she settles back against the sofa, her eyes grow distant. It must be something I said or did. I comb my memory to find the thing that's turned her distant again.

And then it hits me.

It's not me. It's about someone else.

I watch her start playing with the keychain again. "He must be pretty special if you don't want to upset him."

Vicky looks up, her irises widening, surprise written on her face. "How did you guess?"

I shrug my shoulders. "Judging from the fact that this is not exactly a vacation, it was either that you're recovering from a bad relationship or that you're here to get rid of him. Call it a wild guess, but I don't think it's the latter."

"He has nothing to do with it." She wets her lips, and for the first time I see nervousness and something else—vulnerability—flicker across her face.

I wouldn't usually pursue the issue, but with her it's different. It's partly entertaining, partly interesting, and partly, to my surprise, I find that I care somehow.

"You're not here because of him?" I ask.

"I'm here because I violated my restraining order that ordered me to keep away from him."

I lean back. It's my turn to be stunned. I never expected her to be so frank.

"I take it you're a professional stalker?"

She lets out a fake laugh. "I'm anything but that." Her laugh grows silent, the words soft. "It's all a big misunderstanding. That's all there is."

My body tenses at the way she says the words. As if she's grown tired of having to repeat them over and over again. Vulnerability stains her voice, her stance, even the air surrounding her.

It makes me want to touch her, to hold her hand in mine and make her laugh again, which is absurd. I'm not someone who likes to comfort. Heck, I usually don't give a damn.

Her hands brush over her skirt, and then she gets up. "I should get going."

I rise with her. "Want me to help you find your way around?"

"I don't think that's necessary, but thanks." She offers me a weak smile.

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Definitely."

"Your room is—"

"—is the first door down the hall. I know," Vicky says, interrupting me.

"That's correct. I took the bigger room, seeing that I arrived first. First come, first serve, dibs, and all that." I offer her a smile, but she doesn't return it.

“I don’t mind. I prefer the smaller one anyway.” Her gaze travels the front of my robe.

With a soft groan, she lifts up the box. I take it out of her hands. “Come on. Let me help you.”

I follow her down the hall and we reach her room. I open the door for her and step aside to let her past. She steps inside, barely giving me a second glance as she hauls her luggage into a corner. As she turns around, I pass her the box. Our hands touch again and her last words echo in my mind.

“To hell with them, Vicky,” I whisper. “I believe you. If you say that it’s all a misunderstanding, then that’s all it is.”

I don’t know what just made me say that, but it feels true.

For whatever stupid reason, I believe her.

“You are?” Surprise replaces the weariness. I expect her to withdraw her hand, but she doesn’t.



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“Why not? I’m not the person to judge you. Right?”

My gaze meets hers again, and in that moment something happens. I don’t know what it is, except that it feels like a vault’s just opened. It’s deep, intense, and a hell of a lot intimate. As my eyes zoom in on her, I know she feels the same way.

We’re standing near the door. She pulls back and places her hand on the handle. It’s my clue to leave. I know it is, and yet I find myself glued to the spot, fighting the sudden want to stay.

She places the box onto the table and then she turns around. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

She shrugs. “For making it all so easy, I guess.”

I let out a chuckle. “Don’t get your hopes up. I’m not doing it for you. I’m selfish and incredibly vain and really need my beauty sleep. A yelling, angry roomie wouldn’t be in my best interest.”

Her lips twitch. “Okay. I don’t want to hold you back longer than necessary.”

Turning around, I head out the door. She closes it behind me when I remember her ugly accessory. I can’t leave without making a last impression.

“Hey, Stalker!”

The door opens again and her head pops out. “Yeah?”

I put on my most serious expression. “May the Force be with you!”

She frowns, confused. Finally, as my words sink in, her lips start quivering, and then a laugh erupts from her chest.

It’s really addictive.

Her lips. Her eyes. Most of all, her laugh. I love people who can laugh like that. Open. Full of life.

“May the Force be with you too, Panty-chaser.”

I can feel her gaze on me as I head down the hall, realizing I like it. I like her. But most importantly, I want her.

The little, sexy nurse.

10

VICKY

Jane Austen Fan Club

PO Box

June 8th

Dear Jane,

This may sound silly at first, but would you say that Elizabeth is suffering from a love addiction just because she loves Mr. Darcy? I don't think so. See, my dilemma is that I'm very much in love with someone. I know he loves me. I know he wants to be with me. I know he's afraid of disclosing the magnitude of his feelings, which is the only reason why he's not replying to any of my messages. I also know I'm in rehab because his ex is trying to ruin his life.

She's trying to ruin our relationship.

Because there's no way he would do this of his own will.

But I won't let her.

As tiresome and inconvenient as it may be, I've got to say that I've reached a crossroads in my life. It's either give up or fight for us.

I'm not ready yet to give up what we have because I truly believe that we belong together. A restraining order won't stop me. People may not see what we have, they may call me crazy, but I know our connection is special. I know that if I love hard, fight hard, the reward will be great.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

When darkness prevails, love remains.

I truly hope so.

Lots of love,

Vicky Sullivan

11

Vicky

Shit.

I think I've just reached the lowest point in my life.

As I stumble out of the counselor's office into the hall, tripping over my own two feet, someone almost hits me. My stomach is churning; the urge of emptying my stomach overwhelms me. Inside my mind I know that I'm in denial, and yet I can't quite grasp the meaning of it all as her words keep coming at me like an echo.

"You need to accept that your feelings for Bruce are unhealthy."

Unhealthy.

That's what she said when I mentioned how often I think about Bruce, and I didn't even admit the full extent.

Bruce is constantly on my mind.

Like. All. The. Time.

Even now, flashes of Bruce keep circling before my eyes.

His smile. His eyes. His happiness whenever his team scores a win.

How can she, the counselor, the judge, everyone, be so wrong?

The fact that I can't see him, haven't heard of him in what feels like an eternity, is too much.

The smell of coffee hits my nose as I stumble into the canteen. There are only a few tables, but most are occupied, the unfamiliar faces as grim as mine. Without a doubt, they want to be here as much as I do.

Which is not at all.

“Hey, Vicky. Over here.”

I turn in the direction of the voice calling my name and spy Sylvie waving from a corner booth on the east side. She's wearing a short dress and cowboy boots that draw attention to her long, tanned legs.

I make my way toward her.

“Coffee?” Without waiting for my answer, she pushes her cup toward me.

“No, thanks.” I grimace at the strong smell.

“Not a fan?”

“It’s not that.” I press my fingers against my temples in a futile attempt at easing the tension inside my skull. “I’m kind of sick.”

Which is an understatement.

I feel like I’m being squeezed into a can of sardines where even talking requires Herculean effort.

“How’s the coffee?” I ask.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

“Worth trying, I guess. But it’s nothing like my usual blend back home. Or a good bottle of wine.” She leans over and pats my arm conspiratorially. “You’re coming straight from your counselor’s office, right?”

I narrow my eyes at her. “How do you know?”

“I can tell from the way you look.” She grimaces. “I had my meeting yesterday and it wasn’t pleasant. I locked myself up inside my room and had a whole bottle of wine. I’m surprised you didn’t get the same idea.”

“They serve wine here?”

She grins. “Of course they do. We’re not exactly alcoholics, are we?”

“Not yet.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure that counselor of mine could turn me into one in no time.”

I laugh, feeling the tension slowly lifting off my shoulders. “God, I wish someone had told me about this place yesterday. I would have claimed the whole bar.”

“There goes my plan of keeping this little secret all to myself. I should learn to keep my big mouth shut.” She joins in my laughter. “I’ll get you some tea. Wait here. Don’t move from the spot.”

Before I can protest, Sylvie’s gone. I lean back in my seat and close my eyes for a few moments. When I open them again, I take in the surroundings. The walls are

painted in yellow and green tones. Pictures of early settlements adorn the walls, and there's a large grandfather clock in the far corner, its unnerving noise carrying over.

Sylvie takes her sweet time, during which more patients arrive. I scan their faces, but there's no sight of Kade.

I realize I haven't seen him since yesterday. A wave of disappointment washes over me, even though I don't understand my reaction one bit. I close my eyes again, waiting for Bruce's familiar face to flash before me. Instead, I find myself smiling as I remember my conversation with Kade.

He's so different from Bruce.

In some strange way, he reminds me of my little brother and his inability to stay serious, which can be both irritating and endearing.

"I bet they're not rated PG-13." Sylvie's voice draws me back.

I open my eyes in time to see her sliding back into her seat. On the table are two cups of tea and a bowl of fries.

"What?"

"Your thoughts," she clarifies and pushes a cup of tea toward me. "You looked all flushed and miles away."

Judging from the color and strong smell, it's an herbal blend. I wrap my hands around the cup, warming my hands because it's too hot to drink. "You didn't have to get me anything."

"I wanted to. You're my only friend here, and there will come a day when I'll hit



rock bottom and need you.” She pushes the bowl with fries toward me. “Try them.”

“At ten in the morning?”

She shrugs and pops a fry into her mouth. “They’re one of a kind.” She motions to the bowl again. Hesitantly, I grab one and take a ginger bite, expecting my nausea to hit me with full force. The flavor is strong, oily with the slightest hint of chili. I swallow and realize I feel better.

“You’re right. They’re good,” I say.

“They’re the best,” Sylvie agrees. “They probably serve good food so we don’t want to leave.”

“Really?” I regard her, unsure whether she’s joking or being serious.

Sylvie shrugs her shoulders. “It’s not that bad here, you’ll see. Not when they serve fries like these.

I cock my head. “That little statement might apply to you because you’re here on your own free will. Me on the other hand—” I grimace “—not so much. I bet your counselor serves you coffee—the delicious, creamy kind.”

“He actually does,” she says slowly. “Why? How’s yours?”

“My counselor went right for the jugular without even thinking about offering me anything first. No sign of a coffee whatsoever.” I stir sugar into the tea and take a tentative sip, realizing it’s still too hot to drink without burning my tongue. “This new therapy plan sucks. They should set up a vote whether we want to work together with a guy, because as far as I’m aware, I should still be allowed to voice my opinion.”

“I don’t think this place works that way.”

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

“No, it doesn’t. But one can hope.”

“Your first session was really bad, huh?” Sylvie says.

“It was. It was worse than bad,” I say. “I didn’t take kindly to her words, and she didn’t take kindly to mine. I wouldn’t be surprised to find myself kicked out.”

“What happened?” Flicking her long hair back, Sylvie leans forward until I’m sure no one can hear us.

Under different circumstances, her inquisitiveness would have annoyed me, but those aren’t usual circumstances. I feel lonely. Stuck in a place that scares me. I need a friend.

And if I’m to be absolutely honest, I’m happy to have someone to talk to. Someone to conspire with, especially when said new friend will assist me with my plan of getting in touch with Bruce.

“She said my feelings weren’t real,” I say.

“Wow. Those were her exact words?”

“No, but I’m sure that’s what she meant to say.” Pausing, I take a deep breath and release it slowly, considering my words. “She said my love for my boyfriend wasn’t healthy. I’m ashamed to say that I overreacted. I actually blew a gasket.”

Her eyebrows shoot up, her incredulous expression inviting me to go on.

“I might have screamed a little,” I say. “Actually, make that a lot. And I’m not even the screaming type.”

Sylvie eyes me as I stuff another fry into my mouth. “How did she take it?”

“To be honest, she was quite composed. As if she expected such a reaction from me.” I shrug my shoulders. “Her reply was that I’m in denial, which was the point where I stormed out, slamming the door behind me, and skipped my first mandatory lesson. Like I said, I wouldn’t be surprised if they kicked me out.”

“They won’t do that because of a little disagreement,” Sylvie says.

“It was a little more than that.” My words come out so low for a moment I’m not even sure I spoke them. “Things were...heated. I told her that her therapy plan sucked and that she could shove it. I also might have told her that I didn’t need therapy and that she might need it more than I do, among other things.” My hands close around the cup. I bite my lip hard to stifle the growing sense of helplessness inside me. “I don’t feel like we got along. At this point, I think I’d be better off switching counselors. Do you think they’d let me do that?”

Sylvie remains silent for a moment. “I don’t think so. But hey, give her another chance. After all, it was your first meeting and it’s her job to help you. It gets better, you’ll see.”

“Maybe,” I mumble. “If they let me stay.”

Which I don’t even want to. But if it’s the only way Bruce and I will be together again, then so be it.

“I don’t think anyone’s ever been kicked out.” She grabs my hand over the table and squeezes it. “At this point, you need to stay positive and have faith. Just keep your

head up and see what happens. Trust that everything happens for your own good and you'll be surprised with the outcome."

"I'm trying." I look up, my eyes burning. There's a tight sensation in my chest, but the tears don't come because underneath it all I still feel angry.

Angry that nobody's getting me.

Angry that hurdle after hurdle keeps stopping me from being with Bruce.

"How come you're here of your own will?" I ask.

"That's pure coincidence." She waves her hand good-humoredly, as if she saw the question coming. "When my best friend broke up with her boyfriend, I bought her a therapy plan as a gift to help her move on from him. But they worked things out. She had no need for it, so I thought why not to use it for myself?"

I laugh, my worries almost forgotten. "Why would you do that?"

"What? Getting her a therapy gift card or using it for myself?" She shrugs her shoulders. "I meant well. Obviously I was happy for them to reconcile, but it wasn't exactly cheap. Besides, I heard nothing but great things about this place. Maybe it was just curiosity. Or the fact that my love life's a mess. The truth is, I think everyone needs therapy in some way or another."

That's a strange statement.

"How so?" I lean forward, eager to hear more.

"I always seem to attract the wrong man," Sylvie says. "Every guy I go for either doesn't want to enter any sort of commitment or just not with me. There must be

something wrong with me.”

I stare at her. Sylvie’s beautiful. With her perfect teeth and her symmetrical features, she could easily pass as a model. Her skin is tanned and glowing—the kind of complexion I’ve always wanted rather than my pale, freckled skin. In addition, she’s tall and slender, with the kind of body you only ever see on a Victoria’s Secret runway. And then there’s the straight, glossy, blonde hair of hers that looks so natural it can’t possibly be.

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“I’m twenty four and I can’t keep a guy committed to me for long,” she continues. “Last year I had a relationship with my married boss, and then I found out he lied to me. I thought he and his wife were separated, but obviously, that wasn’t the case. Long story short, he fired me when she found out about the affair.” She draws a long breath and shakes her head grimly. “Just so you know, I’m not a cheater. I really didn’t know. Now, I’m with someone I love, but he keeps telling me he isn’t ready for commitment.”

Leave out the married guy account, and her story sounds so much like mine. I don’t know what to tell her, so I keep quiet and wait for her to continue.

Sylvie grabs her cup, her hands clasping it. “It seems my life’s dominated by patterns that keep repeating themselves over and over again. No matter what I do, I can’t make it stop. So here I am in the hope to get the bad luck that’s been following me out of my system and finally settle down with someone who takes me seriously and wants the same thing.” Her gaze shoots up to me, and her gloomy expression instantly lifts. “What about you? Why are you here?”

“Pretty much the same. I’ve been single most of my life, not because I hate dating. It’s just hard to find the right guy.”

Sylvie giggles as she raises her cup to her lips and takes a sip. “Come on. What’s the real reason? I know you’re not in for being single. No one gets therapy for that.”

She doesn’t look like she’s going to drop the topic, and I’m not sure I want her to. Taking my sweet time, I take a sip of my tea and grimace at the bitter aftertaste it leaves in my mouth. “Well, there’s this guy.”

“I knew it,” she shouts with a little too much enthusiasm.

“It’s not really a secret.” I avert my gaze from Sylvie and peer out of the window. But instead of seeing the water and the beautiful backdrop of woods, it’s Bruce I see. “I think I was about five years old when I first realized that all I wanted was to get married. I want the white-picket-fence type of life. Have two kids. Grow old with someone who loves me. I know I’m not old enough to think that it’ll never happen, but recently all my friends from college seem to have started to settle down. Every day I go through my mail, I seem to see a wedding invitation popping up. And did I mention that my younger sister got engaged? I feel like such a failure.”

“Why?”

I bite my lip hard.

Why indeed?

“I don’t know,” I say slowly. “Maybe because my sister has it all. A kid, a house, a great boyfriend who will soon be her husband. For a while, I couldn’t stop the feeling that I was running out of time; that I’d never find someone to fall in love with. That’s when I met Bruce, and everything changed. We started to date, but then his family found out about us and he broke it off with me.” I turn my head back to Sylvie and meet her questioning frown. “His mother doesn’t like me.”

“Doesn’t surprise me at all. Protective moms can be like that.”

“Yeah. Except, she wants him to get back with his ex. His ex, who I’ll have to stress is rich. Her parents are friends with his, so it’s all perfect.”

“Well, she can’t force him, can she?”



I take a breath, pausing to calm the sudden tightness in my chest. “No, she can’t. But his mom is influential and has a real shot at being the next mayor.”

“So?”

“So compared to her and his family in general, I’m ordinary. You need to understand, his family has a long history of politicians that spans generations. It’s the reason we used to meet in secret in the first place. She wasn’t supposed to find out.”

“I still don’t see how that landed you in here.”

I nod slowly, understanding her confusion. “He never told anyone that we were dating, and I didn’t know. If I had, I wouldn’t have turned up at his parents’ house for a surprise visit on Valentine’s Day. His mom arrived early and thought I was an intruder. I tried to explain. I told her that we were dating. She called him, but he denied it.” I clear my throat to get rid of the lump that seems to cut off my air supply. “She thinks I’m someone he met in college who’s still crushing on him and has been following him around.”

“Wow.” Sylvie looks horrified. “What a coward.”

“He had a good reason for lying,” I defend him quickly. “You don’t know his family. They’re crazy controlling. His mom and his ex demanded that he request a restraining order against me.”

“So let me get this straight. You both were dating, and yet he requested a restraining order against you?” She sounds partly upset, which is understandable given that she doesn’t know Bruce.

I know how this makes me sound. Like a weak woman.

“They forced him.” My voice comes out low, choked.

“How do you know?”

“He told me.” I grab the spoon and start to stir the tea furiously until some of the liquid spills onto the table. “He’s apologized like a thousand times. He says he’s going to tell them when the time’s right.”

“What’s wrong with now?”

“Because like I said, his mom is running for mayor and—” Breaking off, I turn my head away, hit by the same train of hurt, confusion, and turmoil I just can’t seem to get rid of ever since that fateful day. “Officially, like whenever he’s mentioned in the papers, he’s still dating his ex. He told me he’d get that sorted out so I agreed to continue to see him. We met in secret. Unfortunately, his ex saw us and went straight to his mom, weaving a story about how I was still stalking Bruce. They filed another report and before I could even realize what was happening, I was told that I had broken my restraining order. But Bruce continued to want to meet up.” I meet her frown. “He said he needed me and I told him I would always be there for him. It went on for a few weeks. Until...he stopped replying to my texts.”

I fall silent.

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My heartbeat speeds up as I recall the events that changed my life.

“I didn’t know what happened. Call it my gut feeling, something felt wrong. Days passed and no reply came. Finally, after about two weeks of not hearing from him, I couldn’t wait any longer, so I decided to pay him a visit, even if that meant sneaking into his parent’s house, knowing that I would really break my restraining order.”

“You...” Sylvie cuts me off, shaking her head.

“Yeah, I know.” Grimacing, I peer down at my hand and realize I’ve been clutching at the cup so hard, my knuckles turned white beneath my skin. “It was a stupid move. I don’t even know what I was thinking sneaking in through the back door. But to be honest, I may have been a bit drunk that day.” I release the cup before it snaps into countless pieces and go on, ready to get the whole story out. “In my defense, it was my birthday; I was drunk and like I said, I had this bad feeling. Besides, I didn’t break in. The door was open, so...anyway, as you can probably imagine, it all went wrong. He wasn’t even there that day, but his ex was, and his mom.” Catching Sylvie’s frown, I hurry to add, “They’re friends, and his mom really likes her. They’re like this huge, perfect family.”

“What happened?” Sylvie asks impatiently.

“The cops arrived, and they treated me like I was a criminal.” I groan inwardly, annoyed with myself for making such a bad decision when I should have known better. “It’s my fault, really. I should have insisted that Bruce make our relationship official and tell the truth. Instead, I played along. I just couldn’t out him. I loved him that much. So, now I’m here, taking responsibility for my actions. Crazy, huh?”

I don't expect an answer. I don't need anyone telling me that I was a fool in love. I know that damn well.

Sylvie and I remain quiet for a few seconds. But the silence isn't uncomfortable; it's cleansing, lifting the fog that seems to have been clouding my mind for too long.

I'm glad that she knows.

Finally, she leans back, sucking in the air in a long, deep breath.

"Wow," she says. "Why would you want to be with someone who doesn't tell their family about you?" A pang of anger flashes across her face. "Sorry. I don't want to meddle in your affairs, but this...this makes me angry. You seem like a good person and he treats you like a toy he can play with. I mean, who does he think he is?"

I shrug my shoulders, feeling oddly defensive of him. "He has a good reason, I'm sure. His parents are rich. His mom's in the paper all the time. I just don't fit in. So—" I shrug again, my words eluding me.

Crap.

How can I explain it? The feeling of betrayal. The desperate need to believe his excuses. Is believing lies easier than acknowledging the truth?

I don't want to lose him—that's it. That's what keeps me trapped in a vicious circle.

"I so want to punch that fucker. I hope you gave his ass a good kicking."

I laugh. "Actually, I didn't. I chose to forgive him."

Sylvie's mouth drops open. "No!"

“Yeah, I did,” I say, shifting uncomfortably in my seat. “Right after the court order, he called me on a friend’s phone, saying that the situation at home was heated and tense. And I gave him one more chance. He said he was going to sort it out and that once I’m out of here, he’ll take me out.”

Sylvie starts to shake her head again. “How can you do that?” She sounds so shocked, I can barely contain a laugh.

“Because I love him, silly.”

I meet her eyes and see pity reflected in them. Her concern causes another lump in my throat.

“That’s why you need this.” Her words sound so resolute, I almost believe them. “Sorry, that came out wrong. I didn’t mean to imply that you’re crazy. It’s just—”

“It’s fine.” I take a deep breath. “I’m an optimist. I’m sure he misses me and something good will come out of this experience. I want to leave everything behind—the fear, the anguish—and start anew. I want to come out stronger. I want to prove to him that we can beat this. We’ll start over again, but this time everything will be different. That’s what he said. That’s what I choose to believe, too.”

She looks at me for a long time. “You know there’s nothing wrong with you, right? He’s the one who should be held accountable for this mess.”

I turn my head away. That’s what my counselor said this morning, right before I began a shouting marathon.

“How’s your roommate?” I ask.

The change in topic isn’t subtle, but Sylvie bites.

“Don’t get me started.” She laughs.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

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“He’s a designer, and so playing for the other team,” Sylvie says with the kind of excitement that’s usually reserved for Prada warehouse sales. “When I complimented him on his work, he asked me to help him create a custom clothing line and even invited me to a runway event as a guest.”

“Oh.” I say, surprised. “So, he doesn’t run around naked?”

The words make it out before I can stop them.

She lets out another laugh. “Hell, no.” Her face lights up as realization sinks in. “Are you saying yours is?”

“Aren’t they all?” I swallow. “Sex addicts, I mean.”

“No. Mine definitely doesn’t take off his clothes more than is necessary.” Her eyes narrow as a soft smile plays her lips. “Looks like someone’s messing with you.”

“He’s not.”

“Well, I hope he didn’t ask you out, because that would be so totally against the rules,” Sylvie says.

Rules.

I forgot the rules.

As if reading my mind, Sylvie frowns. “Don’t tell me you haven’t read them yet?”

“I forgot, all right.”

“You need to read them.” She leans forward in a conspiratorial way. “My counselor told me at the end of my session that they’re pretty strict about it.”

“I broke off my first therapy session, so she probably didn’t get the chance to remind me. Why? What’s the most important rule?”

“You’re not allowed to fuck your roommate. Obviously.”

“Oh.” Obviously.

Kade’s almost naked body pops into my mind.

“Between me and you, I think it’s an experiment.” She drops her voice further. “You haven’t slept with him, have you? Because if you have, you’re both in so much trouble.”

“No, God no.” I let out a sound that remotely sounds like laughter, but it comes out a bit too shrill. Heat begins to scorch my cheeks. I was so close to saying yes when he asked me out.

Too close, and I don’t even know him.

“Vicky?” Sylvie’s voice snaps me out of my thoughts.

I smile at her. “Don’t worry about me. He’s not my type,” I say, my voice a bit too breathy. “Even though he’s funny, easygoing, and...”

Hot.



And built like a rock star god. But he's still not my type.

Or is he?

Shut up. Shut up.

"He's okay. Just okay. In a friends kind of way." I add quickly, "But let's say someone broke the rules, what's the worst thing that could happen? Being grounded or what?" I take another sip of my tea and almost choke on it. Now that's cold, it's way too spicy and burning my throat.

"Should you decide to break the rules, they'll transfer you abroad and the treatment will take at least twice as long. I've heard they'll even subject you to control visits afterwards."

"Oh."

Sounds like a load of BS to me. I mean, this is a treatment center, not exactly the FBI.

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“But you didn’t sleep with him, so there’s nothing to worry about.” Sylvie says chirpily as she eyes my cup of tea. “Are you ready for the big tour? I bet you haven’t seen the communal kitchen yet.”

12

KAIDEN

She may be just a woman, but to me she’s paradise in a place that’s Hell.

For the last three days, I’ve fought to get into a routine while mainly doing four things: eat, sleep, attend sessions with my counselor, and work out. My thoughts, however, have been occupied by the many ways I want to have her, be inside her, stilling my thirst that stretches as deep as a canyon. Every time I pass her room, I fight the very urge of knocking down her door to kiss her and carry her into my bed, where she should be.

A distraction is what I need—if only to clear my mind, get rid off the thoughts that have been plaguing me day and night. Thoughts that make no sense. Usually, I’m not someone who’s wasting his breath on a woman when there’s no way I’m hooking up with her as long as there’s a chance that I’m losing my seat on the company board. And yet here am I, fantasizing about a woman I’ve known less than three days.

A woman I can’t even say I like, which isn’t to say you need to like someone to engage in a good hookup with.

According to my schedule, love addicts have their therapy sessions in the morning.

Ours are in the afternoon.

As soon as the door to the apartment closes, I check the hall to make sure she's gone and indeed find no sign of her. Satisfied, I settle on the sofa in the living room and speed-dial the one number I know won't let me down.

Cash might not be as responsible and word-savvy as my brother, but as a club owner and my best friend, he always knows what I need: a quick pep talk.

After three rings, he picks up. His voice is heavy with sleep as if I've just woken him up. "Kade? Is that you?"

"Who else would it be?"

"I didn't realize you'd be calling so soon. I thought you'd be busy fucking all the nurses, and then call me to tell me all about it."

"Yeah, I thought so too, but life has a way of fucking up your plans when you least expect it." As I fall silent, I make out the hushed voice of a woman.

I frown.

"Do you have someone over?" Oh wait. It's not one voice. It's two. I lean back, a wry smile on my face as I realize what I'm missing. "Am I interrupting your threesome?"

"No. To be honest, I expected your call. Give me a sec to get rid of them." Hushed voices again and steps. Eventually, the sound of a door closing and a heavy chair being moved.

"Please don't tell me your ass is back in California," Cash is back on.

I let out a laugh. “Come on, man. I may be many things, but I’m not stupid enough to lose my seat. I worked my ass off for that company. I sure as fuck won’t be walking away just to chase some pussy. I’m not sure though how I feel about you having a party of three while I’m gone.”

“It wasn’t a party. I crashed a wedding and decided to take my desert home.”

“Two, huh?” I shake my head even though he can’t see me. “Been there, done that. It’s easy to get caught up in the excitement. Make sure to wear a condom. Otherwise you’ll soon be paying for child support. Not that you couldn’t afford it.”

He lets out a laugh. “So, what’s up?”

“Not much. I’m good. Really good.”

“Yeah?” He sounds unconvinced.

“Once I’m done here, I might be quitting my job and become a counselor.” My words are rewarded with dead silence so I continue, “My first group session was nice. Lots of handholding. Plenty of support and understanding. I’ve come to realize I have a lot of issues and that I haven’t been the real me in a long time. My point is, having so much meaningless sex is blocking my spiritual path and yours as well. You should give rehab a try.”

“You are bullshitting me right now? There’s no way you’d give up your sex life.”

“Damn right, I wouldn’t. I was just quoting my counselor.” I lean back against the sofa and prop up my legs on the table. “Is the other half of the world doing okay without me?”

“Obviously, you’re being sorely missed, but I’ve vowed to make you proud. I was

doing fine before you called.” There’s the unmistakable sound of a glass being set down on the table. “You managed to sneak in your phone.”

“Thanks to your invaluable advice, I did.”

Cash came up with the idea of hiding it in my boxers, assuring me that no one would pat me down. My boxers are tight enough without my smartphone, so the even more defined bulge earned me a few interested looks, but no one dared make a comment.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

“How you are you holding up?” Cash asks.

I grimace. “I’m not going to pretend it’s been smooth sailing so far.”

“No shit?” The hint of amusement is unmistakable. “Are there no good looking women to keep your mind occupied?”

“It’s not that. It’s worse. There’s plenty of them; I’m just not allowed to fuck any.”

Cash laughs. “Come on, man. Don’t tell me you didn’t see that one coming.”

“Yeah, I did, but that doesn’t mean I’m okay with it.” I sigh and take a sip of my soda. “I feel like I’m being prepared for the end of times.”

“No, Kade, it’s not the rapture. Six weeks are nothing, you’ll see.”

“It still feels that way. Six weeks feels like six centuries for my cock.” I move over to the bar and grab a beer bottle, knocking off the cap. “It’s barely been seventy-two hours and I’m already feeling like a thirsty man in the desert. They won’t even hook me up with a porn channel. Heck, some magazines would do.”

“Why don’t you use your imagination?” Cash asks.

I grimace. “You know me. I’m not particularly good at jerking off, all alone with nothing but my imagination. I may be good at my job, but I’d rather go for the real deal rather than imagine it.” I cock my head to the side. “Maybe I’ve had too many women, but no one long enough to recall a face.”

Or a particular body.

However, last night, when I jerked off, it was her I thought of.

Her face, her eyes. All in precise detail.

She has such a pretty mouth, all soft lips and little freckles on her nose. Of the way she moves, as if she owns the world, and the way she frowns.

Her shoulders are petite and rounded; her skin is the color of alabaster.

She has wide hips, and a tight, perky ass.

Her legs look strong, as if she used to be a dancer. Judging from the way she moves, it sure would make sense. I so would do a dancer right now.

My cock stiffens, reminding me that I'm in desperate need of sex.

"You might be right," Cash says. "We've had far too many women."

"And it doesn't exactly help that I have a living arrangements situation."

"Which is?"

"I'm roomed with one."

"You're roomed with one?" Cash asks in disbelief.

"Yeah. "

There's a short silence. "No way. You're bullshitting me."

“I’ve been assigned a new roommate,” I say slowly. “The rehab’s freshest meat, for the next six weeks. We’re basically sleeping wall to wall.”

“Get out.” I wince as Cash lets out a roaring laugh. “Oh, shit. You’re serious?”

“Yes, I am,” I say, irritated that my best friend finds my dilemma funny.

“Dude, I’m so glad I’m not you. That sounds like a nightmare.”

“She’s a lot of things. A nightmare is definitely one of them.”



“You think she’s hot.”

“Like you wouldn’t believe.” I close my eyes and the image of her red hair brushing her shoulders flashes before my eyes. “Under any other circumstances, I would fuck her.”

“Why don’t you?”

“Because she’s crazy.”

“That’s your kind,” Cash says. “I don’t think you’ve ever done normal.”

“Not that kind,” I reply. “She’s like batshit crazy.”

“How crazy are we talking about?”

“Let me think.” I pause and think back to all the crazy shit that’s ever happened in my life. “Remember when I stopped giving out my phone number because of that woman who kept calling and went on to stalk me for nearly a year?”

“You mean Joanna?”

“You still know her name?” I ask surprised.

“Hell yeah, I do. She worked the bar at one of my clubs. As I recall, I explicitly told you not to fuck her. I told you she had issues, but you wouldn’t listen.”

“You weren’t explicit enough,” I say with a smile. “Anyway, this one’s just like her. A stalker.”

“You’re saying that—”

“—I’m roomed with a fucking love addict.”

“Shit,” Cash says slowly after a pause. “No sex addict, then. I feel for you.”

“Sex couldn’t be further from her mind. But the problem lies elsewhere: she’s into someone else,” I say. “I’m facing a crisis here. I need to hook up with someone. Do you think you can arrange something to make this all a little easier on me? You know, get me out of here for a couple hours.”

He lets out another roaring laugh. “Are we talking about breaking you out? Already? You’ve barely been in there for what—a day?”

“Come on. We’re only talking for an hour or two. Let’s hit a club. Meet some chicks. Have a few drinks. Help me get the chance to finish my 365 non-stop sex calendar. I only skipped yesterday so it doesn’t really count. I’m so close.”

“How close?” I can hear the excitement in his voice.

“Just one left, and you’ll hear the dong.”

“Damn. You’ve really gone through with it?” Cash’s voice echoes through the line, heavy with disbelief. “I thought you gave up long ago.”

“A bet is a bet. Do I look like someone who’s ready to lose?”

“I didn’t think you would take it so seriously.”

“Well, I am. So don’t waste the five hundred bucks you owe me because I’m almost ready to pick up my check.”

“Almost,” Cash says, laughing. “All right. I’m going to help. You still have your phone?”

“I wouldn’t be talking to you if I didn’t.”

“Good, don’t lose it. I can arrange for a driver to pick you up this Friday.”

“Why Friday?”

“I’m opening another club. There’s someone I want you to meet. She is a new dancer I hired last week. I think you’ll like her. You’re absolutely her type: young, rich and an asshole.”

I let the asshole comment slide, because to be honest, I don’t care what Cash thinks of me.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 6:05 am*

“If you weren’t a club owner, you’d probably make a good pimp, you know?”

“That wouldn’t be my career choice.”

“What would be?” I ask interested and take another gulp of my drink.

“Making great movies and asking you to be the lead actor.” The dirty connotation is unmistakable. I shouldn’t have mentioned the missing porn channel.

I grimace. “I love sex, but I wouldn’t want to make money off of it. Give it a few more days here, and I might be telling you a different story.”

“Two more days and you’ll have your fun.”

“Thanks. I owe you big time.”

“Yeah, you do. I’m most certainly not doing this for free. I mean, let’s face it, the 365 days are up. But I’ll help under one condition.”

“Which is?”

“I want you to fuck your roommate.”

My heart speeds up as Vicky’s image flashes before my eyes. “What if I don’t want to do that?”

“Then you’ll lose the bet. Remember we also agreed that I’d once get the chance to

point to anyone and you'd have to fuck her. Well, I haven't used that card yet. So here's my condition: I want her to be the last on the list. It goes without saying that any women you might have in between don't count. Including the dancer I'll arrange for you to meet." There's a short pause, but the silence is ominous, heavy with the promise of bad news. "And Kade? I want proof."

I let out a snort. "As if I'd ever cheat my way into winning a bet."

"You never know. Remember the time we played cards and you kept on winning? I'll just say, trust is earned."

"That's old news. I was twenty and in desperate need of quick money, seeing that I was going through a losing streak."

"Who's to say you're honest now?" There is another pause. "You can come up with the kind of proof you want, as long as it's believable."

I close my eyes and take a breath. "What about my company? If I'm being kicked out of this place I could lose everything."

"Then make sure you're being discreet about it. No one needs to find out. You've always been very good at that."

Until recently, when I slipped.

"I can take all the time I need?" I ask warily.

"Of course."

This can't be too hard.

A woman like her is in desperate need of romance and love, and I know exactly how

to lavish attention on her. Besides, I can plan this carefully, make her want me with everything she's got, and then strike on the last day, right before I leave this place.

"It shouldn't be too difficult," Cash says, reading my thoughts. "Most women dig bad boys. However, my gut feeling tells me that's not what she needs. Patience is not your best virtue, so, me being your best friend and all, I suggest you play the friends card." Short pause. "Do we have a deal?"

I let the thought sink in for a moment.

"It's a deal. If she needs nice, I can be nice," I say at last.