



Never Kiss Your Neighbors

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Description: No one warned me I was living next to not one but two thirst traps!

As a single mom, I live by one rule: no unnecessary chaos. So when I move next door to not one but two ridiculously hot men who earn a very good income by being professionally shirtless on the internet, I'm in trouble.

Cam Walker is the walking definition of "too much." Too confident, too charismatic, and way too willing to stroll around in just a towel like he's allergic to clothes. Women basically camp outside his house, hoping for a glimpse of those world-famous pecs.

Wyatt Wilson is his best friend, his partner-in-thirst-trapping, and somehow even harder to resist. He's got this low-key, sarcastic charm that makes me laugh even when I'm having a bad day, and a protective streak that turns my insides to goo.

I know better than to get involved with men who don't fit into the calm, stable future I want for myself and my six-year-old daughter. So when the studly content-creating duo come on strong, flattering me like I'm one of their panty-waving followers, I should sprint in the other direction.

I have one job: avoid them at all costs. But then comes the flirting, the late-night run-ins, and kisses that I swear are definitely a mistake. Spoiler alert: they aren't.

I should never have kissed my neighbors, but now I'm in over my head with two dangerously attractive men who seem determined to convince me I need a little chaos in my life. Sure, I could pack up and move...but that would mean leaving behind their delicious abs, a houseful of hilariously awkward moments, and the best kisses of my life.

I know I'm playing with fire here. But honestly, when the flames are this hot, is it really so bad to get burned?

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CHAPTER1

WYATT

“Incoming!”

I drop the box I’m holding and leap to my left just in time to catch the white blob in my mouth. It takes a beat to chew and swallow before I can speak. “We need to save those for tomorrow.”

“We have plenty.” Cam pops one into his own mouth, then another, his cheeks bulging momentarily. “Mmm, it’s been a long time since I’ve had a marshmallow. I used to eat bags of these when I was a kid.”

“Theyaregood. Toss me another.”

He lobs it higher and farther this time, and I have to jog backwards to line up my catch, but I nail it, sinking my teeth into the sugary mass. While I chew, I pick up the box I dropped, pry it open and slide out the colorful blaster.

Cam leans in to get a better look. “Sweet, that one takes mini marshmallows. It’ll hold a lot in those double cylinders.”

“I think the ones we modified are going to perform better, though.”

“We’ll see. We have plenty of options.” He lays a plastic crossbow in the grass next to the others. “Are we about ready? We should get this done while the light’s still

good.”

“Just one more to unpack. Oh, and those PVC pipe air models.”

“Cool, I’ll get the camera while you put those out.”

Cam’s wearing a t-shirt when he goes into the house, but it’s gone when he returns. Right before we start, he eyes my casual button-down. “You should open up your shirt, or take it off entirely.”

Annoyed, I shake my head and let out a huff. “Is that really necessary? This is just an intro about the equipment.”

“We gotta give the fans what they want. At least undo a few buttons.”

With a resigned sigh, I undo all the buttons and shrug out of the shirt, because I don’t want to hear Cam fuss about angles and visibility while we film. I’m just a piece of meat, tossed out to feed our followers on a daily basis.

I should be used to this by now, and I’m glad my workouts pay off—literally—but I can’t seem to shake my discomfort at thousands upon thousands of random people ogling my body and telling us exactly what they think about it.

It was flattering at first, but I’m long past that.

Cam records me discussing the highlights of the various marshmallow weapons—only reminding me once, with a not-so-subtle gesture at his own arms, to flex my biceps—and then we switch places. He goes through the devices much like I did, and tomorrow, our editor will be here to splice the footage, putting together the best takes.

We take care of easy shoots like this one, but tomorrow a videographer will be here to capture the marshmallow battle in all its glory.

“That’s a wrap. Let’s get this stuff cleaned up.” Cam scoops a handful of mini marshmallows from the bag and shovels them into his mouth before putting the camera back in its case.

As I straighten after collecting two of the blasters from the ground, something catches my eye. A small face is watching me from over the tall back fence.

There’s been a child’s play structure in the yard behind us for as long as we’ve lived here, but in all that time, I’ve never before seen a kid up there.

I give the little girl a smile and return to my task, but when Cam spots her, he waves and calls out a “Hello!” She stays silent, but keeps staring, so Cam grabs a few of the large marshmallows from the open bag and starts to juggle them for her amusement.

Cam is good at juggling, but he intentionally fumbles a few times, trying to be funny. It takes some work, but the girl eventually cracks a smile.

When I return to cleaning up, her tiny but pleasant-sounding voice says something about laundry.

Cam takes a couple of steps toward the fence, cupping a hand to his ear. “What was that?”

“Do you need to do laundry?” she calls over in a louder tone.

It takes a moment to make sense of her question. Our washing machine is indoors; we don’t even have a clothesline out back.

“Laundry?” Cam questions.

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“You’re not wearing shirts. Are your shirts all dirty?” the girl asks.

Immediately, I reach for my discarded shirt, but Cam says, “Yes, we do need to do laundry.”

“You’d better tell your mom you’re out of shirts,” the girl says matter-of-factly.

“That’d go over real well,” I mumble under my breath. My mom hasn’t done my laundry since I was ten, and I’m pretty sure Cam was raised the same way, or he’d likely be a messy housemate.

“We’ll do that for sure.” Cam resumes his juggling, tossing one of the marshmallows high in the air, and abandoning the others as he maneuvers to catch it in his mouth.

“What did you just eat?” she asks.

“A marshmallow,” he says after he swallows. “Do you like marshmallows?”

She’s quiet for several seconds before she responds. “I’m not allowed to talk to strangers.”

Cam nods, looking solemn. “That’s a smart rule.”

A moment later, she disappears.

I give him a look to indicate my surprise at the conversation and the girl’s presence in general. I hope she’s not going to make a habit of watching us when we’re out here

filming.

Cam shrugs and tosses another marshmallow my way, but I step to the side and let it pass by. I already ate too many while I was loading the blasters.

There's only one white blob left in the jumbo-sized bag, actually, and Cam plucks it out. "We're gonna need more marshmallows."

CHAPTER2

STELLA

"We should have gotten here earlier, Mommy."

"I agree," I tell my daughter as we inch forward in the long drop-off line at her new elementary school. "Sleep and breakfast are very important, so in order to get here earlier, you'll need to go to bed earlier at night, or wear the clothing we set out the night before, rather than trying on new outfits in the morning."

"But I didn't feel like wearing blue today."

"Hmm." My mind is half on this conversation and half on calculating whether I'll still have time to stop for groceries this morning.

Her feet softly kick the back of the passenger seat. "I don't know what I'm going to feel like wearing until I wake up."

"Please don't kick, Jessie. How about ... tonight we lay out three different outfits, and in the morning, you can choose among those three?"

Her face is thoughtful in the rearview mirror as we continue our glacial parade. I'd

rather park and walk her to the door like I did when she was in kindergarten, but this school wants all the kids dropped off at the curb. We definitely need to arrive earlier, because it seems like everyone gets here at the last minute.

“I guess we could try that,” Jessie says when we’re a few cars away from the waiting line of staff.

“Great. Sounds like a plan. Got your bag ready?” Glancing over my shoulder, I confirm that she’s ready to go. “Have a fun day! I love you!”

“Love you too, Mommy!”

“I’ll see you this afternoon.” I pull to a stop, a young woman opens the back door, and Jessie unbuckles from her carseat and exits the car.

A familiar sensation tugs at my chest, though it’s not as painful as when we first moved here. It helps knowing that she’s made a couple of friends in her class.

The backseat now empty, I continue with the parade, stealing a couple of quick glances backward to try to catch sight of Jessie before she goes inside.

Once I’m out on the road, I check the time. I should be able to pick up a few groceries and still make it home before nine. We’re out of milk and running low on several staple items, and it’s usually much quicker to get in and out of the store now than it will be in the afternoon.

As I’d hoped, the parking lot at the market is mostly empty. Inside, I’m greeted by the fresh scent of the produce department, where I put a bunch of bananas in my basket before making a beeline to the bread section.

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After I grab a loaf of our usual bread, I'm tempted to browse the store's bagels, but I tell myself to wait until my next trip. My bosses, who happen to be my friend Ana's romantic partners, told me that my hours are flexible, but I try to keep as close to regular office hours as I can, except for the times when I'm taking care of Jessie.

Saving the milk for last, I collect my other items first. When I reach the other end of the store, I realize I never saw the jam and jelly section, so I go on a hunt for it, and eventually find it all the way back near where I started, in the same aisle as the bread. I'm still learning my way around the stores in this town, but I'm sure I won't make this mistake again.

Jessie likes strawberry jelly a lot, and I'm standing in front of the shelves full of various brands, wondering if she'd put up a fuss over a low-sugar variety, when a broad forearm appears beside me, reaching for a jar at the same time a masculine voice says, "Excuse me."

I take a step back to give the man room, and am only intending to give a quick glance to see who's invading my personal space, but one glance is not enough.

Whoa, he's gorgeous.

First of all, he's tall. And dark. And undeniably handsome.

I must be staring, because once he has his selection in hand, he takes a step back and looks at me in return.

The eyes taking me in are like rich dark chocolate, but maybe I'm only thinking that

because I passed through the candy aisle on my way over here. His lips are full and soft-looking, and are probably more delectable than any of the jellies and jams.

“Did you know ancient Romans had recipes for jam?” he says.

I squint at him, trying to make sense of his words, while I try even harder not to look at the bare expanse of his chest that’s exposed by his decidedly low-buttoned light blue shirt.

All of his skin is a beautiful warm olive color, and his chest—oops, I’m looking again—is smooth, though I suspect that if I were to touch it, it would be hard as granite.

Those forearms that led the way look strong too, under their fine covering of rich dark brown, almost-black hair that matches the thick, wavy hair on his head.

And did I mention his cheekbones? They’re sharp enough for a game of Fruit Ninja back in the produce department.

“The Romans made jam,” he says, his beautiful eyes dropping to the label of the jar he’s holding. “Though probably not raspberry chipotle.” He holds the jar out so I can see it. “This is really good in barbecue sauce, by the way.”

I don’t know if it’s what he’s saying, or the way he looks, but I can’t quite seem to join the conversation.

“Can I help you reach anything?”

The shelves are indeed stacked high, but I hadn’t even looked beyond eye level, and it doesn’t matter, because I’m still tongue-tied.

“What flavor are you looking for?” he asks.

After a silent but harsh admonishment to get myself together, I answer, “Strawberry ... preferably reduced sugar.”

“Brand?”

He has somehow turned into my own personal shopper, though he'd be much better suited as a model, or maybe some kind of athlete whose sport demanded physical perfection.

After quickly scanning the rows of jars, he slides one off the shelf and hands it to me. While I study the ingredients, he selects a couple more, and soon he's holding two jars in each of his big hands, one of them being his raspberry chipotle.

“Oh ... I don't need ...” As I fumble to explain that my jelly selection isn't this serious, I realize that I'm ridiculously out of practice when it comes to talking to attractive men. I didn't know it was a skill that faded away without regular use.

“So many options,” he says, just before he tosses one of the jars into the air. Then he tosses another. And before I know it, he's juggling all four jars.

From personal shopper to circus clown. What in the world is happening right now?

CHAPTER 3

STELLA

“What are you doing?” The mom in me wants to tell this handsome but extremely strange stranger to put the jars down immediately, because he's about to make a huge mess right here in aisle nine.

The rational adult in me says I have no business telling a grown adult what to do or not to do if he isn't hurting anyone—but why is he behaving like this?

The man may be stunningly good looking, but he is very odd.

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He is also, I have to admit, an extremely talented juggler. The longer he keeps the jars in the air, the less I'm envisioning the floor covered in shards of glass and globs of bright red jelly.

When an older woman appears in the aisle, the guy stops juggling, though I don't get the sense that he's embarrassed or fears getting into trouble. More like he doesn't want a bigger audience. He manages to catch all of the jars, using his arms and chin to help keep them from smashing into each other.

I feel like I should clap, but I'm still too bewildered by the whole situation.

"This one looks good," he says, holding out a square-sided jar with a gold label. When I take it from him, our fingers touch, and heat races up my arm like a lit fuse.

Flustered, I take a step back, and the next thing I know, the man's arms are around me, pulling me out of the path of a fast-moving cart. The haste of the man pushing the cart reminds me that I, too, was in a hurry when I came in here, but suddenly, I'm in no rush to leave the juggler's embrace.

His body feels firm but comforting, and just as warm as I imagined.

"Slow down, buddy," my rescuer calls after the speed demon before releasing me. "You okay?"

"I'm good. Thank you." I actually feel like I'm glowing, and I hope my reaction to his touch isn't written all over my face.

It has definitely been far too long since I've interacted in any meaningful way with a member of the opposite sex. Not that any of this is meaningful—just bizarre, really.

The smile he turns on me almost compensates for the loss of his touch. "Maybe they need to post speed limit signs in here," he says as he sets down all of the jelly jars except his chipotle one.

"I'm sure everyone would ignore them, just like they do out on the road."

"Good point. Anyway, I'm glad you're okay." He gives my arm a quick, light touch with the tips of his fingers, lighting another fuse. "I'd have hated to lose you right after meeting you."

Lose me? Again, I'm at a loss for what to say as the realization sinks in that he's flirting with me. This gorgeous man is flirting with me.

"Maybe I could get your number?" he asks. "You know, in case you need help choosing groceries in the future."

Somehow this request is more shocking than the random history facts and the juggling. Jessie's usually with me when I'm out in public. I can't remember the last time a guy even looked at me, much less asked for my number.

I'm pretty sure I do some stuttering after this, but honestly, it's all a blur. I manage to say something about how I'm "not dating right now," and the handsome stranger responds with a nod and a continued smile, even if it does lose some of its wattage.

"Good luck with the jelly," he says amiably, before giving me a wave and continuing on his way.

I continue to ponder the strawberry jelly options, or at least pretend to while I take a

moment to get my bearings. There's an argument going on between my body—which wants me to run after the hottie and tattoo all my contact info in bold, black letters on the back of his big, strong hand—and my head, which is firmly in the no-dating stance, especially when it comes to a man who's so ...unserious.

Feeling overwhelmed by options, I end up buying the same brand of strawberry jelly that my mom always bought, the one Jessie loves. I'll revisit the low-sugar types on my next visit, when I'm not so distracted.

Amazingly, I remember that milk was my priority when I came in, and I head to the back of the store to pick up a gallon.

The sight of a dark head gives me pause when I approach the checkout area, and I consider stalling until he leaves the store, but then I remind myself that I'm not a child. There's no reason to hide. He accepted my refusal without an issue.

I intend to choose a different lane than the one he's in, though. No point making awkward conversation. But, of course, only one lane's open at this early hour, and the self-checkout area is roped off, for some reason.

It's not until I get in line behind the jam juggler that I realize he's not alone.

CHAPTER4

STELLA

The second man has lighter, sandy brown hair that flops over one of his eyes, which are a beautiful blue-gray color. He looks quite different from the juggler, but somehow he's equally as good looking, with muscular arms displayed nicely by the heather blue t-shirt he's wearing.

Maybe it's a sign that I should start dating if I'm lusting after random men in the grocery store.

The juggler gives me another easy smile, letting me know there are no hard feelings. "Did you decide on a strawberry jelly?"

His question prompts the new guy to look down into my basket. "Wow, you must love chicken nuggets."

I let that comment go, and give the juggler a quick nod to answer his question.

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“Want to go ahead of us in line?” he asks.

“Oh ...thank you, but no. That’s okay.” Even though I’m in a hurry, and it would help to be able to get out of here sooner, I don’t want to accept a favor from this man after refusing to give him my number.

I tilt my head to look past both of them to gauge how many items they have, and I’m dismayed to see a nearly full cart. Full of ... marshmallows?

There are a couple of other random items in there, like a two-liter bottle of cola and a loaf of bread, but there are at least a dozen or more bags of marshmallows, both large and small, filling the rest of the space.

Why was that guy commenting about the two large boxes of chicken nuggets in my basket when he’s buying out the store’s entire stock of marshmallows?

Curiosity almost gets the best of me, but I keep my questions to myself. Considering the juggler’s erratic behavior, I’m not sure I want to know the answer.

Maybe it’s as simple as they love marshmallows and there was a big sale going on. Or maybe they operate a massive s’mores business. Either way, it’s none of my concern.

“Hey, nice to see you!” The older woman cashier’s eyes light up when the men in front of me step up to check out.

Standing a few steps behind them, I try not to listen in on their conversation, but I’m

hopeful an explanation for the marshmallows that fill the conveyor belt will be offered, so I also don't try too hard to tune them out.

Sadly, the cashier doesn't even seem to blink an eye over all the confections. Instead, the conversation is mostly the men asking how the woman's grandchildren are doing, and from the sounds of it, she has a lot of grandchildren.

The two guys bag their own groceries, and continue to talk to the cashier after their order is finished and she starts scanning mine. They load their bags into their cart, and start bagging my purchases as the cashier pushes items down to the end.

I reach a hand out while I dig my wallet out of my purse with the other. "You don't have to do that."

"Old habits," the juggler says, continuing to snag my items and put them into bags. "I used to work here when I was in high school."

"Oh." Maybe that's why he felt comfortable enough to juggle fragile items right in the middle of the store.

The men are still hanging around after I pay. "We can carry your things out to your car for you," the lighter-haired guy says. "Where are you parked?"

While I'm trying to turn down his offer, the cashier teases the dark-haired man that he's trying to get his job back. When he puts my gallon jug of milk on the cart's child seat, I get a little flashback to the days when Jessie would sit in that seat when I went shopping. She could probably still fit, but she'd never want to sit there now.

"I can carry everything. It's not that much," I tell the guys.

"It's no problem. We're headed in the same direction," the light-haired guy says.

I definitely don't need their assistance, and I feel odd accepting help from two strange men, but the cashier knows them, so I suppose it's safe enough to let them walk to my car.

As we exit through the store's automatic doors, a woman who looks to be about ten years older than me, somewhere in her mid-to-late 30s, checks out the two men as she approaches. She obviously likes what she sees.

Right before she passes, her eyes go big, like she can't believe what she's seeing. She gives the men a big smile and a wave, which they return.

"Who was that?" I ask after she goes by. I don't mean to be nosy, but her reaction was strange; it wasn't the typical greeting of an acquaintance.

"I don't know." The juggler sounds sincere, but I'm skeptical. The woman definitely seemed to know them.

Oh well, it's another thing that's none of my business. Despite the intimate atmosphere of this early morning grocery run, this town isn't small at all, and I doubt I'll run into these guys ever again.

I pop the trunk of my old compact SUV, hoping that it isn't full of toys and coats. Sometimes, I lose track of what ends up back here. To my relief, there are only two coats, a frisbee, and a lawn bowling set from a recent park outing.

While the guys are loading my groceries into the back, a woman pulls in next to my vehicle and quickly gets out of hers, hyper-focused on the two men.

"Oh my god! I've spotted you in the wild. Can I get a picture with you?"

The juggler grins, seemingly unsurprised by this request. He quickly agrees, and the

other guy smiles too, but his grin appears somewhat forced.

The woman positions herself between them and extends her arm to take a selfie.

“Want me to get that for you?” I ask, more out of polite habit than anything else. I have no idea what’s going on, but I’m just going to go with it.

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“My mom is going to be so excited when I send this to her,” the woman gushes. “Could I give you guys a hug?” When they agree, she wraps her arms around first the juggler, then his slightly-reluctant friend. “It was so great to meet you! You made my day.”

When she finally scurries off toward the store, I can’t let it go. “What was that about?”

The light-haired guy smirks. “Just someone else who knew Cam from his bag boy days.”

This elicits a laugh from the juggler, who’s apparently named Cam. Maybe I should introduce myself and ask the other man’s name, but it’s likely I’ll never see them again, and that will be a good thing.

Outside of their good looks, everything about them—the juggling, the marshmallows, the fans?—is allsostrange.

“Thank you for your help with the groceries,” I say. “Should I tip you?”

Cam points a finger at me. “Good one.” He and the other man step backward, waving as they turn to push their cart away. “Have a good rest of your day.”

“You too.” I get in my car and reflexively lock the doors behind me. It’s something I always do, but it’s a very intentional action now, because I’m still weirded out by the whole encounter. Maybe I should go to a different grocery store next time.

The parking lot still isn't crowded, so I have an unobstructed view of the men loading all of their marshmallows into the back seat of a black luxury sports car.

Hmm. The man, Cam, must have a much better job now than he did in high school. If I had to guess, I'd peg both men to be right around my age, or maybe even a couple of years younger, around 25, based on their youthful behavior, including buying a cartful of sugar.

When I turn my car on, the clock lights up on the dash. Crap, it's already a quarter after nine, and it's going to take about ten minutes to drive home, assuming traffic isn't too heavy. This isn't how I wanted to start my workday.

When I pull out of the lot, the sports car is right behind me. When I make my first turn, it turns too. I take my mind off of it for a minute to speculate about what type of work awaits me today, but when I make another turn, left this time, the car is still on my tail.

I shouldn't have let them carry out my groceries. Just because they looked nice enough and the cashier knew them, doesn't mean they're decent people. Plenty of people put on an innocent facade to hide sinister intentions.

Maybe I'm being paranoid, but they seem to be following me.

CHAPTER5

STELLA

I wrack my brain to try to remember where the police station is. I've never been in this situation before, but I remember the advice I've heard: drive to a police station so your follower will abandon their pursuit.

I have no idea where the police station is, but I'm definitely not leading these guys back to my house.

Giving thanks that Jessie isn't with me, I scan the road ahead and spot a small medical plaza. After giving only a brief signal, I turn into the lot, and heave a sigh of relief when the sports car drives by without following me.

I park in a spot where I can see the road, and when there's no sign of the black car after several minutes, I pull out and continue on my way. I was probably overreacting and letting my mind run wild, but you can't be too careful.

It's well after 9:30 when I finally get home, and I need to let the dog out and put away the groceries before I can log in for work. The dog, who I sometimes privately call G, is a two-year-old cockapoo mix with gold curly fur. He belongs to my friend and roommate, Marissa, but she got him right after we moved into this house, and I know she did it largely for Jessie's benefit.

He greets me with a fluffy wagging tail when I open his crate, and then he bounds excitedly toward the sliding glass door that leads to the back yard. I'll admit I didn't really want a dog, because I knew it would be a lot of work, and I already have my hands full with Jessie, but the little guy has grown on me.

While G does his business, I hurriedly put the groceries away, ignoring the strange feeling I get when I set the jar of strawberry jelly on the counter. I really hope I won't be thinking about juggler Cam every time I make toast for Jessie.

Finally, I log on to my work email, and am relieved to see that nothing urgent is waiting for me. The pup scratches at the back door, and when I let him in, he gets a drink of water and curls up in the bed next to the small dining room table, where I work on my laptop.

I'm a customer service rep for Community Bean, a hugely popular and growing coffee company. My work is mostly online, where I respond to customer inquiries and issues that come in, but sometimes I take calls, and I've been starting to help the customer relations manager with a survey project.

The work has been fairly basic so far, but there's enough variety to keep things interesting, and I'm eternally grateful for the opportunity. My friend Ana used to work at Community Bean, and the company is owned by her boyfriends, Jansen and Derek, whom she met when she interviewed with them.

I went to college with Ana and Marissa, and the three of us have been friends ever since, even though our lives took us in very different directions.

It's thanks to them that my life is completely different than it was just a few months ago. I'd lived with my mom and stepdad on the other side of the state ever since Jessie was born. I appreciated being able to stay with them, but the situation was never great there, largely thanks to my mom's drinking habits.

Arguments and disagreements were common, but when things got really bad, Ana, accompanied by her men, came and saved Jessie and me, bringing us here to live with her and Marissa.

At the time, Ana and Marissa lived in a townhome, but when Ana moved out to live with her men, Marissa, Jessie, and I moved into this house, which is closer to Marissa's job and has a nice big back yard for Jessie. Marissa said the yard needed a dog, too.

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After I've been working for about half an hour, a text comes in from Ana. "Hey, can I stop by?"

"Sure. It's just me here right now, of course."

"See you soon."

Ten minutes later, she arrives with Community Bean iced lattes for each of us and a box full of treats from the bakery case, some for us to have now, and extras for Jessie and Marissa to enjoy later. She also brought something for G, who's greeting her so enthusiastically, his whole back half is wiggling side to side.

She slides her hand into the outer pocket of her tote bag. "Can I give him a biscuit?"

When I say yes, she dangles a bone-shaped treat in front of him, which he politely accepts before trotting off to his bed to enjoy it.

Ana sets her bag on one of the chairs at the dining table. "I had a doctor appointment this morning, and thought I'd stop by before I go to work."

"Everything okay?"

She scrunches up her face. "Yeah, just a routine pap test."

I give her a sympathetic smile over my shoulder as I get two small plates out of the cupboard. "What a way to start the day."

“Right? When I spread my legs in the morning, a cold speculum is not what I want up there.”

Spending so much time with Jessie, it's not often I hear any mention of sex, and sometimes I forget how spicy a conversation with Ana can be when there's no kid around to overhear.

“I'd ask how you and your guys are doing, but since they're my bosses, I'm not sure it's appropriate for me to hear the kinds of things you'd tell me.”

Ana pouts, like this would never occur to her. “Oh, well. I'll spare you the details and just tell you that things are great. They're still trying to get me to come back to Community Bean, but I think it's best if I keep my new job.”

Moving my laptop aside, I sit back down at the table across from where Ana's taken a seat. “Would it be too much to see them both at work and at home?”

“No, I wouldn't mind that at all, but I'm not sure I'd be as productive if I worked with them. Knowing I could go into their offices and scratch the itch anytime I thought of them ... that'd be dangerous.”

For some reason, this comment reminds me of the men I met in the grocery store this morning. Sure, they were odd, but with those bodies, they could be excellent itch scratchers.

Maybe it's time for me to think about dating again.

Ana's looking at me funny.

“What?”

“You had an interesting expression on your face. What were you thinking about just then?”

“I did?” My first instinct is to keep these kinds of thoughts to myself, but considering how confusing the entire shopping encounter was, I’m tempted to see if Ana will be able to make sense of it.

I tear off a piece of chocolate croissant and toy with it as I launch into the story, from the ancient Roman factoid, to the juggling, all the way up to the woman asking to take a picture with the two men in the parking lot.

“But you don’t know who they were?” Ana looks puzzled.

“Not a clue. We didn’t even introduce ourselves. The second guy mentioned that the juggler’s name was Cam, but that’s all I know.”

“Why didn’t you give him your number when he asked?”

After a sip from my drink, I say, “I don’t really date. It’s not easy as a mom.”

“Why? You have a built-in babysitter, not to mention me on call, and Derek and Jansen. Jessie loves them.”

“I would never ask my bosses to babysit.”

“They love Jessie as much as she loves them. We’d be happy to come over and watch her anytime.”

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“Well, that’s very nice of you.”

Ana finishes the last bite of her blueberry muffin. “How long has it been since you’ve been out with someone?”

“I don’t know. I went out a couple of times when Jessie was little, but it wasn’t worth the trouble.”

Ana looks like she’s doing calculations in her head as she gets up from the table to help herself to a glass of water. “So, Jessie is six. Does that mean you haven’t had sex in like, three years?” My friend sounds horrified at the notion, and I can’t help but laugh before I give her the real number.

CHAPTER6

STELLA

“I haven’t had sex since Jessie was conceived.”

She clutches the edge of the counter. “What? You should’ve told me to sit down before springing something like that on me! Seven years! Are you kidding me?”

“I’ve been a little busy, Ana, and it’s not like I’ve had men lining up for it.”

She slides back into her chair. “You had two of them at the store this morning who wanted to get in line.”

“Only one of them asked for my number, and trust me, they weren’t the right type of guys.”

Her perfectly-manicured brows lift. “No? Something wrong with gorgeous and sexy?”

“Need I remind you of their cart full of marshmallows? They were like boys. I already have one child; I don’t need another. When I date, I’m going to be looking for a serious man. Someone who’s mature enough to be a good father figure for Jessie.”

Ana takes a long drink of water and appears to mull this over. “Considering you haven’t been with a man for the better part of a decade, don’t you think you ought to go out and get your wet on, and then get it filled real good before you think about finding someone to settle down with? My god, I think you qualify for virgin status again!”

Get my wet on and get it filled? Why did I enter into a conversation with Ana about dating? Before she even said a word, I could have predicted that her advice would be to go out and have sex. She makes it sound so easy, but sex is complicated.

I know better than anyone that a simple night of pleasure can change your life, and I’m not talking about the flowery happily-ever-afters that neatly wrap up all the smutty romance books that Ana reads. Sex can have lifelong consequences, and even if you don’t unintentionally end up pregnant like I did, there are also complications of the heart. I don’t think I’m the type of person who can have sex with someone without having my feelings get involved.

What’s important right now is getting my life on track with my new job and our new home. Making sure Jessie’s environment is stable and safe will always be my top priority.

On top of all that, I haven't had the best luck picking men. Jessie's dad let me down in spectacular fashion, and the couple of men I went out with after that turned out to only want sex, even though I was determined to learn from my mistakes and take things slow.

"I don't think virgin status works that way, Ana, and anyway, I'm just not interested right now. Maybe when we're more settled here."

"Or maybe, love will find you when you're least expecting it."

"Oh, now you're talking about love? I thought this was about sex."

Ana's smile is knowing. "Sometimes, when we're really lucky, the two things coincide. That's when it's the best. You should open yourself up to that possibility."

As I'm considering her words, my phone buzzes with an incoming text, and I catch sight of my manager's name on the screen.

"I'd better get back to work," I tell Ana. "Let's get together again soon. Jessie would love to see you."

"Oh! That reminds me." Ana fishes around in her tote and pulls out a wrapped box. "This is for Jessie."

"You don't have to bring a gift for her every time you see her. I still feel bad about you and Marissa paying for her dance classes and buying her a tutu, and now she's not even interested in dance."

"That's okay. She should try a little of everything and figure out what she likes. Good advice for her mom, too." She nudges my arm with zero subtlety, then pulls me into a hug. "Don't worry about any work you missed. I'll put in a word for you with those

big grumpy men who run the company.”

I’m laughing as I walk her to the door. G, who’d fallen asleep after all the excitement, wakes up to say goodbye to our guest.

With my spirits lifted after the visit, I get back to work, first responding to my manager, who was texting to tell me about a virtual meeting this afternoon about the company’s new app that’s launching next week, and how it will impact customer service.

She scheduled the meeting so that it fits with my availability. I have to leave to pick up Jessie at 3:30, and then I do a bit more work after we get home. I’m so grateful for the company’s flexibility and their consideration for my schedule, and I’m especially grateful to Ana for setting me up with the job. Most working moms aren’t nearly this lucky.

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Diving into my emails, I do my best to make up for lost time, and things go smoothly until the app meeting. I'm in the midst of it, and taking a lot of notes, when the dog scratches on the back door, asking to go outside. I gesture for him to wait, but he gives me a look and paws more insistently. When you've gotta go, you've gotta go!

I carry my laptop to the back door, so I can stay present in the meeting, and balance it with one hand while I pull the door open with the other. That done, I return to the dining room table just in time for a question from the office manager.

About ten minutes later, when the meeting's starting to wrap up, a flash of movement catches my attention. G is still outside—oops!—and I'm surprised he hasn't asked to be let back in. He typically only stays out long enough to do what he needs to do. Occasionally, he sniffs around a bit, but he never just hangs around out there all alone.

Splitting my attention between the summary points from the meeting and my limited view of the back yard, I catch sight of the dog again. His head is down, nose to the grass, but then he lifts up, his jaw working on something.

Oh no, what has he gotten into? Just as I'm saying goodbye to the other meeting participants, poised to log off as quickly as is acceptable, something white flies through the air out back.

As soon as the meeting ends, I rush to the back door, where I find the lawn dotted with small white balls. It's a sunny day, so it's not hail, and the balls are bigger than a typical hailstorm, anyway, but there are a lot of them.

And G is eating them. What in the world!?

I slide into the clogs I keep by the back door and hurry out, yelling for him to stop, but he just looks up at me, pauses for a second, then continues chewing.

There are dozens of balls in the grass. Several dozen. As I kneel next to G, I discover that they're not actually round; they're more like little white cubes ... no, more like short cylinders.

I pick one up and it squishes between my fingers. Is it a marshmallow? I sniff it, and it smells sweet. Looking around, I confirm that all of the white objects look the same, except that there are smaller ones too. Mini marshmallows.

What the hell is going on? It's like something from the twilight zone. A cart full of marshmallows at the store this morning, and now a yard full of marshmallows? Either we're heading into some kind of sugary Armageddon, or Ana laced the coffee with hallucinogens this morning.

I pick up the dog, because he clearly has no intention of stopping eating these things, and carry him back to the house. As I'm walking, a marshmallow zings by me and skids onto the back patio.

Where are they coming from? The sky is completely clear, though what would I expect—a cloud raining marshmallows? A plane flying by, dropping sweet samples throughout the neighborhood?

Another marshmallow comes flying in, and I finally see where they're coming from: directly over the back fence. Are there kids over there having a marshmallow fight? Are they intentionally throwing them over the fence, trying to feed the dog?

Still in my arms, he makes a gagging sound, so I quickly set him down on the patio,

keeping a loose hold on him so he can't run back to resume binge eating. He stiffens and retches.

"Are you okay, buddy?"

After a moment, he licks my arm and wags his tail, letting me know he's okay.

I set him inside the house, close the door, and return to the yard to try to figure out what's going on. The fence is too tall for me to see over, but it's built with alternating wooden slats, so if I stand close, I can see beyond it at a hard angle. This limited view only offers grass and shrubs.

Looking from the other angle, I see the corner of a house and more shrubbery, but no kids. At first, I don't hear anything, either, but then there's a thump, a click, and a whizzing sound, just before another marshmallow lands nearby.

There's scratching at my own back door, where G is watching me, wanting to return to his marshmallow feast. When I go to check on him, there's a spot of white vomit on the floor next to him.

I'd like to be able to put him outside, so he can't make a mess all over the house if he continues to be sick, but the yard needs to be cleaned up, and there's still an occasional marshmallow flying over the fence.

Luckily, there's still time before I need to leave to get Jessie. Hurrying to the front door, I clip the leash onto G's collar and set out for a walk around the block.

Our house is the third from the corner, so I go to the next street over, count three houses down, and ring the doorbell.

When the door opens, a very familiar face appears. "Hey, it's the strawberry jam

woman. How'd you find us?"

CHAPTER7

CAM

The gorgeous brunette from the store this morning is standing on my front porch. Hmm. She acted like she didn't know us, so why is she suddenly at our door?

"How did I find you?" A frown on her face, she repeats my question, turning it back on me.

"Did you follow us here this morning?"

"Did I follow you?"

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Why does she keep repeating everything I say?

Her hand goes to her hip, and she appears to be irritated, but I'm distracted by the way this pose pushes her chest out. She has a great chest. Top tier, even in the modest gray shirt she's wearing.

Even though we've had a busy day, her stunning figure has been on my mind more than a few times since I first saw her this morning.

With valiant effort, I force my eyes back up to her face.

"I found you by following the trail of marshmallows," she says pointedly.

As I'm standing there confused, Wyatt walks up behind me. "Oh, it's you. And you have a dog."

A dog? Sure enough, there's a little fluff monster standing obediently by her feet, wagging its curly tail. I can't believe I didn't notice it, but I guess my eyes never made it down that far.

"Do you live here?" she asks us both.

"Who's asking?" Wyatt sounds borderline hostile, so I nudge his side with my elbow.

"This is our house, but we like to keep that information quiet," I tell her. "What's going on?"

She glances down at her dog, who's now sniffing every inch of the doormat. "You've been feeding my dog too many marshmallows—unknowingly, I presume?"

"We've never seen your dog before." Wyatt goes down on a knee and offers his hand as something new for the dog to smell. "What's its name?"

Still looking irritated and also impatient, she shifts her weight to her other hip, drawing my eyes to that part of her body, which is nicely curvy and looks softly padded. "Goldfish," she says.

I tilt my head to the side, not sure I heard her correctly. "The dog's name is Goldfish?"

"Does he like to swim?" Wyatt asks. He's earned the dog's trust and is now scratching it behind the ears.

"Goldfish crackers are my daughter's favorite snack," the woman says, as if that explains everything.

"Wait a minute. We know your dog's name, but what's yours?"

Maybe it's the sun, but her cheeks turn a soft pink at my question. "I'm Stella."

"Nice to meet you again, Stella. I'm Cam, and this is Wyatt. Why don't you come inside?"

I move back to make room for her to enter, but she stays put. "I just came over here to ask if you could please keep your marshmallows out of my yard."

"Your yard? Where do you live?" Is this sexy woman our neighbor? Sure, she shot me down at the grocery store, but if I could run into her in the neighborhood from

time to time, maybe she'd change her mind. It was early this morning, and I wasn't on my best game. Oh shit—she said she had a daughter. My eyes dart to her hand. No ring.

"I live in the house right behind yours, and my yard is full of marshmallows. Who knows how many the dog ate before I stopped him."

"Is your husband home?" I blurt, and Wyatt looks up at me like I'm a dumbass. Smooth, real smooth.

Stella's brows knit, bringing my attention to her pretty brown eyes. "I'm not married, but I have a roommate."

"A male roommate?"

Wyatt gives the dog a pat on its head and gets to his feet, stepping in front of me. "Cam isn't nearly as creepy as he sounds right now. He's just trying to find out if you're in any kind of relationship."

Her lips start to curve into an amused smile, but she bites her bottom lip and shakes her head. I don't know if that's an answer, or if she's just amused and annoyed by my questions.

"I know how Goldfish feels," Wyatt says. "I ate a few too many marshmallows myself. Can we come over and clean up the mess we made in your yard?"

She shakes her head, and I'm disappointed, because it would be a good way to be able to spend more time with her. "No thanks. I'll take care of them. I just want to be sure they don't keep coming over the fence, because I don't want Goldfish to get sick."

“We’ll make sure of it, Stella. We’re all done for today, anyway,” I say.

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“Done?” She looks past us into the house, as if she’s looking for clues.

“We had a marshmallow battle with Nerf blasters and other stuff,” I explain. “Things got pretty wild and out of control.”

She arches a brow, then squints as she looks back and forth between Wyatt and me. She has no idea who we are.

“Okay. Well, thanks.” She turns to go, and as we’re saying goodbye, I’m already making plans for when I’ll see her again.

CHAPTER8

STELLA

Wow, I had those guys pegged. There are probably kids in Jessie’s class who are more mature than the two of them.

Guys shouldn’t be allowed to be that handsome on the outside, while being absolute children on the inside. But my god, they’re every bit as good looking as they were this morning—in fact, even more so in the daylight versus under the fluorescent lights in the store.

Their arms alone, all thick and bulging with muscles under the workout-type clothes they were wearing, are enough to make a woman drool. They both have big, strong-looking hands, and there was a moment when Wyatt was petting G that I envied the dog.

But a marshmallow battle? So ridiculous. So childish.

I march back to my house, put G in his crate, then do a super fast, if not very thorough, cleanup job in the back yard before I rush out to pick up Jessie.

Sometimes, when something interesting happens in my day—which is rare—I tell Jessie about it during the ride home, but I decide to keep all of today’s nonsense to myself.

I do tell her about Ana’s visit, and as soon as we get home, before she even takes her jacket off, Jessie opens the gift Ana left for her, which turns out to be a crystal-growing kit.

“So cool!” she says. “Auntie Ana always knows exactly what I like.”

“That does look very cool. Maybe we can get it started tonight after you do your homework.”

“I will, but first, Goldfish!”

At first, the name Jessie chose for the dog caused some confusion. When she was excited about goldfish, I was never sure whether she was talking about the dog or she wanted a snack. After a few days, it became clear that Jessie was always talking about the dog.

“Uh oh, Mommy.”

My stomach sinks at her tone. “What’s the matter, sweetie?”

“Goldfish is sick.”

I join my daughter at the dog’s crate, where there’s another foamy white puddle,

much bigger this time than the spot by the door. Luckily, the crate is large, and Goldfish seems to have managed to stay clear of the mess.

“Jessie, can you do a favor for me? There was a very weird thing that happened earlier, and I’ll tell you all about it later, but I need your help right now while I clean this up.”

“Okay, Mommy.”

I hand her a small grocery bag from the cupboard. “Could you please search the back yard for marshmallows, and pick up every one you can find, and put them in this bag?”

“Marshmallows?” Her voice pitches up higher, understandably incredulous.

“That’s right. To make a long story short, there are two men who live in the house behind ours, and they accidentally launched a lot of marshmallows into our yard. Goldfish ate some, and that’s why his tummy’s upset.”

Jessie giggles but then stops herself. “I’m not laughing because Goldfish is sick, but that’s really silly about the marshmallows.”

I nod. “I agree. Very silly.”

After the mess and the remaining marshmallows are cleaned up, and Goldfish has been allowed in the back yard, Jessie brings him back inside and offers him a snack, which is part of her after-school routine.

“He won’t take the treat, Mommy.”

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“Maybe he’s still full from the marshmallows.” That’s what I tell her, and maybe it’s true, but G has proven himself to have an insatiable appetite. He’s never passed by a single crumb, much less turned down a treat. So this is concerning.

Twenty minutes later, he throws up again.

When Jessie starts on her homework, I open the browser on my phone, search, “dog ate too many marshmallows,” and instantly feel sick, when I find out that certain ingredients in sugar-free marshmallows can be toxic.

This could be more than just an upset stomach.

Marissa’s due home from work soon, so I try not to worry while I wait to discuss things with her. In the meantime, G throws up again.

While I’m grabbing paper towels to clean up the mess, the doorbell rings. Marissa is my first thought, though I can’t imagine why she’d ring the bell when she typically pulls into the garage.

I open the door to find Cam and Wyatt standing there. They’ve changed back into jeans and shirts, similar to what they were wearing this morning. Cam’s in a dark button-down that is again one button lower than how most men would wear it. Wyatt’s in a maroon-colored henley that stretches across his chest like it’s holding on for dear life. I can’t fault it. But I have bigger concerns right now than ogling these man-boys.

“What’s up?” Before, I was just irritated about the mess, but now I’m truly fearful

about what's wrong with the dog, and it's these men's antics that are responsible.

"We came by to find out how Goldfish is doing," Wyatt says.

I look over my shoulder to confirm that Jessie's out of earshot. "He's not doing great. He's thrown up several times, and he won't eat. What kind of marshmallows were you using?" Even though I saw them in their shopping cart, I didn't pay attention to the packaging.

"What kind?" Cam asks.

"What brand? I need to know if any were sugar free or had xylitol in them." I lower my voice to a whisper. "Xylitol can be toxic to dogs."

"Oh, shit!" Wyatt runs a hand through his hair, looking distraught.

"Most were the major national brand, but we bought up all we could find," Wyatt says, making my heart sink.

"Have you taken him to the vet?" Wyatt asks.

I shake my head. "I just found out that it could be serious, and I'm waiting for my roommate to come home. He's technically her dog."

"We'll pay for the vet visit," Cam says quickly.

"In fact, we can drive him to the vet," Wyatt adds, "so you don't have to worry about a mess in your car. We're so sorry about this."

Both of them look as worried as I feel, and their concern softens my opinion of them a little.

I'm not too sure about having them drive, because I had a bad feeling about them this morning, but then I remember that was because I thought they were following me home from the store, and now I know they were taking the same route because they live in the same neighborhood.

As I'm considering how to respond to their offer, Marissa pulls into the driveway. She casts a curious look at me and the two men on the porch before her car disappears into the garage.

CHAPTER9

CAM

"C'mon in," Stella says, opening the door wider.

I would be excited to be invited into this woman's house, but all I can think about right now is how we've made her dog sick.

"Guys, this is my daughter, Jessie. Jessie, this is Wyatt and Cam. They live in the house behind ours."

"It's the juggler," the girl says.

When Stella looks confused, I explain that her daughter saw us in the yard yesterday from atop her playset.

Stella raises a brow at this information, making me assume that Jessie must not have told her mom about it.

"Our dog is sick," Jessie informs us in the same direct way she told us that our mom needed to do our laundry yesterday.

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Before I can respond, another woman comes in, asking what's going on, and Stella introduces us to her roommate, Marissa, and explains that Goldfish isn't feeling well.

"It's our fault," I say. "We carelessly let a lot of marshmallows fly into your yard earlier today, and unfortunately, Goldfish ate some. Maybe too many."

"We'd like to take him to the vet to make sure he's okay," Wyatt says as Marissa frowns.

The roommate looks between us and Stella, and then at Jessie, who appears to be on the verge of tears. In the back of my mind, I'm trying to figure out how to build a time travel machine, so I can go back in time and prevent this whole horrible situation.

"We'd need an appointment for the vet," Marissa says, "and it's after hours now."

"There must be some kind of vet around that's open in the evening," Wyatt says, pulling his phone from his back pocket. He taps and scrolls for just a moment before telling us there's an emergency vet just ten miles away.

"I'll go," Stella says, turning to her roommate. "Is it okay if Jessie stays here with you?"

"Of course."

Stella retrieves her purse from where it was hanging on a chair at the dining table, then kneels in front of her daughter, telling her to be good, and that she'll be home as

soon as they get Goldfish checked by the doctor.

“Will he be okay, Mommy?” the girl asks, and my god, the dog had better be okay, or I don’t know what I’m going to do.

Goldfish, for his part, is lying on the tile floor, flat on his belly, legs splayed out behind him. As soon as Stella grabs his leash, his tail starts to wag. Poor guy probably thinks he’s going for a walk.

“We’ll run home and get our car. And we’ll check the package labels. We still have them in the trash,” I tell Stella, who nods. “We’ll be back in a minute.”

Wyatt and I are both quiet as we jog back around the corner to our house. I know he’s feeling as sick about this as I am. How could something as innocent and basic as marshmallows cause a problem like this? We should’ve been more careful.

“I’ll get the marshmallow bags while you get the car,” Wyatt says when we’re at the door.

“This had better turn out okay,” I tell him.

A minute after I back out into the driveway, Wyatt appears with a fistful of empty plastic bags and several beach towels tucked under his arm.

“I don’t see xylitol listed on any of these,” he says. “None are sugar free.”

“That’s a relief. I hope that means it’s just a simple upset stomach for the poor pooch.”

“Let’s hope.”

Around the corner, Stella is waiting at the end of her driveway with Goldfish on his leash and a pile of her own towels in her arms.

“We brought towels, too,” Wyatt tells her when he hops out. “Want to sit up front?”

“I’ll sit in the back with Goldfish,” she says.

He opens the back door and spreads our towels on the seat and floor, but Stella hangs back when he’s done.

“We should really take my car. Yours is too nice.”

I wave her in. “It can be cleaned. No worries.”

As soon as we’re on our way, Wyatt tells her that there was no xylitol listed on any of the packages. “These are all the brands we got,” he says, handing her the empty bags.

“Okay, good. Maybe we should take these in and show the vet, just in case.”

“Sure thing.”

I drive fast, but not so fast that I might make Stella feel unsafe. This would be a perfect opportunity to get to know her better, but it would be insensitive to talk about anything else right now when she’s worried about her dog.

When I’m stopped at a light, I catch her eye in the rearview mirror. “I can’t say enough how sorry we are about this.”

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“I know you didn’t mean any harm.”

When we check in at the vet, the receptionist warns that we may need to wait an hour or more to see the doctor. I guess it’s a good thing that Goldfish isn’t sick enough to be their top priority. He didn’t throw up during the trip here, either. Another positive sign, I hope.

We take seats in a back corner of the waiting area, and after sniffing everything his leash will let him reach, Goldfish finally lies down beside Stella’s chair with his chest resting on her foot, and falls asleep.

After a few minutes of silence, Stella asks, “How long have you lived in the neighborhood?”

“Almost two years,” I tell her. “Did you just move in recently?” When she nods, I ask, “How do you like it so far?”

“It’s nice. Pretty quiet.”

“It’s good except for marshmallows flying into your yard, right?” Wyatt quips.

She smiles and nods, and it suddenly occurs to me that she probably has no idea why we were flinging marshmallows around.

“We’re content creators,” I tell her.

She lifts her brows. “Is that right?”

“That’s what we were doing with the marshmallows. Having a battle for online content.”

“Oh, do you do kids videos?”

“Not exactly,” I say, and Wyatt shoots me a look that I can’t quite read.

“Is that why the woman at the grocery store wanted a picture with you?” When I nod, she says, “You must be pretty popular.”

“Our channel’s been growing nicely.”

Just then, Goldfish makes a low growling sound followed by a quiet bark, but he’s still asleep, lying on his side, his legs twitching.

“He’s dreaming,” Stella explains. “Probably imagining himself chasing marshmallows around the yard.”

I’m grateful she’s making jokes about the situation, despite her worry.

“How old is your daughter?” I ask.

“Six.”

“Are you divorced?”

In response to my question, Wyatt gives me another look that’s much easier to read. You are an idiot, he says without words. I give him a look back: Can’t blame a guy for trying.

“Never married,” she says, with no other explanation. Sounds good to me, though I

imagine it probably hasn't been easy raising a child without a dad. Hopefully, her friend has been a good support.

Though I'm in no hurry to end our conversation, the vet ends up calling for us sooner than expected. "Want us to go back with you?" I ask Stella.

"No, but thanks. I'll meet you back out here."

As soon as she walks off, Wyatt says, "You just can't stop, can you?"

I shrug. "She's gorgeous. Besides, I'm just trying to get a clear picture of her relationship status. What's wrong with that?"

"She already turned you down once."

"I was just a random stranger in a grocery store this morning. Now, I'm her neighbor."

Wyatt appears to consider that for a moment, then says, "Guess what?"

“What?”

“I’m her neighbor, too.”

CHAPTER10

STELLA

Cam and Wyatt are both looking at me expectantly when I walk back out into the lobby. When I stop at the front desk, they both jump up to join me.

Wyatt runs a hand through his tousled hair. “What did they say? Is he going to be okay?”

“They can’t say for certain yet, but the expectation is that this is just an upset stomach and he’ll be fine. They’re going to run bloodwork, and they gave me medicine for the vomiting. If he still isn’t eating by tomorrow, or if the blood tests show something bad, I’ll need to bring him back in.”

Cam’s posture softens, his shoulders relaxing. “Okay, we’ll be standing by ready to bring him back if we need to.”

When the bill, which is quite sizable due to the emergency service, is presented, Wyatt grabs it. “I’ve got this.”

“We’ve got this,” Cam says, pulling out his wallet.

There's something different about the energy between the men. There's a stiffness that wasn't there before, and a couple of irritated looks exchanged between them. Maybe they had some sort of argument while Goldfish and I were in the exam room.

After they pay and we head back to the car, Cam rushes ahead to open the door for me. A few minutes into the drive home, he asks, "Do you have dinner plans?" Quickly, he adds, "I mean, what were you going to do for dinner? Did this mess up your evening?"

"I'll be making something at home."

Wyatt turns and gives me a grin. "Chicken nuggets?" He's being a smartass, but there's something so charming about his grin, that I can't help but smile.

"Maybe. They're Jessie's favorite, and they're easy. I usually cook while Marissa's on her way home, but this evening didn't go as planned."

"We'll bring dinner over for the three of you," Cam says. "It's our fault your schedule's thrown off."

"You don't have to do that. Taking care of the vet bill was plenty." More than plenty, really. I wonder if Marissa knew how much vets cost before she decided to adopt a dog.

"I know we don't have to," Cam says. "I want to."

"Let me see if Marissa's made anything yet." I text her, first with an update on G, then I ask about food.

"I gave Jessie a snack, but we haven't had dinner yet," comes her reply.

When I relay this to Cam, his grin widens. “Great. We’ll bring something over. How about in half an hour? We’ll get carryout, if that’s okay, so dinner isn’t too late for Jessie. Any allergies or dislikes?”

Wyatt names a popular chicken restaurant chain, and I tell him that anything from there would be good.

This evening has been a hassle, but being treated to dinner, and not having to cook, is nice.

When Cam pulls into my driveway, Wyatt jumps out to open my door. I have to admit they have very nice manners, especially for man-children.

“We’ll see you soon,” Cam calls with a wave before pulling away.

Inside, Jessie runs up and wraps Goldfish in a hug. His tail wags like he hasn’t seen her for years.

A few minutes later, when she offers him a treat, he takes it. I hold my breath, worried the treat will come right back up, but he seems to be fine, and he’s still doing fine when the men show up only twenty minutes later with two big bags in hand.

“How’s Goldfish doing?” Wyatt asks, and Jessie tells them about the treat he ate.

“That’s great!” While Jessie’s petting Goldfish, the men kneel down on her level. “Jessie, we’re sorry for making Goldfish sick,” Wyatt says.

“We were being careless, but we’ll be much more careful next time,” Cam adds.

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She nods, looking thoughtful. “Do you play with marshmallows a lot?”

Both of them chuckle. “Not really, but it was actually fun.”

Goldfish licks Wyatt’s chin, making Jessie giggle. “He likes you!” she says, as little warning flares go off in my head.

The men unpack the food they brought—chicken tenders, macaroni and cheese, green beans, salad, and bread—and then they start saying goodbye.

“Aren’t you going to stay for dinner?” Jessie asks them, and she looks so disappointed about them leaving, that I can’t help but invite them to stay.

Unfortunately, our dining table only has four chairs, but as soon as Jessie sees the problem, she runs off to bring a chair from her bedroom. She returns a few seconds later with one of the small pink plastic seats that goes with the play table in her room.

“That’s meant for a smaller table,” I tell her when she sets it next to the dining table. “You won’t be able to reach your plate.”

Marissa looks between me and our guests. “I’ll sit at the kitchen counter.”

“How about if I take that one?” Cam says, reaching for Jessie’s chair. “It looks pretty sturdy. Then we can all fit at the table.”

He sits down in Jessie’s chair, and my daughter erupts into giggles.

“What’s so funny?” he asks with mock innocence as he looks around as if searching for what might be the cause of her laughter.

His knees are level with his chest, and the little chair has all but disappeared under his body. It’s all so ridiculous, but my chest fills with warmth at hearing Jessie laugh on this night when she’s been so worried about Goldfish.

We all sit down to eat, with Cam somehow making the chair work, even though it leaves him a bit lower than the table. Conversation flows pretty smoothly, and the guys are great with Jessie. They question her about what some of her favorite things are, like colors, foods, and songs, and they even ask to try the special sauce she mixes up for her chicken, which is ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise.

At first I’m surprised how well they relate to her, but I guess it makes sense, since they’re like kids themselves.

While they’re talking to Jessie, I take the opportunity to study them, and decide they’re every bit as good looking as I thought when I first saw them. Almost unfairly so, with their beautiful, thick eyelashes and strong cheekbones.

It’s odd that they’re making online content by having marshmallow battles, yet the woman at the grocery store seemed to appreciate them for their looks. I wonder if she’s representative of their fan base demographics. You’d think the men would just do workout videos or some kind of “hey, girl” motivational messages if they were trying to capitalize on their looks.

As I study them, I can’t find any particular similarities in their features, except that they’re both so attractive. “Are you two related to each other?” I ask when there’s a break in the conversation.

“No, we’re friends from college,” Wyatt says.

“So are we,” Marissa tells them.

A discussion follows about where we all went to school and when, and I’m stunned to find out the men are five years older than I am. It’s hard to believe, because they seem so boyish.

When we’re all done eating, the men help clear the table, and they even try to load the dishwasher, but I stop them. “You don’t have to do that.”

“Alright, we’ll get out of your hair,” Cam says with an amiable grin.

“I hope we can get together again soon,” Wyatt says. “Under better circumstances, that is. And I hope we can have chicken again, too, because Jessie’s really on to something with that special sauce.”

My daughter glows at the compliment.

At the door, when it’s just me and the guys, Cam pauses on the threshold. “Can we get your number ...you know, so we can check in on how Goldfish is doing tomorrow?”

“How many times today are you going to ask for her number?” Wyatt quips, earning a dirty look from his friend.

“Yeah, was this all just a setup to get my number?” I tease.

As we exchange numbers, Cam says, “It’s good for neighbors to be able to get in touch. If you ever need anything, give us a call.”

After they leave, I find Marissa in the kitchen. “They were a lot of fun,” she says. “Not too hard on the eyes, either.”

“Are you interested in them?”

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She smirks. “I might have been, but it was clear that they only have eyes for you.”

While Jessie plays in her room for a few minutes before it’s time to get ready for bed, I catch Marissa up on how I first met the men this morning at the store, and also on Ana’s visit.

“She was horrified to find out how long it’s been since I had sex,” I tell Marissa, who already knows about my years of abstinence. “She encouraged me to go have sex with someone as soon as possible.”

“Well, one of those men would certainly be a good candidate,” Marissa says.

CHAPTER 11

STELLA

Two days later, while I’m working, the doorbell rings, and when I answer it, a delivery truck is already driving off. There’s a box on the welcome mat, which I assume must be Marissa’s, because I’m not expecting anything, but when I pick it up, I find it’s addressed to Wyatt Wilson.

The address doesn’t match ours, either. The house number is one digit off, and the street is the next one over, where Cam and Wyatt live.

I think about texting Wyatt, since I have his number. In fact, the men both messaged me yesterday in a group chat to ask about Goldfish, who’s thankfully back to his normal self. He’s been eating fine, with no more upset stomach.

Since Goldfish is due for a walk, I clip his leash onto his collar, and decide we'll be good neighbors and deliver the package rather than asking Wyatt to pick it up.

The box isn't particularly small, but it's light. Probably a new Nerf gun. Or maybe a LEGO set. I wonder what other kinds of toys they play with.

Then a wicked thought pops into my head. Do they also play with the types of toys grownups play with in the bedroom?

Whoa, where did that come from? I've never played with sex toys. I don't even own a vibrator, but my brain just conjured an image of Cam and Wyatt tying me to a bedpost and tickling me with a feather.

As I turn the corner, I see a couple of cars parked in front of the men's house and another in the driveway. There are two women in one car, who are sitting there talking with their windows down as I go by. Another woman is standing outside of the next car, leaning against it, her body aimed toward the men's home.

When I step onto the walkway that leads to the men's front porch, the standing woman calls out to me. "Hey, who are you? Do you know them?"

I turn, answering automatically, even though I'm bewildered and a little alarmed by the question. "I'm a neighbor. Why?" Did something happen to them?

"Ooh, a neighbor. Lucky you." The woman nods at me, and I turn and continue up the path. Maybe more fans of theirs?

Several seconds after I ring the doorbell, the inner door is opened, and another female voice greets me. Well, greet isn't the right word. Actually, quite the opposite.

"What are you doing up here? I told you you need to keep your distance," the irritated

voice warns.

“Excuse me?”

“You can’t keep bothering the men. They’re trying to work.”

“Um ...I’m not here to bother them. I’m dropping off a package that was delivered to the wrong house.”

Is this one of their girlfriends? Surely Cam wouldn’t have asked for my number if he’s involved with someone, but maybe she’s Wyatt’s girlfriend.

A face appears behind the screen of the security door, assessing me. “Where do you live?”

“Directly behind here. Next block over.”

The woman’s eyes dart out to the street, before the lock clicks and the door opens. “C’mon in.”

“My dog’s with me,” I say.

“That’s okay. C’mon in, little pooch.” The woman’s tone softens as she takes the package from me and sets it down near the door. “Sorry for the inquisition. Can’t be too careful.”

“What’s going on?”

The woman locks the screen door immediately after she closes it behind me.

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“Oh, just the usual. I mean, it doesn’t happen every day, thank god, but once in a while, these women get the idea that they know when the men will be filming, and they hang out trying to get a peek. Some of them even think they might be invited to appear in a video. The guys really need to be more careful about what they say. Or I need to be more careful to edit things out,” she says with a laugh.

She holds out her hand. “Sorry for rambling. I’m Trish, their video editor. I help with their social media management, too.”

“I’m Stella. Nice to meet you.”

“And who’s this?” Trish asks, bending to hold her hand out for Goldfish to smell.

I tell her his name, explaining that my daughter chose it.

“He’s so cute.” She pets him, but Goldfish seems distracted. Maybe he smells the men.

“So you live right behind here?” Trish confirms. When I nod, she says, “Oh, are you the one whose yard was filled with marshmallows?” I nod again, and she says, “I’m so glad your dog is okay.”

“I told them to be careful with the marshmallows,” Trish says, “but boys will be boys. I may be the video editor, but my job description should also include wrangling the men.”

I find it interesting that Trish refers to them as boys, and am glad it’s not just me who

sees them that way. Trish doesn't look much older than me, maybe two or three years at the most.

"Some days, I have to remind them to eat," she says. "Today, they're building some sort of elaborate stunt. I have no idea what it is. Some kind of Rube Goldberg contraption. And somehow, they made a big mess. Cam came in a while ago covered in mud."

"Did I hear my name?" Cam appears from a hallway with just a towel around his waist, his hair wet, and the sight of him momentarily knocks the air from my lungs. "I thought I heard your voice, Stella. How are you?"

I can't even speak for a moment, he looks so good. My god, his chest. I've caught glimpses of it from the way he likes to wear his shirts open, but the full view is—my god, I should have been warned.

I try to avoid looking directly at him as I tell him I'm fine. When he asks about Goldfish and crouches down to pet him, I also try really hard not to notice how broad his back is, but I'm not strong enough to look away.

My body is also taking notice, much as I might try to deny it. I give thanks that I'm wearing a well-lined bra, because my nipples are also responding to what I'm seeing.

The sound of a door opening draws my attention toward the back of the house, and then Wyatt joins us. "Stella, good to see you. Everything okay?" His gaze shifts to where Cam is still petting the dog.

"Everything's fine. I just came by to drop off a package of yours that was delivered to my house by mistake."

"You could've called and I would have come to pick it up, but thank you," he says.

“We needed to walk, anyway.” I glance down at Goldfish, then peel my eyes away from Cam when they get stuck.

Wyatt’s looking pretty compelling himself, in shorts and a loose tank top. There are smudges of dirt on his arms and legs, and he’s wearing a ball cap backward. He looks so young, yet also so much like a man. It’s kind of confusing.

Cam stands and crosses his arms in front of him, which only makes his biceps bulge further. Speaking of bulges, I may or may not have seen one under his towel, and my cheeks feel like they’re flaming. I want to look again to confirm what I think I saw, but I won’t let myself.

Meanwhile, Trish appears to be unfazed by Cam standing there in a towel, and Cam seems completely at ease.

“Well, I’m glad you came by, because it’s always nice to see you,” Wyatt says, making this sound like much more than a pleasantry. The way he’s looking at me isn’t helping the state of my cheeks.

“I’d better get home. I need to get back to work,” I say.

“It was nice to meet you, Stella,” Trish says, also waving goodbye to Goldfish.

Cam opens the door for me, and his bare arm with all its dark hair is so distracting that I almost trip as I leave. “Hope to see you again soon,” he says. “Stop by anytime.”

When he notices the women standing out front, he waves to them.

“Don’t encourage them, or they’ll never leave,” Trish tells him.

Out on the sidewalk, the women pepper me with questions: “Was that Cam in a towel? My favorite videos are the ones where he’s in a towel.” “Was Wyatt there too?” “Did you take any pictures?”

“I’m just a neighbor,” I tell them as I hurry on by.

CHAPTER12

STELLA

One night the following week, I'm in the back yard after Jessie goes to sleep. It's warm out, and I want to relax for a few minutes before I go to bed myself.

Marissa's inside, listening to a crime podcast while she folds a massive pile of laundry. She waits until she's nearly out of things to wear and then does a huge load all at once.

Goldfish was outside with me sniffing around a bit, but he got bored and asked to go back inside with Marissa.

I'm curled in the loveseat that's on the back patio, listening to music on my phone and playing a mindless matching game while I enjoy the way the light breeze feels on my skin.

"Hello," comes a voice out of the darkness.

I startle and look around, finally spotting the top of a head just over the back fence. The thick tousled hair is unmistakable, even in the darkness, though the nearly full moon helps me see his face when his eyes appear.

"Wyatt?"

"Hi, Stella. How's it going?"

I walk over toward the fence. "Just enjoying the lovely night. How about you?"

“I was taking out the trash and thought I heard music from your yard.”

“Oh, sorry. I thought I had the volume down low enough.”

“You do, I just have good hearing. How was your day?”

“It was fine. The usual. What did you guys do? Build a pillow fort?” I’m mostly talking to the wooden fence, but if I shift to the side, I can catch a glimpse of him between the slats.

His laughter is a deep rumble. “No, but that’s a great idea. Our viewers would probably really like that.”

“I’m really confused about who your target audience is,” I admit.

“Sometimes I am, too,” he says, sounding rueful.

“What’s your channel name?”

“It’s kind of dumb. We were much younger when he picked the name.”

“What is it?” It feels like we’re sharing secrets out here in the dark.

“We’re called the Battle Duel Boys, BDB for short.” Then, completely changing his tone, as if he just remembered something, he says, “Hey, do you like chocolate chip cookies?”

I laugh at the quick topic change. “Who doesn’t?”

“I made a batch tonight. Wait here, and I’ll bring one for you to try.”

He returns quickly, handing me a cookie between the slats in the fence, our fingers brushing.

The cookie is still warm, and it melts in my mouth. “You made these?”

“Yeah, do you like it?”

My mouth already full with another bite, I can’t help but gush about it. “I love it. Are you kidding?”

“Good, because I brought a few more for you.” He hands a quart-sized bag filled with cookies over the fence. “You can share them with Jessie and Marissa, or keep them hidden all for yourself. I won’t judge.”

“I might eat them all before I go back inside,” I tell him.

“That also works. Speaking of food, we’d like to have dinner with you again sometime. Maybe just the three of us.” When I don’t answer right away, he says, “Or even better, just you and me. I’ll take you out to someplace nice, and we can leave Cam here.”

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Maybe it's because it's late and I'm tired, but I'm actually tempted, though I'm not sure if I'd rather go out with both of them or with one of them. Cam is entertaining and charming, while Wyatt seems like he'd be someone I could have a long conversation with.

It would be nice to have a grownup night out. And they're both so attractive. But they're not the right kind of men for me, despite how nice they've been.

"I'm... not dating right now," I tell him. "There's just too much going on in my life at the moment."

"That's fine," he says lightly. "If you change your mind, the offer's good anytime." After a pause, he says, "I'll leave you alone with the cookies. Have a good night."

"Thank you for the delicious cookies. You have a good night, too."

As I walk back to the house, I experience a pang of regret. Should I have said yes?

I'm drawn to him—to both of them—even though I know better. They're ridiculously hot, but there's something that doesn't sit right with me about how they make their living.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with what they're doing; in fact, it's really cool that they can have fun while they're earning money. But their lives are on a completely different path than mine.

Maybe if I'd have met them before I had Jessie, I'd feel differently, but I have

responsibilities now, and having fun with guys who play with marshmallows for a living just isn't the right fit.

CHAPTER13

STELLA

The next day, my mom calls to talk with Jessie. It's late when she phones, only fifteen minutes before Jessie needs to get ready for bed.

"You should have called earlier," I say gently, when I tell her she'll need to keep the conversation brief.

"How would I know when Jessie's bedtime is?" is her annoyed reply.

I let out a sigh and bite back my retort. We lived with her until not that long ago; she should know Jessie's bedtime perfectly well. It's not like the little girl turned into a teenager overnight.

"Here's Jessie. You can talk for ten minutes." I hover nearby and hear Jessie say, "I miss you, too," several times, leading me to assume that my mom is repeatedly telling her she misses her. Maybe she should have thought about that before kicking us out of her house in a drunken rage.

I'm glad we don't live with her anymore, but I hate how the move disrupted Jessie's life, and now here's my mom making Jessie sad. It's fine for her to tell her she misses her, but she shouldn't be dwelling on it.

Jessie looks like she's on the verge of crying.

"It's time to say goodbye," I tell her. "You can talk to Nana again soon."

When the call is over, I tell Jessie it's time to take a quick bath, but she refuses, saying she isn't dirty.

"You were running around the yard with Goldfish earlier, so please don't argue. Oh, and before the bath, you need to pick out three outfit options for tomorrow."

She folds her arms across her chest. "I don't want to."

"That's fine. I'll choose something for you to wear."

"No," Jessie says, pouting, but she goes to her drawers and starts looking through her clothes.

This sudden change in her behavior is a direct result of the phone call, and I'm pissed at my mom for upsetting her. I've talked to Jessie about whether she misses nana and pop pop, and she says, "a little," but I worry that she's downplaying her feelings. Even though they weren't the best grandparents—and that's an understatement—they're all that she's known.

I get Jessie through her bath, read her a story, and am relieved when she falls asleep before I reach the end.

I'm tired too, but too wound up to go to bed early. I just want to decompress for a while.

Marissa's watching a reality dating show, with Goldfish curled up next to her, but I can't get into it. So much unnecessary drama. One of the guys looks kind of like Cam, and it's very distracting.

Sitting at the opposite end of the sofa from Marissa, I make sure my phone's on silent, then search for the men's channel. It's not hard to find them, and wow, they

have an incredibly impressive number of followers.

I scroll through several of their videos, trying to keep my face neutral so Marissa doesn't ask what I'm looking at.

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Their posts are fun, and very thirst-trappy.

I find a few about the marshmallow battles, and see that the number of marshmallows in my yard were nothing compared to how many were in theirs. I wonder if any raccoons came in to help them clean up.

The guys may be having good clean fun battling with water blasters and building interesting contraptions, but a quick scroll through the comments makes it clear why they have a large following.

There are countless comments along the lines of: “Take your shirt off!” “Nerfs aren’t the guns we’re here to see,” and in a video where Cam is wearing green lounge pants patterned with a golf ball motif, someone asks, “Can I touch your balls?”

Oh my god, they are definitely not right for me to date, but I have to admit that the videos are pretty tasty.

Among all the smutty stuff, I’m pleased to see they do charitable projects throughout the year. They’ve raised money for breast cancer, children’s health organizations, and several other causes, and a lot of the videos are good, innocent fun, but the ones that are most popular are the spicy ones.

The ones where neither of them are wearing shirts, where they’re flexing muscles, or wearing sweatpants are especially distracting, but they’re not overtly sexual. They’re not porn by any stretch of the imagination, and there’s nothing on their channel, outside of the comments, that’s NSFW.

For the most part, they're just being their own handsome, fun selves and viewers are focusing more on their looks than whatever else the men are doing.

I can't blame the viewers. There's one video of the men shirtless, playing catch with a baseball, but the way their muscles work, and the strength of their upper bodies, is simply mesmerizing.

I let it replay more times than I'd care to admit.

After a while, I make a show of yawning, announce that I'm tired, and say goodnight to Marissa. Then I go to my room and enjoy more of the videos in private.

I'm sure I'm smiling while I'm watching, even though I try not to.

After I get ready for bed, I return to their videos. It's fascinating how their personalities come through in the short clips, even when they're not saying much.

Cam makes eye contact with the camera, so it looks like he's talking directly to a viewer. He's so charming and personable, even on the small screen of my phone, that it feels like he's talking to me and me only. It's easy to see why they've grown such a big following.

There are plenty of shirtless dudes on the internet, but the Battle Duel Boys have a special charisma.

While Cam lays on the charm, even winking at the camera in many of the reels, Wyatt is usually more focused on whatever silly thing they're doing. He appears reluctant to flaunt his body, while Cam purposely holds items right in front of his chest, drawing attention to his pecs in such a blatant way.

There's a video of them building two Adirondack chairs, which they later auction for

charity, that really showcases this difference, with Wyatt focusing on the craftsmanship, and Cam focusing on looking as hot as he can while building his chair.

The funny thing is, he doesn't need to try. His body is gorgeous, and draws attention all on its own.

I'm startled when I notice the time. I'm up way past my bedtime, thanks to these videos. I scrolled much farther than I planned to.

Typically, I fall asleep while I'm looking at something on my phone in bed, but the men kept me awake and engaged.

I check that my alarm is set and put my phone on the nightstand. I still feel too, umm, stimulated to fall asleep, but I do a bit of relaxing breathing, then replay some of their videos in my head, and I start to feel drowsy.

The next thing I know, I'm lying atop a huge pile of pillows, almost like a cloud, and Cam and Wyatt are with me. Cam has his shirt off, of course, and Wyatt's wearing a backwards baseball cap.

Each of them is holding a bag of marshmallows, and they take turns dangling them one by one near my mouth, teasing my lips with the puffy white treats.

I eat a ridiculous amount of them, but I don't have to chew in my dream, and I never get full. There's just a pleasant sensation of the sweet, soft, pillowly texture on my lips.

When the men run out of marshmallows, they're very resourceful. They keep my mouth busy by kissing me.

They take turns giving me tender kisses that gradually turn hotter and spicier. But as

I'm kissing Cam, a bee starts flying around, and I swat at it with one hand, while keeping a firm grip on Cam's strong shoulder with the other.

No matter how vigorously I wave my hand, the buzzing bee won't go away. Its buzz gets so loud, it sounds more like an insistent beeping, and I get the idea that I need to kiss Cam faster, because time is running out.

Oh shit! I squint at the morning sun that's streaming into my bedroom and reach out to slap at my phone screen until the alarm finally stops. How did it get to be morning already? I just fell asleep.

And my dream was just getting good.

Oh god, I was dreaming about the neighbors. I feel vaguely guilty about that, but also ... very turned on.

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I reach into my pajama shorts, where the area between my legs feels sensitive and tingly, and I let out a big sigh. Ana told me to go out and get wet, and here I am getting wet just dreaming about my neighbors.

It feels like if the dream had continued, I might have come. There's a warm, gnawing sensation low in my belly that I haven't felt in a while.

Maybe I do need to start dating—but not these guys. Dating men with hundreds of thousands of followers, who have women hanging around outside their house just for a glimpse of them, would be the exact opposite of keeping my life free of drama and chaos.

But my neighbors are worming their way into my brain.

Maybe I should do my best to avoid seeing them, including staying out of the back yard for a while, and definitely staying off the Battle Duel Boys channel.

CHAPTER14

STELLA

On the weekend, Marissa and I take Jessie to a science museum downtown that has a lot of interactive exhibits for kids. She has a great time getting involved with several of the stations, learning about the body, the weather, and all sorts of different things.

We also watch a show in the planetarium, and my mind keeps wandering to the dream I had about my neighbors.

The dream has been haunting me, filling my mind any time real life isn't demanding. I thought it would fade away after a day, but apparently not.

When we're back out at the exhibits, and Jessie wants to revisit some things she's already looked at, Marissa and I sit down on a bench along the wall.

I consider telling Marissa about my silly dream, because maybe talking about it would clear it from my brain, but I don't really want Marissa to know that I'm attracted to the neighbors.

Plus, it's just all too embarrassing. They were feeding me marshmallows! So ridiculous.

The science museum needs an exhibit about why our brains make up such crazy stories while we're sleeping.

When we're finally able to tear Jessie away from the museum, we go to a nearby cafe for a late lunch. It's a beautiful day, so we sit at a sidewalk table to enjoy the weather.

Just after we order, I think I must be daydreaming again, because the two men walking toward us look exactly like Cam and Wyatt.

I give my head a little shake, sure I'm imagining things, but then Jessie spots them, too.

"It's the guys who live behind our house!" she says, waving at them excitedly, and I have to look again.

The men are wearing crisp khaki pants and nice button-down shirts, and for a change, Cam has his shirt buttoned-up. They look like they work professional jobs, rather than do half-naked stunts for internet fans.

The guys don't notice us at first, but as they get closer, they hear Jessie and smile when they spot her. When they look my way, their grins get even wider, and there's warmth in their eyes.

Their apparent pleasure at seeing me makes my stomach all warm and fizzy, and then I remember my dream, which makes the area a few inches below my belly feel a certain kind of way, too.

"Hi!" Jessie calls out, continuing to wave as the men approach. "Can you have lunch with us?" she asks them.

"It's not even lunchtime anymore, sweetie," I tell her as I check my watch. "It's mid-afternoon. They've probably eaten already."

It's so weird to see the men in person after the dream I had. I feel embarrassed, even though no one knows about the dream but me.

I'm not even sure I'll be able to eat if the men join us. How can I look at them without thinking about what I hoped they were about to do to me in that dream? If I'm honest, I wanted a lot more than marshmallows and kisses.

To my relief, Cam says, "We'd love to have lunch with you, even if it's our second lunch, but unfortunately, we're on our way to an appointment. We'd love to join you another time, though."

Jessie is visibly disappointed, and alarm bells ring. My daughter is getting attached to these men in a small way; how much worse would it be if I dated them and she saw them regularly?

After the upheaval of having to move away from her grandparents, the last thing I want to do is bring people into Jessie's life who may or may not stick around. If I

were to date them, and things went badly, they'd be gone from Jessie's life, too. I'll be much better to keep them as neighbors, who we only see once in a while. I was definitely right to turn down dates with them.

The men say goodbye to Jessie and Marissa, and then I get a goodbye that includes a lingering look from Wyatt, and a wink from Cam, just like in his videos.

Unfortunately, Marissa sees the wink too, and she sees the effect it has on me. My cheeks are definitely flaming.

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She gives me a meaningful look, but doesn't say anything, probably because Jessie's there.

As her eyes track the men's departure, she says, "They sure clean up nice."

"Looks like their moms finally did their laundry," Jessie says.

I give her an odd look, but she returns to the coloring page the restaurant gave her and doesn't say anything else.

Their moms do their laundry? Somehow, that figures. I wonder if the men mentioned this to Jessie when they were over for dinner. I'm about to question her, but the waiter arrives with our food, and I decide to let it pass.

How could men in their thirties have their mothers doing their laundry?

CHAPTER15

WYATT

I find Cam in the kitchen, collecting ingredients on the counter.

"What're you making?"

"My famous bacon mac and cheese."

Cam rarely cooks, and though his mac and cheese is good, I'm not sure where he's

getting the famous designation from. “What’s the occasion?”

“I’m going to have Stella and her crew over for dinner.”

That takes me by surprise. Stella turned down my invitation, but said yes to Cam? “When are they coming?”

He bends down to dig for a pot in the cupboard. “Not sure. I haven’t invited them yet.”

I watch him for a while, as I wonder whether to say anything else. Finally I say, “I invited Stella out. She turned me down.”

Cam makes a face that pretends to be sympathetic. “Sucks to be you.”

“What makes you think she’ll say yes to you? She wouldn’t even give you her number when you first met her.”

He looks over his shoulder from the sink, where he fills the pot with water. “But she eventually gave me her number, didn’t she?”

“Because she’s our neighbor.”

“All I’m doing is being neighborly, inviting her over for a meal.” Before he turns the stove on, he says, “Maybe I’d better make sure they can come over tonight.”

“Are you going to text her?”

“An in-person invitation will be more effective. Want to come?”

I follow him out the door, not sure if I’m hoping he’ll get shot down or be successful.

Then something occurs to me. “You’re counting on Stella’s daughter wanting to come over, aren’t you?”

Cam shrugs. “Like I said, I’m just being neighborly.”

“Sure, dude.”

“So you asked her out and got shot down, huh? What’d she say?”

“She said she’s not dating right now.”

He looks smug when he says, “She’ll start dating soon.”

“That confidence might be setting you up for a fall. She’s not one of our followers.”

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Cam doesn't respond, and a moment later, we're heading up her driveway.

"Want to do push-ups before you ring the bell?" I ask him. "Make your muscles pop?"

He barks out a laugh. "My muscles don't need the extra help."

"Who knows?" I say with a shrug. "They might."

It's early evening, right around the same time we were here when her dog was sick, and when her roommate got home. The roommate answers the door now.

Cam gives Marissa a friendly greeting, then spots Jessie in the living room and waves at her. When Jessie runs to the door, he says, "I'm making a big batch of my famous bacon mac and cheese," and I somehow resist rolling my eyes. "I wondered if you'd all like to come over for dinner."

"Oh, I don't know," Marissa says, looking over her shoulder into their house.

"Did you already have plans for dinner, or is something already cooking?" Cam asks.

"No, actually. Stella was planning to cook, but her work ran late tonight. We were just talking about ordering a pizza."

"Well, pizza is good, but I have to say, my mac and cheese is better." He turns his focus on Jessie. "Do you like mac and cheese?"

The little girl nods enthusiastically, rubs her belly, and says, “Yum yum.”

“Great, sounds like perfect timing,” Cam says. “It’ll be ready in less than an hour. Want to come by our house, or should we bring it over here?”

Marissa stands there looking hesitant, and then Stella appears. “What’s going on?”

“Hey, Stella. We came over to invite you to dinner. Bacon mac and cheese.”

Jessie smiles up at her mother. “He says it’s better than pizza, Mommy.”

“Oh, is that right?” She looks hesitant, too. She’s not dumb. She realizes it’s not just an innocent neighborly dinner, but a ploy to spend time with her.

“Can we go, Mommy, please?”

Stella’s expression makes it clear that she wants to say no, but she doesn’t want to disappoint her daughter. Cam is much smarter than I sometimes give him credit for.

CHAPTER 16

STELLA

I resist the urge to change my outfit, but I do freshen my makeup, justifying that I’d do it if I were going to dinner at any neighbor’s house, not just the super sexy ones.

On the walk over, I have to call Jessie back to us because she keeps skipping ahead. “You didn’t like mac and cheese the last time I made it. Why are you so excited to go eat it at Cam and Wyatt’s house?”

“Because Cam and Wyatt are fun. Maybe their mac and cheese will be good too.”

Her first grade logic turns out to be sound, because the mac and cheese is delicious, creamy and rich, with a generous amount of perfectly cooked bacon on top. There's salad too, and roasted brussels sprouts, and my jaw drops when Jessie eats three of them and asks for more.

It's all so tasty that I eat a bit too much, and I regret it when Wyatt brings out a plate full of his chocolate chip cookies.

While Jessie's oohing and ahing over them, Wyatt bends and whispers in my ear. "Would you like me to create a distraction, so you can grab all the cookies?"

I smile and laugh, but what's actually distracting is how his warm breath so close to my ear makes me feel. And the smell of him, so crisp and clean and manly. I wouldn't be surprised if my pulse rate doubled from that brief exchange, and I'm glad the cookies are attracting everyone's attention, because I'm afraid my reaction to Wyatt might be clear to anyone looking.

Sure enough, Marissa happens to glance my way across the table, and the way she smiles and quirks her brow tells me that she can see exactly how I'm feeling.

Marissa looks at the men, who are both in conversation with Jessie about their favorite types of cookies, then back at me. She tilts her head toward the men and gives me a look that communicates so much, namely: What's wrong with you? You need to get after those men. Especially if they can cook and bake food like this.

I bite my bottom lip and shake my head. We shouldn't have come over here. I'm afraid Marissa is going to join Ana in encouraging me to go out, but neither of my friends have kids, and they sometimes overlook the fact that I have bigger concerns than sex and romance.

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Shit! Why did I have to think about sex? Ever since I walked into the men's home, I've been struggling not to notice how good they look, or think about how they made me feel in that damn dream that I can't get out of my head.

What makes it worse is that even though most of their videos are filmed outdoors, some short ones were done in their house, and being here keeps reminding me of things I've seen.

One type of recurring video on their channel that breaks up all the dueling and battling, is of Cam making morning coffee and wishing their viewers a good day.

There's another really popular type that's a montage of Wyatt, shirtless, doing household chores like dusting, vacuuming, and washing dishes, and their followers go wild on those, with comments offering all kinds of indecent enticements to get Wyatt to come clean their houses.

"Stella?"

"Hmm?"

Cam's calling my name, and when I look up, everyone's looking at me, except for Jessie, who's fully focused on the cookie she's eating.

"Would you like tea or coffee?" Cam asks, sounding like he's repeating the question.

"Sorry, I was lost in my thoughts for a moment. No, thank you. I'm good."

Marissa is giving me yet another knowing look, but I ignore her.

After dinner, we all go into the living room, which looks both lived-in and comfortable, but also tidy and nicely decorated, with a lot of warm, dark tones and rich textures, like the plaid fleece blanket on the back of the sofa, which looks like it would be cozy to curl up in.

Their whole house is neat and clean, in fact. I saw some of it the day I brought the delivery package over for them, but somehow I've still been picturing them living like frat boys, imagining their living room being dominated by a giant pool table piled with red plastic cups, but it's nothing like that.

There's a big-screen TV mounted on the wall, of course, because they are men, but there's a nice wooden coffee table, a sofa and loveseat, and good lighting. It's really inviting, actually. The only nod to their boylike behavior is a big stack of board games on the shelf in the corner, which Jessie is immediately drawn to.

Cam follows her over and asks if she'd like to play a game.

"Ooh, Clue! Can we play Clue?"

"Sure, we can play that," Cam says easily before turning to the rest of us. "Would anyone else like to play?"

Wyatt quickly agrees, and Marissa shrugs and says yes, so I guess we're playing.

The few times I've played Clue, it's been really boring. It's not a game I own, and I'm not even sure how Jessie knows about it. Maybe she saw it at a friend's house.

While Cam sets up the game on the coffee table, he asks Jessie if she's played, and when he finds out she hasn't, he tells her how the game works.

I'm surprised how good he is with her, explaining things perfectly for her age, while not simplifying them so much that it would insult her intelligence. He must have younger siblings.

All of us gather around the table, and what follows is surely the most entertaining game of Clue that has ever been played.

Both men do voices throughout the entire game. "I suspect Colonel Mustard in the ballroom with the rope," Cam says in a comically distinguished British accent.

"I suspect Miss Scarlet in the conservatory with the lead pipe," Wyatt says in a sultry feminine Southern drawl.

Not only do they do the voices, they make up hilarious motives for the suspected murderers that keep Jessie, Marissa, and me laughing through the entire game.

Cam gives Jessie assistance with keeping track of clues, and after several rounds of questioning, he urges her to make a guess that leads her to win the game.

On our walk home, a big bag of chocolate cookies in hand, Jessie raves about what a good time she had, and my own cheeks hurt from smiling and laughing so much.

It was the most fun I've had in a long time.

If only Cam and Wyatt were a bit more mature and serious, with jobs that didn't have thousands of women lusting after them, they might be the perfect men.

CHAPTER17

STELLA

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“Are you working late?” Marissa asks when she finds me hunched over my laptop one evening.

“What? No. Well, kind of.”

She gives me a curious look after that nonsensical reply, and I explain that I found out I’m eligible for tuition reimbursement benefits from Community Bean, so I’m looking into online courses at the community college so I can finish my degree.

“That’s great!”

“I’ll work on it slowly, just one course at a time.”

“That’s good. You don’t want to spread yourself too thin. And you’ll want to keep some time open in your schedule for dating.”

When I frown at her, she says, “How long are you going to keep pretending you’re not interested in the neighbors?”

As I actively ignore the question, Goldfish comes over, sits in front of Marissa, and barks a couple of times.

“See, even Goldfish agrees,” she tells me. To Goldfish, she says, “I’ll take you for a walk soon, buddy. You have to wait.”

“Want me to take him?” I offer. I’ve been sitting too much today, and going out for a walk will be a good way to avoid further questioning about my interest in the

neighbors.

“If you want to.”

“Sure. I’ll just make sure Jessie’s still asleep. Be right back, Goldfish.”

I grab a thin sweater and clip the leash onto G’s collar. Marissa’s usually the one to walk him at night. I walk him during the day, when I purposely steer clear of the men’s house, both to avoid running into them, and to avoid seeing their female fans camped outside.

Now that it’s after dark, I consider walking down their street, and it makes me feel like a schoolkid with a crush. So silly. What will I do next, write their names in my notebook?

The neighborhood is usually quiet, and now at night, it’s extra peaceful. No cars, no other people out. There’s an owl somewhere nearby, calling hoo-hoo-hooooo. I should probably come out at night more often, especially since I’ve been avoiding the back yard.

At the corner, I decide to head in the opposite direction from the men’s house. It’s bad enough that I stalk their channel now, even though I tell myself not to. I don’t need to stalk their house, too.

A sound behind me startles me. It takes a second to realize it’s the sound of someone running, which puts me on edge, but when I spot the man’s silhouette, and clock the steady, unhurried pace, I realize it’s just someone out for a jog.

Goldfish starts barking, even though I tell him to shush, and he doesn’t stop until the man is about to pass us.

Once Goldfish realizes that the jogger is Cam, he immediately stops barking and starts wagging his tail. Actually, his whole body is wagging as Cam crouches down to pet him.

“Good evening.” He looks up at me, flashing a grin that crinkles the outer corners of his eyes.

“Hi.” I’m suddenly shy, which is ridiculous for someone my age, but Cam is, of course, shirtless, and the magnificent muscles on his chest seem to glow under the streetlight.

We just look at each other for a long moment, as Cam finds the sweet spot behind Goldfish’s ear that the dog loves.

“He doesn’t like people running,” I say, feeling the need to fill the silence.

“Hmm?” Cam seems distracted, then says, “Oh, right. How’s your day been?”

“Good. Nothing eventful. How about you?”

“Same. Nothing eventful until now.”

I lift my brows. “Now? What happened?”

Cam rises to standing, his body just inside my personal space. My stomach flutters. “I ran into you. It’s the highlight of my day.”

I laugh a nervous laugh, “Must have been a boring day.”

He frowns at me. “You have no idea, do you?”

“No idea about what?”

“How gorgeous you are.”

I don't know what to say. It's absurd, a man who looks like him, calling me gorgeous.

It must just be his nature to flatter women. He has to always be the most charming man around, charming my daughter, the dog.

“You're beautiful, Stella?—”

All of a sudden, I'm jerked off balance. I quickly regain my footing and see the rabbit that's standing as still as a statue, just a few feet beyond the end of Goldfish's leash, which is straining as the dog tries to reach the rabbit.

Goldfish barks once, and the rabbit suddenly runs to the left, but then just as quickly darts back toward the right, once it's beyond the spot where Cam and I are standing.

In Goldfish's attempt to follow this zigzag action, the dog ends up wrapping the leash around one of Cam's feet and both of mine, effectively tying us together.

“Goldfish, stop!”

The rabbit flees down the road and into someone's yard, and Goldfish tries to go after it, taking up all the leash's slack.

When I bend to attempt to unwrap the leash from my ankles, I lose my balance and

start to fall, but Cam is quicker, catching me in his strong arms before that can happen. He saves me from injury, just like he did when I was almost run over in the grocery store.

I'm not typically accident-prone, so it's bizarre that both times recently that I've almost been knocked over, Cam has been there to catch me. It's like the universe is trying to push us together.

In the grocery store that morning, he released me right away, but tonight, he's much slower to let go. In fact, he pulls me closer, his arms encircling me, pressing my back against his firm chest. "I've got you."

I'm afraid he does, in more ways than he knows.

All the time I've spent avoiding Cam and Wyatt hasn't helped a bit. Even though Cam keeps preventing me from hitting the ground, it's clear that I'm starting to fall hard.

CHAPTER 18

CAM

Stella feels so right in my arms. I didn't lie. She's gorgeous, but there are plenty of other beautiful women in the world.

There's something special about this woman, though. Something that makes me want to keep holding her.

Her dog is still pulling at his leash, and I'm afraid it's going to cut into Stella's ankles. Reluctantly, I take one hand off of her so I can free her feet.

When I bend down, she rests her weight against my back to keep herself steady, and the gesture does something to me. Her needing my support, and relying on my strength, makes me feel like I've got purpose—like she needs me—and I could get used to feeling like this.

These kinds of thoughts probably make me some sort of caveman, but I can't help it.

In a low-volume yell that's respectful of the late hour, Stella calls for Goldfish, and tugs gently at the leash to urge him to give up the chase.

I join in the effort, crouching down and calling for him to come back, and after one final bark in the rabbit's direction, he returns for more ear rubs.

"He really likes you," Stella says.

"I'm very likeable."

The smile she gives me tells me she's starting to agree, but she says, "It's getting late. I'd better get back home."

"I'll walk with you."

"But you were jogging. I don't want to interrupt your run more than I already have."

"I'll jog home after I drop you off. Unless you'd rather walk alone?" I'd like to think I'm pretty good at reading signals, but I don't want to force my company on her if she doesn't want it.

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“Company is nice,” she says, and I couldn’t agree more.

I’d gladly give up my nightly jogs and walk with her instead.

“Jessie’s still talking about game night at your house,” Stella says.

“We’ll have to do it again soon, then. Jessie’s a really smart kid.” It’s the kind of thing I might say to make someone feel good, but in this case, I mean it.

“Thanks. I think so too.”

It would be so easy to take Stella’s hand, and I’d really like to, but being with her is like spotting an elusive animal in the forest. I don’t want to make any sudden moves and scare her off.

We reach her house much too quickly.

“Well, it was nice running into you,” she says. “Thanks for helping me rein in Goldfish.”

“Of course. Any time you need protection from the rabbits that run wild around here, I’m your guy.”

Hearing her laugh is like winning a million dollars.

“Good night,” she says with a small wave.

It's like I'm bringing her home after a date, and all I can think about is how it would be to kiss her.

CHAPTER 19

STELLA

"Are you ready for your call with Dad?" I watch Jessie's face for any signs of sadness or stress, but her response is neutral, as if I'd asked her if she was ready to have dinner or run an errand with me.

"Sure." She puts the crayon she was using back in its box, closes the lid, and follows me out to the dining room for a video chat on my laptop.

Brandon isn't a super-involved father. He does consistently help out financially, which he's legally required to do, but it's a small amount because he doesn't have a great job. Despite completing his engineering degree, while I had to drop out to take care of Jessie, he works in maintenance at a hotel and doesn't make much.

He cares about Jessie, but the two of them never formed much of a bond. I never badmouth him, and several years ago, I suggested things he could do to help improve his relationship with his daughter, but he wasn't much for following through. Jessie seems content with how things are, so it's fine with me.

Unlike my mom and stepdad, he's been supportive of our move, and I'm grateful for that. He understands that I really didn't have any other options.

He used to visit Jessie about once a month, or sometimes only every other month, but now we do video calls.

"Hi, Dad," Jessie says when we're connected. Her voice is like someone starting a

business meeting. Not excited, but not upset, either. I say hello to him, and then let the two of them talk alone while I put away dishes in the kitchen.

Several minutes later, when I hear them wrapping up their conversation, I go in to close the call.

“How was your visit with Dad?” I ask her.

“It was good.”

I keep watching for some kind of emotion or longing for him after these calls, but there doesn’t seem to be any there.

Later, after Jessie’s in bed, I go out to the back porch to relax. It was a warm day and the house feels stuffy.

After I’m outside for about ten minutes, a bad smell arrives on the breeze, and I quickly identify it as pot. I’ve smelled it out here before and a couple of times out in the neighborhood while walking the dog.

The neighbors next door are older; they must be in their yard smoking. I tried it once at college and didn’t like it, but I’ve heard that some people smoke it at night to help them sleep better.

Despite my better instincts, I find myself hoping to see the neighbors who live behind me, but things are quiet over in their yard.

I close my eyes and let out a sigh. I should just go to bed, but it feels so nice outside, despite the unpleasant smell. Maybe there are relaxing properties to secondhand marijuana smoke, because I’m getting sleepy.

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A rustling sound catches my attention, but I decide it must be the breeze. It's not Goldfish; he's inside, sleeping at the foot of Jessie's bed, so I can't blame the noise on him.

I close my eyes again and am starting to drift off when there's a loud crash right next to me on the patio. I jump at the sight of a small furry animal near the back door. A stripe of white fur stands out in the dim light, and I yelp, bounding from the loveseat and off the patio entirely. "Oh my god!"

The skunk watches me for a moment, then apparently decides I'm not a concern. It returns to the flower pot it overturned, digs in the dirt, and uproots the flowers planted there.

I'm muttering curses, with no idea what to do.

The skunk is blocking my path to the back door, Marissa is out with work friends, and Jessie is sleeping.

If I go around to the front, I won't be able to get in, because the door is locked.

I decide to call Marissa, but then realize my phone is still on the patio, left behind when I scrambled to put distance between myself and the skunk. "Shit!"

"Are you okay?" It's a man's voice, and then Wyatt's head appears above the back fence.

"No. There's a skunk on my patio!"

When he says, “I’ll be right there,” I assume he means he’s going to run around the block, but the next thing I know, he’s atop the fence, then jumping down into my yard.

CHAPTER 20

STELLA

“I heard you and Goldfish were terrorized by a rabbit last night,” he says. “Now you’re being attacked by a skunk?”

“At least it’s just me this time. Goldfish is in the house.”

“That’s a relief. Where is the smelly little critter?” It’s dark in the yard, but the light coming through the back window allows Wyatt to spot the skunk before I point it out. “It didn’t spray you, did it?”

“No, but it smells like it sprayed something.”

“I hate to say it, but a full-on attack would smell much worse.”

“Have you had skunks in your yard?”

“Not here, but we had a few come into my parents’ yard when I was a kid. They got our dog twice, and it was miserable.” He shudders at the memory.

“I can imagine.” As we talk, huddled near the back fence, the furry invader continues its gardening, not seeming to care about us at all.

“Do you have anything back here like a rake or maybe a big stick?” Wyatt asks.

I think for a moment, looking around. “There’s a broom, but it’s over there.” I point to where it’s propped against the house on the other side of the patio.

“That’ll work. And do you know where there are any holes in your fence?”

I point to the right. “Up front on that side. There’s a small spot where it might have come in.”

He nods and starts off toward the house, but I grab his arm. “Won’t it spray you?”

“I’ll be careful.”

As I hang back watching, Wyatt moves stealthily toward the broom, and manages to grab it without attracting the skunk’s attention. I expect him to use it to push the skunk toward the side of the house, but instead he pulls out his phone and aims his flashlight toward the ceiling of the patio, illuminating the area. Then he starts tapping the end of the broom handle on the concrete, softly at first, and gradually more loudly.

He’s wearing a loose-fitting tank top that gives me a great view of his upper body, even in the dim light, and I can’t help thinking that all of this would probably make good content for the Battle Duel Boys channel.

The skunk abandons the flower pot and ambles toward the house, then turns and heads away from Wyatt and the noise he’s making.

As Wyatt follows the skunk’s retreat at a distance, continuing to repel it, there’s another voice from the other side of the fence. “What’s going on?” Cam asks.

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“There’s a skunk in my yard. Wyatt’s chasing it out.”

Cam comes over the fence the same way Wyatt did, and quickly scopes out the action before turning to me, taking my arms in his big hands and assessing me. “Are you okay? You smell okay.”

I grin and nod. “Gee, thanks. Yes, I’m fine.”

“What about Goldfish?”

“Inside, luckily.”

“Great.”

He releases me, and I feel an immediate pang of disappointment.

He has a shirt on for a change, but of course, it’s almost fully unbuttoned, adding to the feeling that I’ve somehow ended up in the middle of one of their videos. Today, it’s a skunk battle!

Cam heads toward the side of the house, following Wyatt around the corner, and both of them disappear into the darkness. With the skunk out of sight, I hurry over to the porch and grab my phone. Using its flashlight, I trail after them, and find them both near the part of the fence that faces the street.

“He’s gone,” Wyatt says. He props the broom against the house and scans the ground with his light. “I’ll block the hole for tonight, and we can come back tomorrow and

do a more thorough job.” He picks up one of the large rocks that forms the border of a flower bed and wedges it against the hole in the fence.

“We’ll check to see if there are any other holes, too,” Cam says. “Wire mesh will work well to keep the critters out.”

“Or we can find a black cat with a white stripe on its back that the skunk can fall in love with,” Wyatt says.

When I give him a confused look, he says, “Pepé Le Pew?”

I snort out a laugh. “Of course. I should have thought of that. I guess I’m just tired.”

Cam puts an arm around me and rubs my shoulder in a way that’s meant to be encouraging, but ends up making me long for more of his touch.

He keeps his hand there, rubbing his thumb into a tense muscle as we return to the patio, where the skunk made a bigger mess than I thought.

“What a little vandal!”

“Guess he wanted to help with your gardening.” Wyatt stoops to set the pot upright, and Cam joins him, both of them scooping up handfuls of dirt and returning it to the pot.

“I think it’ll be okay,” Wyatt says.

“You don’t have to do that,” I tell them.

“Already done.” Cam stands, rubbing his hands on the sides of his shorts to brush off the dirt.

“Thank you both very much for your help tonight,” I say. “I didn’t know what to do. It was blocking my path to the door, and I don’t have the key to the front door on me.”

“You can always call on us,” Wyatt says.

“I really appreciate it. I’ll have to make you some chicken nuggets or something, as a thank you.”

Cam tilts his head to one side, and something in his expression tells me he’s about to cause trouble.

“Or you could give us each a thank-you kiss,” he says with a wicked grin.

CHAPTER 21

WYATT

As I’m giving Cam the dirtiest of dirty looks—because why is he suggesting Stella repay a kindness with kisses she most likely doesn’t want to give—something in her expression stops me.

She’s considering it.

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Not only is she considering it, the shy smile on her lips tells me she likes the idea.

“Give you a kiss?” she asks, sounding like she’s inviting encouragement.

Cam takes a step closer to her. “Yeah. Just a kiss.”

After a long pause, she says, “I suppose I could do that.” She stares back at him for a moment, considering, though it’s clear she’s already made her decision.

She goes up on her toes, putting one hand on Cam’s shoulder, then the other. I’m expecting her to aim for his cheek, but she goes straight for the lips, triggering a jab of jealousy that’s like a kick in my stomach.

I’m too stunned to look away at first, but when the kiss continues, I not only avert my eyes, I also turn my back to them. I don’t want to watch, but curiosity instantly eats away at me.

How long is the kiss going on? Are hands getting involved? The image of them together is already burned on my brain like a nightmare, and I’m shocked at how strongly I feel about it.

Then Cam clears his throat, and I turn back to find Stella fully separated from him and looking at me.

As conflicted as I am, I still move toward her without any forethought, like nothing could keep me away. When she looks up at me, I’m gentleman enough to say, “You don’t have to do this.”

“You don’t want me to kiss you?”

“I didn’t say that. But I don’t want you to feel obligated.”

She shakes her head, a small movement, her eyes on mine the whole time. “That’s not why I’m kissing you.”

I swallow the lump that’s formed in my throat. Knowing Cam’s interested in her too, I hadn’t envisioned this.

I’ve thought about a few other things that involved Stella and me, but those were only because I couldn’t control the way my dirty mind wanders.

But a kiss? Somehow I’m unprepared.

Luckily, my body knows what to do. I close the distance between us and wrap an arm around her waist, pulling her to me with more force than is probably necessary.

Her pretty pink lips form a small round “oh” of surprise, and then those lips are pressing against mine, all sweet and soft, like something I could get lost in for hours.

All of her is sweet and soft, from her back, where my hand is pressing her closer, to her hair, which brushes against my face in the evening breeze, and the scent of her, which washes away any memory of what originally brought me to her yard tonight.

I want more from the kiss, but now isn’t the time. I want more, and I want her to want more, too. When she tilts her head and starts to take another taste, I briefly capture her top lip, tug gently, then pull away.

The highlight of my week—actually, my month and maybe my year—is the look in her eyes after we part. Slightly dazed and surprised with a pout of frustration. She

does want more.

“We’ll be over tomorrow morning to patch up the fence,” Cam says after clearing his throat again.

“I’ll be over with a herd of skunks, so you’ll have a reason to kiss us again,” I tell her, loving the look she gives me in response.

“A surfeit,” Cam says.

“What?”

“A group of skunks is called a surfeit, or sometimes, more suitably, a stench.”

“A stench of skunks?” Stella says. “That’s very appropriate.”

“Why do you know that?” I ask him, and he shrugs.

We reluctantly say goodbye, and Cam and I leave through the gate to walk back around to our house rather than jumping the fence again. Neither of us says anything until we round the corner.

“What’s the plan?” I ask.

“What do you mean?”

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“I’m not going to step aside while you pursue her.”

“I never suggested you should.” He sounds oddly calm.

“Then what are we going to do?”

“About what?” Why is he purposely being so obtuse?

“We both like her.”

He shrugs. “I don’t see a problem. She can decide who she likes. Or maybe she wants both of us.”

CHAPTER 22

STELLA

When I go back inside, Marissa is in the kitchen making a cup of tea.

“Oh, you’re home.” I try to keep my voice level. “How was your work thing?”

“Not nearly as good as your back patio thing.” She pins me with a look. “Which one was better?”

“Which one what?”

“Who’s the better kisser?”

“Oh, you saw that?” I’m failing at nonchalance, but I give it my best effort.

“Yeah, I mean, I wasn’t trying to spy on you, but when I saw that there was more than one figure out on the patio, I had to find out what was going on. What I saw was a bit of a shock,” she says.

“Bit of a shock for me, too. But those were just thank-you kisses.”

“Thank-you kisses?” My friend’s voice drips with skepticism.

“There was a skunk on our patio, and I got trapped outside with it?”

Her eyes widen. “Really? Well, ordinarily a skunk would be exciting news, but let’s focus on what’s important first. Those were not thank-you kisses. Unless it was thank you for having the faces and bodies of gods. Let me stick my tongue down your throats.”

“Marissa! There was no tongue involved. And my god, you’re starting to sound like Ana.”

“I guess she has rubbed off of me. So you kissed them to thank them for chasing away a skunk? Weirdest excuse I’ve ever heard, but okay.”

“Cam suggested it. And ...I was grateful about the skunk.”

She snorts out a laugh, then gives me another skeptical look.

“Okay. I was curious.”

“So am I. How were they?”

I consider downplaying how amazing the kisses were, but I'm not that much of an actress. "Good. Really good."

Marissa nods, as if this confirms exactly what she expected.

"They offered to come by tomorrow to patch up the fence, so the skunk can't get in again."

"No doubt they'll want more thank-you kisses."

I shake my head at her, even as my stomach flutters at the thought of kissing them again. "It's late. I'm going to get ready for bed."

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“Sweet dreams,” she calls after me with a smile in her voice.

It takes quite a while to get to my sweet dreams, because I have a really hard time falling asleep. Even though I try to distract myself by thinking about mundane things, my brain keeps replaying the kisses.

The way Cam’s thumb gently stroked my cheek as his lips pressed mine. How exciting it felt to be so close to his body. The way Wyatt took control so completely. A shiver—the good kind—runs through me at the thought of it.

I’m glad Marissa didn’t persist in asking which kiss was better, because I could never choose.

The longer I lie there trying to fall asleep, the more surreal it all seems. I can’t believe I kissed them, and I’m still not sure what came over me. I know I shouldn’t have done it, because it’s only going to make it harder to stop thinking about them.

Sure, I was curious, and maybe I got caught up in the excitement of the evening. When Cam made the suggestion, it seemed like the perfect opportunity, and I can’t bring myself to regret it. In fact, if I had any regrets, it’s that both kisses were too short.

Squeezing my pillow to fluff it, I roll over onto my other side. It’s impossible to relax with the kind of wild excitement that’s running through my veins right now. I haven’t felt this way since ... well, maybe ever. Maybe Ana is right that I’m like a virgin again, because I feel like I just experienced my first kiss—times two.

* * *

As promised, Wyatt and Cam arrive at my front door the next morning shortly after nine with a bag full of supplies.

“We know you’re busy working and we don’t want to disturb you, but we’ll make sure no more smelly vandals can get into your back yard,” Wyatt says.

I feel closer to them after the kisses, like I know them better somehow, but I also suddenly feel shy.

Those kisses were potent. So much better than how it felt to kiss them in that weird dream about the marshmallows, and now that I’m face-to-face with them this morning, I can’t stop thinking about kissing them again.

“Do you have someone who cuts your lawn?” Wyatt asks.

“Marissa and I do it, though neither of us particularly enjoys it, so we tend to let it get a little long.”

“So you have a mower?” When I nod, he says, “We’ll take care of it.”

I shake my head. “You don’t have to do that.”

“I know. I want to do it.”

“Don’t you have to work, too?”

Cam shrugs this off. “I can record some footage while we cut the grass, so we can be working and trimming the lawn at the same time.”

It sounds ridiculous, but I know their followers will love watching them cut grass. In fact, I'm going to have a hard time not watching them, especially since I just know they're going to have their shirts off while they do it.

"Will the noise from the lawnmower disturb your work?" Wyatt asks.

"I think it'll be okay, but really, you don't need to do that."

"You work hard," Cam says. "What's wrong with letting someone help you once in a while?"

"Okay, but I can pay you."

"No, you can't. We're just being neighborly." Cam nods toward my laptop, sitting open on the dining table. "You'd better get back to work."

So I do, though I'm very distracted by the thought of the men working in my yard, and I lose all train of thought when either of them passes by the back door.

It's like a live-action Battle Duel Boys reel, all for my own personal viewing, but then I remember that they're recording footage to post for all their followers. The jealousy that accompanies this thought isn't rational.

After about an hour, Wyatt knocks on the back door. "Do you have time to come outside so we can show you the places we patched the fence?"

They lead me to the side of the house where the skunk exited, and then also around to the other side, where they found another small hole.

"Your yard is secure now," Wyatt says with a satisfied grin.

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“Thank you for that, and for cutting the lawn, too. I really appreciate it.”

“No big deal.”

Maybe it’s no big deal to them, and it’s just basic yard work, but it gives me a strange feeling.

No man has ever made me feel like he was taking care of me, not even my father or stepdad. Another wave of shyness hits me, along with some other kind of tender emotion I can’t quite name, and I have to look away from the men.

CHAPTER23

CAM

Stella doesn’t seem in any particular hurry to get back inside, so I keep the conversation going. “How are you feeling about what happened last night?”

Something hot flashes behind her eyes, but her smile turns playful. “You mean about the skunk? It was kind of scary.”

I slide my foot closer to hers, and tap the toe of her clog with my shoe. “That’s not what I’m talking about.”

She puts on a sweetly innocent face. “Oh, did something else happen last night?”

If it wasn’t blatantly obvious that she’s joking, I’d be hurt. That kiss was much too

good to forget.

“I had a great evening, despite almost getting skunked,” Wyatt says.

I tap her foot once more. “Can I ask why you don’t date?”

She half shrugs and looks down at our feet, where mine is resting near hers. “I don’t know. It’s complicated as a single mom.”

I nod at that. I can’t imagine the amount of work that goes into raising another human, and Stella is obviously doing a damn good job at it.

“With Jessie and with work, I’m busy, and I’m just not interested in going out and having fun for fun’s sake.”

Wyatt and I both frown at that. “You deserve to go out and have fun,” he says. “In fact, I’d argue that it’s like the oxygen mask thing on planes. You need to take care of yourself first, so you can better take care of others.”

She shrugs again, looking everywhere except at us.

She’s interested. She wanted to kiss us last night, and I can tell she’d enjoy going out with us, too, or I wouldn’t be trying to persuade her.

“Surely you can take a few hours off from mom duty?” I suggest. “Can Marissa watch Jessie?”

“She could ...”

I clap my hands together once. “Then it’s settled. When would you like to go?”

“Wait, I never said I was going.”

“Just one date, Stella. That’s all. Then you can return to your no-dating policy. Though I doubt you’ll want to.”

She’s looking at me when she asks, “Is this date with you, or both of you?”

“Both of us.”

Her eyes widen. “Where would we go?”

I shrug and grin at her. “A little mystery is part of the fun.”

“What he means is that we don’t know yet either,” Wyatt says.

“Yeah, he’s right,” I say. “The mystery is part of the fun for us, too.”

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When Stella laughs, I say, “See? You’re having fun already.”

“Let us know what night you’re free, and we’ll make ourselves available,” Wyatt tells her.

Stella tilts her head, looking adorable. “I still haven’t agreed.”

“You have,” I tease, but then I put on a formal posture and bow in front of her.

“Stella, will you do us the honor of going on a date with us?”

Giggling, she says, “I will, but under one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“No more kissing.”

Hmm. Not what I was expecting her to say, but very interesting. I have no doubt she enjoyed kissing me, so I suspect her condition has to do with her not wanting to get carried away.

“Was Cam that bad of a kisser?” Wyatt quips.

“Like hell,” I mutter, offended even though I know he’s joking.

“Kissing you both made my head cloudy,” she says. “And it makes things complicated. You said this is about going out and having fun, so can we just do that?”

“Absolutely,” Wyatt says.

I nod, and give her a smile. “We won’t hold it against you if you change your mind.”

CHAPTER 24

STELLA

Marissa is, of course, more than happy to watch Jessie for me. “I’m so excited that you’re finally going out,” she says.

“I won’t stay out late.”

“Stay out as late as you want,” she says. “Just let me know if I need to take Jessie to school in the morning.”

“Very funny. I’m not going to spend the night with them!”

I’m trying to decide what to wear, but it’s impossible. I send a text to the men: “I need some idea of where we’re going so I know what to wear.”

“Just dress comfortably,” comes the reply from Cam, which isn’t much help.

I end up wearing casual pants, a nice blouse with buttons up the front, and flats. I curl my hair into soft waves, something different from the mom bun the guys usually see me in.

I take care with my makeup, and wear a pretty pink lipstick that I usually don’t bother with, though I remind myself that my lips won’t be getting any action tonight.

Despite deciding that I’m not going to kiss them again, when they come to pick me

up, my stomach flutters with the same excitement it had that night.

Cam's driving his sports car again, and tonight I'm escorted into the front seat. I know from our trip to the vet that the back seat is surprisingly spacious, but when Wyatt gets in, he makes the space look small.

"I can sit back there," I offer.

He pats the seat next to him. "Sure, c'mon back."

"I meant I'll trade with you. There's more leg room up here for you."

"I'm fine here, but I'd be better if you were back here with me," Wyatt says.

"She's staying up here with me," Cam tells him.

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As he drives off, Cam asks, “Do you like teppanyaki?”

The word sounds familiar, but I can’t place it. “I don’t think I know what that is,” I tell him.

“It’s a Japanese style of cooking, where they cook food on a griddle at your table,” he says.

“Oh, right. I’ve seen that on TV, but I’ve never had it.”

“Are you up for trying it?”

“Sure, I’m up for anything.”

When Cam glances my way, there’s a little flare of heat flashing in his eyes.

At the restaurant, Wyatt opens the car door for me and offers his hand to help me out.

He keeps hold of my hand as we walk to the door, and it’s wild how much of a distraction this simple gesture is. Partly because I’m wondering if Cam notices and if he minds, but mostly because Wyatt’s touch is sending my body on alert. My skin is tingling, and my nipples feel sensitive.

Get a grip, I tell myself. It’s just hand holding.

After a short wait, we’re taken to a large rectangular table that has seating for eight people around a built-in cooking surface. Cam holds out a chair for me at a corner of

the table, and he and Wyatt sit on either side of me.

A man and a woman are already seated at the other end of the table, and another couple is brought over to join us. I wonder if it seems odd to the other people that I'm here with two men.

I'm relieved that neither of the women seated with us seem to recognize Cam and Wyatt from their channel.

The men look especially good tonight. Cam's wearing dark jeans with a light olive green button-down shirt, which is actually buttoned up for a change, and Wyatt has on a dark gray short-sleeve linen shirt with gray chinos. They both smell good, too.

Shortly after we place our food orders, a chef comes to the table and doesn't just cook, but puts on a fun show, with impressive knife skills and some jokes. At one point, he flips a small piece of shrimp at Cam, and Cam manages to catch it in his mouth.

The food is delicious. Each of us ordered a different protein, and we sample each other's food. I can't decide what I like best, because it's all so good.

"Do you think Jessie would like this restaurant?" Cam asks when we're nearly done.

"She'd probably like the food, but the part where the chef created all the flames might be a little scary for her."

I finish the last drop of the cocktail I ordered, something with lychee, pineapple, and vodka in a fancy glass. "It'd be fun to bring Jessie here, but it's nice to have a night out as an adult."

"That's good," Wyatt says. "Would you like another drink?"

“Oh, no. That one was plenty.”

“Ready to go to our next destination, then?” Cam asks.

“There’s more?” This was already like dinner and a show.

“Of course,” Wyatt says. “We’re just getting started.”

On the way out, it’s Cam who takes my hand, but I don’t sense anything competitive in the gesture. In fact, he does it in such an easy and casual way, as if it’s something he’s done a million times.

But there’s nothing ordinary about it for me. It triggers all the same fluttery feelings I had when Wyatt held my hand.

The next part of our date is an escape room.

“Have you ever done one?” Cam asks.

“No, they sound like fun, but I don’t think Jessie’s old enough for it yet,” I say. Actually, I thought escape rooms were for kids, and it figures that these guys would choose an activity like this, being overgrown boys themselves.

The room we play has a colorful candyland theme. “We thought it would be appropriate,” Wyatt says. “Maybe marshmallows will be involved.”

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I hang back and mostly just watch at first, because it all seems kind of silly, but the guys get me involved in solving a puzzle, and the next thing I know, I'm rushing around the room with the two of them, trying to figure things out.

"Why is this so tricky when it looks like a kid's game?" I wonder aloud at one point.

"We've heard that the operators can adjust the difficulty based on who's playing," Cam says.

I get so caught up in the action that when we solve the room with only three minutes to spare, I hug each of the guys, not realizing that hugging them only makes me wish I was kissing them. These men are too tempting.

When we leave, the parking lot is empty. Escape rooms must not be too busy on weeknights.

With no one around, the men both put their arms around me for the short walk to the car. Wyatt's arm is around my shoulders and Cam's is around my waist, and if I thought that physical contact with one of them was a lot, being touched by both of them together is so much more.

Trying to distract myself from all the ways my body is going wild, I force myself to make conversation. "I'm surprised how fun that was," I tell them. "I usually just like to relax in my spare time, but that was invigorating."

Wyatt squeezes my shoulder. "We should definitely go again some time. They also have a room themed with superheroes, and a scary one."

“But that would mean going on a second date,” Cam says. “Against your policy.”

“Okay, maybe I’ve been a little too rigid. Much as I love Jessie, it’s been fun to have a night off from Mom duty.”

“Being a mom is hard work,” Wyatt says. “You need a break sometimes.”

“Well, this has been a really fun night,” I say when we reach the car. “Thank you.”

“The night still isn’t over,” Cam says.

CHAPTER 25

WYATT

Stella checks her watch. “I shouldn’t stay out too late.”

“Of course not, but we need to have dessert,” I say. “I worked up an appetite running around that candy landscape.”

“I ate so much at dinner that I’m not sure I can eat dessert,” Stella says as she settles into the passenger seat.

“I made chocolate chip cookies.”

“And we have ice cream and hot fudge,” Cam adds.

She laughs. “Well, I certainly can’t pass that up.”

As we’re driving back to our house, Stella asks about our relationship histories.

“We’ve dated a lot, but nothing too serious or long term. We’ve been focused on growing our channel,” Cam says.

“Do you usually date women together?”

“This is the first time,” he tells her.

After a pause, Stella asks, “So why are you taking me out together?”

“Because we both like you,” I say, refusing to feel like a third wheel even though I’m in the back seat.

She turns and gives me a smile. “I appreciate not having to choose between you.”

After a couple of minutes of comfortable silence, Stella says, “I have something silly to confess. That morning when I first met you at the grocery store, I thought you were following me home. I thought you were some kind of creeps.”

“Well, technically, we were following you home, or at least close to your home,” I say.

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Cam laughs. “Glad we made such a great impression on you.”

“As a woman, you can’t be too careful.”

“Yet we managed to lure you to our home with a trail of marshmallows,” I say.

At our house, we make hot fudge cookie sundaes. Stella’s is small, while Cam and I put several scoops of ice cream in our bowls. We take them into the living room to eat, and they’re good, but when I catch sight of Stella licking fudge from her spoon, I’m nearly too distracted to finish my dessert.

We don’t talk much as we eat, but all three of us are watching each other and saying things with our eyes.

At one point, Stella’s shoulders quiver.

I set my bowl down and put my arm around her, rubbing her shoulder. “Got a chill? Did the ice cream make you cold?”

I’m not sure she’s telling the truth when she says, “I guess so.”

I take her empty dish and set it on the table, then pull her to me, wrapping my other arm around her in a hug.

Then I pull the throw blanket from the back of the sofa and cover her with it. I settle her back against me so that her head is resting on my chest, and a sense of calm falls over me.

This is where she's supposed to be.

I continue to rub the side of her arm and savor the nearness of her for several long minutes.

"I'd better not lie here like this, I might fall asleep." Contrary to her words, she curls closer. Her body is relaxed, but when she looks up at me, her eyes are saying something else.

Cam gets up and moves next to her, sitting on her other side. "We can't have you falling asleep on your date. You'll think we're boring."

She shakes her head. "The last thing you are is boring."

When he tucks a strand of her hair behind her ear and leans closer, she asks, "What are you doing?"

"It looks cozy over here. Thought I'd join you." I expect to be bothered as he settles in beside her, but surprisingly, I'm not. Not as long as Stella's still in my arms.

As he continues to toy with her hair, she says, "Remember. No kissing." She sounds breathless.

"No kissing on the lips, right?" Cam touches a spot on her neck. "How about here?"

Sometimes my friend is so clever.

CHAPTER 26

STELLA

I can't believe Cam wants to kiss me while I'm lying in Wyatt's arms.

And Wyatt isn't saying anything to protest. In fact, he's stroking my arm and nuzzling his nose in my hair. I'm suddenly surrounded by the two of them, and it's overwhelming in the very best way.

But persuasive as they are, they're not forcing anything on me. Their easygoing demeanors make me certain that if I said I wanted to leave right now, they'd stop what they're doing and take me home.

I feel like I'm on a very slippery slope right now. Actually, I've been slipping and falling ever since I first kissed them, and now that I'm in their arms, momentum is building.

"Can I kiss you here?" Cam asks again, swirling the tip of his finger on a spot on my neck that I never knew was so sensitive.

I nod, desperate to know how his lips will feel on that spot. He kisses me there, softly at first, but then he uses the tip of his tongue and then his teeth to nip gently and turn me into a puddle.

Meanwhile, Wyatt slips his fingers under the bottom of my shirt, the warmth of his hand rough on my skin.

Cam traces his finger over to a spot on my collarbone. "How about here?"

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My breathing has grown shallow, but I manage to say, “Okay.”

Wyatt’s hand smooths up my side toward the bottom edge of my bra as Cam’s head dips lower, pressing a hot kiss to his target.

“Would you like us to stop?” Wyatt whispers in my ear. He strokes a finger along my jaw, under my chin, and directs my gaze toward him, where he’s waiting for an answer. “Everything is your call.”

“I don’t want you to stop.”

I have no idea how far they plan to take things, and no idea how far I want them to go.

I didn’t think things would head in this direction while I was with both of them. Going on a date with them together is one thing; having them kiss and touch my body at the same time is something else entirely. It’s incredible.

Wyatt’s lips brush my cheek, then gently tug at my earlobe as his hands graze the underside of the cups of my bra.

Cam kisses a trail back up to the side of my neck as his hand takes hold of my hip.

It’s getting harder to tell where one man ends and another begins. Or what’s up and what’s down. I’m getting dizzy with lust.

“That feels so good,” I tell them both, about nothing in particular. It all feels so good.

Wyatt runs his thumb over my nipple, and my body quivers. Cam moves the blanket aside and unbuttons my blouse, from top to bottom, kissing a line down my center as he goes.

I'm glad I wore my prettiest bra, because it's getting a lot of attention, both men running their fingers along its edges and over the cups, turning my nipples into such hard points I'm surprised they don't cut through the lace.

Wyatt leans me forward and slips the sleeves of my shirt off my arms. Cam peels one of the cups of my bra down and sucks the nipple into his mouth. My back arches, and Wyatt repositions himself so that he can reach my other breast, and then both of them are sucking on my nipples, making me squirm on the sofa.

Just the sight of these two gorgeous men enjoying my body is nearly overwhelming, but the sensations are incredible, too. Desire spirals up inside me, making me light-headed and needy and feeling like I might burst out of my skin.

Cam sucks more insistently at my breast, Wyatt drags his teeth over my pebbled flesh, and my vision goes blurry.

"Oh god. It's too much." It's almost a struggle to catch my breath.

"Want us to stop?" Wyatt looks up to ask this question, and the sight of his face right there at my breast, my nipple at his lips, almost sends me over some invisible line.

I shake my head. "I don't think so."

"C'mere." Wyatt grabs my hips, and Cam moves aside as Wyatt pulls me onto his lap, letting my knees fall on either side of his thighs. I'm topless, straddling him.

A flicker of self-consciousness ripples through me. My stomach is soft, nothing like it

was the last time a man saw me this way, but Wyatt doesn't seem to mind. His eyes eat me up like I'm more delicious than the sundaes we just had.

He tugs me forward, and I catch a glimpse of the sizable bulge in his pants just before I'm sitting atop it.

He cups my breasts in his big hands, pinching my nipples between his thumbs and forefingers, stroking his fingers over them again and again, until I let out a whimper.

He lifts his hips, pressing himself between my legs. When I shift to adjust my position, he grasps my hips and grinds me down onto him. "Use me for your pleasure."

I freeze. I can't possibly do that with him watching me, not to mention Cam, who's watching too, but the gnawing ache between my legs urges me on, and when Wyatt sees my hesitation, he moves me on him again.

Oh my god, it feels so good. Just the right amount of pressure, right over the spot where it feels the best. He's so thick and hard between my legs. God, what would it feel like to have him inside me?

I roll my hips once, and warmth flares into my belly.

"That's it." His gaze drops to my core then slowly returns to my face, an appreciative smile curving his lips. "You're so beautiful, Stella."

He bends his head to suck one of my nipples into his mouth, and Cam's hand comes around to cup the other breast.

I grind down on him, then lift up just enough to slide my heat over the length of his constrained erection. Wyatt splays a hand over my hip and strokes his thumb over my

center when I lift up again, making my eyes go wide.

He keeps hold of my hips, encouraging me to use his body for my pleasure. As soon as I release my shyness and let myself take what I want, I'm instantly overcome. Pleasure races through me faster than I can comprehend what's happening. Sensations spiral out to every limb. My pussy throbs, like it's trying to pull Wyatt's cock inside me through our clothing.

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Despite the fact that he's not inside me, the orgasm is solid and very satisfying, like it was a long time coming. I'm exhilarated and alive.

Wyatt's hands continue to hold my hips as I recover, and then my self-awareness races back in. I just came while he watched. I took my pleasure without a thought for his. In my mind, I'm covering my face, sliding off his lap, and running out of the room, but I'm too old for behavior like that. I'm embarrassed though, until I let myself look at Wyatt's face and see that it's filled with joy and admiration.

He arches a dark brow and licks his lips. "That was hot."

I can't imagine seeing myself the way he does, but his words do a pretty good job of cutting through my regret.

Lips press to the back of my neck before Cam whispers in my ear. "So damn hot."

"I can't believe I did that," I tell them.

"Mmm ... I'm so glad you did." Wyatt leans in, about to kiss me, then swerves his head at the last moment. "Almost forgot. No kissing."

This makes me laugh, dissolving almost all of my self-consciousness.

"Don't forget. No kissing on the lips," Cam scolds as he lays a line of kisses up my back. His hands come around to cup my breasts again. "Think you have another one in you?" he asks.

“Another one?”

“I want to make you come.”

“Oh. Um ...I’ve never come more than once.”

“Mmm ... good,” he says, kissing my shoulder. “You never had teppanyaki or played an escape room before, either. It’s a night of firsts.”

CHAPTER 27

CAM

Stella looks at me like she’s not sure if I’m serious.

I arch a brow in response. Challenge accepted.

By the way she got off on Wyatt’s lap, I don’t think it’s going to be difficult at all.

I tap her shoulder. “Turn around.” I help her slide backward and stand up, then tug at one of her belt loops. “Okay if I take these off?”

Her eyes go big, and for a moment, I’m afraid I’ve pushed too far. “I’m not trying to have sex with you. It’s too soon for that. I just want to make you feel really good.”

“It’s been a long time since I ...” Her words trail off as her eyes flicker toward the floor.

“Then this will be perfect. Nothing you need to do but enjoy yourself.”

“What are you planning to do?” Her question is quiet as a whisper.

I cup her chin so she'll look at me. "Since I can't kiss you here—" I brush my thumb over her bottom lip. "I'm going to kiss you here." I trace a line from her hip toward her center, not quite touching her there ... yet.

She's quiet for a moment, then barely audible when she says, "No one's ever done that."

"Oh, Stella." Maybe she's inexperienced, or maybe she's been with selfish dicks. Maybe both things are true. "I'll make it so good for you. I promise."

When she nods, I take off her pants, exposing silky pink underwear. "So pretty," I say, as I kiss each of her soft thighs.

She's covering the lower part of her stomach with her hand, and I hope it's just a random thing, but in case it's not, I kiss her there. "Your curves are so gorgeous. I love how soft your skin is." I press my lips all along her middle, on her belly, her hips, her thighs. "I'm honored that you're letting me see your beautiful body."

My words seem to relax her, but there's still tension in her legs.

I've heard that women can be self-conscious about having men so close to this part of their body. "You don't understand how sexy you are, how good you look, how good you smell."

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I slide her panties down and draw in a breath. “You’re so gorgeous, Stella.”

With reverence, I draw a finger through her folds. “I love how wet you are for us.”

When her stance softens, I ask her if she’d like to sit on Wyatt’s lap, and she nods.

I’m glad Wyatt’s here to hold her and make her feel safe and comfortable while I focus on her pleasure.

“Women seem to have no idea how good they taste.”

Her brows shoot up, and I give her a grin, then move in to sample her, first with a short lick, then a longer swipe of my tongue over her clit, making her ... giggle?

“Did that tickle?”

She nods. “A little.”

“Try to relax.” I love making women laugh, but that’s not my goal at the moment.

Wyatt toys with her nipples and nuzzles her neck, as I drape her legs on the outside of his knees, spreading her open. “You look so good, and you taste even better,” I tell her. “A beautiful flower, with the sweetest nectar.” I take another long taste, and am happy to hear her moan instead of laugh.

My mouth is fully occupied now, but if it wasn’t, I’d explain that if women truly understood how men felt about their pussies, they’d be shoving them in our faces all

the time. They'd be sending us pussy pics, giving nicknames to their ladybits, and talking about them nonstop.

Nah, women are much too classy for all that, but I wish they knew what goddesses they truly are.

Stella's juices are flowing, dripping from her almost faster than I can keep up with. Her hips are quivering, and her intermittent moans are turning into a steady whimper as I focus on her clit, circling it with my tongue, flicking across it over and over, until she cries out.

"Let yourself go," Wyatt tells her, sounding rough himself.

I almost feel bad keeping Stella's pussy all to myself, but not bad enough to stop and switch places. At least Wyatt's having a good time playing with her gorgeous tits.

I wasn't sure Wyatt would be game for sharing her at all, so I'm shocked when he tells me, "Fuck her with your fingers, Cam. Make her come."

I check for Stella's response to this, and she looks surprised but doesn't appear to object. In fact, she tilts her hips, giving me better access, and my cock, already rock hard, aches for her.

Next time. Hopefully soon.

I bury one digit inside her wet heat, and Stella moans. Fuck, she's so wet.

Wyatt groans, his eyes fixed to where my finger disappears inside her over and over. I curl it to stroke a spot inside her, and am rewarded with the sight and sound of Stella losing control.

Her hand clamps onto Wyatt's leg, her hips press upward, her head goes back, and she cries out. "Oh god, oh god!" Then her pussy throbs around my finger and I nearly come in my pants at how fucking hot she looks and how good she feels.

I keep my finger buried deep and press the palm of my hand against her pussy as she pulsates through her peak. When she starts to come down, I flick my tongue over her stiffened clit at a wild pace and keep fucking her with my finger until she cries out again, louder this time, disbelief mingled with the ecstatic expression on her face.

I keep her coming for as long as I can, my pride swelling bigger than my dick. She thought she couldn't come again, but I made it happen—twice.

Well, Wyatt and I made it happen. His arms are still wrapped around her, holding her steady as she comes back to herself.

"I can't believe that," she says, when she finds her voice.

"That was so unbelievably hot, Stella." I press a kiss to her soft inner thigh, then head to the hall bathroom to grab a towel and a washcloth, running it under warm water before I return.

Wyatt's still holding her, talking quietly in her ear when I get back.

There's not much to clean up, just a few shiny spots on her thighs, and when I dab at them, Stella looks down in surprise. If no one's gone down on her before, it's likely she hasn't been well cared for after sex, either.

"Thank you," she says, still looking dazed.

I gather her clothes, folding them into a neat pile. "The bathroom's in the hall," I remind her, "if you want to get dressed in there."

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Her eyes drop down to my pants, where my cock is still semi-erect. “You want me to get dressed?”

I take her in, from her flushed skin, to her darkened nipples, to her messy hair. “No, I definitely don’t want you to get dressed, but I don’t want you to regret how late you stayed out.”

“What time is it?” she asks.

When I tell her, she jumps up and grabs her clothes. “Oh, shit!”

“If you turn into a pumpkin, we’ll roll you home,” Wyatt calls after her, chuckling.

Both of us enjoy the sight of her ass as she hurries out of the room.

CHAPTER28

STELLA

Three days have passed, and I haven’t even begun to get over what happened at the men’s house.

They may be playfully immature in many ways, but they sure have some advanced grown-man skills when it comes to knowing how to please a woman. I still can’t believe they set aside their own gratification to fully focus on my pleasure. In my limited experience, and from much of what I’ve heard other women say, men don’t operate that way.

I also appreciate that the night didn't progress to full-on intercourse, though as comfortable as they made me feel with what we did, I was actually ready to do more, and I continue to be shocked when I think about how far I might have gone with them.

I feel a lot like a virgin again, just like Ana said, and I've also had a lot of insecurities about my body ever since giving birth. There are stretch marks, and things don't look like they used to, but Cam and Wyatt made me feel like I was beautiful and perfect. I'm amazed at how comfortable they made me feel.

And the things they did!

My one night with Jessie's dad years ago was so disappointing. I was young and naive enough to be excited that it was happening at the time, but in hindsight, I came to realize how lame of an experience it actually was.

There was virtually no foreplay on Brandon's part, and it was all over so quickly. Afterward, he asked me if I came, and I couldn't understand how he didn't know that I hadn't.

Now, after last night, I have an entirely new perspective on things—if I can ever fully wrap my mind around what happened.

If I thought kissing Cam and Wyatt was distracting, it was nothing compared to them giving me multiple orgasms. I'm pretty sure I'm still glowing, and my skin heats every time I think about it, which is nearly all the time.

Somehow though, despite my head being in the clouds—or rather, over the back fence and in my neighbors' living room—I manage to carry on with my everyday activities, doing my work and taking care of Jessie.

The carpool line at the school is a lot less monotonous with x-rated daydreams running through my head. Just before I reach the curb, I shove all the wonderfully dirty thoughts aside.

“Hi, sweetie. How was school today?”

“Hi, Mommy. It was good. Do we have to stop anywhere?”

“Nope, we’re headed home. I stopped at the store before I picked you up.” As soon as Jessie gets herself strapped in, I pull away and head out.

At home, Jessie gives Goldfish a treat while I prepare a snack for her. After she eats, I send her outside to burn off some energy before she does her homework. While she plays on the swingset, I get back to work.

There’s an email from my manager that apparently came in just after I logged off earlier. It’s an invitation to attend a celebratory event at the corporate office today at five. In her message, she apologizes for the last-minute notice, and says the event isn’t mandatory, but that it would be nice to see me there.

I’ve only been to the office a couple of times, and this would be a great opportunity to foster relationships with people there, so I’m frustrated, because the timing is impossible. I hope to eventually move up the corporate ladder, and making my presence known would definitely help, but I can’t leave Jessie alone, and I can’t take her there with me, no matter how understanding my bosses are. Marissa won’t be home for at least another hour.

I’m resigned to missing the event and composing an email to send my regrets, when, through an open window, I hear Jessie squealing with laughter and G barking excitedly.

My neighbors' heads appear over the fence. Cam and Wyatt are tossing a ball into the yard and Jessie's tossing it back.

My stomach flutters with excitement, but I remind myself to tamp that down. My desire for those men cannot exist in the same realm as my daughter.

I can't look away though, and while I thought at first that Jessie was returning a ball they might have accidentally thrown over the fence, the three of them are continuing to toss it back and forth. They're playing a game. Goldfish is playing too, running after the ball anytime Jessie doesn't catch it.

I force myself back to the screen, and am about to continue my message when I get an idea. Since the men are already playing with Jessie, could they possibly watch her while I run to the office?

CHAPTER29

STELLA

I head out the back door, ignoring the impulse to check my hair and makeup first. When the men see me, their smiles grow bigger, and Cam almost misses the ball that Jessie threw his way.

“Hi!” I wave at them.

“How are you?” they call over.

When I reach the fence, I ignore all the butterflies in my stomach and explain that I just found out about a work event. “Is there any way you could stay with Jessie for about half an hour or forty-five minutes? I just need to put in a quick appearance at the office.”

“Sure,” they say easily.

Turning to Jessie, I ask, “Is it okay with you if the neighbors come over to watch you while I run into work?”

My daughter is so excited, she literally turns a cartwheel.

“We’ll be right over,” Cam calls as they disappear from view.

They arrive at the front door minutes later, their Clue game in hand. “Take your

time,” Wyatt says. “We’ll be fine here.”

As I drive off, I second guess asking them to babysit. Even though I won’t be gone long, it’s a pretty big favor to ask, but they seemed up for it, and Jessie sure was happy.

When I arrive at the office, I send a text to the guys to check in, and they tell me all is well, and to enjoy my event.

Community Bean is celebrating an outstanding quarter. There’s food and drink in the office’s big break room, including samples of new coffee drinks and bakery items that will soon be in the company’s coffee shops.

My manager seems glad to see me, and I get to talk with some people I’ve only ever interacted with through a computer. Before I leave, the owners, Ana’s men, Derek and Jansen, find me and tell me they’ve heard good things about the work I’m doing for the company.

All in all, it’s a great little event, and I’m grateful I was able to go.

On the way back to my car, I text the men again to let them know I’m on my way.

“Good!” Cam writes, adding a silly emoji. “Jessie’s just beaten us at Clue again.”

“It’s a good thing we’re not playing for money,” Wyatt says.

During the drive home, I wonder when they might ask me out again. Or if I should ask them to go out, especially since I originally told them I was only going to go on one date with them.

Of course, I also told them they couldn’t kiss me again, and they sure found a creative

way to break that rule!

My mind wanders to all the ways they kissed almost everything except my mouth, and then I think about all the things I'd like to do to them the next time we're alone together. It's not fair that I was the only one to have orgasms.

As I pull into the driveway, I wipe my mind clear of all the sexy stuff, and switch back to mom mode. In the house, I find the three of them sitting around the dining table with a couple of Jessie's favorite stuffed animals filling the fourth chair.

Cam's wearing a bright pink boa from Jessie's dress-up bin, and Wyatt's neck is wrapped in Jessie's pink winter scarf. The table is set with cups and saucers from her toy tea set, and Goldfish is lying at Wyatt's feet.

"Hi, Mommy!" Jessie calls out when she sees me.

"Hello," Wyatt says, smirking, as Cam waves one end of the boa at me.

Consumed with raising Jessie the best I can, I haven't thought much about having more children, but seeing the men have a tea party with Jessie feels like someone's squeezing my ovaries like a cow's udder.

"This looks like fun," I say.

"We're having so much fun," Jessie tells me.

"Well, I hate to break up all the fun, but you'd better clean things up, because you still need to do your homework while I make dinner."

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“I did my homework already, Mommy,” she says.

“You did? When?”

“Before we played Clue.”

I frown, because even though Jessie doesn’t usually have a lot of homework, it usually takes a while. “Even your reading?” There’s typically a comprehension worksheet, with a brief story and some questions to answer, and Jessie hates them. Getting her through it is usually the worst part of the day.

Jessie nods. “Yep. Cam and Wyatt made it so much fun.”

My brows lift, and I’m both impressed and curious.

“We did some voices,” Cam explains.

“There was a story about rhyming words, so we played a rhyming game afterward, too,” Wyatt says.

Jessie starts chanting, “Dog, frog, house, mouse, no, go!” Then she laughs and repeats the sequence. The guys smile and shrug.

“Maybe I should have the guys come over every afternoon,” I say.

Jessie tosses her stuffed frog into the air. “Yay! They’re the best sitters ever!”

The guys insist on helping to clear away the tea party, then give Jessie back the pink accessories.

Before they leave, I reach for my purse. “Thank you so much for helping out. Let me give you some money for your time.”

Cam puts his hand on mine to stop me. “Stella, don’t be ridiculous. We’re not taking money for a favor.”

“Aside from getting our butts kicked at Clue, it was our pleasure,” Wyatt says. “Glad to help anytime.”

“Well, thanks again.”

Cam tilts his head toward the front door. “Walk us out?”

My stomach goes all fluttery again. With Jessie busy taking her stuffed animals back to her room, and Marissa not yet home, I follow the men to the front porch, pretty sure, from the look on Cam’s face, what he has in mind.

When I step outside with them, he says, “If you wanted to, you could thank us like you did when we helped with the skunk.”

I nod. “I could.”

Cam slides his hand along my jaw and angles my face as he leans in. The first time we kissed, it was full of wonder. Now, it’s familiar, but somehow, even more exciting. It’s full of depth, and sparks memories of what we’ve done together, along with promises of things we may do in the future.

His tongue gets involved this time, instantly flooding my panties with desire. I know

what that tongue can do.

As soon as Cam pulls back, Wyatt turns me toward him, gripping my waist, his fingers sinking into me possessively, and it makes me so hot for him. The taste of him makes me ache. Before he pulls away, his teeth tug at my bottom lip, and I don't know how I keep from pushing him down on the front lawn and having my way with him.

Both of the men are wearing satisfied smirks. It's clear they're aware of the effect they have on me. They're still grinning as they walk away, while I'm left on the porch trying hard to compose myself so I can go back inside.

CHAPTER 30

STELLA

There are no stalkerish fans lingering outside their house. That's a relief. There are two cars parked in the driveway, and when I ring the doorbell, it's Trish who answers.

"Stella, hi! And your sweet little pooch!" She throws the door open wide. "C'mon in."

When she spots the shopping bag in my hand, she asks, "Did a delivery get dropped off at your house again?"

I shake my head. "No, the guys did a big favor for me yesterday, and I brought this over as a thank you."

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Just the mention of thanking them reminds me of the kisses we exchanged on the front porch. They weren't really adequate repayment for babysitting, because I'm pretty sure I enjoyed the kissing even more than they did.

"When we went to dinner last week, I noticed they both like Japanese beer, so I bought a six-pack for them," I explain to Trish.

"Oh, I bet they'll like that. Here, I'll take it. I can put it in the fridge. The guys are out back with the videographer." Trish angles her head toward the back yard. "They're in the middle of a shoot."

"Oh, okay. Well, I don't need to talk to them. Just let them know I stopped by."

"You don't have to rush off. Would your pooch like some water?"

Goldfish is panting and straining on the leash, probably trying to find the guys, who he no doubt can smell.

"Sure, thanks. It is pretty hot out there today."

"You want something to drink, too?"

I shake my head. "No, I'm good. I can't stay long, anyway. I have to pick up my daughter soon."

"The guys mentioned you have a daughter. How old is she?"

“She’s six.”

“That’s such a cute age. Does she like school? My sister has two kids, and her oldest just started kindergarten.” As she says this, she heads toward the kitchen, her voice growing louder so I can hear her.

I call out my answer, staying by the door to keep Goldfish from sniffing every inch of the house.

Trish returns a moment later and sets a bowl of water on the floor, where Goldfish happily takes a drink.

“Thanks for that,” I say.

“Of course.” There’s laughter in her voice when she says, “I could see the guys out in the yard from the kitchen window. They’re in the middle of a water blaster battle, and they’re both getting drenched. Their followers are going to love it!”

There’s no stopping my mind from conjuring an image of the scene. I’m sure they’re both shirtless, and I can practically see the rivulets of water dripping from their hair, running down their chests ...

When I notice Trish giving me a curious look, I quickly adjust my features into an expression that I hope hides the fact that I’m lusting after the men she works for.

“Did you say you went out to dinner with them?” Trish asks.

Something in her tone makes me hesitate. “Yes.”

“A date?”

“Yeah.” Suddenly uneasy, I look down at Goldfish as if he’s doing something interesting.

“Maybe I shouldn’t say anything,” Trish says, lowering her voice, “but my sister is divorced, and I know she’s careful about the kind of men she goes out with, because of her kids.” My stomach starts to feel heavy, even before she adds, “I wouldn’t want you to get hurt.”

I know I’m not going to like what she has to say, but I give her a look that encourages her to continue.

“It’s just that Cam and Wyatt get involved with a lot of women. A lot.” She lets out a sigh. “Involved isn’t the right word. They don’t get attached, but they go and have fun. They receive a lot of female attention, and they thoroughly enjoy it.”

I stand there like a statue, trying my hardest to appear unaffected by this news.

“Nothing wrong with that, of course,” Trish says, “but if you’re getting involved with them, you should know what you’re getting into.”

“Right. Okay. Thanks.” I feel like an idiot. “It was just one night out,” I tell her, feeling the need to make excuses for my bad decision-making. “We’re just neighbors.”

She nods, not buying my story, but kindly pretending she does, so I can save face. She gives me a sympathetic smile, and says, “Those two can be very charming.”

The backs of my eyes start to sting. “Thanks for the water. We need to get going.” I say goodbye and hurry out the door as quickly as I can, fighting to keep myself together until I’m down the street and around the corner, poor Goldfish hurrying to keep up with my hasty retreat.

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“I’m such an idiot,” I tell the dog once we’re back on our street. I let a few tears fall, but don’t let myself fall apart, because I don’t want any neighbors to see me.

I don’t have time to fall apart, either. I have to pick up Jessie, and I don’t want her to see that I’m upset.

Even though it’s distressing, I needed this wake-up call, and I’m so appreciative to Trish for telling me how things are. I should go back over and tell her to keep the beer for herself, because it’s her I should be thanking.

I knew better, and I let myself get carried away.

I’m not looking to get involved with fuckboys, yet I said yes to a date, and on that date, I said yes to so much more. It was all a great time, but I know I’m not the type of woman who can just have a good time with a man without wanting a connection with more depth.

Even before I had a daughter to consider, I didn’t take intimacy lightly. Now, I need to keep Jessie in mind, and just because the men have fun with her doesn’t mean they’re dad material.

Thoughts swirling like a cyclone in my head, I drive to Jessie’s school and join the line of cars. In the moments when I’m not being hard on myself, I rationalize that not having a sex life for so many years probably led to me making poor choices.

I knew Cam and Wyatt were all wrong for me, but I kissed them, and, well, everything spiraled from there. And I was starting to fall for them, too. Maybe I

already have, but at least things haven't gone too far.

I've had fun with them, but I need to put an abrupt stop to it, so I don't get hurt.

Somehow, I didn't realize they were players, and I feel so dumb. I wonder if those women who hang out in front of their house are there for more than just catching a glimpse of the men. Maybe Cam and Wyatt invite them in when Trish isn't there to gatekeep.

I was probably just the convenient girl next door for them. Someone to have fun with when they're not busy with other women.

My heart squeezes when I catch sight of Jessie waiting on the curb for her turn to be picked up. I hope I can somehow wise up in time to teach my daughter to make better choices when it comes to men.

CHAPTER 31

WYATT

"When did you get this beer?"

Cam pulls his head out of the cupboard to look my way. "What beer?"

"The six-pack of Sapporo." When I lift the carton out of the refrigerator and hold it up to show him, he frowns and shrugs.

"I've never seen that before."

"Would Trish put beer in here? She's the only other person who's been here," I say.

“The videographer was here too, but I’m sure he didn’t bring it.”

“I’ll text Trish.”

Her response comes right away. “I’m sorry. I forgot to tell you. Your neighbor Stella dropped that off yesterday. Said it was a thank-you for a favor you did for her.”

It’s early, and Cam’s still groggy, but when I relay this message, it perks him up more than coffee ever could. “Stella was here?”

“I know. Must have been when we were filming yesterday.”

“Well, shit.”

We’ve texted her a few times, but we’ve been intentionally taking things slow. Assuming that more happened on our date than she may have originally intended, we haven’t wanted to scare her off. But if she’s bringing a gift over, maybe that’s a sign that she’s ready for more.

“We should go see her today,” Cam says.

“My thoughts exactly.”

An hour later, while we’re working on a new build out back, we hear Goldfish barking. Random dogs bark in the neighborhood all the time, but we happen to be especially attuned to the sound of Stella’s dog.

Our ears perk up, and a moment later, we hear the lovely woman herself calling for him to come back inside their house.

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I rush over to the back fence faster than if I were shot out of the toy cannon I'm constructing. Cam's right behind me, and both of us peer over into her yard, waving to get our gorgeous neighbor's attention.

She doesn't see us at first, then she gives a small wave from the back door.

She's still focused on getting the dog to come to her, and it's hard to tell from this distance, but it seems like something's wrong.

"Everything okay?" I call out.

"Yeah, everything's fine." Her tone is stiff. Maybe Goldfish got into something? We've only been messing around with water lately. I hope we didn't accidentally create a muddy spot in her yard.

"Do you have a minute to talk?" Cam asks.

She hesitates, then slides into her shoes and comes out, closing the door behind her.

"Okay if we come over?"

Instead of waiting for her to answer my question, Cam vaults over the fence, so I go after him.

Stella's standing in the center of the lawn, arms wrapped around herself, covering most of the pale pink shirt she's wearing. Her hair is piled up on her head, and her face looks so soft and fresh that I have an overwhelming urge to kiss her.

But first, I need to find out what's wrong. I pull my eyes away from her and assess the yard. Nothing seems to be amiss. Goldfish is running around between Cam and me, wagging his tail.

"Everything okay?" I repeat.

"Everything's fine." She still doesn't sound fine, and she's not smiling, but maybe something's going on that she doesn't want to talk about.

"You look nice this morning. I like your hair like this." Cam must be having the same urges I am, because he goes straight over to her, touches her hair, and slides an arm around her waist. He tries to hug her, but she pulls back.

"We shouldn't do that," she says.

Shit. There's a wall up. And it's higher than the fence we just cleared.

"Stella, what's wrong? Did something happen?" I want to touch her so much my fingers ache, but I stay back.

"Thank you for the beer, by the way," Cam says. "Trish forgot to tell us about it, and we didn't see it until this morning."

She nods and mumbles, "You're welcome." It doesn't look like the beer, or our lack of acknowledgement, is the issue.

"We were planning to come by to see you later this morning," I tell her, and she frowns.

Maybe we've been taking things too slow, but it's only been a few days since we went out. We kissed her the night we babysat, and we've been in touch with texts. I

thought we've been striking the right balance between letting her know we're interested and coming on too strong, but we're still getting to know her, and she may have a different perspective on things.

"We wanted to ask if you'd like to go out again," Cam says. "We could play a different escape room, with or without Jessie, it's up to you. Or do something else entirely."

She takes a step backward, folding her arms more tightly around herself. The wall just got higher. She kicks at a clump of grass near her foot. "I had a lot of fun the night we went out, but I don't think we should go out again."

"Why?" Cam asks, beating me to the question.

"When I date again, I need to focus on looking for something serious. I have Jessie to think about, and I want to invest my time in something with future potential."

Wow, okay. Does Stella see us the same way our followers do? Just good for looks and laughs, eye candy with no substance? It's a punch in the gut, and I'm ready to jump back over the fence, but Cam doesn't seem to be taking it quite as hard.

"Why are you assuming this can't be something serious? Because there's two of us?"

She doesn't quite look him in the eye. "I'm not comfortable with what you do ...with what goes on with all your fans."

"That doesn't mean anything," Cam says, waving a hand dismissively. "Besides, we don't plan on making shirtless videos forever."

I crouch to pet Goldfish and take time to think things over. The idea of Stella looking at our channel makes me cringe. Some of the videos are fun and funny, but if she

ventured into the comment section? That's a different story.

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How would I feel if I was dating a woman who made thirst trap videos for thousands of followers? I probably wouldn't be comfortable with it, either.

But Stella has to know that none of our followers mean anything to us. I mean, we appreciate them, but not that way.

It's been a long time since I've been interested in a woman like I am with her. I can't let this be an obstacle, and I'd be a fool not to at least try to convince her to give us a chance.

CHAPTER32

STELLA

Why are they making this more difficult than it needs to be?

When I planned to tell them I didn't want to date them, I figured they'd say something along the lines of, "Okay, it's been fun, see you around." Maybe we could be friends, since we're neighbors, but surely they don't need to persuade me to keep seeing them when they have so many other women available.

Wyatt, who's been mostly quiet, suddenly reaches for my hand, unfolding it from where I have it tucked next to my side. "Stella, you're special. Dating you has nothing to do with anyone else, certainly not our fans. They don't even really know who we are."

His words send my heart fluttering, even though I know very well that it could be a

line. Maybe he says this to all the women. Makes each of us think we know the real them.

Cam takes my other hand, and I regret that I didn't keep more distance between us, or better yet, have this conversation by text, because their touch is making my head light. "You know you had a great time when you were out. We're still getting to know each other, but I don't see why it couldn't develop into something serious. Why not give us a chance?"

"Let's go out again, Stella," Wyatt says, squeezing my hand. "Let's see where things go."

Would it be easier to resist them if they weren't so incredibly handsome? And if they hadn't given me so many orgasms?

I'm trying to protect myself from heartbreak, but my body is starting to ache for them just because they're holding my hands.

"What do you say? Another date to get to know us better?" Cam's eyes are sparkling with an irresistible warmth that melts almost all that's left of my resolve.

I could go out with them again, even knowing that I'm one of many. It's obvious that I need more experience dating, and what better way to get experience than with my two affable neighbors? Maybe I need to get comfortable going out, and then I could date other men, too. After all, I missed out on several years of dating while I was raising Jessie, so I may as well have fun.

Somewhere deep in the back of my mind, a little voice tells me that I'm manufacturing reasons to keep seeing these guys, but I tell that voice to be quiet.

Instead, I listen to Cam when he says, "You know you want to," and to Wyatt, when

he brings the back of my hand to his lips and presses a kiss there, his beautiful blue-green eyes on mine the entire time. It's a potent reminder of how good those lips can make me feel.

Goldfish lets out a short bark, reminding us of his presence. His tail is still wagging as he trots in circles between our legs.

"Goldfish thinks you should go out with us again, too," Cam says.

"I guess I can't argue with Goldfish."

I'm rewarded with two wide smiles and then two kisses, each brief but tantalizing.

"Let us know what night you're available," Cam says, and then my handsome neighbors disappear the way they came.

* * *

We end up going out again two nights later.

I don't want to lie to Jessie about what I'm doing, but I don't want her to know I'm dating the men either, because she might think something could come of it. Instead, I tell her that Cam and Wyatt are helping me with a work project, something that sounds so boring she doesn't bother to ask any questions.

In reality, the night is anything but boring. After delicious wood-fired pizza at a trendy eatery, they take me to an arcade, where I spend nearly two hours feeling like a kid again.

I lose track of all the games we play, but there's auto racing, air hockey, and several times when I barely notice what game we're playing at all, because one or the other

of the men has their arms around me at a machine. Those are the best games.

After an epic skee-ball tournament, we take our game credits to the redemption shop and pick out silly souvenirs.

“I feel guilty coming to these fun places without Jessie,” I tell them as we walk out to the car, both of their arms around me in the dark parking lot.

“I’d love to come again with Jessie along,” Wyatt says, “but it’s also nice having time alone with you.”

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There is something refreshing about going out and having fun without having to worry about Jessie's enjoyment of an experience. It's probably something I should have prioritized earlier on for myself, but I never realized it was something I needed until now.

After Wyatt's mention of alone time, I'm fully expecting that they'll drive me back to their house for "dessert," but instead, Cam turns down my street and pulls into my driveway.

"The date's over?" I'm unable to hide my surprise.

He puts the car in park and turns to face me, taking my hand. "We are very much looking forward to another night like the one we shared last time, but we worry that it might have been too much too fast."

"We want you to know that this is serious," Wyatt says. "We're not just fooling around."

I feel like leaning fully into the kid I got to be at the arcade tonight and showing my disappointment by pouting, but instead, I tell them I understand. Because I do.

Maybe it was too much the other night, as amazing as it was. I'm frustrated, because I want more from them, but I appreciate their restraint. Maybe this means they do see me differently than the other women they date, but I try not to overthink it.

When they walk me to my door, I don't think about anything at all, except how good their kisses taste and feel, and how I can't wait to see them again.

CHAPTER 33

STELLA

The next time I hear from Jessie's dad, he surprises me by saying he's planning to visit her in person on the weekend, if the timing works for us.

"Sure," I text back.

"I'm hoping we can all go out together?" he writes. "Maybe to a park if it's nice."

I suspect he isn't sure whether he'll be comfortable being alone with her. Kids change so much so fast at her age. Not that long ago, she could be fussy and sometimes unreasonable, and maybe he's worried that he'll need help to deal with her.

But I find out that's not the reason he asked me to come along.

While Jessie plays on the playground at one of the nice parks nearby, Brandon asks me to sit with him on a bench.

"I wanted to talk to you privately about something," he says. There are kids yelling and having fun all around us, and we're far enough away from the play structure that Jessie can't overhear.

"If you're open to it," he says, "I'm seriously considering moving closer to you."

"Oh, that's a surprise."

"I understand that you had to leave, and I'm glad you got away from a bad situation with your parents, but I didn't realize how much I'd miss you."

“You miss Jessie, you mean?”

Brandon gives me a quick look, then focuses on the playground. “Both of you, if I’m being honest.”

“Oh.”

“I was actually thinking that if I move here, maybe you and I could date and see if a relationship could work.”

This comes so far out of left field that I’m speechless. When we lived closer, Brandon didn’t see either of us all that often. I certainly understand him missing his daughter, but how much could he actually miss me? I have so many questions.

“Where did this come from? Why now, after six years?”

He shrugs, still staring out into the distance. “I guess it took you leaving for me to realize how I felt. I’ve dated other women, but I never found anyone special. You and I had great chemistry?—”

Inwardly, I frown at this, not entirely sure I agree. “And we created a beautiful daughter together,” he goes on.

That much is definitely true.

“Hell, who knows. If things work out, maybe we could give Jessie a brother or sister.”

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I scoot a few inches away from him and turn to focus on him fully, trying to figure out exactly where all this is coming from.

Brandon frowns. “Sorry. I’m not trying to freak you out. I’m not talking about jumping right into making a baby. I’d just like to see if there’s still something there between us.”

After our one night together, after I got pregnant and he didn’t want a relationship with me, it never seemed like there was anything there between us. Nothing that went in both directions, anyway.

“I don’t know ...I mean, you’re certainly welcome to move here for Jessie’s sake. That would be really nice for her. As for me, I don’t know. We’d have to see if we even have anything in common outside of our daughter.”

He nods. “That makes sense. How about if I come back next weekend, visit both of you during the day, and then at night, we go to dinner, just you and me?”

I hesitate, still catching up with this surprise he’s sprung on me, and also wondering if Cam and Wyatt would mind if I go out with Brandon.

But they can’t mind, can they? They’re still having fun with other women, even if they insist I’m special. We definitely don’t have any kind of exclusive arrangement.

“I guess that’d be fine,” I tell Brandon, who reaches across the bench to squeeze my hand.

“Great. Looking forward to it.”

* * *

Even though we haven’t made any promises to each other, the next time I’m out with Cam and Wyatt, I decide it would be best to mention Brandon. They may have their own entanglements, which I don’t need to know anything about—and actually prefer not to—but for some reason, I feel better being open with them about my dating life.

It’s Friday night, and after a sushi dinner—another first for me, which I can’t say I enjoyed quite as much as the teppanyaki—we drive to the beach, where the sun has just set.

“We’ll have to come earlier next time,” Wyatt says.

I let out a contented sigh. “It’s still beautiful.” The sky is glowing warmly, and the water is painted with vibrant blues and oranges.

We take off our shoes and leave them close to the access path. Cam and Wyatt roll their pant legs up, and we walk along the sand, staying just out of the surf. The men are on either side of me, and though neither of them holds my hand, our fingers touch as we walk, each bit of contact sending delicious sparks up my arms.

It’s very different from our previous activity-filled dates. It feels very romantic, but before I sink fully into it, I want to get the Brandon thing off my chest.

“Remember how I told you Jessie’s father came to visit last weekend?”

My dates both nod, Cam saying, “Yeah?”

“He’s coming back tomorrow ...and he’s taking me out to dinner.”

Wyatt cocks his head. “Just you?”

I nod. “He’s considering moving here to be closer to us, and he wants us—me and him—to ...explore whether we might have a connection.”

Cam and Wyatt stop in their tracks.

“He’s taking you on a date?” Cam asks.

I nod again. “Yeah.”

Wyatt’s hair blows wild in the ocean breeze, getting in his eyes. “I thought there wasn’t anything romantic between you and him.”

“There wasn’t ... there isn’t. But he wants to see if there could be.”

“And is that what you want?” Wyatt seems ...not quite angry, but somewhere in that neighborhood. Definitely unsettled.

“I ... I don’t know. I figured we should at least see if something’s there.” I take a step to resume our walk, but both men stay put. “What’s the matter?”

They exchange a look that I can’t read, especially with the light growing darker. Finally, Cam says, “Of course, we’re not going to try to stop you from getting together with Jessie’s dad, because maybe that would be the right thing for her, but I guess we should have made our intentions clear.”

“Your intentions?”

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“We’re serious about you, Stella. Actually, I thought we did make that clear when you said you wanted to stop seeing us.”

That wasn’t what I got out of that conversation in the yard. “Aren’t you dating other women?” I blurt.

They’d better not have one set of rules for themselves and another for me, and I’m prepared to tell them that, when Wyatt says, “Not since we met you.”

CHAPTER34

STELLA

I open my mouth to respond, but close it, then eventually just say, “Oh.” Because I don’t know what to say.

Is it a coincidence that they haven’t seen anyone else? Did they set aside their entourage for me? They told me I was special, but I didn’t put much weight in that word, since men can throw it around like confetti to get what they want.

“What’s he like, Jessie’s father?” Wyatt asks.

“He’s ... he’s ...fine.” I don’t know what to tell them about him, and I’m still surprised that they even care. Why are they suddenly being so serious?

Wyatt snorts. “Fine? Sounds like a promising start to a relationship.”

I squint at him. There's a strong undercurrent of possessiveness in his mockery, and I'm not sure if I'm irritated or flattered, or some odd mixture of both. "Wait a minute, though. Let's back this up. Are you saying neither of you have been out with anyone else since we went on our first date?"

"Not since before we met you, actually," Cam says. "I haven't. I don't think you have either, have you, Wy?"

Wyatt shakes his head. "It had been a while."

I try to square this with what I thought I knew, but something's not adding up. "Trish told me you both liked to have a lot of fun with your female fans. To be honest, I had the distinct impression there was a steady line of women going through revolving doors in and out of your bedrooms."

Their surprised expressions seem sincere.

"That's not the case at all," Cam says.

"Then why would Trish say that?"

He looks convincingly clueless. "I don't know. Maybe she's basing that on things our followers say."

Wyatt shakes his head, looking disgusted. "Our followers say a lot of shit."

"Right, and Trish helps with our social media, so she sees all that stuff."

It doesn't make sense that Trish would warn me about the men based on comments their followers were making—unless the commenters were implying that they'd had sex with Cam or Wyatt? But why would she believe that?

I don't know what to make of it all, but I can't think of a reason the men would lie to me.

"You're special, Stella—" There's that word again, though as Cam gently strokes my arm, I'm starting to think he isn't using it lightly. "And we think the three of us could be something special together, but we don't want to get in the way of you and Jessie's dad, if you think there's something there."

"I don't know if there's anything there, but I think I should see."

Wyatt takes my hand and starts to walk again. "What went on between the two of you? Why aren't you together anymore?"

Cam takes my other hand, and we're all connected.

"We were never actually together. He was in a couple of my classes at college, and I had a crush on him for nearly a year. One night, at a party at the end of my sophomore year, he finally noticed me."

I take a deep breath. There's a highly edited version of this story that I usually tell, one in which I don't look quite so naive. But I decide to give Cam and Wyatt the full picture.

"We danced and talked, and he seemed so into me. Our lecture classes were huge, and I figured he'd just never noticed me, but at the party, he was looking at me like I was something special.

After we talked for a while, I confessed that I'd had a thing for him, and he seemed really flattered. He asked me if I'd go out with him. He even named a specific restaurant, and talked about what we'd do on the date. He talked about fun things we could do together over the summer. It was all like a dream come true, actually."

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The men are quiet while I pause, but I feel their support.

“He said so many nice things to me. Then he tried to lead me upstairs. Even though I was excited, I didn’t want things to move that quickly, but he laid it on thick and kept pushing. Told me how beautiful I was, how he couldn’t believe he’d never noticed me before. How this was all meant to be. He said all the pretty words, until I finally went along.”

The men’s faces are grim as I head into my conclusion.

“All his sweet talk, and his talk of future plans only had one purpose, and he got what he wanted that night. Afterward, he ghosted me. I never saw him at all until I had to track him down six weeks later to tell him I was pregnant.”

Wyatt’s hand has grown sweaty in mine. “Asshole,” he mutters.

“What did he do when he found out you were pregnant?” Cam asks.

“He resisted it at first, said it was probably someone else’s, but there wasn’t anyone else. I understood his surprise, because he’d used a condom, but he didn’t put it on soon enough. He messed around a bit first, and it turns out pregnancy is possible before ... you know ... even though odds are against it.”

There’s an actual snarl on Wyatt’s face as he shakes his head. Cam looks much more sympathetic.

“As rough of a start as that was, he hasn’t been a bad father. He’s not super involved,

but he's steady. Always sends support. He's stepped up as much as I've wanted and needed him to."

"He never tried to have a relationship with you before, beyond coparenting?" Cam asks.

I shake my head. "After the ghosting, I wouldn't have wanted to be with him, unless he had some sort of incredible excuse, like he ended up in the hospital the next day or had amnesia or something."

"But he had no excuse." Wyatt sounds like he'd punch Brandon if he were here right now.

"No. He didn't even try to make excuses. I don't think he thought he did anything wrong back then, but he's grown up. We both have. I'd like to think I wouldn't fall for a line as easily as I did back then."

Cam stops walking again, squeezing my hand in his. "He lied to you, Stella. It's not your fault for believing him."

When I don't respond, Wyatt says, "He's not good enough for you."

"We were so young," I say, nearly whispering. "And he's Jessie's dad. Maybe he deserves another chance."

Wyatt's jaw is set so hard, I wouldn't be surprised if the bone broke through the skin. But his eyes are somewhat softer.

"It would be good for Jessie to have her dad in her life more," I explain.

"We could be there for Jessie, too, you know." Cam turns me toward him, his hands

rubbing my arms. “Not to take her father’s place, but to support her in any way she needs. And to support you.”

Jessie certainly loves spending time with them, but do they realize what kind of responsibility that is? And how would being father figures fit in with their internet career? It’s much too soon to even think about that in any meaningful way.

Wyatt steps up behind me, the length of his body pressing against mine, his husky voice warm on my neck. “Go ahead and go out with him, Stella, and see if you can stop thinking about us when you’re with him.”

He slides his hands around my waist as Cam moves closer, his eyes fixed on mine, then dropping to my mouth.

I’m surrounded by the heat of their bodies, but a shiver runs through me that has nothing to do with the temperature.

Cam lowers his head to mine, his hand smoothly cupping my chin, tipping my face toward his. “See if you can forget about this when you’re with him.” And then he kisses me in a way that makes all of the spectacular kisses that preceded it pale in comparison.

Maybe it’s the rhythmic sound of the waves, or the ocean breeze, or the heated discussion we’ve been having, but the way his mouth moves, the way his lips taste, the way his hands—and Wyatt’s—claim my body, make the kiss more potent than I’d have thought possible.

My knees go weak, but both men are right there, making me feel utterly safe and supported.

I slide my hands over the stubble on Cam’s cheek and pull his face closer. A groan

rumbles from somewhere deep in his throat, and his tongue finds mine, starting a fire below my belly.

I want to be consumed by this man, but then Wyatt's turning me toward him, pulling me so close that I don't know where I end and he begins. The stiff bulge pressing into me clears up any confusion. I know exactly where Wyatt is and how much he wants me. His hands slide into my hair, holding my head still as his mouth dances with mine, a sultry tango, one where I somehow know all the moves. Give and take, spark and ignite.

I'm ready for him to throw me down on the sand and do whatever he wants.

I love their mouths, and their firm muscles, and their strong hands. I want to get to know more of them, every inch, up close and personal. "Should we ...go back to your place?" My voice is so breathy, I barely recognize it.

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Cam takes one of my hands and folds it in his, pressing a kiss to my knuckles in a way that's both lovely and infuriating. "Next time. First, go out on your date. Then come and tell us how it went."

CHAPTER35

STELLA

I do my best to clear my mind of Cam and Wyatt before my dinner with Brandon, but it's an impossible feat. At best, I only manage it for a few minutes at a time.

I leave Jessie at home with Marissa, telling her that her dad and I are going out to run errands. We all went to the park again earlier, and Brandon, who's staying at a hotel nearby, returns to pick me up, freshly showered and changed into nice pants and a button-down shirt.

Cam pops into my mind when I notice how high Brandon's shirt is buttoned up, and when I notice the outline of his undershirt. Cam never wears an undershirt over his spectacular pecs. The word spectacular pops into my head, and I almost giggle as we walk to Brandon's car, but I keep it inside.

He asked earlier if I have a favorite local restaurant, and I thought about the places I went with Cam and Wyatt, but it would be much too distracting to go to one of those restaurants, and possibly out of Brandon's budget.

We end up at a family restaurant, nothing fancy, but the food is good. We spend at least half the night talking about Jessie. It's inevitable. As her mom, I could talk

about her nonstop, but I rein in that impulse when I'm with others, especially people who don't have kids. But if anyone should want to hear all about her, it's Brandon, and he does.

It's nice to have this in common with him, but when I purposely switch to other topics, like TV shows, movies, and even current events, the conversation becomes stilted on both our parts. I even dredge up memories from college, though it's a bit of a sore subject for me, but nothing sparks.

I can't help but notice the distinct absence of laughter during our date, putting it in sharp contrast to my nights out with Cam and Wyatt.

Brandon is a nice enough guy, and he's definitely matured, but it's hard to imagine a spark igniting.

On the drive back to my house, I wonder if I should kiss him goodnight, just to see if I feel anything. We must have kissed that one night in college, but I can't specifically remember doing so, so it's hard to imagine that it was anything special.

Glancing over at his profile, and listening to him talk about his favorite sports team, I can't find anything that reminds me why I crushed on him for so long years ago, and I decide to stop hunting for something that's no longer there.

I have it bad for my neighbors. When my mind wanders, it's always daydreaming of being with them—back on the beach, standing in the grass in my back yard, and especially in their living room, where I'm naked and letting them do whatever they please.

As Brandon pulls into the driveway, I tell him that he's welcome to move nearby, and that Jessie would enjoy seeing more of him, but there's no point in us trying to force a romantic relationship.

What I don't say is that while it might be good for Jessie to have her parents together, I want her to see me in a loving relationship, not just one of convenience or a last resort.

Someday, I hope she finds a man who adores her, and I deserve the same for myself.

If there's one thing tonight has made clear, it's that I need to follow my heart.

CHAPTER 36

WYATT

Cam's confident about how Stella's date will go, but I can't quite get there.

He and I are both spending the evening in the garage, where he's working out on the weight bench and I'm cleaning out a tool chest. What I'm actually doing is traveling through the land of worst-case scenarios.

First of all, I don't trust the guy she's out with. He may keep current on child support payments, but that's most likely due to court orders. It doesn't mean he has good intentions, and it definitely doesn't mean he wants what's best for Stella.

In the darkest corners of my mind, the asshole is currently strong-arming her into doing something she doesn't want to do. Or maybe he's playing a pity card, or using her concern for her daughter as a tool of persuasion.

When I'm not worrying about what that jerk might be up to, I imagine that it's Stella who decides all on her own that she's better off with a stable, if underwhelming man, rather than two guys who make their living transmitting shirtless pictures of themselves across the interwebs.

One night out with her respectable yet boring “ex” will convince her that Cam and I could never be the right choice for her and her daughter.

“He’d better not be blowing smoke up her ass and making more false promises.” Cam’s out-of-the-blue comment jolts me from my ruminations.

“Yeah ...” I finish rearranging the wrench drawer with more force than necessary. “Do you think Stella is uncomfortable with the type of work we do?”

“I don’t know, but I know she wants to be with us.”

“And what about the fact that there are two of us? Might be fine for going out on dates, but maybe she can’t picture herself settling down with two men.”

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Cam's only response is a grunt as he does a curl. A few minutes later, he groans as he sets down a heavy weight with a thud. He sounds tortured when he says, "I've never felt so protective about a woman before."

"Yeah, me either."

"I like it, though."

I slide the last drawer of the chest closed, wondering what I can do next to keep busy. "Me too, but I'll like it a lot more when she's back from her dinner."

"When do you think she'll be in touch?"

The idea of her not contacting us tonight makes me want to jump out of my skin. If she doesn't get in touch, I'll be left imagining her doing things with her date. Maybe they'll start reminiscing about college and one thing will lead to another.

The sound of rapid footsteps approaching saves me from my dreadful imagination.

Stella's coming up our driveway in a skirt and blouse, with a purse over her shoulder. As she approaches, I scan her body to see if she looks harmed in any way. After that, I do a second check to see if she's disheveled, the way she is after we kiss her.

She appears to be fine, except for being breathless.

CHAPTER37

CAM

“Did you walk over here?”

“More of a half walk, half jog.” She looks down at her feet, where she’s wearing low heels. Not the type of shoes to jog in.

“Get in here.” I pick her up and carry her into the house, with Wyatt leading the way and opening the door.

“I couldn’t stop thinking about you,” she tells us.

“We couldn’t stop thinking about you,” Wyatt says.

“How was the date? I ask.

She tugs at my shirt. “I don’t want to talk about the date.”

In the living room, I sit down on the sofa with her in my lap. “Are you going to see him again?”

She shakes her head. “Not to date him. There’s nothing there.”

I slide the tip of my finger down the length of her nose. “Are you ready for this to be something serious with the two of us?”

She nods without hesitation.

Wyatt sits down next to us and rests his hand on Stella’s arm. “We don’t want anyone but you.”

“I don’t want anyone but the two of you ... and I do want you. I want you right now. Both of you.”

I’m ready to haul her off to the bedroom, but Wyatt’s still looking into her eyes. “Are you sure you won’t regret it? We don’t have to rush into anything.”

She answers by reaching for his collar and pulling him into a kiss, signalling that the time for talking is over.

When they break apart, I get to my feet with her still in my arms. “Let’s get more comfortable.” I carry her to my bed and lay her in the center of the comforter.

With smooth and silent coordination, Wyatt and I work together to remove her clothes.

We kiss and stroke her all over, and having her here in my room, naked, feels like more of a treat than all my birthdays and Christmas mornings put together.

She’s so gorgeous, and she’s ours. I almost can’t think straight, but that’s probably because all the blood in my body has raced down to my cock.

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Stella moves to sit up. “This isn’t going to be all about me tonight. Take your clothes off.”

I glance at the bedroom clock. “When do you need to leave? Are we in a hurry?”

She shakes her head. “No work and no school tomorrow. Marissa’s home with Jessie. I just need to be there before she wakes up in the morning.”

I tug her legs toward the edge of the bed, a sudden move that flops her upper body back onto the mattress. “Then we’re not taking our clothes off until you’ve had at least three orgasms.”

CHAPTER38

STELLA

Cam’s grin is a wicked challenge.

“You’re giving me an orgasm quota?”

“I’m givingusan orgasm quota. All you need to do is lie back and enjoy.”

Cam crawls onto the bed beside me, cradling one of my breasts in his hand as he draws me into a kiss. The taste of him, so raw and exciting, makes me want him inside me right now, but I love that the men are setting the pace.

As Cam slides his tongue into my mouth and thumbs over my nipple, other hands

grip my legs, spreading them apart. Kisses are pressed to my inner thighs as Wyatt's weight presses down the edge of the bed. Then his tongue is on my most sensitive spot, jolting my entire body, making Cam chuckle against my mouth.

Cam shifts to take one of my nipples between his lips, as he twists his fingers around the other one. Wyatt slowly circles his tongue around my clit and I groan their names.

I feel like I could either melt into the bed, or burst into flames. Maybe both.

The men keep a steady rhythm with their actions, and I quickly build toward an orgasm. "I'm going to come," I pant.

Cam cradles my face in his hand and presses the tip of a finger into my mouth when I cry out. "That's it. Just like that."

Wyatt sucks my clit between his lips and I explode, my entire body pulsing with a need that's been building up for days.

It's glorious, deep and long. The type of release I could only have if I felt entirely safe and adored.

"You're so beautiful," Cam tells me as he brushes strands of hair back from my cheeks. As he kisses me, Wyatt lifts my legs onto his shoulder, and presses his face into my pussy, plunging his tongue deep inside me.

I gasp, and Cam chuckles, likely seeing what Wyatt's doing.

"He didn't get to taste you last time, and you taste delicious."

Whatever Wyatt's doing, it feels amazing. One of his fingers takes the place of his tongue, pressing deep inside me, curling to reach some magic spot. His tongue flicks

rapid fire over my clit, and before I know it, I'm flying off again, into nothingness and everythingness.

Fireworks explode behind my eyelids, white and hot and dazzling. My heels dig into Wyatt's back as my hips arch, pressing my pussy into his face.

Cam strokes his hand over my throat, down to my breasts, where he squeezes one possessively in his palm. The two of them are making my body sing like it's never sung before, every cell vibrating at some higher frequency that I've never experienced, like I've reached another plane of existence.

I'm panting, crying, whimpering, not sure I can take more, but also never wanting it to stop.

"Please," I moan, not even sure what I'm asking for.

"Please?" Cam questions, between kissing my jaw, my cheek, my chin, my neck.

"I need you ... one of you ... inside me ... now. Please."

Cam traces a finger along the edge of my cheek, my face flushed with heat. "But I only counted two orgasms so far."

Wyatt's voice, deep and husky, comes from the end of the bed. "He's joking. We'll never make you ask twice for anything you want."

I barely have the energy to lift myself up, but I manage to grab a handful of Cam's shirt. "Take your clothes off. Both of you."

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He tugs his shirt over his head, and I swear I hear angels singing. I've seen him this way plenty of times, of course, mostly online but also in person, but now he's mine to touch. I stretch my hand up to glide it over his abs.

"You're built like a superhero," I sigh, making him chuckle.

The sight of him, and the knowledge that Wyatt is also hopefully removing clothing, gives me the energy to lift myself onto my elbows to take it all in.

Wyatt's jeans are open and he's just about to slide them down his hips. He's taking his briefs down at the same time, and I swallow a lump in my throat when I see how thick the stem of his cock is. Then, as he pushes his pants down, the length of him becomes apparent, and I'm blinking at it, eyes wide. My mouth waters, and my pussy clenches, but my god, look at the size of him.

CHAPTER39

STELLA

Cam must be watching my face, because he tells me, "Don't worry. It'll feel good."

"You're so big," I say to Wyatt, unable to keep the thought to myself.

"I'll take it slow." Wyatt's face is edged with a serious determination as his eyes drop to my center.

Still in his jogging pants, Cam crawls behind me on the bed, lifts me up, and settles

me back onto his thighs as he kneels. Nestling my back against him, he asks, “Are you comfortable?”

I nod, still focused on Wyatt’s huge cock as he sheathes it with a condom he grabbed from the dresser behind him.

Cam cups one of my breasts in each of his hands and thumbs over my nipples as Wyatt spreads my knees wide.

This position gives me an incredible view of what’s about to happen, and I realize it gives Cam a front-row seat too, when he tells me, “Try to relax. It’s going to feel good.”

Much as I want him—both of them—I’ve tensed up. Sure, a seven-pound baby once passed through me, but that wasn’t exactly a pleasurable experience. Brandon wasn’t built anything like this. I thought that when a man is packed with muscles, his cock looks smaller by comparison, but that’s not the case with Wyatt.

He twirls a fingertip around my clit, making me quiver, then lifts one of my legs to the side, opening me wider still, and my juices run down the seam of my leg.

He wraps his fist around his beefy cock, lengthens it toward me, and nudges the head of it into my wet folds, and I let out a breath.

Cam bends to kiss my shoulder. “You ready for him?”

Physically, I’m in such a vulnerable position between them, but I don’t feel vulnerable at all. I trust that the two of them will take care of me in every way, even if a particular part of Wyatt’s anatomy looks incredibly imposing.

He’s watching me closely, waiting for the word. He’s pulled his shirt off too, and to

say he's stunningly handsome would be an understatement. Both men are the pinnacle of male perfection with their ridiculously cut abs, broad chests, and strong shoulders, and somehow I'm lucky enough to be here between them, ready to find out what their gorgeous bodies can do.

"I'm ready."

Wyatt presses in slowly, the first inch of his cock disappearing inside me.

"Fuck, that's hot." Cam punctuates his words by squeezing my nipple.

My pussy is stretched around Wyatt's girth, eating him up as he pushes in a little further.

He slides a hand along the inside of my leg. "You doing okay?"

"Yeah, you feel good so far."

His answering grin is warm as a summer's day, and then, when he returns his focus to where our bodies are joined, his eyes burn hot as the sun.

His cock slides in another inch, then another. Still a few more to go, and I'm starting to feel very full. Pausing, he thumbs over my clit, and when I clench around him, he groans.

"It's killing you to go slow, isn't it, Wy?" Cam asks.

Wyatt bites his bottom lip and nods.

"I'm ready for more," I say.

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Wyatt's fingers press into my leg, gripping me tighter, as his hips move in and he feeds more of himself into me. We both moan when he bottoms out, our bodies so close together, we've become one.

He stays that way for a long moment, fingering my clit, giving me time to relax and get used to the size of him. There's discomfort, but it's mild, and nothing at all when combined with the sight of him, the sound of Cam's dirty talk at my ear, and the fact that this wild experience is another first for me, and one I never imagined I'd have—well, never imagined before I met these two men. But it's also much more than I could have hoped for, and we're just getting started.

In the stillness, Wyatt's cock throbs inside me, like a heartbeat.

“You ready for him to fuck you, Stel?” Cam's shortened version of my name makes something flutter in my chest.

I let out a breath and nod. “Yeah. I'm ready.”

Wyatt pulls back, slowly and steadily retreating, the head of his cock dragging along my inner walls in a way I'll never get over. My head falls back against Cam, who's holding me steady as I prepare for the most intense experience of my life.

Wyatt fills me anew, as tenderly as someone can with a tool that large. He pulls nearly out and pushes in, again and again, each time with increasing speed and intensity, monitoring my face as he goes.

“You feel incredible, Stella.” The gentleness in his expression takes me by surprise. I

lock eyes with him and we stay that way as he fucks me, deep and steady and delicious, my pussy gripping him each time he retreats, then welcoming him back home over and over.

He switches things up, burying himself deep, then working his hips to grind his pelvis against my body.

“Oh god, oh yes. Just like that!” The pressure of him, along with the fullness, and the friction—”Oh god, I’m gonna come!”

I reach for Wyatt, and also search for Cam behind me with my other hand, and it’s like that, connected to the two of them, grasping onto their hard bodies for all I’m worth, that I come apart. It’s so amazingly intense that I scream—I actually scream—and just after I crest the peak, a single laugh bursts out of me without warning.

Wyatt is still filling me, still grinding his body against me, keeping rhythm with my body’s own contractions. It’s magical and mind-blowing, and attentive in the most skillful way.

Suddenly, a sense of overwhelm engulfs me. I’ve never experienced anything like this, never even dreamed that I could, and as I try to take it all in, a bundle of emotion forces its way out in the form of tears, and I’m powerless to stop them.

CHAPTER 40

WYATT

Oh shit, oh fuck, I got carried away.

“Stella, are you okay?” I pull out and bend over her, each of her tears like a knife to

my chest.

I thought she was enjoying herself, but I fucking hurt her like a selfish asshole.

She blinks, surprised to find me so close, then blinks some more, her eyelashes thick with moisture. “I’m okay.”

“You’re not. Did I hurt you?”

She shakes her head quickly. “No, you didn’t. Not at all.”

My eyes flicker up to Cam, and the angry expression on his face takes me by surprise. He never gets angry. But that’s nothing compared to how mad I am at myself.

“But you’re crying.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I couldn’t help it.” She wipes at her eyes and tries to hide them behind her hand.

“Why are you crying?”

She shakes her head. “I don’t know, really. It was just all ...so intense.”

“Are you sure I didn’t hurt you?”

Shaking her head again, she reaches a hand to my face and strokes my cheek. “No, trust me. You felt incredible.”

I’ve never had someone cry during sex before. I have caused women pain, but that was when I was younger and inexperienced.

She must see my confusion, because she cups my chin, making sure I look right at her. “No one’s ever made me feel that way, Wyatt. I just felt a lot, and I couldn’t process it all.”

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Searching her eyes, I see that it's the truth, and first relief, then pride wash over me. All the raunchy, empty comments from strangers I've received on our videos come to mind. When I've complained about them, Cam said I should be flattered, but I couldn't find it in me to have a positive reaction to all those objectifying remarks.

Strange as it is, Stella's tears have flattered me more than anything ever has. I made her feel so much she couldn't handle it all at once. Of course, I'm sure there's more to her reaction than just me and the action of my cock, but still, I'm gratified.

"It was great, Wyatt, and in fact, I want more." She slides her hand around to the back of my head and pulls me closer so she can kiss me, and desire flares again inside me.

This woman is so responsive, so trusting, so open for anything. She fits so well here with me and Cam. In every way.

"Are you sure you don't need a break?" I can't help but ask.

"Wyatt, stop worrying about me, and finish what you started!"

Her command makes me laugh, and it's just what I need. I wasn't joking when I said she'll never have to ask twice for anything.

When I sink back inside her, the perfection of her body surprises me all over again. Sex always feels good, but with this woman, there's something more there that makes it a whole new experience.

She's so hot and wet, but I hold myself back, careful not to go too hard—until Stella urges me on.

“Harder, Wyatt!” she cries, and her wish is my command.

I piston in and out, her sweet pussy gripping me tight. She cries out, like she's on the verge of losing control again, and that's all it takes for me to lose mine.

Electricity races down my spine, gripping my balls, shooting me past the point of no return. My cock swells inside her, and I let loose, wishing I was filling her up, that there was no barrier between us.

Stella's pussy pulses, milking me for all I have, and after I finish, she's still lost in her release.

Her skin is flushed pink, and her nipples have darkened to a deep rose color. She's so gorgeous.

As she starts to recover, I slide out of her, taking care with the condom, even though I wish it wasn't there. I'm not in any hurry to get her pregnant, but I wish I could leave something of myself inside her. I want to mark her and make her mine.

Mine and Cam's.

CHAPTER 41

STELLA

I may never leave this bed.

I don't think I have any bones left in my body to make it happen. I've been so well

satisfied, I think I've evolved to become a cloud.

Wyatt's left the room, but my head is still propped on Cam. I study what I can see of the space around me, because I didn't pay any attention to it when Cam brought me in.

The walls are a soft, warm gray that adds to my relaxed feeling. Sports memorabilia hangs in one corner, opposite a large landscape photo in a frame. Things are tidy. The bed was made when we came in; I did notice that. It's a bit messy now.

"Is this your room?"

"Mm-hm." He's lazily tracing a finger over my hips, my chest, down my arms.

"It's nice."

His fingers dance across me, just under my chest. "Glad you like it. How are you doing?" His fingers dip down and softly graze the top of the trimmed hair between my legs.

I let out a blissful sigh. "I'm wonderful."

There's a smile in his voice, when he says, "Good. Think you might be ready for more?"

I muster enough strength to roll over, so I can touch him. "Definitely."

"You sure? You look, um ... very relaxed."

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A giggle erupts out of me, as my hands slide over his pants toward the tie at his waist.

He helps me pull it open. “I’ll take it easy on you tonight.”

“What if I don’t want easy?”

Now he’s the one laughing as he slides off the bed and stands up to finally, at long last, take off the rest of his clothes.

Of course, I watch, sure that he can’t possibly be as well-endowed as Wyatt, and knowing I won’t mind, but it turns out he’s been hiding an equally fearsome monster in his pants.

I can’t help but imagine what all their fans and followers would say if they knew what the Battle Duel Boys are packing, then a concerning thought pops up.

“You and Wyatt don’t have an OnlyFans or anything like that, do you?” I should look at his face while we’re talking, but other parts of him are massively distracting.

“No, we don’t.”

“That’s good. I’m sure you’d break the internet, though you could probably retire as billionaires after about a week.”

He’s fully naked now, and looking like a Greek statue, except that his skin is tan and warm and so alive. “We’ll stick to the slower method of earning money by just taking our shirts off.”

I'm relieved that they're not sharing everything with their online fans. It would be their business if they chose to, and maybe I could get used to it, but right now, the idea makes me burn with jealousy. I guess I want to know that there's something of them that's just for me.

Bringing a condom packet with him, Cam lies down next to me, stroking my hair and my body as if he misses me after being apart for just thirty seconds while he removed his clothes.

He brings me up toward the headboard, fluffing the pillow and positioning it under my head, then stretches his body out next to me, turning me onto my side, and pulling my back up against his welcoming chest. When his strong arms wrap around me, I wonder what it would be like to sleep this way, nestled against him all night.

I almost find out when I start to drift off as he cuddles with me, but when his hands eventually head to a particular place, I'm wide awake and ready for what's to come. He lifts my top leg, setting it on his, opening me. His cock nudges at my damp folds, and he gradually presses inside me, like it's where he's meant to be.

His arm is still around me, cupping my breast and holding me close. He starts to fuck me in a way that feels languid and leisurely, but no less exciting. It's more like making love than having sex, but I know it's much too early to throw around a word like that.

I could definitely see myself falling, though. I can't even remember why I thought these men were immature. From their strong bodies, to their responsible actions, to the way they take care of me—they're all man.

Especially in the way they make my body feel.

Cam trails his hand down to find my clit, and he slowly and lightly strokes me there,

as his cock keeps the same pace inside my body. It's hypnotic and heavenly, and another orgasm—how many? I've lost count—builds just as slowly and steadily, eventually rolling through me, wave after wave, as Cam whispers beautiful things in my ear.

“It feels so amazing to be inside you, Stella. I'll never be able to get enough of you.”

We're so connected in this position that when he comes, it almost feels like I'm coming again too. Our bodies are one, his pleasure is mine, and mine is his.

I could nearly cry again, but instead, I smile.

CHAPTER 42

STELLA

“What time did you get home last night?” There's a small smirk playing at the corner of Marissa's lips as she pours herself a cup of coffee.

“Technically, it was this morning.” I can't even begin to hide my smile, and I still feel radiant, even though I've only had a couple of hours of sleep.

Marissa studies my face, and says, “I don't even need to ask you how it went. Let me just offer my congratulations. Were you with both of them?”

I nod. “Mm-hm.”

Marissa shakes her head. “Incredible. Half the women I know are hooking up with multiple men.”

“I still can't believe it happened.”

“That good, huh?” she says.

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“Absolutely mind-blowing.” I lower my voice. Jessie’s still in bed, but she could wander out anytime. “But it’s not just the sex. I’m afraid I’m really falling for them. I already was, and then after last night—I’m a goner.”

“What’s wrong with falling for them? Is it because there’s two of them?”

“No. I mean, maybe I should worry about how that would look, but after seeing Ana with her men, that part seems kind of normal.”

“Then, what is it?”

“There’s just so much potential for things to go wrong, and then I’ll be worse off than before I was involved with them.”

As she stirs cream into her cup, Marissa says, “I suppose, but that’s a pessimistic way of looking at it. What if things go incredibly right, and you end up much better off than if you didn’t take a chance?”

I shrug. “Somehow, that possibility seems less likely. I don’t know.”

“I think you should just have fun and try to stay open.”

Seeing me frown, Marissa asks, “Is there something specific you’re worried about?”

Goldfish wanders into the kitchen then, and I hear Jessie go into the hall bathroom.

Quickly and quietly, I say, “The woman who edits their videos, Trish, told me that

the guys are players. That they sleep with their fans. Lots of them. I don't want to just be one of their numbers, and now that we've ... done what we did ... I don't want to share them with anyone else."

"Have you talked to them about it?"

"I did. They said it wasn't like that, but they literally have thousands of women lust after them online. I just can't help but worry that I'm being reckless with my heart."

Marissa's quiet for a moment, thinking. "From what I've seen, they seem like good guys. If it were me, I guess I'd be inclined to trust them until they give me a reason not to."

As I wash blueberries for Jessie's breakfast, I take that in. It makes sense. The men gave me assurances, and they don't seem like the types to take my heart for granted. I don't think they'll hurt me, at least not intentionally.

* * *

Just after breakfast, my phone pings with a text, then another, before I can even check the screen.

Wyatt: "Been thinking about you all morning."

Cam: "Wish you could've stayed all night."

"Me too," I tell them both.

It's sweet torture, knowing they're just a few steps away, off my back patio. Assuming I could scale the back fence, that is.

If they were in their yard naked and waiting for me, I think I probably could.

“We know you’re a busy woman,” Wyatt says, “but let us know when we can get together again. We have a lot of date ideas.”

“And a lot of other ideas, if you know what I mean,” Cam sends. The silly disguised face emoji he adds to his message cracks me up.

Jessie looks up from her coloring book. “What’s funny, Mommy?”

“Oh, nothing.”

To the men, I say, “I look forward to all of that, but unfortunately things are busy right now. I’m starting that college course this week that I told you about, and my mom and stepdad are planning to come next weekend.”

“Can we meet your mom?” Cam asks. “I’d like to thank her.”

“Thank her?”

“For having such a wonderful daughter.”

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“Laying it on pretty thick, aren’t you, Cam?” Wyatt sends, and I swallow my laughter to keep Jessie from being too curious.

“You don’t want to be involved with my parents’ visit,” I tell them. “I don’t expect it to be a good time.”

“No? All the more reason to have us over. We’ll liven things up,” Cam says.

I let the topic go, but later in the week, he brings it up again, and since I miss them, having only seen their faces over the fence a couple of times since Saturday night/Sunday morning, I give in and invite them to come over and meet my mom and stepdad.

Interestingly, Jessie seems more excited about the neighbors coming over than she does her grandparents, and when Cam and Wyatt arrive mid-morning on Saturday to help me prepare lunch, it’s hard to tell who’s most excited to see them: me, Jessie, or Goldfish.

Let’s just say, if I had a tail, I’d be wagging it.

I’d like to greet them with a kiss, and their eyes tell me they’re thinking the same thing, but we’ve agreed to keep our relationship on a purely-friends basis today. I haven’t thought about how long I’ll need to date the guys before I feel comfortable being honest about the relationship with Jessie, but it’s too soon right now.

“You okay?” Cam asks when he and I are alone in the kitchen, and Wyatt and Jessie are setting the tables, both the dining table and the card table I bought for the

occasion. Marissa had plans today, and I think she was relieved not to be here.

It's the first time my mom's visited since I moved away—since she kicked me out—and there are a million ways the day could go wrong. The knot that's been in my stomach since I woke up this morning has loosened, though, ever since my neighbors arrived.

"I've been better, but I'm alright." I offer Cam a smile, which is actually genuine, now that he's next to me.

He gives me a sympathetic smile in return. "I get it. Families can be difficult." When I nod in agreement, he says, "Mine are embarrassed by how I make a living. They actually lie to family and friends about it and tell them I work in marketing."

"Oh, I didn't know that."

"Wyatt and I have both been harassed and teased by old friends about it, too."

"I'll bet your friends are just jealous."

Cam adds the tomato he sliced to the salad bowl. "I don't know about that, but they would be now, if they saw who we're dating."

"You do lay it on thick, don't you?"

He leans toward me, so close that my body goes on alert. "I'm only speaking the truth."

"You're just a charmer."

"No, you are," he says, "because you've charmed me."

Jessie's calling for me, so I give Cam a warning look to get him back in friend mode, though it's hard for me to keep a special smile off my lips.

CHAPTER 43

STELLA

Twenty minutes later, my mom shows up half buzzed. She wears it well, so maybe someone who doesn't know her as well as I do wouldn't even notice.

She gushes over Jessie, acting like she hasn't seen her in three years, while also somehow simultaneously casting a disapproving eye around the house, which makes no sense, since my mom isn't exactly a domestic goddess herself.

"You've grown so much," she tells Jessie, while my stepdad shakes the men's hands.

Shortly after my mom is introduced to Cam and Wyatt, she asks where they're from and uses her question as a segue into complaining about what a shame it is that I moved so far away from her.

"You arrived just in time. Lunch is ready," I announce almost immediately. Because I don't want to prolong the visit, even if they did drive a long way to be here.

I only agreed that they could come here for Jessie's sake. I still haven't forgiven my mom for kicking us out, though I understand her alcoholism underlies all her erratic behavior. I love her, but I'd be happier not to see her very often at all.

She actually did me a favor by kicking me out of her house.

Lunch proceeds, with most of the talking done by Jessie and her grandparents. When there's silence, Cam does a great job reviving the conversation.

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Both Wyatt and Cam give me supportive looks when the others are preoccupied, and it's so nice having someone here who's on my side.

Outside of having Jessie, I've felt very alone for much of my adult life, until I moved in with Marissa. Now, having not one but two men in my corner feels incredible.

"I keep thinking you both look very familiar," my mom tells Cam and Wyatt at one point as she studies them.

Horried, I wonder if she's about to tell us that she's seen them online, but then she says, "Maybe you just look like some young men I've seen around our town."

I let out a sigh of relief, and inwardly shake my head. There are definitely no men where I'm from who look anywhere near as good as Cam and Wyatt do.

"That reminds me," she says. "There's a new pottery painting shop in the plaza by our house. It's too bad you moved away. I could take Jessie there. I bet it would be fun."

I try to be the grownup when I'm with my mom, but when I see my daughter's face fall at the thought of the fun she's missing out on, I decide to say what I'm thinking for a change.

"There were so many places around town you could have taken Jessie during the first five years of her life, but for some reason, you never did."

Turning to Jessie, I ask, "Does pottery painting sound like fun? There's a place just

past your school that we could check out.”

“I went to a painting party once when I was a kid,” Wyatt says. “I ended up getting more paint on myself than on the dish I was supposed to be painting.” He lifts up his hand and puts it right in front of his face, inspecting it. “I think my fingers might still be blue, actually.” Holding his hand out to Jessie, he asks, “Do you see any blue on here?”

With my daughter distracted and entertained, I shoot my mom a quick dirty look, then I paste on a smile.

After a couple of uncomfortable hours, their visit is finally over and my parents leave without too much added drama. I brace for Jessie to be upset like she is after their phone calls, but with Cam and Wyatt here, she’s in good spirits.

The guys insist on helping me clean up, and then the three of us relax in the living room while Jessie plays outside with Goldfish.

“Thanks for your help today,” I tell them. “I really appreciated the support.”

“Always,” Cam says, lightly resting his hand on my leg.

It’s so hard to keep a friend-appropriate distance from the men, and I can tell they feel the same, because they take every opportunity to touch me.

“Do you and Jessie have any plans tomorrow?” Wyatt’s tone tells me it’s more than just a casual question.

“Just some chores around the house, and I’ll probably do some schoolwork.”

“Can you take a day off from that, to do something fun?” Cam asks.

These men are doing the absolute opposite of ghosting me. In fact, I may need to tell them to back off a bit—just kidding! I can't get enough of them.

"Maybe. What do you have in mind?"

"We didn't want to say anything in front of Jessie, in case the answer's no, but we were thinking Disneyland would be fun."

"Disneyland?"

"Yeah, have you ever been?"

I shake my head. Of course, I know it exists, but I've never even thought of going there. "Have you?" They both nod. "When you were kids?" I ask.

"Yes," Wyatt says, "and several times as adults. We went last year, actually."

"Oh, was it something you did for your channel? A promotional thing?"

They both seem surprised that I would assume that. "No, we just went for fun."

"Isn't it for kids, with princesses and pirates, and all that?"

"Why don't you let us take you there, so you can see for yourself?"

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I shrug. “Okay. I guess so. I’m sure Jessie would have a great time.”

“Great!” Cam looks over his shoulder to confirm Jessie’s whereabouts, then leans over and gives me a quick kiss. “It’s going to be so much fun.”

“I’ll buy our tickets,” I tell them. I have the idea that it’s an expensive place, and they definitely don’t need to pay for my daughter’s admission.

“Absolutely not,” Wyatt says. “Wear your most comfortable shoes, and we’ll pick you up early.”

They both seem extra excited about the whole idea, and though I’m confused about why they’re so enthusiastic about an amusement park, their mood rubs off on me.

When Jessie comes inside, and I tell her about the plans, she jumps up and down. Apparently, she’s heard about the park from friends, and I’m sure she’s seen advertisements.

“I’ve wanted to go to Disneyland my entire life,” she cries, making it sound like that’s been a long, long time.

CHAPTER44

STELLA

When we pass through the gates at Disneyland the next morning, I’m still dubious about how much I’m personally going to enjoy the park. I’ll definitely enjoy

watching Jessie have fun though, and she's so happy, she's skipping instead of walking.

From the moment we enter, we're surrounded by music, colorful decorations, and tempting food smells. Little by little, as we twirl on teacups, circle around on the carousel, and tour the houses where Mickey and Minnie live, the place starts to have an effect on me.

It seems like it would be impossible to worry about everyday concerns while you're here.

Wyatt takes us on his favorite ride, which is filled with pirates, and Cam shows us his favorite roller coaster, a runaway train.

"Would you like to ride it?" I ask Jessie, as the ride vehicle goes whizzing by our viewing spot. "You're tall enough."

She toes the concrete under her feet, looking uneasy. "I'm not sure."

"How about if we work our way up to it?" Cam suggests. "We can ride the regular train that goes around the park first, then a smaller roller coaster by Mickey's house, and if you love both of those, you know you'll be ready for this one."

When she nods her head, he holds his knuckles out to her for a fist bump. "It's a plan. Let's go!"

Jessie's still a little nervous, but also excited when we finally make our way back to the big coaster. Cam and Wyatt are encouraging without being at all pushy. As we wait in line, they tell her exactly what to expect, while also cracking jokes to keep the mood light.

When it's almost our turn to ride, she asks if she can sit next to one of the guys.

"Which one?" I ask.

She looks back and forth between the men, who are engaged in a discussion about what they want to eat after we get off the ride. "I can't decide."

"Maybe we can ride twice, so you can sit once with each of them."

She lifts her hand up, and I have to laugh when I finally figure out she's looking for another fist bump.

She rides the coaster with Wyatt first, and Cam and I sit behind them. Cam takes the opportunity to squeeze my knee, and keeps his hand on me during the entire ride, in a very PG family-friendly way.

Jessie and Wyatt are both laughing as we exit the ride, and my little girl is exhilarated as she recaps her favorite parts.

When we ride again, Wyatt pulls me close to him on the bench seat. "Are you having a good time?"

"I'm having a great time," I say, nodding.

"Good. I think Jessie's having a good time, too," he says.

"I'm pretty sure she's having the best day ever."

Wyatt's grin warms my heart as he takes my hand in his. "Good."

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Afterward, while all four of us are sitting around an outdoor table enjoying ice cream bars shaped like Mickey Mouse's head, two teenage girls approach.

"Are you—" they start to ask, and when Cam and Wyatt turn toward them, they squeal. "Oh my god, it is you! I knew it! We love you guys!"

Both girls gush over the Battle Duel Boys, as the men smile and nod with humble expressions on their faces.

"Can we take a picture with you?" one of the girls asks.

The men agree, and I do the polite thing and offer to take the picture instead of making them take a selfie.

The men get recognized two more times throughout the day, but both encounters are polite and not too intrusive. It's odd to be out with people who are semi-famous, but I think I could get used to it.

We go on several more rides, including another rollercoaster that my brave daughter requests, and the world famous "Small World" ride, whose song I'm certain will be a worm in my brain for the rest of my life.

After dark, we watch fireworks over the castle, and by the end of the show, Jessie's barely able to keep her eyes open. Wyatt carries her out of the park, onto the tram, and all the way back to the car. Seeing my daughter asleep in his arms makes me feel all kinds of things.

I'm tired too, but the happiness I'm feeling gives me energy.

"That was so much fun. Thank you for everything," I tell them both when we're all in the car. Neither of the men let me spend a penny all day, not for admission, food, or even souvenirs. They insisted on buying a shirt, a stuffed toy, and Mickey ears for Jessie, and sparkly sequined Minnie ears for me. I feel a bit like a kid again myself.

I'll have to find some way to pay them back, maybe with homemade blueberry muffins, because I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be able to make cookies as good as Wyatt's. I'll definitely have Jessie make a thank-you card for them, too.

"Our pleasure," Cam says, as Wyatt says, "You're welcome. We should plan to come back during the Halloween season."

"I'd like that," I say softly, thinking about how nice it was for the four of us to spend the day together, and how nice it is that the men want to make future plans with us. They were so attentive to Jessie, so helpful, and as always, so much fun.

The little part of my brain that remains wary is sometimes on the lookout for their faults, but I haven't found any yet.

CHAPTER 45

STELLA

The men stay in touch throughout the week with text messages, chats over the back fence, and one night, they join me when I take Goldfish for a walk.

"Can you go out this weekend?" Cam asks as we slowly circle the block after dark.

I'm eager for another date with them, especially for time alone with them at their

house, but I don't want to shirk my mom responsibilities or take Marissa's time for granted by asking her to watch Jessie too often.

However, when Wyatt slides his arm around my waist, and Cam stops me on the corner to kiss me, I'm persuaded to ask Marissa if she's available to babysit.

"Go out all you want," she says, when I bring it up later that night. "You've been so much happier since you started dating the hot neighbors. I mean ...I can only imagine why." Her eyes make lewd suggestions.

"It's not that," I protest. "Well, it's not just that. But yeah, I really like them."

I tell the men I'm available on the weekend and ask what they have in mind for our date, but they say it's a surprise.

I'm fluttering with anticipation and curiosity when I drive over to their house to meet them Saturday evening. I asked them not to pick me up, because if Jessie catches a glimpse of them, she'll want to go along, no matter what type of boring errand I claimed we were doing.

Cam opens their door looking like I've caught him in the middle of getting dressed. He's wearing black dress pants and a gray sleeveless undershirt that molds to his broad chest like it was painted on. He pulls me into a welcoming kiss, and I take the opportunity to squeeze one of his biceps, because I can't resist.

"We know you're not ready to tell Jessie we're dating yet," he says, "so we didn't want to ask you to get dressed up tonight, or we figured she'd ask a lot of questions."

"Okay ..."

Wyatt appears from the hallway with a garment bag in his hand. "So we got this for

you, so you could change here.” He unzips the bag, revealing silky black fabric.

“You bought a dress for me?” I couldn’t be more surprised if there were a giraffe in their house.

Cam says, “Yeah, we’d like to take you somewhere nice tonight.”

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I look down at my comfortable flats, then at the basic brown purse on my shoulder. “I don’t have the right accessories to go with that dress.”

“We have those, too. C’mon.” Wyatt takes my hand and leads me to their hall bathroom, where the rest of my makeover is waiting.

There’s a box with elegant black heels, a clutch bag from a brand that makes me raise my eyebrows, a pair of sparkly earrings, and a beautiful necklace.

I gape at the men, stunned. These aren’t things you wear to an escape room or even a walk on the beach. “Why did you do all this?”

“Try them on,” is the only response I get, and then they leave me alone to get changed.

When I take off the blouse I’m wearing, I realize my bra is probably going to be an issue, too, because the dress they bought appears to have a deep V neckline, and I’m wearing a white lace bra with full coverage cups.

I’m wondering if I dare go without a bra, when I find a lingerie bag on the hanger behind the dress. Inside are silky lace scraps of fabric that make my skin flame. What do they have planned for tonight?

The dress feels great on my body and seems to fit well, but the only mirror in the bathroom is above the sink, so I don’t have a good view. When I open the door, the men are waiting for me in the hall, and there’s an instant ache low in my belly when I see them.

How could these possibly be the same men who loaded a cart up with marshmallows and chased a skunk from my yard?

Cam's put on a black dress shirt that looks like it was specifically cut for his body. Wyatt's wearing dark gray pants and a white dress shirt that makes his skin glow.

Both of them look equally stunning and stunned.

"Stella ..." is all Wyatt says, in a way that makes me feel like the most beautiful woman in the world.

"You look gorgeous," Cam says, as his eyes eat me up.

"Do you have a bigger mirror?" I ask.

Wyatt leads me into his bedroom, a dark, masculine space neatly filled with books, sports equipment, and what appears to be a deconstructed Nerf gun on the corner of his dresser.

The sight of it grounds me, when I otherwise feel like I've stepped into a fantasy.

Both men come to stand behind me as I check myself in the mirror. The dress is simple and elegant, all black, floor-length and sleeveless, with a low neckline and a high slit on the thigh. It's tasteful but also incredibly sexy. It seems to add a foot to my height, not counting the heels that go with it.

"How did you know my size?"

Cam cups my hips and slides his hands up along my sides to my chest. "Measured you by hand. Don't you remember?"

“Even the shoes fit,” I say, amazed.

“Good,” Wyatt says. “What about the jewelry?”

I lift my hand to my bare neck. “Oh! I forgot.”

He disappears and quickly returns, handing the earring box to Cam before draping the necklace onto my chest and fastening it at the back of my neck, pressing a kiss to a spot nearby.

When Cam makes moves to put an earring on me, I offer to do it, but he insists, and it feels incredibly intimate to have them adorning my body this way.

Head to toe, I’m dressed in clothing they selected with me in mind, and the thought of that makes me feel like I’m shimmering.

“Maybe we should change our plans and just stay in tonight,” Cam says, as his eyes devour my reflection.

“Patience,” Wyatt says, before brushing his lips to the side of my neck.

CHAPTER 46

CAM

It’s fun keeping secrets from Stella, and even better when we get to reveal the surprise.

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It's not really anything that special, just dinner in a private dining room at a downtown hotel restaurant, but when we're seated around the intimate table for three, Stella's eyes dance around, taking in the fancy table settings, the black and gold decor, and most of all, the sparkling view of the city beneath us.

"This is beautiful," she coos.

We've positioned her so that she has a view of the skyline, and we have the better view—of her.

She looks incredible tonight, but then, she always does. I like dressed-up Stella, Stella in sweats and a ponytail, and especially Stella in nothing at all.

I forcefully redirect my thoughts to the menu, otherwise my erection will be bumping into the table and upsetting the shiny glassware.

After the wine waiter leaves the room, Stella comments that there are no prices on the menu.

"Don't worry about it," I say. "Order whatever you want."

"You're always treating me, and I'm starting to feel weird about it."

"There's no need to feel that way," Wyatt says. "We can afford it, and we want to take good care of you."

"Our channel makes good money, that's why it's hard to let it go," I explain.

“Oh? Do you want to let it go? I remember you saying you don’t plan to do it forever.”

A waiter brings in an amuse-bouche, telling us they’re caviar and crème fraîche tartlets, before leaving us alone again.

“Here’s another first for me,” Stella says when she raises one of the bites to her lips. After she tastes it and her nose crinkles, she says, “And maybe a last. I don’t think caviar is my thing.”

“Did you know that female sturgeons, who produce caviar, can live up to 150 years?” I say.

“Sure, Cam, everyone knows that,” Wyatt says, and Stella giggles.

She takes a sip of wine, probably to wash away the fish flavor, then asks us, “Why, if you can afford meals like this, do you live in such a modest neighborhood?”

“We like meeting women over our back fence,” Wyatt says.

“We like the neighborhood,” I tell her, “and we wanted to focus on building up our savings accounts and investing the money we earned.”

She nods, looking impressed, then asks, “How did you get into the work you do?”

“We started out making videos to appeal to all ages. Family-friendly stuff was our original intention,” Wyatt tells her.

“But we didn’t have much of a plan or a solid direction for our channel,” I say. “In one of our reels, Wyatt’s arms were prominent, and that caught the attention of female fans. Because our channel wasn’t growing as quickly as we wanted, we

decided to lean into the female fanbase. We started subtly showing more muscle?—”

“And then less subtly,” Wyatt adds.

“Eventually, it became all about that,” I explain, “though we wanted to keep ourselves entertained while we were doing it, and stand apart from all the guys making workout videos and doing pull-ups, so we kept building fun things and setting up oddball challenges.”

“But we’re making plans to leave all the thirst trap stuff behind,” Wyatt says. “We’re planning to transition back to the family-friendly content we originally intended.”

“I think kids would really enjoy watching the type of stunts and games you do,” Stella says.

I fish in the bread basket and pull out a roll. “That’s the goal, but we need to find a different audience, so the comments section stays family-friendly, too.”

The knowing and somewhat uneasy look on Stella’s face tells me that she’s read the comments.

“So, if all goes well, it’ll be little kids swarming you when you’re out, rather than women? You’ll have to wear disguises when you go to Disneyland.”

“We’ll be lucky if we can get a new channel to catch on. That’s why it’s risky to make the change,” I say.

“I think you should do whatever you feel you’d like best, because I’m sure you’ll succeed in any direction you set your mind to. I know one kid who loves you, as you can probably tell.”

“That’s nice to hear,” I tell her.

I like that Stella’s not making the type of work we do a condition of our relationship. It seems that even if we keep doing what we’re doing, she’d be okay with it, but I don’t want to keep up the same work.

My heart’s definitely not in it anymore, and I don’t think Wyatt’s ever was. Even though we’re incredibly grateful to our followers, we hate looking at some of the viewer comments, and we definitely don’t want strange women continuing to show up at our door.

The food arrives, and Stella seems to enjoy it much more than the bite of caviar. “Have you been here before?” she asks after she’s a few bites into her pork loin.

“No,” Wyatt says, “but we heard it was a great place for a special date.”

Her brows lift. “Oh, is this date special?”

“Every date with you is special,” I tell her.

“We just wanted to do something nice with you,” Wyatt says, “to let you know we’re not all about amusement parks and games.”

I reach for her hand. “And we wanted to take the opportunity to say that we understand you may want to take things slow, and we know that being open about our relationship with your daughter is a big step, but we’re ready for that whenever you are.”

“No pressure,” Wyatt says, “but we’re all in, and we want you to know it.”

CHAPTER 47

STELLA

The night still feels like a fantasy, even though these men are so very real as they feed me bites of food, kiss me between bites, and touch my knee under the table.

This date isn’t like any date I’ve ever imagined having. Truth be told, I’m more comfortable walking the beach or playing games with them, but it’s quite impressive how smoothly they slide into this world, too. While I found myself wondering which utensil to use for the fancy courses of food that have been brought in, the men seem completely at ease.

Finding out how much money they’re earning and how responsible they are with it is another unexpected sign of their maturity. I made so many assumptions about them when I met them, and they’ve proven me wrong in so many ways.

I love that they can be so playful, yet so committed to whatever it is they’re doing. They have a good time, but they also achieve their goals.

And they’ve apparently set a goal of having me in their life. They’re wooing me hard with this dinner.

Their talk of us having a future together is still a bit scary, but I think that has more to do with my past than with them. Just because I was burned by Brandon, doesn’t mean I shouldn’t trust someone when they show me they deserve that trust.

All those years ago, I put my faith in Brandon without even knowing him, but things are different with Cam and Wyatt. These men don’t have ulterior motives like

Brandon did. They don't seem to want anything from me, they just want to be with me. And they're not only saying nice things, but showing me with their actions how much they care.

After the three of us share a decadent trio of miniature desserts, the men settle the bill and lead me back to the hotel lobby.

"Do you like to dance?" Cam asks, and I nod, though I haven't been to a club since I was in college, and my recent dancing has been limited to the Hokey Pokey and shaking the sillies out with Jessie.

We take the elevator to the seventh floor, where there's an open-air nightclub that's already busy, even though it's not very late.

Since I drank a good bit of wine with dinner, I decline their offer of a cocktail, and we head straight to the dance floor, where an upbeat number is playing. Cam and Wyatt get right into the groove, moving their bodies with the music, impressing me with yet another thing they're good at. Though, after experiencing their moves in the bedroom, it should come as no surprise that they can dance well.

As one song fades into another, I notice a woman nearby watching Cam and Wyatt, and after a minute, she heads over to them, leaving her date behind at the bar.

"Wow, I can't believe it's you," she yells to be heard over the music. "Can I get a picture with you guys?"

Cam gives her a smile as he pulls me closer, putting his arm around my shoulder. "Not right now. We're on a date. Sorry." He says it with such charm that the woman isn't upset, and instead she gives me a look that says, "Aren't you lucky?" before she retreats.

“I wouldn’t have minded if you took a quick picture,” I tell them, and it’s mostly true. Their fans make me a little bit jealous, but the men have been so reassuring, that I’m not really worried about what other women want from them.

“I normally don’t mind either, but now isn’t the time,” Cam says, giving me a quick kiss before pulling my hips close and swaying with me.

The men take turns dancing with me, the three of us enjoying our own little corner of the floor. As the songs go by, things get hotter—not just from working up a sweat, but also from our moves getting closer and closer.

They keep things just on the clean side of dirty dancing, but their hands stray all over my body, and watching them move the way they do makes me wish we were back at their house. I love the dressy clothes they’re wearing tonight, but I also want to see them take those clothes off.

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When Wyatt, who's behind me, presses his hips against my backside and I feel that he's growing hard, I reach over my shoulder to grab his collar.

"Maybe we should leave soon," I tell him.

His lips play at the back of my shoulder. "I'm ready when you are."

He and Cam exchange a look, and then they're each taking one of my hands and leading me toward the door.

We return to the lobby and cross to a different bank of elevators where, instead of lighting up the button for the underground parking garage, Wyatt presses a higher floor.

"Where are we going?"

"Up to a suite. It's too early for the night to be over," he says.

The yearning inside me feels like it's been stirred with a hot fire poker, all the embers swirling around, starting to spark. But even during this dream date, I can't forget reality.

"I can't stay the night. I need to be home for Jessie."

"Of course," Cam says. "We'll take you home whenever you need to go."

"Do you want to check in with Marissa?" Wyatt asks. "Make sure everything's

okay?”

I do, and immediately get a big thumbs-up emoji from my friend along with a message not to hurry home.

If I thought dinner was fancy, it’s nothing compared to the room that’s behind the door Wyatt opens on the fifteenth floor.

It’s pure luxury, with a city view, an enormous bed, and a bathroom that’s the stuff dreams are made of, with a walk-in mosaic-tiled shower and an oversized freestanding bathtub. There’s a bottle of champagne on ice in the sitting area, along with a vase of roses and a box of chocolates.

“Did I get my calendar mixed up? Is it Valentine’s Day?” I ask them, as I marvel at the amount of preparation they put into this date.

Both of them laugh, and Wyatt says, “No, not Valentine’s Day. You just wait and see what we come up with for that holiday.”

Cam pops open the champagne, pours us each a glass, and raises a toast. “To a wonderful evening, with a beautiful woman.”

“To many more nights like this,” Wyatt adds, clinking glasses.

After we all take a sip, Cam lifts his glass again. “To taking off Stella’s dress as soon as humanly possible.”

As I’m laughing, he takes the champagne flute from my hand and sets it on the table, while Wyatt puts his own glass down. Then the two men are on me like I’m their only source of air.

CHAPTER48

STELLA

They each take one of my hands and kiss their way up my arms. At my shoulders, they slide the straps of the dress down, and one of them unzips the back. They don't make it fall right away, but instead let it hang from my arms and chest as their mouths claim every bit of my exposed skin.

One of them bends and slips my shoes off, and then together they remove the dress completely, leaving me standing between them in only the jewelry and the black lingerie.

"It's been too long," Cam says, as they touch and kiss and lick every inch of me. He kneels at my feet, his hands caressing my thighs, as he kisses the delicate skin of my inner thighs and mouths over the sheer bit of fabric between my legs.

Wyatt slips one bra strap from my shoulder and takes my breast in his mouth, his tongue sending shockwaves through my entire body.

I'll never get over how amazing it is to have these two men adoring my body at once. It's pleasure overload, yet at the same time, I can never get enough.

A few minutes later, I'm naked, though I'm not even sure when it happened.

Wyatt moves to lift me up, but I put a hand out to stop him. "This needs to go differently this time. As good as you both look in your dress clothes, I want to see you out of them."

They both strip, with me helping where I can, my fingers handling buttons, helping to pull belts, and eventually peeling undershirts off of them.

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Then, I get to do something I've wanted to do for a while. I stroke their bodies, over their chests, down their pebbled abs, and follow the happy trails to finally slide my hands over their cocks.

They both grow hard as soon as I touch them. I grip both of them at the same time, start to stroke them, then kneel in front of them and take Cam in my mouth while I continue to work Wyatt with my hand.

I alternate between them and love the way they respond. Each moan and groan and every subtle response from their bodies spur me to take them deeper and work them faster.

Cam utters my name, sounding like he's being tortured, as he slides his fingers into my hair and palms the back of my head. He thrusts in and out of my mouth a few more times before his pace staggers. "I'm gonna come."

He meets my eyes and starts to pull back, but I hold the base of his cock and keep him steady. Hot jets of his release stream into my mouth and down my throat, and I try to take it all, but when it gets to be too much to handle, I pull back and am decorated by his pleasure.

At the same time, Wyatt lets out a loud groan and his body stiffens. I keep stroking his cock, gripping it tight, and he joins Cam, letting loose, painting me with thread after thread of his cum.

When they finish, the men look at me with awe and admiration in their eyes.

“Fuck, that was hot,” Cam says, as he bends to pick me up.

Wyatt kisses me once I’m in Cam’s arms, and together they carry me into the gleaming bathroom, set me on the counter, and work together to clean me off.

As Cam wipes my neck with a cloth, Wyatt crosses to the tub and turns on the tap. I’m treated to the incredible view of his bare backside—his long legs, muscled and firm, and an ass that looks so good, I want to jump off the counter and go take a bite.

He fills the tub, then carries me over and sets me down among the bubbles. The water is perfectly warm with a light fragrance that will seal this moment in my memory forever. Not that I’ll need the help of a scent to remember this.

“Another first for me,” I tell Wyatt as he steps into the tub and settles down behind me, pulling me back against his chest.

“What’s that?”

“Well, all of this night, really, but I’ve never taken a bath with a man before.”

“How about two?” Cam hands each of us our champagne glasses that he retrieved from the living room, then steps in at the other end of the tub, and though it seems like there’s no way he’ll fit, somehow it works, even though some bubbles do overflow.

I sip champagne as Wyatt cradles me in his arms and Cam massages my feet under the water, and I’m pretty sure I’ve died and gone to heaven.

I’m once again struck by how very manly these men are. From the sexy dark stubble shading Cam’s face as he smiles at me across the cloud of iridescent bubbles, to the reassuring steadiness of Wyatt’s arms as he holds me close.

There's a calm strength to both of them that tells me I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be.

CHAPTER 49

CAM

Before the water gets cold, I step out, dry off, and bring one of the big bath towels over to dry Stella. While she's still wrapped in the towel, I carry her into the bedroom, set her in the middle of the bed, and stretch out beside her.

Wyatt comes in and lies down on her other side. "We still have a couple more hours before we need to get you home," he tells Stella.

I tap a finger on my bottom lip and pretend to think. "Hmm. How ever will we fill the time?"

Stella trails the tips of her fingernails down the center of my chest. "By filling me."

My god, I love this woman. I'm not ready to tell her yet, because I don't think she's ready to hear it, but it's the truth just the same.

"I can do that," is what I say instead, as I slide my foot along the silky skin of her legs.

She turns toward Wyatt, drawing him in as well. "I wish I could take both of you at the same time."

Surprise registers on my friend's face, just as I'm sure it does on mine.

"We could try that, if you want," I say.

Stella frowns, then giggles. “Have you seen the size of yourselves? There’s no way you’d both fit.”

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“There are other ways,” I say carefully, watching her face as she processes my meaning, seeing the moment it registers.

“Would you ... want to do that?” She looks back and forth between me and Wyatt.

“Are you kidding?” I say lightly, hoping my chuckle eases the furrow on her brow. I slide my hand down to her hip and squeeze the soft flesh there. “I want to do anything you want to do.”

She turns to Wyatt. “Do you want to do that?”

“We can try it. If you don’t enjoy it, we’ll stop.”

Her eyes are wild as she studies the ceiling, imagining. “I’m up for anything with the two of you,” she says finally.

“Oh, Stella.” I roll her onto her back and cage her between my arms as I kiss her sweet mouth. This woman is incredible.

Luckily, I packed lube with the condoms I brought to the room earlier in the afternoon. I didn’t really think we’d need it, but I believe in being prepared.

And speaking of preparation, we spend a lot of time getting Stella ready for another new experience. This time, it’s something new for all of us, as far as I know.

While Wyatt sucks on her nipples and fingers her pussy until she’s writhing around between us, I use a slick finger to tease her other hole, gradually exploring new

territory, and finding out she likes it.

After a lot of foreplay, Wyatt slides his cock into her drenched pussy and starts to fuck her at a relaxed but steady pace. At the same time, I enter her from behind, slow as a glacier, as I rely on Wyatt to watch her face and alert me if she appears to be experiencing anything but pleasure.

Though I regret that I can't see her expression as we both take her, I can hear the sounds she's making, and it's those purrs and soft gasps that have me worried I'm not going to last long.

My endurance is doubly tested when Stella starts to come.

Her body grips me so tight, it's unlike anything I've ever experienced, and I immediately want more.

Somehow I manage to hang on until she's on the other side of her peak, and then I can't hold back a second longer. I come, and come hard, my vision going white, euphoria filling every cell in my body.

Vaguely, I'm aware that Wyatt's coming too, and in an instant, I understand why Stella cried the last time we were together, because this is all so intense in a way I didn't anticipate.

And it's not just about the physical experience. I'm overwhelmed that this woman who's been hurt in her past trusts us enough to be vulnerable with us, to know that we'll take care of her through such an intimate experience. She's a perfect fit for Wyatt and me, in every way, and I'm going to do whatever it takes to keep her here between us forever.

CHAPTER50

STELLA

A few days have passed since the night at the hotel with my neighbors. Since the night I became a different woman.

It may be incredibly old-fashioned, or maybe clichéd, to say that sex changed me, but it did.

Or maybe it's just the men who changed me, and not the sex itself, but I feel like my heart's been laid open in the very best way. Like it grew several sizes and is now not only big enough to hold my daughter, but to hold Cam and Wyatt too, and there's room for a lot more happiness in there as well.

The happiness is bubbling over, in fact, much like the bathtub we shared at that luxe hotel.

I'm humming a happy tune and savoring memories of how it felt to be in that tub, as I finally mix the batter for the blueberry muffins I promised myself I'd make to thank Cam and Wyatt for our day at Disneyland.

I have so many new experiences to thank them for.

Daydreaming as I spoon the batter into the liners, I imagine what it would be like to live with them. Maybe Wyatt and I could bake together, and he could show me how he makes those delicious chocolate chip cookies, and then all three of us could cuddle on the sofa as we feed them to each other.

I'm getting way ahead of myself, but I've got it bad for those men. At first, going out with them seemed like something completely separate from my real life, and being with them has felt like a fantasy, but now I'm starting to think about them being part of my daily life. Waking up with them, sharing meals, doing things with Jessie as a

family ...

Despite these ideas, I'm still not quite ready to tell Jessie that I'm dating them. Even though the men make me feel secure, I just feel that more time should pass before everything's out in the open.

Maybe part of what's holding me back is their internet fame, though I'm getting good at ignoring the fact that so many other women see their bodies every day. I get to see all of them, and I know there's so much more to them than their looks.

I get some work done while the muffins bake and cool. After they're set, but still warm, I line a basket with a pretty dish towel and arrange them inside.

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It's time for Goldfish to go for a walk, so I decide to combine errands. I heard the guys out in their back yard earlier, so I assume they're still home, but it's Trish who answers their door.

"Stella, how are you?" Something about her greeting doesn't seem as friendly as it's been in the past. Maybe I should have come over after work hours.

"Are you busy? I'm just dropping these off for the guys." I hold out the basket.

She makes a face like she smelled the muffins and is about to tell me that someone has a deadly blueberry allergy. Instinctively, I pull the basket toward me and take a step back.

"I'm sorry," she says with an apologetic frown.

"Sorry for what?"

"I'm just feeling really embarrassed." She actually covers her face for a second and is grimacing when she moves her hands away.

"What's the matter?" She looks the same as she always does. Maybe her hair is a bit out of place.

"Last time you were here, I practically lectured you on staying away from the wrong kind of men."

I nod, expecting she's about to tell me that she was wrong about the guys.

“I was all full of advice for you, and this morning, I did the stupidest thing. I didn’t even take my own advice.”

“What do you mean?”

“After all these months of resisting them, they caught me in a weak moment, and I gave in to them, even though I told myself I never would.”

“What? Who?” My hand that’s holding the basket drops to my side, and Goldfish takes advantage, rising up on his hind legs to smell the baked goods, before I lift them out of his reach.

“Cam and Wyatt.” She says this in a loud whisper as she tips her head in the direction of the back yard. “Apparently, they were extra horny this morning, and they came on to me just like they have so many times before. I’ve always said no, because you know, they’re my employers, and giving in to them could make things complicated here.”

She fans herself and grins. “Actually, I used to think they were joking about wanting to fool around, but let me tell you, they were not joking. No sir.”

She might still be talking, but I can’t hear a thing. Blood is whooshing through my ears like a river, and the rest of my body has turned into a block of ice.

I shove the basket of muffins at her because I need a free hand to open the door, and then I’m out of there, stumbling down the front porch steps, grateful that Goldfish isn’t lagging behind.

“Stella, what’s the matter?” Trish calls after me, but I don’t even turn around.

How could they? How could they?

That's all that fills my head the whole way home.

Why did they make promises to me? Why did they toy with me if they wanted to sleep with other women? Why did they lie?

I just ...I thought they were good men, but I should have known better. I'm not a good judge of men and never have been.

And my friends were telling me to have fun with them, and that's all I should have been doing.

I shouldn't have been giving them my heart.

I shouldn't have been falling in love.

I can't believe I was so stupid.

CHAPTER 51

WYATT

"If you're not going to take your shirt off, open more buttons." Cam has the camera by his hip, and he's not hiding his impatience.

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“I’ll give them some skin tomorrow.”

We spent the day building a bunch of kites, and tomorrow, when we go to the park with the videographer to launch them, I’ll have my shirt off. I shouldn’t have to show skin for this informational video. It would be nice if our viewers actually focused on the kites.

“I get it,” he says. “The more time we spend with Stella, the less I want to do this, too.”

I check the tail on one of the delta kites and tighten the ties. “I wonder if she watches our reels.”

“I’m sure she’s seen them, and I’ve wondered if she watches regularly. I can’t decide if I like the idea or not.”

“I definitely don’t like the idea, especially if she reads the comments.”

Cam shrugs, but I can tell it doesn’t sit well with him, either.

Even if Stella doesn’t mind how we make our living, I never planned to do this when I was in a relationship with someone. I know it’s not cheating, but it feels like it.

“I’d like us to transition to making videos for a different audience as soon as possible,” I say.

Cam nods. “Agreed, but we can’t abruptly stop what we’re doing now, or all our hard

work will go to waste. We need to make a plan and be smart about how we transition.” He lifts the camera, tries out two different angles, then lowers it again. “It’s bad enough that we haven’t been posting as frequently lately.”

“Stella’s the reason for that, and she’s well worth it,” I say.

“Again, agreed, but we need to figure out how to balance work and personal life better, or we’ll never be able to get a new channel going.”

He’s ready to record, and I try to get my head into it, but there’s too much running through my mind. Even though everything’s currently going well, it feels like one misstep could throw it all off balance.

“Think you can smile?” Cam prods, and I sneer at him.

“We’ll make a change soon,” he says, “but in the meantime, I suggest you pretend the camera is Stella. That’s what I do.” He’s smirking as he hands me the camera. “Let me show you.”

Hoping that Cam will take care of doing the footage we need, I press record and capture what turns out to be a bunch of nonsense.

“Hey, lover,” he says, arching a brow suggestively. “How are you today? I missed you.” There may as well be hearts in his eyes as he flirts with the camera in a ridiculously exaggerated way. “Ready for me to show you the kites we made just for you? There are long ones—” He picks one up and holds it in front of his crotch. “And thick ones ...and they’re all stiff and hard.”

As I’m fumbling to turn off the camera, Cam makes a kissy face and runs his hand down his body, dipping it into his shorts.

“What the fuck was that?”

“I’m just trying to get you to lighten your mood, bro.”

I shove the camera back at him. “Get serious. Let’s just get this done so we have time to take a walk with Stella this evening.”

CHAPTER 52

CAM

When we finally wrap up and go inside, there’s a sweet smell in the house. I find the source in a basket on the kitchen counter, and carry it into our home office, where our editor is working on footage we shot yesterday. “Trish, where did these muffins come from?”

“Oh, Stella dropped those off for you.”

A warm, fuzzy feeling fills my chest. “Stella was here? Why didn’t you tell us?”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t want to disturb you while you were filming.”

Balancing the basket against me with one arm, I unwrap a muffin and take a bite. It tastes like it was baked with love.

“Want one?” I hold them out to Trish, but she shakes her head.

Wyatt finds us, grins when he hears what’s going on, and plucks a muffin from the basket. “We should go over later and thank her.”

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“Definitely.” I take another bite, finishing off my first muffin, while Wyatt hands the camera off to Trish. As soon as I swallow, I gesture to it. “Trish, there’s some over-the-top stuff on there. I was just goofing around at one point. You’ll know it when you see it.”

She nods. “Okay.”

“Just ignore it. You know what type of stuff to include or not include. Definitely don’t put anything that goes too far. Especially now that we’re planning to transition our focus.”

“Of course. Got it.” She nods again once, but then looks at her watch. “Actually, I need to get going, but I can finish this from home and get it posted.”

“Can you? That’d be great. We’ve been slacking lately.”

“Don’t worry,” she says. “I’ve got you.”

“You’re the best, Trish. Sure you don’t want a muffin? They’re really good.”

“I guess I’ll have one,” she says, giving me a smile. “Thanks.”

CHAPTER53

WYATT

“Did you get anything yet?”

Cam shakes his head. We texted Stella a half hour ago to ask if it's okay to stop by, but she hasn't responded. "Maybe she's busy with Jessie," he says, unconcerned.

Another half hour passes, then an hour, still nothing. The message is unread.

"I'm getting worried. It's not like her not to respond."

Cam gets up from the sofa. "Let's just go over, then. I thought I heard Jessie and Goldfish in the back yard a while ago."

At her door a few minutes later, we ring the bell, but no one answers.

"They must have gone out," Cam says, but with a bad feeling in my gut, I ring again.

I hear Jessie's voice inside, but can't tell what she's saying.

Finally, the door opens a few inches and Stella's face is there. Her expression doesn't ease my worries.

"Stella! What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong." Her tone is ice cold.

"Is Jessie okay? Are you?"

"We're fine." Her eyes are cold too, and I don't know what to make of it.

I exchange a quick glance with Cam, whose easygoing expression is long gone.

"I'm busy right now," she says.

Jessie is behind her, saying something about wanting to see us, but Stella ignores her. Something is obviously very wrong, but I don't want to push for answers in front of Jessie.

“Are you sure you're all okay?” Cam asks.

“We're fine,” Stella repeats, and then she closes the door in our faces.

CHAPTER54

STELLA

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Everyone keeps asking if I'm okay, and the question is starting to seem ridiculous.

I'm not sure I'll ever be okay.

Marissa gives me looks all through dinner, even though I try to act normal. As soon as Jessie's out of earshot, she insists on knowing what's wrong.

"I'll tell you later." I'm too angry to talk about it, even if we had privacy.

The men have been texting me all evening, ever since I sent them away. I'm going to have to block their numbers, because apparently, I'm some kind of game for them to play.

I make it through the rest of the evening, but after Jessie falls asleep, I break down.

Marissa finds me in my room and offers me a box of tissues. Without saying a word, she sits next to me and rubs my back as I cry.

"I shouldn't be wasting my tears on them," I say eventually, as I try to pull myself together.

"Your tears aren't for anyone else. They're to help you feel better. Let it out."

I take a deep breath and blot my eyes. "I'm so angry at myself. I'm so stupid."

"You're not. Don't talk that way," Marissa says gently.

“I trusted them, even though I knew better!”

My friend starts to rub my back again. “What happened?”

So I tell her everything. How I decided to be with the men even though I was warned, even though I knew they were players. And against my better judgement, I allowed myself to fall hard for them, even though I knew I shouldn’t.

I tell her all about what Trish said today, even though recounting it makes me feel like I could throw up.

“It’s all just a game to them,” I tell her. “Why would they take me out, and even say they wanted to be in Jessie’s life, and then fuck around with their editor? I’m so disgusted with them, and so disappointed in myself.”

“Stop blaming yourself. You didn’t do anything wrong. You gave them a chance, and it didn’t work out. There’ll be more men.”

I snort. “Who even wants more men? Are there any good ones out there?”

Marissa’s tone is wry. “It does seem that the good ones are few and far between, but they’re out there. Look at Ana and her men. Our old roommate Callie found a couple of good ones, too. I guess it’s true about having to kiss a lot of toads.”

A traitorous little part of my brain thinks that if toads kiss the way Cam and Wyatt did, then I’m happy with toads. I tell my brain to shut up and stop reminding me what good kissers they were, and then I’m sad and angry all over again at the thought of never kissing them again.

My phone buzzes with another text.

“It’s probably them,” I tell Marissa. “I need them to stop.”

“It’s hard to believe they’d need to be told, after what they did, but maybe they’re used to women letting them get away with that shit. Maybe you should talk to them. Explain that you’re done, and tell them to stop contacting you.”

“I don’t think I can stand to look at them.”

I slide my phone out. “Please can we talk?” Cam’s latest message is at the end of a string from both him and Wyatt that I don’t bother to read.

“Can you meet us out by the fence for a minute?” Wyatt sends.

I show the screen to Marissa. “Perfect. I won’t have to look at them.”

Their faces will disgust me, but if I’m being honest, I’m afraid that seeing them will hurt too much.

“I’ll be out in five minutes,” I tell them, and then I use that time to splash cold water on my face and pull myself together.

They don’t deserve to know how much they hurt me. Maybe that’s part of their game, too, and I’m not giving them the satisfaction.

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I wonder if their story about how they started Battle Duel Boys as a family channel is all a lie, too. Maybe they get so much pleasure out of getting women to fall for them that they found an international platform for it. Charm, hook, repeat, repeat. I'm such a fool.

I make sure to leave Goldfish inside, because I don't need him wagging his tail with excitement for our horrible neighbors.

My feet are like lead as I cross the lawn. I just want to get this over with so I can crawl into my bed, deep under the covers, and make the world go away.

"Stella?" It's Cam's voice, right next to the fence.

I remember angling my view just right so that I could see them through the fence. Tonight, I stay firmly in front of a wooden slat. I don't want to risk a glimpse. If they look over the top of the fence, using their stupid tall height, I'll ignore them.

"I'm here."

"Stella, what's wrong?" Wyatt sounds strangled with pain. What a pathetic act.

How dare they fuck me, then fuck their editor—and god knows who else—and act like they're the victims?

"We're done," I say. "What you do is your own business, but it's not what I want for myself, and it's not what I want to show my daughter." Just the thought of Jessie almost makes me break down, but I manage to continue. "I may make terrible choices

when it comes to men, but I won't settle, and I'm never going to let her think it's okay to stay with men who don't respect women."

CHAPTER 55

WYATT

Cam's mouth is hanging open, and so is mine.

"Stella, what are you talking about? What happened?"

When there's no response, I stretch to look over the fence, and she's already on her way back to the house.

"Stella!"

She turns, giving me a glimmer of hope, but all she says is, "Please stop contacting me," and then she goes inside.

"She's gone," I say, though Cam's also looking over the fence, so he already knows.

"What did we do?" he says.

My brain spins, tracing through memories, starting with our most recent encounter and working backward, desperately searching for anything that might have caused her abrupt change in attitude.

She called us terrible choices. Said we weren't good enough men to be around her daughter.

"She brought us muffins," Cam mutters, dumbfounded, just like me.

“The way she’s acting now, I’m afraid they might be poisoned.”

“What the hell happened?” He looks over the fence again, then shakes his head, his eyes wide but blinking in disbelief.

“I can’t think of anything. Things were fine last we talked to her.”

“Maybe she saw something on our channel? Some old thing she didn’t like?” Cam slides out his phone and I’m prepared for him to start scrolling, but he stops right at the top of the feed.

“What the fuck?”

There’s a new reel, and even from my upside down vantage point, Cam’s hand going down his pants is unmistakable.

“What did she do?” He lets it play again, the kissy face at the camera, him holding a kite like it’s his dick, his hand going down his pants again. “Why the fuck did Trish post this?”

Cam swipes to his contacts and jabs at Trish’s name. The call rings with no answer.

“That must be what Stella saw,” I mutter. “She must think we’re idiots.”

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I pull the reel up on my own phone and watch it, seeing it through her eyes, and it looks ten times worse that way. Of course, someone who's a responsible parent doesn't want to be involved with men who post shit like this. "Fuck!"

Cam's phone buzzes, and Trish's name is on the screen. He answers and puts the call on speaker.

"Trish, what did you do?"

"Did you see the way that reel's blowing up? It's going to be your best one yet!" she says, sounding excited and proud.

"You weren't supposed to use that footage."

"But look at the response! Once I saw it, I realized it made no sense not to use it. The engagements are through the roof, and your follower numbers are growing by the second."

That's the kind of interaction we've been thriving on, but it means nothing now. This is a disaster.

I swipe through the comments and want to throw up.

Let's just say, if Cam ever needs someone to hold his dick for him, there are a lot of volunteers.

"You need to take it down right now," he tells Trish.

“Are you serious?”

“Never mind. I’ll take it down. Talk to you later.” Cam ends the call, taps on his phone, and the post disappears.

But the damage is already done.

CHAPTER 56

STELLA

I wake up from a terrible night’s sleep to find more messages from Cam and Wyatt on my phone. I tell myself not to look, but I only make it as far as the kitchen before curiosity gets the best of me.

“The video was a mistake,” Cam says. “It was all a joke gone wrong.”

I pour myself a cup of coffee, and it’s too hot, but I take a sip anyway, trying to figure out why he’s talking about a video. The coffee doesn’t help.

Surely, they didn’t film themselves having sex with Trish.

“Can we please explain in person?” Wyatt’s message says.

I take a deep breath and try to push down my anger. The last thing I want to do is listen to them try to explain why they had sex with Trish. Not now, not ever.

I need to wake Jessie up soon, and I need to go about my day, and I don’t want to have to deal with this anymore.

“I don’t want to hear from you again. Take care.” And then I block them.

* * *

So, if I thought that not receiving text messages from Cam and Wyatt would help me forget about them, I was wrong.

I go to a grocery store that's way out of my way. I avoid our back yard. I walk the dog on a completely different route that goes nowhere near their house, and yet the pain doesn't go away. If anything, it gets worse as each day goes by.

I don't allow myself to look at their channel, even in my weakest moments, when for some dumb reason, I just want a glimpse of their smiles. My stupid heart keeps aching for what I thought I had. It's mourning an illusion, and not for the first time in my life.

Silly me, thinking the four of us might form a little family. That I might find a happily ever after with these two men who can't keep their dicks in their pants.

CHAPTER 57

CAM

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“I’m pissed that she won’t let us explain.” I’m spotting Wyatt at the gym, and my comment is completely out of the blue, but he grunts out ayeahfrom between clenched teeth.

We’ve talked about her a lot over the past several days. There are also times when we don’t talk at all, but I know we’re always thinking about her.

Life is fucking empty these days.

I couldn’t give a shit about working out, but I keep doing it out of habit.

Making videos has lost all its appeal. I used to get excited about the number of likes and comments we received, but it seems pointless. It’s actually a source of irritation now.

Nothing in life is much fun anymore, and the contrast between before-Stella and after-Stella is astounding. I thought I was perfectly happy before I met her, but now I know what I’ve been missing.

If I had any doubts about whether I was actually in love with her, it’s all cleared up. Nothing but love could hurt this bad.

“She doesn’t need us to explain,” Wyatt says when he finishes his reps. “She knows she doesn’t want professional thirst traps as boyfriends, and especially not as father figures.”

“But we’re going to stop making those kinds of videos.”

Wyatt's expression is grim. "Too little, too late. Maybe we should just stick to showing off our bodies, cracking jokes, and having fun. That's all we're good for."

I start to argue, but he turns his back and heads to a machine, leaving me alone with my storm of thoughts.

Objectively, there's nothing wrong with how we've been making a living, but we weren't being true to ourselves, even before we met Stella. We went after easy money, when we should have put our time and effort into something we were proud of.

We need to get our life on the right path, and Stella needs to give us another chance.

CHAPTER 58

STELLA

If there's a silver lining to what's happened, it's that I now have plenty of time for my coursework. I'm ahead on my modules, actually, and completely on top of Community Bean's customer service demands, because any time I'm not doing things with Jessie, I bury my head in my job and school work, so I don't have to think about anything else.

Trying not to think about them goes just about as well as you'd imagine.

Jessie's outside playing, and she sticks her head in the door to ask, "Mommy, when are we going to have dinner with Cam and Wyatt again?"

"I don't know, sweetie. I think they're busy." Busy sleeping with other women, I finish in my head.

Working beside me in the kitchen, Marissa gives me a sympathetic look. She's been doing her best to keep my spirits up. She even called in Ana for backup, and they both cheered my cold turkey approach to the men. No contact, no internet searches, no social media stalking. I'm very proud of my resolve.

When I get down about things, my friends reassure me that my romantic experience has been too limited for me to say that I don't know how to choose good men.

"It happens sometimes, to all of us," Ana said. "You just have to keep trying."

I told her I will, after I get over Cam and Wyatt. What I didn't tell her is that it seems like that's going to take years.

"I'm hungry," Jessie says. "When's dinner going to be ready?"

"About twenty minutes. I'll call for you as soon as it's ready."

"Okay." She slides the door closed, and I try not to imagine why she asked about the neighbors. She probably heard them out in their yard.

I wish we didn't have so many months left on the lease for this house, because I'd move just to put more distance between us. I swear I can physically feel their presence nearby, even though I haven't laid eyes on them for weeks.

You'd think, after what they did to me, it'd be easy to stop thinking about them. They weren't who they said they were. They knew I didn't want to just play around with them, so they acted like they wanted a serious relationship, even though they were sleeping with other women—their own assistant, even.

It even crossed my mind to wonder if they have a sex addiction, but I decided they're probably just lying jerks. There are so many of them out there.

Knowing they're not good men should make it easier to forget about them, but it doesn't.

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Somehow, I can't get over how they made me feel—both physically and emotionally—even though none of the emotional part was real on their end.

Despite the way they deceived me, there is one thing I'm grateful to them for. They showed me that I need to have more fun and occasionally take time for myself. Jessie will always be my top priority, but in order to care for her, I need to care for myself, too.

I was also apparently in desperate need of the kind of physical pleasure a man can provide, but it's going to be a long time before I'm in the mood to try to find that with someone else.

The thought of even going on a date with someone else is so unappealing right now.

"I'm putting the blender on," Marissa warns before she flips the switch.

It's jarringly noisy but pretty, as the bright green basil leaves transform into pesto sauce.

She pulses it a few times, and on the last round, there's a different sound that makes me wonder if the blender is malfunctioning. Then I realize someone's pounding on the sliding glass door, and there's no way the loud knocking is coming from Jessie's little fist.

Wyatt's at the back door, and Jessie's in his arms. There's blood on her and she's crying.

I'm at the door before I'm even aware that I reacted, and I tug on the handle to let them in. "What happened?"

"Mommy!" Jessie holds out her arms to me, and I reach for her, but before I take her, I need to find out what happened and how hurt she is.

There's a long scrape on her arm that's bleeding, but it appears to be more messy than deep. I'll have to clean her up to know for sure.

"What happened? Where are you hurt?" I take her chin in my hand and look into her eyes. I need to know what also might be injured that I can't see.

I hadn't noticed Cam, but he comes in from behind Wyatt and speaks up. "She fell off of her playset. We jumped over the fence when we heard her scream."

"It hurts, Mommy!" She holds her bloodied arm out to me, and I take her from Wyatt and head to the bathroom.

"This is probably going to hurt, too, but I need to get you cleaned up," I warn her. While I gently clean her injury, I ask her about what happened, using yes or no questions. She continues crying, but nods and shakes her head to answer me.

I find out she fell from the top deck of her playset, which luckily isn't too high, but is nearly as tall as the fence, which is about six feet. She says her head doesn't hurt, but she cries harder when I gently touch her wrist, which is starting to swell. Her bleeding stops after some compression, but there's a nasty scrape on her arm.

"What can we do?" Wyatt asks. He, Cam, and Marissa are all gathered in the doorway.

"I'm going to take her to urgent care to have her checked out. Her wrist might be

sprained or broken.”

“We’ll drive you,” Cam says immediately.

“No. That’s not necess?—”

“Yes, can Cam and Wyatt drive us?” Jessie asks, her eyes still sparkling with tears.

They swooped in to help my daughter, and I’m grateful, but I don’t want to be in a car with them. I also don’t want to make a stink about it, if it’s something that will make Jessie feel better. Most of all, I just want to get her seen by a doctor as soon as possible.

“Okay, fine. Let’s go. Right away.”

“We’ll be back in your driveway in two minutes,” Cam says. He and Wyatt both wave and smile at Jessie, and then they’re gone.

“Want me to come, too?” Marissa asks, and I appreciate the offer, and the sympathy in her eyes, but I tell her no.

Now that the crowd has cleared, Goldfish rushes in and licks Jessie’s knee, making her giggle. Her laughter goes a long way toward easing my worry, but I won’t be able to relax until she’s checked for serious injury.

I grab my purse, Jessie’s jacket, and her favorite stuffed toy, and we go out front, where the men arrive as promised. They question me about what type of medical facility I want to go to, but that’s the end of their conversation with me, and I’m grateful.

The ride reminds me of the Goldfish-marshmallow incident, and I vow that we need

to stop meeting like this.

CHAPTER59

STELLA

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Though they don't talk to me, Cam and Wyatt chat with Jessie for most of the ride, and it's clear they're trying to distract her from her pain and keep her entertained. They even sing silly songs, reprising the funny voices they used when we played Clue.

I'm grateful to them for keeping my daughter in good spirits, but I also wish they weren't so damn charming and likeable.

At the urgent care center, they wait in the lobby while Jessie and I go into the exam room. After x-rays and various other tests, including checking for a head injury, which is my biggest worry even though I haven't seen any signs that concern me, the physician determines that her wrist is sprained. It's the best outcome, though the injury will require some care, including ice and a brace.

I make the mistake of looking at the men's faces when we return to the lobby. Their eyes are filled with genuine concern, and something twists in the center of my chest.

How can they be so nice and caring toward my daughter, while also being so deceitful and careless with my feelings?

When Jessie skips over to them and shows them her new brace, their smiles are full of relief, and now that I'm not consumed by worry, my heart is raw again, burning like the scrape on Jessie's arm.

The ride home is torture, and I'm filled with emotions that don't fit together, like anger, regret, and longing. Part of me wants to curse at them, part of me aches to touch them—and for them to touch me.

I tell myself I'll only have to see them for a few more minutes, because we'll soon be home, but then Cam asks, "Did you have dinner yet?"

"No, and I'm starving!" Jessie cries.

"We could stop at the chicken place you like," Cam suggests, and how can I possibly deny my starving daughter, even when it means spending more time with these men?

With a sigh, I agree, and the next thing I know, the four of us are seated around a table, sharing food.

Can I somehow go back to a time when these men were simply our neighbors? Can I pretend or maybe forget that anything else happened between us? For now, the answer is no.

Despite not having eaten for hours, I don't have an appetite, but I force myself to eat a little. Face to face, it's nearly impossible to avoid eye contact with Cam and Wyatt, especially when they both seem intent on capturing my attention, their gazes lingering on me much longer than they should.

I can't help but remember all of the other meals we've shared together, and all of the new experiences they introduced me to, and I want to cry with anger and frustration.

I turn my full focus to Jessie and somehow get through the meal, and finally, what seems like years later, we arrive home.

I thank the men at the car, hoping they'll drive off, but they walk us up to the front door. I try to say goodbye there, but Wyatt touches my arm. "Can we please talk?"

His eyes are pleading, and I can't say no, especially after the way they helped me this evening.

“Please,” Cam adds.

“I need to get Jessie to bed. Storytime, and all that.”

“We’ll wait.”

I shrug a shoulder, like it means nothing to me. “If you want.”

I give Marissa a sheepish look as the men follow me in, then update her on Jessie’s diagnosis. When I go off with Jessie to get her ready for bed, I leave the men with Marissa, half hoping she’ll give them an earful, but that’s not her style.

I take care of Jessie’s wrist according to the doctor’s instructions, then tuck her in and read her favorite book, one I could probably recite in my sleep. In the back of my mind, I try to anticipate what the men will say and how I’ll respond. I warn my heart not to get involved, and tell my head to remain in firm control.

After my sweet daughter has been asleep for several minutes, I tiptoe out, whispering, “I love you” to the dark room, and sending up a prayer of gratitude that she wasn’t hurt worse today.

Marissa’s in the living room watching TV, but she’s alone, and I’d be lying if I said a small wave of disappointment didn’t run through me.

“Did they leave?”

She looks toward the back door. “They’re out back. I think it was a bit frosty in here for them.” She arches an eyebrow, looking devious, and I laugh, even as my stomach is doing all sorts of fluttery things.

Outside, our traitorous little Goldfish is lying next to Cam, who’s sitting on the

concrete. Wyatt's in a chair; they've left the loveseat for me.

I sit down, my body stiff. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Thanks for agreeing to talk to us," Wyatt says. "We just want to explain and apologize about the video."

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I frown as a little memory pings in my brain. Cam mentioned a video the morning after I found out about them and Trish. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“The video that was way over the top.” Something about Wyatt’s tone gives me the idea that he thinks I’m playing dumb.

“The one that was lewd and obnoxious,” Cam adds.

“I haven’t watched any of your videos in weeks, and I don’t care what goes on in your videos.”

Wyatt squints at me. “I’m talking about the video you saw that made you break up with us.”

Now I’m squinting back at him. We must look like two people trying to decipher a code printed in four-point type. “I broke up with you,” I say, looking at both him and Cam, “because you fucked Trish.”

CHAPTER60

STELLA

From one extreme to another, their eyes go from narrow to wide as saucers. They also suddenly become hard of hearing. “What?!” they both say at the same time, raising their voices so much that I worry they’ll wake Jessie.

“I guess you didn’t realize I knew, but I did. You told me you didn’t want any other

women, then you fucked your editor, and who knows how many other women.”

“We did not!” Wyatt says with conviction, though his voice is lower after seeing me glance toward Jessie’s bedroom window.

Cam’s on his feet now, and has disturbed Goldfish from his sleep. “Stella, where did you get an idea like that?”

I fold my arms over my chest and sit back against the cushion. “Directly from Trish herself. Why? Did you tell her to keep it a secret?”

“My god, Stella. We didn’t do that. We would never do that!” Wyatt’s at the edge of his seat, looking at me like I’m speaking a foreign language.

“Trish told you that?” Cam asks, incredulous. They’re both pretty convincing. Maybe they should try to use their internet fame to get acting jobs.

“She did. Was it just a one-time thing, or have you kept on fucking her?”

Cam falls to his knees and reaches for my hand, but I avoid his grasp. “Stella, it’s not true. We’ve never had sex with Trish. We haven’t so much as looked at another woman since we met you.”

Wyatt’s head is in his hands. When he looks up, he asks, “How could you have believed that?”

Cam looks between me and Wyatt. “Why would Trish have said that? She’s never been anything but a friend and coworker. Even flirting with her would be inappropriate.”

Wyatt comes to kneel in front of me, too. “Stella, it’s a lie. You have to believe us.”

They both look so heartbroken that I can't believe they're lying to me, but I'm still wary. "I'm usually inclined to believe women," I say in nearly a whisper. I'm so confused.

Cam rubs my knee. "I understand that, and I know women are not believed as often as they should be, but in this case, Trish is lying, Stella."

"Didn't you say that Trish also told you we messed around with our followers? Something about revolving doors in our bedrooms?" Wyatt asks.

I give a small nod. "Something to that effect."

"At the time, we thought she was making assumptions from online comments, but maybe there's a pattern here."

Cam pulls his phone out. "I'm going to call her."

As he taps her number, I decide that I'm pretty sure I believe the men. What follows makes me certain.

"Hellooo," she answers. Cam has her on speaker, and as soon as I hear her voice, I'm right back at their house with her, basket of muffins in my hand, my world being upended.

"I'm putting you on FaceTime," Cam tells her. "Wyatt and Stella are here, and we all want to talk to you."

"Okay ..."

Her tone changes completely after she hears my name.

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“Trish, did you tell Stella that we had sex with you?”

The silence is deafening. Then she stutters a bit before saying, “I may have made a joke about that, yeah.”

Cam frowns into the screen. “You joked about having sex with us? What kind of joke is that?”

Trish shrugs, looking like she’d rather be anywhere else but on this call, and I wouldn’t be surprised if she ended it.

“Why would you do that?” Wyatt asks.

Meanwhile, I’m fuming. All the anger I felt toward the men now has a new direction. I’m tempted to yank the phone out of Cam’s hand and give her an earful, but she’s their employee and the lie was about them, so they should be the ones to handle it.

“I didn’t think your relationship with Stella was serious,” Trish says. “Besides, you’re always walking around here shirtless, taunting me. I guess it just got in my head.”

“Our job revolves around us being shirtless, Trish. We weren’t doing it to ‘taunt you.’” We thought of you like family—like a sister—and I can’t believe you did this to us.”

Wyatt, who’s been gripping my knee through the call, takes the phone. “You’re fired, Trish. Effective immediately. We’ll be in touch about your last paycheck.” He clicks off the call and hands it back to Cam, who starts tapping at the screen.

“I’m removing her access to all our accounts.”

“The same day she lied to you, she posted footage we told her not to. Just some goofy shit Cam did that should have never seen the light of day.”

“I was flirting with the camera, pretending it was you,” Cam says.

“Oh, and that’s what you thought I was upset about, that you posted a flirty video?”

“To be honest, it was raunchy as well as flirty, but yeah. We figured you saw it and thought we were childish men who could never fit into your life or your daughter’s life.”

“I never saw it ..” I try to absorb all this new information. They thought I was mad about a video, and they had no idea I was under the impression they had sex with Trish.

I’m so mad about the time that’s been wasted. “I’m sorry I shut you out,” I say. “If we had talked, this could have all come to light much sooner.”

Wyatt moves to sit next to me on the loveseat. “I get why you’d be too angry to talk to us, if you thought we’d slept with someone else.”

Cam manages to fit on my other side. It’s a tight fit, but it feels so good to be between them again. “I can’t believe you’d think we’d do that,” he says, as he takes my hand.

“Trish planted the seed a while ago, making Stella believe we’re the type of guys who’d do that,” Wyatt says. Looking at me, he adds, “I get why you’d have trust issues, after what happened with Jessie’s father, and with your mom. I’m going to be more skeptical of people myself now, after what Trish did.”

“We’re so sorry about all this,” Cam says.

“There’s nothing for you to apologize for. You didn’t do anything wrong. I should have questioned you instead of just believing Trish, but it never occurred to me that she’d lie about something like that.”

“Me either,” Cam says. “I still don’t get it.”

“I think she was trying to chase me away because she wanted you for herself.”

They both seem mystified by the idea, and it’s amazing how humble two men who look like them can be.

“I can’t believe we almost lost you over this.” Cam slides an arm around my shoulder and pulls me close, but then leans away so he can look into my eyes. “We haven’t lost you, have we?”

I shake my head. “You haven’t lost me.”

He wraps me in both of his arms and pulls me into the best hug I’ve ever had, which is only to be matched a moment later by an equally enthusiastic embrace from Wyatt. “We were miserable without you, Stella.”

“I’ve been miserable without both of you,” I admit.

After Wyatt’s had his time with me, Cam pulls me back into his arms. “If this whole ordeal had one silver lining, it’s that we now know for certain that we can’t live without you. We need you in our lives, Stella.”

Wyatt’s hand slides up my thigh. “We’re going to show you each and every day how much we want you, and only you.”

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Cam nuzzles my cheek as he gives my arm a squeeze. “In fact, I’m ready to carry you over that fence and into our house, and never let you go,” Cam says.

“Not to break the mood, because I would enjoy that very, very much, but I can’t leave tonight, not after Jessie’s fall.”

Both men nod. “Of course,” Wyatt says.

“But let’s make that happen very soon,” I say.

“In the meantime ...” With a finger on my chin, Wyatt turns my face toward his and meets my lips with the sweetest, most satisfying kiss, one that’s filled with tenderness, relief, and what I’d swear might be love. I give it all back to him as gratitude washes over me in waves.

I was already incredibly fond of these men, but absence has increased that feeling immeasurably, and my heart feels like it’s grown so big, my chest can’t contain it.

Cam takes his turn next, and as warmth fills my entire body, I’m certain that the best thing I ever did was kiss my neighbors.

I’m just as sure that I never intend to stop.

CHAPTER61

WYATT

I'm ready to go, but Cam is looking me over with a critical eye. "You should fasten another button." He gestures to a spot near his own neck, as if to demonstrate.

I roll my eyes to the heavens. "Are you kidding?"

"You heard what the consultant said. No extra skin."

He may be taking things too far, but I can't fault his determination.

Cam's the one who found a consultant to advise us on the best way to transition our channel to a new audience, and Cam's also the one making sure we follow that advice to a T.

When he's satisfied with my clothing and ready to record, I take a deep breath and launch into the speech we prepared.

"We're coming to you today with a special announcement. We have some big changes going on in our lives, and we want to share them with you. The thing is ... we've fallen in love. We're both in love with a very special woman, and she just so happens to be the mom of a very special little girl.

"We're so grateful to have them in our lives, and so full of energy and excitement, that we're planning to bring you even more fun builds, more stunts, and more outrageous and hilarious competitions.

"If you've enjoyed that sort of content from us in the past, keep following for even more fun, along with new contests and a lot of cool giveaways. We're going to be bringing you one hundred percent wholesome, family-friendly content that will make you smile and laugh, and it's guaranteed to brighten your day.

"If that family-friendly focus isn't what you're into, we understand, and we want to

take this opportunity to say thank you for being here with us over the past several years. We appreciate you more than you know, and we're very grateful. Also, if you have a special kiddo in your life, maybe a child, grandchild, or niece or nephew, we'd love it if you invite them to tune in and watch what's to come."

Cam raises a hand to let me know he's going to stop recording.

"How was that?"

He nods, looking thoughtful. "Good, good." After reviewing the footage, he hands the camera to me. He's going to make the same speech, and then our new editor will splice it together, using the best parts from each of us.

While we were planning what to say, we talked about including Stella in the announcement, because we'd love to introduce her to our followers, if she'd be up for it, but the consultant advised us not to hard launch her yet, because there's a potential she might receive some hate from disappointed fans.

I really hope our viewers are better than that, but I know people say all kinds of shit when they're hidden behind a screen.

All we can do is hope for the best—and do some cleaning up in the comments section, if necessary.

"I texted Stella to see if she can come by when she walks Goldfish," Cam says a little later. "I'd like to have her review the footage before we send it to the editor."

"Sounds good."

His phone pings with an incoming message. "She's on her way."

CAM

Stella arrives looking distractingly beautiful in shorts and a thin white tank top that clings to her curves.

I'm hoping for a long heatwave this summer, so I can see her in a lot more clothing like this—and take her out of a lot of clothing like this.

But business first.

“C'mon in,” I say, kissing her sweet lips, before I kneel to pet Goldfish.

When I stand back up, she hands me his leash, then wraps her arms around my neck and comes in for another kiss. Truth be told, we've invited her to detour over here during her dog walks anytime she can spare a few minutes, and most days, it's only so we can make out with her—or do more, if she has the time.

After I indulge myself for a couple of minutes, I pull away. “I actually asked you over to show you something.”

“What are you going to show me?” Her hand finds my cock and gives it a squeeze through my jeans. “This?”

I press one more quick kiss to her lips, then take her naughty hand in mine. “If you're a good girl.”

We find Wyatt at the computer, and while I give the two of them a minute to have a

proper greeting, I free Goldfish from his leash so he can roam around the house. We did a thorough dog-proofing last week, and among other things, there are definitely no bags of marshmallows lying around.

When Wyatt and Stella finally part, he gestures for her to take a seat in the desk chair where he'd been sitting, and I direct her attention to the monitor, as I explain what we recorded and why. "We want to get your opinion and your okay on it before we post it."

"Why do you want my okay?"

I nod to Wyatt, who's waiting to click play. "Just watch," I tell her.

She's smiling at first, but a few seconds in, her body stiffens. Through the reflection on the screen, I watch her eyes grow wide. After Wyatt's version ends, he lets it play through my take. When it ends, she doesn't move.

I kneel at her side. "Are you okay with us posting that?"

"Or would you like us to take out the mention of Jessie?" Wyatt asks, kneeling on her other side.

For a long moment, she doesn't speak and still doesn't move, and an irrational wave of panic runs through me.

Finally, she draws in a breath. "You're in love with me?" She looks back and forth between Wyatt and me.

Nodding, I take her hand and bring it to my lips, then lay a kiss between her knuckles. "We've got it bad, Stella. We're head over heels."

Wyatt takes her other hand, helps her stand, and pulls her close to him. “So in love with you,” he says.

“I love you, too,” she says, right before Wyatt draws her into a kiss.

As they kiss, she blindly reaches a hand out to me, and I hold it tight until I can take her in my arms.

Brushing hair back from her face, I look deep into her beautiful eyes. “I love you, Stel. I have for a while now.”

“I love you, too.”

And the kiss that follows is so much sweeter than any that have come before, because I know I’m hers, and she’s ours, and nothing could be better than that.

CHAPTER63

STELLA

“How long until you need to pick up Jessie?” Wyatt asks.

I glance at my watch, though the numbers barely register, because I’m still in a daze.

They love me. We’re in love.

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“I can’t stay long,” I tell them. “I have a date tonight, so I need to get ready.”

“Oh, a date? Is that right?” Cam slides his fingers under the bottom of my shirt. “Then we’d better give you something to remember, so you’ll be thinking of us while you’re on your date.”

“Yeah, you’d better do that.” My last word comes out in a squeal as he pinches one of my nipples.

When he picks me up to carry me into the bedroom, Goldfish starts scampering around at his feet, barking.

“Treat time,” Wyatt says, reaching for a toy from the table at the end of the hall. They showed it to me the other day when they bought it; it’s one of those kinds designed to keep dogs busy for a while.

“Treat time, indeed.” Cam curls his head down to mouth over my breast through my shirt, dragging his teeth over the hard peak.

He sets me on my feet in the middle of his bedroom floor and immediately peels my shirt up and off. Wyatt joins us, reaching around from behind to unzip my shorts and slide them down over my hips.

As Cam pulls my bra cups down and sucks on my nipples, Wyatt slips my panties off and cups my mound, stroking a finger over my slit.

“You’re so wet already, Stella.”

“When I know I’m coming here, I’m pretty sure I start getting wet for you as soon as I leave my house.”

Wyatt slides a finger inside me and groans, sounding as dazed as I’ve been feeling. “Fuck, so wet.”

When he pulls his hand away, I look back to find him quickly unzipping his jeans. Without even bothering to take them off, he hurriedly unrolls a condom onto his hard cock, grabs my hips, presses my upper body forward toward Cam, then plunges inside my pussy, making me gasp.

Him needing me with kind of urgency is so fucking hot.

And I was more than ready for him.

“Feel okay?” he asks, his voice ragged.

“Incredible.” My own voice has gone breathy.

As Wyatt fucks me like he’s desperate for me, Cam continues to suck on my nipples while he plays with my clit, and I’m pinned between them, my favorite place to be.

Cam gets me off with his hand and mouth, and just as I’m crying out, starting to come, Wyatt’s cock seizes inside me, swelling, then pumping out his release, with long, deep pulses.

Our bodies move together like one, and it’s as amazingly good as it always is.

Not moments after Wyatt pulls out, Cam scoops me up by my bottom, and I wrap my legs around him as he impales me on his hard, sheathed cock.

These men—my men—are always prepared.

“Oh, fuck, I like this position,” he says, letting his eyes dip to where my breasts are pressing into his chest as he strokes his cock in and out of me.

“Me too.” I wrap my hands around the back of his neck and watch his gorgeous face as he slowly but steadily loses himself inside me.

When I see that he’s getting close, I clench all my inner muscles, and Cam’s eyes flash, before they squeeze shut and he starts to throb inside me.

He comes hard, the two of us wrapped in each other’s arms, and all I can think is what a lucky woman I am.

CHAPTER 64

STELLA

It takes a while to transition, but I’m fully back in mom mode by the time I pick up Jessie at school.

“How’s your wrist been feeling today?” I ask when we’re nearly home.

“It’s fine, Mommy. It’s been fine all week.” She doesn’t bother to hide her impatience with my questions about her injury. Even though it’s been healing for ten days, I worry that she might reinjure it on the playground.

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“Well, that’s good. Only three more days, and you can be done with the brace.”

“Thank goodness!” She sounds like she’s been wearing it for ten months, rather than ten days.

At home, we go through the regular routine of a treat for Goldfish, a snack for Jessie, and some playtime outside, though what Jessie can do has been limited while she heals.

We also had a talk last week about safety on the playset, after I found out she was doing something risky to try to impress Cam and Wyatt that evening that she fell.

When she comes inside, she skips through the living room.

“Are you excited to go out to dinner with Cam and Wyatt?” I ask her.

“Yes, I am!”

“They told me they’re taking us to a restaurant where we’ll eat outside, and there are games like bean bag toss, that we can play before and after we eat.”

“I can’t wait,” she cries.

“Before we go, I wanted to talk to you about the neighbors, about Cam and Wyatt.”

Jessie scoots to a stop and plops her bottom down on the carpet. Goldfish is immediately at her side. “What do you want to talk about, Mommy?”

I sit down on the floor with her. “Well ... I really like them, and I’m going to be going out on dates with them.”

“Okay.”

“But I want you to know that you’ll always be my first priority. Seeing them won’t take away from how much I love you.”

Jessie nods as she pets Goldfish. “Are they your boyfriends, Mommy?”

I bite my lip. “I guess you could call them that.”

She nods. “I knew that already.”

“You did? Did they tell you?” I can’t imagine that Cam or Wyatt would have decided to tell her before I did, but maybe it slipped out somehow.

Jessie shakes her head. “No, I just knew. I told Goldfish a few days ago, and he said he already knew, too.”

ONE YEAR LATER

Jessie

Mom’s in the kitchen. I always know where she is, because she’s always humming or singing.

She smiles a lot too, and when Cam and Wyatt are around, she laughs a lot. We both do.

Mom plays games and jokes with me a lot more than she used to, too, even when

Cam and Wyatt aren't here.

We all live in a big, new house together, which is great, except that Goldfish doesn't live with us. He visits, and we visit him a lot, but because he's Auntie Marissa's dog, he lives with her.

I miss having him in my bed with me at night, especially in my new room, which is big and kind of scary when I'm trying to fall asleep.

During the day, my room is so pretty, and I love it, because I got to pick out all the decorations. But when it's dark, I can't see all the sparkly unicorns on the wall.

Mom puts on music for me at night, and it helps a little.

I miss being able to play with Goldfish every day, too, even though Cam and Wyatt know way more games than Goldfish and I do. They're even building a mini golf course in our back yard!

Cam and Wyatt are so much fun, and I love them so much, but they're not dogs.

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“Aunt Marissa just sent another video over,” Mom says, when she sees me at the table coloring.

Auntie Marissa sends a picture or video of Goldfish almost every day, and I love it, but sometimes it also makes me miss him more.

“He’s so cute!” I can’t help but laugh as I watch him lying flat on his belly, sniffing a treat that’s just in front of his nose.

As Mom clicks off of the video, she says, “Maybe you can send Auntie Marissa a picture of your dog today.”

“What are you talking about, Mom?” Sometimes, she’s silly these days, but now she’s being kind of mean.

“Here, follow me.”

When I take her hand, she leads me toward the back door. Cam and Wyatt are kneeling on the patio, and there’s a wriggly little puppy in Wyatt’s arms. It’s black and white and brown, with the cutest, floppiest ears, and a little wagging tail.

“Mom, it’s a puppy!” I’m jumping up and down, while Mom takesforever to open the door.

“She’s your puppy, sweetie. Cam and Wyatt picked her out for you.”

“Let her smell your hand,” Wyatt says when I finally get out there.

“Hello, little puppy.” I’m so excited, I’m shaking, but I hold out my palm and the puppy licks my fingers, making me laugh. “She likes me!”

“You’ll have to think of a name for her,” Cam says.

Wyatt sets the puppy down, and she follows me out into the grass. When I sit down, she crawls all over me and licks me some more. When I get up and run, she runs after me.

I show her around the big yard, and tell her about Goldfish, sure they’ll be friends, too. “We’re going to have so much fun!”

When we get back to the house, Mom, Cam, and Wyatt are all standing together, smiling.

Stella

“Jessie’s going to sleep a lot better with the pup running her around the yard,” I say.

“Hopefully the puppy will sleep good, too,” Cam says, “though he’ll need potty breaks in the middle of the night until he’s older.”

I cringe. “Really? I’ve never had a puppy, or even a dog before living with Goldfish.”

Cam pats my back. “Don’t worry. We’ll take care of the night shift, since our work schedule is more flexible than yours.”

The men have been making my life easier in so many ways. I feel spoiled, actually.

They bought this beautiful house for us to live in. There’s so much space for all of us, including an office and a workshop for the guys, a home office just for me, and a

playroom for Jessie.

They also built a big, new playset for Jessie in the back yard, and covered the ground around it with thick, spongy mats to protect her from injuries.

They care for both of us in so many ways, and more than I ever imagined was possible.

They've become my best friends—though, of course, they're so much more than friends.

“Good thing we got the pup after your parents visited,” Wyatt tells me, as the three of us watch Jessie and her new best friend. “Your mom doesn't seem like the type who likes dogs.”

I shake my head. “You're right. She doesn't.” I let out a sigh at the memory of their visit. It wasn't horrible, but it would have been so much worse without Cam and Wyatt keeping the mood light, like no one else can.

At least my mom didn't have anything negative to say about our new home. Though she doesn't express it, I think she's relieved that Jessie and I are living with Cam and Wyatt. Maybe she worries about us, in her own weird way.

Last year, I met Wyatt's parents, and they were so lovely and accepting. His mom was especially kind to Jessie, and she keeps in touch with me often. I've met Cam's parents, too, and though they were a bit standoffish, they seem like decent enough people.

“Do you think Jessie's going to come up with a name for the pup that's as creative as Goldfish?” Cam asks.

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I smile as she throws a ball for the dog, and then ends up running after it herself. “Hard to say.”

“Chicken nugget?” Wyatt suggests. “Maybe marshmallow.”

I wrap my hand around his arm and lean into his shoulder. “That’s what I’d name her, if it were up to me.”

“How about Miss Scarlet?” Cam suggests in his Southern drawl.

We’re already holding hands, and I give his a squeeze. “She does love those Clue characters. Oh, that reminds me of Halloween.”

During the season, Cam and Wyatt took us to Disneyland again, just as they had suggested during our first visit. We went to a costume party there, and it was Jessie’s wild idea that we dress as Clue characters.

Cam and Wyatt took the lead, putting together the most amazing and creative costumes for all of us, with Cam in a mustard-colored military suit, Wyatt looking like an academic in shades of purple, me in a beautiful dress adorned with peacock feathers, and Jessie as a miniature Miss Scarlet, in a red dress with satin gloves and a red boa.

“That was a lot of fun,” Wyatt says, laughing.

After all this time, the men still haven’t stopped giving me new and fun experiences. Just when I think they’ll surely run out of ideas, they introduce me to a new food, a

new place to go, and most fun of all, new toys for the bedroom.

Not too long ago, on a day when Jessie was at school, Cam and Wyatt took advantage of our alone time by setting me up with remote-controlled vibrating underwear! I still get hot every time I think about it.

When they promise, or even suggest, that they're going to do something, they do it. We've gone out to play other escape rooms, with and without Jessie, and they've taken both of us out for teppanyaki, which Jessie loves, too.

When we got together, they promised they'd make sure I know every day that they want me and only me, and they show it with gestures both big and small.

There are special looks we share, thoughtful gifts they give me like flowers, and things they do to let me know they're thinking of me, like making coffee for me in the early afternoon, so that I'll have energy for the rest of the day. Lately, I need that extra energy boost, especially since our oversized custom-made bed was delivered.

The best thing I ever did was take a chance on them, and I only hope I can spend the rest of my life trying to show them as much love as they show me.

Cam

"Cam and Wyatt, can the puppy be in some of your videos?" Jessie asks, the next time she leads a lap around the yard.

"Hmm ...maybe. If you think she should be," Wyatt says.

"I do! People are going to love her!" Jessie spins in a circle, arms spread wide, and the pup barks at her with an adorable little puppy bark.

It's not the first brilliant idea Jessie's had. At first, she liked to watch us build things from a distance. Gradually, she started hanging out right next to us, asking questions and then offering suggestions, and we've produced some really fun content as a result of her input.

Now, she helps us make things, too, always behind the scenes, but our viewers know we have a special assistant known only as J. We protect Stella and Jessie's privacy above all. Our viewers don't know where our new house is, and we're hoping to keep it that way.

Our transition to children's entertainment couldn't have gone better. We lost some followers, and there were some rough patches along the way, but with guidance from the consultant and after getting involved in some special events, the channel's now bigger than ever before.

With Jessie often helping us, Stella's had more time available to focus on her college courses, and because of her continuing education and her great work, she's being considered for a promotion at Community Bean. If she gets the job, she'll still be working from home, but she may have to go into the office once a week; and that's fine, because Wyatt and I are available to chauffeur Jessie anytime.

We'll support Stella in any type of job she chooses, or no job at all, but selfishly, I'm glad she works from home, because we make use of quick spare moments to enjoy grownup private time whenever we can.

Living with her—waking up next to her and going to bed with her at night—has taught me that I'll never get enough of Stella's body.

I've also learned that it's possible to love someone more and more every day.

Wyatt

The sight of a child and a dog has never done something to my heart like it's doing right now. I've always enjoyed watching Jessie and Goldfish play together, but seeing this little pup looking at Jessie like she's her world, and knowing Jessie's going to have so much fun with the new pup, well, it has me feeling things I can hardly name.

Jessie doesn't call us dad, because she already has a dad, and because we're not married to Stella, though I hope someday that will change. Nevertheless, I love her like a father, and I always will.

Cam and I met her father, Brandon, on one of his visits last year, and we even helped him when he moved into a house across town. He's never going to be a good buddy, but he was a decent enough dude, and I appreciated that he didn't seem to harbor any ill will toward Cam and me.

His play to get Stella back last year seemed half-hearted at best, and he assured us it's a thing of the past. Poor guy. His loss, our immeasurable gain.

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I respected Brandon more when he expressed regret for not having been in Jessie's life as much as he should have been, and ever since he moved closer, he's been taking steps to change that.

We told him that we're not trying to take his place in Jessie's life, but that we wanted to provide for her in any way we can.

His general opinion was that as long as Jessie's happy, he's happy, and I respect that, too.

When the puppy starts to slow down, Stella calls out for Jessie. "Time to take a break. The puppy needs a nap."

To our utter surprise, Jessie ends up falling asleep on the couch a few minutes after her dog does. "Naps are very few and far between these days," Stella whispers as the three of us creep out of the room.

I pull Stella into the kitchen for a leisurely kiss, aware from her near-silent moans that Cam's getting handsy with her at the same time. The two of us enjoy her for a few minutes, until she pushes us away.

"We'd better stop, or we'll end up in the bedroom, and I'm not sure Jessie will sleep long enough for us to fully enjoy ourselves."

"Later, then," I tell her, right before I steal one more kiss. "I'm going to make a batch of chocolate chip cookies. Want to help?"

“I’d love to,” Stella says.

As I start to set ingredients on the counter, Cam picks up the bag of chocolate chips, looking at it in a disinterested way. “Did you know the Mayans and Aztecs used cocoa beans as currency?”

“Didn’t you say you had something to do in the garage?” I ask him in response.

All three of us are laughing quietly as he gives Stella another kiss, then leaves us alone to bake.

Later that night, after Jessie’s in bed, the three of us are back together, sitting on the couch, sharing a plate of cookies with milk. Jessie had a cookie after dinner, but we waited until now to enjoy ours.

Things were hectic all evening, with us taking the still-unnamed puppy outside frequently for potty breaks, then cleaning up puddles in the kitchen and the dining room, despite our best efforts.

“What a day,” Stella says with a sigh, before taking another bite of her cookie.

“Things are going to be extra fun around here for a while,” Cam says.

Stella smiles at him. “I wouldn’t have it any other way. Speaking of fun—” She reaches for her phone on the table, and taps the screen. “There’s something I want to show you.”

She holds the phone out at a distance, urging Cam and I to lean in closer, so we can both see the screen. “I hired a graphic designer from Community Bean to do a little side project for me. I asked them to make a new logo for your channel.”

Cam and I exchange a look, both of us confused, because we never mentioned

needing new branding, and we're fine with what we have.

"Even though you still do plenty of childish stuff in your videos, you're not boys anymore. You're men, through and through, so I thought it was time for you to drop the 'boys' in Battle Duel Boys."

What an odd thing for Stella to do, I'm thinking as I watch her pull up the logo design. Then I read the new name, and stop breathing for a few seconds.

"Stel, tell me that name isn't random," Cam says.

"Does that mean what I think it means?" I blink and then look at the screen again, making sure I saw what I think I saw.

She nods, a radiant smile spreading across her face. "What do you think? Are you ready for a name change to Battle Duel Dads? Because in eight months, that's what you're going to be!"

I toss the dish of crumbs on the coffee table as I get to my feet, then pull the love of my life into my arms. "We're going to be dads?"

Stella nods, just before I crush my lips to hers. I'm going to be a dad. We're going to be dads.

The four of us—five, counting the new puppy—are going to grow our family.

I don't want to let her go, but Cam's right there, so I open the hug to welcome him in, and the two of us hold onto Stella ... for the rest of our lives.
