



Only to Save You

Author: *Shannon O'Connor*

Category: Romance, Lesbian Romance

Description: Lainey:

She walked into my life the moment I needed her most. On the cusp of a breakup, all I wanted was to be alone, until I met her. Suddenly, she's all I can think about and I'm questioning everything I've known about myself.

Carter:

I didn't believe in love at first sight until it happened to me. Now the cute barista is the only one on my mind and I'm not even sure if she likes women. The more I get to know her, the more smitten I am. So when she finally agrees to be mine it almost seems too good to be true.

Total Pages (Source): 34

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

CHAPTER1

LAINY

“Ma,Pa, what are you both doing here?” I ask as my parents sneak behind the counter at the bakery, Cinnamon Roll Savors.

“We came to check in on things.” My mother smiles.

“You know I have everything under control.” I shoot them a knowing look and they look between each other.

“Steve stopped by the house today, he said you broke up with him out of nowhere,” my pa adds.

I clench my jaw and I think about how I want to proceed. I know my parents like Steve, he is good like that. Classy in front of my parents, but the rest of the time he is a completely different person. I didn’t have the guts to tell my parents that he slapped me last weekend, and break the glass that the man they knew wasn’t who they thought he was. It had broken before my very eyes when his hand impacted with my left cheek. It took me a few days to build up the courage to leave him, but once I did, I felt lighter. But I can’t explain that right now.

I pull my parents into the back of the kitchen, giving us a quiet space to talk. I motion to Jen to help out in the front and she nods. She knows what my family can be like and I have a feeling she doesn’t want to be in the middle of another “helpful” lesson about making cinnamon rolls from my parents.

“I did, I think it’s for the best,” I explain.

“We just wanted to make sure you were doing okay, we know how much you liked him,” my mom points out. And it was true, I was over the moon about him, but once he put his hands on me, my feelings were all but gone.

“I know, I’m sure this was for the best though. I promise I’m doing fine and so is the bakery,” I assure them. Cinnamon Roll Savors has been in the family since my parents started it almost thirty years ago, it is like their second baby, after me. Sometimes before me. So when they reached the age that they wanted to retire, it only made sense that I stepped up and took over for them. I’ve basically been running the place for the last few years anyway, but they had made it official a few months ago.

“We know you can handle the bakery but if you ever need us, we’re just a phone call away,” my pa says. I nod, knowing he means more about the bakery than myself. Sure, I can always call if I need something, but they will be more likely to help if the bakery is in trouble instead.

“I should let you get back,” Ma says, smiling. She gives me a big hug and whispers in my ear, “Just give Steve a call.” I nod to please her but I have absolutely no intention of doing that. I can’t imagine ever seeing him again, let alone speaking to him after what he did. The fact that he’s gone behind my back to my parents is just a sign of how manipulative he is.

My parents leave and I feel a little lighter. Like there is less pressure on me without them being around. I get back to manning the front counter like I always do and send Jen, our lead baker, back into the kitchen. She’s not the quickest on register and I’m not the best at the actual baking. Something I hadn’t picked up from my parents. But that’s why you can hire people to do the things you can’t do.

“What can I get you?” I say in my most friendly customer service voice.

“A cinnamon roll and five minutes of your time.” I look up at the familiar voice and I can’t believe I didn’t see it was Steve. His dark eyes and dark hair standing tall before me, looking like a lost puppy without me.

“One cinnamon roll, coming up.” I force a smile and head to the case to pick out the grossest looking one. I wished no customers were behind him because then I could just throw it at him and tell him to get lost. But no, I need to think about what is best for the family business, not just what would make me feel better.

“Here you go, that’ll be three seventy-five,” I say cheerily and try not to flinch when our hands graze as he hands me a five dollar bill. To make sure that doesn’t happen again, I drop his change on the counter.

“Please, Lainey, I’m so freaking sorry. Can’t you just forgive me already?” he begs. He’s actually begging like he has a real chance of getting me back.

“No. I’m working, Steve. You can’t just show up here and demand I speak with you,” I whisper growl.

“Fine.” He scoops up his change, throwing the coins in the tip jar and grabs his cinnamon roll before storming out the front door.

I can still feel my body tensing at the thought of him being so close to me. But I try to push it out as I help the next customer in line. This time I look up at each customer, so I’m not surprised. Not that I think Steve would come back today, but you never know with him. He seems to be something of a loose cannon lately.

Sure, when we dated he was a little bit intense with how much control he wanted to have over me and how secretive he was about certain things. Like where he was when

I was working and he wasn't at work. But I try not to let those things bother me anymore. I mean the worst was already done, he'd hit me in the middle of one of our last arguments. I had asked where he was since it was late and I was waiting at his apartment for him. He had gotten aggressive, angry, and told me it was none of my business and when I pushed him just a little bit more, he slapped me right across the face.

I stormed out of his apartment and three days later I broke up with him. My best friend, Jen, came with me to get my stuff and make sure he didn't try anything else with me. Of course, all he did try was to get me to take him back. The usual business of 'he didn't mean it' and he'd 'never do it again'. I've read one too many books and seen one too many movies to know the man who hits you once, will always hit you again. So as much as I loved him, and I did love him, I couldn't stay with him.

"Excuse me? Could I get some more coffee?" an older woman asks, holding out her mug. I nod and grab a fresh cup from the coffee pot behind me. That is another thing we offered, free coffee refills.

"Here you are, ma'am." I smile and she takes the steaming mug.

I need to stop thinking about Steve and start thinking about literally anything else. I can throw myself into the bakery, maybe start some renovations or something that will distract me. But we'd renovated the whole place only five years ago after that nasty flood. Maybe we can introduce a new item or something. We are famous for our cinnamon rolls that were my great great grandmother's recipe, but maybe we can introduce a new item with a spin on it. I'm overthinking it when I see my favorite customers come in.

"Leanne, I swear you're only getting bigger." I smile at the six year old in front of me.

“And this little man, can he have a cinnamon roll yet?” I tease, looking at baby Emmett strapped to Reagan’s chest.

“Not yet, he’s still on breastmilk and cheerios.” She smiles. She’d been one of my regulars for as long as I could remember, coming here in high school with her now husband, Grayson. Then coming with her daughter and now their second child, Emmett.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Can we grab two iced coffees and a chocolate chip cookie, and a cinnamon roll to split?” Grayson says, walking in a minute later.

To anyone else, their little family would be intimidating. Grayson and Reagan are covered in head to toe of tattoos, considering Reagan owns the local tattoo shop, Rainy Day Tattoos. But it is how close their family is that always makes me jealous. Even when it was just Reagan and Leanne, I longed for the closeness that the two of them had. I wonder if I’ll ever have kids and a family like them. I thought I was getting closer to that with Steve, but well, here we are.

“Coming right up,” I say, bursting my own little bubble. “Go pick a table and I’ll bring it over,” I suggest; there is no line behind them so what is the harm. I want to soak in a few more minutes with them before I have to get back to work.

“Are you back to work yet?” I ask Reagan as I bring over everything.

“I am, I officially started last week but just to catch up on managerial things. This week I actually get to be tattooing again,” she says proudly.

“Stay at home daddy then?” I tease Grayson.

“Oh yes, I’m looking forward to it,” Grayson says proudly as he bounces the baby on his knee.

“You guys give me hope for the future,” I say aloud.

“Good, you’re still young, girl. You’ve got plenty of time before you settle down,”

Reagan says reaching for my arm. She gives a light squeeze and a smile, and I nod before heading to help the next person at the counter.

While I help my customers, I can't help but keep an eye on them. They laugh and chatter about, giggling when Leanne gets chocolate all over her nose and baby Emmett almost knocks over the iced coffee. They're an imperfect family if you look close enough, but I think that's what makes them almost perfect. I can't help but feel a twinge of jealousy while I watch them.

"Hey, Laine? It's time to clean up," Jen reminds me and I look at the clock, realizing it is already ten minutes past closing. So I quietly flip the sign on the door and ask the last two customers if they can make their way out. Thankfully they're both polite tonight and don't give me a hard time.

I meet Jen in the back and she hands me a celebratory iced coffee. We made it through the week, we have a ritual of celebrating that. It is the little things that we appreciate.

"So, how are you doing?" she asks, giving me a knowing look. She tilts her head down, looking at me over her glasses with her dark eyes.

"As good as can be expected, I guess."

"What did your parents want today?"

"For me to call Steve." I clench my jaw.

"WHAT?! Are they nuts or do they not know everything?" she exclaims.

"They don't know everything." I don't bother telling her that he showed up here earlier, I know that would just upset her even more than knowing my parents tried

making me talk to him.

“Well still, you can’t call him. I mean, it’s your life but you know what I mean.” She sighs.

“No, trust me, I won’t.” I promise her anytime I was feeling low or thought I’d want to call him, I’d call her instead. It has only been a few weeks but so far it is working out for us.

“Look, everything back here is done but you may want to sweep the front. Otherwise I think we can head home.”

“I’ll sweep the front, you head home,” I decide.

“Okay.” Jen hugs me and takes her iced coffee with her, heading out the back door of the shop.

It’s eerie when it’s closed. The sun is starting to set, and the lights are all off inside. But I feel safe here, it isn’t like anyone is going to rob a bakery. So I close up the front, sweeping and cleaning out the rest of the case since I’d forgotten to do that earlier. I dump the pot of coffee and I’m about to head out when I feel a chill run down my spine. I glance out the front windows and a shadow zooms by. I could’ve sworn I saw someone but I don’t know. There are at least ten other stores and shops on this block, it could’ve been anyone. So I push the thought out of my head and decide to head home.

CHAPTER2

CARTER

“Carter!” Reagan greets me on one of my first days at Rainy Day Tattoos.

“Reagan!” I smile back. I’m not normally so excited, but something about a new job and a fresh haircut had made me feel optimistic.

“Wow, what a bold hair change!” Addison comments. “It looks so nice,” she adds with a smile.

“Thank you, I was feeling something different.” I touch my newly cut and colored red hair.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“It looks awesome.” Reagan smiles.

“Thanks.” I blush. I’m not used to so much attention, but I kind of like it.

“So, I’m going to have you do some paperwork with Addison and when you’re done you can start seeing clients,” Reagan instructs. The last few days she had me watch Lynn and her just to see how things are done here and I appreciate how easy they are to talk to. Even Lynn, who’s incredibly quiet, has taught me a lot and kept me involved in her process of tattooing people.

It isn’t that I don’t know how to tattoo, I actually have years of experience but I get it, every shop has their own way of doing things. This place is definitely different than my last male-operated shop. I was the only woman in the crew and they made a point of mentioning that as much as possible. It would be nice to work in an all-female shop for once.

“Sounds good,” I answer, realizing Reagan is waiting for a response.

“Come on back.” Addison smiles and I nod. I follow her back to the office where I had my interview and she takes a seat at the desk. The printer goes off and she hands me a stack of paperwork for me to go over and sign. A lot of it is self-explanatory, but I read everything just in case. My lawyer of a father would be proud of me for that.

“When you’re all done, head to the front and we can get a client or two set up today.” Addison smiles softly. She is quiet and soft spoken with little to no visible tattoos, I wonder how she got a job here but I don’t ask. Maybe she is covered in hidden

tattoos.

“Sounds good,” I reply and she nods, leaving me alone.

I read and sign everything and it only takes about forty-five minutes, so I head to the front and hand her everything. Addison is on the phone so she nods and I take a walk around the shop. Lynn and Reagan are both tattooing people, so I sit in the front waiting for Addison to get off the phone.

“Are you new?” a little boy on his tablet says to me. He can’t be more than eight, but he is quiet and shares Addison’s fair skin.

“I am, Carter.” I smile and hold out my hand for him to shake. He looks at it weirdly. “I don’t bite,” I joke.

“I’m not supposed to talk to strangers, but you work here, right? So I don’t know if that means you’re still a stranger.” He furrows his eyebrows together.

“She’s not a stranger, but good job for being cautious.” Addison comes over with a smile.

“I’m Aaron.” He finally shakes my hand and I nod. Aaron and Addison, that is cute.

“Nice to meet you, Aaron.” I smile. I’m not the biggest fan of kids but it seems like I’ll have to get over that. Between Aaron and Reagan’s daughter and new baby, this place is bursting with kids.

“You can come back with me, Carter.” Addison directs me down the hall of the shop and we stop outside one of the tattooing rooms.

“Is this mine?”

“Yup, feel free to decorate how you see fit. Anything you book just make sure you let me know so I can put it on the calendar, but we’re happy to have you book anything on your own as well as take walk ins.”

“I have a bit of a following from my last shop with some clients who have been waiting for me to start a new job, so I can definitely bring in some business,” I say proudly.

“Perfect. Just let me know and I’ll get you booked up, are you okay if I have a call that fits your style?”

“Of course, fill up my schedule.” The more tattoos I do, the more income I have and the better I can pay off my student loans. Which are killer at this point. Something like I’ll be fifty-two before they’ll be paid off fully.

“Awesome, well we have two clients coming in at noon, would you be able to take one today?”

“Sure.” I nod. I am happy to dive right in and show them what I can do.

Addison leaves me alone and I look around the room, it is a nice size and can easily be fixed up with a few posters or art prints. Maybe some tattoo flash sheets I can offer, I will have to have some stuff printed up quickly. In my last shop it had only been chairs, not our own rooms, so this is a lot more private. It is going to be a nice change of pace for my clients.

“Your appointment is here!” Addison calls, knocking lightly on the door, and I head out to the lobby to meet them.

“Hey, it’s nice to meet you. I’m Carter.” I shake hands with the tall brunette. She towers over me easily, and her hair is dark and thick, almost down to her ass. She is

beautiful but I don't spot a single tattoo on her.

"I'm Robin." She smiles, her teeth slightly crooked, and she bites on her bottom lip.

"Shall we?" I bring her to my room and she takes a seat on the chair, looking around nervously.

"Is this your first tattoo?"

"Is it that obvious?" she asks with a chuckle.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“You just seem a tad nervous, but don’t worry. I’ve had plenty of first timers,” I reassure her. “So what are you here for?”

“My mom just passed away suddenly, so I wanted to get something to commemorate her.” She pulls out her phone and shows me an array of roses and a clock in the middle. “Roses were her favorite.”

“This is awesome, I’d have to draw it up in my style but that shouldn’t take me too long. Would you like to listen to some music?”

“Sure.” She nods. Thankfully I had thought to bring my 12Bluetooth speaker with me. I connect to Spotify and let her pick the music while I grab my iPad and start working on her design. I lean against the counter, knowing I’ll be sitting for most of the tattoo.

“Something like this?” I say when I’m done with her design. I’ve added my own flair to the design and her eyes light up, knowing I’ve gotten exactly what she wants.

“Yes! Oh my gosh, my mother would love that!” She smiles and then starts to cry.

“I’m so sorry, it comes in waves. I’m fine and then suddenly I’m not.” I reach for the box of tissues and let her pull a few out as she wipes her eyes and blows her nose.

“It’s okay. I lost my dad a few years ago and I still have days like that sometimes. You take your time and if you cry during the tattoo I’ll check in with you, but I’m okay continuing. It can sometimes be more therapeutic for you to let it all out while you’re actually being tattooed,” I explain.

“I’d like that actually, I think it’s just residual grief.” She nods.

“Okay, let’s get started then.” I get the colors mixed and set up the tray with fresh gloves, Vaseline, and all the things I may need for her tattoo. I grab my own gun from my bag and put in a fresh needle.

As I’m prepping everything, she puts her legs on the chair and gives me her arm to prep. I shave the spot she wants it in, wipe it with rubbing alcohol, and look to her to make sure she’s ready. “You all set?”

“Yes.” She nods and takes a deep breath. She’s fiddling with finding music she wants to listen to and I get started. I can feel her tense when I put the needle to her skin, but she handles it well. She’s tense but she’s trying to calm herself down which is the most I can ask for. When she finally decides on music, she closes her eyes, and she’s so calm that I thought she might be sleeping. It turns out she is just zoning out into the music.

About halfway through the tattoo, she opens her eyes to look and that’s when the tears return. I stop for a few minutes until she asks me to continue, and with a breath, her eyes close again and I finish up. She does better than expected during the shading and coloring. I half expected her to cry or wince but she handles it like a champ. When we’re all done, she looks at it and pulls me in for a hug. It’s not the first time I’ve had a client hug me, but it is the first time in a while, and it startles me.

“I’m so sorry! I just love it so much,” she says with tears brimming in her eyes.

“No worries, I’m glad you like it so much.” I smile. “Can I grab some pictures of it for Instagram?”

“Of course!” She nods eagerly. I move her arm so I can see the full tattoo and snap a few pictures of it. I tag Rainy Day Tattoos and post the picture to my Instagram with

the caption, new adventures.

“You can see Addison in the front to handle payment,” I say after I wrap up her arm.

“Got it. Thank you so much.” Robin smiles, staring at her wrapped arm. It is nice to see such a happy client, especially one who is clearly grieving.

I clean up as Robin pays and Addison knocks on the door a few minutes later. She hands me a wad of cash, telling me it is my tip from Robin.

“The tattoo was beautiful,” Addison adds.

“Thanks.” I smile. It is nice to get complimented by another artist.

“I have one more waiting for you, if you have time.”

“Send ‘em in.”

Addison goes to get the next client, and I start prepping my space for them. The next few tattoos go by in a blur, one client after another once I’ve got the hang of things. I stop at some point for a sandwich we have delivered and a pee break, but otherwise I’m handling the walk ins today. I can’t tell if it is just a busy day or if Addison is testing me, but I think I handle each client well. I make sure everyone is happy when they’re leaving and I give them my Instagram to follow me or book another appointment. A few say they’ll be back, and I can tell it’s not just them being polite but they actually mean it.

By the time it’s closing time, I’m exhausted but I don’t let on when Addison knocks on the door. I’m slipping my hand into a carpal tunnel brace and her eyes widen.

“Are you okay?”

“Purely preventative. I like to make sure I’m not going to be out of commission,” I explain.

“Thank goodness, because you’re already booked solid for tomorrow. I had a bunch of call ins and it’s Lynn’s day off. Think you can handle it?”

“Definitely.” I smile. For the first time in a long ass time, I am enjoying my job again. Remembering why I got into the business of tattooing people to begin with. It is more than just a job to me, it is a way of connecting with people. And helping people to heal in their own way.

CHAPTER3

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

LAINY

“Wow, you’re here early,” Jen notices as I walk into work one day.

“I thought I’d get a head start to my day, I woke up early,” I say with a shrug. I hate waiting around the house just counting down until work starts.

“Well there’s a whole line of customers, and I think Jax needs help.” Jax is the high schooler I had hired for the summer. They seem to be doing alright so far, but this will be one of my first times working with them since they were hired.

“Gotcha.” I pop on an apron over my clothes and head to the front. Jax indeed looks like they can use some help. Their shaggy blonde hair is hanging over their blue eyes as they look at me in a panic.

“Hey, Jax.” I smile.

“Lainey! Hi! Thank goodness, can I have some help?” they say panicked.

“Of course, what’s up?” I walk over and see they’re trying to make change of a fifty when we only have a few singles starting out for the day.

“Hold on one moment, ma’am.” I grab the fifty and head to the safe in my office, grab some change, and hand it to the woman.

“Normally, we don’t take anything over a twenty,” I whisper once she’s out of ear reach.

“Oh, sorry, boss,” Jax says.

“No worries, things to learn.” I smile. Jax is worried, but I reassure them there is nothing to worry about. They are a bit nervous and over eager but overall a great employee.

“Why don’t you clean the front while I man the register for a while?” I suggest.

“Okay!” Jax nods. While they’re cleaning up empty mugs and dishes, I start taking people’s orders again. It is early so at this time in the morning there is a bit of a rush until about nine thirty and then it dies down, at least until lunch time.

I’m absentmindedly taking orders when the rush finally dies down and I have a moment to breathe. I grab myself a hot cup of coffee and check on Jax who’s busy at work cleaning the front case. I’m about to take a break when I notice a new customer walk in. It isn’t abnormal to get new customers, we do live in a touristy area, but there is something different about her. Have I seen her before? She reminds me of Reagan, being covered in head to toe in ink.

“Hi, welcome to Cinnamon Roll Savors, what can I get you?”

“Well, my boss recommended this place and I wanted to get something she’d like, but I honestly have no clue what that might be. I was also thinking of ordering for the staff, but again, I have no idea what they’d like.”

“Are you new in town?” I ask.

“Ha, I am. Is it that obvious?” She chuckles, her short bottle red curls bouncing with her.

“I just happen to know most people in town, and I haven’t had the pleasure of

meeting you yet.”

“I just moved here from Portland,” she says shyly. “Carter.” She holds out her hand and I shake it. Something sparks a smile in me when I do and it makes me hesitate. Something about her gives me pause, in a good way.

“Lainey, I’m the owner,” I explain.

“Oh! My boss said you make the best coffee and cinnamon rolls.”

“May I ask who your boss is?” I ask out of curiosity.

“Of course, it’s Reagan Gold, well I think she’s just changed her last name actually,” Carter rambles, and it gives me a moment to notice her beautiful hazel eyes.

“Reagan is one of my favorite customers, and I know her order. So are you working at Rainy Day then?” I ask as I start to get Reagan’s usual order put together.

“Yes! Wow, I’m still not used to this whole small town thing. I keep running into people I know or that know me and they say hello and are actually friendly.” Carter smiles. Her teeth are perfectly white and straight. I don’t normally pay so much attention to the looks of my customers but there is something about her.

“So that would mean you’re also getting coffee for Addison and Lynn, right?” I ask, trying to think of who else works there. They don’t come in as often as Reagan, but I do remember their orders.

“Shit, yes! If you know their orders too, I’m going to have to thank you for being such a lifesaver.” Carter beams.

“Well, then call me a lifesaver because I definitely do!” I say happily. Call me a

lifesaver?What is wrong with me. Something about Carter makes me feel all gooey and flirty inside.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Lainey the lifesaver, it has a nice ring to it,” Carter teases. And I can’t help but blush as I make her coffees. I grab one of the holders and pop all four coffees in.

“Wait, how’d you guess my coffee order?” she says, looking down at the drinks.

“I made the house special, it’s a cinnamon almond blend. I’ve never had anyone not love it,” I say proudly. I like being able to guess coffee orders and help make someone’s day just a little bit better with a cup of coffee and a cinnamon roll.

“Mmm, this is delicious,” Carter says as she takes a hearty sip.

“I also packed four cinnamon rolls and, just in case Leanne and Aaron are there, I packed two chocolate chip cookies, on the house.” I smile and hand her the bag with all the goodies.

“How much is everything?” Carter asks and I ring her up.

“Shit, that’s even cheaper than I expected, thank you so much, Lainey. You’ll definitely be seeing more of me in here, that’s for sure.” Carter winks and heads out the front door, leaving me wanting for something more.

“Jax, can you take over?” I need a moment in my office.

“Sure.” Jax smiles and takes over the register for me while I pass Jen and head to the back office.

What is going on with me? Did I just catch myself flirting with Carter? No, I mean I

am straight. For all intents and purposes, I have never even looked at a woman like that before. Or let alone thought of a woman in a romantic way before. Why all of a sudden has Carter caught my eye? Is there something familiar and comforting about her? Yes, sure, of course there is. But that doesn't mean I like her, does it?

Carter is beautiful, I mean something about that dyed red hair did something to me and the chuckle she did left a lasting impression. But that doesn't mean I am suddenly into women, does it? No, I know sexuality is fluid but being only with men my entire life has to mean something. Besides, why am I getting myself all worked up over some harmless work flirting. It is clear it didn't mean anything, or she would have at least asked me out.

I decide to bury myself in the office of paperwork I'm usually putting off. I need something to distract myself from the impending thoughts of a woman I know nothing about. So I fill out forms and bills and busy myself with the task of cleaning off my desk until suddenly Jen is knocking on my door, telling me it's time to go home.

"Have I been back here all day?" My eyes widen.

"Yes, I figured you didn't want to be disturbed," she says with a light shrug.

"Have you ever kissed a girl?" I blurt out. My best friend laughs and then shakes her head.

"No, can't say I have. Why are you offering?" She winks.

"No. I just was curious."

"About if I have, or curious for yourself?"

“Both,” I admit with a blush. I know there is nothing to be ashamed of, yet there is something almost taboo about it. It feels like something I shouldn’t be curious about, but I’m sure that’s some deep down trauma I don’t want to fuck around with.

“It’s totally cool to be curious. Vaginas scare the shit out of me so I can’t say I’ve ever wanted to go that way,” Jen explains.

“Hmm.” I can’t say I’ve ever thought about them, but the thought of seeing Carter’s doesn’t immediately gross me out. But it also doesn’t necessarily turn me on, what the hell does that mean?

“Anyway, um, Jax did great today by the way,” Jen says, changing the subject.

“That’s great! No issues then?”

“Nope, they figured everything out themselves and only needed some help like twice,” she says proudly.

“Perfect.” I smile. “Are you headed home tonight?”

“I’m actually going out to grab a drink and was thinking you might want to come? Maybe get back out there? We can find you a hot new...person?” She hesitates before changing her language. That’s what I love about Jen, she is one to roll with the punches. I might be having a midlife crisis here worrying about my sexuality, and Jen just wants to get me laid.

“Thanks, but I’m okay, I think I’m just going to head home tonight.” I’m not ready to ‘get back out there’. At least I don’t think I am.

“Okay, but call me if anything changes.” She hugs me and heads out the door. Jax is already gone so I head to the front to start locking up when I notice Steve by the front

door. He's motioning for me to let him in, and I know it's just going to be worse if I don't. So, begrudgingly, I open the front door and let him in.

"What?" I cross my arms over my chest and stare him down.

"I just wanted to talk to you and you're not picking up my calls anymore." Little does he know, Jen took my phone and blocked his number. It was something I was too chicken to do but thankful that Jen had done it.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Okay. Spit it out then.” I shrug.

“I want you back. I know what I did was stupid and I’ve beat myself up over it every damn day. But we can’t just be over.” He’s begging again, something I’ve come to learn I hate him doing.

“I don’t want to be with you anymore, not after how you treated me.” I clench my jaw. It isn’t worth trying to explain that to him if he doesn’t get it.

“You’re being unreasonable! I make one fucking mistake and I lose everything because of it?” he spits. It’s like a light has flipped in his eyes and now I’m the enemy.

“I think you need to go.” I hold open the front door and he grabs my arm, digging his hands in my wrist.

“Ow!” I pull back, and he lets go.

“Lainey, please.” He’s all soft and sweet again. I can’t keep up with these constant mood swings.

“You need to go. NOW.” I raise my voice for the first time at him.

“No, I’m not leaving until you consider to get back together.”

“No, you need to leave before I call the cops,” I threaten, holding up my red wrist. That is all the proof I need to have them believe me this time.

“You wouldn’t.” His eyes darken and he steps closer.

“T-take one more fucking step and I will,” I growl. It is like fighting with a bear, you just have to seem stronger and tougher than the bear.

“Whatever.” He rolls his eyes and laughs. “I’ll be back, Lainey,” he says in a tone that sounds equally threatening and equally like a promise.

As soon as he leaves, I shut the door behind him and brace myself. Taking three large deep breaths, I try to make myself feel better, but all I feel is anxiety. I close my eyes, holding my wrist and taking more deep breaths. It takes a few minutes but I finally calm down, and I can’t believe I let him hurt me again. I can’t believe I let him get to me like that, once again. I sigh, grabbing some ice from the back and putting it on my wrist. It’s then that I make a promise to myself to make sure Steve never puts his hands on me again.

CHAPTER4

CARTER

After meeting Lainey, I swear it is what most would call love at first sight. Only, I don’t believe in love at first sight and I barely know this woman. I can’t possibly be falling for someone after one encounter. But then again, it is clear that after the third time I get coffee from her, there is some kind of a spark. I can’t quite explain it, but it is almost like a buzz of electricity between us.

I’ve made it part of my morning routine to grab coffee and a cinnamon roll at Cinnamon Roll Savors. Sometimes I’ll bring in coffee for the whole staff, but not every day. I used to be more of a tea drinker but lately I am drinking coffee by the gallon full, to have an excuse to see Lainey. And on the days she isn’t there, it is more disappointing than I care to admit. Although the kid behind the counter is

cheerful and helpful, they aren't Lainey.

"Carter, right?" Lainey says today, with a smile on her face. I waited on the line for my time to talk to her and order something, just like everyone else, but I can't help but wonder if she thinks of me like I think of her. Probably not.

"Yup." I wonder if she really knows everyone in town's name. I probably am not special or anything, yet it made my heart flutter when she knew my name. What the hell is going on with me? I'm not the gushy, romantic, butterflies in my stomach type. I am the grumpy, you can come to me and maybe I'll admit I like you type. Something about Lainey makes me fall out of all my norms, and I don't know how to feel about it.

"Can I get you anything special today?"

"Yeah, I want to switch it up. Can I try the pumpkin latte?" I have a feeling everything on the menu is going to be good, but I don't want her thinking I am someone who has a 'regular' drink choice.

"Ooo, those are delicious! You should try it with our pumpkin muffin if you're interested." She smiles happily. She is like a ray of sunshine with how perky she is. Which is normally something that would piss me off, but with Lainey, I find it to be endearing.

"Sounds perfect." I nod, looking at them through the glass case. They are topped with cream cheese icing, my favorite.

"Coming right up, are you getting this to go today?" she asks, looking at the clock. I am here later than normal because it is my day off and I had gotten to sleep in for once. Something I hadn't expected her to notice.

“Actually, I’m going to stay here. I have off today.” Is it bad that I am still getting out of bed for a Lainey and coffee fix on my day off? Probably. But I don’t want to admit how I am crushing on someone who might not even be into women. Let alone someone who might be this perky and cheerful with all her customers.

“Perfect, why don’t you have a seat and I’ll bring everything to you?” She smiles, her red lipstick bold and bright.

“Okay.” I pay and look around for a table to sit at. There’s one in the back corner by the window that has a booth, a table, and an extra chair. I make my way over, sling my bag over the chair so no one tries sitting with me and then take a spot in the booth. I pull out my iPad from my bag and wait for Lainey to bring over my stuff.

I try not to watch her, but she is sort of mesmerizing. Sure, she is smiling and cheerful with the rest of the customers that had been behind me, but I still want to believe it is different with me. Lainey and I have this sort of connection that goes beyond customer and employee. At least, that’s what it feels like to me. Sometimes it is hard to read Lainey, as if she has this guarded wall up between us. I wonder if that is something everyone can feel.

“Here you go.” Lainey smiles, bringing over my coffee and muffin. The coffee has a heart design with the milk, and the muffin is on a small plate.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Thank you.”

Lainey nods and heads back to work so I take a sip of my coffee. I’m not the Instagram type where I need to capture everything I do, I save that for work. But I am working on some new tattoo ideas so I post some work in progress snaps to my story and then get back to work. I’m drawing for what feels like hours, my coffee and muffin are long gone when my butt starts to fall asleep. I hate that feeling and I know I should stand so I bring my empty dishes to the dish bin on top of the garbage. Ah, it feels good to stretch my legs out. I am barely thirty and already it feels like my body is giving out on me. My legs crack as I stretch them out with a few extra steps to grab a napkin.

“You’re working hard for a day off,” Lainey says, coming up behind me. She would have startled me, had I not noticed her gone from behind the counter.

“Eh, it doesn’t feel like work when I’m drawing,” I admit. I am still wearing my hand brace and Lainey looks at it questioningly.

“Did you hurt it at work?”

“Nah, I wear it so I don’t get hurt. Helps my hand not hurt when I’m tattooing all day long,” I explain.

“Gotcha, I should probably get my cake decorator to wear one of those, her hands are always killing her from the icing bag.”

“It definitely helps.” I nod.

“Let me know if you need more coffee, it’s on the house if you’re staying here.” She smiles.

“Just for me?” I blurt out. I can’t help it, I need to know if she is flirting with me or not.

“Well, it’s kind of the policy. But I don’t add free muffins to everyone’s order,” she says with a wink and that’s when I can confirm that there’s more going on than just in my head. She heads back behind the counter and I follow her, grabbing another mug of coffee and a fresh muffin. It is probably more sugar than I need, but I am hungry.

Heading back to my table, I devour the muffin and sip my coffee. Noticing this time the milk was in the shape of a leaf instead of a heart. What does this mean? Am I really becoming one of those girls looking to the shape of my milk as some kind of meaning? What is going on with me? I should just ask Lainey out and see what she says. Although I don’t want to come on too strong, especially when I just moved to town. I’d have to find a new place to get coffee from and I have a feeling, considering how small this town is, that might be a hard thing to do. God, I might have to resort to making coffee at home and no matter what, it never tastes as good as when someone else makes it for you.

“Do you mind if I sit with you?” Lainey says a few minutes later, standing above me. I glance around the cafe and realize all the other seats are taken up. The choice is between me and some older man reading the newspaper.

“Of course.” I move my bag and she takes a seat with her sandwich and iced drink.

“I have like fifteen minutes to eat, so I won’t be here long,” she says nervously.

“Don’t worry about it, it is your cafe after all. Stick around as long as you’d like,” I reassure her.

“What are you working on?” she asks quietly after a few moments of silence.

“Just drawing up some tattoo designs for a flash sale.”

“What’s that?” She crinkles her eyebrows into one.

“People can choose from like ten to fifteen designs for a cheaper price on a certain day, we call it a flash sheet sale,” I explain. “Do you have any tattoos?”

“No, Reagan’s always telling me to come in but I don’t know what I’d even get,” she says with a sigh.

“What about a cinnamon roll?” I joke.

“Honestly, I think that would make my parents proud.” She laughs.

“Do they own the place?”

“Kind of? Like yes they do, but so do I. It’s complicated.” She shrugs.

“Gotcha.” I nod. I don’t want to press her for details.

“Can I see some of the flash designs?” She peeks over my iPad, and I nod. I turn it toward her, and her eyes widen as she sees the array of designs.

“Wow, those are some naked women.” She laughs with a blush.

“A lot of my clients are queer women who want women on them.” I shrug. I don’t personally get the appeal, but I had been asked so many times if I did pinup women that I knew I needed to start offering some.

“Are you queer?” Lainey blurts out. “Fuck, sorry. That was so rude. You totally don’t have to answer that.” She scolds herself and I chuckle.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Yes. I like women.” I smirk. Is Lainey really trying to flirt with me?

“That’s cool.” I don’t ask her if she’s into women. It’s obvious by the way she’s acting but I don’t say that.

“I s-should get back behind the counter.”

“There’s no one looking for help,” I point out.

“D-do you want me to stay?”

“Your company is nice.” I smile.

“Thank you, but really I should, um, get back,” Lainey says nervously.

“Okay.” I nod.

Lainey looks like she’s going to say something, perhaps ask me something, but then thinks better of it and closes her mouth. She drops her dishes off and heads back behind the counter just before a large rush comes in. I can’t help it, I decide to start drawing her. Fuck, there is just something about her and how unknowingly beautiful she is that makes me want to capture her. Immortalize her in my art even if no one but me is ever going to see it. I take out my Apple Pencil and get drawing. When my hand eventually begins to cramp, I decide to call it a day. I’ve been here until almost closing anyway. I wave goodbye to Lainey and head to my car that’s been parked out front all day long.

Before pulling out, I stop to stretch out my hand and pick the music for the drive home. Although I live close by, I want a nice few songs to listen to and not be stuck on some random playlist. I'm picking the music when I see a guy hanging out by the front entrance of Cinnamon Roll Savors. He's got this hoodie and ball cap on that makes him look like Joe from You. Which is creeping me out more because the way he's peering into the bakery instead of just going inside is freaking me out. I decide to wait a few minutes and see what he's doing before I leave. Lainey is the last one in the bakery with only that old man reading his newspaper. I reach for my phone and accidentally hit my brights, shining in the guy's face and causing Lainey to look out too. He quickly scurries away down the block as I turn off my brights. Lainey looks confused for a moment and then goes back to what she's doing so I decide she's safe for me to get going. I don't want to seem like a stalker here on my own. So I take off in the direction of home and try not to think about the beautiful barista and how melty she makes me feel inside.

CHAPTER 5

LAINY

I am exhausted after my shift today. It was like a never ending line of customers that all seemed to want whatever we were out of. It was frustrating and exhausting to say the least. The most exciting part of my day was my daily five minute encounter with Carter. Something about her walking in, ordering coffee and a pastry, always seems to make my morning. Jen says I was majorly crushing on her, but I still am confused about it. I have never felt this way about another woman before. It's not like I haven't noticed women's beauty, but this goes beyond how beautiful Carter is. It is like we have this connection. But it is also probably one sided because no matter how much I flirt with her, she never seems to make a move. I know, I know, I could make the first move. But the thought of doing so makes my stomach shrink.

"Are you home yet? I have to go walk Milo," Jen says on the other end of the phone.

Fuck, I forgot she was still there.

“Yeah, I’m opening my front door right now.” Ever since I had seen that weird figure outside the bakery, I’ve been calling Jen on my way home. She stays on with me until I get inside and then we say goodbye. She hangs up to go walk her puppy, Milo, and I flick on all the lights in my apartment.

I live alone, which can get kind of lonely, but I work too many hours to think about getting a pet and am too raw from Steve to think about being in a relationship. Would Carter want to be in a relationship anyway? She strikes me as more of a one night stand kind of person. Something about her doesn’t scream relationships, but maybe I am wrong. I mean, I barely know her outside her coffee order.

There’s a knock at the front door, and I use the Ring camera app on my phone to see who it is. I almost jump out of my skin when I see that it’s Steve. I think about pretending I’m not home, but as soon as I think that he’s calling through the door, “I see your car Lainey, I know you’re home. Just open the door.”

I still feel unsafe around him, but I don’t want him to hang out there all night. I mean I have neighbors after all. I call Jen back but she doesn’t pick up, probably out for her walk with Milo. I don’t blame her for not bringing her phone with her. There’s another pounding on the door.

“Come on, Lainey!” He sounds angry, and the last thing I want to do is wait for him to get even angrier.

“What is it?” I call through the door.

“I’m not talking through the damn door, Lainey, just open up.” He sounds calmer so I take a deep breath, grab my key, and open the door just enough for me to slip outside. I close the front door behind me and he looks at me confused.

“You’re not going to invite me in?”

“No, we can discuss anything you want to say out here.” The truth is I do have nosey neighbors and if he wants to talk, we can talk where they can hear and see everything.

“Fine. I came to say that this little break we took is over. I want you back and I’m tired of playing these games with you.”

“It’s not a game and it wasn’t a break, we broke up,” I clarify.

“I don’t think that we did.”

“That’s funny because I think that we did.” I cross my arms over my chest.

“Come on, it was a stupid fight. You said things you didn’t mean, I did things I didn’t mean.”

“You hit me, Steve.” I whisper the word like it leaves a bad taste in my mouth. Probably because it does. It’s not a sentence I ever expected to have to say out loud.

“Again with this nonsense! No, I didn’t.” He growls. Here he is, gaslighting me again. Only this time I am not falling for it. I know what happened and I’m not going to let it go.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“I’m done discussing this.” I reach for the doorknob, but he stops me. Putting his hand on my hand, and I jump back, reacting quicker than I can register.

“What the fuck, are you really afraid of me, Lainey?” He smirks, towering over me like it is some kind of new kink he’s figured out. Only to him, it probably is. Some sick thing that turns him on knowing I am afraid of him. I hate to think what he might do next. Thankfully my phone starts ringing, and I answer it before he has a chance to tell me not to.

“Hi, Jen! Can’t really talk right now because Steve is here,” I say loudly into the phone. Knowing Jen will take that as an SOS call to come over right away.

“I’ll be right over,” she says before Steve grabs the phone from me and hangs up.

“You shouldn’t have done that. Can’t we have a conversation without your bitch best friend getting in the middle of everything?”

“She’s not a bitch and she’s on her way over with the cops, so I’d get moving along if I were you,” I say fiercely.

He scoffs. “Whatever, Lainey.” Rolling his eyes, he takes off in his black mustang and heads down the road. Almost seconds later, Jen pulls up with Ben, her boyfriend and one of the six cops in town.

“Everything alright?” Ben asks as Jen jumps out of the car to give me a hug. She checks over me for marks and then lets me go.

“He was here to try and get back together, but at this point it’s harassment,” I explain.

“Is there anything you can do?” Jen asks Ben.

“Unfortunately not, he’s not breaking any laws since we don’t have any proof he put his hands on you. Unless you’d like to file a restraining order, there isn’t much we can do. I’m sorry, Lainey,” Ben says with a frown.

“It’s okay, thank you.”

“I better head back to the station before I’m missed, but please call me if there’s a next time.” Ben hands me his card even though I have his cell phone number. We’ve all been friends since high school, but I get it, he is being thorough with his job.

“I’m going to stay here tonight, you can take my car back,” Jen says, giving Ben a quick kiss goodbye.

I open the front door and let out a deep breath. Jen watches me carefully, I think she thinks I’m going to break or something. The truth is, I’m surprised I haven’t yet. But I think it’s because I might still be in shock. It’s not something a person can just be okay with, not when someone you loved put their hands on you. I think it’s okay to still be in some form of shock.

“We’re going to have a movie night and forget about that bastard.” Jen starts ruffling through the drawers in the kitchen for something.

My back is against the front door, and I feel frozen in place. At least I knew better than to let Steve in the house, but what if I had? What if Jen hadn’t called me back when she did? I am so tired of thinking of all these horrible what ifs when it comes to him. I thought once you broke up with someone it was supposed to be the end of them in its entirety. Not to keep running into them and finding them on your doorstep

or outside your job.

“Lainey? Did you hear what I said?” Jen’s voice snaps me back into reality.

“No,” I admit.

“Okay, I asked what kind of takeout you want.”

“Oh, I’m not hungry.”

“I figured that, but you need to eat anyway. I’m ordering pizza. Our normal.” I nod, knowing she knows what I like, and there is no point arguing with Jen. She is going to do what was best for me even when I can’t put one foot in front of the other.

“I think I want to take a shower, is that okay?” I look at Jen and she nods.

“Of course, I’ll make myself at home.” She calls for the pizza, putting her feet up on my coffee table and flicking the tv on.

I head to the bathroom and close the door behind me, locking it for good measure. I know Steve isn’t anywhere near here, but I just need to wash off the remnants of him. I strip down to nothing and hop in the shower, turning the water up to scalding. It’s a little too hot to handle and my skin is turning red, but I want to erase the fact that I ever let him touch me. I want to get rid of the way he’s touched me in every realm. So I keep the boiling water on my skin until it runs cold. Then I cry. This loud, primal, cry that doesn’t even sound like me. It doesn’t feel like me, but I let it out because it feels better than holding it in. I don’t want to hold on to these feelings anymore. I don’t want to live in this skin, knowing he’s touched it. So I cry until the tears run dry, and then I wash my body and get out of the shower. Wrapping a warm towel around my body, I look in the foggy mirror at my reflection.

I know I can never make it so he hasn't touched me. My skin will always be touched by him. But I can move forward and not let him touch me again. I head to my room and put on my comfiest clothes, then head into the living room where Jen is digging into the pizza without me.

"I couldn't wait, I was starving." She chuckles.

"It's okay." I smile and grab a plate. Maybe I am hungry after all, it does look delicious.

I pick up a piece of pizza and plop down on the couch next to Jen. We're watching reruns of Friends, and I don't care enough to pay attention to them. Jen looks at me like she wants to ask if I'm okay, but she knows better. I'm not, and that's okay. It's okay to not be okay after what I've gone through.

"I know you're not okay, but you can talk to me about it if you need to." She smiles.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“I know. I appreciate that. I just don’t think I’m ready to.”

“And my offer still stands, I can find you a therapist out of town. I know you wouldn’t want one in town, but we can find you one to talk about everything.”

“I-I just don’t think I’m ready for that quite yet,” I admit. The thought of purging my thoughts to a complete stranger feels oddly exhausting.

“Okay, well if you want to.” I nod.

I know Jen means well. There is nothing wrong with seeing a therapist, and I’m sure that in time I will sign myself up for therapy. It is clearly needed after what I’ve been through. I’m just not ready yet. And sure, maybe I should push myself and just go, but for now I don’t want to push myself out of any more boundaries. I just want to eat pizza with my best friend and try not to think about the man who put his hands on me and made me lose trust in everything else. It’s funny how one person can make you feel like your world is upside down with a few simple actions. I guess that’s what happens when you let love take over. I know I won’t let that happen to me ever again. The next time I fall in love, I’ll protect my heart.

CHAPTER6

CARTER

I swallow my pride and leave it at the door as I step into Cinnamon Roll Saviors this morning. I decided today would be the day I ask out Lainey. I am tired of wondering if everything is in my head or she actually likes me. So I am going to be the bigger

person and just ask her out. Sure, it could be all in my head but I am willing to place that bet against myself.

“Hey,” Lainey greets me with a genuine smile.

“Hey.” I smile back.

“What can I get you today?”

“I would love another pumpkin latte, a cinnamon roll, and your number?”

“E-excuse me?” Lainey is all ready to get my order until she hears my last request.

“I was hoping you’d want to go out with me. So can I have your number?” I repeat. It is more nerve wracking saying it the second time.

“Uh.” Lainey looks like a deer in headlights. I can see a million thoughts racing behind her head, and I can’t tell which direction she is going in. Is she about to let me down gently or is she going to tell to say yes?

“I-I’ve never been out with a woman before,” she blurts out just loud enough for me to hear.

“Oh.” Now my eyes are wide. I don’t make it a habit of going out with women who are experimenting, but I didn’t take her as the bi curious type. I had read her as being into women, was I wrong to think that?

“I-I think I’d like to go but I don’t know...” her voice trails. I understand what she’s saying.

“If you want to, we can go out and I promise to take things slow.” It’s not like I have

a habit of sleeping with women on the first date anyway.

“I’d like that a lot.” She smiles, nodding.

“Perfect, so can I have your number?”

She picks up a piece of register paper and writes her name and number on it. I tuck it into the front pocket of my jeans and smile. Lainey grabs the rest of my order and I take it with me to work. It’s a usually busy day at work that I don’t have a chance to text Lainey, let alone put the number in my phone. But I check throughout the day that it’s still there. Almost like a good luck charm, I keep touching the paper just to make sure I didn’t lose it.

“Your last client cancelled, sorry, Carter,” Addison says, knocking lightly on the open door.

“No worries, I was tired anyway,” I admit.

“Headed home then?” She looks at the clock.

“Yeah, is that okay?”

“Go for it, I’m just getting some practice in before I start working on people,” Addison says, holding up the fake skin she’s been practicing tattooing on.

“Gotcha.” Before I head out the door, I clean up my room, leaving everything set up for tomorrow morning. Then I finally grab the piece of paper from my pocket and add Lainey’s number into my phone.

I think about what I want to say when I text her. Do I just go for the normal ‘Hey, it’s Carter’? Do I go for something funny? Something sweet? Something original? While

I'm busy overthinking it, I decide to drive home. Although I drive on autopilot all the way home, I still don't know what I should text her by the time I get to my apartment.

Unlocking the front door, I'm met by my cozy and clean apartment. It's bigger than I'd like, but it works for me. It has an extra bedroom that I've dubbed an art storage room. If I didn't work so much I would get myself a dog, but with the hours I keep, it just wouldn't be fair. Plus I like working too much to cut back on that. I like staying busy and I like having money for things that I want to do. I hang up my coat by the front door and kick off my boots. Then I look for something to eat in my fridge and end up with a bowl of cereal. Sniffing the milk, deeming it to still be fresh, I have a hearty bowl of cheerios and call it a night.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

I'm changing into my pajamas when I realize I still haven't texted Lainey. It's only seven pm so it's not like it's too late to text her. I decide to just keep it simple and send her a hey with my name. Then I wait by the phone like a teenager, waiting for her to text me back. Of course it doesn't happen right away so I put the tv on to distract me. But each time I swear I hear a buzz, I pick up my phone and get excited only for it to be an email for something I don't care about.

Finally, a double buzz comes in and it's a text back.

Lainey

Hey! How's it going?

Carter

Good! How was your day?

Lainey

LONG. And *sleeping emoji*

Carter

Same here, so many clients today. Are you working tomorrow?

Lainey

Surprisingly no.

Carter

Do you like ice cream?

Lainey

Who doesn't?

Carter

You'd be surprised lol. How about we grab ice cream tomorrow? I have work until 5 but then I'm all yours.

Lainey

I like the sound of that!

Carter

It's a date.

* * *

The next night I'm done with work fifteen minutes early and I don't take on the extra client Addison's asking if I have time for. Because today I have my date with Lainey and I don't want to be late. I'm already all dressed, my nicest jeans a black crop top, and a light jacket since it's been a little chilly lately. Paired with my usual black combat boots, I felt ready for anything. I text Lainey that I'm on the way to her and she sends me her address to pick her up. When I get there she's waiting outside and

damn, do I nearly crash the car. She's wearing this light pink dress that hangs to her knees but shows off her thick curves beautifully. I've only ever seen her in her work uniform before, which is all black so it is nice to see her in some colors.

I jump out of the car to open the door for her and she blushes. "Thank you."

"No problem." I close it behind her and get back in on the driver's side. My dad had always told me it was important to open the door for a lady, and by God, is Lainey a lady.

We drive in silence, mostly due to me needing to focus on the directions and Lainey's nerves. I help her out of the car, opening the door for her again when we arrive at the new ice cream place. I had heard good things about it from some of my clients so I thought it might be a good place to take Lainey. There's a big sign illuminating the night sky that says 'Sprinkled on Top'. That is cute.

"Have you been here yet?" I ask Lainey.

"Nope, it's my first time."

"Mine too." I smile. I grab the door for her and she walks through first, a gust of cool air hits us as we walk in. They must have the AC on or something to keep the ice cream from melting.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

We both look at the menu hanging above the counter, listing the multitude of flavors they have. A redheaded woman comes up to us with a big smile. “Can I get you guys anything to sample?”

“Um... I think we’re still looking?” Lainey says unsure, looking at me.

“Yeah, I think we need more time.” I nod.

“No worries, we also have some vegan options in the back that we keep separate if you need,” the woman says pleasantly.

“Thank you.” I have never had vegan ice cream, and I can’t imagine it tastes as good as real ice cream.

“I think I want the strawberry blitz,” Lainey says after a few minutes. I’m still looking over the flavors but I convince her to order hers, it’s not like it will melt in such a chilly shop.

“Can I get a scoop of mint chocolate chip?” I ask, and Lainey makes a face. “What?”

“You like mint chocolate chip?” She looks at me warily.

“I do. Is that bad?” I chuckle.

“It just tastes like toothpaste.” She makes a face, scrunching her nose.

“I don’t know what toothpaste you’ve been using, but no, it does not.” I laugh.

“You’ll see.” She shrugs.

I pay for the ice cream, pushing away Lainey’s attempt at trying to pay. Then we grab a table toward the back of the shop. It is cute, decorated with all kinds of ice cream memorabilia. Lainey digs into her ice cream, and I notice how quiet she is. But it doesn’t feel awkward, like we aren’t trying to force conversation or anything.

“How—”

“What—” We both start at the same time. I hold up my hand. “You go first.”

“I was going to ask how your ice cream was.” She laughs.

“It’s delicious, would you like some?” I ask, knowing the answer.

“No, thank you, I brushed my teeth before I left home.” She giggles.

“Tease all you want, but it tastes delicious to me.” I shrug. “How’s yours?”

“Good, but I think it could be better with some chocolate syrup. I think I’m going to ask for some.” She stands and I watch her curves bounce with each step. Fuck, is she doing this on purpose, looking so damn sexy?

She returns a few minutes later with chocolate syrup poured on top and a smile on her face. “Mmm, now it tastes like a chocolate covered strawberry.” She makes these sounds that cause me to clench my thighs together. She has no idea what she is doing to me, but the way she is licking her spoon clean makes me jealous of a damn spoon.

“So, how did your family get into the bakery business?” I ask, trying to keep the conversation flowing.

“My family had a recipe that was to die for cinnamon rolls, one day my parents decided to open a business and mostly sell them. They both loved baking and the small town aspect that Seaside has,” she explains happily. A smile crossing her face as she talks about her family.

“Do you have any siblings?” I ask.

“Nope.” She pops the p. “I’m the only child, unless you count the bakery as their second baby which I think my parents do.” She laughs. There is this ease about her, an almost lightness that she carries with her.

“Did you always want to take over the bakery for them?”

“Yes and no.” She frowns. “I think it’s expected of me and I don’t mind that most of the time, but sometimes I do wish I had a choice in what I wanted to do. I would probably still pick the bakery, but I just wish it was more my choice than being thrown in my lap,” she admits.

“Will you do it forever?”

“Probably, it’s been the only career I’ve ever known and I don’t see myself doing anything else in life. It makes me happy and it’s a job I like having. Not too many people can say that, even if they had the chance to choose for themselves.”

“That’s true,” I agree.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“What about you, do you love tattooing? How’d you get into that?”

“I always had an itch to tattoo, ever since I was sixteen and tattooed myself in the basement of my friend’s house. It was extremely risky and I’m glad I didn’t get a disease, but it was always something I wanted. I love art and to permanently put a piece of myself on someone else is the coolest thing in my book.”

“I’ve never thought of it like that.” She smiles.

“You’ll have to consider letting me tattoo you sometime.”

“Maybe I will,” she muses.

With that, we finish eating our ice cream but we don’t get up. Both of us sitting with empty cups in front of us, we talk about our families, our hopes, our dreams for the future. It’s as if we never run out of anything to talk about. One story easily running into another, one topic meshing beautifully with another and another. All the nerves from the beginning of the night disappearing before my eyes.

CHAPTER7

LAINY

I don’t know what the hell I was so nervous about. I mean sure, I changed my outfit sixteen times and I called Jen freaking out, only twice, but now that I am actually on the date, I don’t know what I was so nervous about. Carter is one of the easiest going people I’ve ever met. It is easy to talk to her about anything. I was worried it might be

awkward, as some first dates are, but it is like we both have a million things to talk about and neither of us want to stop talking. I thought I was boring her with all my talk about the bakery but the more I talk about it, the more she asks. She is genuinely curious about my life and my career, not just making small talk about it. It is nice to talk to someone who cares about what I care about. I've never had that before.

I am still unsure about how I feel about her. Carter is hot, I mean that much is obvious. And there is this something I've felt from the very beginning that I still can't explain. Maybe chemistry? It is something new and exciting and I have those stupid little butterflies in my stomach that I've had with others I've dated. Maybe this is just a new experience for me. I think the only way for me to know for sure, is for us to kiss. If I feel something, if I like it then I'm definitely at least a little bit into women, and if not I guess I just have a strong friendship crush on Carter. I can't tell which one I am leaning more toward wanting. It isn't like it necessarily matters, I mean do I really need a label? I can be into women without putting myself into a box.

"What are you thinking about?" Carter asks suddenly, and I realize I've been a little too quiet.

"I-I'm just a little chilly." It isn't a lie, I am a little cold from the ice cream place, but I am having such a good time that I am trying not to let my bare shoulders bother me.

"Here." Carter shrugs off her jacket and hands it to me.

"Are you sure?"

"Positive, I was getting a little hot anyway." I can tell she's lying but I can also tell she's not going to sit here with me if she knows I'm cold, so I begrudgingly put on the jacket.

"Thank you." I smile. As it slips on I can smell her perfume lightly. It smells like

some kind of fruit and flowers, the complete opposite of how I'd expect her to smell, but I like it. It's softer than I expect.

"It looks good on you." She smiles, and I blush.

"So, what do you do when you're not at the bakery?"

"I read a lot of books, I'm a bit of a book nerd," I admit.

"Oh yeah? Do you have a favorite genre?"

"Probably psychological thrillers."

"Wow, I wouldn't have pegged you for them, aren't they usually a little bit of a mind fuck?"

"Only the best ones." I laugh.

"I don't read much, but a good horror film gets me every time," she shares.

"Oh no, I'm too much of a wimp when it comes to actually seeing horror films." I shake my head.

"Gotcha, I guess we won't be going on a date to see the new *Scream* movie then," she teases.

"You'd want to see me again?" I ask surprised.

"You sound surprised, and maybe I'm thinking too far ahead, but yeah I had fun tonight." She smiles. Her lips are bare but still a light red, just begging to be kissed. I wish she would make a move already. I don't know what I am doing but I know I

want her to kiss me.

“I did too,” I agree.

“Should I take you home?”

“Oh, sure.”

“Well, you have work in the morning, right? I didn’t want to keep you out too late,” she explains. It is thoughtful actually, but all I want to do is stay out all night with her.

“I do, yeah.” I had completely forgotten about it to be honest. It is like time stops when I am with her.

We dump our empty ice cream cups in the garbage on the way out, and Carter grabs the door for me. It is so sweet and chivalrous how she keeps opening doors for me. I don’t think I’ve ever had anyone do that for me before. Is that just a lesbian thing or do I just date people who make me open my own doors? She opens the car door for me and I lean against the car for a second, just looking at Carter, and she hesitates. Her hand holding onto the car door, she pauses to take in the moment, and I wonder if she can feel the tension like I do. I’m willing her to kiss me. To take three steps forward and press her lips to mine, so I can know if this is all in my head or this is something real between us.

“Lainey,” she whispers, and I nod slightly. Just enough to let her know I want this as much as she does. She takes the three steps between us, pushes my hair from my cheek, and holds my face up to hers. Carter looks into my eyes before leaning in and pressing her lips against mine. I close my eyes, wanting to remember everything about this moment. I can smell her perfume again, her kiss is soft, lips softer than I expected, and they only melt into mine for a moment before she’s pulling back.

Carter looks at me expectantly, like she’s waiting for me to say something. My eyes

flutter open and I bite down on my bottom lip. It was only a quick kiss, but I know that everything I am feeling is real. I reach for her, putting my arms around her neck, and she kisses me again, this time slipping her tongue inside my mouth and our tongues move in unison together. I follow her lead, letting her take control. Her body pushes against mine lightly and I let out a light moan. I can't seem to help it. Is kissing supposed to turn you on this much? Because my panties are nearly soaked by the time Carter is pulling away.

"We should get going," Carter says with a smile and I slip into the car in a daze.

She pulls into the driver's seat and then takes me by the face, pushing her lips against mine. "You don't know how badly I've wanted to do that," she whispers before picking up her phone to drive me home. She types my address into the GPS and we head toward home, but I can't remove the dopey grin from my face or the fact that I know what she tastes like.

When we pull in front of my apartment, I think she's going to get out and open my door again, but when she doesn't, I look at her and she's smiling. "I was wondering if I could kiss you again," she whispers.

"I would like that a lot." I nod.

Carter leans in and her lips caress mine. She tastes a bit like the minty ice cream she just had but it's a good taste after all. Maybe I do like mint chocolate chip if it is coming off her lips. Although I have a feeling I'd like to taste anything from her lips. It is a little daunting kissing a woman for the first time. I don't know if it should be different, but it is just softer than kissing men. The technique is all the same.

"I guess you've decided you like women?" Carter says as she pulls away, giving us a moment to catch our breath. I feel like two teenagers kissing in the driveway after a date. We are one step away from heavy petting and I am not going to stop her.

"I definitely like you," I decide. Answering her question with a vague enough answer.

"I like that answer." Carter reaches for my face, holding my face in her palm for just a moment. It's slow and intimate, giving me a moment to take in everything that's happened. I can feel it in my whole body, almost shaking in delight from our kisses. I can only imagine what it would be like to actually touch her. My thighs clench at the thought, aching for some relief. But that will have to be another time.

Carter begins kissing me again, this time it's her lips crushing mine. Smashing into mine like she suddenly can't get enough. Her hands rake through my hair and pull gently, causing a moan to escape my lips.

"Oh!" I gasp and she smirks, pulling me closer over the hump in the car. She begins kissing my neck, her teeth grazing gently as she nibbles on my ear.

"Mmm," I moan. I don't know why I bothered wearing panties tonight when I could feel my thighs are soaked with my own juices. I am more turned on than I've ever been with another partner.

"I want you," she grumbles against my neck, and I swear it's the sexiest things I've ever heard. Her voice full of desire and tension.

Carter kisses back up my neck and our lips meet again. This time our tongues thrashing against one another's. But I gasp when she reaches for my breast through the thin fabric of the dress I'm wearing. I can feel my nipples hardening through it and she groans into my mouth, feeling it too. Aren't I glad I decided not to wear a bra tonight. She brushes a hand over the other one, squeezing the underside of my breasts and playing with my nipples through my dress. Something about the sensation of them rubbing against the fabric and her fingers was enough to drive me wild.

"Fuck." I moan into her mouth and she smirks. She actually fucking smirks like she's

proud of herself for making me moan like that. For turning me on so damn much.

“You’re pretty proud of yourself, aren’t you?” I ask, panting lightly.

“Maybe.” She winks, and I lose it. Pulling her in for another kiss, this time I’m the one to reach for her breasts. They’re smaller than mine but she’s wearing a bra so I don’t get the same effect but damn, boobs are sort of cool. They’re like squishy but suddenly I’m even more turned on touching them. Carter moans lightly, and I know I’m doing something right.

“We should, um, call it a night,” I say suddenly. We are getting into dangerous territory and I don’t want to take it too far the first night. No matter how much I am aching between my legs. I’ll have to take care of that myself when I get inside.

“Okay.” Carter places a chaste kiss on my lips. “Let me walk you to your door.”

“Okay.” I nod. It is sweet, like something out of an old time movie. She was definitely raised right. So Carter walks me to my front door, holds my hand for just a moment, and I’m instantly missing the connection when it’s gone. Something about her, I can’t explain it. But I am definitely falling for her.

“Thank you for tonight, I had fun,” I say.

“Me too, I’m hoping we can do this again some time?” Carter asks hopefully.

“I’d like that a lot.” I nod. She places one last kiss on my lips before heading back to her car. She waits until I’m inside the apartment before taking off and I lean against the door smiling. Like an idiot I just stand there, breathing in the night. I can’t remember the last time I felt this happy. It has been too long and I am going to relish in the feeling for as long as it stays.

CHAPTER8

CARTER

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

I keep my routine of going to Cinnamon Roll Savors every morning. Which is mainly because I want to see Lainey. It is the greatest start to my day. Most of the time she's too busy to talk too much, but even seeing her for a few minutes makes my cold heart warm. I swear I am falling harder and harder for her than I ever expected. There is something about her that makes me want to make her mine, but I am also trying not to move too fast. I know she is new to the world of dating women and I don't want to scare her or freak her out by coming on too strong.

We had another date tonight, this one being our fifth in the last month. I had been patient but we talked about it and she seemed ready to venture further south of the border so I booked us a hotel room for the night. I thought we'd grab something for us to eat and then head to the hotel room and see how things go. Which is why I'm currently trying to stuff the new bag of sex toys into my bag before heading to work for the day.

I am one of those people that believe you need a new strap on with each new partner, so I scoured Amazon for the best one and then snuck a few other vibrators and dildos in the cart too. I have no idea what Lainey is into, but I am excited to find out. And if she is just into normal stuff, fuck if she is a pillow princess, I'll still have a good time with her. I just want to be with her in that way. Intimately.

I drive to work with my bag suddenly feeling like a bag of explosives, I am better off leaving it in the car just in case. I don't want anyone opening it and finding an array of sex toys. Especially at work. I am packed to fuck a whole football team at once.

Work goes by even slower than anticipated, which if you're curious is insanely slow. The clients just don't give me the joy they normally do and I'm sure it has more to do

with me than them, but I'm just not in the mood to be doing tattoos. I feel like I have one foot out the door today, just waiting for it to be five o'clock so I can take off and be with my girl. Fuck, I like the way that sounds. I know she isn't exactly my girly yet, but soon enough. I mean five dates with an intense amount of kissing and heavy petting has to make her more than just a fling.

"Are you okay?" Addison asks, coming in after one of my clients.

"Yeah, why?"

"You just seem more antsy today."

"I'm sorry, I just have plans after work today so I'm kind of ready to get out of here," I admit.

"Do you want me to cancel your last appointment?"

"Could I?"

"Yes, you never do and I'm sure you won't make a habit of it."

"I promise I won't." I all but jump up for joy.

"Have fun tonight," Addison calls as I run through the front doors ten minutes later. My station isn't set up for tomorrow but I am off and I need to get out of there. It is like I have all this adrenaline coursing through my veins that I just can't get out.

I race over to Cinnamon Roll Savors and I get there just before closing. Lainey smiles hugely when she sees me.

"Hey! What are you doing here?"

“I got out of work early and I couldn’t wait to see you,” I admit. I am becoming somewhat of a simp but I suddenly don’t care anymore. Call me whatever you want, but I am going to tell my girl how much I like her.

“I’m just finishing up here, do you want to wait in the back? You can meet Jen.” She smiles.

“Sure!” I have heard stories about her best friend but we have yet to officially meet.

“Jen! Come meet my… Carter.” Her voice trails with a deep blush. She was about to label us and I’m sure that scared her as much as it sounded like music to my ears.

“Carter! Hey, I’m Jen,” a brunette with a sassy smirk and thick eyebrows says to me. She looks me once over as if she is trying to figure out my intentions with Lainey. I get it, I’d do that if I had a best friend too.

“Nice to meet you.” We shake hands and Lainey excuses herself to clean up in the front.

“So, you guys have big plans tonight?” Jen asks.

“Yup, it’s a big night,” I agree, not trying to give away too much detail. I know Jen is her best friend but I don’t know how much she knows about our relationship.

“Please don’t hurt her, she’s been through a lot lately and she just…she deserves to be happy.”

“I promise I won’t hurt her,” I agree.

“Good, well, I’m off for the night. It was cool meeting you.” Jen heads out a back door and I’m left alone in the kitchen of their bakery. Everything is clean and

pristine. So when I hear arguing in the front, I peek behind the curtain to make sure Lainey was okay.

“It isn’t over until I say it is,” a man growls. The same one that was lurking outside the shop a few weeks ago. Has he come back to hurt Lainey? I’m about to jump in and save her when she picks up the phone and threatens to call the cops. He huffs out of the place in a hurry, and Lainey looks like she needs a minute. I try to give her some space, but I am dying to know. Who the hell is that guy and what does he want with Lainey?

* * *

“Where are we going?” Lainey asks as we head a little bit out of town.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“I’m taking you out of town tonight, I know a few good places to eat in Portland and I thought we could spend the night there.” She had known about the hotel part, but I had left out that it was in Portland.

“Really? I love Portland.” She smiles.

“Perfect. There’s some food trucks that have food to die for.” My mouth waters just thinking about it.

Lainey settles in her seat, letting the music play on the car stereo, and we talk about our days. Lainey doesn’t bring up the man at the bakery, and I don’t either. If she wants to talk to me about it, she will. I just wish I knew who he is. He seemed like he knew her but they didn’t look happy to see each other in the slightest. It makes me feel a little unsteady, but I have to trust Lainey will tell me about it if I need to know.

“So why did you move from Portland to Seaside?” Lainey asks.

“I needed a change. And I saw the all-female tattoo shop was hiring so I thought I’d apply and if I got it I’d move. It’s a little different being a small town, but I like it more than I thought I would,” I admit.

“I love that Reagan opened her own shop, so many people are tattooed by her and the shop.”

“One of these days I’m going to get some ink on you.” I wink.

“Maybe.” She giggles.

“What kind of food are you in the mood for, Mexican or Asian?” I ask, changing the subject. We are getting closer to the spot and I need to know which way to turn.

“Ooo, definitely Mexican, I can go for some tacos.”

“Perfect.” I nod. I make a turn toward the taco truck I knew in Portland. It is one of the best I have come across, thanks to an old client of mine.

We pull up, parking in the nearby lot, and I grab Lainey’s hand. I love having her hand wrapped in mine, it makes me feel even more connected to her. We look at the menu together and decide what to eat, she wants three chicken tacos while I want three beef tacos and we decide to share a plate of nachos. I pay for everything to her protest and then we grab a seat at one of the picnic tables. I am thankful the weather is staying clear, I had been worried about light showers but thankfully they had passed over us for once.

“So, what do you think?” I ask Lainey as she takes her first bite.

“Oh, my gosh.” She wipes her mouth. “It’s delicious.”

“If you like this, we’ll have to try the churros for dessert.”

“You know I love some cinnamon,” she jokes.

We eat in somewhat of silence, listening to the conversations of the couples and families nearby. Lainey devours the tacos and I’m so glad to be on a date with someone who actually enjoys her food. Too many women I’ve taken out have just picked at their food, but I know Lainey isn’t like that. In all the dates we’ve been on, she enjoys her food as much as I do. So we eat quietly, sharing the nachos, dipping them in salsa and sour cream that’s to die for. By the time we’re done eating, I almost don’t have room for the churros. Almost. I make myself take a few minute break and

then I have enough room, making sure to order them hot, and Lainey and I share one.

“Want to take a little walk?”

“Sure.” She smiles.

We walk along the streets of Portland, sharing bites of the way too big churro I ordered. It has to be at least a foot long but Lainey seems to have more room than I do. We hold hands again, my fingers twisting around hers perfectly. Despite our height difference, we seemed to make it work. I can't help but look at Lainey instead of the path we're walking. Lainey is beautiful, especially out of that work apron; she is wearing jeans that hug all her curves and a crop top that shows off a sliver of her belly. I love that she dresses to show off her body instead of trying to hide any piece of her. My gaze flows over her and I can't wait to get to see what she looks like without all those clothes on later. The thought makes my core ache, just the teasing I've seen of her has been enough to let my imagination run wild.

“What are you thinking about?” Lainey asks, pulling me to the present.

“Honestly?” I ask.

“Always.” Her eyes flutter to mine.

“I was thinking about your body and how badly I want you,” I whisper in her ear. I feel her shiver and I smile as I see her biting down on her bottom lip.

“Oh,” she says wide eyed.

“You're beautiful, Lainey.”

“Carter...” she whispers back. I tuck a piece of her long brown hair behind her ear

and smile.

“I’m going to kiss you now,” I whisper. She nods lightly, and I smile.

Our lips meet and just like every time before, I feel like I’m walking on air. It is this indescribable feeling that I assume is love. I’ve never been in love before Lainey. All of my relationships not lasting long enough for the feelings to deepen. But here I am, barely a month in with Lainey, and already I am feeling everything. Her tongue slides across my own, and I groan into hers. I want the space to explore every inch of her. I press my body against hers and she moans lightly.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Let’s get out of here.” The words escape her lips like music to my ears.

CHAPTER9

LAINY

There is something addictive about kissing Carter. Like our lips are meant for each other. Which is how we end up back in her car, driving across town to a beautiful hotel and running to the room together. Carter grabs our bags, insisting she doesn’t need any help. I grab the room key and walk in, the queen bed taking up most of the room. I walk over to the balcony and open the curtains, showing an amazing view of Portland.

“Wow.” I am impressed. Carter has really thought of everything this weekend. I have been too used to crappy dates with men but I am learning that with Carter, she pulls out all the stops.

“Do you want to freshen up or anything?”

“Yeah, I probably should,” I say shyly.

“Bathroom’s all yours.” Carter smiles.

I grab my bag from her and head to the bathroom. I feel like I am about to lose my virginity with how nervous I am. I mean technically I am, just with a woman. I open my bag and take out my toothbrush, deodorant, and wipe my face with a cool washcloth. I am attempting to calm my nerves but it seems useless. Carter is waiting

on the other side of the door for us to finally have sex. And it isn't like I don't want to, because trust me I do. And it isn't that I don't trust Carter, because I trust her more than anyone else I've been with before. But it is the fact that I am venturing into something I've only seen done in porn. I mean what if I am bad at sex with women? What if Carter hates it and we have to stop seeing each other because she wants someone more experienced?

I place my hands on the counter and look in the mirror, taking three deep breaths. I am beautiful and Carter is lucky to have me, I try to convince myself. There is nothing wrong with being a little inexperienced, and Carter knows what she is getting into. I take a final deep breath before changing into the lingerie I bought specifically for tonight. It is a pink bodysuit with lace butterflies all over it that shows off all my curves. My breasts pop out the top and my ass looks fantastic. Opening the door, I watch as Carter's jaw actually drops. I know that's what people say happens, but I've never experienced it in my life and let me tell you, it's eye opening. Carter catches her mouth from hanging open like she'd never seen a woman in lingerie before, and I let out a light laugh.

"Holy fuck," she mumbles under her breath.

"Thank you." I bite down on my bottom lip.

"Get over here." Carter pulls my body to hers, our lips crashing against each other's.

"Lainey, you lookamazing." Her voice trails as she stands up from the bed and looks me over. It's like she's trying to commit this moment to memory or something.

"Thank you." I blush. I feel like I am on display, which I don't normally love but tonight, with Carter, I feel safe. She is looking at me like I am the most beautiful person she's ever seen.

“Come here,” She takes my hand and then pulls me in close to her body. She presses her hand to my cheek, just under my chin, and looks in my eyes. Hers are this delicious chocolate brown, only highlighted by her dark curls with the red highlights.

“I-I’m a little nervous,” I admit.

“We can go at your pace, anything you want,” she whispers and waits for me to nod before leaning in to kiss me.

I don’t speak, instead I let her lips cover mine in every way. We kiss for what feels like forever, but is probably only a few moments. I lose track of everything when her lips are on mine. Carter’s hands stay on my face, not exploring my body like I am dying for her to. But she is taking this slow, slower than I had expected.

“I’m not going to break if you touch me,” I tease.

“I just want to savor you,” she whispers against my lips.

“Mmm,” I murmur, closing my eyes. She kisses me again, this time with more passion and way more tongue. My knees feel weak at the change of her kisses. Fuck, is kissing always supposed to feel this good? I’ve had good, but this is different than anything I’ve experienced before.

“I want you on the bed,” Carter whispers.

“O-okay.” I nod. I back up and climb onto the queen sized bed and throw the covers back. I sit on the bed, crossed legged, and wait for more instruction.

“Trust me?” Carter asks, and I nod.

“Of course.” I smile. Then she picks up her bag and starts pulling out a variety of sex

toys. She must have thought ahead, way more than I had. She places them on the nightstand and I look at all of them wide eyed. Are they all for me? For tonight?

“Hey, they’re just options. We don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do,” Carter reassures me.

“Okay.” I smile. I know I am safe with Carter, she’d never do anything to hurt me.

Carter climbs into the bed and pulls off her t-shirt in one swoop over her head. Something that is extremely sexy. She straddles my legs and pushes me back into the pillows. Her bra is black lace with a little bow in the middle, it looks girlier than I expected from her, but it’s cute. I want to take it off and take her breasts in my mouth but I stop myself. I want her to take charge here, I want to see what she has in mind for tonight.

So as she grinds on my hips through the thin pink lace, and I’m instantly wetter. She slides her hands across my collar bone, teasing me as she touches the tops of my breasts but stops before grabbing them. Fuck, I am tired of being teased. I just want to scream for her to touch me and fuck me already but I restrain myself. I want to savor my first time just as much as she does.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“This is killing me,” I finally groan.

“Good.” Carter smirks. “I want you nice and wet and ready for me.” She growls and bends down to bite on the side of my neck. Oh god, who put heaven right there and how did she know?

“Fuck,” I mumble as she kisses and bites on my neck. She is definitely leaving behind some hickies, but I don’t even care. I just want her to never stop. I run my hand through the underside of her head, my fingers running through her scalp as I push her against me.

All of a sudden Carter’s hands start roaming around my body. Her hands stop on my thighs to squeeze lightly, then travel up my hips toward my stomach and brush across my chest. She squeezes the undersides of my breasts and I moan lightly. Everything she touches seems to light me up. I can’t help it. It is like she is setting every nerve on fire with a simple touch.

“I want this off you,” she mumbles and reaches behind me to unhook the top of my lingerie. The cups fall off and I slide the straps down my arms, looking her in the eyes as I do. I want to tease her just as much as she is teasing me.

“Get over here.” She pushes the cups down to my waist and pulls me in for a kiss. Her hand on my neck, pulling me in to kiss her lips.

“Touch me,” I beg.

Carter nods and begins sliding the lingerie down the rest of my body and discards it

to the floor. That didn't last very long. I feel exposed so I cross my arms over my chest but just as I do, Carter takes my arms, kissing my hand and placing them down at my sides.

"Let me admire you," she whispers with hooded eyes. The way she looks at me sends chills down my spine. My nipples harden, and she bites on her bottom lip.

"I feel underdressed."

She smiles and tosses her bra across the room, sliding out of her jeans, she lays next to me in just a pair of black lace panties. I can see her breasts on display, pink taut nipples that I'm dying to put in my mouth. A body that's covered in tattoos. I knew she had a lot but now seeing her like this, she is like a canvas someone had taken the time to make beautiful. Well, more beautiful. Carter is gorgeous naturally but these tattoos make her seem more dangerous, more exciting. It makes me want to get one or two of them myself.

"Can I fuck you?" Carter asks, and my eyes shift from her body to her face.

"Yes, please," I murmur quietly. I am nervous. What if we had gotten this far and then this is the part I don't like? I can't see that happening with how close we've gotten and how good Carter feels, but I am still worried.

"Don't overthink it, just be in the moment with me," she whispers, kissing the top of my head.

Carter straddles me and then kisses me. Her lips taking control, her tongue working circles in my mouth while I reach for her breasts. It feels natural, my hands playing with her breasts and taking her nipples in my fingers just as she did with mine. Carter smiles against my lips before placing one last kiss on my lips and diving between my thighs.

“Just tell me if you want me to stop,” Carter reminds me. I nod, and then that’s all I can remember. Carter’s mouth connects to my clit and I’m a complete mess in her arms.

“Oh!” I call out. Her tongue does these movements I’ve only seen in porn and fuck does she feel good. She keeps switching it up, changing what she’s doing with her tongue, and I’m in ecstasy. How can someone’s tongue feel that fucking good?

Carter runs her pointer finger up and down my slit before inserting a few fingers, and I gasp. I have no idea how many she is using but as she pumps her hand in and out of my core, I never want her to stop. She slides a tongue across my clit and I’m seeing stars. Is this what an orgasm is supposed to feel like? I’ve never felt one so fucking good before. Was I missing out being with men all my life? I am having a post orgasm existential crisis while Carter is still eating me out like I am the best thing she’s ever tasted. Is she trying to make me cum again? Can I even come a second time in a row? I am used to men who barely cared about getting me off the first time, let alone a second time.

“Ohfuck.” I moan. Closing my eyes, I let the sensations take over, feeling how good Carter is.

“Mmm, you like that, baby girl?” Carter asks, sitting up and wiping her mouth.

“Yes.” I smile. I like being called baby girl even more than she realizes.

“Can I try something?”

“Anything if it’s like what you just did.”

Carter gets off the bed, and I watch as she picks up something off the nightstand. It looks like a penis connected to some kind of harness and I wonder what she’s going

to do with it. But she slides it on her legs like a pair of panties and the penis looking thing is bright pink and hangs fully in attention. Is she going to fuck me with that? My pussy and I are instantly intrigued.

“It might be bigger than you’re used to so we can go slow,” she explains.

“O-okay.”

She takes a bottle of lube from her bag and places a little bit along the length of it. It’s turning me on probably more than it should to watch her run her hands from length to tip. Once it’s shiny with lube she positions herself between my thighs and then pushes in slowly. First the head, which makes me gasp, and then a little bit of the length at a time. After she’s finally in, she moves her hips slowly, aching, teasingly slow.

“Fuck me harder,” I beg.

“Yes, baby girl.” She kisses my cheek and smiles. Then begins thrusting her hips toward me.

“Oh! Yeah!” I say breathlessly as I feel all of her pushing inside me. It is an amazing feeling, and definitely bigger than any guy I’ve been with before. But fuck, I was missing out. Who knew women could be bigger than men? And actually know what they were doing with it.

Page 20

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“You like that baby girl? You like it when I fuck you?” Carter whispers in my ear.

“Oh god, yes,” I mumble. Carter reaches between us and flicks a finger over my clit, rubbing gently, and I let out a loud and breathy moan.

“Ohfuck,babe,” I curse. She is definitely going to make me cum again and quick, if she keeps that up. Her hips seem to be working overtime as she hits my g-spot each time, and her thumb on my clit is enough to send me over the edge.

“You want to cum?”

“Oh yes!” I beg.

“Be a good baby girl and cum for me.” She growls, and it’s all I need to let go of the orgasm I was chasing. She continues thrusting her hips as I moan and thrash against her.

“Oh fuck, you’re so hot when you cum.” She kisses my lips, and I can barely open my eyes. I let out a little yawn, and Carter laughs. Pulling out of me gently, she stands and heads to the bathroom to clean off. By the time she comes back, I’m falling fast asleep waiting for her arms to be wrapped around me.

CHAPTER10

CARTER

By the timeI come back from the bathroom, Lainey is fast asleep. I can’t help but

laugh to myself. I fucked my girl to sleep. She is too cute so I climb into bed next to her and pull the sheets over us. I am still horny but that can wait until the morning. I know she had a long work day and I want her to get her rest. So I close my eyes too and within minutes I'm sleeping with my girl in my arms.

"No! I said no!" Lainey screams in her sleep. I jolt awake and look at her. Her eyes are still closed, but she's thrashing around like she's trying to escape someone.

"Please! No!" she yells again, but this time I wake her up, shaking her shoulders lightly as I look at her. Her eyes flutter open, and I wait for her to say something, but she's quiet.

"Baby girl, are you okay?" I pull her into my arms, and she leans on my bare chest.

"I-I was having a nightmare," she whispers.

"Okay. Do you want to talk about it?"

"I—I don't know," she admits.

"Okay." I wait for her to say anything else. I don't want to push her, but her nightmare seems to upset her more than she realizes. In my experience one doesn't usually yell in their sleep unless it is an intense dream.

"I-it was a dream about my ex," she says quietly.

"Okay, what happened?"

"I don't really want to talk about the dream." She says and I nod. "But is it okay if I talk about him?"

“Sure.” I don’t really want to hear about her ex-boyfriend, but if it is something that is bothering her and talking about it will make her feel better, then I am all for it.

“He’s been giving me a hard time since I broke up with him. I broke up with him because he, um... well, he hit me. And I broke up with him hoping to never see him again, but he keeps pushing me to take him back. Which obviously I don’t want to do. But he came into the shop yesterday and just fights with me and I’m tired of it.” Lainey sighs. So that’s who that guy was yesterday. My fists and jaw clench at the thought of anyone hitting her. Of the thought of a man hitting a woman in general, I mean what fucking century are we in?!

“I’m so fucking sorry, Lainey. Do you need me to do anything? Did you tell the police?”

“They said without any proof there was nothing I can do. But he’s becoming more persistent, and I might have to get a restraining order,” she explains.

“Well, whatever you need, I’m there to help.”

“I appreciate that. I didn’t want to ruin our weekend by rehashing the past, but it’s been weighing on my mind and I feel better now that you know,” she admits.

“I love you, and this isn’t going to ruin our weekend.” I smile.

“You love me?” Lainey turns around and looks at me, wide eyed.

“I do.”

“I—I...”

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“You don’t have to say anything back. I just know how I feel.”

“I love you too,” she whispers. I tilt her chin up to look at me.

“Really?” I ask, surprised.

“I do.”

Our lips tangle together like two teenagers, neither of us letting go for air. She’s still naked and I’m still horny from earlier so we’re both wasting no time touching and squeezing everything. She gasps under me as my hand finds her core and just as I’m about to slide a hand inside her, she stops me.

“It’s your turn,” she says with hooded eyes.

“Are you sure?” I want to make sure this is what she wants and not just because she thinks she should. But she doesn’t answer and instead pushes me into the bed and positions herself between my legs. She’s hesitant at first, like she isn’t sure what to do. But then I feel her take a deep breath between my legs and she dives in.

Lainey’s tongue slides from my clit to my core and back again. Slurping up all of my wetness, she’s slow at first, as if she’s getting used to the taste. Then she flicks her tongue over my clit, and I buck my hips into her face involuntarily. I can’t help myself, her tongue feels like heaven and I want to pray.

“Shit, you’re really fucking good at that,” I praise her.

“Mmm,” She hums against my core, and my head falls back into the pillows.

Lainey keeps going, swishing her tongue across my clit and sliding her tongue up and down my core until she finds her rhythm. She takes a second to breathe, giving me a moment to catch my breath too. But god, I don’t want her to stop.

“Can I use one of the toys?” she says, looking at the nightstand.

“Fuck, please.” I nod ferociously.

Lainey gets up and looks at all of the toys, taking her time to pick them up and look them over. It’s killing me because I’m horny as fuck and dying to be touched, but I let her take her time. Eventually she decides on the vibrator wand and plugs it in next to the bed. She brings it to life and brings it to my core. I gasp at the vibrations and then moan at how good it feels. Lainey takes her time making it nice and wet before leaving it on my clit, making soft strokes with it and starts playing with my breasts with her other hand. My nipples are two hardened pebbles under her touch. Then she bends down and takes one in her mouth. She sucks not so gently and rubs it between her teeth, which should hurt, but fuck if it didn’t bring me to life. I am so fucking close to orgasming that I beg her not to stop.

“Please keep going,” I say between breaths.

“Okay, babe.” She smiles like she likes being in charge. Or she likes seeing me like this. Either way her smile is addicting. I will be her sub if it means I get orgasms like this. She flicks the wand over my clit one last time and I’m cursing, screaming her name.

“Oh, Lainey! Fuck! Oh my fucking god!” I scream, and she shushes me with one hand swiftly over my mouth.

“That was sexy,” she says biting her bottom lip. “Can we do that again?”

“I, uh, need a second there, baby.” My clit is still vibrating and my legs feel like jelly. I need a moment to catch my breath.

“Okay.” She smiles happily and settles on my chest.

“So, I’m guessing you liked having sex with a woman?” I murmur.

“Oh yes.” Lainey nods. “But I think it’s more to do with who the woman is.”

“Because you love me?” I tease.

“Yes, because I love you.” She squishes her face together, wrinkling her nose.

“You’re so beautiful,” I whisper against her skin.

“Do you think this is too fast?”

“The real question is do you think it’s too fast?” I counter.

“I just know that it feels right with you. Different than it ever has with anyone else.” She sighs.

“So maybe let that be enough. Don’t overthink it, baby girl.” I rub my hands down her shoulders.

“Is this what you want in life?”

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“You? Definitely.” I smile. “Maybe own my own tattoo shop someday.”

“I can see that.”

“What about you? Any life plans?”

“The bakery is my life, and now...you too.” She pauses. “Maybe I’d get a dog one day if I ever stopped working so much.”

“I want a dog one day too.”

“A big fluffy one that can keep intruders away but is also a ball of love to its owner,” she adds.

“That sounds perfect.”

“Would you get married?” I ask, knowing it is way too soon for us, but I am curious if that is something she’d want. It was never something I’d considered was for me, until now. I would love to see Lainey in a big and poofy white dress.

“I would. Would you?”

“I would. If it was the right person,” I add.

“Yeah, I’d only want to get married once.”

“Me too.” Then we lie in silence. Just the sounds of our breathing and soft sighs from

Lainey. I think she's fallen asleep when she's suddenly turning around and looking up at me.

"Can I fuck you again?" she asks mischievously. Have I created a monster?

"Please."

"Can we try new positions? I like eating you out, but I want to try new things too."

"What do you want to try, baby girl? The bed is all yours."

"What's your favorite?"

"If you were to use the strap on on me and fuck me from behind," I say without skipping a beat.

"Fuck. Let's do that then." Her eyes and smile get big.

She picks up the pink strap on and I'm about to explain how to put it on, but she slips it on no problem. I'm used to being the more dominant one in bed, but fuck if it doesn't look sexy as hell on her. Wetness instantly pools to my thighs and I can't wait to see what she has in store for me.

"Get on your knees, babe." She bites down on her bottom lip and giggles. This girl fucking giggles like we're playing a damn game.

I listen and slide my body back, almost into hers as she hops back on the bed. My ass in the air, panties still on, I wait until she huffs and then taps my ass.

"Excuse me, I need these off," she says politely.

“Yes, baby girl.” I slide my panties off in one swoop and toss them across the room.

She then takes a hand and slides it through my aching core. “I don’t think you’re going to need any lube, you’re soaked.”

“All for you, baby girl.” I wink even though she can’t see it.

She readies herself at my core and hesitates only for a second before sliding in. I groan at the contact, feeling so full. Lainey begins to thrust her hips, holding on to my waist to steady herself, and I moan with each pump. She feels way too fucking good for this to be legal. My eyes roll to the back of my head and I slip a hand between my thighs to touch my clit.

“How does it feel?” she asks.

“So fucking good, baby,” I gasp out as she fucks me harder.

“Excuse me?” Oh right.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Baby girl, so fucking good.” I moan.

“I want you to make yourself cum for me.” She growls and reaches for my breasts. I arch my back so she can reach them better. She starts playing with my nipples, and I rub faster circles along my clit.

“I’m so, so close.” I whimper.

“Good, don’t stop.” It’s like Lainey’s been possessed by this sex vixen and I don’t know what to do except cum for her. So I do. My orgasm rushing over me, making me drop into the pillows as I moan out her name.

“Good fucking girl,” Lainey praises me with a kiss behind my ear as she slides off the bed.

She heads into the bathroom, cleans up, and comes back with a glass of water which she hands to me. I sip it gingerly and sit up in the bed, waiting for her to climb back in.

“I love you.” She smiles and I can’t help but smile too.

“I love you too,” I whisper.

Lainey climbs back into bed and settles herself on my chest, my arms wrapped around her, and I begin to play with her hair again. She closes her eyes and I pray she only has sweet dreams from now on.

CHAPTER 11

LAINY

When I wake up from the night we had together, Carter is playing with my hair. The curls I do have are being wrapped around her fingers. She traces my jawline with one hand and smiles down at me.

“Good morning,” she whispers.

“Good morning,” I whisper back as she places a quick kiss on my lips.

“Mmm.” She smiles. “Last night was amazing.”

“Yes, it was.” I nod.

“Want to do it again?” Carter’s eyes wiggle, and I can tell she’s been waiting for me to wake up.

“Is that even a question?” I lean in to kiss Carter. My lips finding hers desperately like two lost souls looking for each other. She climbs on top of me, her thighs straddling my own, and I groan. I love when she takes control like this. Last night she had been more timid but I guess the multiple orgasms made her more at ease.

Lainey kisses me with ease and desperation. Her lips are soft, like they haven’t been kissed enough in her life, and I am dying to change that. I want to be the one and only one she’ll kiss for the rest of her life. I know it is soon, but it is like I’ve known her forever. Something about the way she makes me feel inside is indescribable.

I don’t know how much time has passed but after our morning romp, Carter heads into the shower and I lie in bed in ecstasy. My hair spread along the pillows, my

naked body curled up in the silkiest sheets. I am at peace and nothing can bring me down. That is until my phone rings.

“You stupid fucking bitch,” his voice says eerily from the other end of my phone. I should’ve known better than to pick up a restricted number.

“Leave me alone,” I mumble. Carter is in the shower and I don’t want her to hear me.

“You think I wouldn’t find out that you’re seeing someone? That it’s a fucking woman?”

“W-what?” I thought Carter and I lived in this bubble away from Steve, but now it is like he had popped and infiltrated it.

“I didn’t know you couldn’t be with me because you liked women. So disgusting. I guess it’s fine since I can watch,” Steve says and I get chills down my spine. I instantly run to the open window and shut the curtains, hanging up the phone. The number calls back, and I block it this time. I am not going to let him win, I am not going to play his games.

“Hey, baby girl, everything okay?” Carter comes out of the bathroom in just a towel covering her waist, and I force my feelings away.

“Yes, all good. Just didn’t want any peeping toms getting a show,” I explain.

“Good thinking.” She walks over and kisses me, but I can’t get into it like normal. It feels like Steve is right behind me, somehow seeing everything.

“We should pack up, I’d hate for them to overcharge you for staying a few minutes late.” I rush to my bag and start packing things.

“Okay.” Carter looks at me with confusion but she doesn’t push. And for that, I’m grateful.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

We pack up everything and then head to the lobby together. Carter checks out and then we head for her car. She takes her hand in mine, and I can't help but look around anxiously. Is he still watching us? Is he somewhere nearby? I hold on tightly to Carter's hand as if she might protect me from him. I know that is a lot to ask, but I also have a feeling Carter wouldn't mind.

"Do you want to stop for breakfast anywhere?" Carter asks.

"Sure." I nod. But I'm not really into it.

"I can just drop you at home if you need some alone time? You seem like you're not really here with me." Carter frowns, looking over at me.

"I'm sorry. It's just with the nightmares last night, Steve is on my mind more than usual." It isn't a complete lie. Steve is on my mind.

"I'm sorry, love, why don't we just head back home then? We can get breakfast closer to us if you're hungry."

"Okay." I nod. That does sound like a better plan to me. Carter reaches for my hand and gives it a light reassuring squeeze. I take a small breath and try to calm myself down. The conversation from this morning with Steve is still jarring me.

We're both pretty quiet on the way home, but it doesn't bother me. It's a relief not to have to fake anything with her and that she isn't pushing conversation when I'm not really in the mood. It is like she can read my mind and know what I need without even saying it. When we get to my house she helps me bring my bag inside and we

both look between each other for a moment.

“I had a really nice time,” I finally say.

“You did?”

“I did,” I reassure Carter. “I’m sorry things were weird this morning, I didn’t plan to dream about my ex.”

“Don’t apologize, I promise you can be yourself with me. I’m glad you told me about him.”

“You are?”

“I am. It means you trust me.” She kisses the top of my forehead, and I feel an ease flow through me.

“I love you.” I smile.

“I love you, too, see you tomorrow morning?”

“Yes.” I nod. I will be back at work tomorrow and things will be back to normal. I will be able to not think about Steve and instead think about my amazing girlfriend.

* * *

CARTER

I leave Lainey’s apartment feeling a little bit unsettled. It’s like there’s something more she isn’t telling me and as much as I don’t want to push, I do want to know what’s going on. Is there more about her ex that she isn’t telling me? She seems to

have told me everything last night, I mean how much more could there be besides him abusing her? Fuck. Just thinking about that makes my blood boil. The guy is lucky I wasn't around to teach him a lesson or two.

I decide to head into town and grab Lainey some lunch by the seaside before heading home. I don't have to stay if she doesn't want me too, but my girl deserves some flowers and a good lunch. I stop at the florist first, grabbing a bouquet of roses because Lainey strikes me as the cliché romantic type. Then I grab her some fish n chips from the local stop. I'll have to get there quick to make sure it stays edible, but her apartment is only a ten minute drive from town.

I'm pulling up to her apartment when I see the guy from the other day at the bakery and Lainey arguing. I pull into a random spot, stop the car, and get out within seconds.

"You have no fucking right to be here!" Lainey's yelling.

"I have every right! You're mine until I say you're not," the guy screams. What the hell is his name? Steve?

"Excuse me!" I call, interrupting them.

"What?!" Lainey yells, not realizing it's me. Her face softens as she realizes who I am.

"What are you doing here?"

"I was bringing you some lunch, are you okay?" I look at her to make sure she's okay. He hasn't laid a hand on her and he isn't about to now.

"Oh great, your little girlfriend is here now. Have you told her about me yet?" Steve

says mockingly.

“She’s mentioned how you’re an abuser. So you have no business being here.” I stand in front of Lainey and puff out my chest so he knows I mean business.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Ha, like I’m scared of two chicks.” He rolls his eyes.

“You should be afraid of the cops,” I add.

“Yeah, sure. What did you call them on your invisible phone? I’m not afraid of the cops. Lainey here’s been threatening that for weeks.”

“What the hell do you want with her anyway?”

“I want my girlfriend back.”

“Ha! Good luck with that.” I laugh. No way am I going to let Lainey go back to this loser, not that she’d ever want to.

“Please don’t engage with him,” Lainey whispers from behind me.

“I don’t know what you’re doing here, but it’s not going to work. Lainey is mine.” He scowls.

“It’s not like Lainey is something you can have. She’s a fucking human and she doesn’t belong to anyone. But right now she is my fucking girlfriend so no, she’s not coming with you or being with you ever again. I think it’s time for you to leave.”

I turn to Lainey. “Go call the cops.” She nods and heads into the apartment, rushing for her phone.

“The cops won’t do shit.” Steve laughs. “Another warning to stay away from Lainey

won't do anything.”

“What about a restraining order?” His face drops. What, did he not think of that? Considering all his harassment, I'm sure we'll be able to get one no problem.

“She wouldn't fucking dare,” he growls and Lainey's back, phone to her ear talking slowly.

“Yes, I would,” she says loudly enough for him to hear.

I look between them with a smirk on my face, as if for me to say ‘told ya so’.

“All this started when she met you. If she hadn't met you she'd still be mine so it's your fucking fault,” he grumbles. Steve turns to go, and I think we've finally managed to get him to leave. But then it all happens so fast.

Steve's picking up a piece of metal that's been laying on the ground, something that looks like an old rusty pipe. He's swinging it in the air like he's a fucking madman. I'm about to block Lainey from getting hurt when she pushes me out of the way, causing me to fall to the ground, twisting my ankle. Just as the pipe connect with Lainey's head and she falls to the ground.

“No!” Steve and I both scream in unison. It is clear that was meant for me. Lainey's out cold and Steve drops the pipe but just as he's about to make a run for it, help comes. The police witnessed the entire encounter, not being able to get out of their cars fast enough, but quick enough to make an arrest for once.

I crawl over to Lainey and look at her bleeding head. I am terrified he has killed her, something I will never forgive myself for. One of the cops pushes me out of the way and begins working on her. Tears start falling down my chin as I wait for some sense of relief that never comes.

CHAPTER 12

CARTER

“I don’t need any help, I need to know if my girlfriend is okay,” I yell at the EMT who tries putting an oxygen mask on me. They loaded Lainey into one without giving me any information and she is already on her way to the hospital.

“Look, the quicker you let us help you, the quicker we can get information on your friend,” one of the EMTs say.

“Girlfriend, not friend,” I repeat. I want it to be clear I am more than just some scatterbrained friend. She means everything to me and I don’t even know if she is okay or not. Thankfully she is alive, she had breathing sounds when she was leaving, but that is all I know.

I begrudgingly put on the oxygen mask and then let them look at my ankle. It feels like it is broken but I am braving it so they won’t make me go through an x-ray before I get to see Lainey. But of course, you can’t hide from medicine so when the EMT touches it and I almost scream out in pain, she orders an x-ray as soon as we get to the hospital.

“We’ll get an update on your friend as soon as possible,” the EMT says with kind eyes, resting a hand on my shoulder. I nod as they wheel me into the hospital and I peer around every corner just in case I see Lainey.

We head to get me an x-ray first and I don’t see Lainey. I sit as still as possible, hoping that if I can, I’ll be able to get this done as quickly as possible. As it turns out, it’s not broken, just a gnarly sprain. And the doctor actually uses the word gnarly. I think he is barely older than me and looks like a surfer, but I refrain from judgement. They bring me to a room to hang out in until a second doctor can come and take a

look. But more than likely I'll be on crutches for a few weeks. Which is fine, it isn't my driving foot or anything. I can still do things if I need to.

"So, the police are coming by soon to get a statement from you," one of the nurses explains.

"What for?" I think it is obvious what happened.

"Apparently it's protocol," she says with a shrug.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Do you have an update on my girlfriend? She came in ahead of me? A head injury.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t. Let me see what I can find out.” She fixes my IV and then leaves me alone. I don’t even have my phone with me, not that I can call Lainey. But fuck if I’m not worried about her.

“Excuse me? Miss? Could we have a word?” One of the cops from the scene comes in.

“Sure,” I say less than enthusiastically.

“We have a fairly good idea of what happened, but we need to hear if from you if you can.”

“Of course.” I nod. I recite what happened to the best of my memory, which wasn’t impacted in any way from my fall.

“Thank you, we’re sorry to make you relive that.”

“Have you spoken to Lainey yet?”

“Yes, she gave a similar statement to yours so there shouldn’t be any issues with booking Mr. Roach.” A sigh of relief floods over me. They’ve talked to Lainey, she is okay. She is alive.

“Steve?” I crack a smile. His last name is Roach? No wonder he wouldn’t leave us alone, it is in his blood to be a bug that can’t die.

“Yes, he’s behind bars now and you both shouldn’t need to worry about him anymore,” he reassures me.

“Thank you.” I nod.

They excuse themselves and leave me alone again. But this time I know my Lainey is okay. Lainey is lying somewhere nearby in this hospital, but she is awake enough to give a statement to the police. I just wish I could see her. I glance at the other side of the hospital room, thankful the bed is empty and not occupied by some random stranger. Maybe they’ll be able to move Lainey in here later. I just wish I knew where she is.

The hours pass by slowly as I watch crappy tv and get checked on every few hours. They say I’d be able to go home soon, but with the shortage of nurses there is a bit of a delay. So I am patiently waiting for someone to bring me an update on Lainey that never seems to come. Each person I talk to tells me the same thing: they haven’t heard anything but they’ll be happy to check. I think it’s something they’re brainwashed to say because it isn’t true, nor is it helpful to me.

“Can I please get some crutches?” I ask the nurse. She nods and assumes it’s to bring me to the bathroom, but instead I’m going to make a run for it. Ask to leave and sign one of those forms if I have to. I am tired of being a sitting duck and waiting around for Lainey.

* * *

LAINY

“Her head wound looks worse than it is. It’s a middle grade concussion at most,” one of the doctors says to the other doctor. I squint, the lights hurting my eyes, the squinting hurting my head.

“Oh, she’s awake.” I look around for Carter, but it’s just a bunch of doctors and nurses looking at my scans. I’d already talked to a place officer before I fell asleep or passed out. Is there really a difference when my head hurts this much?

“Miss, are you okay? We gave you some medicine for the pain but it’s mild. We see here you’re allergic to morphine.”

“Y-yes,” I choke out. My mouth is too dry to speak.

“Here’s some water.” One of the nurses, my new best friend, hands me a cup.

I drink the whole cup before speaking. “Thank you.”

“You have a middle grade concussion. So we’re going to keep you here overnight for observation, but you’re incredibly lucky. The trauma could’ve been so much worse,” one of the doctors tells me.

“Okay.”

“Do you have any questions?”

“Two,” I start. “Can we turn off these lights? And where’s my girlfriend?”

“Nurse.” The doctor motions for her to shut off the lights and it makes it just a little easier on my headache. I don’t have to squint quite as much although the hallway lights were still just as bright.

“We have it here that she’s in room 405, she just has a sprained ankle so she should be able to come by and see you soon,” he explains looking at his chart.

“Okay.” I nod and then wince. That hurt more than I expected it too.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Try not to move your head too much,” he says. Now he tells me.

Everyone leaves, and I’m thankful for the quiet, but fuck if I’m not worried about Carter. She must be okay enough if it’s just a sprained ankle but it’s my fault she even has that. If she hadn’t been trying to defend me to Steve, none of this would have happened. I should’ve gotten the restraining order when I had the chance, not now when he was already hurting us. Sure, they reassured me he is behind bars but that will only be for what? A year? Maybe two? He doesn’t seem like the type to let go of things. So in my statement I requested a restraining order which was granted temporarily. I’ll have to appear in court when I am feeling better to make it permanent but that is a thought for another day. All I want right now is to see Carter.

“Oh, sweetie!” My mother comes rushing in with tears in her eyes. She’s much too loud for me, but I don’t stop her from hugging me. My dad is standing behind her, looking just as solemn.

“I’m so sorry this happened to you.” He’s holding back tears. I can tell. And I don’t think I’ve ever seen my dad cry before.

“I’m okay, it’s just a concussion,” I whisper. Even my own voice being too loud hurt my head.

“I’m so sorry I pushed you to be with him, I had no idea...” my mother’s voice trails as she looks at me. I’m sure I look as crappy as I feel.

“It’s okay,” I reassure her. “I just didn’t know how to tell you he was...like that.” I sigh.

“Well, it’s all over now,” my dad adds.

“We heard you asked for a restraining order. We’re going to do everything to help you and make sure it sticks,” my mom says. She looks at me with tear filled eyes and wipes her nose in a small tissue.

“Thank you, Ma,” I smile.

“Lainey?” a voice says from the hall, and I stretch around my mom and dad to see Carter on a pair of crutches, smiling at me.

“Excuse me? Who are you?” My mom jumps into protective mode.

“I’m-” I cut Carter off.

“Ma, Pa, this is my girlfriend, Carter. She tried to help me today,” I explain.

My mother looks at me with a dropped jaw and my dad smiles proudly. “G-Girlfriend?”

“Yes.” I smile. Everything still hurts, but it is suddenly background to seeing Carter. She hobbles into the room and steps closer to me.

“I love your daughter,” Carter says quietly.

My mother doesn’t speak but her face softens. It might take her a moment to get used to things, but I know she’ll be okay with it. My dad is already smiling at Carter like he is happy to meet her so I know there aren’t any problems there.

“Why don’t we give them a bit?” my dad says.

“We’ll come back in the morning with stuff from the bakery.” My mom smiles. They both say goodbye to me and Carter before leaving.

“Sorry, I didn’t expect your parents to be here,” Carter says quietly, hobbling forward.

“It’s okay, they’re my emergency contacts,” I explain.

“Are you okay? Like really okay?” Carter asks softly. She takes a seat in the chair next to my bed. She takes her hand in mine and I instantly feel calmer.

“I’m okay with you here.” I smile.

“I’m serious, Lainey.” She frowns.

“I’m okay as can be. I just have a concussion, but nothing more serious.”

“You shouldn’t have jumped in front of me. It was supposed to be my concussion.”

“It was my psycho ex-boyfriend, Carter, I’m sorry you were even involved. I understand if you don’t want this anymore. If I’m too much of a risk to be around.”

“Will you shush? I’m not going anywhere.” Carter leans forward and kisses my hand. It’s a gesture not lost on me.

“Really?” I look into her deep eyes.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“I promise. I can’t even walk properly, where am I going to go?” she jokes and I laugh, then wince.

“Don’t make me laugh, everything hurts.” I frown.

“Sorry, baby.” She smiles and I look at her. We stay like that for a while, in silence, just smiling at each other. Like we were both worried about how the other was but now that we’re both okay-ish, we can relax.

“I love you,” I whisper before I feel a yawn coming on.

“I love you too. If you fall asleep, I’ll be here. I’m not going anywhere,” she promises and I nod. I know I need the sleep as much as I don’t want to. But I want to get better. So I hold Carter’s hand tightly and drift myself off to sleep. Thinking about me and her, thinking about all the things that are to come, and how much time we have to be together now that Steve isn’t an issue anymore. I relax into a dreamless sleep for once. My life being its own nightmare for the day.

CHAPTER13

LAINY

SIX WEEKS LATER

“How do you feel about that?”my therapist, Christine asks. She pushes her glasses up her nose and straightens her notebook on her lap. She is always taking notes throughout the sessions. At first it used to bother me, but now I am used to it.

“I think that considering all I went through, I’m happy that Steve is no longer popping up in my dreams.” I smile. It is true, it has been a few weeks of therapy, starting right after the incident. And the first few weeks were hell, filled with nightmares and terrors that Steve was coming back for Carter and me. But with the help of therapy, and a non-temporary restraining order, I am finally feeling like myself again.

“That is fantastic.” She smiles.

“I think I want to push our sessions back to once a week, if you think I’m ready for that.”

“I think the real question is do you think you’re ready for that?” she retorts.

“I do. I want to spend more time working and with Carter. Three times a week has been a lot for me. Necessary, but a lot.”

“Well, I don’t see why we can’t try it out. I’ll keep your other spots open just in case you think you need it. You’re always welcome to pick back up. Progress isn’t linear,” she reminds me.

“Thank you.” I smile. My session is over so I grab my bag and walk outside. Carter is waiting for me next to her car, playing on her phone.

“Hey, babe.” I smile hugely. I love that she doesn’t mind picking me up and dropping me off for therapy.

“Hey, baby girl. You look like you had a good session.” She kisses me on the cheek and opens the car door for me. I slip in and she gets in on the other side.

“Wait! Where are your crutches?” I exclaim. Did she forget them somewhere?

“I’m done with them! My ankle is completely healed now.” She smiles proudly. “I stopped by the doctor during your session and they said I’m good to go!”

“That’s amazing!” Just one less reminder of the incident. My head had healed weeks ago and although I’ll always have a little scar, it is mostly hidden by my hairline.

“Are we headed home?” she asks. I like that she calls her place home, like we both live there. Which honestly, in the last few weeks, we definitely have. It was just easier staying in the same place especially when I couldn’t go on my phone and she needed help getting around. We both helped each other while we recovered together. Plus, I felt safer at Carter’s apartment.

“Yes, please, I need a long soak in the tub or something.” I smile.

“Oh yeah? Maybe I can give you a massage first?” She wiggles an eyebrow.

“Is that code for something else? Because if so, I’m in.” I bite down on my bottom lip.

We’ve had sex a few times in the last few weeks but it’s been different. Almost like she is treating me with kid gloves. I get it, we have both gone through a trauma. Me a little more than her with all the stuff from Steve beforehand, but I don’t want to be treated like I am going to break. I want her to treat me like she used to. Anything else is just a reminder of how what happened to us. And I prefer not to think about it unless I have to. Unless I am in therapy, it isn’t something I want on my mind all the time.

“It might be.” She winks and drives us to her apartment.

When we get in the place, I kick off my shoes and head straight for the bedroom. I am too eager to wait for Carter so I strip down to my panties and wait for her to meet me.

“Fuck,” she utters under her breath when she sees me. I’m sitting cross legged on the bed, waiting for her to join me.

“You’re too overdressed.” I crawl to the edge of the bed and begin kissing Carter. Our lips melting together as I unbutton her shirt and fiddle with her belt. Why does she have to be wearing so many layers? I tug her jeans down and she tears off her sports bra. God, I love her tits.

“Get on the bed,” she mumbles.

I lay on my stomach and she grabs a bottle of lotion from the nightstand. I am not really in the mood for a whole massage, but if Carter wants to give me one, I’m not going to say no. I want her to take her time with me. She squirts the lotion on my back and straddles my ass. I just want to shake my ass and rub against her core, but I restrain myself. She rubs circles along my shoulders, back, and lower back. It feels so good that I can feel myself yawning. I am exhausted from the emotions in therapy and the day I’ve had. But I don’t want her to put me to sleep, I want to connect with her.

“Mmm, I’m going to fall asleep, babe,” I grumble.

“That’s okay.”

“No.” I flip over, grabbing onto Carter’s waist to steady her against me. Now she is straddling my waist, and I can buck my hips into her.

“Oh.” She bites her lip and smirks at me. She leans down to kiss me, and I groan into her mouth. Now this is what I want. I wait for her to tug on my hair as her hands find their way into my hair but instead she holds them steady. So I wait for her to bite my neck or leave me hickies like she used to, but instead she doesn’t.

Carter kisses my neck lightly. She sucks on each breast like she’s afraid to tug or pull on them, and I clench my jaw. This is exactly what I didn’t want.

“You can be rougher,” I whisper. She nods but doesn’t change anything. Her hands

are hovering over my body like she's afraid of me, and I don't know what the hell is happening anymore.

"Can we stop?" I ask, and Carter jumps off me like my body is on fire. Which I appreciate, but also feels like too much.

"Is something wrong?" Carter asks worriedly. She studies my face for a moment before sitting next to me on the bed.

"Yes. You." I feel the tears building in my eyes, and I don't know how to stop them from falling.

"W-what?" She looks at me, confused.

"I'm not going to break. I'm not fragile. I know I'm in therapy, and I know something big happened to us, but I need you to fuck me how you used to. I need you to touch me like you used to. I don't want this to be one more thing that ruined." I start sobbing, and Carter pulls me into her arms.

"I'm so sorry," she whispers in my ear.

"I know you're trying to help. I know you're looking out for me, but I need you to stop."

"I just don't want to be too rough or hurt you or trigger you in any way."

"What? That's what you're afraid of?" I ask, wiping my eyes.

"Yes, I don't want you to ever think of me and him in the same light and I was worried if I was too rough in bed, it might trigger you. I was just trying to be respectful."

“I love you,” I whisper and lean in to kiss her. “Thank you.”

“I didn’t know you thought that I thought you were fragile. Babe, you’re one of the strongest people I know. There’s nothing wrong with you or us. We can go back to the way things were.” Carter smiles.

“You promise?”

“Baby girl, I’ll show you right now,” Carter says and pats the bed. “Lay down.”

“Oh, fuck yes.” I smile.

I lay down on the bed and she straddles me again, but this time every inch of her is in this moment. I know she’s not thinking about anything else besides me because I can feel it in her fingertips. Carter grabs my face, pulls it into hers, and our lips intertwine. She bites down on my bottom lip, pulling it toward her, and I moan lightly into her mouth.

“Fuck.” It is just rough enough to turn me the fuck on.

“Be a good girl and get the toy from the nightstand,” she commands.

“Yes, baby.” I nod and look through the array of toys she has in here. Then I pick up the bright pink strap on, it has become my favorite.

“You want me to fuck you?” She smiles, looking it over.

“Yes.” I hand it to her and she stands to put it on. Then she climbs into the bed, and I toss my panties at her. She laughs and throws them on the ground.

I lay with my ass in the air, my face in the pillows, and she stops at my entrance. First

she runs her tongue up and down my slit. Let me tell you, someone eating you out from behind is one of the hottest things I've ever experienced. It's like a whole new level of pussy eating that I'm a big fan of.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Spread your legs,” Carter commands. I do what she says, and I can feel the tip of the strap on moving between my thighs. Carter slides it in, and I gasp out in pleasure.

“Oh my!” I feel the fullness of her inside me, and I groan. Carter pulls me by the hair to have my back up and my chest in the air.

“You like how I’m fucking you, baby girl?” she whispers in my ear.

“I do,” I whimper. She pumps in and out of me so fast that it should hurt, but all I feel is pleasure. She grabs my chest and takes my nipples between her fingers.

“I want to hear how much you like it,” she grumbles.

“So fucking much, ohh.” I moan and gasp with each thrust.

“Get on your stomach.” She pushes me back on the bed and grabs my ass, using them for support as she begins thrusting even harder. The toy is barely making it out of me with each thrust and it’s going deeper and deeper inside me.

“Oh my goodness!” I scream in pleasure.

“Say how good it feels, baby girl,” she says breathlessly.

“So fucking good.” I whimper. “Don’t stop. I’m so close!”

“Good, I want you to fucking scream for me baby girl,” she commands, and I lose it. She feels so fucking good and with a few quick circles around my clit, I’m coming

and screaming her name.

“Oh, Carter! Carter! Carter!” She doesn’t stop until I’m collapsed on the bed and breathless.

“Was that better?” she says with a smirk.

“Oh, fuck yeah.” I pull her in for a long kiss. It has been too long since we have made love like that. Where we could both be ourselves without holding anything back. My orgasm felt too good to be true, my pussy is still throbbing from the intensity.

“Mmm, I missed this.” Carter smiles.

“I’ve missed it too,” I whisper.

Carter heads to the bathroom to clean off the strap on and comes back, places it in the drawer, and lies in bed next to me. She pulls me into her arms and I smile. I kiss her cheek lightly, and she presses her lips to the top of my head.

“I love you, baby girl,” Carter whispers.

“I love you too, babe,” I whisper back. She rubs small, slow circles around my arms, and I try not to, but I end up drifting off into a perfect sleep. My girl fucked me to sleep and I’m not even upset about it.

CHAPTER14

CARTER

Thankfully,it’s been easier around the house now that I’m not on crutches. I tried working at the tattoo shop while I was on crutches but Reagan sent me home the third

day and promised to pay me in advance and I could work it off when I was feeling better. She's one of the best bosses I've ever had, truly. At my other shop they would've told me to fuck off or find another job, but here I know my job is still waiting for me.

I trace circles around Lainey's arms and watch as she yawns slightly and starts to fall asleep. I love when she falls asleep in my arms, it is like I can protect her with just my arms. I'm glad she told me what was wrong earlier. I had no idea I was treating her so fragile. I wanted to protect her and look out for her but I didn't want her to feel the way she was. I'm glad she at least was able to tell me and we could work it out.

Lainey wakes up forty-five minutes later when my arm is dead and I'm scrolling away on my phone. I am looking at some new tattoo ideas I can draw for the shop, but she sits up and I put my phone away.

"Hey, sleepyhead." I kiss her lips and she yawns.

"Sorry, I was just so exhausted," she says quietly.

"Are you awake now?"

"Why? What did you have in mind?" She smiles, and I know we're both on the same page.

"I thought we could finish what we started earlier."

"I'd like that very much," I start. Lainey is still naked and the thoughts have crossed my mind, but I didn't want to wake her. Now that she's suggesting it, my hands find her breasts and slide across her chest.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Mmm,” she groans. Lainey climbs over me to reach for the drawer, and I smile as she takes out the purple vibrator. It is one of my favorites and she knows it. Something about using it alone isn’t as fun as when Lainey likes using it on me now.

My eyes widen as she tells me to lay down. Placing the vibrator on the bed next to us, I lay into the pillows and she climbs on top of me again, this time straddling my waist.

“I want you,” she whispers. Lainey kisses me full of force and passion. She is super into dominating me, and fuck if I’m not into it too.

“You have me,” I whisper into her lips.

Lainey’s hands slide down my chest, stopping to take each breast in her mouth. She flicks her tongue over my nipples and they harden in her mouth. I moan lightly and toss my head back into the pillows. I am no match for Lainey’s tongue. My body goes limp as she kisses down my stomach, stopping to lick my belly button, and kisses just above my hip bone.

“Take these off,” she grumbles as she reaches my boy shorts. I chuckle and slide them off, tossing them off the bed.

Lainey positions herself over my core and blows lightly. She looks up at me with hooded, desire filled eyes as she takes a long, languid lick of my core. I moan loudly and she smiles. Fuck, she is going to have too much fun teasing me. I hate giving into her but she has complete control over me when her tongue is involved.

“D-don’t tease me,” I mumble as she takes the slowest licks of my pussy as if she’s trying to savor the taste.

“I’ll do what I want.” She shrugs. Then stops licking me and runs her hand up and down my core. She presses her hand on it, and I clench my jaw. I just want to be fucked.

“Okay, baby girl,” I mumble. I want her to go back to licking me and making me feel so good.

“That’s better.” She smirks and continues going down on me. She sucks on my clit, making my hips buck and me grab onto her hair. My breathing is labored as she runs her tongue across my pussy. She is still teasing me but at least her tongue is on me. I take a fistful of her hair and push her face closer to my pussy. Lainey stops just for a second before going even faster.

Her tongue working overtime on my clit. She adds two fingers inside, and I groan out in pleasure. “Fuck!” I scream.

She doesn’t speak or let up. Instead she flicks her tongue over my clit harder if possible. Faster and faster until I can feel my orgasm building. Lainey is enjoying herself because she has no sign of stopping and I’m so close to cumming that I keep my hand pressed to her head. With one last flick of her wrist, I’m screaming her name and holding on even tighter to her hair.

“Oh my god! Lainey! Don’t fucking stop!” I scream. I’m riding out the way her face feels so fucking good when I let go of her hair and she comes up for air. My legs are still shaking when all of a sudden I hear vibration and she’s pressing the vibrator to my clit.

“Fuck!” I scream again. My clit is extra sensitive from the orgasm I just had, what is

she doing? Oh my gosh. Is she trying to make me come again?

“I want to see how many times you can come in a row,” she says with a mischievous look. Gone is the sweet and tame Lainey that most people know, and in her place is a dominant sex goddess. I don’t know how I got so fucking lucky.

“Oh!” I moan out as she presses the vibrator to my clit and rubs small circles. Her hand is still inside my core and the sensation is a lot. I don’t know how much longer I’ll be able to last while she keeps this up. But that is her point.

“Fuck, you’re so beautiful, Carter,” she whispers against my skin. She leans in to kiss me, and I’ve never felt closer to her.

“I love you, baby girl,” I whimper out. I am close again. The sensations are too much. Her fingers pumping in and out of me, the toy on my clit, its vibrations sending waves of pleasure through my body.

“I love you too,” she says quietly.

“Oh! I’m... I’m coming!” I scream, and she doesn’t let up. Keeping the toy on my clit as I ride out a second wave of pleasure.

“God, you’re so sexy when you cum.” She kisses all over my cheeks and lips, an overflowing sensation of her lips. I close my eyes as I let my body come down from the pleasure it just felt.

“Fuck. You’re the devil woman for that,” I growl. Climbing on top of her, I press my lips to her and slide two fingers across her pussy. It’s dripping wetness down her thighs for me.

“So punish me,” she says devilishly.

“Oh no, that would be too easy,” I grumble. I don’t want to punish her, I want to taste her. She is addicting as hell.

I dive between her thighs and start devouring her. I lick up every last drop of her. Just to tease her, I’m not going to let her cum, not after what she just did to me. I am still on edge from the multiple orgasms. I lap her up, tasting her sweetness and listening to her groans and moans. She reaches for her clit and I push her hand away. She isn’t going to cum that easily. I want to hear her begging for it before I let her stop.

“Oh!” She calls out as I dip my tongue further in her hole. Then I flip her over and start eating her pussy out from behind. My tongue lapping up everything as her beautiful ass is in my face. I slap it once, lightly. I know she can take it harder but I want to build her up.

“Harder!” she begs, and I smile. I slap her ass again, this time just a little bit harder.

“Oh, Carter.” She whimpers and my tongue teases her tight center.

“I need you to slap me harder,” she says way too clearly. She should be a whimpering, begging mess right now. Not clearly and coherently asking for more.

Page 32

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Oh yes, baby girl.” I smirk even though she can’t see it. I slap her ass hard enough to leave a print, and she calls out in pleasure. Before she can say anything else, I slap her ass again.

“Ah!” She screams out and then I go to town on her pussy. I have one hand on her ass, grabbing tightly while I continue eating her out. She moans and whimpers now, and I know I’m getting her close.

“Are you close, baby?” I ask.

“Oh yes!” She screams.

“Seems like a good time to stop then,” I tease.

“No! Please! Carter!” She flips over and looks at me with big eyes. She is dangerously close, I can tell by her darkened eyes and the way her breathing is.

“Beg me,” I whisper.

“Please, I’m begging. I want you to fuck me. Make me cum,” she begs, her voice a low whimper.

“Spread your legs for me,” I command.

She holds her legs in the air and I dive between them. She wraps them around my head and I touch my tongue to her clit. She immediately moans and begs for more. So I grab the toy she left behind and slide it inside her. Turning the vibration up all the

way and watching as her breathing becomes labored and she's shaking in pleasure.

"Oh my!" She screams and I watch as her mouth forms a little 'o' and she whimpers out a bunch of incoherent sounds.

"Fuck, baby girl," I mumble. She is something out of a porno when she lets herself come undone. It is sexy as hell.

"Mmm." She lays back into the bed and I pull her into my arms. We spoon, and I'm the big spoon this time. We usually switch it up, depending on what mood we're both in. But I want to hold my girl right now.

"We should get a dog," she says suddenly.

"A dog?" I ask, wondering if I heard her correctly.

"Well, I want a dog. But I know you've always wanted one too, so maybe we should both get one," she explains.

I pause to think about it. She's right, I have always wanted a dog. But I work too much to properly care for one. But if Lainey and I share the dog it could be better for us.

"It's not too soon?" I ask.

"I asked my therapist about it. She said I may be looking for a reason to keep us connected after the trauma. But I think I just know I want a life with you, and I want a dog, so why not?" She turns over to face me. "What do you think? Honestly?"

"I would love to have a dog with you. If your therapist and you are sure you're not rushing anything, then we can do it. I just don't want to move too fast and regret it. A

dog is a shared responsibility.” I pause. “Where would we keep it?” I ask.

“My place. Until I move or change my locks, it’ll make me feel safer. Especially when you’re not there.” She’s clearly thought a lot about this. It’s not some impulsive decision, post orgasm or something.

“I love you, I’d love to share custody of a dog with you.” I kiss her forehead and smile.

“Really?” She looks surprised.

“Whenever you’re ready, I’m here to take that next step with you,” I promise her.

“Thank you, Carter, for everything. It’s more than I can ever explain, but I love you more every day for it.” She presses her lips against mine, and I feel an overwhelming sense of peace coming over me.

EPILOGUE

CARTER

SIX MONTHS LATER

“Doyou need any help with those?” I ask Lainey as she moves boxes from the truck to my apartment. It’s labeled Heavy and I don’t want her to hurt herself.

“I lift heavier boxes of bread and frozen treats on the daily, I promise I’m not going to hurt myself,” Lainey reassures me.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Okay, I’m here if it’s too heavy,” I remind her.

“I know.” She smiles.

“It’s cute how much you worry about her,” Jen adds, carrying a box marked pillows into the place.

“You do what you can for those you love,” I say with a shrug.

It is second nature for me to care about Lainey and to look out for her. Which includes moving into my place. Even though Steve is still off far away in county jail, and won’t be allowed to be within five hundred feet of Lainey ever again. It seems like the better and safer option for us to move into my place. It is bigger and there are no leftover memories from him. And he had never followed me as far as Lainey and I knew, which means he doesn’t know where I live. Something both Lainey and I feel much safer about.

“Well, don’t just stand around!” Lainey jokes and snaps me out of my head. Today is supposed to be a positive and happy day. I don’t need to think about one of the worst days of my life. I need to soak in each and every moment of today.

“You got it, boss!” I salute her, and she shakes her head laughing.

I head to the truck and grab the dog stuff from Lainey’s apartment. We had adopted a German Shepherd a few months ago from the local animal shelter. Which Lainey named Derek Shepherd after her favorite Grey’s Anatomy character. I was just happy to have a dog with her that I didn’t mind what we named it. He was a little older than

we thought we'd get but the moment we saw him, we both knew it was the dog we wanted. Plus it was rare that older dogs got adopted so we made a point to take him home while we could. He spent his time straddled between Lainey's place and mine for the last six months. Which was a little bit complicated but we wanted to wait until we were sure we were in a good spot to move in with each other. We didn't want to rush it, even though some would say that less than a year is rushing it.

"Derek!" Lainey shouts playfully as I walk in the box of his toys. "Look, Mama's got your toys from my house!" We've also gotten used to calling each other Derek's mom's.

"I'll take that." Jen smiles and grabs the box from me. We've gotten along great too, getting to know each other better after the incident. Jen was a little weary of me. I mean I was the first woman Lainey ever dated, and I was so soon after Steve, I get it. But I am not some rebound, I am the real deal, and I plan on proving that to her any chance I get. Which I have over the last six months.

"Thank you." I head back outside and grab the rest of the boxes. Between the three of us, it only takes a few hours to pile in all of Lainey's things into my place. We put it in the extra bedroom I have and although Lainey promises to unpack as soon as possible, as long as she's here, I don't mind.

Jen leaves after dinner and that gives Lainey and I some alone time to start unpacking together. Lainey starts in the kitchen with cooking utensils, most of which I don't have, and I unpack a few boxes of books and dvds in the living room. When we're both too tired to move anything else, we retreat to the couch together and turn on a random movie to watch.

"I love being here with you." She smiles.

"I love having you here," I agree.

“I cut back some hours at the bakery, so I’ll be home more with Derek.” She smiles.

It is something we have both talked about, life is too short to work ourselves to death. So instead of being on call seven days a week, we both are down to working four days a week each. Sometimes our days off overlap, which is my favorite because then we spend time together going on adventures or staying in bed together.

“Even more?” I ask surprised.

“I want to be here more, I’ve hired extra help and my parents are supportive of it,” she explains.

“Whatever you want to do, I’m happy if you’re happy.”

“I was thinking about starting to sell pastries and things at the farmers market on the weekend. I really enjoy baking and then I’m not tied to my parents’ recipes.”

“That sounds awesome! I’m down to be your taste tester anytime.”

“Oh yeah?” She wiggles her eyebrows suggestively.

“I was saying something nice and you have to make it dirty.” I roll my eyes at her.

“I want to be a taste tester for you.” She smiles mischievously.

“Oh shush.” I toss a pillow at her and she laughs.

“Mmm, please?” She smirks and I lean in to kiss her.

Just as I’m about to pull her into my lap, Derek runs over and puts his head in my lap.

“He probably wants to go out, I usually take him out at this time,” Lainey explains.

“Okay, I’ll take him and be right back.” I give her a quick kiss on the lips and reach for Derek’s collar and leash. Putting it on him, his tail starts wagging and he knows what’s coming. I take him for a quick walk around the apartment complex and then head back after he’s done his business.

Heading in the apartment, I don’t see Lainey on the couch or in the kitchen so I look around confused. I call out her name twice and she doesn’t answer. My heart begins to beat fast and I start to panic, is something wrong? Where is she? I’m about to call the police after checking the extra bedroom, when I get to our room and I find Lainey lying completely naked on the bed, only wearing a pink strap on and smiling mischievously.

Source Creation Date: July 13, 2025, 4:01 am

“Fuck, you scared the crap out of me,” I admit, letting out a breath.

“I’m sorry, I just wanted to surprise you.” She smiles, and I start undressing to match where she is. Her body is spread out and waiting for me. Fuck. She is gorgeous.

“Whoa.” I stand before her and climb into bed next to her. Gone are any fears I had about where she was or what was wrong. I am in this moment with the love of my life.

“Get on top of me,” she commands, and fuck if I didn’t already give her everything, I would now.

I climb over her lap, straddling her, the pink toy between us and just touching my core but not yet inside. “You have to warm me up first,” I tease. Just seeing Lainey makes me wet as the ocean, but I want some foreplay and I know Lainey can deliver.

She pulls me in for a long kiss. She uses her teeth to bite down on my bottom lip and pull it toward her, causing me to moan in her mouth. Fuck. I want her even more now. She slides her hands over my breasts, caressing them and teasing me by playing with my nipples. Lainey surprises me by putting a hand around my throat and squeezing gently. Just tight enough to elicit a groan from me. My baby wants to choke me? God, how did I get so lucky?

“I want you to ride me,” she commands, and I nod. Sliding the pink strap inside my core, I sit on it fully and gasp out in pleasure as I feel all of her inside me.

“You look so sexy from up there.” She smiles.

“You look so sexy down there.” I bite my bottom lip. Her hair spread out over the pillows, her hips thrusting into mine, her lips plump from all the kissing, her breasts bouncing with each movement. She is beautiful.

“Touch yourself,” she tells me, and I lick my fingers before sliding them across my clit. I start to rub small circles around it as I ride her and it feels so fucking good. I groan out and call her name as I move my hips faster and faster.

“God, you’re so sexy,” she says again. I reach for her breasts with my spare hand and hold on tightly to her nipple while I move my hips. She’s breathing heavy and I wonder if the friction from the strap on is enough to make her cum. I can see the look in her eyes and I can tell she’s close. Pinching her nipples even tighter, I look down into her eyes while I move my hips. I want us to come together at the same time.

“Come for me, baby girl,” I whisper, and she starts uttering an array of curses as my orgasm flows through me. Her hips don’t stop moving and I’m breathless as I fall into her, calling out in pleasure.

“Holy fuck, that was so hot.” Lainey pants.

“I love you, baby girl.” I kiss her forehead and slide the toy out of me.

“I love you more, babe.” She presses her lips to mine and I close my eyes. Wondering how I got to be so lucky to have the girl I fell for fall for me back. As she settles into what is now our bed, I can’t wait to spend every night cuddled together for the rest of time.

THE END