



Rescue My Heart

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Lesbian Romance

Description: When a daring rescue leads to an unexpected connection, can love survive the pressures of fame?

Phoenix Ridge Fire Department- All the lesbians, all the action, all the steamy scenes and all the Happy Ever Afters.

Mazey Snow is Hollywood's top actress, but when a stunt on set goes terribly wrong, she finds herself in real danger—until firefighter McKenna Adams swoops in for the rescue. Mazey's used to the spotlight, but nothing prepared her for the heat she feels around McKenna.

McKenna's all about keeping things simple—she's never imagined getting caught up with a celebrity, let alone one who is straight. As sparks fly, Mazey's drawn to McKenna in ways she's never felt before, but the paparazzi are circling, and the pressure of fame makes everything complicated.

Can Mazey embrace the unexpected and risk it all for love, or will the fear of public scrutiny push them apart?

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MAZEY

I can't believe this is the place, Mazey Snow thought to herself as she stepped into the hotel room, her breath catching in her throat. The room was modern and sleek with a wall of windows that looked out over the sprawling hills and jagged cliffs of Phoenix Ridge. Phoenix Ridge—she hadn't heard of it before landing the job, but now, standing here, she had to admit it was beautiful in an eerie, quiet way. The type of beauty that felt like it was hiding something. Majestic yet haunting, a perfect setting for the show she'd signed on to.

Her fingers traced along the edge of the desk as she walked through the room, still taking it all in. The cool air from the vent hit her skin, reminding her just how far she'd come. There was a lot riding on this, more than just another paycheck. This was the job she'd been waiting for, the one where she could finally show her authentic self without feeling like she had to bend to fit someone else's expectations. Edge of the Abyss. What a name for a show, she thought, letting out a small chuckle. It was fitting, though. Everything about this job felt like standing at the edge of something. Whether it was her career or her personal life, she didn't quite know.

Mazey set her suitcase on the bed, slowly unzipping it as she thought about the weeks ahead. The people she'd meet, the work she'd do. This was her big shot, and she wasn't about to waste it. But, as excited as she was, she couldn't shake the feeling of unease curling in the pit of her stomach. It wasn't nerves, at least not in the way she was used to. It was something deeper, something unfamiliar that made her want to pull the curtains closed and lock herself away. Maybe it was the place. Or maybe it

was the pressure she had put on herself to finally be the person she'd always wanted to be, without hiding, without holding back.

She pulled her phone from her pocket, absentmindedly scrolling through emails and social media as if looking for some sort of distraction, something to calm her racing thoughts. Everyone who knew her would say she was lucky. She had been working in television, chasing her dream, getting to travel to places like this. And she was. She knew that. But what no one saw was how exhausting it was to constantly pretend and shape herself into whatever version of Mazey Snow they wanted her to be.

Not this time. This time, she would be herself. All of herself. No more holding back, no more second-guessing if she was too loud, too much. The show's producers had told her they wanted someone with a fresh voice, someone who would bring something different to the table, and she planned to give them exactly that. Edge of the Abyss was going to be her moment, her chance to stop living on the edges of her own life and start diving in, consequences be damned.

The suitcase lay open on the bed, her clothes folded neatly, but she couldn't bring herself to unpack yet. Instead, she wandered over to the window, pushing back the sheer curtains and staring out at the rolling hills that disappeared into the distance. A part of her felt connected to this place already, as if Phoenix Ridge was a crossroads where she might finally decide which direction her life would go.

Outside, the sun was beginning to set, casting an orange-pink glow over the landscape. The shadows stretched longer, and for a moment, everything seemed still, too still. Mazey's hand rested on the window, and she felt the glass cool beneath her palm. She'd made a promise to herself to embrace this opportunity fully, but standing here now, she couldn't help but feel the weight of what that truly meant.

Taking a deep breath, she turned away from the window, letting the curtain fall back into place. There was no turning back now. Phoenix Ridge was the kind of place

where people found something they didn't know they were searching for, whether it was success, truth, or something else entirely. And she had the feeling that, by the end of it all, she'd find exactly what she'd been running from for so long: herself.

Mazey ran a hand through her hair, eyes drifting to the pile of clothes in her suitcase. There was no rush. She had time. The rest of the crew would arrive in the morning, and from there, it would be a whirlwind of filming, scripts, and long nights. But for now, tonight, she had Phoenix Ridge all to herself. She smiled, the tension in her shoulders loosening just a little. Maybe, just maybe, this was the beginning of something better.

Suddenly, her phone buzzed. The screen lit up with an unfamiliar number, and she swiped to answer. Must be someone from the show.

"Hello!" she greeted, her voice bright and charismatic.

"Ms. Snow. The director wants you to come check out the filming spot," came the reply, curt and efficient.

"Oh, really? Okay, I'll get ready. Could you tell the makeup artist to come to my room?"

"Of course, Ms. Snow. She's on her way."

Mazey hung up and glanced at the outfit her stylist had laid out. Sporty yet chic, exactly what was expected of her. She sighed as she slipped into the ensemble, the fabric cool against her skin. Every detail had been thought out for her, down to the accessories. She always had to look perfect, polished, and effortlessly chic, no matter how she actually felt. There was no room for a bad day. Bad days meant bad press, and the media loved to pounce on the tiniest flaw in her image. Exhausting. But it was part of the job, one she'd come to accept.

Just as she finished adjusting her clothes, there was a knock at the door. The makeup artist had arrived.

Mazey opened the door and was greeted by a young woman clutching a large black makeup case. “It’s such a pleasure to be working with you,” the artist gushed, her face lighting up. “Mazey Snow, I can’t believe it! I’ve watched all your movies since you were just a teenager. You were such an inspiration. I thought you were the coolest.”

Mazey flashed a warm smile, her tone gracious as always. “You’re so kind. Thank you so much. Honestly, it’s all thanks to the amazing production teams and the people I work with. I’d be nothing without all of you.”

“Oh my god, you’re even kinder than you seem in interviews. You just always come across so funny and laid back. I remember watching this interview you did on?—”

Mazey listened, or at least appeared to. She’d gotten good at that over the years, smiling and nodding at all the right moments while her mind drifted elsewhere. There’s a role to play, even off-screen, she reminded herself. It wasn’t that she disliked the admiration or the praise. But it all felt routine, rehearsed. Just another part of the performance.

As the artist continued talking, Mazey’s mind slipped into preparation mode. She was thinking about the scene, about the character she needed to embody today. She could hear the artist’s voice in the background but wasn’t fully present. That was her talent. She could make it seem like she was listening, even while a million other things swirled in her head.

Suddenly, the artist asked a question that pulled Mazey back to the moment.

“I’m sorry. Could you repeat that?”

“Oh, I was just asking if you wanted your hair up or down.”

Mazey tilted her head slightly, considering the image she wanted to project. “I think up would be most fitting, don’t you?”

“I totally agree,” the artist replied with a smile.

A few minutes later, the artist swept Mazey’s hair into an elegant, yet casual updo. When she was done, Mazey glanced at her reflection. She looked flawless, everything in place, every detail perfect. She felt a flicker of relief that she wasn’t the one responsible for making herself look this way. One less thing to worry about, she thought. It was a strange comfort knowing that if anything was off, there was someone else to blame. That tiny bit of pressure lifted made it all a little more bearable.

“Thank you so much,” Mazey said, standing up from the chair. “Do you want to walk to the set together?”

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“Really? Wow, yes! Thank you!”

“Great. Let’s go.”

They left the hotel room, stepping into the cool afternoon air. The makeup artist had grown quieter now, her earlier excitement tempered by the seriousness of Mazey’s role. That silence was welcome. It gave Mazey the mental space she needed to slip fully into character. Focus, she reminded herself. Get into the zone.

They made their way to the waiting car, a sleek black SUV that was meant to take Mazey to the filming location. The driver opened the door for them, and Mazey and the makeup artist slid into the back seat. The door closed with a soft click, and the driver nodded at her through the rearview mirror once he got back in his chair.

“Ready?” he asked.

Mazey nodded. “Let’s go.”

As the car pulled out of the hotel parking lot, the scent of pine and the promise of distant rain filled the air outside. The sprawling beauty of Phoenix Ridge stretched out before them, with its rolling hills and jagged cliffs. But Mazey hardly noticed. Her mind was elsewhere, already running through the lines she needed to deliver, the expressions she needed to perfect.

The car glided smoothly along the winding roads, the hum of the engine a low, constant sound beneath the whirr of her thoughts. She stared out the window but didn’t really see anything; it was all a blur. Get into the zone, she reminded herself

again. No distractions.

The road narrowed as they left the main highway, now winding up through the hills. The higher they climbed, the more the landscape seemed to loom around them, as if the mountains themselves were watching. A part of her registered how cinematic it all was, the perfect backdrop for a dramatic scene. But she didn't let herself get distracted by the beauty of the view. This wasn't a vacation. This was work.

She took a deep breath, her fingers tapping lightly on her knee as she reviewed the scene in her head again. She had to be on today; there was no room for mistakes. This was her shot to show the producers that she could be more than just the bubbly, marketable face they'd seen in the past. She needed them to see her depth and range. The part of herself she rarely got to show.

Mazey glanced at the makeup artist sitting beside her, gazing out the window, hands folded in her lap, blissfully unaware of the pressure Mazey was under. It wasn't personal, but Mazey couldn't afford to be personal right now. Not when so much was riding on her ability to nail this scene.

They rounded another bend in the road, and suddenly, the cliff came into view. The car slowed as they neared the edge, and Mazey caught a glimpse of the jagged drop-off just ahead. The driver parked the car and turned off the engine.

"We're here," he said.

Mazey stepped out of the SUV, the cool breeze immediately hitting her face. She walked toward the edge of the cliff, her heels clicking softly against the uneven ground. The view was stunning, miles of untouched wilderness, stretching out as far as the eye could see. The ocean below crashed against the rocks, a distant roar that was somehow both calming and overwhelming.

But Mazey wasn't here to admire the scenery. She had a job to do.

The director was already heading toward her, clipboard in hand, a focused expression on his face. As the crew set up behind him, cameras and equipment scattered across the uneven ground, Mazey's heartbeat quickened. Something about the atmosphere felt heavier than usual.

The director stopped in front of her, barely glancing up from his clipboard. "Mazey, we're going to need you to climb down the cliff for this shot."

"This is the part where I'm rescuing someone hanging off the cliff, right?" she said.

"Yeah." He nodded, flipping through his notes. "Don't worry, we'll get you in a safety harness. We've got stunt coordinators here, and everything is set up. If you follow the instructions, you'll be safe. No issues. Once you're all set up, we'll send the actor you're meant to save."

Mazey glanced over the edge, the vast drop below now seeming even more daunting. The ocean waves crashed against the rocks far beneath them, the abyss stretching out endlessly. She could feel the ground almost pulling her toward it, the height making her legs feel shaky.

"You're going to be descending about twenty feet," the director continued, oblivious to her growing nerves. "We'll be capturing the whole scene from the top. You'll look out over the edge, take a deep breath, and start your descent. Cameras will follow your every move. We need to capture that raw emotion as you climb down."

Mazey tried to keep her voice steady, but the nerves had crept in. "And you're sure the harness is...safe?"

He finally looked up, meeting her eyes. "Mazey, you'll be perfectly fine. We've done

this dozens of times with other actors. As long as you follow the instructions, there's no danger. The crew will be right here the whole time. You'll have a safety team watching every move."

She nodded, though her throat felt dry. She didn't want to come off as scared, but the thought of stepping off the cliff's edge, even with safety gear, was terrifying. She'd done plenty of risky scenes before, but this was different. This wasn't a controlled set with walls around her; it was nature. Unpredictable. Dangerous.

The wind was stronger here, tugging at her clothes and hair, as if reminding her of the very real forces she'd be contending with once she started her descent. The makeup artist adjusted a few strands of her hair that had fallen loose from her updo, but Mazey barely noticed. Her eyes remained fixed on the edge of the cliff, the sheer drop making her palms sweat.

The director, sensing her hesitation, softened his tone. "Look, I know it's nerve-wracking, but I promise, you're going to crush this. And once you nail it, this scene is going to look incredible. It'll be one of the highlights of the show. Just trust the team, trust the gear, and focus on your performance."

She nodded again, trying to internalize his words. It was easier said than done when all she could picture was the endless drop below, but this was her job. The stakes were high, and she knew what this role could do for her career. This was her chance to show more than just her carefully curated exterior. This was her opportunity to prove she could handle intense, dramatic moments, even if they involved literal cliffs.

The safety crew arrived, walking her through the process of getting strapped into the harness. She listened intently, trying to push past the fear and absorb the instructions. They fastened the straps around her waist and shoulders, tightening everything until it felt secure. The metal clips jingled as they attached the safety line that would prevent her from falling.

“Okay, Mazey, we’re going to start with you at the edge, looking down,” one of the crew members explained, checking the equipment one final time. “Take it slow, trust your gear, and remember, don’t look back up. Just keep your eyes forward or down at your next foothold.”

Mazey took a deep breath, nodding. She approached the cliff’s edge, her heart pounding. The wind whipped against her as she stepped closer to the drop. The sheer height made her feel weightless, as if any wrong step could send her over.

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She planted her feet just at the edge, toes peeking over the abyss, and looked down. Her pulse quickened as the reality of the task set in. Twenty feet didn't sound like much when they explained it, but staring into the void below made it feel like an eternity.

The director's voice echoed behind her. "Alright, Mazey, we're rolling. Take your time, and show us that fear, that hesitation before you go for it. And when you're ready, start the climb."

Mazey took another deep breath, her knuckles white as she gripped the harness's rope. This was it. No turning back. She forced her mind to settle, to focus only on the moment, the camera, and the performance she had to give.

One step at a time, she told herself. You've got this.

Mazey inched her way down the cliff, her heart racing at first, but after a few careful steps, she started to feel secure. The harness was tight, the rope sturdy. The nerves that had been gnawing at her earlier began to fade. She was in the role now, her body moving with newfound confidence. This wasn't so bad, after all.

With a smirk, she glanced over her shoulder at the crew below. "This all you got?" she quipped, barely breaking a sweat. Easy.

"Alright, Mazey, launch off the wall a little harder!" the director's voice rang out, cutting through the wind.

She could hear the stunt team murmuring behind her, their tone urgent. They were

trying to tell him something about it not being safe, but she wasn't about to back down now. The adrenaline was kicking in, and she could already feel the shot coming together in her mind.

She waved a hand dismissively, her voice ringing with bravado. "Don't worry, everyone! I'll do it! No big deal!"

Before anyone could object, she pushed off the wall with more force, sending herself flying out a little farther than before. The wind whipped around her, and for a split second, she felt like she was flying. Then, with a hard thud, she hit the wall again, her fingers gripping the rock like she was born to it.

She grinned as she clung to the cliffside, her chest heaving. See, I'm fine. I can do anything, she thought. "Told you!" she called back over her shoulder.

That's when she heard it. A sharp snap echoed through the air, followed by the chilling clink of metal against rock. Her stomach dropped as she realized what it was. The latch securing her to the safety line had broken. She glanced down, watching in horror as her lifeline slid, uselessly, down the cliff.

"Oh, fuck," she muttered under her breath, her hands clenching the rock. The safety line was gone, and all that was holding her now was her own strength. The cliff stretched endlessly below her, the waves crashing far beneath her feet. No safety net, no crew to save me now.

For a moment, her mind raced. Should she scream? Call for help? Her arms were starting to burn already, her grip slipping slightly with every passing second. The reality of the situation settled in: she was dangling from a cliff with nothing but her own muscles keeping her alive.

But even in the face of danger, Mazey couldn't help the snarky voice in her head. Is

this really worth it? Risking my life for a shot? This better win an award. She tried to suppress the panicked laughter bubbling up inside her.

Her breaths came faster now, but she forced herself to focus. Okay, think. You're not dead yet. She glanced around, looking for the next foothold, the next crevice she could cling to. The director's voice was faint now, the crew still unaware of how serious the situation had gotten.

With a shaky inhale, she shifted her weight, testing her footing on the next ledge. Her palms were slick with sweat, but she didn't have time to hesitate. Her strength was fading fast.

"Just another day at the office," she muttered under her breath, a weak grin pulling at her lips. The absurdity of it all was almost funny if it wasn't so terrifying. Don't look down, Mazey.

She reached out, fingers scrabbling for purchase on the rock above her. Every movement had to be calculated, precise. One wrong move, and it was a long way down. But she wasn't about to let that happen. Not here. Not now.

"Just hold on, Mazey! We've called for help, and they'll be here soon. Try to conserve your energy as much as possible, okay?"

Easier said than done, she thought, her muscles burning with every second that passed. But what choice did she have? Give in? Not a chance. As the adrenaline surged through her, she tightened her grip on the rock, pushing away the panic threatening to overwhelm her. She had faced countless challenges before. This was just another hurdle, and she wasn't about to back down now.

Mazey's determination solidified. She wouldn't just hang there; she'd fight her way back.

With a deep breath, she prepared herself for whatever came next, ready to take on the world, one heartbeat at a time.

2

MCKENNA

McKenna Adams sat on the worn leather couch at the Phoenix Ridge Fire Department, idly flipping through channels. It was a typical Monday, one of those quiet shifts where the biggest excitement was usually the latest ridiculous reality show her fellow firefighters were glued to. Tonight's episode featured extreme sports and overzealous competitors pushing their limits, fittingly absurd for a group that often dealt with the aftermath of real-life disasters. The familiar sounds of laughter and playful banter filled the room, a welcome distraction from the daily grind of their rigorous jobs. McKenna had settled into a comfortable routine, ready to enjoy the calm before the storm.

McKenna had dedicated her life to the Phoenix Ridge Fire Department ever since she graduated from the academy. The fire station felt like a second home to her, filled with the camaraderie and respect she had always craved. Growing up in the area, she had witnessed firsthand the heroic deeds of the firefighters. They had come to her school as guests, showcasing their strength and bravery, leaving an indelible mark on her young mind. She remembered the thrill of watching the firefighters in their bright gear, the way they handled the equipment with ease, and the respect they commanded from everyone around them.

She had always been captivated by their confidence and competence- especially the women on the team. With their muscles flexed and laughter ringing through the air, they embodied a kind of strength McKenna aspired to. It was during those formative years that she realized something profound about herself. She was drawn to women, especially those who could stand tall in a male-dominated field. Maybe that was the

real reason she wanted to become a firefighter: the allure of strength, resilience, and empowerment that came from being part of such an extraordinary team.

As she settled into her role as one of the department's leading firefighters in a now all female team, McKenna found herself embracing the challenges that came with the job. Each alarm that rang through the station sent a thrill of adrenaline coursing through her veins. She relished the rush of responding to emergencies, knowing she was part of something bigger than herself. Yet, even with all the bravery she exhibited on the job, there were moments when she found herself pondering the choices that brought her here.

Just as McKenna reached for her coffee, savoring the rich aroma that wafted through the air, the alarm shrieked, a deafening sound that cut through the warm chatter of her fellow firefighters and shattered the relaxed atmosphere of the firehouse. The sudden blare jolted her upright, her heart racing as the reality of the moment sank in. She felt the familiar rush of adrenaline, a cocktail of excitement and urgency surging through her veins.

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“Movie production crew in trouble at the cliff! Rescue from height!” The voice of her captain Hallie Hunter boomed through the room, urgency lacing her tone. The gravity of the situation set in as the words echoed off the walls, and she could see her colleagues immediately snapping into action. The banter and laughter that had filled the room just moments before were replaced by a sharp focus, each firefighter knowing the drill as they prepared for the unexpected.

McKenna’s mind raced as she absorbed the information. This was more than just another call; it was a chance to prove herself. As the most senior firefighter on shift that day, she felt a profound sense of responsibility wash over her, a weight that pressed heavily on her shoulders. “Let’s move, team! Gear up!” she commanded, her voice steady and authoritative, masking the nerves bubbling beneath the surface. She could feel the intensity of the moment, the palpable tension hanging in the air as her team scrambled to collect their gear. The sound of boots pounding against the floor, the clinking of equipment, and the rustle of jackets being thrown on filled her ears created a symphony of urgency.

As they prepared, the crew exchanged quick jokes to ease the tension, but McKenna’s mind raced through the protocols and strategies she’d practiced countless times. She could already hear the echo of their training: “Every second counts when someone’s life is on the line.”

As they rushed to the scene, McKenna felt the adrenaline sharpening her focus. The quick drive to the cliff was filled with anxious chatter, the crew discussing what they might find and who would prep the equipment. A movie production team? An actress? As the fire truck sped along the winding road, the details were still murky, but one thing was clear: they had a job to do.

As they approached the site, the serene beauty of Phoenix Ridge seemed almost ironic in the face of potential danger. The cliffs loomed ahead, majestic and imposing under the fading light, their shadows stretching like dark fingers toward the ground below. McKenna could already see the growing crowd gathered at the base, a mix of crew members and onlookers. Her stomach tightened.

She parked the truck and leaped out, her boots crunching against the gravel. The scene before her was chaotic. A production crew? Yes, but the urgency in their voices sent a shiver down her spine. She could make out a figure hanging perilously from the cliff—a woman, her hair whipping wildly in the wind.

“Who is it?” McKenna called to one of the production assistants, who was frantically waving his arms.

“That’s Mazey Snow! You need to get her down as fast as possible! She’s holding on, but she isn’t a professional climber! If she falls...” the assistant shouted, panic etched on his face.

McKenna felt her heart drop at the realization. She knew the name, Mazey Snow. She remembered some of her movies. As she looked down again, she recognized the beautiful face tight in concentration and fear. “Don’t worry. We’ll handle it.” She steadied her voice, forcing confidence into her words.

Mazey’s voice floated up to them, teasing yet strained. “Take your time! I’ve got these giant muscles! I can hold on forever!” Her attempt at humor didn’t quite mask the tremor in her voice, but McKenna couldn’t help but admire Mazey’s resilience in the face of danger.

A chuckle broke through the tension, but McKenna couldn’t afford to lose focus. “You look very strong, Mazey,” she called back, the corners of her mouth lifting in a smile. “I’m McKenna, and I’ll be rescuing you in just a few minutes! Don’t go

flexing too hard up there.”

“I promise to save my strength for when you pull me up,” Mazey replied, a hint of flirtation in her tone. McKenna felt a rush of warmth at the banter, the lightness between them serving as a small comfort amid the chaos.

With a plan forming in her mind, McKenna surveyed the cliff. It was steep and jagged, the rocks glistening ominously in the sun, casting dark shadows on the ground below. She understood the risks involved. If she descended too quickly, loose rocks could dislodge, potentially hitting Mazey or herself. This wasn’t just about speed; it was about safety.

“Alright, team,” McKenna said, her voice steady, masking the slight flutter of nerves. “I need two of you to secure the base while I lower myself down. Keep a lookout for any falling debris and alert me if you see anything.”

As she prepared her harness and rope, McKenna could hear the production crew whispering behind her, their anxiety palpable. But her focus remained on Mazey, who was still hanging on bravely, albeit with her grip showing signs of strain. “How’s it going down there?” McKenna called out, taking note of the actress’s tense expression.

“Better days, to be honest,” Mazey replied, her wry smile not quite reaching her eyes. “But I’ve survived worse, like the time I did my own stunts in a rom-com!”

“I can’t imagine,” McKenna shot back, her heart racing as she began her descent. “But if you survive this, I’d say you’ve earned a few action movie roles.”

As she inched down the cliff face, the wind whipped around her, and the sheer drop below was both exhilarating and terrifying. McKenna found her rhythm, each movement calculated and precise, and she admired how Mazey held her composure

despite the perilous situation. The actress was clearly shaken, but her fierce spirit shone through.

Mazey's voice drifted up, light yet strained. "You know, getting rescued by a hot firefighter was not on my list of things I would do today."

McKenna felt her cheeks warm. "I didn't think I'd be rescuing a beautiful movie star today, so I guess we're both doing things we couldn't have imagined," she replied, a smirk playing on her lips. "Just keep those muscles flexed a little longer for me, alright?"

"Yup, of course," Mazey said, with strain in her voice.

McKenna positioned herself carefully on the rocky outcropping. "I'm going to secure you to my emergency harness. It's going to feel a bit tight, but it'll keep you safe." She fished out the emergency gear, her hands moving with practiced precision.

As McKenna looped the straps around Mazey's hips and between her legs, she felt some intensity of connection as Mazey's frightened eyes met her own. The closeness of the act felt almost intimate. It sent a jolt of electricity coursing through her. She felt Mazey's warmth, the way her body shifted slightly under the pressure of the harness. The world around them fell away, and McKenna found herself captivated by the determination etched on Mazey's face. Despite the fear lingering in her eyes, there was a flicker of strength that McKenna admired.

"You're a lot stronger than you look," McKenna remarked, trying to keep the mood light, though her heart raced with an unexpected thrill. "I mean, you're practically a superhero right now."

Mazey looked up, her gaze locking with McKenna's. In that brief moment, everything shifted. The air crackled with unspoken tension, and the weight of their

circumstances seemed to dissolve.

“Superhero? You’re just saying that because I’m dangling off a cliff,” Mazey replied, her voice a mix of bravado and vulnerability. Yet there was something deeper in her tone, an underlying current that resonated between them.

“Maybe,” McKenna teased, her lips curving into a smile. “But I think you’d make a fantastic one in a movie. You’ve got the look for it.” As she tightened the straps, she couldn’t help but admire the way Mazey maintained her composure. The actress was clearly shaken, yet she hid it well behind a veneer of charm and wit.

Mazey returned the smile, a light blush creeping across her cheeks. “Well, if I ever need a stunt double, I know who to call,” she quipped, her playful tone not entirely masking the flicker of fear that danced in her eyes. The way their bodies were so close, the way McKenna could feel the warmth radiating from Mazey, ignited something within her. It was a spark, a pull that was impossible to ignore.

In that suspended moment, as McKenna finished securing the harness, she realized that they were both teetering on the edge, not just of the cliff but of something new and exhilarating. The gravity of their situation was undeniable, yet so was the magnetic connection that pulled them together. McKenna could see the determination in Mazey's eyes, and it sparked a fierce protectiveness within her.

“Just hold on tight, okay?” McKenna said softly, her voice steady yet laced with something deeper. “I won’t let you go.”

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Mazey nodded, her breath hitching slightly as she met McKenna's gaze. "I trust you," she said, her tone sincere. That simple phrase hung in the air between them, heavy with significance, and McKenna felt her heart swell.

With the last clip secured, McKenna's focus sharpened again, but she couldn't shake the warmth radiating from their brief encounter. She felt an undeniable pull, as if the universe had conspired to bring them together in this chaotic moment. And as she prepared to lift Mazey back to safety, she couldn't help but wonder if this encounter would mark the beginning of something more than just a rescue. It felt like the start of a connection that would linger long after the adrenaline faded.

With a surge of determination, McKenna took a deep breath, anchoring herself in the moment, ready to pull them both back to solid ground.

Mazey laughed softly, but it quickly turned into a wince as she adjusted her grip. "You know, if I survive this, I might just consider a career as a firefighter myself."

"Hey, why not? You've got the strength and bravery," McKenna shot back, finally securing the last clips. "Alright, let's do this. On the count of three, we're going to make our way back up. Ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be," Mazey replied, her voice steady despite the situation, a flicker of trust in her gaze.

McKenna radioed up to Kaia Montgomery at the top of the cliff.

"Good to go," she said.

“Roger,” came back Kaia’s singsong voice.

“Just climb behind me. The team will take your weight so it should be easy,” McKenna said to Mazey. Mazey’s blue eyes were wide and clear and looked at her with absolute trust.

With a heave and a tug, McKenna began the ascent, careful to keep her footing as they began the climb back up. The team above was ready, bracing for Mazey’s return. As they neared the top, the cheers of her crew rang out, echoing through the canyon. McKenna felt a surge of pride as she pulled Mazey Snow the movie star safely over the edge.

“Welcome back to solid ground, Mazey,” McKenna said, panting but exhilarated.

Mazey flashed a grateful smile, breathing heavily. “Thanks for saving my life. I owe you one.”

She looked at Mazey, now safely back on solid ground after her perilous hang on the cliff, and couldn't help but marvel at how Mazey managed to maintain her composure. Despite the adrenaline still coursing through her veins, the actress appeared flawless. Mazey's shiny dark hair, tousled yet perfectly styled, framed her face in a way that seemed almost effortless, and her makeup remained untouched, enhancing her striking features even in the aftermath of chaos. It was a surreal contrast, this glamorous Hollywood star who had just escaped danger exuding an air of poise that was almost otherworldly.

But it wasn't just Mazey's appearance that caught McKenna's attention; it was the undeniable spark that ignited within her. There was something electric in the air between them, a palpable tension that sent shivers down McKenna's spine. It was more than just the adrenaline of the rescue; it was a connection she couldn't quite articulate. As their eyes locked, she felt an inexplicable pull toward Mazey, a mix of

admiration and attraction that both thrilled and unsettled her. What was this feeling? Could it be that Mazey felt it too?

McKenna's mind raced with questions. She knew Mazey's public persona well. She was known for dating high-profile men in Hollywood, her romantic life often splashed across tabloids. The actress was portrayed as the quintessential straight starlet, the kind of woman who graced magazine covers and red carpets, always linked with handsome actors. But as McKenna gazed into those expressive eyes, she couldn't shake the nagging feeling that there was more to Mazey than what the media portrayed.

Was it possible that Mazey could be anything other than straight? The thought sent a rush of warmth through McKenna. It felt audacious to even entertain the idea, yet the way Mazey looked at her, so intently, as if she were more than just a rescuer, suggested there was a depth to her that defied the labels typically assigned in Hollywood.

"You don't owe me anything. I was just doing my job," McKenna said, trying to maintain her professional demeanor even as her heart raced.

Mazey tilted her head, a playful glint in her eye. "Do you save actresses hanging off cliffs often??"

"This is my first time," McKenna admitted with a chuckle, a slight blush creeping up her cheeks.

Mazey grinned, her smile infectious. "This is my first time being rescued by a hot firefighter, so today is a day of firsts for both of us. How fun!"

McKenna couldn't help but laugh at the absurdity of it all. "Yeah, that's right. I hope I'll run into you again while you're here. But, you know, maybe in less dangerous

circumstances.”

“Oh, it depends. I might just make cliff climbing my new hobby,” Mazey replied, feigning seriousness as she tossed her hair over her shoulder.

“Well, if you get stuck, I’ll come and rescue you again,” McKenna shot back, a teasing lilt in her voice. “But next time, I’ll bring snacks.”

Mazey raised an eyebrow, clearly intrigued. “Snacks? Now you’re speaking my language! What’s your go-to snack for cliff rescues?”

“Definitely something high-energy. Gotta keep my strength up, you know? Maybe some protein bars, trail mix, or...just a giant bag of chips,” McKenna said, her voice light. “What about you? What’s your rescuee snack of choice?”

“Oh, I’m all about the chocolate,” Mazey confessed, a mischievous smile spreading across her face. “Nothing like a little sugar rush after dangling off a cliff. Do you think chocolate’s a valid cliff-climbing fuel?”

“Absolutely! If it helps you get through a rescue, I’d say it’s essential,” McKenna replied, feeling the warmth of their banter draw her closer to Mazey.

“You might be onto something,” Mazey mused, her eyes sparkling. “If I have to hang off a cliff again, I’ll make sure to pack a stash of chocolate.”

“Just promise me one thing,” McKenna said, her tone turning mock-serious. “If you do, I want to be your official cliff-rescue partner. I’ll bring the snacks; you bring the charm.”

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Mazey laughed, a melodious sound that filled the air between them. “Deal! But only if you promise not to be too heroic. I’d like to keep my makeup intact next time.”

McKenna raised her hands in mock surrender. “No heroics, I promise. Just snacks and good company.”

“Sounds like a perfect plan,” Mazey said, her gaze lingering on McKenna a little longer than necessary. “You know, it’s not every day you meet someone who makes a rescue feel like an adventure.”

“I could say the same about you,” McKenna replied, her heart fluttering at the sincerity in Mazey’s clear blue eyes. “You handled that situation like a champ. I was impressed.”

“Thanks! I’ve always had a flair for drama,” Mazey said with a wink. “But I have to admit, I felt a bit of panic creeping in. You were my calm in the storm.”

“Just doing my job,” McKenna replied, trying to sound modest, but the warmth spreading through her made it hard to hide her smile.

Mazey stepped a little closer, lowering her voice as if sharing a secret. “Well, you’ve definitely got my attention. Maybe we can turn this rescue into a series of adventures? You know, where I don’t hang off cliffs.”

“I’d like that,” McKenna said, her heart racing again. The chemistry between them crackled like electricity, and she felt a connection she couldn’t ignore. “Just let me know when you’re free, and I’ll show you around Phoenix Ridge.”

Just then, Mazey was called over by the director.

“Well, thank you again. Bye.” She walked away.

As McKenna watched Mazey walk away, she thought about how she had always played it safe, keeping her emotions tucked away behind a wall of professionalism. But now, the thought of letting Mazey in sent butterflies fluttering in her stomach.

She let out a shaky breath, her resolve hardening. There had to be something more, some thread of connection between them that went beyond a momentary rescue. If there was even a chance, she owed it to herself—and Mazey—to find out.

McKenna walked toward the truck. Her thoughts continued to swirl, but now they were tinged with hope. She glanced over her shoulder, half-expecting to see Mazey waiting for her, a smile playing on her lips. The possibilities danced in her mind, and for the first time, McKenna felt excited about what lay ahead.

3

MAZEY

Mazey was still feeling the buzz of adrenaline coursing through her veins. Her heart hadn't quite slowed down, and her mind was still replaying the moment she was hoisted up from the ledge. She had only been able to briefly talk to her rescuer, McKenna, a calm, collected firefighter with an undeniable presence. There was something about her that had caught Mazey off guard. A subtle connection, a flicker of something beneath the surface. But she pushed it aside, rationalizing it as a side effect of the intense situation. After all, she had been dangling over the edge of a cliff just moments ago, and the high emotions could be making her read into things.

Before she could dwell on it further, the director called her over. "Mazey, can we talk

for a second?" His voice carried over the noise of the bustling crew, and Mazey noticed the concern etched into his features. The entire production team was still buzzing with activity, people rushing around to reset the scene, cameras being adjusted, grips hauling equipment back into place. But the director's focus was solely on her, his face lined with worry.

She made her way over, tucking a few stray strands of hair behind her ear, trying to appear as composed as possible despite everything that had just happened. She could still feel the residual tremor in her hands, though, and as she reached him, she tried to shake off the remnants of fear that clung to her like a second skin.

"Oh my god. Are you okay? I'm so sorry. I should have never pushed you that hard."

Mazey gave him a reassuring smile, brushing off his worry like the professional she was. "It's no problem. Isn't it good to have a little danger? Isn't that what Lila Hart would be used to?"

Lila Hart was the character she had been cast to play, a highly skilled rescue specialist and former Navy officer who led a team of elite search-and-rescue specialists into the world's most dangerous locations. In a way, Mazey had to channel Lila's fearlessness today, more than she ever thought she would need to.

The director gave her a weak smile, shaking his head. "Yeah, but you're not Lila Hart in real life. I don't want to see you hanging from cliffs again, okay?"

Mazey chuckled, though her mind wandered back to McKenna the firefighter. No, I'm not Lila Hart. But McKenna...she is. The strength, the control, the calm under pressure. McKenna embodied the very traits that her character was supposed to have. But there was something more to it. Something deeper. Lila Hart was tough, unflinching in the face of danger, but underneath that exterior, she struggled with vulnerability. Mazey felt a strange kinship to that. Maybe it was why she had been

drawn to the role in the first place. She wasn't so different from Lila, after all.

Mazey thought that maybe, just maybe, playing this character would help her learn how to become more open. Lila's story wasn't just about being a hero; it was about learning to trust others, to admit when she needed help, a lesson Mazey knew she needed to take to heart.

Something about McKenna drew Mazey in. McKenna had stepped in when things got dangerous, but it was more than her competence that Mazey couldn't stop thinking about. It was the way McKenna had looked at her, with a mix of admiration and...something else, something that felt like a pull. Was it real? Or was she just projecting the things she wished for into the situation?

Mazey realized she'd been zoning out, lost in thought. The director was still talking, but his voice had faded into the background. Her mind was stuck on McKenna. The firefighter's confidence, her calm strength in the face of chaos. It had left an impression, one that went deeper than just gratitude for saving her life. There had been a spark, a connection—or at least she thought there had been.

"Okay, Mazey," the director said, pulling her back into the moment. "We'll get the rest of the shoot rescheduled, but take it easy for the rest of the day, alright? You've earned it."

"Thank you. Would I be able to thank the firefighter personally, actually?" Mazey asked, her voice steady despite the lingering adrenaline still pulsing through her veins.

The director raised an eyebrow, glancing back at her. "Didn't you thank her already?"

"Yeah, but I feel like if someone's going to save my life, I should thank them while there aren't a million people watching as well," she replied, her tone firm. It felt

important to her, more than just a simple acknowledgment. This was a moment that deserved intimacy, a chance to convey genuine gratitude away from the spotlight.

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The director regarded her for a moment then nodded. “Yeah, that makes sense. I’ll send someone to bring her to your trailer.”

“Thank you.” Mazey offered a smile, her mind already racing ahead to the conversation she hoped to have with McKenna.

As she settled into her trailer, the buzz of the set faded into the background. The cozy confines of the small space felt oddly soothing, a stark contrast to the chaos outside. She waited, fidgeting slightly with the hem of her shirt, her thoughts swirling around the earlier encounter. There had been a spark, something electric in their brief exchange that she couldn’t quite shake off.

She replayed their banter in her mind, the teasing remarks, the genuine laughter, and the undeniable chemistry that crackled between them. It felt so easy, so refreshing. Mazey couldn’t remember the last time she had connected with someone like that. The layers of pressure she often felt in her interactions with others, especially in Hollywood, were stripped away in McKenna’s presence.

The actress wanted to delve deeper into that connection, to explore what had ignited within her. But more than that, she wanted McKenna to know her, really know her. Not just the actress who played a part on screen, but the person behind the façade. She needed McKenna to see her as genuine, as someone who wasn’t just playing a role for the cameras.

The anticipation of their conversation filled the air with tension. What would they talk about? What would she ask? Mazey had so many questions bubbling inside her, not just about McKenna’s life as a firefighter, but also about how she managed to

remain so composed during the rescue. She felt a magnetic pull toward her, a desire to understand not just the bravery that had saved her life, but the heart behind that bravery.

The sound of footsteps outside her trailer broke her thoughts, and she held her breath, her heart racing at the prospect of seeing McKenna again. When the door finally swung open, her breath caught in her throat. There was McKenna, looking as confident and composed as ever, her shirt still slightly damp from the exertion of the rescue but her demeanor radiating strength.

“Hey,” McKenna greeted, a small smile playing on her lips. “I hope I’m not interrupting anything.”

Mazey shook her head, her voice a little breathless. “Not at all. I was just...waiting for you.”

“Good,” McKenna replied, stepping inside and closing the door behind her.

“I just wanted to thank you. you know, without everyone around,” Mazey said, her tone softening as she met McKenna’s gaze.

“Oh, really? You didn’t have to,” McKenna replied, crossing her arms, a hint of surprise in her voice.

“Yeah, I know I didn’t have to, but I wanted to. I guess I wanted to know a little more about my rescuer. I mean, I am acting as one in the show.” There was a nervous energy in her words, a slight flutter in her chest that she couldn’t quite ignore.

“Ah, I see. So you just wanted me to help you with your acting, huh?” McKenna joked, a playful grin spreading across her face.

Mazey chuckled, but her expression quickly turned serious. “No, no. I am really grateful. For a while, I wasn’t sure if I could hold on. I just worry about burdening others.”” Her vulnerability laid bare, she felt a mixture of relief and apprehension, hoping McKenna wouldn’t dismiss her feelings.

“In those kinds of situations, you really shouldn’t,” McKenna said gently, leaning in a little closer. “I get it. But it’s our job to take care of people. You’re not a burden for being scared or for needing help.”

Mazey bit her lip, pondering McKenna's words. “I don’t know. I guess the way I was raised, it’s better to die than show weakness.” The weight of that statement hung heavy in the air.

“I think being vulnerable is brave, though,” McKenna replied, her voice steady, reassuring. Her beautiful brown eyes were full of care. Her chestnut hair messy and in a ponytail. “It takes a lot of courage to admit when you need help or when you’re afraid. You don’t have to carry that alone.”

“Well, anyway,” Mazey said, trying to steer the conversation, “tell me more about yourself.”

“Okay, well, tell me more about the character you’re playing. Then I can help you with things that I actually have experience with,” McKenna offered, her eyes sparkling with curiosity.

“I’m kind of not supposed to talk with anyone about this character or show, though. I signed an NDA.” Mazey grinned, her playful spirit returning.

“You did?” McKenna raised an eyebrow.

“Nah, I’m just kidding.” Mazey laughed, feeling the tension ease a little.

“Okay, then tell me. Start with the name, then tell me the rest.”

“Well, the character’s name is Lila.”

“Oooh, Lila. What a strong name,” McKenna remarked, leaning in with genuine interest.

“Yeah, well, Lila is actually a highly skilled rescue specialist and former Navy officer who now leads an elite international rescue team,” Mazey explained, excitement lighting up her face as she spoke about her character.

“Wow, a Navy officer?” McKenna's admiration was evident, her eyes wide.

“Yup, that’s right. Basically, she’s the kind of woman who stays cool under pressure while saving the lives of people. Kindof like what you just did, right?” Mazey teased, a smirk dancing on her lips.

“Oh, so you thought I was cool, huh?” McKenna's playful challenge made Mazey's heart race.

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“Yeah, you were pretty cool, I guess.”

“You guess?” McKenna’s tone feigned disappointment, but her eyes sparkled with humor.

“Okay, yes. Yes, you were very cool,” Mazey conceded, raising her hands in mock surrender.

“Thank you. Continue, please,” McKenna prompted, crossing her arms again, this time leaning forward with genuine interest.

“She’s intensely focused on her job, often sacrificing personal relationships in the process. Does this sound like you at all?” Mazey asked, a teasing lilt in her voice.

“Okay, maybe this character does have a few similarities to me. Does your director know me?” McKenna replied, a teasing smirk on her lips.

“That’s so interesting. I’ll have to ask him!” Mazey laughed, feeling the connection deepening between them.

“Is that all?” McKenna pressed, eager to know more.

“She’s also a bit of a complicated character. She’s tough, resourceful, and driven by her need to make up for her past. But, you know, she’s also confident, skilled at negotiations, and struggles with vulnerability.”

“Her past? What happened in her past?” McKenna asked.

“Oh, right! That’s the most interesting part about her, actually. There was an incident in the Navy where a mission went wrong, causing the death of one of her comrades. This tragedy is what haunts her, and the show explores her struggles with guilt, responsibility, and the burden of being a hero.”

“Wow, that’s quite deep, actually. Such a tragic backstory. I’m glad that I can’t say that’s the reason I’m a firefighter,” McKenna replied, a soft smile playing on her lips.

“I’m glad that part you can’t relate to at least,” Mazey replied, her heart racing as she felt a flicker of attraction in McKenna’s warm gaze.

The warmth of their conversation wrapped around them like a cozy blanket, and Mazey couldn’t help but wonder about the layers beneath McKenna’s tough exterior. She wanted to know more about the woman who had just saved her life and who was suddenly captivating her in ways she had never expected.

Was it just her imagination, or was there an undeniable chemistry between them? The way McKenna spoke, the intensity in her eyes, it was captivating. Mazey couldn’t recall ever feeling this drawn to someone, especially not a woman. It was exhilarating yet terrifying, like standing on the edge of a cliff with a swirling abyss below.

She stole a glance at McKenna, who was leaning closer, genuinely interested in what she was saying. It was disarming. How could this woman with her strong, steady presence have such an effect on her? Mazey’s mind raced, questioning everything she had thought about her own feelings. Maybe it was the adrenaline from the rescue or perhaps the intense connection forged in such an extraordinary moment.

What if she was attracted to McKenna? The thought sent a shiver down her spine, igniting a curiosity she hadn’t expected. It was confusing, yet there was something liberating about exploring this newfound attraction. Maybe she could learn from Lila, her character, about being brave enough to confront her feelings.

“Is that all?” McKenna's voice pulled her back, and Mazey realized she had been lost in her thoughts. She needed to focus, to stay present in this moment that felt so real. But could she dare to entertain the idea of something more with someone like McKenna? The possibilities seemed endless, and for the firsttime in a long time, Mazey felt a thrill of excitement at the prospect.

Before she could respond, McKenna's walkie-talkie crackled to life, the sound of firefighter code filling the air. The momentary shift in energy was palpable as McKenna's expression shifted from warmth to focus, her professional demeanor taking over.

“I'm so sorry, but I have to leave,” McKenna said, glancing toward the door, her voice tinged with regret. “It was really great to talk to you. I hope to see you again.”

With that, she turned and walked away, her presence lingering in the air like a gentle breeze. Mazey felt a bittersweet pang in her chest as she watched McKenna leave, her heart racing with a mix of hope and longing.

“I hope so too,” she whispered to herself, her gaze fixed on the door long after McKenna had left. She really hoped that they would meet again. As she sat in her trailer, the echoes of their conversation played in her mind, stirring a whirlwind of emotions she had never expected to feel.

4

MCKENNA

McKenna wished she hadn't had to leave, that she could linger in the moment with Mazey in her trailer just a bit longer. The fire truck sirens blared as they sped toward another emergency, but all McKenna could think about was how she longed for a chance to talk to Mazey again. She replayed their conversation in her mind, trying to

pinpoint exactly what had drawn her in. The way Mazey's lovely blue eyes lit up when she spoke, the subtle way she leaned closer, as if sharing a secret.

With every shared joke and curious glance, Mazey had revealed layers of herself that McKenna hadn't expected. The actress was much more down-to-earth than she had imagined. Beyond the glamorous Hollywood façade, there was a warmth and authenticity to Mazey that drew McKenna in.

Mazey's laughter still echoed in her mind, a melody that brightened the haze of her day. It was as if their conversation could stretch into infinity, filling her with an exhilarating sense of possibility. McKenna found herself captivated by the way Mazey spoke about her character, Lila, with such passion and depth. It was as if Lila reflected parts of Mazey that the world rarely saw.

After finding out that the call was just a false alarm, McKenna wrapped up her shift, but she couldn't shake the thoughts of Mazey Snow from her mind. Just breathe. It was just a chat, she told herself, trying to dispel the disquieting feelings swirling within her. But deep down, she knew it had been so much more.

She found herself longing to know more about Mazey. The stories behind her laughter, the motivations driving her roles, and the dreams she harbored beyond the glitz and glamour of Hollywood. What lay beneath that confident exterior? McKenna couldn't help but wonder.

The conversation wasn't merely about gratitude for saving her life; it was about a connection that felt profound and genuine. It was a connection McKenna realized she desperately craved, one that stirred something deep within her that she hadn't felt in a long time. With every passing moment, the need to explore this newfound bond grew stronger, pulling her thoughts back to Mazey and the warmth of their conversation.

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She couldn't shake the feeling that this was more than just a fleeting encounter, but rather the beginning of something unexpected and beautiful.

She definitely did not want to leave that conversation, especially for a damn false alarm. Of all the times to be called away, she thought, frustration bubbling beneath the surface. Why now? The way Mazey spoke, the warmth in her voice. It had been so nice to feel such a genuine connection with someone, so unexpected.

But what if it was just a fluke? She desperately wanted to know if Mazey was feeling it too. The thought made her heart race in a way she hadn't felt in years. It was exhilarating and terrifying at the same time. But then again, Mazey was straight, she reminded herself, trying to ground herself in reality.

There was one person she trusted to help her navigate these feelings: her good friend Ember Thompson. The daughter of the legendary Phoenix Ridge Fire Chief Becky Thompson, Ember was a force of nature in her own right. Though she had previously worked at the fire station, (and these days did the occasional shift) she'd ventured out to open her own muscle car garage, a dream she had nurtured for years. Ember was the embodiment of adventure: fearless, driven, and unapologetically herself.

In the past, Ember had been a thrill-seeker, but everything shifted when she met her now-wife, Dr. Josephine Mars, the head of Phoenix Ridge Hospital. McKenna had seen Ember transition from the wild, rebellious spirit she once was to a devoted partner and mother. She never envisioned Ember settling down, but now they had a seven-year-old daughter who brought joy to their lives and grounded Ember in ways McKenna found admirable.

Even though Ember had embraced a safer lifestyle since becoming a mother, she never lost her adventurous spirit. She still encouraged McKenna to explore, to date, and to live life fully, often pushing her toward experiences that McKenna hesitated to pursue. Perhaps Ember felt the longing for adventure vicariously through McKenna, or maybe she simply understood the importance of embracing life's possibilities.

Regardless, McKenna appreciated Ember's straightforwardness. She wouldn't sugarcoat anything; if anyone could give her the unfiltered truth about her feelings for Mazey, it would be Ember. With determination, McKenna decided it was time to have that conversation. She just hoped that whatever Ember had to say wouldn't complicate things further. Yet she couldn't help but feel a flicker of excitement at the thought of discussing it with someone who would understand.

She hopped in her truck, the familiar rumble of the engine providing a comforting backdrop as she drove over to Ember's garage. The sun hung low in the sky, casting a warm glow over the Phoenix Ridge landscape, and McKenna felt a surge of anticipation. What am I even doing? Am I really about to spill my feelings to Ember?

Parking her old truck in the lot, she stepped out and made her way inside, the scent of motor oil and gasoline wrapping around her. This is just a friendly visit, she reassured herself, trying to convince herself she couldn't have a crush on someone she barely knew.

Ember was sprawled beneath a classic Mustang, her hands buried in the engine compartment. "Hello!" McKenna called out, her voice echoing off the concrete walls.

"I could hear your old truck from a mile away; you don't need to yell for me," Ember shot back, her tone playful. She rolled herself out from under the car, a smudge of grease marking her cheek, and grabbed a towel to wipe her hands, leaving streaks of oil across her apron.

Why do I feel so nervous? It's just Ember.

"What brings you here, Adams?" Ember asked, arching an eyebrow as she leaned against the car, crossing her arms.

"I went on a rescue today," McKenna replied, a hint of pride swelling in her chest. I need to focus on the rescue. Talk about the adrenaline, not Mazey.

"Oh! How was it? What did you do? Tell me all about it!" Ember's eyes sparkled with excitement.

"It was out by the cliff. There was some production team there for a new Netflix show," McKenna explained, feeling the adrenaline of the day rush back. "For Netflix? Fuck, that's so cool! Who was there? Anyone famous? Wait, was there a fire?"

"No, actually, one of the actresses got stuck out on the cliff. Her damn safety harness and rig ended up snapping," McKenna said, shaking her head as the details replayed in her mind.

"Holy fuck! She did well to stay on the cliff till you got there. Who was it?" Ember's eyes widened in disbelief, her body tensing with concern.

"Have you heard of Mazey Snow?" McKenna asked, watching Ember's reaction closely.

"Of course! Everyone knows Mazey Snow. I mean, I feel like she has the spirit to hold herself up there, but I didn't think she had the strength. God damn, it must be all that CrossFit shit celebrities are doing these days. Maybe I should join," Ember said, flexing her muscles and looking at them with a mock frown, as if trying to gauge her own strength.

“Hey, you’re plenty strong already,” McKenna reassured, chuckling. “But yeah, she was incredible. It’s wild how composed she was, even while dangling off a cliff.” God, she couldn’t stop thinking about her. Was this what a crush felt like?

Ember leaned in, intrigued. “What was she like? Did you get to talk to her?”

“Yeah, actually.” Her mind drifted back to their conversation. “She was a lot more down-to-earth than I expected. We hit it off, you know? I mean, she’s an actress, but she felt...real. It was refreshing.”

“Wait a minute,” Ember said, her expression shifting to one of playful suspicion. “Are you telling me you’ve got a crush on Mazey Snow? Because if you are, I’m going to have to get you a poster of her to hang in your bedroom.”

“Ha, ha. Very funny,” McKenna replied, rolling her eyes but unable to suppress a smile.

“No, but seriously. If you’re really interested in her, why not just go for it? What do you have to lose?” Ember leaned back against the workbench, arms crossed, an eyebrow raised in challenge.

“Yeah, that’s easy for someone who’s married to say,” McKenna shot back, trying to mask the flutter of nerves in her stomach. She wasn’t entirely convinced by her own dismissal.

“How do you think I was able to get married? By not shooting my shot? I don’t think so.” Ember’s eyes sparkled, and McKenna couldn’t help but admire her friend’s unwavering confidence.

“Okay, you’re right,” she conceded, sighing deeply. It was frustrating, this swirling mix of feelings for Mazey. It was new territory, and the thought of crossing that line

filled her with both excitement and dread.

“Hey, let’s head inside. I need some coffee if I’m going to keep working on this thing,” Ember said, gesturing toward the car.

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“Alright. I should be sleeping, but I guess I could drink some coffee with you,” McKenna replied, trailing behind her as they walked inside.

“Do you have work tomorrow?” Ember asked, flicking on the coffee maker.

“No, but—” McKenna began, feeling the pull of responsibility tugging at her.

“Ah, you don’t work tomorrow, so shut up.” Ember laughed, pouring steaming coffee into two mugs.

“Okay, okay! You win,” McKenna said, surrendering to the moment. McKenna followed Ember into the kitchen, the warm scent of brewing coffee filling the room. Ember grabbed two mugs from the cabinet, pouring hot coffee into each.

“You sure you don’t need something stronger?” Ember teased, offering McKenna a raised eyebrow as she set the mug in front of her.

McKenna shook her head. “Yup. I’m sure. Coffee will do just fine.”

Ember shrugged. “Suit yourself.”

They sat at the small table, the silence comfortable but filled with unspoken thoughts. Ember finally broke it.

“So, Mazey Snow, she’s known for being straight, right? Only ever with those Hollywood big shots.”

“That’s exactly what I’ve been thinking,” McKenna admitted, stirring her coffee absentmindedly. “I can’t tell if I’m just making up these feelings in my head or if she was actually giving me some kind of vibe.”

“Why overthink it? Just because someone’s been with men doesn’t mean they’re not into women. For all you know, she’s been seeing women on the down-low for years. Hollywood’s not exactly kind to lesbians.”

McKenna sighed, a mix of frustration and hope bubbling inside her. “Yeah, you’re probably right.”

Ember leaned back in her chair, a small smile tugging at her lips. “Remember my ex, Ashley? Well obviously it didn’t work out, but did I ever tell you what it was like before we got together?”

“No, you haven’t,” McKenna said, suddenly curious.

“Well, when I first met her, she didn’t even know she was into women,” Ember confessed, her eyes soft with memory.

McKenna’s eyebrows shot up. “Really?”

“Yup. I had no idea what was going on in her head. All I knew was that I was attracted to her, and I couldn’t shake it.”

“You weren’t put off by the uncertainty?”

Ember chuckled softly. “Back then? No way. I wasn’t about to let a little uncertainty stop me from something I wanted. I just had to be patient and give her time to figure things out.”

McKenna nodded, the tension in her chest easing slightly. “Did you ever worry that your feelings weren’t mutual? That she didn’t want the same thing?”

“Of course I did. But you’ve got to start with friendship and expect nothing. If it’s meant to happen, it’ll happen.”

McKenna stared down at her coffee, swirling the liquid in her cup as Ember’s words sank in. The uncertainty gnawed at her, but Ember’s story had her thinking. Could she really make an impression on Mazey in such a short time?

“But I’m not sure I have the same amount of time that you did. I mean, Mazey’s only here to film for her show, and once she’s done, she’s gone.”

Ember tilted her head, a small smile playing on her lips. “Then you’ve got to impress her before she leaves. You’d be surprised how much can happen in a short time.”

McKenna chuckled, shaking her head. “No pressure then.”

Ember laughed softly before leaning back in her chair. “You know, with Josephine, we just had a one night stand. That was where it started- now look at us. When there is a connection, there’s a connection.”

“I remember hearing about that. Wasn’t that pretty intense?”

“Not as intense as you’d think,” Ember said, grinning. “But it was when the next time we met, my mom was there and it turned out they were best friends and I had no idea! Anyway, then we fucked in my hospital room and nearly got caught.”

McKenna blinked in surprise. “Josephine? No way! She’s so calculated and safe. I never would’ve imagined that.”

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“Yeah, she is for sure... but she also has a wild streak, that’s for sure. ”

“So what happened?” McKenna asked, her curiosity piqued.

“Well, my mom eventually caught us and she was MAD! But, eventually it all calmed down and we lived happily ever after! So, it is possible!”

McKenna laughed. “You are crazy. But, I kind of like your style!”

“Hey, it worked out in the end,” Ember said, shrugging. “Now look at us. She’s still running the hospital, I run a muscle car garage, and we’ve got a perfect daughter. I wouldn’t trade it for anything. But none of that would’ve happened if I didn’t have patience. Who knows what my life would’ve looked like if I hadn’t taken the time to let things unfold.”

McKenna took a slow sip of her coffee, thinking about Mazey and the limited time they had. “It’s just she’s so different from anyone I’ve ever liked before. I don’t want to mess it up.”

Ember smiled, her voice soft but firm. “You won’t. Just be yourself, McKenna. If there’s something real between you and Mazey, it’ll find its way.”

McKenna nodded, feeling a small spark of hope flare in her chest. She could make this work. Maybe she didn’t have all the time in the world, but she had enough to show Mazey who she really was, to make her see there was something worth holding onto.

“Thanks, Ember,” she said, setting down her empty cup. “I needed this talk.”

“Anytime,” Ember said, standing up and clapping McKenna on the shoulder. “Now go get some rest. You’ve got a Hollywood star to impress.”

McKenna smiled, a mix of nerves and excitement swirling inside her as she stood. She didn’t know when she would see Mazey next, but she knew that she’d just have to let whatever might happen happen.

5

MAZEY

It had already been a couple days, but Mazey couldn’t stop thinking about McKenna. The way she felt so secure when McKenna had saved her from the cliff, the calm strength in her touch, the easy flow of their conversation afterward—it lingered in her mind, almost obsessively. She couldn’t figure it out. Sure, McKenna had rescued her, and yeah, they’d had a great talk, but there was something more to it, something deeper that Mazey couldn’t shake.

Was it just admiration? Or was it something more?

This feeling...it was familiar, like the admiration she’d felt for people she looked up to, but much stronger. And the strangest part? It was for a woman. She wasn’t used to this. It wasn’t the way she had felt around men before, the fleeting crushes, the predictable interest. This was something that rooted itself in her, demanding attention.

She needed to explore it, but carefully. Mazey wasn’t the type to rush into anything, especially not with the spotlight constantly on her. The last thing she needed was some media frenzy over whatever this was she was feeling. If the paparazzi even got a whiff of her spending time alone with a woman, especially one like McKenna who

gave off serious lesbian vibes, it'd be all over the tabloids in seconds, spun into something she wasn't ready to handle.

She could probably play it off if anyone asked and claim it was just her way of getting deeper into her character for the show. That would work, right? But the more she thought about it, the less she wanted to lie. This wasn't about acting. This was about something personal, something she wasn't even sure she wanted to admit to herself.

No one from production could know. Mazey had always been good at keeping secrets. She'd navigated Hollywood's harsh scrutiny for years, dodging rumors and scandals, always in control of her image. But this...this felt different.

She didn't want anyone assuming what she was feeling, not when she hadn't even figured it out herself. For now, she'd keep it buried, try to focus on the work, and hope it would pass. But every time she closed her eyes, McKenna's face flashed in her mind, the memory of her touch pulling Mazey deeper into confusion.

And maybe, just maybe, she didn't want it to go away.

She paced around her trailer, trying to shake off the thoughts of McKenna, but it was no use. The more she tried to push them away, the stronger they came back. Maybe it was because McKenna had saved her. Maybe it was the way they'd connected so effortlessly during their conversation. But no matter how much Mazey tried to dismiss it, the truth was there, nagging at her: this was more than admiration.

She needed to clear her head, maybe get some distance. But no amount of distractions seemed to help. Her mind kept wandering back to McKenna, her easy smile, the way she'd made Mazey feel safe in a way no one ever had. She felt torn between curiosity and fear. What did it mean? What did McKenna mean to her?

Mazey glanced at the clock. She had a few hours before the next shoot, but sitting around wasn't doing her any favors. She needed to do something, anything. Her feet carried her toward the door before she realized what she was doing.

Before she could second-guess herself, she grabbed her jacket and left her trailer. There was only one place she could think to go.

The fire station.

Maybe seeing McKenna in her element where she thrived would help her make sense of everything. If nothing else, it might ease her mind to just talk things out or maybe even get a better grasp on the connection she felt. She had to figure it out one way or another.

As she stepped outside, the crisp air filled her lungs, and with every step toward the station, Mazey's pulse quickened. She wasn't sure what she expected to find there, but she knew she had to go.

She made her way over to the fire station. She realized she hadn't even checked to see if McKenna would be working that day. Hopefully if she was, it wouldn't be an intrusion that she would be coming to see her. She was so focused on her own feelings she didn't even stop to think if McKenna even wanted to see her.

It was too late for that. She was already driving herself over to the station. If McKenna wasn't there, that meant that it wasn't meant for them to see each other, she thought to herself. When she arrived, she parked and gave herself a minute to compose herself.

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As she walked in, someone called out to her.

“Hey, stranger. What brings you here? Another apology?” McKenna’s voice cut through the air, playful but with that strong, no-nonsense undertone she had.

Mazey turned, trying to suppress the sudden flutter in her chest at seeing McKenna again. “Hello again,” she replied, offering a smile she hoped didn’t betray her nerves. “We didn’t get to finish our conversation last time. You know, I really need to get to know my character better if I’m going to make these rescues realistic.”

McKenna raised a brow, her lips quirking into a smile. “Yeah, of course. You’re right, last time was cut short.” Her tone was casual, but Mazey could sense there was something behind her deep brown eyes, curiosity, maybe, or something more.

“So, did you end up rescuing someone from a near-tragic accident? Tell me all about it.” Mazey leaned against the doorframe, trying to match McKenna’s ease.

McKenna chuckled, shaking her head. “Oh, it was crazy. I thought I was going to die. Had to jump out before the building collapsed.”

Her expression was so serious that for a second, Mazey believed her.

“What?” Mazey’s eyes widened, her heart skipping a beat. “Oh my god, I’m so glad you’re okay. I-I’m sorry for making a joke about it earlier.”

McKenna burst out laughing, her deep, hearty chuckle echoing through the fire station. “I’m messing with you. It was a false alarm.”

Mazey's mouth fell open. "Wow. You're supposed to be someone who's truthful and reliable!"

"Hey, I can joke around too!" McKenna shot back, crossing her arms and grinning at her.

Mazey shook her head, laughing despite herself. "You got me. Alright, alright, you win this round." She paused, then her smile turned mischievous. "But this time, I want some demonstrations."

"Demonstrations?" McKenna tilted her head, a twinkle in her eye. "Alright. How about we get you geared up, and I'll show you a few things?"

Mazey's stomach fluttered with a mix of excitement and nerves. "That sounds perfect."

McKenna disappeared for a moment, then returned with a heavy set of firefighting gear. She handed it to Mazey, who immediately felt the weight of it.

"You think you can put this on yourself?" McKenna asked, her tone teasing but kind.

Mazey smirked. "Yeah, I'm a big girl. I got this."

She started with the pants and boots, and she nearly toppled over trying to step into them. McKenna watched with a raised eyebrow, clearly holding back laughter.

Mazey pulled at the jacket, trying to get it over her head without unzipping it first. After a solid minute of wriggling, she huffed in frustration, realizing she was hopelessly stuck.

"Uh, I think I might need some help," she muttered, muffled beneath the bulky fabric.

McKenna tried and failed to hide her amusement as she stepped forward. “Did you try to put this on without unzipping it?” she asked, shaking her head but smiling.

Mazey’s face flushed with embarrassment. “Maybe...”

McKenna let out a soft laugh, stepping closer. “Alright, hold still. Is it okay if I unzip this?”

Mazey nodded. “Yeah, I’ve got clothes on underneath.”

“Good to know.” McKenna knelt slightly to unzip the gear, her hands brushing against Mazey’s sides. “Alright, now grab onto my arms so I can help you out of this mess.”

Mazey’s hands found McKenna’s forearms, gripping them tightly. Her fingers brushed against the firm muscle, and for a moment, she was struck by how strong McKenna felt under her touch. It sent a small jolt through her, something electric.

“Lift up your arms,” McKenna instructed softly, her voice low.

Mazey did as she was told, and McKenna gently slid the jacket onto her properly. But the proximity, how close they were, how she could smell the faint scent of McKenna’s skin, mixed with the musk of smoke and sweat, made her dizzy. And even after the gear was settled, she was still holding onto McKenna’s arms, their faces just inches apart.

Without thinking, without planning it, Mazey leaned in. The kiss was long and deep, her lips pressing against McKenna’s with a kind of urgency that surprised even her. The world around them seemed to melt away. For a moment, Mazey forgot where they were, who they were, everything except the feeling of McKenna’s lips on hers, the rush of heat that spread through her entire body.

It wasn't just a kiss. It was a revelation, an unraveling of everything Mazey thought she knew about herself. She had kissed people before plenty of times, but never like this. There was a hunger in it, a desperate need to be closer, to hold on to this moment for as long as she could. Her heart pounded, her pulse quickening as she deepened the kiss, her hands instinctively finding their way to McKenna's shoulders. They were strong, solid beneath her fingertips, grounding her as the world spun around them.

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McKenna responded, her lips moving against Mazey's with equal intensity. The warmth of her breath sent a shiver down Mazey's spine. McKenna's hands hovered at her waist, hesitant but firm, like she was torn between pulling her closer and holding herself back. But then, as if something clicked between them, McKenna's grip tightened, drawing Mazey in until there was no space left between them. The connection was magnetic, their bodies drawn together like two pieces of a puzzle finally fitting into place.

Mazey felt herself melting into McKenna, her knees weakening, her mind buzzing with sensations she had never felt before. Her senses were overwhelmed, the softness of McKenna's lips, the faint taste of mint lingering on them, the warmth of her skin as their bodies pressed together. Time seemed to stretch, each second marked only by the thudding of her heart and the quiet hitch in her breath.

The kiss deepened even further, and Mazey felt like she was losing herself in it. She was vaguely aware of the weight of the fire gear she was still wearing, the bulky fabric making it harder to feel McKenna as fully as she wanted. And the faint scent of smoke that clung to the fabric and perhaps also to McKenna's hair. But none of that mattered. All she could focus on was McKenna, on the way her lips moved, the subtle gasp she made as Mazey shifted closer, the gentle but undeniable force of their shared desire.

Mazey's head spun, her thoughts spiraling into a chaotic mix of wonder, fear, and excitement. She wasn't used to this, to feeling so out of control, so swept up in the heat of the moment. But with McKenna, she didn't want to be in control. She wanted to let go, to surrender to whatever this was between them, even if she didn't fully understand it yet.

Then, just as quickly as it had started, it was over. Mazey pulled back, her heart racing, panic flooding her veins. What did she just do?

McKenna blinked, her expression a mixture of surprise and something unreadable. But she didn't pull away, didn't flinch. Still, she straightened herself, returning to her professional demeanor, though Mazey could sense the slight shift in her posture.

Mazey, trying to keep her composure, immediately pretended nothing had happened. "Alright, uh...so, what'snext?" Her voice was breathy, her heart still thudding in her chest.

McKenna cleared her throat, nodding slightly as she moved toward the equipment rack. "Next, I'll show you how to use the safety equipment."

The rest of the time went by in a blur. McKenna went through the motions, explaining the gear, how to handle certain emergencies, and what to do in high-pressure situations. But Mazey wasn't really listening. She nodded in all the right places, asked a few questions to seem engaged, but her mind kept wandering back to the kiss.

Had she imagined the tension between them or was it real? And why did it feel like McKenna wasn't freaking out like she was? Mazey tried to act natural, tried to focus, but she couldn't stop replaying the moment in her head. The softness of McKenna's lips, the warmth of her breath, the way her tongue pushed into Mazey's mouth, claiming her. The shock that Mazey hadn't just admired her, she wanted her. That realization was terrifying and exhilarating at the same time.

I want her to fuck me.

As McKenna finished demonstrating the last piece of equipment, she turned to Mazey. "You got all that?"

Mazey blinked, snapping back to attention. “Yeah, yeah, I got it,” she said quickly, though she couldn’t have repeated a single word McKenna had just said.

“Good.” McKenna’s eyes lingered on Mazey for just a beat too long, something unreadable in her gaze. Then she gave a small smile, the kind that seemed to say she understood more than Mazey realized. “You did great today.”

“Thanks,” Mazey replied, her voice quieter than she’d intended.

McKenna nodded, stepping back slightly. “Well, I guess I’ll see you around then.”

Mazey swallowed hard, trying to gather her thoughts, but nothing came out the way she wanted. She forced a smile. “Yeah, see you around.”

As Mazey turned to leave, her mind raced. What had she done? What had just happened? She hadn’t planned to kiss McKenna, but now that she had, she didn’t regret it. Not entirely.

I want to get on my knees for her..

Mazey stepped outside, the crisp air hitting her face like a splash of cold water. She took a deep breath, trying to steady her racing heart. She still didn’t know what to make of her feelings for McKenna, but one thing was certain: this was more than admiration.

As Mazey drove home, her mind spiraled with questions. Everything she thought she knew about herself seemed to unravel. She had believed she was straight her whole life. There was never a doubt in her mind. No hints, no lingering thoughts that maybe she was attracted to women. At least, that’s what she’d always told herself. But now, in the quiet of her car, her thoughts became more complicated. Had she really been oblivious to her feelings or had she simply pushed them down because it was easier?

Because that's what society expected from her?

The kiss with McKenna had shaken her. It had felt so natural, so right in the moment. But now, she couldn't help but worry that it might have been a fluke, a fleeting impulse brought on by the tension of the day. Yet, deep down, Mazey knew that wasn't the case. It wasn't just the kiss that had affected her. It was McKenna herself. The way she made Mazey feel: safe, understood, seen. And that feeling both thrilled and terrified her.

She gripped the steering wheel tighter, her knuckles turning white. Loving the way McKenna made her feel was one thing, but the questions it raised were something else entirely. Could she really be attracted to a woman? She had never seriously considered the possibility before, not even once. The thought alone made her chest tighten with anxiety.

Mazey tried to brush it off as a moment of confusion, a one-time thing, but she knew better. The more she replayed the kiss in her mind, the more it became impossible to deny the truth. She had felt something real, something undeniable, and that meant she had to face the fact that she was somewhere on the queer spectrum. Bisexual? Pansexual? Lesbian? What the hell was this? There was no escaping that now.

The reality of it hit her like a wave. This realization was terrifying in ways she hadn't anticipated. The scrutiny that could come if word ever got out gnawed at her. She could already imagine the headlines, the gossip, the endless speculation. She was a public figure, after all, and her life had always been under a microscope. But the fear of what people might think or say, though very real, seemed distant compared to the storm of emotions she felt inside.

Still, she pushed those thoughts to the back of her mind, focusing instead on the memory of McKenna. The closeness she had felt with her, the way their bodies had seemed to fit together so naturally. And, of course, the kiss. Mazey's lips still tingled

when she thought about it, but alongside the thrill, a seed of doubt crept in.

Was pretending the kiss didn't happen the right move? She'd acted like it hadn't meant anything, but what if that was a mistake? What if McKenna had felt something too? And, more troubling still, what if Mazey's sudden forwardness had made McKenna uncomfortable? She hadn't even asked McKenna if she was into women; she had just assumed. Mazey cringed at the thought. Had she overstepped?

She had based her assumptions on McKenna's appearance and profession, which now seemed ridiculously shallow. Just because McKenna was strong and confident, worked in a male-dominated field, and carried herself with a kind of quiet dominant power didn't automatically mean she was into women. Mazey realized she had been projecting her own confusion and curiosity onto McKenna, assuming they were on the same page without ever actually knowing. That thought weighed heavily on her. What if McKenna didn't see her that way at all?

Her stomach churned with uncertainty. She replayed their time together in her mind, searching for clues in McKenna's body language, in the way she had reacted to the kiss. But everything was a blur now, muddled by Mazey's own rising panic. Maybe McKenna had just been caught off guard, unsure of how to react in the moment. Maybe she hadn't felt the same spark that Mazey had.

Mazey sighed deeply, her heart heavy with conflicting emotions. She knew she had to talk to McKenna, to clear the air, but the idea of confronting her felt daunting. What if McKenna didn't want to talk about it? What if she really was straight, and the kiss had only made things awkward between them?

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The thoughts swirled in her head as she pulled into her driveway. She sat in the car for a moment, staring blankly at the dashboard. This was supposed to be simple, her working with McKenna, getting tips for her role, maybe even making a friend in the process. But now, everything felt complicated and uncertain.

One thing was clear, though: Mazey couldn't ignore her feelings any longer. The kiss had opened a door inside her that she wasn't sure could be closed again. Whether it was a new chapter of self-discovery or just an unexpected twist in her life, she had to face it head-on.

She just wasn't sure if she was ready yet.

With a heavy sigh, Mazey finally stepped out of the car, feeling the cool night air hit her skin. She knew things were going to get more complicated from here. But for the first time, she felt like maybe that wasn't such a bad thing.

6

MCKENNA

McKenna could still feel the ghost of Mazey's lips on hers as she drove through the quiet streets, her grip on the steering wheel tight. The kiss played on a loop in her mind. It was slow, deep, and unexpected. It was the kind of kiss that wasn't supposed to happen, especially not in the middle of a fire station, especially not with someone like Mazey Snow.

Her heart raced again just thinking about it. She'd been helping Mazey with the gear,

showing her how to put on the uniform, guiding her hands. There was nothing out of the ordinary about it until Mazey pulled her closer. Then their lips were pressed together, and everything else had faded away.

But what really confused McKenna was what happened after. The way Mazey had gone back to pretending like it hadn't happened, like they hadn't just shared one of the most electric moments of McKenna's life. Mazey had returned to the training, her expression calm, as if the kiss had been nothing more than a fleeting impulse. Meanwhile, McKenna's entire world felt like it had been upended.

Was it just part of the act? McKenna couldn't help but wonder. Mazey was an actress, after all. Maybe she was just used to blending reality and fiction. Maybe the kiss hadn't meant anything to her beyond the moment.

But no, McKenna knew that wasn't true. She had felt something. It wasn't just physical. There was a pull between them, something that went deeper than either of them was acknowledging. She couldn't stop thinking about how Mazey's lips had felt, how her hands had lingered on McKenna's arms like she didn't want to let go.

McKenna turned onto her street and parked the car in her driveway, staring blankly ahead for a moment. What now? she thought. She couldn't pretend like nothing had happened, but she also didn't want to push Mazey or make her uncomfortable. She didn't even know if Mazey liked women, or if she was just confused. And that thought gnawed at McKenna, filling her with doubt.

Was it just a mistake? Maybe Mazey had acted on impulse, and now she regretted it. Maybe that's why she hadn't said anything afterward. Maybe McKenna had been reading into it too much.

But then there was the way Mazey had looked at her, the way her breath had hitched just before the kiss, the way their bodies had gravitated toward each other like

magnets. McKenna wasn't making it up. She couldn't have been. There was chemistry between them—undeniable, raw, and real.

“Get it together,” McKenna muttered to herself, running a hand through her hair as she climbed out of the car. She couldn't let herself spiral over this, but the kiss had shaken her more than she wanted to admit. It wasn't just that Mazey was stunning or that they'd connected on some level during their conversation. It was that McKenna had felt something she hadn't in a long time. And it terrified her.

She let herself into her house, the quiet solitude doing nothing to still her racing thoughts. She dropped her keys on the kitchen counter, but instead of feeling the usual calm that came with being home after a long shift, there was only a hollow, restless energy inside her.

She couldn't get Mazey out of her mind.

What was she supposed to do now? She wasn't the type to chase after someone, especially not someone like Mazey Snow, who probably had people fawning over her all the time. But then again, McKenna had never felt this kind of connection with anyone, and she wasn't sure if she should let it slip away without finding out what it really meant.

She felt her phone buzz in her pocket, snapping her out of her thoughts. It was a text from one of her colleagues.

"Good job with the safety training today! Snow looked like she had fun."

Fun. McKenna let out a breathy laugh, shaking her head. Yeah, she had fun, alright. But her chest tightened. It wasn't just about fun for McKenna. It was about what that kiss had stirred up inside her, something she hadn't let herself feel in a long time. And it scared her.

She sank into the couch, staring at the TV screen in front of her. She knew she had to figure this out, but where did she even start? Should she talk to Mazey about it? Could she even bring it up without making things awkward or uncomfortable? What if Mazey really did just want to forget it happened?

But McKenna couldn't forget it. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't shake the feeling of Mazey's lips on hers, the way her pulse had quickened, the way it had felt so...right.

She let her head fall back against the couch cushion, closing her eyes. What was the right thing to do? Part of her wanted to call Mazey, to talk to her, to ask her what that kiss had meant. But another part of her was terrified to even acknowledge it out loud, scared that Mazey would brush it off as nothing more than a fluke, a mistake.

Maybe I'm overthinking this, McKenna thought, her heart heavy with uncertainty. But deep down, she knew she wasn't. That kiss had meant something. She just didn't know if Mazey was ready to admit it too.

And the worst part was, McKenna wasn't sure if she could keep pretending that it didn't matter. Because it did. It mattered a lot.

She shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts. Don't overthink it, she told herself. There was no point in losing sleep over something she couldn't control. Mazey would reach out if she wanted to, there was nothing McKenna could do to force things along. She just had to let it go for now, as hard as that seemed. Ember's words echoed in her mind, "Be patient."

Right, she thought, sighing softly. Patience.

But patience wasn't something McKenna was good at, not when it came to something that had rocked her so deeply. Still, she had to try. She convinced herself that the best

thing to do was to sleep on it and figure out her feelings in the morning. If Mazey wanted to explore whatever it was they had started, she'd reach out. It was simple, right? McKenna couldn't be the one to push this further, especially with Mazey's career and the added complication of her fame.

With that resolve, McKenna dragged herself into bed, pulling the covers up to her chin. As much as she tried to focus on anything else, work, her upcoming shifts, the pile of laundry she needed to do, her thoughts kept drifting back to the kiss. The feel of Mazey's lips against hers, the way it made her entire body feel alive. It was like nothing she had ever experienced before.

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McKenna clenched her eyes shut, forcing herself to think of something else, anything else. But the memory of the kiss had its own rhythm, playing on repeat in her mind. She could still feel the lingering heat from Mazey's body, the way their lips had moved together so naturally, as if they'd done it a hundred times before. It was frustrating, really. She had kissed women before, but none of them had made her feel like this.

Eventually, the fatigue won out. McKenna felt herself slipping into sleep, her mind still clinging to the last thought of Mazey before she drifted off.

Her alarm blared, jolting her awake. McKenna groaned, blindly reaching for her phone to shut it off. She blinked against the early morning light streaming through her curtains, her head heavy with exhaustion. What time did I even fall asleep? she wondered groggily.

It didn't feel like she'd gotten much rest at all. The night had passed in a blur of half-conscious thoughts, and even in her dreams, the kiss had replayed over and over again. No matter how hard she tried to forget it, Mazey was right there in the forefront of her mind: her smile, her touch, the feel of her lips. McKenna rubbed her eyes, feeling the weight of the restless night settle in her bones.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed, sitting there for a moment as she let herself wake up fully. Why did this have to be so complicated? It wasn't just a kiss anymore. It was everything that came with it. The feelings she couldn't quite pin down, the questions about where Mazey stood, the way her heart felt like it was on a rollercoaster she couldn't control.

McKenna ran a hand through her hair, staring blankly at the floor. Should she reach out to her? The question gnawed at her, but she quickly shook it off. No, she wasn't going to make the first move. If Mazey wanted to talk about it, if she wanted to explore whatever was happening between them, she'd have to come to McKenna. And if she didn't? Then maybe the kiss had meant nothing to her after all.

But that didn't sit right with McKenna. It had to have meant something to Mazey. There was no way she didn't feel that too. Yet, the uncertainty was still there, and it clawed at her. The doubt. The nagging fear that maybe she'd misread everything.

She stood up, stretching her stiff muscles, and tried to shake off the sleep that still clung to her. Today would be a fresh start, she told herself. She had work to focus on, and she wasn't going to let herself get distracted by one kiss. No matter how much it had affected her.

But as she went through her morning routine—making coffee, checking her phone, preparing for the day ahead—her mind kept wandering back to Mazey. To the way Mazey had kissed her with that sudden urgency, that spark of something undeniable, and then had gone back to being cool and composed as if nothing had happened.

McKenna sighed, sipping her coffee, trying to calm her racing thoughts. Be patient, she reminded herself again, but the words felt hollow now. Waiting wasn't something she was good at. She was used to taking action, solving problems, moving forward. But in this situation, all she could do was wait and see if Mazey would make the next move.

She stared at her phone, half-expecting a message from Mazey that wasn't there. Maybe it was too soon, she reasoned. They had both been caught off guard by the kiss. Maybe Mazey needed time to figure out her own feelings.

Still, McKenna couldn't shake the feeling that today was going to be a long day,

filled with more questions and no answers. She'd do her best to get through it, but she knew one thing for sure, Mazey wasn't someone she could easily forget.

Just as she pulled into the parking lot, her phone buzzed. An unfamiliar number flashed on the screen. She frowned, her curiosity piqued, and opened the message.

"Hey, stranger. Thanks for all the safety tips. It's really going to help me with my character."

McKenna's breath caught. It must be Mazey. How had she even gotten her number? More importantly, why was she texting? They hadn't exchanged much beyond that one encounter, and yet here she was. McKenna stared at her phone for a second, unsure how to respond, her mind swirling with the kiss they'd shared and how Mazey had brushed it off afterward.

She typed back quickly, keeping her tone light. "Can I assume this is Mazey?"

A moment passed before her phone buzzed again. "Yes, it is. Do you have any other actresses coming to ask for advice on rescues?"

McKenna let out a quiet laugh, shaking her head. She wasn't used to this kind of banter, especially with someone she couldn't quite figure out. "Nope. Just you."

Her phone buzzed almost instantly with a response. "Good. I like that. You really helped me yesterday. You really know your stuff."

McKenna felt her cheeks warm. She wasn't sure why Mazey's words affected her like this. It was just a text. It was just friendly. She could feel herself overthinking it, reading into every word, and tried to convince herself that it was nothing more than a casual message.

"I've been doing this for a while," she replied, trying to keep her cool. "I hope I can teach something as simple as safety when it comes to rescues."

The pause that followed felt heavier than it should have. McKenna found herself staring at her phone, waiting for the next message, wondering why it even mattered. It was just Mazey being polite, she told herself. But the memory of the kiss tugged at her mind. She thought about the way Mazey had pulled her close, the warmth of her lips, the electricity between them and then the way Mazey had acted like nothing happened afterward.

Her phone buzzed again, pulling her out of her thoughts. "You did more than that. I feel like I understand a lot more now. About the role. About other things."

McKenna's heart skipped a beat. Other things? Was Mazey hinting at the kiss? Or was she just being vague? McKenna couldn't tell, and that uncertainty was gnawing at her. She didn't want to push, didn't want to assume anything. But there was something there, wasn't there? Or was she just imagining it?

"You're a quick learner," she typed back. "Glad to be of help."

This time, the pause was longer. McKenna stared at the screen, waiting, her mind swirling with a million questions. Was Mazey reaching out just to talk? Was she looking for something more? Or was this all just professional, like Mazey had insisted at the end of their encounter?

Finally, her phone buzzed. "I've been thinking a lot since yesterday. About how you made everything feel easy. I guess I didn't expect that."

McKenna's pulse quickened. The message felt different. Not flirty, exactly, but more personal. She could feel the vulnerability in Mazey's words, and that surprised her. For someone so confident, Mazey was hinting at something deeper. But was it about

their kiss or just the connection they'd shared?

"I'm glad it helped," McKenna typed slowly, unsure of how to proceed. "Sometimes things are easier when you're not thinking too hard about them."

She hesitated before sending it, wondering if that was too vague, too cryptic. But maybe that was for the best. She didn't want to push Mazey into saying something she wasn't ready to admit. If there was even anything to admit.

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Mazey's reply came quickly this time. "Yeah, maybe you're right. I tend to overthink everything."

McKenna smiled softly to herself. That, she could relate to. "I get that. Happens to the best of us."

She waited for the next message, her thoughts racing. She wanted to ask about the kiss, about how Mazey had felt, but she didn't know if she should. The last thing she wanted was to make things awkward, to make Mazey feel like she'd done something wrong by pulling away. Maybe it really was just business for her.

Then another message appeared. "Anyway, maybe you could swing past my penthouse tonight? I'd love to talk more."

McKenna stared at the message, her heart pounding. Her penthouse?

McKenna took a deep breath, trying to calm the flutter of nerves in her stomach. She wasn't sure what this was, but she knew she wanted to find out.

"Yeah, sounds good," she typed back, keeping her response neutral, even though she could feel the excitement bubbling inside her. "I'll come over after I finish my shift tonight."

Mazey's reply was quick and to the point. "Looking forward to it."

McKenna hit the call button and listened to the phone ring as she drove, her mind still spinning from Mazey's text. Ember would know what to do; she always did. When

the familiar voice answered, McKenna immediately felt a little more grounded.

“Adams! What’s up? You sound tense.”

McKenna hesitated, gripping the steering wheel a little tighter. “It’s about Mazey. She just invited me to her penthouse tonight.”

There was a brief pause on the other end of the line. “Her penthouse? Wow. That’s a move. So, what’s the problem?” Ember’s voice was calm, as usual, like she wasn’t surprised at all.

“I don’t know if it’s just...friendly or if it means something more.” McKenna sighed, frustration creeping in. “I mean, we kissed yesterday, and then she acted like nothing happened. Now she’s texting me about hanging out, and I don’t know if I’m reading too much into it.”

Ember chuckled. “McKenna, you’ve been overthinking this since the start. You talked to me about this a few days ago, remember? And I told you to be patient.”

“Yeah, I know,” McKenna said, rubbing her forehead. “I’ve been trying to be patient, but now I’m more confused than ever.”

“You’re always patient when you’re at the station or working a scene. You know how to stay cool under pressure. Why’s this any different?” Ember’s voice was steady but probing. “You like her, don’t you?”

McKenna bit her lip. “I don’t know. Maybe. Probably. It’s just weird. I’ve never felt this way about anyone.”

“You’re overcomplicating it,” Ember replied, her tone firm but warm. “It’s not about figuring everything out in your head. Look, this thing with Mazey? It’s real for you,

whether you admit it or not. I get that you're scared of messing up, but you can't live in limbo forever."

McKenna sighed, the knot in her stomach tightening. "I just don't want to walk into something I'm not ready for, you know?"

"McKenna, listen," Ember said, her voice dropping into that no-nonsense tone McKenna was used to hearing when things got serious. "This isn't a fire you're running into blindly. You're smart; you've got instincts. If it doesn't feel right, you'll pull back. But if you keep holding yourself back from even finding out what's going on with her, you'll never know."

McKenna stayed quiet for a moment, letting Ember's words sink in.

"I know you, McKenna," Ember continued. "You've always been careful, and that's good, but sometimes you've gotta just go for it. The worst that happens is you go there, you talk, and it's just friendly. But at least then you'll know."

McKenna exhaled, feeling a mix of nerves and relief. "You think I should go, then?"

"I think you'd regret it if you didn't," Ember said, her tone softening. "You've got a chance here. You said it yourself you've never felt like this before. That's worth something, isn't it?"

"Yeah," McKenna admitted quietly. "It is."

"Good," Ember said, a hint of a smile in her voice. "And don't overthink it while you're at work today. Focus on the job, and when the shift's done, go see what's up with Mazey. Who knows? Maybe it'll be nothing. Or maybe...it'll be something."

McKenna laughed lightly. "You make it sound so simple."

“Because it is simple. Don’t overcomplicate it, McKenna. And hey, if you need to talk afterward, you know where to find me,” Ember teased.

“Thanks, Ember. I appreciate you talking me down from the ledge.”

“Anytime, McKenna. Now get through your shift and see what happens. You got this.”

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They said their goodbyes, and McKenna hung up, feeling a little more centered. Ember was right. She didn't have to have all the answers right now. She just had to show up, see what Mazey wanted, and go from there.

She glanced at her phone one more time, rereading Mazey's text. Penthouse. Tonight. Whatever was about to happen, McKenna knew she couldn't avoid it forever. She just had to finish her shift, and then she'd find out.

7

MAZEY

Mazey paced around her penthouse, her nerves running wild.

I can't believe I did it. I actually invited her here.

She ran a hand through her hair. She couldn't decide whether she was bold or just plain reckless. What was she thinking?

She kept trying to convince herself it was strictly for professional reasons. "It's just for safety precautions," she muttered under her breath.

McKenna could help her make sure she was doing things right on set. That's all this was. But as she looked down at her reflection in the mirror, adjusting the delicate lace of her lingerie, she knew she was lying to herself. She'd picked out her best set, something that made her feel both confident and a little vulnerable. She even spent time perfecting her makeup, wanting to look flawless. She told herself it was just for

fun, but deep down, she wanted to see McKenna's reaction. She wore her favourite long silk kimono over her lingerie.

With a deep breath, she turned her attention to the rooftop. She had called room service earlier to get everything ready, blankets draped over lounge chairs, candles flickering in the evening breeze, and a carefully curated spread of wine, cheese, and fresh grapes. It was more than just casual. It was romantic, and she knew it.

Well, if we're going to talk about safety on set, she reasoned, why not do it under the stars? The idea of it made her smile. The place really was stunning, and for the first time in a while, Mazey stopped to admire it. As the golden hues of the sunset painted the sky, she felt a pang of guilt for not appreciating it sooner. She'd been so wrapped up in her swirling emotions that she hadn't taken the time to truly take in the beauty of her surroundings.

But now, as she watched the sky fade from amber to deep purple, her thoughts were consumed by McKenna. She'd always been good at keeping her cool and professional, but something about the firefighter had gotten under her skin. Mazey wasn't used to this, feeling vulnerable and uncertain about where things might lead. She'd never been the one to second-guess her own actions, but here she was, wondering what McKenna would think when she arrived.

And then, as if on cue, her phone buzzed in her hand.

"I'm here."

Mazey's heart leapt into her throat. She stared at the message for a moment, the gravity of the situation hitting her all at once. She was really here. There was no more time for overthinking or planning. McKenna was downstairs waiting, and the night was about to begin.

Taking a deep breath, she glanced around one last time. The rooftop looked beautiful, intimate yet casual, just the right mix of effort and ease. The wine was chilled, the cheese perfectly arranged, and the sunset cast a warm glow over everything. Even if tonight didn't lead to anything more than conversation, Mazey knew it would still be special. She smiled to herself. At the very least, she'd get to know McKenna better.

Just as Mazey was lost in her thoughts, a knock rapped on the door.

Beneath her calm exterior, her mind raced. What if McKenna didn't feel the same way? What if she was only here because of work? Mazey shook off the doubts. Just be yourself, she reminded herself. Let the night unfold however it's supposed to.

When she opened the door, McKenna stood there, looking slightly unsure but as composed as ever, dressed in her work uniform - fire department navy blue t shirt and pants with a jacket slung over her arm. She smelled deliciously of what Mazey assumed were her pheromones, something oaky, something smokey. She clearly hadn't showered and Mazey was glad of it.

"Hey," Mazey greeted, her voice a little softer than usual, trying not to show how fast her heart was beating.

"Hey," McKenna replied, her gaze flickering up and down over Mazey's body and then around, taking in the setting. "This looks nice. You didn't have to go all out."

"Oh, this? This is nothing. It's the least I can do for taking up even more of your time. I honestly don't know how you have the energy to come here after a long shift," Mazey said, her voice teasing but with a hint of genuine curiosity.

McKenna chuckled softly. "Eh, it's no big deal. I'm used to this. Sorry, I should have showered. The water was out for some reason at the station. Anyway, you should've seen me when I was in my twenties. You would've been really impressed."

Mazey raised an eyebrow, intrigued. “Oh really? Want a glass of wine? By the way, how old are you?””

McKenna grinned, leaning back slightly as Mazey handed her a glass. “Yeah, I’d love one. I’m actually forty-one.”

Mazey’s eyes widened slightly. “So you’re older than me. I have to treat you with even more respect now.”

McKenna laughed, shaking her head. “Oh no, you don’t. Just treat me like you would anyone else.”

Mazey tilted her head, a playful smile tugging at her lips. “I think that’s going to be kind of hard.”

McKenna’s brow furrowed slightly. “Why’s that?”

The question hung in the air for a moment, and Mazey could feel the warmth rising to her cheeks. She didn’t answer right away, running the memory of their kiss through her mind, the way McKenna’s lips had felt against hers, the way time had seemed to stop. She blushed, wondering if McKenna could read her mind, if she knew exactly what was going through her head.

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Instead of diving into the obvious, Mazey bit her lip and gave a small, nervous laugh. “You’re just...different. I don’t know, there’s something about you.”

McKenna gave her a curious look, that flitted down over Mazey’s body in the kimono again. A look that made Mazey’s heart skip a beat and she felt an insistent pulse inside her panties. “Good different or bad different?”

“Oh, it’s definitely a good thing,” Mazey replied quickly, taking a sip of wine to calm her nerves. She didn’t want to come off as too intense, but it was hard not to feel the pull toward McKenna.

They sat in silence for a moment, the air between them thick with unspoken thoughts. Mazey couldn’t help but glance at McKenna from the corner of her eye. She was trying to keep things casual, but the more they talked, the more she realized how much she wanted this night to go beyond just friendly conversation.

McKenna, meanwhile, seemed just as calm and collected as always, sipping her wine, her gaze wandering across the rooftop. But Mazey noticed the way McKenna’s eyes flicked back to her, the way her gaze took in Mazey’s long smooth leg that had slid out of her kimono and she was sure she saw a hunger in McKenna as her gaze lingered on Mazey’s breasts.

“Are you always this calm?” Mazey asked, trying to break the tension, though part of her wanted to dive right into it.

McKenna smiled softly. “Not always. I’ve learned to be, though. Helps when things get chaotic.”

“That must come in handy at the station, huh?” Mazey said, wanting to know more about McKenna beyond her easygoing exterior.

“Yeah.” McKenna nodded. “It’s kind of a survival skill. But, you know, sometimes things catch you off guard.”

Mazey leaned in slightly. “Like what?”

McKenna looked at her for a moment, her expression unreadable before she finally said, “Like people. Like moments you don’t expect.” There was something in her tone, something almost cautious.

Mazey’s heart raced. Was she talking about the kiss? She wanted to ask, wanted to push, but she didn’t know if she should. She felt like they were both dancing around it, afraid to say what was really on their minds.

She set her glass down and cleared her throat. “Do you ever... I mean, do you think about it?”

McKenna’s eyes met hers, and Mazey felt the weight of the question lingering in the air.

“The kiss,” Mazey added, her voice barely above a whisper.

McKenna hesitated for a moment before giving her a small, thoughtful smile. “Yeah, I think about it.”

The simple admission made Mazey’s heart leap, and she couldn’t help but smile back.

McKenna shot back, a teasing smile dancing on her lips. “Did you maybe want to try

it again?”

Mazey's heart raced at the boldness of the question. She contemplated for a moment, shock rippling through her as she processed what McKenna was asking. But deep down, she knew it was exactly what she'd been hoping for. She took a gulp of her wine. “Yes. I was hoping you'd ask.”

With that, the air between them shifted, charged with anticipation. McKenna downed her glass of wine then leaned in slowly, the distance between them shrinking. Mazey could feel her breath quicken. Last time, it was Mazey who had initiated the kiss, and having McKenna take the lead this time felt different, exciting, nerve-wracking, and exhilarating all at once.

As soon as their lips touched, something ignited in Mazey. It was a spark, a warmth that spread through her like wildfire, overwhelming her senses. McKenna's lips were soft and firm, and there was a confidence in the way she kissed that made Mazey melt into it. The world around them faded again, leaving only the two of them, lost in this moment that felt both familiar and entirely new.

Mazey's fingers found their way to McKenna's shoulder, wanting to pull her closer, to deepen the connection they were forging. This kiss was different; it wasn't just a brush of lips, but a promise of something more, something she had been craving since their first encounter. She felt the electricity of their chemistry pulse between them, growing stronger with each passing second.

McKenna's hand found its way to Mazey's waist, holding her as if she were the most precious thing in the world. The kiss deepened, and Mazey melted into the embrace, savoring the taste of the wine on McKenna's lips and the warmth of her body against hers. It was intoxicating, and Mazey felt as if she were flying, weightless and free, caught in a whirlwind of emotion.

Before she knew it, McKenna was untying the waist belt of her kimono and opening it like she was a gift ready to be unwrapped, pulling it over her shoulders, the silk sliding off her body with a fluid grace that made Mazey's heart race. A part of her thought maybe she should stop McKenna, but the stronger impulse was to let it happen, to revel in the moment. As she felt the soft brush of silk against her skin, she silently thanked herself for putting on her best lingerie.

McKenna's eyes looked at her body as though it was the one thing she desired most in the world and Mazey felt herself melting.

Mazey loved the feel of McKenna's strong hands gliding over her body, each touch sending shivers down her spine. McKenna's grip was firm on her hips as she kissed her again. Mazey had never been with a woman before and had no idea what her next move should be, but McKenna made light work of stripping her out of her lemon lace lingerie and pushing her down onto the day bed on the rooftop terrace. She felt the cool of the air run over her body and harden her nipples.

It felt like it had happened in seconds as suddenly she lay completely naked in front of McKenna and she felt a surprising rush of confidence. Usually, in these situations with men, she would feel self-conscious, but this was different. She felt sexy, empowered, and utterly free. Why did it feel so right?

"You are so fucking beautiful," McKenna said, looking over her body.

Mazey felt herself blushing slightly, but making no moves to hide herself.

Happy to let McKenna take the reins, Mazey relaxed into the daybed, feeling the fabric beneath her cool against her heated skin. McKenna crawled on top of her, a teasing glint in her eye that sent Mazey's pulse racing. She started by kissing her neck, the warmth of her lips igniting a fire between Mazey's legs. She felt her legs parting instinctively. McKenna playfully bit her ear, sending electric shocks of

pleasure through her body. Mazey let out a soft moan, surprised at how responsive she was to McKenna's every move. As McKenna continued to kiss her neck, her hands trailed down Mazey's body, hesitating above her breasts. Mazey's breath caught in her throat, anticipation pooling deep inside her as she yearned for that next touch.

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“You want me to continue?” McKenna whispered in her ear, the playfulness in her voice making Mazey’s heart race even faster.

“Yes, please,” Mazey begged, urgency lacing her voice. She had never in her life begged for someone’s touch, but this was different. Her need was all-consuming. “I need you...”

With a sultry smile, McKenna cupped Mazey’s breasts in her hands, rubbing her nipples in a circular motion that sent waves of pleasure coursing through her. Mazey could feel herself getting wetter, her breathing quickening as McKenna’s touch felt like fire against her skin. She had never experienced anything like this before. This blend of desire, vulnerability, and raw need.

McKenna kissed her chest, moving lower with a deliberate slowness that made Mazey ache for more. When McKenna’s hand rested between her thighs, pressing lightly against the wetness of her pussy, the gentle pressure made her gasp. “Feels a bit hot here,” McKenna teased, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

Mazey didn’t care if she had to beg; the way her body reacted to McKenna’s touch was undeniable. She had never wanted anything or anyone more. The heat pooling between her legs was a testament to the desire coursing through her. “Just...please,” Mazey murmured, her voice barely above a whisper. She wanted to let McKenna do whatever she wanted, to explore this uncharted territory together.

“I need you...” Mazey moaned.

McKenna’s eyes darkened with desire, and she leaned closer, her breath warm against

Mazey's skin. "You have no idea how much I've wanted this... you..." she murmured, her voice low and intimate. The sincerity in her tone made Mazey's heart swell with a mix of excitement and trepidation. She was used to men wanting her, but there was no depth to their desire. Notlike this. This was more than just physical; it was a connection that seemed to deepen with every shared breath, every lingering touch. And with men, in recent years, it was very rare Mazey ever actually gave into their desire, she realized. Because, she never actually enjoyed it as much as she wanted to. Not like this. Every part of her body pulsed with a desperate need for more.

As McKenna continued to explore, Mazey surrendered completely, losing herself in the sensations flooding her body. She was ready to embrace this moment, to discover what lay ahead, and to see just how far they could take this beautiful exploration together. It was all new territory, but with McKenna, it felt like the most natural thing in the world.

"If people couldn't hear us, I'd make you yell and beg for me to touch you," McKenna whispered, her voice sultry and teasing.

Mazey felt a rush of heat at the thought. She wished she could just let loose, scream out her desire for McKenna to touch her, to explore every inch of her body. All the apprehension she had felt moments before had vanished, replaced by a deep hunger. She wanted McKenna's fingers in her, deep inside her, feeling her body respond to that touch.

Deciding to take a bold step, Mazey locked her gaze with McKenna's, her heart racing as she reached out to grab her bicep. "I want to feel you inside me," she declared, her voice firm despite the butterflies in her stomach.

McKenna smiled, a mischievous glint in her eye. "Oh, I want that more than you can imagine. But, I'm going to tease you a bit more first," she replied, her tone playful yet

filled with promise.

Mazey gasped as McKenna rubbed her fingers along her inner thighs, just barely grazing the sensitive skin. Every light touch ignited a flame within her, and she felt like she was on the edge of an explosion. The anticipation was maddening; she was so close to the release she craved. Just as she was about to take McKenna's arm and pull her in, McKenna moved. With an expert flick of her wrist, she slid two fingers inside Mazey, filling her completely.

Mazey let out a sharp intake of breath, her body arching toward McKenna as the sensation overwhelmed her. It felt as if all her pent-up desires had been unleashed in that one electrifying moment. McKenna's other hand began to massage her clit, adding to the exquisite pleasure that coursed through her veins.

Mazey was losing herself in a haze of ecstasy, the world outside fading away until it was just the two of them. Each thrust, each stroke, pulled her deeper into blissful oblivion. She closed her eyes, surrendering to the sensations that rocked her body. She was completely at McKenna's mercy, and she relished every second of it.

"God, you feel incredible," McKenna murmured, her breath warm against Mazey's ear. The intimate words only intensified the heat pooling between Mazey's thighs, making her ache for more.

"Don't stop," Mazey pleaded, the urgency in her voice making it clear just how much she wanted McKenna. She could feel the tension building inside her, each movement drawing her closer to the edge. The fire that ignited in her core was impossible to contain, and she could feel herself teetering on the brink of something magnificent.

"Just a little longer," McKenna teased, her fingers expertly coaxing waves of pleasure from Mazey's body. "I want to hear you come hard for me."

Mazey whimpered, feeling a delicious tension coil tightly in her stomach. She wanted to scream, to express the overwhelming need surging through her, but the thrill of restraint mixed with her desire to unleash herself only heightened the experience. She bit her lip, trying to suppress her reactions, but it was becoming increasingly difficult.

McKenna leaned in closer, as she continued to work her magic. The sensation of McKenna's fingers beginning to fuck her harder, more deeply, the warmth of her body pressed against hers, and the sultry ambiance of the penthouse combined to create an atmosphere that was intoxicating and electric. With everything combined, Mazey could hardly contain herself as she surrendered fully to the experience. Her body was getting hotter and hotter.

"Please don't stop," Mazey begged, her voice trembling with need.

McKenna's fingers moved with an expert rhythm, faster and harder, curving up to hit the perfect spot every time, each stroke sending shockwaves through Mazey's body. Every caress brought her closer to the edge, but a part of her didn't want this incredible feeling to end. She relished the pleasure, the way McKenna's touch ignited her senses and made her feel alive in a way she had never experienced before.

"Just a little longer," McKenna murmured, her eyes locked onto Mazey's, filled with a mix of desire and mischief. Each time Mazey thought she was at her limit, McKenna would change her rhythm, drawing out the sensations, teasing her in a way that kept her teetering on the edge of bliss.

But the tension within Mazey was building, tightening like a coiled spring, and she could feel herself spiraling closer to release. The world around her faded, narrowing to just McKenna and the sensations washing over her.

Suddenly, it hit her like a truck. The orgasm crashed over her in a wave of ecstasy, leaving her breathless and gasping. Mazey felt her body pulsate, the aftershocks

radiating through her legs as she lost herself completely in the moment. She bit down on her lip to stifle a scream, the overwhelming pleasure threatening to consume her entirely.

“Let it out, Mazey. I want to hear you,” McKenna encouraged, her voice a sultry whisper that sent another shiver of delight down Mazey’s spine.

The combination of McKenna’s words and the lingering sensations made Mazey feel as though she was floating, suspended in a euphoric haze. “I...I can’t,” she managed to say, breathless and overwhelmed.

“Yes, you can. Just let go,” McKenna urged, her fingers never ceasing their motion, coaxing every last ounce of pleasure from Mazey.

With one final push, Mazey surrendered, her body trembling as she released the moan that had been building inside her. The sound echoed through the room, raw and beautiful, mingling with the night air. In that moment, all her worries and fears melted away, leaving just the two of them, entwined in an intimate embrace.

As the waves of pleasure began to subside, Mazey opened her eyes, meeting McKenna’s gaze. The connection between them felt electric, filled with a sense of understanding and trust. She couldn’t help but smile, feeling lighter than air. It was a moment she would never forget, one that had transformed her in ways she never thought possible.

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“Wow,” she breathed, still trying to catch her breath. “That was...incredible.”

McKenna grinned, the corners of her lips lifting in a way that made Mazey’s heart race.

“Didn’t know I had it in me,” Mazey teased, her voice still a bit breathless.

McKenna chuckled softly, brushing a strand of hair from Mazey’s face. “Trust me, you did. You just needed the right person to help you find it.”

Mazey smiled, feeling the weight of the day’s worries slip away. “I never expected this evening to turn out like this.”

“Neither did I,” McKenna admitted. “But I’m glad it did.”

“Let’s move to the bedroom before we both pass out here.”

McKenna nodded and followed her to the bed. As sleep began to take hold, Mazey thought about how much had changed in such a short time. How she had stepped into the unknown and found something extraordinary. The last thing she remembered before drifting off was the comforting weight of McKenna beside her and the promise of a new day ahead.

McKenna felt the soft morning light filter into the unfamiliar luxury hotel bedroom. She blinked slowly, adjusting to the brightness as her gaze fell on the beautiful figure beside her. Mazey's dark shiny hair rested gently and perfectly on the pillow, framing her face in delicate waves that caught the sunlight. McKenna couldn't believe what had happened the night before—the passion, the vulnerability, the unguarded moments that had unfolded between them.

She savored the feeling of having Mazey in her arms, the warmth radiating from her body. The way Mazey's skin had felt beneath her fingertips was etched in McKenna's mind, each touch igniting a fire that lingered even now. She remembered how Mazey had contorted in pleasure when she reached her peak, her breathless gasps and soft moans echoing in McKenna's ears like a sweet melody.

A rush of warmth flooded through McKenna at the memory, a mixture of pride and awe at the intimacy they had shared. It was a night that had pushed her boundaries and broken down walls she hadn't realized she had built. Lying there, she felt a sense of contentment wash over her, wrapping around her like a cozy blanket.

Mazey stirred slightly, a soft sigh escaping her lips as she shifted in her sleep. McKenna couldn't help but smile at the sight. There was a softness about her, an unguarded beauty that made McKenna's heart flutter. It was a stark contrast to the image of the glamorous actress everyone else saw, a side of her that felt genuine and real.

As she watched Mazey, McKenna wondered what the morning would bring. Would they talk about last night? Would it change things between them? A part of her felt nervous, unsure of how to navigate the delicate territory of their newfound connection. But another part of her was excited about the possibilities.

She brushed her fingers lightly against Mazey's arm, reveling in the sensation of their skin touching. "Hey," she whispered softly, not wanting to startle her. "Good

morning.”

Mazey blinked awake, her stunning blue eyes slowly adjusting to the light. When she finally focused on McKenna, a smile broke across her face, and the warmth in McKenna’s chest blossomed further. “Good morning,” she replied sleepily.

She turned around, and they were face to face once again. The attraction surged between them, electric and palpable, just as it had the night before. McKenna could feel her heart race, anticipation tightening her chest as she searched Mazey’s eyes for any sign of hesitation.

Before McKenna could say another word, Mazey leaned in, closing the distance between them. Their lips met with a fervor that took McKenna by surprise. The kiss was urgent, hungry, filled with a depth of emotion that left McKenna breathless. Mazey's hands found their way to McKenna's face, cradling her cheeks as she slipped her tongue into McKenna’s mouth, igniting a fire that spread through her body.

“You’re ready for round two already?” McKenna teased.

Mazey replied by climbing on top of McKenna, straddling her while kissing her. Their bodies pressed together, warmth radiating between them as Mazey’s fingers tangled in McKenna’s hair, pulling her closer as if afraid to let go. McKenna savored the kiss for a moment, feeling the sweet urgency of it envelop her, but a sudden rush of confidence surged through her. In one fluid motion, she flipped Mazey onto her back, pinning her wrists gently but firmly above her head.

Mazey looked up at her, eyes wide and shimmering with desire. There was a vulnerability in that gaze, mixed with an undeniable hunger for McKenna’s touch. It ignited a primal instinct within McKenna, and she leaned in closer, capturing Mazey’s mouth once more.

When their lips finally parted, McKenna explored the smooth expanse of Mazey's neck with gentle kisses, trailing her lips downwards, savoring the taste of her skin. Each kiss ignited fire across Mazey's body, and she arched her back slightly, encouraging McKenna to continue. McKenna reveled in the intoxicating feeling of being the one to drive this moment, of hearing the soft gasps and moans escape Mazey's lips.

As she continued her descent, McKenna paused to admire the beauty of Mazey's body beneath her, every curve, every delicate line illuminated by the soft morning light. She felt an overwhelming urge to worship her, to take her time and enjoy every inch of the woman who had captivated her heart.

She stopped at Mazey's breasts, taking a moment to appreciate how they rose and fell with each breath. With deliberate slowness, McKenna began to suck on Mazey's nipples, alternating between gentle nibbles and soft pulls. The sight of Mazey's reaction sent a thrill through her. Mazey began to moan softly, each sound a sweet melody that resonated deep within McKenna.

"I love hearing you like this," McKenna murmured against Mazey's skin, the vibrations of her voice sending shivers through them both. The intimate connection made her feel powerful, alive in ways she had never experienced before.

Mazey's back arched as she gasped, encouraging McKenna's every movement. "Don't stop," she breathed, her voice thick with longing. The urgency in Mazey's tone only fueled McKenna's desire, and she doubled her efforts, lavishing attention on both of Mazey's breasts, alternating between sucking and nibbling, relishing the taste of her skin.

Each moan that escaped Mazey's lips felt like a soft command, pushing McKenna to explore further. She trailed kisses down Mazey's abdomen, savoring the way her body responded, every quiver and gasp a testament to the connection they were

forging. The world outside faded away, leaving just the two of them lost in this moment of shared pleasure and discovery.

“McKenna,” Mazey gasped, her eyes filled with a mixture of desperation and excitement.

The sound of her name on Mazey’s lips was intoxicating, and McKenna’s resolve only strengthened. She looked up, meeting Mazey’s gaze with a playful smile, silently promising to give her everything she desired.

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She began to kiss Mazey's inner thighs, lingering in the same spot where she had been massaging her the night before. Each gentle kiss sent electric jolts through Mazey's body, and McKenna could feel the tension building within her. The warmth radiating from Mazey's skin urged her to continue, to explore further.

Mazey kept repeating her name, each utterance a desperate plea, a sweet melody that danced in McKenna's ears. "McKenna...oh, McKenna," she breathed, her voice trembling with need.

It was music to McKenna's soul, a symphony of longing that inspired her to delve deeper into their shared intimacy.

McKenna's kisses were soft yet deliberate, trailing up and down Mazey's thighs, alternating between tender pecks and teasing nips that elicited soft gasps. She savored the moment, enjoying the way Mazey's body reacted to her touch. The slight quiver of her muscles, the way she instinctively spread her legs wider, inviting McKenna in closer.

"Please..." Mazey's voice was thick with desire, filled with a mix of yearning and anticipation. The vulnerability in her tone stirred something primal in McKenna. She reveled in the power of being the one to bring Mazey to this point, to draw out these delicious sounds and reactions.

"Just a moment," McKenna murmured playfully, her breath hot against Mazey's skin. Her lips danced along Mazey's inner thighs, teasingly close to the places that craved her touch the most. Each kiss was intentional, a promise of what was to come.

Mazey whimpered, frustration and eagerness blending into one sweet sound that made McKenna's heart race. She glanced at Mazey, their eyes locking for a brief moment, and saw the need swirling in her gaze. It was a beautiful, consuming fire that ignited McKenna's own desire, beckoning her to continue.

"Look at you," McKenna whispered, her voice low and sultry. "So responsive to me. You're breathtaking." She reveled in the way Mazey blushed at her words, a delicate flush spreading across her cheeks. There was something so intimate about this moment, a sense of trust that made everything feel heightened, electric.

With that, she pressed her lips to the soft skin just below Mazey's navel, letting her tongue trace delicate patterns that made Mazey squirm. Each soft gasp and moan only encouraged McKenna, drawing her further into this blissful dance of intimacy. She could feel the heat radiating off Mazey, the urgency building between them, and she was determined to savor every second of it.

Mazey's body trembled under her lips, and McKenna felt a swell of emotion rise in her chest. It wasn't like with other people, where it felt like she was just going through the motions with someone. With Mazey, every kiss, every touch felt like a silent conversation. A way to say what neither of them could put into words.

As Mazey whispered her name in the quiet of the morning, McKenna let the sound wash over her. It wasn't just desire anymore. It was something that made her want to protect this, to hold on to whatever was building between them. There was a vulnerability to Mazey that McKenna hadn't expected, and it made her want to be vulnerable, too, even if she wasn't ready to say it out loud.

She continued her slow path all over Mazey's body with her tongue, savoring each moment, every breath, every moan that escaped Mazey's lips. McKenna knew this was more than just physical. It was about trust, and the kind of connection that didn't come around often.

Mazey's fingers tangled in McKenna's hair, pulling her closer, and McKenna couldn't help but smile against her skin. This, she thought, was something she didn't want to let go of. Something real. Something she had never felt before. And she didn't need to say it. It was there between them, unsaid yet understood.

As McKenna's fingers found their way between Mazey's thighs, she moved with intention, slow and careful, wanting to make sure every moment was perfect. Mazey's body arched into her, and McKenna could feel the warmth radiating off her skin, the way she trembled with each gentle stroke. Her moans filled the air, and McKenna couldn't get enough of the sound. It wasn't just about hearing Mazey's pleasure. It was about knowing that she was the one making her feel this way. That Mazey wanted her to keep going, that she trusted her with this moment.

McKenna's fingers pressed deeper, her other hand moving to massage Mazey's clit in small, deliberate circles. She could feel the tension building in Mazey's body, her muscles tightening, her breathing quickening, and she knew she was close.

"Please don't stop," Mazey begged, her voice breathless, desperate.

Hearing her like that, needing her touch so badly, did something to McKenna. It lit a fire deep in her chest, and she moved faster, more intently, wanting to push Mazey over the edge. She watched as Mazey's head tilted back, her lips parted in a silent cry of pleasure, and then it hit. McKenna felt the shudder that ran through Mazey's body, her muscles tightening around her fingers, and she knew she was there.

Mazey's body contorted, her moans muffled as she bit down on her lip to keep from screaming. McKenna held her through it, her fingers still moving gently, letting her ride the waves of her orgasm until, finally, the tension began to ebb.

For a long moment, the room was filled with nothing but the sound of their breathing. McKenna slowly withdrew her hand, her lips pressing a soft kiss to Mazey's stomach

before she moved up, resting beside her.

McKenna held Mazey close, savoring the quiet moments after they finished, both of them breathless and spent. Her arms wrapped around Mazey's waist, pulling her in tight as they lay there, their bodies fitting together perfectly, like they were made for this, for each other. She could still feel the echoes of their shared passion reverberating in the room, a warmth that lingered between them. McKenna's heart was steady now, but she couldn't shake the realization of how different this felt. The connection between them was undeniable.

She wasn't one to get swept up in moments like this, but with Mazey, it was impossible not to. Everything had flowed so naturally, from the first kiss to this quiet aftermath. She pressed a soft kiss into Mazey's hair, her hand gently stroking her back as Mazey's breathing slowed to a calm rhythm. For once, McKenna wasn't thinking ahead or planning her next move. She was fully present, and it felt...right.

But then, the blaring sound of Mazey's phone alarm shattered the tranquility.

Mazey groaned and reached over to silence it, reluctantly pulling away from McKenna. "Already?" she muttered, rolling back onto the pillow and rubbing her eyes.

McKenna chuckled softly. "Guess it's time to face the world again."

Mazey looked over at her, a playful grin on her face. "After last night and this morning, I'm not sure I'm ready to go back to reality. I think I might need a nap first."

McKenna smirked, propping herself up on one elbow as she watched Mazey stretch lazily beside her. "A nap, huh? I thought you were tougher than that."

Mazey shot her a teasing look. "Oh, I'm tough, don't worry. You just wore me out with all these orgasms."

"That's one way to put it," McKenna said with a grin. "I didn't hear you complaining."

Mazey laughed softly, her eyes sparkling in the soft morning light. "No complaints, trust me. You definitely know how to keep things...interesting."

"Interesting?" McKenna raised an eyebrow. "That's all I get?"

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Mazey feigned innocence. "What? Should I be more specific?"

McKenna leaned in, her lips brushing against Mazey's neck. "Maybe."

Mazey's breath hitched slightly, but she quickly pushed McKenna playfully away. "Okay, okay. You were amazing, alright? Happy?"

McKenna laughed, satisfied. "That's more like it."

They shared a light moment, both of them grinning like teenagers after a first date, but eventually, Mazey sighed and sat up, swinging her legs over the side of the bed. "As much as I'd love to stay here and bask in your presence, I really do have to get ready for work."

"Right, work." McKenna leaned back, her hands behind her head as she watched Mazey start gathering her clothes. "I keep forgetting you have a job."

Mazey rolled her eyes with a smile. "Some of us have to be on set, you know. Not all of us get to run into burning buildings or sit around on call."

"Hey, I don't just sit around," McKenna protested, but she was still grinning. "Though, today's an exception. No shifts for me."

Mazey paused in the middle of pulling on her pants and shot her a mischievous look. "So, you're telling me you have the whole day free?"

"Pretty much," McKenna replied casually, sitting up and reaching for her own

clothes. "But don't worry, I'm still on call. So if you burn the place down, I'll be right there."

"Good to know," Mazey teased as she buttoned up her shirt. "Maybe I'll stage a small fire on set just to see you in action."

McKenna laughed, shaking her head as she pulled on her jeans. "You do that, and I'll have to charge you extra for the rescue."

They shared another easy laugh, the lightness of the moment deepening the connection they already felt. There was no awkwardness, no tension, just a natural flow between them. McKenna wasn't used to this, waking up with someone and feeling like she didn't need to rush out the door or make excuses. She wanted to be here, and it seemed like Mazey wanted her here too.

Once they were both dressed, Mazey walked over to McKenna and gave her a quick kiss on the lips. "Thanks for everything."

"Anytime."

As they left Mazey's penthouse and stepped out into the hallway, they shared a glance that said everything they hadn't put into words yet. There was something between them, something neither of them had expected but were curious about.

Mazey gave her one last smile before heading toward the elevator. "Don't be a stranger, McKenna."

"Wouldn't dream of it," McKenna replied with a grin, watching her go.

The moment the elevator doors closed, McKenna's grin softened, and she found herself lost in her thoughts. She wasn't sure what was happening between them, but

she knew it was more than just a fling. She could still feel the heat of Mazey's touch, still hear the way her name had sounded on Mazey's lips. The connection they shared wasn't something McKenna could easily shake.

She stood there for a moment, rooted to the spot, before finally heading toward her truck. Sliding into the driver's seat, McKenna's thoughts drifted back to the night before, the way Mazey had looked at her, touched her. It was more than just chemistry. There was a kind of closeness she hadn't felt in a long time, maybe never.

McKenna didn't have work today, but she was still technically on call. Normally, she'd use her rare day off to relax, maybe grab a drink with Ember, or catch up on some sleep. But now, she couldn't stop thinking about what could be with Mazey and where this thing between them might lead.

McKenna sat in the driver's seat, the engine rumbling softly as she pulled away from the curb. Her mind swirled with thoughts of the night before, unable to shake the feeling of Mazey's body close to hers, the way they'd fit together so perfectly. But as the familiar streets of Phoenix Ridge rolled by, doubts began to creep in, uninvited.

She had no idea where Mazey stood. Sure, the connection between them had been intense, undeniable, but what did it mean? Mazey wasn't out, at least not publicly. She was a movie star who lived in the spotlight, her image carefully curated for the media. What if this was just some kind of experiment for her? A fleeting curiosity? McKenna felt her chest tighten at the thought. She didn't want to be someone's secret, and she definitely didn't want to be just another phase.

Mazey had made her feel things she hadn't in years. Maybe ever. The way they'd looked at each other, touched each other, it felt like more than a casual fling. But was McKenna reading too much into it? Was she letting herself get carried away by a moment that might not mean the same thing to Mazey?

She didn't want to be another notch on someone's belt, especially not someone who had the luxury of keeping everything hidden behind the veneer of fame. The thought of being pushed aside or forgotten as soon as the cameras came back made her stomach churn. But still, she couldn't help but hope for more. The connection was too strong, too real, to ignore.

As she turned onto the main road, McKenna allowed herself to imagine, just for a moment, what it would be like if this wasn't just a one-night thing. What if it was the start of something real? The thought made her heart race. Maybe she was getting ahead of herself, but she couldn't stop wondering what could be.

9

MAZEY

Mazey climbed into the waiting taxi, her heart still racing, her mind spinning. She couldn't believe what had just happened. It was like something had taken over her the moment McKenna kissed her, and she hadn't been able to resist. Not that she wanted to. In fact, she'd wanted it for a while, even if she hadn't been ready to admit it to herself. But now, as the haze of the night started to clear, reality began to set in.

What had she done?

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She squeezed her knees with her hands trying to calm herself, her mind spinning a mile a minute. She had been curious about what it would be like to be with McKenna, a woman. The idea had crossed her mind and lingered there, but she had never imagined it would feel so...right. Yet, now that it had happened, the flood of fear and uncertainty started to hit her hard.

What would people think if they found out?

Mazey's stomach twisted at the thought. She had spent years carefully crafting her image: the poised actress, always in control, always perfect. Being seen with McKenna, let alone having it come out that she was with a woman, could unravel everything she had built. She'd seen how the public treated people when they stepped out of line, even just a little. She had watched others—celebrities, public figures—be torn apart by rumors, gossip, and scandals, even over things far less shocking than this.

Her mind drifted to her last serious relationship, a high-profile romance with a famous actor. When they'd broken up, the media had a field day. Every detail of her personal life had been dissected and exaggerated until she barely recognized the person they were writing about. She had just started to feel like she had gotten back on solid ground. If this got out, if anyone even suspected that she was with McKenna, it could be a disaster. And McKenna wasn't famous. She was from Phoenix Ridge, not Hollywood. Would they tear her apart even worse because of that?

Dating someone ordinary? Was that going to be another crime?

Mazey could picture the headlines already. "Mazey Snow's Secret Romance,"

“Mazey’s New Lesbian Love Scandal”, and worse, she could see the consequences. The interviews she might lose, the sponsorships, the roles. She had fought hard to get where she was, to build a career based on her talent and hard work, not just her looks or connections. Could she risk losing it all for this? For McKenna?

But even as her thoughts raced, she knew that what happened last night was different. The connection she felt with McKenna, it wasn’t like anything else. It wasn’t just a fling, not some mistake. It had been real, genuine, and now that she had felt it, she wasn’t sure she could walk away from it. She didn’t want to. But how could she balance what she wanted with the image she had to uphold?

She didn’t want to think about it, but she knew she had to. It wasn’t like she could just pretend it hadn’t happened. But the stakes were higher now. If this went viral, if people started talking... She didn’t know if she could survive another public exposé. And this time, it wouldn’t just be about a breakup or a romance gone wrong. This time, it could ruin her career, her entire life.

She sighed, rubbing her temples. There was no easy answer, no clear path forward. She was standing at the edge of something unknown, something thrilling, but also terrifying. What scared her the most, though, was that despite all the risks, part of her still wanted to take that step forward. Part of her wanted to see what could happen with McKenna. But another part of her wondered if she was about to make the biggest mistake of her life.

Although all these negative thoughts were swirling in her mind, Mazey couldn’t shake the feeling McKenna gave her. Every time she tried to focus on the potential fallout, the image of McKenna’s face, her touch, and the warmth she felt with her the night before resurfaced. The night they’d shared had been incredible. It wasn’t just the physical connection, though that had been undeniably electric. It was something deeper. Mazey felt a pull toward McKenna that scared her. It was more than lust or curiosity. There was an emotional connection she hadn’t felt in a long time, if ever.

That was what frightened her the most.

She'd been with men before—famous men, men who knew how to play the game, men who understood the demands of being in the public eye. It had always been easy to compartmentalize those relationships and keep them at arm's length. But McKenna...she wasn't a part of that world. She was real, grounded, and that made everything feel more intense. Mazey wasn't used to that kind of raw, unfiltered connection. And now that she'd had a taste of it, she wanted more.

But was it worth it?

She bit her lip as she considered the consequences. Was McKenna even looking for something serious? They hadn't talked about it, and the last thing Mazey wanted was to assume they were on the same page. McKenna was kind, sure, but did she want to take on all that came with being involved with someone like Mazey? The attention, the scrutiny, the invasive headlines? It wasn't fair to expect McKenna to navigate the pressures of fame just because Mazey was curious about where things could go. Could McKenna handle being with a celebrity? More importantly, should Mazey ask her to?

Mazey's stomach twisted at the thought. If word got out about them, everything would change. They wouldn't be able to go out without being watched, analyzed, and judged. The media would dig into McKenna's life, expose her to the kind of relentless attention that even seasoned actors struggled to handle. Could she do that to McKenna? Could she ask someone who had no experience with the harsh realities of fame to dive headfirst into her world?

The uncertainty gnawed at her. Maybe it was better to leave this as a one-time thing, a passionate moment between two people who were better off as a secret. But even as the thought crossed her mind, her chest tightened. She didn't want to walk away from McKenna. The idea of not seeing her again, not feeling that connection, left a hollow

ache in her heart. Mazey wasn't sure if she was ready for something serious, but the truth was, she didn't want this to end.

She pushed those thoughts away as she walked onto the set, trying to focus on work. The usual hustle and bustle of production surrounded her, the makeup artists, the wardrobe changes, the endless stream of instructions from the director. But for once, she wasn't fully present. McKenna lingered in the back of her mind, her touch, her smile, the way her eyes had softened as they lay together after their shared intimacy.

Mazey took a deep breath, pushing her shoulders back as she prepared for a day of filming. She had to get it together. There was no room for distractions, not here. This was her career, her life. She had worked too hard to let her feelings for someone, no matter how strong, throw her off balance. But even as she tried to push it all aside, McKenna's face flickered in her thoughts again.

What if this could be more? What if it was worth the risk? Mazey couldn't deny how right it had felt with McKenna, even with all the fears and doubts that came with it. This was definitely something she had to figure out and soon.

After she finished the first scene, she went to her trailer and stared at her phone, torn between the urge to message McKenna and the fear of what that might mean. The night they had shared kept replaying in her mind, every touch, every breath, every moment that made her feel more alive than she had in years. She couldn't stop thinking about it. But now, as she faced the reality of the day, her emotions felt like a tangled web she didn't know how to navigate.

She wished she had someone she could confide in, someone to share everything that was happening with her. The burden of keeping it all to herself was becoming too much to bear. She had close friends, sure, but none she could talk to about this, not really. They wouldn't understand. Even the ones who were the closest to her wouldn't get the complexity of what she was feeling. How could they? They didn't

know what it was like to be in the spotlight all the time, where every personal decision was displayed for the world to see. And more than that, they didn't know the pressure of being seen a certain way, of having an image to maintain.

Mazey glanced out the small window, the bustle of the set just beyond the glass. She was surrounded by people all day, yet she felt so isolated. The thought of telling someone, of opening up to a trusted friend or confidant, was tempting, but it was too risky. The problem was, there was no-one she trusted completely. And she thought to herself just how sad that was. It wasn't just about her; there was McKenna to consider too. She couldn't afford to let this slip, not even to her closest friends. One wrong word in the wrong place, and suddenly her personal life would be all over the tabloids.

And yet...the idea of sharing this with someone who could truly understand felt like a weight lifted from her chest. But who? Who could she trust? Who would keep her secret safe and not judge her for falling for someone like McKenna? Someone who wasn't famous, someone who wasn't in the public eye? The media would tear her apart if they found out she was seeing a woman. And not just any woman, someone who had nothing to do with the world of glitz and glamor. She wasn't sure she was ready to face that kind of scrutiny, let alone drag McKenna into it.

Mazey felt her phone buzz in her hand, but it wasn't the message she was hoping for. It was from her manager, reminding her of the upcoming shoot schedule for the next few days. She sighed and tossed the phone back onto the couch beside her. She didn't want to think about work right now. All she wanted to think about was McKenna.

She wondered if McKenna was thinking of her and would text. The night they shared had been intense, and she knew that McKenna had felt it too. But what if McKenna wasn't as caught up in the moment as she was? What if she saw it as just a fun, passionate night with no strings attached? The thought made her stomach churn. Mazey wasn't sure if she could handle it if that were true. She didn't want to be just a

passing fling for McKenna.

Part of her wanted to take matters into her own hands and message McKenna first. Maybe she could casually bring it up and see how McKenna was feeling without coming on too strong. But the other part of her, the one that had spent years building walls around her heart, told her to wait. Let McKenna come to her. After all, if McKenna was really interested, she'd reach out, right? Mazey shouldn't have to chase her.

But what if McKenna was feeling just as nervous, just as unsure about what came next? The vulnerability of it all gnawed at her. For the first time in a long time, Mazey felt unsure of her next move. Usually, she was confident, in control. But this...this was different.

With a sigh, Mazey picked up her phone again, her fingers hovering over the screen. Should she text her? Should she wait? The indecision gnawed at her. All Mazey knew was that she didn't want this to be the end, and yet, she had no idea how to move forward without risking everything she had worked so hard to build.

"You know what? I'm Mazey fucking Snow," she thought, her resolve strengthening. "What harm is a little texting? A little flirting?" If McKenna didn't want to continue, she'd just ignore her, right? Mazey tried to calm the anxious flutter in her chest as she stared at her phone, willing herself to stop overthinking. She had been bold in so many other areas of her life, why was this any different?

After a moment's hesitation, she decided to keep it simple and playful. A rose emoji. That would get the point across. It wasn't too forward, but it was enough to let McKenna know she was thinking of her. She smiled at the thought, her confidence returning as she hit send.

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Within minutes, her phone pinged. It was McKenna. “How are you feeling today? Tired? We worked hard yesterday!”

Mazey couldn't help but smile at the memory, the thought of McKenna's fingers moving inside her making her heart race. You worked hard, Mazey thought, remembering how she'd laid there, savoring every second of being ravished. She had never been able to just lay there before. Sex always seemed like a chore. Something she wanted to avoid. After her encounter with McKenna, she could finally understand why people were so obsessed with it. She bit her lip and tried to focus, needing something flirty to keep the conversation going.

Before Mazey could even think of a witty response, her phone buzzed again. Another message from McKenna.

“What's on the cards for the big-shot movie star today?”

Mazey smiled, relieved that McKenna was keeping the conversation going. She hadn't realized how nervous she'd been about texting her. After last night, everything felt so...uncertain. The connection had been intense, almost too intense, and Mazey had been afraid that maybe it was a fleeting thing. But here was McKenna, making it easy, light, and fun.

Mazey tapped her fingers against the screen, trying to come up with something that matched McKenna's playfulness but also hinted at how much she wanted to keep things going between them.

"Same old stuff," Mazey typed back. "You know, dazzling the masses, pretending I

know my lines, maybe getting my hair blown out by a wind machine. The usual."

She hit send and immediately bit her lip, second-guessing her words. Was that too much? Not enough? Why was she overthinking everything so much?

McKenna's response came quickly.

"Sounds like tough work. Maybe you need a personal masseuse on set?"

Mazey laughed softly, shaking her head at the image of McKenna showing up to her trailer in her firefighter uniform, offering a massage. Now that would definitely make headlines.

She could still feel the warmth of McKenna's strong hands from the night before, the way they'd confidently moved over her body, bringing her to places she hadn't known she could go. Her cheeks flushed as the memory of their night together played in her mind, and she had to steady herself before typing back.

"Only if you're offering," she replied with a winking emoji.

Her heart raced as she hit send, her mind instantly flooding with the possible interpretations of that response. Was it too bold? Was she playing it too cool? She wasn't used to this dynamic, this uncertainty. With men, it had always been straightforward. But with McKenna, there was more at stake. It felt raw and real. And that terrified her.

She didn't have long to overthink it, though. Her phone buzzed again.

"Maybe I am," McKenna texted. "You'd have to let me know if the job's available."

Mazey grinned, feeling her nerves melt into excitement. She loved the banter and

flirtation. It was new, refreshing.

She was about to respond when McKenna sent another message.

"But seriously," McKenna wrote. "Any big plans tonight? Or do you need a break from being fabulous?"

Mazey hesitated, her thumbs hovering over the keyboard. Was this it? Was McKenna about to ask her out again? Her heart thrummed as the thought crossed her mind. She didn't know what to say. Should she make herself available or should she play it cool?

What if last night had been just a one-time thing for McKenna? What if it meant more to Mazey than it did to her? And then there was the fact that Mazey wasn't out publicly. Could McKenna even handle that kind of secrecy?

She quickly shook those doubts away. She didn't want to think about the what-ifs right now. She wanted to enjoy this chance to keep exploring something new.

Mazey typed back, "No plans yet. Did you have something in mind?"

Her heart raced as she waited for McKenna's response, her nerves on edge. She was trying to stay cool, but inside she was giddy like a schoolgirl.

After a few seconds, her phone buzzed again.

"Dinner tonight? But not just you and me. My friends too. It'll be low-key, I promise. My friends are nice- they will welcome you to town."

Mazey's heart skipped a beat. Dinner with McKenna's friends? That wasn't what she had expected, and the idea of meeting people from McKenna's world so soon made

her stomach flip. But at the same time, it thrilled her. The thought of being included in McKenna's life, even in a casual setting, was exciting. It made things feel more real, more significant.

Mazey hesitated for a moment before typing back. Was she ready for this? What would McKenna's friends think of her? Would they treat her differently because of who she was? She didn't want to be the "celebrity" at the table. She just wanted to be Mazey, the woman who had spent an incredible night with McKenna and was eager to see where it could go.

Her fingers hovered over the screen, a mixture of excitement and nerves filling her. Then, with a deep breath, she typed, "That sounds fun. Count me in."

She hit send before she could overthink it, smiling softly to herself. It wasn't what she had expected, but maybe that was the point. Maybe this was a chance to see McKenna in her element and see how she fit into that world.

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Mazey felt a sense of anticipation bubbling up. Despite the butterflies in her stomach, she was ready to take this step. Ready to explore whatever this was with McKenna.

10

MCKENNA

As soon as McKenna received Mazey's reply, her heart raced. She couldn't believe it. Mazey had actually said yes to having dinner with her friends. It felt like a huge step forward, not just for them as a potential couple but for McKenna personally. She smiled at her phone, thinking about the evening ahead and how it could play out.

The decision to invite Mazey to meet her friends wasn't random. She wanted Mazey to see her world, to meet the people who grounded her. Ember and Josephine had been her pillars of strength for years, and their daughter, Natalie, always brought warmth and laughter to their lives. McKenna thought maybe seeing a couple like Ember and Josephine could help Mazey feel more at ease.

McKenna knew Mazey must be having a whirlwind of emotions after what happened between them, and she could imagine the confusion Mazey might be facing about her feelings, especially with Mazey not being out publicly. That was a pressure McKenna couldn't fully understand, but she hoped being around people who would treat her totally normally might offer Mazey some reassurance.

She wanted Mazey to have someone else to talk to, who could share insights from a different perspective. McKenna knew that their connection was undeniable, but she didn't want Mazey to feel overwhelmed or pressured. She wanted Mazey to know

that there was no rush, no expectation, and that McKenna was there, waiting for Mazey to figure things out in her own time.

But beyond that, McKenna hoped that this dinner would give Mazey a glimpse of something more, something real. She hoped that seeing Ember and Josephine and the life they had built together would help Mazey consider what their own future might look like. A future that wasn't confined to secret moments or fleeting feelings. A future where they could build something together, something that wasn't hidden away or uncertain.

McKenna could barely contain her excitement as she thought about how the night might unfold. Mazey, with her charm and beauty, meeting her closest friends and hopefully feeling safe in their presence. She hoped that by the end of the evening, Mazey would feel a little more sure, a little more open to the idea of exploring where this could go.

She didn't want to rush Mazey, but she also couldn't ignore how much she wanted this to be real. More than just a night of passion. More than just chemistry. She wanted something lasting. And maybe, just maybe, this dinner would be the start of that.

As she started getting ready for the evening, McKenna's heart was full of anticipation and hope. She couldn't wait to see Mazey again. She knew it would be a defining moment, one way or another. And she was ready for whatever came next.

Later that day, McKenna drove over to Ember's house to lend a hand with the dinner setup and talk with Ember before the evening kicked off.

As she pulled up, she spotted Ember working in the garage, as usual.

"McKenna!" Ember waved, wiping her hands on a rag. "Nervous for tonight?"

McKenna chuckled, but there was a hint of tension in her voice as she responded, “Yeah, a bit.”

Ember smirked knowingly, leaning against her car. “Remember what I said. Just let it unfold.”

McKenna nodded, appreciating Ember's calm, no-pressure approach. It was easier said than done, though. Meeting friends was one thing, but the potential weight of what tonight could mean was another.

As McKenna helped Ember and Josephine set up for dinner, she heard her phone buzz. It was Mazey.

“Hey, would you be able to pick me up?”

McKenna's heart skipped a beat. The thought of driving Mazey to dinner, like they were already something, sent a rush of excitement through her.

“Yeah. Just tell me where to pick you up, and I'll be there,” she quickly typed back.

Mazey sent her the address, and McKenna turned to Ember and Josephine. “Hey, I'm going to go pick up Mazey, okay?”

Ember was engrossed in setting up the grill, too focused to respond, but Josephine smiled warmly. “Okay, drive safe.”

As McKenna drove to the filming location, her mind raced. It felt right, like she was slipping into a role that was meant for her: picking Mazey up from work and bringing her to dinner with her friends. She wanted to show her off. Deep down, though, she knew Mazey might need time. This was new for her, and McKenna didn't want to rush anything.

When she finally pulled up to the set, Mazey quickly slipped into the car, her scent filling the space between them. The intoxicating mix of perfume and the sight of her in the passenger seat made McKenna's pulse quicken.

"Thank you so much for picking me up. I hope it wasn't too much trouble," Mazey said, giving her a soft smile.

"It's no problem at all. You ready to go?"

Mazey nodded. "Yeah. Let's go."

As they drove, the air between them was charged with that subtle tension of something new. Neither said much, but they didn't need to. The silence wasn't awkward; it was comfortable. Both of them could feel the quiet excitement of sharing something unspoken. Just a short while later, they arrived at Ember and Josephine's house.

McKenna felt her nerves flare up again. Would Mazey be comfortable here? Would she see what McKenna saw in these people, in this life? Before she could spiral too far, the front door burst open, and Natalie came running out, her wild red curls just about contained in a hairband.

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“McKenna!” the little girl shouted, her excitement infectious.

McKenna grinned, hopping out of the car. “Hey, kiddo!” She kneeled to give Natalie a big hug. As they embraced, Mazey stood back, watching with a small smile.

“Come see what I did in school today!” Natalie demanded, grabbing McKenna’s hand and dragging her inside before she could even introduce Mazey.

Josephine and Ember appeared at the door, stepping out to greet Mazey. “Hi, you must be Mazey. I’m Josephine, and this is Ember,” Josephine said warmly, extending a hand.

Ember smiled. “Welcome. It’s great to finally meet you. McKenna’s told us a little about you.” She gave Mazey a knowing look, though her tone remained light and friendly.

Mazey blushed slightly, glancing at McKenna, who was being whisked away by Natalie. “It’s nice to meet you both.” Meanwhile, McKenna found herself in the kitchen, trying to listen to Natalie about her school project while wondering how Mazey was feeling. Was she nervous? Was she okay meeting herfriends? Maybe she was pushing this too far too fast, McKenna thought, but she quickly pushed the thought away as Natalie proudly displayed her drawing.

“I drew this today,” Natalie said, holding up a picture of a firefighter drawn in crayon.

“Wow, Natalie, that looks amazing!” McKenna exclaimed. “Who is it supposed to

be?”

Before Natalie could answer, Mazey walked in, smiling. “Can’t you tell it’s you?” she teased.

Natalie beamed, proud of her work. “Yup! Do you like it?”

McKenna grinned, glancing between Mazey and Natalie. “I love it. Can I keep it?”

Natalie pretended to think for a moment before agreeing. “Hmm...okay!”

Just then, Josephine entered the room. “Natalie, go wash your hands and get ready for dinner, okay?”

“Okay!” Natalie scampered off, leaving McKenna and Mazey standing there.

Ember soon followed, wiping her hands on a towel. “You both want some wine or a beer or soda?” she offered. “Oh, and, Mazey, I hope you like steak because Ember’s been working hard at the grill today, and she’s very proud of her grilling skills,” Josephine said with a playful grin.

“Hey, I’m proud because I’m good!” Ember retorted, puffing out her chest dramatically.

Mazey laughed. “I’ll have a glass of wine, and steak sounds great.”

McKenna was relieved that her friends were so welcoming. It seemed as if Mazey had been nervous at first, but the banter between the two couples seemed to put her at ease. There was a warmth and familiarity here that she hadn’t realized she’d been craving.

A few minutes later, Natalie came back, hands freshly washed, and they all sat down to eat. McKenna kept stealing glances at Mazey, relieved to see her fitting in as the conversation flowed. “This steak is amazing, Ember!” Mazey complimented.

“Please don’t give her a bigger head than she already has,” Josephine teased, rolling her eyes playfully.

Ember grinned. “Hey, I take pride in my grilling skills.”

Mazey smiled. “So if you don’t mind me asking, how did you guys meet?”

“Well, you see—” Ember started, but Natalie interrupted with the frankness only a child could muster.

“Mommy E, you talk forever! Let Mommy J tell the story.”

“Uhm, rude,” Ember quipped, feigning hurt, but her smile betrayed her amusement.

They all laughed, the atmosphere growing more relaxed by the minute.

“Okay, my love,” Ember said with a wink toward Josephine. “Why don’t you tell it?”

“If you insist,” Josephine said, gently nudging Ember with her elbow. “Well, this might be the more censored version,” Josephine nodded to Natalie. “We met on a dating app, just you know for a one off.”

“And you guys just hit it off right there and then?” Mazey asked.

“Oh, we definitely hit it off!” Ember jumped in with a smirk.

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“EMBER!” Josephine scolded.

Josephine chuckled softly. “The next time I saw Ember, she had been in a car wreck and she was a patient at the hospital. She was my good friend Becky’s daughter, you see. Only I had no idea she was the same woman I had met on the dating app.”

Mazey tilted her head. “Oh really? What did Becky say?”

Josephine laughed. “Well, initially we pretended we didn’t know each other. And then, well. We started dating in secret.” Josephine admitted. “It was only a matter of time really before Becky caught us. But after she saw how happy Ember was and realized it wasn’t just some kind of phase, Becky came around. She got over the shock of the age gap.”

“Yeah. Luckily, Phoenix Ridge is a super accepting place. And, my mom. Well, she comes across all fierce, but really, once you get past the stubbornness, she is so open minded.” Ember chimed in with a laugh.

Mazey smiled, her eyes shifting briefly toward McKenna, who was watching her closely. “Yeah, I’ve noticed. It seems very gay friendly here. I thought California was progressive, but here? It’s like no one even bats an eye.”

Josephine nodded. “It is an amazing place. I have been so very happy since I have been here.” Josephine looked lovingly at Ember and Natalie.

“Well, you two are lucky you found each other,” Mazey said softly.

“Yeah, we are,” they both said in unison, their smiles reflecting the love they shared.

After dinner, it was time to put Natalie to bed.

“Mommy E, can you tell me a bedtime story?” Natalie asked, rubbing her eyes.

“Of course, kiddo,” Ember said, standing up. “Goodnight, everyone. It was nice to meet you, Mazey,” Natalie added, looking up at her with sleepy eyes.

“It was nice to meet you too, Natalie. Sweet dreams,” Mazey replied, her voice warm.

Now it was just the three of them in the kitchen. McKenna felt her nerves bubble up again, wondering what Mazey was thinking. She’d seen a different side of her tonight, more relaxed, more comfortable.

“So, Mazey,” Josephine started, “tell me more about what you’re doing here in Phoenix Ridge. I heard McKenna saved you from a cliff.”

Mazey laughed, shaking her head. “Yeah, that was...an interesting day. The safety gear didn’t really do its job.”

“You must’ve made quite the impression on McKenna,” Josephine teased. “I’ve never met anyone she’s dated before.”

McKenna’s face turned bright red. Why did she have to bring that up? she thought, glancing at Mazey, who was now smiling directly at her.

“Oh really? Wow, I feel so special,” Mazey said, her smile widening.

That smile. It made McKenna’s heart melt, and in that moment, she knew just how much Mazey meant to her. There was something special between them, and it wasn’t

just a passing connection. It was real.

Ember returned after tucking Natalie in, and the conversation continued until they all started yawning.

“It looks like we’re getting old,” Josephine joked. “How is it only 9 p.m. and we’re nearly falling asleep at the table? We used to just be getting started at this time!”

They all laughed, and soon after, Mazey and McKenna said their goodbyes, heading to the truck.

As they sat in the truck, Mazey grabbed McKenna’s hand, her eyes soft and full of affection. “That was really nice,” she said, her voice almost a whisper. “I don’t ever really get to hang out with normal people if that makes any sense.”

McKenna felt a surge of warmth. She reached out, cupping Mazey’s face gently before leaning in for a tender kiss.

“Were you really feeling tired?” McKenna asked softly. “I was wondering if you would like to come over to my place.”

Mazey’s eyes flickered with excitement as she nodded. “Yeah, I’d love to.”

With a smile, McKenna started the truck, holding Mazey’s hand as they drove back to her place. The night, it seemed, was just beginning.

As they entered McKenna’s house, Mazey looked around, her eyes widening. “Wow. This place looks nice.” McKenna raised an eyebrow, a playful smirk tugging at her lips. “What? Were you thinking I lived in a trash heap?”

“No, no,” Mazey replied, laughing softly. “I guess I was just expecting it to be

less...put together.”

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“You were expecting me to have some kind of messy bachelor pad? Well, sorry, honey, I’m not a man,” McKenna teased, her grin widening.

Mazey laughed, shaking her head. “That’s not what I meant at all, geez.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, Ms. MovieStar. You can say whatever you want.”

“Hey, I’m not Ms. Movie Star. My name is Mazey,” she said, stepping closer and getting in McKenna’s face, her blue eyes sparkling with mischief.

The proximity between them was electric, too much to resist. McKenna didn’t waste a second, closing the distance between them as their lips crashed together in a heated kiss. The world seemed to blur, leaving only the intensity of the moment. Their hands were everywhere, fumbling with clothes, removing them piece by piece as McKenna led Mazey toward the couch.

By the time they reached the couch, they were both completely naked, their breathing heavy with anticipation. Mazey pushed McKenna gently onto the cushions, her eyes dark with desire. McKenna looked up at her, longing written all over her face. She wanted Mazey’s touch, craved it in a way she hadn’t felt in so long.

Mazey climbed on top of her, their bodies fitting together as though they were meant for each other. Their lips met again, the kiss deeper this time, more urgent. Their hands tangled in each other’s hair, pulling softly, their bodies aching for more. Mazey broke the kiss, leaving kisses trailing down her cheek, her jaw, her neck. The sensation sent shivers down McKenna’s spine.

Mazey worked her way down to McKenna's breasts, licking and biting at her sensitive skin. It had been so long since someone had touched her like this or made her feel like this. A moan escaped McKenna's lips, and Mazey smiled against her skin, clearly pleased with the reaction. She continued her descent, her hands tracing down McKenna's body, making every inch of her burn with desire.

When Mazey's fingers found McKenna's inner thighs, she hesitated for a brief second, her touch so gentle, yet filled with promise. McKenna's breath hitched, her entire body trembling with need. Mazey leaned in closer, her lips brushing against McKenna's ear as she whispered, "Tell me what you want."

McKenna could barely think, her voice coming out in a breathless whisper. "You. I want you."

Mazey's smile grew wider as her fingers explored McKenna's skin. The heat between them intensified, building as Mazey's touch grew bolder, more confident. McKenna arched into her, her body responding eagerly, every nerve on fire.

McKenna's breath hitched as she whispered, "I want you to fuck me with your fingers."

Mazey responded without hesitation, her fingers pushing inside of McKenna and beginning a steady rhythm.

"Like this?" she asked, her face earnest.

"Curl your fingers upwards and then thrust in and out," McKenna guided her.

Mazey changed what she was doing and McKenna felt the impact of her fingers as the pads of them pressed against her G spot.

“Oh, fuck, yes.” McKenna gasped. “Do that. Exactly that. Keep doing that -in and out -and gradually get faster.”

McKenna tipped her head back and closed her eyes as Mazey began to follow her instructions exactly.

The pleasure was intense, and McKenna couldn't help but be surprised at how good Mazey was. She hadn't expected it to feel so perfect, but with every movement, Mazey seemed to know exactly what McKenna needed.

“Put your thumb against my clit,” McKenna growled and Mazey responded sending waves of pleasure through McKenna's body.

McKenna moved her own right hand down Mazey's smooth body, her fingers sliding into her wetness and she smiled as Mazey moaned deeply. The sensation clearly sent a jolt through Mazey, and her moans quickly turned into gasps of pleasure every time McKenna's fingers thrust into her. Their bodies were moving in sync now, both giving and receiving in a passionate dance. The air was thick with their ragged breathing, the room filled with the sound of their moans.

Mazey's fingers quickened inside her, and McKenna's body tensed, her muscles tightening with the heat building inside. Every nerve was on fire, and the way Mazey's body was reacting to her fucking on top of her, only heightened her own desire. Mazey's moans became louder, more desperate, and McKenna felt herself getting closer and closer to the edge.

“I'm going to come,” Mazey whispered, her voice trembling with anticipation.

McKenna's movements grew more frenzied, her thumb applying just the right pressure as her fingers worked inside Mazey. The pleasure was overwhelming, their bodies now completely lost in the moment. With one final thrust, McKenna's body

twisted in ecstasy, her back arching as she let out a long, drawn-out moan. The pleasure consumed her, wave after wave crashing over her until she could hardly breathe.

Mazey followed quickly after, her body tensing and tightening around McKenna's fingers. She let out a soft cry, her body trembling before she went completely limp, collapsing onto McKenna before rolling off to the side.

They lay there for a long moment, facing each other, the afterglow of their shared pleasure lingering between them. They didn't need to say anything. The connection they had felt was undeniable, and the intimacy of the moment spoke louder than any words could. McKenna gently traced her finger along Mazey's cheek, her lips pressing soft, tender kisses against hers. Mazey responded with a sleepy smile, their fingers lightly playing with each other's hair.

It wasn't long before Mazey's breathing slowed, her eyes fluttering shut as she drifted off to sleep. McKenna stayed awake for a little while longer, watching Mazey in the soft light, feeling an overwhelming sense of contentment. She couldn't believe how perfect the night had been. Everything had felt so right, so natural. And now, looking at Mazey lying beside her, McKenna knew she didn't want this to be just one night.

She wanted more. She wanted this to continue, and as she drifted off to sleep, she hoped Mazey felt the same way.

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Mazey stretched lazily, the warmth of the morning sun filtering through the windows as the smell of coffee and the sizzle of something frying lured her out of the cozy cocoon of the couch. The memories of the previous night flooded back, bringing a smile to her lips. Everything had felt so perfect. For once, she hadn't been overwhelmed by anxiety or the need to keep up appearances. Being with McKenna and meeting her friends, it was all so comfortable, so... real.

Mazey sat up, running her hands through her hair in a futile attempt to smooth it down. Her reflection in a nearby mirror made her laugh. Her hair was a mess, sticking up in all directions. She gave up, deciding to leave it as it was, and picked up a fire department T shirt of McKenna's that she pulled on with her own panties from last night. She padded barefoot toward the kitchen, drawn by the sounds and smells of breakfast being made.

As she approached, she paused in the doorway. There was McKenna, standing at the stove, her back turned as she flipped something in a pan. Mazey watched her for a moment, a soft smile forming on her lips. This felt so right. She couldn't help but imagine mornings like this in the future, waking up beside McKenna, sharing breakfast, just living life together.

Just then, McKenna turned around, and her eyes widened as she jumped back.

"Oh my god!" McKenna gasped, her hand flying to her chest as she bent over, trying to catch her breath.

Mazey grinned, leaning against the doorframe. "Did I scare you?" McKenna let out a breathy laugh, shaking her head. "Yeah, just a little bit! Say something next time

when you enter a room. Please.” Mazey walked over and stood beside her, peeking at the pan. “What are you making? It smells amazing.”

“Just eggs and bacon. Figured I’d keep it simple.” McKenna smiled as she turned the heat down. “You looked like you needed some fuel after last night.”

Mazey raised an eyebrow, smirking. “Oh, so it’s like that, huh?”

McKenna shot her a playful look. “What? I’m just being practical.”

Mazey leaned in, wrapping her arms around McKenna’s waist from behind, resting her chin on McKenna’s shoulder. “Well, I could definitely get used to this, waking up to you, breakfast, the whole thing.”

McKenna turned her head slightly, looking at Mazey out of the corner of her eye. “You could, huh?”

“Yeah,” Mazey whispered. “I think I could.”

McKenna watched as Mazey’s expression shifted, her carefree smile fading the moment she picked up her phone. The air of ease between them suddenly felt fragile, as though something invisible had wedged itself into the space between their shared laughter and this new, heavy silence.

"Do you have a charger I can borrow? It looks like my phone’s dead," Mazey asked, a hint of nervousness in her voice.

"Yeah sure. You can plug it in next to the table."

Mazey stood up and walked over to plug her phone in, taking a seat at the table as it powered on. She glanced at McKenna, trying to steady her nerves. "No work today?"

she asked, hoping to steer the conversation back to the comfort of their morning.

McKenna shook her head with a small smile. "Nope. It's another day off for me."

Mazey hesitated for a moment, she had the day off too, then asked, "Would you like to spend the day together?" Her heart raced as the words left her lips. She didn't want to seem too eager, but after the connection they'd shared, the idea of leaving felt unbearable.

Before McKenna could respond, Mazey's phone buzzed to life. The name on the screen made her stomach drop. It was her manager. She answered, trying to keep her tone light. "Hello?"

"Mazey. Oh my god, I've been trying to reach you all morning. Where have you been?" her manager's voice was frantic on the other end.

Mazey furrowed her brow. "Out. Why? We don't have any filming today."

"Yes, I know that, but have you been online? Turned on a TV?" her manager pressed, the urgency in her voice deepening.

"No, I haven't," Mazey replied, a knot forming in her stomach.

"Well, word is that you've been cozying up with a lesbian firefighter," her manager said, the words sharp and cutting.

Mazey's heart dropped into her stomach. She could feel panic rising in her chest as the reality of the situation settled in. One of her worst fears had come to life. The paparazzi, the media, and all the things she had tried so hard to keep at bay had managed to worm their way into her life again. And just as everything was starting to feel so right with McKenna.

Her hand shook slightly as she lowered the phone and covered the mic. “This is kind of urgent,” she said, her voice strained as she tried to keep her emotions in check.

Mazey paced as she held the phone to her ear, trying to control the panic that was clawing its way to the surface. “What do you mean it’s out there? Who leaked it?” Mazey demanded, her voice trembling.

“I don’t know yet, but it’s spreading fast. The media’s all over it. Photos, speculation, the whole nine yards. It’s not looking good,” her manager said. “You need to get ahead of the narrative, Mazey. This could hurt your career.”

Mazey’s breath caught in her throat. Hurt her career? Was it really that serious? She glanced back toward the kitchen where McKenna was, oblivious to the storm brewing outside their little bubble. Mazey felt a wave of guilt wash over her. She wasn’t just thinking about herself anymore. This could affect McKenna too. How was she going to explain this to her?

“I need to figure this out,” Mazey whispered into the phone. “I’ll call you back.”

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She hung up, her mind racing. How had things spiraled so fast? Just a few hours ago, she'd been wrapped in McKenna's arms, feeling like everything was finally falling into place. Now, it felt like the ground was being pulled out from under her.

Mazey walked back into the kitchen, her expression unreadable. McKenna turned, her brow furrowed with concern.

"Everything okay?" McKenna asked, her voice gentle but laced with worry.

Mazey forced a smile, but it didn't reach her eyes. "It's just...work stuff. Something leaked, and now there's this whole thing going on with the media," she said, trying to downplay the severity of it.

McKenna took a step closer and reached out to touch Mazey's arm. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

Mazey's heart twisted at the kindness in McKenna's beautiful brown eyes. She wanted to tell her everything, to let her in completely, but fear held her back. The media attention, the scrutiny—it was exactly what she'd been running from. And now, here she was, standing at the edge of the cliff again about to fall into the chaos.

"I... I don't know," Mazey admitted quietly, her voice cracking. "I don't know how to handle this."

McKenna pulled her into a tight embrace, her hand gently stroking Mazey's back. "We'll figure it out," she whispered. "We'll deal with it together."

Mazey closed her eyes, allowing herself to melt into McKenna's arms for a moment. She wanted to believe that everything would be okay, that they could handle whatever was thrown their way. But as she buried her face in McKenna's shoulder, a part of her couldn't shake the fear that this was just the beginning of something that could tear them apart.

Mazey's phone buzzed. Her manager was coming to pick her up. She wanted to have a meeting with her. Mazey hurried to find her own clothes and dress. She grabbed her bag, her movements hurried and distracted. The comfortable ease they'd shared moments ago now felt like a fragile memory slipping through her fingers.

"Are you okay?" McKenna asked gently, trying to catch Mazey's eye.

Mazey paused at the door, turning to face her. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"Will I see you later?" McKenna asked, a trace of uncertainty in her voice.

Mazey hesitated for a moment, then nodded, though it felt more like a promise she wasn't sure she could keep. "Yeah, I'll text you when I'm free."

Mazey's fingers tightened around her phone as she waited for her manager to pull up. The silence of the neighborhood was comforting, but her mind was anything but quiet. What had she gotten herself into? Her feelings for McKenna had come fast and hard, overwhelming her in ways she hadn't expected. But now, with the reality of her life crashing down on her, she wasn't sure if she could handle it. She wasn't sure if she was ready to let anyone in, especially not someone like McKenna, who made everything feel so...real.

Her phone buzzed again. She sighed and answered, her voice tight. "Hey, I'm outside."

Just then she saw a black Mercedes pull up. Her manager rolled down the window.

“You okay?” Her voice was brusque, but Mazey could hear the underlying tension. “You’ve been dodging calls. This is serious, Mazey.”

She swallowed and got in the car, trying to keep her voice steady. “I know. I’ve been...distracted.”

“Distracted by a hot firefighter? Look, Mazey, this is all over the tabloids. You’ve got photos everywhere, and people are already talking.”

Her heart pounded, the weight of it all sinking in. “I didn’t realize it was out like that.”

“It is. And we need to handle it before it becomes a bigger mess.”

Mazey rubbed her forehead, closing her eyes. Of course it was a mess. It always was, wasn’t it? She couldn’t just have something for herself, not without it becoming public property.

Olivia’s voice broke through her thoughts. “Look, you know how this works. We can spin it, but we need to get ahead of it.”

“Spin it?” she repeated, her throat tight. “This isn’t just...some fling.”

“Mazey, I get it, okay? I get that you’re probably feeling something here, but you’ve got a career to think about. Your image. You can’t be caught with just anyone.”

Mazey’s chest tightened. Her image. The brand she’d been carefully maintaining for years. The smiling, flawless actress who never slipped up, never gave people too much to talk about. She hated it. But what other choice did she have?

“I don’t want to hurt them,” Mazey whispered, still not ready to admit that she was in love with a woman.

Her manager sighed, her tone softening just a bit. “I’m not saying you have to hurt anyone. But you need to think about what’s best for you. For your future.”

Mazey bit her lip, staring out at the empty street. What if McKenna was part of her future? What if, for once, she wanted to let someone in, to stop pretending? But could she really risk it? Could she handle the pressure that would come with it? The judgment? The loss of control?

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“I’ll...think about it,” she finally said, her voice hollow. She wasn’t ready to make any decisions, not yet. But the doubt was already creeping in, making her question everything that had felt so right just moments ago.

Mazey needed time alone to think. After her meeting with Olivia, her manager, she retreated to her hotel room, hoping to find some clarity. As she made her way through the lobby, the paparazzi shouted questions, their voices overlapping in a chaotic symphony. “Mazey! Is it true you’re dating a firefighter?” “Are you going to respond to the rumors?” “What do you have to say about the photos?”

Each question felt like a dagger, twisting in her gut.

She pushed past them, her heart pounding. This was more than just a minor inconvenience; it was a stark reminder of her reality. She had built her entire life around her perfect, polished, and untouchable image. But now, everything felt like it was unraveling. Olivia had told her to spin it, but how could she spin something so personal? She didn’t even know Mazey was into women. If it were a man, maybe it would be easier. But this was McKenna, someone she cared about deeply. The thought of dragging her into this mess made Mazey’s stomach churn.

As she navigated through the throng, she felt light-headed from the onslaught of thoughts swirling in her mind. Each flash from the cameras was a stark reminder of the stakes. It was a reality check she wasn’t prepared for, one that made her feel as if she were suffocating under the weight of her own decisions.

Finally, she reached the hotel elevator, where security guards created a barrier between her and the media frenzy. She didn’t want anyone to see how shaken she was

or how vulnerable she felt. Maintaining her composure was crucial; she needed a calm exterior and a witty response, something to deflect the probing questions.

“Thanks, fellas,” she called over her shoulder with a smirk that didn’t quite reach her eyes. “Maybe next time, they’ll write about me shacking up with a security guard.” It was a joke, a façade, and the guards chuckled at her attempt to lighten the mood.

“These paparazzi are always spinning some crazy stuff, Ms. Snow,” one of the guards replied, trying to reassure her. “We’ll make sure they don’t bother you, and I’m sure it’ll die down soon.”

Mazey appreciated their kindness, but the words felt hollow. She didn’t have the energy to engage in pleasantries. The weight of everything pressing down on her made it hard to act as if nothing was wrong. As the elevator doors shut behind her, she leaned against the cool metal wall and checked for a CCTV camera. She was safe, but the moment she was alone, the dam broke. She sank to the floor, tears streaming down her cheeks.

The nightmare she had feared had come true far too soon. She needed more time to be completely sure of her choice and gather her thoughts and emotions. Could she really choose love over her career? What if she came out, and it was a non-issue? What if it was a big deal? The questions spiraled through her mind, creating a tempest of uncertainty that left her feeling lost.

The elevator doors opened, and Mazey stumbled out, making her way to her room. As soon as she entered, she threw herself onto the bed, burying her face in the comforter as her body shook with sobs.

Mazey felt a tight knot in her stomach as the weight of her decision settled in. She wasn’t ready to come out to the world, let alone admit to her manager that she was in love with a woman. Not yet. The scrutiny she faced was suffocating, and she needed

it to end now. She considered the prospect of ending things with McKenna in person, but the thought was too painful. Their connection had grown so deep, and she couldn't bear to see the hurt in McKenna's eyes.

Instead, she decided it would be easier to do it over a text. As she sat on the edge of her bed, her heart raced. As she typed, her fingers trembled. "I'm sorry, but I can't do a relationship right now. I hope you can understand. I wish you the best."

Once she hit send, a wave of relief mingled with regret washed over her. It felt like a coward's way out, but she needed to sever the connection. With a deep breath, she blocked McKenna's number, a finality hanging in the air like a heavy curtain.

As the screen went dark, she felt an ache in her chest, a bittersweet pang of loss that she knew would haunt her long after this moment. Why couldn't she have love and a thriving career? Was it really wrong that she loved a woman? As the thoughts swirled in her head, the exhaustion from stress and crying got to her, and she nodded off, hoping that everything would be solved once she woke up.

12

MCKENNA

McKenna stared at her phone in disbelief, the glowing screen illuminating the chaos of her thoughts. How could Mazey just end things over a text message? After an incredible night filled with laughter, intimacy, and promises of a future, it felt like a punch to the gut. This was exactly how she imagined a Hollywood diva would handle a situation: impersonal, cold, and callous. McKenna had wanted to believe that Mazey was different, that their connection was real, but now, she couldn't shake the feeling that maybe she was just a fleeting experiment, a chapter in Mazey's life that she could easily close.

She tried to calm herself, but the whirlwind of emotions was overwhelming. McKenna turned on the TV and switched to the entertainment channel, hoping to distract herself. The reporter was in the middle of speculating about Mazey Snow's sudden disappearance from the public eye.

"Is she having a fling with a hunky firefighter? Could this be her new boo?"

The words felt like daggers. Seeing Mazey's face on the screen was painful, a reminder of the warmth and affection they had shared. Deep down, McKenna wanted to believe that the woman she had spent time with, the one who had made her laugh and feel alive, was still in there somewhere. Maybe this was just a moment of panic for Mazey, a reaction to the pressures of her fame and the overwhelming scrutiny she faced.

But as the minutes ticked by, McKenna realized she couldn't be alone with her thoughts any longer. The self-doubt and confusion were too much to bear. She needed to talk to someone, to get a fresh perspective, to figure out if there was still hope for her and Mazey.

Without hesitation, she picked up her phone and called Ember.

"Yo, McKenna! What's going on? Is everything alright?" "Can I come over and talk? I'm going crazy," McKenna admitted, her voice trembling.

"Of course! I'm at the garage. Drop by anytime," Ember replied, her tone instantly reassuring.

"Okay. I'm on my way," McKenna said, feeling a flicker of hope igniting in her chest.

She drove over to Ember's garage, her mind racing with questions and doubts. She

hoped that Ember had some magical words that would make her feel better, whether it was the push she needed to move on from Mazey or something to cling to, giving her a glimmer of hope. But deep down, McKenna knew she didn't really know what she wanted.

In the past, she hadn't cared so much about her previous partners. Whether they were closeted or too afraid to come out didn't matter; she had been able to compartmentalize her feelings. But this felt different. This was Mazey, someone who had sparked a fire in her heart, and she found herself clinging to the hope that their connection was genuine. The thought of being just another secret for Mazey was almost unbearable. What if Mazey had just had a change of heart? What if she realized she didn't want to be with McKenna after all?

As she pulled up to the garage, McKenna took a deep breath, trying to calm the storm inside her. She stepped out of her car and walked toward the entrance, where the sounds of machinery and laughter filled the air. Ember was working on a car, her hands covered in grease, but she looked up and smiled when she saw McKenna.

"Hey, you okay?" Ember asked, wiping her hands on a rag and setting it aside.

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“No, not really,” McKenna admitted, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Come on, let’s talk,” Ember said, leading her to a more secluded corner of the garage.

They settled onto a pair of worn-out stools, and Ember leaned in, her eyes searching McKenna’s face for answers. “What happened?”

“It’s Mazey,” McKenna said, her voice cracking. “She ended things over a text. I don’t even know what to think.”

“Yeah, I got a message from Josephine this morning,” Ember said, her brow furrowed with concern as she leaned against the workbench. “She heard some nurses gossiping about it at the hospital. I’m sure Mazey’s freaking out right now. But I didn’t think she would just end things with you.”

“Yeah, I didn’t either,” McKenna replied, frustration tightening her chest. “You know I really liked her. I’ve never felt that way about anyone before. It seemed like we had a real connection. Especially last night. I mean, all of us together. It felt so right.”

Ember crossed her arms, contemplating McKenna’s words. “Mazey seemed like she liked you a lot. Do you really think she would give it up over a tiny scandal?”

McKenna sighed, dragging a hand through her hair. “I mean, from the beginning, she talked about how important this new netflix show was for her and that she couldn’t let anything get in her way. I don’t think someone she met recently is going to deter her from making all her dreams come true. And who knows? Maybe I was just an

experiment for her.”

“Hey, don’t think that way,” Ember said firmly, stepping closer to McKenna. “All it’s going to do is hurt you. You need to remember that Mazey lives in a completely different world from us. We live in a community that embraces who we are and doesn’t scrutinize us. Our world is woman-dominated. Hers isn’t. It’s a really big decision she needs to make, and it could take her some time to come to realize what’s really important.”

McKenna nodded slowly, processing Ember’s words. “I get that, but it’s just...hard. I don’t want to be a secret or some fling she can easily toss aside. I thought we had something real, something that could last.”

Ember reached out and squeezed McKenna’s shoulder, a gesture of comfort. “You’re not a fling, McKenna. You know that. Just look at how you both clicked. The chemistry was undeniable. It’s just that the stakes are higher for her. Hollywood can be brutal, especially when it comes to personal lives. She probably feels trapped between wanting to be true to herself and wanting to protect her career.”

“I know,” McKenna said, her voice trembling. “But that doesn’t make it any easier. I feel like I’m on this emotional roller coaster. One minute, I’m hopeful, and the next, I’m convinced she’s going to walk away and never look back.”

“That may be how it seems now, but you don’t know what’s going on in her head,” Ember continued. “It’s better not to assume anything.”

“Yeah, but what am I supposed to do in the meantime?” McKenna asked, her frustration slipping through her voice.

“You know, you have to do what feels right for you,” Ember replied. “If it’s such a great love, maybe give her space, but be open to whatever may happen. You never

know.”

“You’re right,” McKenna agreed aloud, but inside, she felt an overwhelming urge to shut out everything and everyone. The feeling was foreign and uncomfortable. She’d never let herself care for someone the way she did for Mazey. And to have that connection ripped away so suddenly over a text with no chance to respond made her feel helpless. She hated not having control.

Ember gave her a soft nudge. “Why don’t you go do things you enjoy to take your mind off it? There’s no sense in dwelling on it, especially on your day off. You deserve a break. Me and a few of the girls from the garage are heading over to Ace. Why don’t you join us? Have some fun, knock back a few drinks.”

McKenna gave a small smile but shook her head. “Thanks for the invite, but I think I’m gonna head to the gym.”

Ember laughed. “Just don’t punch anyone’s lights out while you’re there!”

McKenna chuckled back, feeling a bit lighter. “No promises. See ya.”

As she drove to the gym, her mind raced, replaying every memory of Mazey. Every small laugh they’d shared, every look that lingered a bit too long. The ache in her chest was raw, and she knew she’d have to sweat it out or it would consume her.

Once inside, she focused on the weights, pushing herself harder than usual. The burn in her muscles was grounding, a reminder that she was strong, even if her heart felt fragile. As she finished a set, she noticed the loud clatter of weights and the rhythmic hum of people around her. The routine brought her a semblance of peace. She moved from one exercise to the next, her mind settling into a steady rhythm.

But her thoughts still drifted back to Mazey. She wondered if Mazey felt the same

pull she did or if she'd already moved on, brushing it all off as a mistake. The idea twisted something deep inside her, fueling her next rep, the weights clinking with each movement.

An hour later, sweat dripped down her back, her muscles aching in a satisfying way. She felt slightly more at ease, yet her chest still held that hollow ache, reminding her of how much Mazey meant to her. McKenna sat on a bench, wiping her face with a towel. She knew she couldn't make Mazey's decisions for her, but she wished Mazey had given them a real chance instead of closing the door before they'd even fully opened it.

She walked into the locker room and checked her phone, half-expecting a message from Mazey apologizing, telling her it was all a mistake. But there was nothing. She took a deep breath, steeling herself.

Maybe Ember was right. She couldn't control what Mazey did, but she could control how she responded. If Mazey truly cared, maybe she'd come back. And if not, McKenna would find a way to move forward, just like she always did.

McKenna decided she might as well go to the bar. Ember was right. It had been a long time since she'd had a real night off, and she shouldn't waste it sulking around. Her house was the last place she'd seen Mazey before she ended things, and returning to that empty, quiet space felt too raw. The thought of sitting there, surrounded by memories, was unbearable. She didn't want to risk seeing any reminders of Mazey and spiraling into the hurt all over again.

Instead, she decided she'd shower at the gym, grab a quick bite, and then hit the bar. She'd avoid her phone, stay away from any screens that might show Mazey's face, and pretend, just for one night, that Mazey didn't exist. She knew Ember wouldn't tell anyone, so she wouldn't have to worry about fielding any prying questions or offering explanations. Tonight, she could just be herself without the weight of her

broken heart in every glance.

As she stepped into the shower, McKenna let the hot water wash over her, her body aching from the intense workout she'd just finished. She stood there for a moment, feeling the heat soak into her muscles, soothing the tension and frustration that had built up inside her. The gym shower had always been a place of quiet for her, a place where she could let her guard down in privacy. She was glad she'd chosen to shower here; the gym had enough people moving in and out that she'd never allow herself to break down.

McKenna was a firefighter, part of a team that saved people's lives. She didn't need anyone in town seeing her vulnerable or hearing whispers that she'd been crying. They depended on her strength and resilience. She closed her eyes and tilted her head back, letting the water cleanse more than just her skin.

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When she finished, she dressed quickly, glancing in the mirror. Her eyes still looked a little tired, a little worn, but she felt a renewed sense of resolve. Tonight, she would go out, laugh with friends, and remind herself that she had a life outside of her connection to Mazey.

McKenna drove to the bar, turning up the music in her car, letting the bass drown out any stray thoughts that threatened to creep back in. By the time she arrived, her friends were already there, gathered around a pool table, drinks in hand and laughing easily. She joined them, grateful for the normalcy and camaraderie. They offered her a drink, and she considered it for a moment before declining. Somehow, a drink didn't feel right. She didn't want to risk letting her emotions get the best of her, and alcohol might loosen the grip she had on her hurt.

"C'mon, you're usually the life of the party! Just one?" Jenna, teased, nudging her shoulder.

McKenna grinned, trying to match their energy. "Not tonight, I'm driving. Someone's gotta keep you girls in check."

They laughed, and McKenna allowed herself to sink into the simple joy of being surrounded by people who cared about her. For a moment, she felt almost normal again, caught up in their jokes and the easy rhythm of their conversation. The noise, the music, and the friendly faces around her created a kind of buffer, holding back the flood of hurt that had threatened to overwhelm her all day.

After an hour, Ember arrived, looking around and spotting McKenna immediately. She gave her a grin and came over, slipping an arm around her shoulders. "Glad to

see you came out tonight. Figured you might hole up somewhere,” she said, her tone light but her gaze knowing.

McKenna smiled, shrugging. “Thought about it, but you’re right. It’s been a while since I had a real night off.”

Ember studied her for a moment. “Proud of you. This’ll pass, y’know. One day, it’ll just be another story.”

“Yeah,” McKenna replied, trying to believe it. But deep down, she wasn’t so sure.

She joined the group for another game of pool, chatting and laughing as best she could. But after a while, the noise started to feel too loud and the crowd too thick. She’d been holding it together all day, pretending everything was fine, and the act was wearing thin. She checked her watch and saw it was getting late; with work the next day, she had an excuse to leave without raising suspicions.

“Well, I think I’m going to call it a night,” she said, grabbing her jacket.

The women groaned in mock disappointment, but Ember gave her an understanding look. “We’ll catch up soon, alright?” Ember squeezed her shoulder. “Text me when you’re home safe.”

McKenna gave her a grateful nod and slipped out of the bar, relieved to be alone again. As she drove home, the silence in the car felt both comforting and daunting, and memories of Mazey crept in despite her efforts to keep them at bay. She had thought the night out might clear her mind, but instead, the ache in her chest felt sharper than ever.

When she finally pulled up to her house, she sat in the car for a moment, reluctant to go inside. The last time she’d been here, Mazey had been with her, laughing and

looking at her with those bright, hopeful eyes that had made McKenna think, just for a second, that maybe she'd found something real. But that vision was shattered now, replaced by the cold text Mazey had sent.

She walked inside, the quiet of the house pressing down on her. She didn't turn on the TV or bother checking her phone. Instead, she went to her room and sat down on the bed, staring at the wall. The emptiness felt like it was consuming her, like a hollow space that nothing could fill.

Lying back, she tried to focus on the positives. The friends who had been there for her, and the strength she'd built up over the years. But the truth was, her heart ached. She'd let herself open up, let herself believe in someone, and now she was left trying to pick up the pieces.

As she lay in the darkness, McKenna let out a slow breath. This was the hardest part, she knew. The waiting. Hoping that maybe Mazey would realize what she'd walked away from, that she'd come back with an apology. And yet, a part of McKenna knew that even if Mazey did come back, things wouldn't be the same. The trust and certainty she'd felt was already cracked.

She forced herself to close her eyes, determined to get at least a few hours of sleep before her shift. Tomorrow would be another day, another chance to move forward, even if it felt impossible right now.

In the dark, she whispered to herself, "One day at a time." It was all she could promise herself tonight, but it would have to be enough.

She quickly fell asleep, exhaustion finally overpowering the weight on her heart. Before she knew it, her alarm jolted her awake, filling the quiet room with its sharp, insistent beeps. McKenna groaned and rubbed her eyes, willing herself to push past the heavy ache still lingering from the night before. It was time for work, and work

meant structure and focus, things she desperately needed right now.

She made herself a strong cup of coffee, sipping it slowly as she got ready. Each familiar step in her morning routine felt like a lifeline, a reminder of who she was outside of Mazey's shadow. Today would be about the job and putting one foot in front of the other because moving forward was the only thing she could control.

By the time she slipped into her uniform, she felt the tiniest glimmer of strength returning. Work was her way forward, her path out of the fog of heartbreak. And as she walked out the door, she took a deep breath, promising herself that today, she'd start letting go.

13

MAZEY

Mazey lay awake in bed, staring at the ceiling in the dim early morning light. She hadn't been able to sleep, not really. After she ended things with McKenna, she'd thought she would feel relieved, even lighter somehow, as if breaking things off would set her back on track. But nothing felt resolved, and the hollow ache in her chest hadn't faded; if anything, it had deepened, settling into an emptiness she couldn't shake. She wanted to tell McKenna she was sorry, to admit she'd been wrong, but every time she thought about reaching out, a weight settled over her, freezing her in place. It didn't matter now. It was over.

Mazey sighed, pulling herself out of bed before her alarm went off. The prospect of another long day loomed, and she couldn't decide if it was a welcome distraction or just more noise to mask her feelings. She walked into the bathroom, splashing cold water on her face in an attempt to ground herself. Today, she didn't want anyone coming to her room to help with makeup or small talk. She wasn't in the mood for the forced smiles or the scripted reassurances. Instead, she would go straight to set and

lose herself in work, pretending everything was fine.

As she dried her face, she remembered today's shoot. Another dangerous stunt, one she'd be performing in rushing river rapids, dodging jagged rocks, and the risks made her stomach twist. It was a reenactment of the scene where McKenna had come to her rescue the first time, after her safety gear had failed. Even though the scene had gone wrong back then, Mazey felt an odd mix of nerves and a strange kind of nostalgia. It was as if, deep down, she hoped to see McKenna there, ready to catch her again.

Apparently, the studio had asked Firefighter McKenna Adams to supervise the scene today. Mazey's heart skipped when she heard this, unsure whether she wanted McKenna to accept or turn down the offer. Was this some kind of sick joke? Did the studio not know the rumors that were swirling? Part of her hoped McKenna would come, even if it meant just a glimpse, some reminder of what they'd shared. But another part feared seeing her again, seeing how strong and composed she'd look, how unaffected she might appear. Maybe if McKenna didn't show up, it would be the sign Mazey needed, a confirmation that ending things was the right choice.

Mazey headed down to the waiting car outside the hotel, shielding herself from the cluster of paparazzi. There were fewer today, though, already drawn to the latest scandal somewhere else. Still, the flashes and noise around her felt louder than usual, reminding her how much she hated the constant buzz, the way every move of hers was a spectacle. As the car pulled away, Mazey looked out the window, hoping for a moment of stillness before the day's demands began. In the back of her mind, she found herself picturing McKenna—imagining her voice, her steady presence, the way her calm confidence had a way of dissolving Mazey's anxieties.

The car wound down a narrow road flanked by dense trees, and eventually, the rush of water grew louder, signaling their arrival at the river. It was an intense location: dark water crashing over rocks, unpredictable currents that swirled violently, creating a challenge for even the most experienced crewmembers. People were already

bustling around, setting up equipment, testing harnesses, and calling out instructions over the roar of the water. Someone quickly directed Mazey toward the makeup trailer, but as she made her way there, her eyes searched the crowd, hoping for a glimpse of McKenna. But she didn't see her.

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Inside the trailer, the makeup artist greeted her with a warm smile and began working, covering up Mazey's fatigue with layers of concealer and foundation. Mazey sat in silence, going through the motions. She wished she could ask someone about McKenna, whether she'd shown up or was planning to later, but she held back. She didn't want to invite questions or raise suspicions. There were already too many rumors swirling around about her personal life, and she didn't need to fuel them further.

As the makeup artist finished, Mazey took a steadying breath and headed toward the set by the riverbank. She tried to focus on the scene. The director ran her through the sequence, pointing out the different positions along the rocks, the path she'd need to follow, and the timing of her movements to dodge the most dangerous currents. The technicalities felt overwhelming, but Mazey nodded along, doing her best to absorb the instructions.

"Are you sure you're good with this, Mazey?" the director asked, concern flickering across his face. "We can always use a stunt double if you don't feel up for it."

"No, I'm fine," she said, steeling herself. "I'll be careful."

He nodded, giving her a reassuring smile. "Just remember, if you feel uncertain, take a step back. We've got plenty of time."

She smiled back, but her mind wandered to McKenna. Part of her couldn't help but imagine McKenna's voice in place of the director's, that firm, grounded tone that always carried an edge of concern. She'd wanted to see McKenna today, maybe just to know she still cared enough to show up.

She made her way to the starting point of the scene, her heart pounding as she stood at the riverbank. The currents looked more aggressive up close, the water swirling around jagged rocks that glinted like teeth under the sun. Mazey took a deep breath, tightening her grip on the safety rope attached to her harness. In that moment, she felt a flash of doubt, her mind spiraling back to McKenna, as if she could steady herself by holding onto those memories. She wished McKenna were here, her presence a balm against the nerves knotting in her stomach.

"Ready!" the assistant director called out, and Mazey gave a final nod, stepping into position.

The scene unfolded as planned—at first. Mazey moved along the bank, fighting to stay balanced as she mimicked the struggle of her character, desperately clinging to safety above the roaring current. She focused on her breathing, on the choreography drilled into her. For a while, everything went smoothly. Then, as she reached a critical point, her foot slipped, catching on a wet patch of rock. Her body jerked forward, momentum pulling her faster than she could catch herself. The world blurred as she tumbled down the embankment, hurtling toward the rushing water below.

Panic seized her as she hit the icy water, the chill knocking the air from her lungs. She struggled to breathe, but the relentless current pulled her under, the world becoming a frantic, violent swirl of bubbles and force. Rocks jabbed into her sides and scraped her arms, and she fought to keep her head above water, desperate for air. In that terrifying moment, her mind went blank, save for a single thought: McKenna. She wished McKenna were there to pull Mazey to safety.

But McKenna wasn't there. Not this time.

Hands reached into the water, gripping her harness and yanking her up toward the surface. She coughed and gasped as she broke free of the river's icy grip, still dazed but relieved to feel solid ground beneath her. The person pulling her back wasn't

McKenna but one of the stunt supervisors. His face was lined with concern, and his gaze was purely professional, assessing her for injuries as she sat on the bank, catching her breath.

“Take it easy,” he said, patting her back gently as she coughed up water. “You had a close call there.”

Mazey nodded, trying to compose herself. She was soaked through, shivering as the adrenaline faded, leaving her both shaken and oddly empty. She kept her eyes trained on the ground, willing herself to feel something other than dread. A faint voice called from behind, pulling her from her thoughts.

“Ms. Snow, we need to check you over before you’re cleared to shoot again,” someone from the medical team said, motioning for her to follow. She forced herself up, her legs weak and unsteady as she headed toward the trailer where the medics waited.

And then, from the corner of her eye, she saw McKenna.

McKenna stood by the riverbank, her arms folded and her gaze fixed intently on the rapids. Dressed in her fire department gear, she looked completely in her element, commanding the scene with an air of authority Mazey had never seen before. Mazey’s heart thudded as she approached, unsure if McKenna would even acknowledge her.

“McKenna,” she said, her voice catching slightly. “Didn’t think you’d be here.”

McKenna turned to her, expression unreadable. “I was asked to supervise the scene,” she said curtly, her tone all business. “Looks like it was necessary.”

Mazey winced. McKenna’s voice was clipped, devoid of the warmth and humor that

had marked their last encounter. She tried to muster a smile, hoping a touch of lightheartedness might break the icy tension. “Guess I couldn’t stay out of trouble even if I tried, huh?”

But McKenna’s face remained impassive, her attention already back on the safety team. “Safety protocols are there for a reason. If you’d followed them, we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

The words stung, and Mazey’s attempted smile faded. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d seen McKenna this cold and detached. It was as if every trace of their personal connection had been scrubbed away, leaving only professionalism between them. Mazey wanted to say something to bridge the distance, to at least let McKenna know she was glad to see her there, but McKenna’s closed-off stance made it clear she wasn’t interested in small talk.

As if sensing Mazey’s hesitation, McKenna gave her a curt nod. “You should get checked by the medics,” she said, her tone carrying no trace of concern. “We’ll reconvene once you’re cleared.”

Mazey swallowed, feeling a pang of disappointment. She’d hoped for some flicker of warmth, maybe a private word away from the others, something that reminded her of the connection they’d once shared. But McKenna was all business, and Mazey could feel the wall between them as solidly.

She turned to walk toward the medics, casting one last look back at McKenna, but McKenna had already resumed her duties, gesturing to the crew and discussing the next steps. Mazey’s chest ached as she watched her from a distance. This wasn’t the McKenna she’d known. The one who laughed with her, who teased her, who looked at her like she saw right through the glamour and walls Mazey put up for everyone else.

Once the medics had checked her over, pronouncing her shaken but unhurt, Mazey headed back to the riverbank where the rest of the crew waited. She noticed McKenna off to the side, going over notes with one of the stunt coordinators. Summoning her courage, she approached again, hoping for a second chance at a conversation that didn't feel so...cold.

"Hey, McKenna," she began, trying a casual tone. "Thanks for coming out here today. It...means a lot."

McKenna barely looked at her, her eyes scanning the clipboard as she nodded. "It's my job," she replied, moving to another point on her list. "I'll do whatever's necessary to keep this set safe."

The words landed heavily, as if a door had just been closed in Mazey's face. She felt a rush of frustration mixed with a pang of regret. She wanted to reach out and break down the wall had gone up between them, but McKenna's professionalism was unyielding. It was clear she wasn't here as a friend, let alone as anything more.

"Right, of course," Mazey said, forcing a smile that felt brittle. "Guess that's all I could ask for."

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She lingered for a moment, hoping McKenna might soften or say something to acknowledge their history, even in a small way. But McKenna kept her focus on the clipboard, barely sparing her a second glance.

Mazey forced herself to leave McKenna's side, her heart feeling heavier with every step. She replayed McKenna's words in her mind, the tone so cold and distant. The past connection, the playful banter, they all felt like distant memories, foggy and blurred. She hadn't been prepared for this version of McKenna, who seemed completely indifferent, like Mazey was just another actress needing supervision. As she headed back to the set, Mazey clenched her fists, swallowing the disappointment. She couldn't shake the longing to see a flicker of warmth in McKenna's eyes.

The director called her back over, gesturing toward the river. "Alright, everyone, let's reset and run the scene again. Mazey, take your mark on the bank, and we'll go from the top."

Mazey took a deep breath and returned to the starting position by the edge of the river. The crew scurried around, making sure everything was in place, while the stunt coordinators reviewed the safety measures. McKenna was nearby, speaking quietly with the safety team. Despite her earlier cool demeanor, Mazey noticed McKenna watching her closely from across the set, her gaze sharp. There was something in McKenna's stance, however, that conveyed readiness, prepared to step in if things went wrong. That thought gave Mazey a small comfort, even if McKenna wouldn't let her see it.

Once the crew signaled the all-clear, the director called action. Mazey fell into character, playing the panicked, desperate struggle to survive. She moved along the

riverbank, stumbling, scrambling, reaching for stability while her feet teetered on the wet rocks. She could feel the water rushing beside her, hear the roar of the current, but she stayed focused, determined not to slip again.

But just as she reached the critical point in the scene, her foot caught on a jagged rock, and this time, she couldn't regain her balance. Her arms flailed as she lost her footing again, and she felt herself tipping forward and sliding down the embankment. Before she knew it, she was tumbling back toward the river, the roar of the current growing louder.

The river swallowed her, and the current gripped her body, dragging her downstream faster than she could react. She tried to steady herself, to fight against the relentless pull, but the water was too strong. She twisted and turned, struggling for air, her breaths coming in shallow, desperate gulps.

In the midst of the chaos, she caught a glimpse of movement along the riverbank. Her vision was blurred, but she saw a figure moving swiftly, a familiar form cutting through the crowd. McKenna. Her heart surged with a mix of fear and hope, knowing McKenna was there, knowing that she would act.

The cold seeped into her bones as she fought to keep her head above the water. Each breath felt like a battle, and just as she felt herself being pulled under again, strong hands gripped her. The grip was a steady lifeline.

"Hold on," McKenna's voice came, commanding and close.

Mazey clung to McKenna's arm, feeling the solid warmth despite the icy water surrounding them. McKenna's other hand was around her waist, holding her tightly as they fought against the current together. For a brief moment, Mazey forgot about the scene, the cameras, the crew. All she could feel was the strength in McKenna's arms, the steady rhythm of her breathing, the way McKenna's gaze remained focused

and fierce.

McKenna navigated them back toward the bank, her grip never faltering. Finally, she hoisted Mazey onto solid ground, guiding her up onto the bank before pulling herself up beside her. “Are you okay?” McKenna’s voice cut through the sound of the rushing water, edged with a hint of anger. She looked down at Mazey, her eyes blazing with an intensity that took Mazey’s breath away.

Mazey struggled to catch her breath, nodding as she managed a faint smile. “Guess I still need saving after all.”

McKenna’s jaw tightened, and for a moment, it looked like she was going to snap back with a retort. But she only shook her head, glancing away, a look of exasperation flickering across her face.

“You could’ve been seriously hurt, Mazey,” she said, her voice low but intense. “This isn’t something to brush off.”

Mazey looked down, a pang of guilt twisting inside her. She knew McKenna was right. She’d been careless and more focused on seeing McKenna’s reaction than on her own safety. But as she looked back at McKenna, her heart ached with the realization that she was here, that she’d saved her without a moment’s hesitation. Despite everything, despite the cold professionalism she’d tried to put up between them, McKenna had still jumped in.

“Thank you,” Mazey whispered, her voice barely audible over the rush of the water.

McKenna looked back at her, her expression unreadable, water dripping from her face and hair, and for a moment, Mazey thought she saw a flash of the woman she knew, the one who used to laugh with her, who’d once held her with a tenderness that felt like coming home. But the moment passed quickly, and McKenna’s face

hardened again, her professionalism sliding back into place like armor.

“Get to the medic tent,” she said, her tone all business once more. “Make sure you’re cleared before you go back to set.”

Mazey nodded, pushing herself up, her body exhausted and sore from the ordeal. She took one last look at McKenna, who had already turned away, focused on ensuring the safety protocols were adjusted. It was as if the rescue had been just another part of her job, just another task to check off her list.

As Mazey walked away, she couldn’t help but feel a tug in her chest, the ache of unresolved words and unsaid apologies weighing heavily on her. She’d felt McKenna’s strength and presence, and for a brief, fleeting moment, it had been like old times. But now, standing on the riverbank, she realized that if she wanted McKenna back, she’d have to fight for it.

Because even if McKenna acted like she’d moved on, today had proven that the connection between them was still there, buried under layers of hurt and hesitation. And Mazey knew she was done letting it slip through her fingers.

This time, she’d find a way to make it right, no matter how hard she’d have to work for it.

14

MCKENNA

McKenna lay on the worn leather couch in the station, her mind replaying the river rescue in excruciating detail. She’d managed to keep her composure and keep things strictly professional, but now, in the stillness, she couldn’t avoid the feelings that had surfaced during those intense moments. Despite every effort to distance herself from

Mazey, she hadn't been able to ignore the familiar surge of protectiveness that had gripped her as she watched Mazey slip into the rushing water.

At first, she'd considered declining the set supervision request. She had told herself that stepping in for Mazey's sake would complicate things, that she had no business getting involved again. But the thought of someone else making a mistake that could put Mazey in danger gnawed at her in a way she couldn't shake. Against her better judgment, she'd accepted. And then, as if fate had conspired against her, Mazey had fallen again, right before her eyes.

The memory of the rescue unfolded in her mind like a scene she couldn't escape. She hadn't hesitated for a second. The moment she'd seen Mazey go under, instinct had taken over. She could still feel the cold rush of the water and surge of adrenaline that drowned out everything but the determination to reach her. Her arms had locked around Mazey's waist, steady and firm, and for those few brief moments, holding her had felt like the most natural thing in the world. Too natural. Too close.

She closed her eyes, fighting the images crowding her thoughts. She didn't want to dwell on the way Mazey's body had felt against hers or the softness of her voice when she'd whispered that faint, shaken "thank you." McKenna had tried to shut it all down and respond with curt professionalism, but it hadn't been enough to push away the familiar feelings that clung to her even now. Being that close to her had stirred up everything she'd been trying so hard to suppress.

As she lay on the couch, McKenna's mind flickered back to the last time they'd been together when things had been easier, lighthearted even. She could almost hear the echo of their laughter, the way Mazey had once looked at her with such trust and warmth. And today, despite everything that had happened between them, she'd been right back at Mazey's side. Even with the distance Mazey had put between them, even though they weren't together, there was still something that bound her to that woman with a force she couldn't seem to break.

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And as much as she wanted to dismiss it as mere duty or professionalism, she knew, deep down, that it was more than that. Today, that had become painfully clear.

In the cold stillness of the station, she let out a long breath, trying to steady herself. She didn't want to admit it. She didn't want to acknowledge that no matter how hard she tried to move on, part of her would always be drawn back to Mazey. She knew she was walking a fine line, one that blurred the boundaries between her role as a firefighter and her own lingering feelings.

All these thoughts whirled around in her mind, one after the other in a spiral she couldn't escape. She gripped the edge of the couch, grounding herself, focusing on the cool leather under her fingers. Her whole life, she'd trained herself to be steady, to maintain control, and yet one near-drowning scene had turned all of that on its head.

She forced herself to breathe, trying to calm the turbulence inside. She couldn't keep doing this. She couldn't keep hovering around Mazey, drawn in by an invisible pull, only to retreat and act like it hadn't happened. The ache in her chest was a reminder that she'd never fully let go, not really. And yet, she also knew the dangers of going back and rekindling feelings that had already burned her once.

She was still lying there, wrestling with herself, when she heard a faint voice calling her name. Her heart stilled, and she opened her eyes, not sure if she'd imagined it. But there it was again, soft yet unmistakable: Mazey's voice drifting through the haze of her thoughts.

“McKenna.”

For a moment, she didn't move. She wasn't sure if she was dreaming, if her thoughts had somehow conjured the sound of Mazey's voice. She sat up, her pulse quickening as she turned toward the door, half expecting Mazey to be standing there.

Her mind raced, wondering what Mazey might say, if she'd acknowledge what had happened today. Or maybe Mazey would brush it off, acting like she always did—confident, playful, unbothered. But either way, it seemed impossible that Mazey's presence here could mean nothing.

McKenna took a steadying breath, bracing herself for whatever might come next.

Mazey's usual confidence was stripped away, leaving a rawness that McKenna hadn't seen before. Her eyes held an intensity that made it impossible for McKenna to look away, as if Mazey was baring her soul.

Mazey took a shaky breath, her voice low and wavering. "I was wrong to push you away, McKenna," she said, her gaze flickering down before meeting McKenna's eyes again. "I don't know what I was thinking. And doing it over a text message? It was cowardly. I was scared. Scared of actually facing you because if I had seen you, if I had heard your voice, I know I wouldn't have gone through with it."

McKenna felt her chest tighten at Mazey's words. The weight of them hung in the air, heavy with regret. She tried to keep her face unreadable, but she couldn't ignore the way Mazey's words struck her. Mazey looked like she was barely holding herself together, her hand twisting the hem of her sleeve as if clinging to it for support.

"What do you mean by that, Mazey?" McKenna's voice was steady, but inside, she felt a storm building. She needed to know if Mazey could understand the hurt she'd caused by walking away so abruptly.

Mazey looked down for a moment, then took a slow, deep breath, as if gathering her

courage. When she finally spoke, her voice was steady but soft, almost as if she were speaking to herself as much as to McKenna.

“I don’t care about everything I’d lose, McKenna. I thought I did. I convinced myself that I cared about my career, about what the media would say, but I don’t. Not really. It’s all noise. And it’s not worth losing you over.” She hesitated, her eyes searching McKenna’s face, and then continued, “I was terrified that if I stayed I’d drag you into something that could hurt you. But losing you hurt more than I ever expected. I’m sorry. I’m so desperately sorry.”

Mazey looked down at the ground.

McKenna swallowed, struggling to hold her ground against Mazey’s words. She tried to keep a level head, but every word chipped away at the walls she’d carefully built since Mazey had walked away. “Mazey, you can’t just say that now, like it’s so simple,” she said, her voice firmer than she felt. “You already tossed me aside over one hint of a media scandal- they don’t even have any evidence. How do I know you won’t do it again?”

Mazey’s face fell slightly, but she held McKenna’s gaze, her voice steady with conviction. “I know I don’t deserve a second chance, but I’m asking anyway. I don’t care what people think of me or how the media spins it. All that matters is you. I didn’t see it before. I thought my career and image were things I couldn’t risk, but I don’t want any of it if it means I lose you.”

McKenna’s mind swirled with conflicting emotions. She wanted to believe Mazey, but the pain still lingered. The memory of that cold, impersonal text Mazey had sent made her wary. Yet here was Mazey, standing before her, saying everything McKenna had wished to hear in the quiet moments when she allowed herself to miss her.

Mazey seemed to sense her hesitation. She stepped closer, her eyes pleading as she searched McKenna's face. "I can handle the media, the attention, the criticism...as long as you're by my side. I know I was wrong to push you away before, but if you give me another chance, I won't make that mistake again."

McKenna wanted to believe her, but the hurt made her cautious. "Mazey, it's not easy," she murmured, looking down as she tried to keep her composure.

"Being with me means you'll be in the limelight for something different than you're used to. You'll be in the limelight for being with a woman. Are you sure you're ready for that? For the whispers and judgment?"

Mazey nodded without a moment's hesitation. "Yes. If you're with me, then I can handle it. You make me braver, McKenna. You make me want to be the kind of person who can face anything. I love you." Mazey's clear blue eyes met her own and her words seemed filled with truth.

McKenna felt her defenses start to weaken. She'd spent so much time imagining what it would be like to hear Mazey say these words, yet now that it was happening, a part of her felt unsteady. She didn't want to be hurt again, but she couldn't deny the pull in her chest, the part of her that had never stopped longing for this exact moment.

Mazey's hand hovered in the space between them, her fingers brushing McKenna's, sending a small jolt through her. She looked down at their hands then back up at Mazey, who was watching her with a look that held a thousand unspoken words.

"Are you sure you can handle this?" Mazey's voice was barely a whisper, as if she feared her own hope might shatter the fragile moment between them. "I know it's a lot to ask. I know I hurt you, but I don't want to run from this anymore. I don't want to run from us."

McKenna felt a flicker of warmth spread through her melting the cold, hard edges she'd built around her heart. She wanted to hold onto her resolve and protect herself from the pain of losing Mazey again, but she couldn't ignore the sincerity in her eyes or the softness in her voice.

For a long moment, she stood there, gazing at Mazey, letting herself feel everything she'd tried to push away. Finally, with a sigh, she allowed her shoulders to relax, the tension easing from her body as she gave a small, tentative nod.

And in that moment, something shifted between them, a quiet understanding, a silent promise to try again and see where this could lead.

McKenna looked at Mazey, a faint smile softening her usually steady gaze. "I can handle anything, Mazey, as long as you're by my side."

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Mazey's face lit up, her eyes bright with a relief that made McKenna's heart clench. "Well," she said with a teasing grin, "it's good to know my hero is willing to stick around. You've already saved my life three times, you know. Twice from real danger and once from heartbreak."

McKenna chuckled, shaking her head. "Guess that makes me a full-time lifesaver then," she replied, her tone light. "Though I don't remember heartbreak being part of my rescue training."

Mazey laughed, the sound warm and genuine, and it felt like the last barrier between them finally crumbled. "You'd think I'd know how to handle it by now."

"Well, maybe it's time you learn to avoid cliffs, raging rivers, and reckless texts," McKenna quipped, her own grin widening as she felt the tension melt into something warm and familiar.

Mazey's smile softened, her gaze meeting McKenna's with a gentle intensity. "Guess I'll have to keep you close. You know, just in case I need rescuing again."

McKenna felt a tug at her heart, pulling her closer until the space between them was only a breath. "Yeah, I think that's probably a good idea," she murmured, her voice softening as her eyes traced Mazey's features.

Their shared laughter faded, replaced by a quiet understanding as they leaned in, neither of them hesitating. When their lips met, it felt like coming home, a warmth that settled into McKenna's bones, steady and real, washing away the doubts and heartache that had lingered for so long.

As they sat close, the weight of their unspoken feelings and past misunderstandings finally lifted, leaving only a quiet excitement between them. McKenna took a steadying breath, looking into Mazey's eyes with a small smile. "So, are we really going to do this?"

Mazey didn't hesitate. "Yes, we are, I'm going to come out," she said firmly, her voice filled with conviction. "And to make it official"—her face softened, and she reached out, slipping her fingers through McKenna's—"McKenna, will you go out with me?"

McKenna laughed softly, the joy in her chest almost overwhelming. "I'd be honored," she replied, giving Mazey's hand a gentle squeeze. "Now, where are you taking me on our first official date?"

Mazey grinned. "Leave it to me. I think I know just the place."

They ended up at an intimate bistro with low lighting and soft jazz playing in the background. As they settled in, McKenna couldn't help but notice how relaxed Mazey seemed, her usual hesitance about public appearances nowhere in sight. Mazey caught McKenna's gaze and smiled. "Surprised?"

"A little," McKenna admitted, leaning forward, unable to hide her admiration. "You're handling this so well."

Mazey shrugged, a thoughtful expression crossing her face. "It's different now. You make me feel...brave, I guess." She chuckled, looking down at her glass. "All those worries about what people think just fade when I'm with you. I realize now I don't want to hide. Not anymore."

McKenna felt a warmth spread through her, reaching across the table to touch Mazey's hand. "Then I'll stand by you. Whatever comes our way, we'll handle it

together.”

The conversation flowed easily as they settled into their meal, sharing laughs, reminiscing, and talking about the future in a way that felt genuine and exciting. Mazey opened up about her aspirations, how she wanted to explore roles that felt meaningful and projects that resonated with who she was rather than just what Hollywood expected from her. She confessed how exhausting it had been to feel like she was always putting on a mask.

McKenna listened intently, her heart swelling with admiration for Mazey’s dreams and determination. “I love that you’re finally seeing your own worth,” she said, squeezing Mazey’s hand gently. “I’m here to remind you of that whenever you need it.”

Mazey smiled, touched by McKenna’s words. “And you? What do you want out of life, McKenna?”

McKenna paused, feeling a bit vulnerable, but Mazey’s gaze was so warm, so encouraging, that she couldn’t hold back. “I want to keep helping people, like I do with firefighting. But...” She hesitated, searching for the right words. “I want a life that feels grounded and meaningful. I want to come home to someone I love, to a life we can build together.”

Mazey’s smile grew, and her fingers tightened around McKenna’s. “Then let’s make that happen. I’ll support you every step of the way, just like you’re doing for me.”

They stayed for hours, caught up in each other’s dreams and promises. The quiet, intimate atmosphere of the restaurant was almost magical, and they soaked in every moment, finding a beautiful harmony in the simplest of things: a shared laugh, a lingering gaze, a brush of hands across the table.

As they left the restaurant, Mazey glanced at McKenna, her eyes full of longing. “What would you say if I asked to come back to your place?” McKenna’s pulse quickened, and she smiled, leaning in close. “I’d say let’s get out of here.”

When they arrived at McKenna’s house, they were both a bit breathless, caught in the electric anticipation of finally being alone together, free of the world’s prying eyes. The moment the door closed behind them, Mazey turned to McKenna, her gaze intense.

They moved slowly at first, savoring each touch and kiss, the world outside fading away as they surrendered to the closeness they’d been craving for so long. In that quiet space, words became unnecessary. Every movement, every whispered breath, seemed to say more than language ever could.

Their passion built steadily, layer upon layer of longing they’d both held back for too long, until it grew into a tender, all-consuming connection. McKenna’s hands traced Mazey’s skin with reverence, memorizing every curve, every shiver of Mazey’s body beneath her touch. Mazey’s fingers slid through McKenna’s hair, pulling her close, as if she wanted to bridge the gap between them entirely, to be as close as humanly possible.

McKenna stripped them both of their clothes and guided Mazey down onto her bed.

“Get on top of me and spin around,” she commanded and Mazey looked at her and raised an eyebrow.

“You mean like a 69?”

“Absolutely a 69. You think you might like that?”

Mazey smiled and her blue eyes sparkled with mischief. “I think I might like that a

lot,” she said. “I’ve been thinking a lot about tasting you.” Mazey blushed and it was the most endearing thing McKenna thought she had ever seen.

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“Probably not as much as I have been thinking about tasting you,” McKenna replied as she helped Mazey into position on top of her.

Mazey lowered onto her face and McKenna lost herself in the scent of her. She pushed her tongue out and into Mazey, tasting on her tongue the sweetest taste she could imagine. She took long slow licks of Mazey as she felt Mazey’s own tongue exploring between her legs.

Oh my fucking god.

69 with Mazey Snow was everything McKenna had hoped for and more. As Mazey’s confidence grew, she began to grind down onto McKenna’s mouth and there were moments where McKenna couldn’t breathe, but she realized she would have happily died here.

She grabbed her breaths where she could. Deep breaths of Mazey’s musky wet sex.

She licked and licked, long strokes from Mazey’s clit up to her asshole. She noticed Mazey copying her movements and she liked it.

She reached her right hand to her mouth licking her index finger and coating it in saliva, before reaching it around Mazey’s ass. She pulled Mazey’s ass cheeks apart with her other hand, before teasing at Mazey’s rim with her slick wet finger.

She heard Mazey moan and felt the vibrations around her own pussy. It felt delicious.

She pressed her finger into Mazey’s ass, opening her up slowly but surely, pushing

her finger deeper as her tongue lapped away at Mazey's ever wetter pussy. Mazey's moans deepened against her clitoris and she felt Mazey begin to grind down on her face with abandon as her finger moved deep inside Mazey's ass.

She felt Mazey's own right hand reaching under her own ass cheek, coating her fingers in wetness from her pussy and then she felt Mazey's finger beginning to push at her asshole.

Just as Mazey's finger pushed deep in her anus, her orgasm tore through her waves and waves of pleasure. Deep deep pleasure. She felt Mazey's orgasm too as it ripped through her, she gushed into McKenna's mouth.

Oh fuck, yes.

McKenna felt herself coughing with surprise at the hot liquid sex in her mouth and then laughing. Sex with Mazey was fucking incredible and she never wanted it to stop.

As the night wore on, they lost themselves in each other, sharing quiet moments of laughter, soft words, and deep, unguarded kisses. They made love slowly, with a sense of reverence, as though every touch was a silent promise, a vow to cherish one another despite the obstacles and fears that had held them back.

By the time the dawn began to paint the sky with soft hues of pink and gold, they were wrapped around each other, content and finally at peace. McKenna brushed a hand through Mazey's hair, watching as her eyes fluttered open, a sleepy smile spreading across her face.

Mazey sighed, her voice hushed. "You know, I never thought I'd feel this way."

McKenna smiled, her heart full. "Me neither. But I'm so glad I do. I love you, too."

They lay together in the gentle morning light, both of them quietly grateful for the chance to begin again, their lives intertwined in a way that felt as natural as breathing.

15

MAZEY

Several months had passed since production wrapped up on *Edge of the Abyss*, and Mazey had spent most of that time relishing the peacefulness of her life with McKenna. The final day of shooting had been filled with excitement and relief; there were no major mishaps after the infamous river scene, and Mazey's confidence on set grew with each day. To her surprise, the director even reached out afterward saying he'd loved her work and had a good feeling the show would be a hit.

Today, Mazey got an email saying they had edited and polished the first episode, and she could hardly contain her excitement. She hurried to the fire station to find McKenna, already imagining the scene they'd create at home, a cozy viewing party with their friends. She found McKenna on her break, sipping a coffee, and shared the news with a beaming smile.

"They just sent me the first episode!" Mazey said, grinning.

McKenna's face lit up in response. "That's amazing, Mazey. We should do a viewing party! Celebrate the big debut."

Mazey's eyes sparkled at the idea. "I love it. Let's invite everyone. We can set up the living room, put out snacks, and make it a real event."

Together that night, they planned every detail, arranging chairs and blankets to make the space comfortable and homey. McKenna took charge of decorations, jokingly insisting that popcorn garlands were essential, while Mazey picked out a movie-

theater-style assortment of snacks. They shared moments of laughter as they worked, pausing now and then to share a glance that said everything about how far they'd come.

As they prepared for their friends, Mazey couldn't help but reminisce. She glanced over at McKenna, who was carefully arranging snacks on the coffee table, and found herself smiling.

"I was so nervous when we first met," Mazey said, breaking the comfortable silence. "You were this mysterious firefighter who barely looked my way. And here we are...setting up for a party in our house."

McKenna chuckled, her eyes softening as she looked over at Mazey. "I remember. You looked like you'd rather be anywhere else but on that cliff."

Mazey laughed, shaking her head. "And I didn't realize I'd just met the person who'd change everything for me."

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Guests began to arrive just as they finished setting up. Ember and Josephine were among the first, bringing a celebratory bottle of champagne and their usual cheerful energy. Soon, the living room was filled with friends from the fire station and a few cast members from the show. There was a warm buzz in the air, conversations and laughter filling every corner of the room.

When everyone had gathered and settled in, Mazey stepped forward, holding up a glass. “Thank you all for coming,” she began, smiling at each friend. “This show has been a journey, one that’s pushed me in ways I didn’t expect. But more than anything, I’m grateful for all of you. And, well, especially McKenna.” She paused, her voice catching as she glanced at McKenna, who was looking back at her with quiet pride. “Without you, I don’t know if I’d have made it through some of those days.”

McKenna just shook her head, a small smirk on her lips. “Well, let’s not forget who’s saved who more times,” she quipped, sparking laughter throughout the room.

“Alright, alright,” Hallie Hunter chimed in. “Let’s get to it. I want to see Mazey hanging off that cliff again. For nostalgia’s sake, of course.”

With everyone settled and laughing, they pressed play, and the room went silent as the screen lit up with the opening scenes of *Edge of the Abyss*. Mazey watched herself on the screen, her character navigating high-stakes moments in breathtaking locations, and then, finally, the infamous cliff scene arrived. The camera panned to Mazey’s character, gripping the edge of a cliff, her face contorted in fear and determination.

Everyone in the room cheered, laughing and making jokes about that day on set. Someone even mimicked her panicked shouts from the scene, drawing more laughter. McKenna leaned over, nudging her with a grin. “Can’t believe you survived that day and still agreed to a second date with me,” she teased.

Mazey grinned, squeezing McKenna’s hand. “Couldn’t let you off that easily, could I?”

When the episode ended, applause and cheers filled the room. Friends surrounded Mazey, congratulating her on her performance, throwing out compliments and teasing remarks alike. She graciously accepted the praise, laughing along with everyone. Eventually, she gestured to McKenna and said with a smile, “I wouldn’t be here without my personal superhero saving me...countless times.”

Everyone laughed, clinking glasses and toasting to their favorite real-life love story.

As the evening wound down and people started to head out, Ember and Josephine stuck around to help with cleanup. Ember caught McKenna’s eye as they gathered empty glasses, smiling knowingly. “Looks like things turned out alright, huh?”

McKenna smiled, nodding. “Yeah. Better than I could’ve imagined, really.”

Ember leaned in slightly, her tone softening. “Remember when you came to me for advice about all this? You were ready to give up. I’m glad you didn’t.”

McKenna chuckled, glancing over at Mazey, who was laughing with Josephine across the room. “I don’t know what I’d do without her. I owe you for keeping me patient.”

Ember patted her shoulder with a warm smile. “Just remember this the next time I’m asking for advice. Which, let’s face it, will probably be about cars.”

They shared a laugh, then moved back to their cleanup duties. Meanwhile, Mazey and Josephine were wrapping up a conversation of their own. Josephine's eyes sparkled with a hint of mischief. "You seem...different, Mazey. Happier."

Mazey smiled, glancing over at McKenna. "I am. I didn't realize how much I was holding myself back until now."

Josephine nodded knowingly. "It's obvious, seeing you two together. You're good for each other." She paused, then added with a playful grin, "And I have to say, it's nice to know McKenna's finally met her match."

Mazey laughed, brushing a stray lock of hair behind her ear. "She keeps me grounded and safe," she said, smiling to herself. "I never thought I'd be this open, but here I am."

Ember and Josephine gathered their things, hugging both Mazey and McKenna goodbye. "Don't forget about the charity event tomorrow," Ember reminded them with a grin. "You're our guests of honor."

McKenna laughed, giving her a reassuring nod. "We'll be there. Wouldn't miss it for the world."

As their friends left, Mazey and McKenna were finally alone, standing in the quiet, cozy living room that just hours ago had been filled with laughter and love. Mazey looked around, letting out a soft sigh of contentment. She turned to McKenna, wrapping her arms around her waist, her face relaxed and peaceful.

"Tonight was perfect," she murmured, resting her forehead against McKenna's. "I don't think I could've imagined anything better."

McKenna brushed her fingers gently through Mazey's hair, her voice equally soft. "I

feel the same. I'm just really, really happy we're here."

Mazey looked up, her eyes shining with warmth and affection. "You know, it's funny. I used to think love like this only happened in movies. I didn't realize I could actually have it."

McKenna's arms tightened around her, her gaze filled with sincerity. "Then I guess we're both living a dream," she replied softly. "Because I never thought I'd find someone like you."

They stood there, wrapped in each other's arms, reveling in the quiet peace that surrounded them. It was a feeling neither of them wanted to let go of, a feeling they'd fought hard to earn. And now, with every whispered word, every shared glance, they knew they'd keep fighting to hold onto it.

McKenna leaned down, pressing a gentle kiss to Mazey's lips, her heart swelling with the certainty that this was where she was meant to be. They had finally found their way to each other, through every doubt and every fear, and nothing felt more right.

Mazey pulled back slightly, a smile tugging at her lips. "So, tomorrow?"

McKenna chuckled, nodding. "Tomorrow, we keep building this life together. One day at a time."

The next day when McKenna returned home, the air buzzed with excitement as they prepared for the evening's event. They shared light conversation, discussing everything from their day's highs to their hopes for the upcoming gathering. Laughter filled the room as they helped each other choose outfits, a joyful blend of anticipation and nervous energy swirling around them.

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Finally, they slipped into the car, fingers intertwined. As they drove through the familiar streets of Phoenix Ridge, the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a warm glow over the town. Arriving at the event, they stepped out together, hearts racing with the thrill of the night ahead, ready to embrace whatever awaited them.

At the charity event, a sense of warmth and joy filled the air, enveloping everyone at Phoenix Ridge's city hall. Soft lighting gave the room a welcoming glow, and tables lined with raffle items, homemade desserts, and photo displays of the firefighters in action brought the community together in celebration and gratitude. Mazey and McKenna had arrived hand in hand, surrounded by the comforting presence of their friends, and Mazey's grip on McKenna's hand was steady and assured.

Mazey took in the decorations, admiring the floral arrangements and twinkling lights strung across the ceiling. She leaned over to McKenna and whispered, "I'm not sure what's brighter, the lights or the smiles on everyone's faces."

McKenna smiled, glancing around. "That's just Phoenix Ridge," she said softly. "People here show up for each other. They always have." She squeezed Mazey's hand. "Just like you showed up for me."

Mazey's eyes sparkled. "I'm just happy I finally found a way to be a part of all this," she replied, nodding toward the cheerful crowd. "It's strange, though. I used to worry so much about how I'd look in public. But now, it's different." Her eyes met McKenna's, warm with unspoken words. "Now, it's like all of this makes sense."

As they moved through the crowd, people paused to greet them, offering kind words and gentle smiles. Some cast quick, approving glances at their joined hands, while

others stopped to express gratitude for the work McKenna had done for the fire department and, in hushed tones, their appreciation for Mazey's role in putting Phoenix Ridge on the map with her show.

"Good to see you both!" Josephine called, walking up with Ember beside her. "How does it feel to be the most talked-about couple here?"

Mazey laughed, glancing sideways at McKenna. "A little surreal," she admitted. "But...kind of wonderful."

Josephine grinned and hugged Mazey. "You're both doing great. Plus, this event wouldn't be the same without Phoenix Ridge's newest celebrity and her firefighter-in-shining-armor."

Mazey blushed, nudging McKenna. "Look at that, celebrity status by association."

McKenna chuckled, pulling Mazey closer. "I'll take it. But really, all this attention, does it ever feel strange for you?"

Mazey thought about it, nodding slowly. "It used to. I used to feel like I was being watched and judged all the time." She squeezed McKenna's hand. "But now, it doesn't feel so scary. I feel like I have a home, a place where I don't have to hide."

As if on cue, Ember appeared, patting McKenna on the shoulder. "I hate to break up this love fest, but the raffle's about to start. You two ready?"

They shared a look, and Mazey grinned. "More than ready."

Ember led them toward the center of the room, where the event's emcee was beginning the evening's announcements. When he spotted Mazey, he gave her an approving nod.

“Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for being here tonight! We’re thrilled to have a special guest with us tonight: our very own Mazey Snow! She’s here with one of our local heroes, McKenna Adams, who I think many of you know is a bit of a hero around here, both on and off the job!”

The crowd cheered, and McKenna felt Mazey’s hand tighten around hers as she beamed at the warm reception. She leaned closer to McKenna, murmuring, “I think that hero title fits you better.”

McKenna chuckled, wrapping an arm around her. “Guess we can share it.”

As the raffle went on, McKenna watched as Mazey laughed with friends, chatted easily with locals, and waved to fans who recognized her from the show. McKenna couldn’t help but marvel at how much Mazey had blossomed, her confidence a new light that radiated from within.

When the emcee began the closing remarks, he invited Mazey to the front for a few words. Mazey glanced back at McKenna with a shy smile before stepping up to the mic. The crowd quieted, eager to hear her speak.

Mazey cleared her throat, casting a quick glance at McKenna before addressing the crowd. “Thank you all for being here tonight. I don’t think I’ve ever felt this at home in a place before, and that’s saying something, considering I’ve lived all over,” she said, her voice warm and genuine. “Phoenix Ridge has become more than just a place on a map for me. It’s home, and it’s because of all of you.”

She paused, her gaze drifting back to McKenna. “I used to worry so much about what people thought of me. I tried to be what everyone wanted. But I’ve learned something very special here in Phoenix Ridge, and from McKenna.” Her voice softened. “I’ve learned that sometimes, the most important thing is just being with the people you love, no matter what the world thinks.”

The crowd applauded, some people giving them knowing smiles. McKenna's heart swelled with pride, watching Mazey speak so freely. She could see the transformation in her, how the walls Mazey once put up had softened, revealing the kind-hearted, resilient woman she knew so well.

After the applause died down, Mazey returned to McKenna's side, slipping her hand back into hers. "You did great," McKenna whispered, squeezing her hand.

Mazey smiled, looking at her with an expression that held years of unsaid words. "I had a pretty great reason to be brave."

They spent the rest of the evening mingling, surrounded by the warmth of the community. The lights dimmed, and soon enough, the crowd began to thin out. Ember and Josephine stayed behind, helping McKenna and Mazey tidy up after the event. They worked in a comfortable silence, punctuated by gentle laughter and easy conversation.

Ember and McKenna moved a few tables, chatting softly as they went. "You know," Ember said, glancing at McKenna with a smile, "I've never seen you this happy before."

McKenna shrugged, a soft smile playing on her lips. "Guess I just found the right person."

Ember's gaze softened. "I'm glad you did. You two are good for each other."

Across the room, Mazey was deep in conversation with Josephine, who had her usual mischievous grin on. "How's it feel, being Phoenix Ridge's newest sweetheart?" Josephine teased.

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Mazey laughed. “A bit overwhelming, but... in the best way.”

Josephine gave her a reassuring squeeze on the shoulder. “It’s amazing seeing you this happy. You deserve it.”

Mazey glanced over at McKenna, her smile widening. “I never thought I’d find this,” she said softly. “I never thought I’d be brave enough to let myself.”

When Ember and Josephine finally said their goodbyes, McKenna and Mazey were left alone in the now-quiet city hall, the lingering warmth of the evening settling around them. They moved to the small, decorated stage, where they had stood earlier, facing the crowd together.

McKenna leaned against the edge of the stage, looking out at the empty room. “This place is so different when it’s empty,” she murmured.

Mazey moved closer, resting her head against McKenna’s shoulder. “I think this night is going to stay with me for a long time.”

McKenna wrapped her arm around Mazey’s shoulders, pulling her close. “You know, I was thinking... When I first met you, I didn’t think we’d be standing here like this. Everything about us felt... impossible.”

Mazey looked up, her gaze warm. “Maybe we’re just good at defying the odds,” she said softly.

McKenna smiled, her heart swelling as she looked at Mazey. “I don’t know what’s

ahead, but... I know I don't want to do it without you."

Mazey reached up, brushing a soft kiss to McKenna's cheek. "Then we won't. No matter what comes our way, we're in this together."

The room seemed to hold its breath, as if honoring their quiet moment of promise. Outside, the town was quiet, the stars scattered across the night sky like tiny points of light. They left the hall hand in hand, stepping out into the cool evening air.

As they walked to their car, Mazey paused, tilting her head up to look at the stars. "You know, I used to dream of seeing my name in lights," she said softly. "But now... now I just want to make a life. Here, with you."

McKenna smiled, pulling Mazey close. "We'll make it, one day at a time," she promised, pressing a gentle kiss to Mazey's forehead. "You're stuck with me."

Mazey laughed, wrapping her arms around McKenna. "Good. Because there's nowhere else I'd rather be."

With their arms around each other, they walked into the night, ready to face whatever came next, together, in a love that felt as endless as the stars above.

EPILOGUE

Five years had passed since Mazey and McKenna found their way back to each other, and life in Phoenix Ridge had never been sweeter. The sun streamed through the kitchen window, illuminating their cozy home adorned with photographs capturing their adventures together: hiking trips, community events, and lazy Sundays spent wrapped in each other's arms. The walls also proudly displayed Mazey's awards, glistening trophies that celebrated her talent and perseverance, each one a testament to the dedication and love she poured into her craft.

As they navigated the ups and downs of life, they had adopted three lively cats: Luna, a sleek black feline with mischievous green eyes; Jasper, a fluffy tabby who loved to curl up on their laps; and Pippa, a spirited calico with an attitude as vibrant as her coat. The trio added warmth and chaos to their lives, often vying for attention during quiet moments at home.

This particular morning, Mazey was bustling about the kitchen, preparing breakfast while humming a tune that McKenna recognized from one of Mazey's hit shows. The aroma of coffee filled the air, mingling with the scent of pancakes sizzling on the stove. McKenna entered, rubbing the sleep from her eyes, her firefighter's uniform hanging over her broad shoulders. "What's cooking, superstar?" she teased, wrapping her arms around Mazey's waist.

"Just trying to impress my favorite firefighter," Mazey replied, glancing back with a playful smile. After breakfast, they settled onto the couch, mugs of coffee in hand, discussing their plans for the day. McKenna's heart raced as she recalled the news she had received earlier that week. "So, I got some pretty big news," she said, trying to sound casual, though her excitement was palpable.

Mazey perked up, her eyes brightening with curiosity. "What's going on? Tell me!"

"I'm getting a promotion," McKenna announced, barely able to contain her grin.

Mazey gasped, clapping her hands together in delight. "No way! That's amazing, babe! You totally deserve it!"

McKenna felt a rush of pride swell within her as Mazey's enthusiasm washed over her. "Thanks! It's a huge responsibility, but I'm ready for the challenge. I want to make a real difference in our community."

Mazey beamed at her with admiration. "You're going to be incredible. Just think of

all the changes you can implement! The department is lucky to have you.”

As they celebrated McKenna’s achievement, they shared playful banter about what her leadership would look like. “Just promise me you won’t start making us do fire drills at home,” Mazey joked.

“Only if you promise to keep dinner off the stove,” McKenna shot back with a laugh, leaning in to steal a kiss.

After breakfast, they spent time in the living room, surrounded by the trophies that Mazey had won over the years. Each one gleamed under the warm light, a testament to her hard work and determination. Mazey stood in front of them, her fingers tracing the edges of one of the trophies. “I still can’t believe I won this for Edge of the Abyss,” she said, her voice filled with wonder. “It feels like just yesterday I was clinging onto that cliff.”

Just as she spoke, Pippa, their mischievous calico cat, darted into the room with a burst of energy. In her playful frenzy, she leaped onto the shelf, her paw swiping at the nearest trophy. Time seemed to slow as the golden statuette teetered precariously before tumbling to the ground with a resounding thud.

Mazey gasped, instinctively reaching out, but it was too late. The trophy hit the floor, the sound echoing through the cozy living room. McKenna rushed over, a mix of concern and amusement in her eyes. “Well, there goes your award-winning career,” she teased, trying to suppress a laugh.

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Mazey chuckled, shaking her head as she knelt to pick up the trophy. “Pippa clearly wants to be in the spotlight too.” They exchanged knowing smiles, laughter dancing in the air, a beautiful reminder of how far they had come.

McKenna wrapped her arms around Mazey from behind, resting her chin on her shoulder. “And now look at you. You’ve come so far, and I couldn’t be prouder.”

They spent the next few hours in each other’s company, their conversation flowing easily from one topic to another. The day was filled with laughter, and every moment seemed brighter as they embraced the life they had built together.

As the afternoon rolled in, they found themselves curled up on the couch, the soft purring of their cats creating a comforting backdrop. “Have you thought any more about us having a baby?” Mazey asked, her tone suddenly serious.

McKenna turned to face her, feeling her heart race at the question. The idea had lingered between them over the past few months, but today felt different. “I have,” she admitted, her voice steady. “I think we could really do this together.”

Mazey’s face lit up with excitement. “I agree! We’ve created a beautiful home with our crazy little family. I can’t help but imagine what it would be like to have a little one running around.”

“I love how gentle you are with the cats,” McKenna said, a soft smile spreading across her face. “It makes me think you’d be an incredible mother. You have this way of nurturing them, even when they’re being little terrors.”

Mazey chuckled, her eyes sparkling. “And you, you’re so protective of them. The way you care for Pippa when she gets into trouble shows how naturally you take on that role. I can already picture you as a mom too.”

They shared a moment of silence, envisioning their future filled with love, laughter, and little feet padding through the halls.

“Maybe we should look into it more seriously,” McKenna suggested, her heart pounding in her chest. “Like visiting a fertility center or talking to a specialist.”

“I’d love that,” Mazey replied, her voice soft and filled with warmth. “I want to build a life with you, McKenna. Whatever that looks like.”

Their hands intertwined, their fingers lacing together. In that simple gesture, a shared understanding passed between them, a silent promise of love and support. The warmth of their connection enveloped them, creating a safe space where dreams could flourish. It was a sanctuary built on trust, respect, and the kind of love that deepened with each passing day.

Later that evening, the sun dipped below the horizon, painting the sky in stunning hues of orange and pink. As twilight fell, they settled on the couch, wrapped in each other’s embrace. The familiar weight of their three cats added to the cozy atmosphere, each one finding a spot to curl up and soak in the warmth of the moment. McKenna glanced around their living room, adorned with cherished memories captured in photographs and mementos, and she marveled at how far they had come. From their rocky beginnings, filled with uncertainty and self-discovery, to this serene evening, their hearts swelled with hope and endless possibilities.

As the night deepened and the stars began to twinkle outside their window, they felt a profound sense of peace. Life would undoubtedly present its challenges, but in that moment, they knew their love would be the anchor that held them steady. They were no longer just two individuals navigating their paths; they were a united front, ready

to embrace whatever the future held together, hand in hand, heart to heart.