



Risk

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Description: There was no turning back once the line was crossed... Callum Crew loved control — on and off the track. It's what made him the best Formula One driver of his generation. But being the best was a lonely road. In his line of work there was no room for doubt or distractions. It was my job to help him get out of his head. Instead — I risked it all and fell for him. Aspen Belle was under my skin. The beautiful therapist was driven and dedicated, two things I was drawn to. There was no denying the chemistry between us was combustible. I couldn't get enough. Our romance was reckless — our relationship forbidden. But that didn't stop us... nothing could.

Total Pages (Source): 43

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

Callum

Australia

Grippingmy steering wheel until it felt like my knuckles might break, I could only pray that the scene in front of me would clear out before I passed through.

“Steady, Callum. You’ve got this. The cars are clearing...oh fuck,” Kaspar said through my headphones. The fear in his voice put my already stressed body on edge.

Unfortunately, God wasn’t with me that day. When the smoke cleared, there was only more carnage in front of me. I braced for impact. It wasn’t my first wreck, but I wasn’t sure if it would be my last.

Would today be the last day I ever drove, or would it be my last day on Earth?

Even though I was prepared for my car to hit what was in front of me, I wasn’t...not really. The sound of metal ripping and the way my car flipped through the air had me praying to a God I didn’t believe in, closing my eyes, and wishing for the best.

Not believing was probably what had me in this mess to begin with, but if He let me live, then I would spend the rest of my days believing. I’d be a good man. I’d give my time to charities and maybe even reach out to my mother who’d left me to fend for myself at the ripe ol’ age of fifteen.

But I couldn’t die in the opening race of the season.

“We’re on our way. Just hang in there, buddy,” Kaspar said before I even hit the ground.

That was the last thing I heard before I felt a searing pain in my leg. My head slammed around inside my helmet one last time before there was only black.

I floated in a sea of nothingness, and no matter how hard I tried to swim up to the surface, I stayed immobile in the blackness that surrounded me. I fought with everything I had to open my eyes to no avail. It felt like years before my eyes finally cracked open.

My surroundings were white and smelled of antiseptic, making me want to crawl out of my skin to get the hell out of there. There was nothing worse for a racer than being in the hospital, except for not being able to drive.

Lying there, I assessed my body. I was in pain, but that was to be expected. I assumed I’d been in a wreck because that was the only way anyone could drag me to a hospital. The only problem was I didn’t remember being in a wreck. I remembered landing in Australia and meeting my team at the hotel and then...nothing.

Did I wreck during qualifying?

No, that couldn’t be.

But again, I didn’t remember.

I went back to assess each body part from my toes to my head. I could move everything; it just hurt like a bitch. My head pounded, and my vision swam as I tried to look around the room.

At least a nurse or a doctor hadn’t come in yet. I knew once they came in, I’d learn

what was wrong with me. I was a little surprised no one from the team was here, even if they were all superstitious. Had I been in a coma? Had they moved on to the next destination without me?

“Mr. Crew, it’s so good to see you finally with us,” a cheery nurse with an Aussie accent said as she came around my bed. When she saw me eying her, she gave me a warm smile and patted my hand. “I’m going to take your vitals, and then I’ll get the doctor to come check you out.”

“Sure. Thanks,” I mumbled. My voice was hoarse and dry.

“I’ll also see about getting you some water or ice chips to help with your throat.”

“Thanks again.”

She smiled down at me warmly as she took my blood pressure. “You’re an American?”

“Yeah, I’m here for the—”

“The race,” she supplied.

“Yeah.” My brows wrinkled, trying to remember where in the process my wreck had occurred. “Did it already happen? I don’t...”

A flash of smoke and the smell of burnt rubber filled my senses. I could almost taste it. Then, as if in slow motion, the entire wreck played out before me until I was staring up into the kind brown eyes of my nurse.

I was lucky to be alive.

“It was the race. From what I hear, you were in the lead,” she smiled, and then it quickly faded. “You were catching up to the boy in the back and would have passed him when there was a wreck.” She shook her head, and her gray hair fell over her forehead.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Was it bad?” I croaked out.

“I’m not supposed to say,” she whispered. Straightening up, she wrapped her stethoscope around her neck. “Is there anyone you want me to call? I can do that.”

There was no one.

“No, that’s okay.”

“Okay, the doctor will be right in to check on you and can answer all the questions you might have.”

A feeling started to form deep in the pit of my stomach, making its way slowly up inside of me. I couldn’t identify what it was. All I knew was it was bad.

My team knew where I was, and they obviously hadn’t felt the need to be here when I woke up. I knew if the owner and his wife were at the race, they’d likely be here, but with them in the States, I was alone.

“Mr. Crew, I’m Dr. Howard. How are you feeling?” A big burly man said from beside my bed.

I must have fallen asleep.

“I’ve had better days,” I replied, blinking to make him come into focus.

“I’m sure you have. I’m going to look you over, and then I’ll tell you what’s going on

and try to answer any questions you have.”

My questions were simple.

Could I drive again? And if that was a go, then when could I get back to training and racing?

I let him do his thing, but when his light hit my eyes, I nearly sunk through the bed, trying to get away from it.

“I know it hurts, but I’ve got to look.”

“I know, Doc, just get it over with,” I grumbled.

“Well, you gave us a bit of a scare, Mr. Crew. We had to put you into a medically induced coma to help with your brain swelling. Besides that, you’re all bruised up with a few scratches. One laceration to your leg was deep, and we had to give you stitches. You’re very lucky that you only have a concussion.”

“How long was I out for?”

“Twenty-three hours. We wanted to give your body time to heal.” He scribbled something on my chart.

Since I didn’t sound too bad, I asked. “When can I drive again?”

“Preferably never, but I know that won’t be the case, so I’d say a minimum of a month. When you get home, you need to make an appointment with your doctor in a couple of weeks and get checked out.”

“That’s it?” It seemed too easy.

“If everything checks out, you’ll be released tomorrow. Do you have a place to stay here in Melbourne?”

“I think I still have my hotel room,” I answered. I was planning on staying here for a week and then traveling to Bahrain for the next race, but now I guess I would be heading back to California until I was cleared.

* * *

LA

“Are you sure the doctor cleared you?” Colton Donavan asked from his seat behind his desk. His fingers were steeped in front of him as his eyes assessed me. “And you didn’t pay him off to say you could race?”

I couldn’t help but chuckle at that. I was sure there were plenty of athletes out there that had tried and succeeded in paying their doctors to clear them for their sport. Don’t get me wrong, I had thought about it as I sat in my house day after day staring out at the ocean. I wasn’t used to being idle. In fact, I was always on the go. At each location of our races, I went out and played the tourist. Formula One racing had taken me across the globe for the last five years, and I appreciated every moment of it. There weren’t many professions where you could do what you love, travel the world, and get paid millions of dollars while doing it. The only con was it was lonely at times.

Crossing my arms over my chest, I answered his question. “I wouldn’t think of it.”

The pain in my head when the light was bright and my swimming vision may have also been contenders as to why I’d stayed home to rest my brain and why I didn’t try to get back onto the track before I was ready. The only problem was with each passing day, the feeling that had started to bubble up in the hospital had risen higher

and higher until it was nearly choking me.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“If you’re not ready, your replacement can drive for you. You’re not going to lose your place on the team because you miss a few races.”

A few? I’d already missed four, and while Colton said he wouldn’t replace me, he was losing money with my replacement. He was an okay driver, but he wasn’t coming in the top four spots, and I knew it was hurting the team in points. If I didn’t get back soon, the team would never be able to make up the points to be one of the top teams at the end of the season.

“I’m ready.” I tightened my arms over my chest. My lips turned down at the thought. “If I have to stay home and look at nothing for a moment longer, I’m going to go crazy.”

“That’s what I thought. I’ve got your plane ticket to Barcelona booked, so pack your bags and get the hell out of town. I’ll warn you that Rylee has insisted we be there. She’s going to mother hen you to death.”

“If it’s the price I have to pay, then I’ll gladly pay it.”

Colton chuckled as he stood and came around his desk to clasp me on the shoulder. “You have no idea how pissed off she was when she found out the team didn’t visit you in the hospital. I thought she was going to skin me alive.”

“Don’t worry about it, and when I see her, I’ll let her know I was fine.” Even though it would have been nice to see a familiar face when I woke up.

Callum

Barcelona

Running the tip of my gloved index finger over the words, Callum Crew, I continued with my ritual. I'd already had my pre-race breakfast sandwich, which consisted of an English muffin, a fried egg, and a thick slice of Canadian bacon, all topped with hot sauce.

Squatting down, I kissed my fingertips and placed them on the ground before standing, placing my helmet over my balaclava, and fastening it underneath my chin.

Colton, who'd been standing off to the side, came over and patted my shoulder and gave me a chin nod. Rylee had already been by to visit while I ate my 'disgusting breakfast' as she liked to call it.

It had been too long since I'd felt the racetrack beneath my feet. I couldn't wait to sit behind the wheel and feel the vibration of my car move through me.

My teammate, Udo Kauppinen, was already in his car. I was happy I didn't have to see him, and it was finally time for me to see where I'd start on the grid tomorrow. To most, it would seem strange, but in the world of Formula One racing, there was no bigger competition than your teammate. So far, Udo had the fastest laps of the day while I was gone, but I paid no mind to his times, knowing I would beat him today.

Luckily, he was already out with the crew while I was getting ready, so I didn't have to see his smug face. We'd both been at a sponsorship dinner last night. While I'd been gone, Udo had befriended my replacement driver, Eduardo Revere, and they'd snickered to themselves all night as they eyed me from the other end of the table.

As if I gave one shit about them. It was a running joke that I was the only racer who didn't have a friend amongst the teams. In the beginning, when I didn't know any better, I had befriended one of my fellow racers. It was all good until I placed ahead

of him in a race. By my fifth win over him, Ricardo wouldn't speak to me. He'd started playing pranks at every destination, and the further they progressed, the angrier I got until one day I blew up and let him get in my head. He was no longer on our team, but since then, I'd vowed to keep to myself and not let anyone affect my driving ever again.

Climbing inside my car, I breathed in the smell of fuel and rubber as Hank attached my steering wheel. I sat back while I was buckled into my six-point harness. Everything about me instantly calmed, from my breathing to the blood flowing through my veins, as I gripped the wheel and felt the leather of my gloves stretch over my fingers.

It was good to be home.

"Crew, do you read?" Kaspar asked through the headset.

"Loud and clear." I grinned from behind my visor.

"You've got about five minutes until Q one starts," I heard through my ear.

"Roger that."

With my eyes closed, I waited until it was time to drive. I listened to the world around me and the crew as they did their last-minute touches to the car. Usually, I was out with the crew, but not today. I wanted to be seated in my car and getting a feel for her again.

"Thirty seconds until engine start-up."

My fingers curled around the wheel as I waited for the engine to start. The roar filled my entire body and exhilarated me, and I couldn't stop the smile that spread across

my face. This was where I was meant to be. If I didn't have racing, I didn't know what I'd do with my life.

"Ten seconds," Kaspar informed me.

And then I was off. I kept to the right and fought my way through the pack of cars.

"You're making great time, Callum. Keep up the good work."

I knew I was. I could feel it in my bones. Today was my fastest time. Each time I was out on the track, I tried to do better than ever before.

Five cars ahead of me, the lead car suddenly jerked to the side and hit the wall. Instantly, heavy gray smoke billowed out of the car.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

I couldn't keep my eyes off the yellow car or the driver as I passed by.

Once they were no longer in my vision, everything turned into some sort of tunnel vision. I shook my head as the voice in my ear sounded garbled, and my heart rate picked up. A sheen of sweat coated my body as I heated internally. My mouth became dry, and I tried to lick my lips to help alleviate even a fraction of the dryness. When that didn't work, I hit the drink button on my steering wheel. I knew I was in trouble when I could barely do that one simple function.

"Crew, Crew, can you hear me?"

I could, but I couldn't answer. I could barely breathe, and with each passing second, I thought my heart was going to explode in my chest.

"Callum, talk to me, buddy. It's all clear. You can speed back up now." Kaspar's voice was the only thing keeping me from slipping away entirely.

"I can't breathe," I finally grunted out. The amount of effort it took for me to get those three words out had sweat pouring down my face.

"Alright, take a deep breath in with me." I listened as Kaspar took an exaggerated breath in and followed his breathing, but it wasn't enough.

Udo rubbed his tires against mine, making the car jerk to the side. I had control of the car, but not of myself.

"Only five more laps."

Five more laps and I would be dead—or at least it felt like it.

“Kaspar,” I croaked out, “I think I’m having a heart attack.”

There was a beat of silence before a familiar, yet unfamiliar voice came on over the headset. “Callum, I think you’re having a panic attack. Have you ever had one before?” Rylee’s soft voice drifted through my head.

I couldn’t be having a panic attack. Panic attacks were for pussies. I’d seen plenty of wrecks in my days and been a part of quite a few of them as well. There was no way that’s what this was.

“The medic, Rylee. I’m...” My breath got caught in my chest, and I wheezed.

“Pull into the pit, Callum,” she demanded.

If I didn’t finish, I wouldn’t qualify.

“I know what you’re thinking, and it doesn’t matter. Your safety and health are more important than anything else at this moment.” If it had been anyone else who’d said those words, I wouldn’t have listened. Maybe I only listened because I knew if I didn’t, I was going to wreck and very well might not make it back.

When the pit lane came into view, I slowed down even more and made my way to our slot. The moment I stopped, someone ripped off my helmet, and our team medics were by my side, checking me out.

“Can you get out?” he asked from beside me.

There were too many hands all around me as they tried to unbuckle me and remove the steering wheel so I could get out. The rest was a blur. It was as if I’d blacked out.

The only thing I remembered was our team doctor saying I was fine, but I'd had a panic attack. Colton and Rylee were in the room, but I wasn't sure when they had arrived because they hadn't been there when we first went in.

Rylee gave me a sympathetic look while Colton remained stoic. I hated to disappoint him, but I was more disappointed in myself. How could I have lost control so easily from witnessing a wreck I'd seen hundreds of times before?

There was no simple explanation.

Aspen

Barcelona

"Mr. Crew is hereto see you, Dr. Belle," my secretary, Maria, called through from the intercom.

I looked at the clock and saw that he was over twenty minutes early. Not something I was used to in Barcelona.

"Let me finish up these notes. Give me five minutes, and then you can send him in," I replied, pushing my glasses up the bridge of my nose. They were constantly sliding, and I was endlessly pushing them up all because I couldn't touch my eyeball to put in my contacts.

Five minutes later, Maria knocked on my door before she opened it and let my next client in.

Standing, I smoothed down my black skirt and moved around my desk to meet him. Today hadn't gotten off to a great start with my ex-boyfriend showing up out of the blue at the ass crack of dawn to ask me to take him back after he dumped me for

another woman four months ago. I was finally moving on after he broke my heart, and the last thing I needed or wanted was to see him again.

The whole thing with Alejandro had left me out of sorts all morning long, and I didn't want my new client to pick up on it. The first impression was always important, especially with a patient. It factored in with how soon they opened up.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

Lifting my head and extending my arm to shake his hand, I was shocked when I took him in. I blinked slowly, as if in a dream. The man before me looked like JKF Jr. in the flesh with longish brown hair that was sexily tousled like only the rich seemed to be able to do. Only this guy had blue eyes that reminded me of a stormy ocean. The scruff on his jaw made me want to feel it between my legs. The fact that he had that much power over me in only a few seconds spelled bad news.

Stepping closer, I greeted him. “Good afternoon. I’m Dr. Belle. It’s nice to meet you.”

Taking the hand that was still hanging, he gave me a grimace of a smile. His low, but deep voice grumbled out. “I wish I could say the same thing.”

Alright, he was going to be one of those clients that hated being here and talking about their problems—typical American.

“Why don’t you have a seat wherever you feel comfortable, and we’ll start. Would you like something to drink?”

“Water would be nice. Thanks.” He looked around at his seating options before he chose the leather chair in front of my desk.

I didn’t like to tell my patients where to sit, especially the ones who didn’t want to be here in the first place. It seemed all the new ones who’d never been to see a therapist before expected me to demand they lie on my couch and spill all their deep dark secrets in the first hour after meeting me.

Taking my seat behind my desk, I cleared the lust from my throat before I hit the intercom button. “Maria, could you please bring us two bottles of water?”

“Yes, Dr. Belle. I’ll be right there.”

We remained quiet, examining each other as we waited for Maria to bring our drinks. I didn’t want to have to stop when she came in, and the view before me didn’t hurt.

I couldn’t remember the last time a man affected me so viscerally. Not even Alejandro had made me forget myself for a split second when we’d met.

Again, Maria knocked before she came in, as she always did. She placed both water bottles on my desk without a word or even a glance at the dream-like man in front of me before she left.

Leaning forward, he took one of the bottles, twisted off the cap, and then drank almost half the contents in one swallow.

“Shall we get started? I was told you needed an expedited process, but that’s all I was told. Whoever called for you didn’t seem to understand therapy doesn’t really work that way. It’s ongoing work.” I got right to the point. There was no sense in us wasting time if he was going to scoff at this being more than a one-time session.

Twisting the lid back on this water, his blue eyes locked with mine and rendered me incapable of thought for a moment. I wasn’t sure if I was going to be able to help him if I couldn’t get my libido in check. Had no sex for four months reduced me to a woman who couldn’t control herself?

“I’m a bit of an emergency case. I’ll admit I’ve never been to a therapist, although my boss’s wife is a counselor and there have been times when I felt like I was in a session, or what I imagine a session to be like when talking to her.” He slid his hands

over his jean-clad legs. Jeans that were plastered against muscular legs that had me wanting him to rip them off and show me what he was hiding. “Sorry, I’m rambling. I’m nervous that you won’t be able to help me and while I hate to admit it, I need help. And fast.”

“May I call you Callum?”

“Yeah, of course,” he answered as if it was a silly question.

He had one of those voices that made you want to listen to him say anything. If he wanted to recite the phone book to me, I’d happily lie in a puddle of my own drool as I sat and listened while ogling him. Which was a problem.

He was my client, not meat on a stick, and I needed to remember that. He was probably going to leave here thinking how unprofessional I was after I sat here and stared at him the whole session.

“Let’s start with what brought you here today, Callum.”

“Well, that’s easy. I’ve had two panic attacks in the last two days, making it impossible for me to do my job.”

“And what job is that?”

He sat up a little straighter in his seat, even though he already had perfect posture. “I’m a Formula One race car driver.”

He was proud, and I was impressed with his profession. I’d never seen a race in person, but I’d caught it on TV once or twice. Before I moved from the States, no one made a big deal out of it, but in Barcelona, it was a huge event. The citizens went crazy when the Grand Prix hit their country, and I knew from all the excitement there

had been a race yesterday.

“Did you just start as a driver?” Maybe his nerves got to him with it being his first race.

“I’ve been doing it since I was nineteen years old.” A bit of a southern twang came out, making me wonder where he was from.

“You mentioned you had two panic attacks recently. Were they your first ones?”

“I thought I was dying while in the cockpit of my car.” His gaze became unfocused as he most likely remembered the feeling of those attacks. “Yesterday I couldn’t even get inside the car. I started to, and then it hit me. My entire body seemed to crank up ten degrees, which might as well have felt like a hundred in my suit. When my heart started to race, and it sounded like I was in a tunnel, I knew I couldn’t race. If I had got in my car, I would have lost control in the first few minutes of being out on the track and then most definitely died or killed someone else.”

Having a panic attack while driving wasn’t safe, but it was a whole other level when going over two hundred miles per hour. I was glad he understood how serious it was.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“I’m glad you didn’t drive. You mentioned having them on consecutive days. What happened the other day when you had your panic attack?”

“The same symptoms, but I was out on the track. I had to come in and didn’t finish my qualifying laps.” He banged his fist on his leg, and his nostrils flared.

Most men didn’t like losing control, but for a man like Callum, who, going by his profession, was most definitely dominant in everything he did, it was worse. I was sure he was beating himself up about what he perceived as his failure.

“Did anything eventful happen before it started?”

I was surprised at how easily he was talking to me. I guess he really was desperate.

“A wreck, but it had cleared before I reached it. They’re always quick to get out of the way, and...I knew that, but it didn’t matter.”

Something had obviously happened, but Callum might not have been putting the two together.

“Okay, so you know wrecks are usually cleared, so what was different about that day? That wreck in particular?”

Placing his elbows on his knees, Callum hung his head. His fingers pulled at the strands of his hair as he grunted in frustration.

“It was my first race back after my wreck. I’d been out for four races and was anxious

to get back on the track. My team depends on me for points. Without me, they won't be making the top positions at the end of the year."

They also wouldn't ever make those positions if he ended up dead.

"That's a lot of pressure on you. Were you ready to start back racing?"

He let out a bitter sounding scoff. "More than ready. I was climbing the walls while I was at home. I'm not used to sitting around doing nothing."

"Were you hurt badly in your wreck?" Physically he looked fine, but there had been something that kept him from racing in those four races he missed.

"Just scrapes and bruises and a concussion," he answered as if his injuries were no big deal, but a concussion was serious. It was possible he still had it.

"Was anyone else hurt?" I softly asked.

"There was another car, and he died. They didn't tell me at first, but once I was released from the hospital, I found out."

"After you found out, did it make you think it could have been you?"

"Oh, yeah. I saw the wreck coming, but that time it didn't clear. I went through the smoke, and when I reached the other side, there was more wreckage. Bam!" he shouted. "It all went down in slow motion, and while I braced, I wasn't sure if I would die or not."

I didn't think he gave the experience he'd had enough credit. An average wreck could be traumatic, but seeing it and knowing it's about to happen, with speeds and consequences of that magnitude, was too much to handle. With a concussion

afterward, he was bound to have some anxiety. Maybe if there hadn't been a wreck the first time he got back into a car, he would have been fine. Or maybe one would have been triggered after he saw another wreck on or off the track.

He lifted his head, his eyes filled with desperation, and pleaded, "I need to be able to get back out on the track, Doc. I have less than two weeks until my next race."

"I can't promise you miracles in such a short amount of time, but we can work on trying to get you back behind the wheel. Did you drive here?" I didn't have the heart to tell him there was no way to cure someone in such little time.

"Taxi. I didn't want to risk the chance of freaking out again behind the wheel." He let out a harsh breath. "I sound like a fucking pussy. Fuck, I'm sorry. I don't mean to swear, but I can't help it."

"I take no offense. Plenty of clients swear and do much worse, so don't worry about it."

He perked up. His distress from a moment ago forgotten. "Oh, yeah, like what?"

I shook my head. "I can't tell you that; doctor-patient confidentiality."

"Fair," he leaned forward again on his elbows.

"Since I've been hired to help you for the next week, why don't we meet tomorrow at a car rental place, and we'll start from there."

"What's renting a car going to do?" he questioned harshly.

"First, you're going to rent it, and then you're going to drive it. I'll be with you, of course, in case you start to feel any panic. We'll also work on exercises for you to try

before you drive. But I can't promise you you'll be ready to race in two weeks. I'm sorry."

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“I have faith in you, Doc.”

“That’s all our time for today. I have a few more patients to see since I won’t be available to them for the week. Why don’t you verify your contact information with Maria out there, and she’ll call or text you the time and place for us to meet tomorrow?”

He looked a little apprehensive, but he stood and held out his hand for me to shake.

“Thanks for meeting with me and letting me take up all your time.”

“It was my pleasure, Callum.”

I only hoped I could keep myself under control once we were out of the office. Neither one of us could afford for me to get sidetracked.

Aspen

Barcelona

I stood waiting for Callum to show up outside of Enterprise. I’m not sure what possessed me to suggest being in such close proximity to him after I nearly drooled at the very sight of him the day before.

Last night, I pulled my vibrator out of my drawer and used it until I literally passed out from the sheer amount of orgasms I’d given myself. When I’d woken up this morning, said vibrator had fallen to the floor sometime during the night. It was now charging by my bedside in case I need any more assistance trying to remember I

didn't need a man—any man—to give me orgasms.

Hopefully, Callum wouldn't affect me today like he had yesterday. Maybe yesterday was because I hadn't been regularly servicing myself.

Scrolling through the messages from my office on my phone, I felt him before I saw him. There was something electric in the air. A charge that had me hyperaware. And then his smell hit me. Yesterday it was light in the air, but today the heady smell of citrus and sandalwood brought my lady bits back to life after being fully exhausted last night.

Closing my eyes, I prepared myself to see him. If my body was already behaving like this from his presence and smell alone, I was in trouble.

“Hey!” he called out in a chastising tone as he grabbed my elbow and pulled me into his strong body when a man came barreling out of the rental place, spewing profanities.

The guy didn't even look back or say excuse me as he stomped down the street.

“Are you okay, Doc?” His low, deep voice vibrated through me, making me all too aware of our proximity.

“I'm fine. Thanks for saving me.” I took a step back before I lost myself and leaned into him. “Are you ready for today?”

His blue eyes darted to the side before his head barely signaled a shake. “I never thought I'd be in this position.”

“And what position is that?”

“Scared to drive a car because of what my body might do, but I know I have to do this.” He huffed out a sharp breath and then opened the door to the rental car agency, holding it open for me. “Ladies first.”

“Thank you. I know today will be hard, more difficult than you realize, but if you want to drive again, you have to do this. But I promise you that I’ll be here every step of the way.”

“I’m counting on it, Doc.”

Thirty minutes later, we were sitting in front of Enterprise with Callum behind the wheel, and a light sheen of sweat had already coated his handsome face.

Perhaps starting at the rental place wasn’t the best location. I wanted to do some meditation exercises with him that weren’t easily done out in public. Tomorrow I’d make sure to pick a better location.

Callum was handsome—too handsome for his own good—and with my attraction to him, it made my job more than a little difficult.

“Okay, Callum, right now, I want you to take some deep breaths. I’m not going to make you drive this car if you’re uncomfortable doing so. You’re safe with me and in this car.”

He let out a shaky breath. “Right, deep breaths. I sure hope you have better skills than telling me what naturally comes to my body for the amount you’re being paid.”

It was common for patients to lash out, so I let the comment slide. I was damn good at my job, and my price reflected that.

“I can assure you, Mr. Crew, I have more up my sleeve than a few deep breathing

exercises, but it's a process, and you need to calm your mind, and the best first step is to breathe."

"Fine," he grumbled, but took a few deep breaths in through his mouth and out through his nose. I noticed his body started to relax a fraction.

"Good, now tell me what you're feeling. What's going through your mind?"

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“I feel like an idiot, and I don’t think this is going to get me back to racing. Now or ever again.” His fingers tightened on the steering wheel until they were white.

“Callum,” I said in my best calming voice, “This may seem like an inconsequential step, but believe me, you’re doing better than you think. Do you know how long it takes some people to seek help? Some never do, so for you to contact my office right after—”

“Don’t make me out to be something I’m not. I didn’t call you. It was the team. They said you were the best in the city, and if I wanted any chance in racing in the next race, I had to at least attempt therapy.”

“Well, you came, and that’s all that matters,” I countered.

“No, what matters is me getting back out on the track.”

“And we’ll get you there. I’m not sure if it will be by your next race, but don’t give up hope.”

“Hope. It’s such a funny thing. One second you’re flying high, and the next, it’s snatched from you, and you’ll do almost anything to get it back.”

“How do you feel about starting the car and driving a couple of blocks?”

“Like I don’t want to freak out while I’m driving.”

“Okay, that’s normal, but do you want to try? I promise that at any second if you start

to feel like you might panic, you can pull over, and I'll take over from there."

"God, I feel like a pussy." He placed the keys in the ignition but didn't start the car. "I shouldn't need you to save me."

I turned to face him fully. "It's okay to need help every once in a while. There's nothing weak about that."

"Maybe not for you, but for me..." He stared straight ahead without finishing his sentence.

"It's a big deal for you. I understand, and it is for a lot of people. Do you think I like asking my colleagues if they could take my clients this week while I work with you?"

His eyes cut to me before he turned the key and started the car. "I'm guessing not."

"No, because they're my patients, and I worry about their wellbeing. I have a few who don't open up to anyone else but me."

"Will you worry about me once I leave Spain?" he asked, pulling away from the curb.

I had a feeling it helped if we talked to keep his mind off what was really happening.

"I will until I see you've successfully raced," I admitted.

A car swerved in front of us and then took a sharp right turn. It wasn't anything out of the ordinary, but I did notice more sweat on his forehead immediately after.

"Are you okay?"

"To tell you the truth, no. I know that I have better reflexes than most, and we

wouldn't have hit that car, but for a split second, I was brought back to the wreck and smoke."

"But you're not there, Callum. Take a deep breath and look at what's around you. Look at the blue sky and the buildings we're passing. You're safe. You're here in the car with me."

When I saw what I was saying was working, I kept talking. He drove around for thirty minutes before he pulled over on the side of the road by a hotel and turned off the engine.

Turning in his seat, he looked to me with a stunned look on his handsome face. "How did that work?"

"Because you let it work."

"When you started talking, I tuned into you. I took in my surroundings, and almost all of my symptoms faded away. They were still there, but manageable with your brand of distraction."

"So, you knew I was rambling and asking silly questions to keep your head in the here and now?" I giggled like a schoolgirl and wanted to roll my eyes at myself. Most of the time, Callum hadn't answered my questions as he kept his focus on the road; a few times he'd glanced over at me, probably thinking I was crazy, and only a couple of times did he answer me. The point wasn't to learn his deepest, darkest secrets—or anything really, for that matter—but to keep his mind off the fact that he was driving, might have a panic attack, and crash I noticed what worked best and kept my line of questioning to that.

And it had worked.

“Does this mean I’m cured? I can race, and I’ll be fine?” His face lit up, and I hated to burst his bubble, but I had no other choice.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“I don’t think you’re quite ready yet. Tomorrow we’ll try the highway, and if that works, then we’ll go from there.”

I didn’t want to mention at one point he’d be driving—or attempting to drive—a Formula One car here first. His team had arranged it, and I was glad they had, since, so far, he’d blown my expectations out of the water.

His face fell just as I knew it would. “You’ve done a remarkable job, though. I didn’t think you’d be able to drive as long as you did today. Tomorrow we’ll start off with a little meditation and another exercise before you drive, and I think it will help a great deal. I want to build on the exercises you can do, so when you start to feel out of control, you can use them and calm yourself down.”

“Whatever you say, Doc. This is my hotel.” He lifted his chin in the direction of the Gran Hotel La Florida. It had to be one of the nicest hotels in all of Barcelona. “Do you want to take the car back to your place and then meet me here tomorrow?”

I was surprised by his gesture. It’s not that he didn’t seem like a gentleman, but they were rare in this day and age. Plus, if I drove it back to my apartment, I could breathe in his scent the whole way home without looking like a crazy person. I looked around at the spacious grounds that surrounded the hotel and thought of no better place to meditate in the morning.

* * *

Slipping the headphones on, I placed the microphone part in front of my mouth. “Can you hear me?” I asked Callum from the stands.

“Loud and clear,” his deep voice with that slight twang came over the airwaves, making me smile.

At every turn, Callum was surprising me. Two days in a row, we hit the highway, and yesterday, he drove for two hours without having to pull over. I had to coach him through a few panic attacks as they started, but he was incredibly in tune with his body and knew when they started. As long as I spoke to him, he was fine. Today was the true test to see if he could get in a car and speed around the track without having a panic attack. Since no one was here but a small crew, he didn’t have cars or spectators to worry about.

We decided he would first take off whenever he was ready, and if that was successful, we would then have a countdown that felt truer to race day, in case something about that was a trigger.

Through the headphones, I could hear him take a few deep breaths. Before we headed to the track, I ran him through several exercises to help clear his mind. Each day I worked with him, I was surprised at how well he took instruction. It showed his dedication and how much he loved his job.

I wished all my patients were as motivated.

“I’m ready,” he announced.

Before today, I had no idea the driver didn’t start the car himself. I watched as a man behind the car twisted or pulled something—it was hard to tell from where I sat—before the engine roared to life.

I kept quiet and listened to Callum breathe. I didn’t want to ask him how he was feeling on the off chance that it would make him question himself and cause anxiety to start to build.

“This feels good, Doc. Thanks for setting this up.” His voice was a little higher than normal, showing his excitement.

My own insides were also bubbling with excitement. Was it possible to treat someone in a week and have them cured of their phobia? Until Callum, I didn’t believe it to be true.

“I’m glad you’re enjoying yourself. Show me what you can do,” I ordered but kept my tone light.

He let out a deep chuckle, and in a matter of seconds, he was going at speeds no man should ever travel. Until that moment, I hadn’t realized how dangerous it would be if Callum started to panic out there.

After about ten minutes, he pulled into the pit and was out of the car in a few seconds. I started to walk down the steps toward him as he pulled off his helmet. His entire face beamed as he looked up at me.

“That felt fucking great!” he shouted up to me.

“Why’d you stop?”

He moved closer and angled his head to look up at me. “I want to do the countdown.” He kicked the toe of his shoe to the ground.

“I’m sensing a but…” I trailed off, waiting to hear what he had to say.

“I wish we could get another driver out there.”

Having another car on the track with him could have been helpful or detrimental, depending on how he responded. It was something we couldn’t risk.

“I’m sorry, Callum.”

He fidgeted in his spot. “There’s no reason for you to be sorry. I’m lucky to get this opportunity.” That same bright smile broke out onto his face again. He went from serious to happy about as fast as his driving. “I feel fucking fantastic. Wait until you see me out there this time.”

“You were holding back?” I asked, amused. Seeing Callum happy brought out a whole other side of him—a side that was dangerously attractive.

“You’ll just have to wait and see,” he smirked.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

I'd always heard athletes were cocky, but up until then, I hadn't thought Callum had it in him. Surprisingly, instead of turning me off, it did the opposite. I had an inkling it didn't matter what Callum did or didn't do, I'd find it hot.

This time Callum started on what they were calling 'the grid.' Above the track, the lights turned red, and then someone started a countdown. Excitement coursed through me. I couldn't imagine what it would be like with the stands full and nineteen other cars out on the track or the hum of life that would vibrate through the air. When the Grand Prix made its way to Spain again, I would make sure to be there with all the excitement.

"Three."

"Two."

"One."

The lights turned green, and Callum was off.

I jumped to my feet and stood against the railing, watching every turn. Even with what little I knew of Formula One racing, I knew they didn't repeatedly go around in circles. They also traveled through city streets, through the countryside, and sometimes—as I was informed—at night.

Callum had barely finished the first lap when I heard his breathing pick up. I waited to see if he could work through it without my help.

“Doc,” he panted out.

“I’m here, Callum. Remember what I taught you. Breathe. Focus on taking deep breaths.”

“I’m trying. Keep talking to me,” he pleaded.

“You’re safe, Callum. Feel the air move through your body. Let it calm your body and your mind. Focus only on my voice, what’s right in front of you, and the life force moving in your body.”

“I need more. What’s your first name, Doc? Tell me about yourself. The sound of your voice soothes something in me,” he huffed.

“My name is Aspen Belle, and I’m thirty-two years old.” As I kept repeating my mantra for him, I could hear his deep breathing become quieter by the minute. “Are you able to continue driving?”

“I will because I must. If I hadn’t heard your voice, I’m not sure I could have continued on. Thank you.”

“It’s my job, Mr. Crew.” I’m not sure why I felt the need to remind him, but I did. The company he raced for was paying me three months’ worth of wages for one week of intense therapy.

“I know it is, but there’s something about your voice. I feel it deep inside of me when you speak.”

A flicker of something I shouldn’t have felt started deep in my belly.

For the next hour, we continued on with me talking over the radio. If I stopped for

longer than a few minutes, Callum's breathing would race, so I'd start reading from a book. It felt wrong to delve too deep into personal information. If I was to stay distanced from my client, we needed to keep it strictly professional. By the end of Callum's driving, he was able to keep calm and only ask that I read to him.

I waited up in the stands as he excitedly jumped out of his car and spoke to the crew. While today had been a success, I wasn't sure what would happen when he was in an actual race. Could the man in his ear calm his racing heart and breath?

Loud footsteps came from the stands, making me turn to look over my shoulder. A tall man with a lopsided grin moved toward me.

"Dr. Belle, I'm Colton Donovan. I'm the owner of Callum's team. He's down below spouting how you're a miracle worker."

I stood and met him with only two rows between us. "While he's doing amazingly well, I'm no miracle worker, I can assure you, Mr. Donovan."

"Yes, that's what I've come to speak to you about. Callum believes that only by hearing the sound of your voice, he'll be able to drive. I believe that if you're not there when he drives, he'll fail."

I'd had the same fear as well.

"Do you not believe whoever speaks to him over the headset will be able to help him in any way?"

"Kaspar would if he could, but he's not trained in any way to guide Callum from losing control. I wasn't there when he wrecked." He looked off into the sun as he finished speaking. "The team left him alone, and I believe it got into his head. Now I can help him."

“How can you help him?”

“I want to hire you to be a part of the team for the rest of the season. Be there for him before and during the race. You won’t have to be in the elements while he races, but he needs you there.”

“Mr. Donovan, while I understand why you’re offering, I have clients here who need me. I can’t leave them,” I tried to make him understand.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

His lopsided grin faded and turned into a thin line. “Will one of them die if you hand them off to another therapist? I believe if you’re not there with Callum, he very well could die out there on the track. If it’s money you’re worried about, I will pay you more than you could ever make in a year.”

I didn’t like the fact he was trying to guilt-trip me or trying to buy me. I wasn’t sure how I would ever live with myself if anyone died on my account, though.

“I can see you contemplating my proposal. Think about it. You’ll get to travel around the world with plenty of time to see the sights. Callum doesn’t want anyone to know it, but he’s the cheesiest tourist wherever we go. I’m sure he’d love some company while he journeys out.”

I seriously doubted Callum wanted anyone with him. While he was charming, he also seemed to be a bit of a loner.

“It’s only until the beginning of December.”

“UntilDecember?” I sputtered out. “But it’s only May.”

“It’s a long season. I can’t possibly travel the tour with my wife in California and my duties to my company. It would give me...and Callum great relief to have you with him.”

Turning back to the track, I had no idea what to do. The thought of Callum getting hurt or worse because I wasn’t there with him was unbearable. But what of my other patients? They were just as precious as he was.

I didn't turn back to look at him when I asked. "Can I think about it?"

"Of course, you have a few days before we fly out to Monaco." I could hear the triumph in his voice even though I hadn't agreed, making me grind my molars together. "I'll leave your ticket with Callum. Good day."

I spun around, only to see his back as he walked away. Unwilling to follow, I sat back in my seat and tried to sort the jumbled thoughts in my head. I had an impossible decision to make.

Callum

Monaco

Aspen waited until the day before I was set to fly from Spain to Monaco to make her final decision. Most racers dreaded the track here, but I loved it. Rumors were flying about whether I'd ever race again after what happened in Bahrain, but I planned to show them I was a better racer than before.

With all my free time, I'd been working out more than ever. I was stronger, and I believed with one hundred percent certainty that with Aspen talking to me, I couldn't be beaten.

"I can't believe we're stuck in this tin can during a storm," Aspen grumbled to herself from her seat.

"If it was bad, they would have gone around, delayed our flight, or landed. We've done none of those things, so we must be safe."

"Safe," she scoffed.

While Aspen had tried to keep me from knowing anything personal, I had learned she hated flying. It seemed crazy that I was fine flying across the ocean during a storm, yet I couldn't race without the woman beside me. I knew it was all in my head and hoped now that she'd agreed to follow me through the season, I'd eventually be able to race without her.

Even if I desperately wanted to fuck her.

Perhaps Colton had seen me checking out her ass as she walked away, or maybe it was the desperation in which I needed her that had him demanding that we agree to keep our relationship strictly a doctor-patient one. We could be friends, but nothing more.

Aspen shifted in her seat, making her shirt dip to show more of her cleavage. The unintentional move had my dick twitching in my pants. One peek of her creamy breasts, and I was like a teenage boy hungering for more.

"Doesn't the flying from country to country get old?" she asked, breaking me away from staring at her chest.

When I looked up, she gave me a knowing look, but I saw the slight upturn to her lips. She didn't mind too much. I knew she was just as attracted to me.

"It's not so bad. Maybe for the crew who fly from one location to the next, packing and setting up in city after city, but I like to stay and explore. If I was hopping on a plane the day after a race, I doubt I'd enjoy it too much."

The plane jostled from turbulence, causing Aspen to grasp onto the armrests on her seat and look over at me with big brown eyes that were pleading with me to somehow get her off this plane. Her face went white with the next bump as she squeezed her eyes closed.

“I knew this was a bad idea. I should have stayed home with my patients. Now we’re going to die.” The terror in her voice twisted at my heart.

Turning in my seat as best as I could with my seatbelt on, I reached across the narrow space that separated us and took her cold, trembling hand in mine, trying my best to distract her. “How long have you lived in Spain?”

One eye slowly opened to peek out at me. “For a little over a year.” Her words were rushed as she spoke.

“Have you always wanted to live in Spain?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“No,” was her simple one-word reply. I definitely wasn’t as good at this as she was. I knew if I got Aspen to start talking, it would take her mind off of the fact that she thought we were going to crash and die.

“What made you move there then?”

“A man.” She shook her head, infinitesimally. Was that the real reason why she hadn’t wanted to leave? Was she leaving her boyfriend for the next seven months? “It wasn’t a smart move, but I was in love and thought we’d be together forever. His visa was expiring, and I thought...” She chewed on her bottom lip for a moment. “I thought if I moved, he’d propose.”

I felt elation followed immediately by knowing I was an asshole for feeling elated at the mention that her boyfriend was out of the picture.

“What happened?” I coaxed her.

Aspen opened her big brown eyes, only for me to find them glassy with emotion. “Everything was fine for the first three months, or so I thought. He was even more affectionate once we got to his home country. He would go out searching for a job for a few hours a day, so I would explore my new home. I was also in contact with a few people so I could start practicing.” She let out a humorless huff. “Alejandro didn’t like the fact that I got a job before him or that I hadn’t mentioned I was looking.” She looked bleakly over at me. “I wasn’t hiding the fact that I was going to work. He knew all along. He’d been with me when I’d spoken to one of my colleagues before I left, and she had a contact in Spain who was going to be retiring soon. It was pure luck. One that made my decision to go with him all the easier.”

The guy sounded like an asshole.

“What happened?” I asked quietly, hoping she would continue her story. This was the first time she’d opened up to me, and the information she was spilling wasn’t what I expected.

“He tried to act as if me having work didn’t bother him, but I saw what he was trying to hide. When we met, it didn’t bother him—or at least he was better at hiding it then.”

“I’m sure it takes a lot to get something like that by you.” She was able to read me at every turn.

“Have you heard the term ‘love is blind?’ It was definitely true in my case. He started picking fights with me about every little thing. Many men do not like it when a woman is more successful than them. At first, he said he didn’t mind, but...” She turned and looked out the window, but quickly looked back to me. The storm outside was indeed becoming a little unsettling.

“I understand.” I saw how difficult it was for her to talk about what this man had done to her and wanted to give her an out. “He started to resent you. I can promise you I would never feel that way toward my partner.”

Her eyes lit with laughter as she rolled her lips to keep from laughing. “The only way I see that happening is if you’re planning to marry a princess. You probably have more money than you know what to do with.” She giggled.

She was right about the last. “Still, I wouldn’t care if you were the main breadwinner in our home.”

“Callum,” she chastised.

I held my hands up in surrender. “I’m merely stating a fact. Take it how you will. I sense there’s more to your relationship with this asshole.”

Her lips twitched at the word asshole. “It’s a boring story that I’m sure you don’t want to hear.”

“I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t want to know.” Plus, it was keeping her distracted.

“I was fooling myself with our relationship. After traveling to a country where I only knew my boyfriend, I had no one else and had signed a contract for one year. But when I discovered he’d been cheating on me, I couldn’t pretend any longer. I caught him at work in the back office at a rental agency, but he didn’t see me. And by the time he came home, I’d moved out.”

There was the smart woman I was getting to know.

“Surely your year is up by now. Why did you stay?” Why had she stayed if she had no one?

“Life is an adventure, and I love my clients, so I thought, why not stay?”

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’m pleased to inform you the storm has cleared and we’re thirty minutes out from landing.”

“You’re most definitely on an adventure now, Doc.”

* * *

As we pulled up to the marina, Aspen shifted in her seat in the back of our car and then smoothed her hands down her dark skinny jeans that hugged every sinful curve.

“Is this normal?”

I couldn't help but laugh. "No, I can assure you there isn't this much grandeur at each stop during the season. Monaco is special for many reasons, and this is one of them. The days before the race, there are parties day and night. I don't attend any of them, but unfortunately, I am required to attend sponsorship dinners, and tonight's is on one of those yachts out there. Probably the largest one. It's a big pissing contest out on the water if you hadn't guessed."

"Why don't you go to the parties?" she asked quietly with her voice full of awe.

"Because I need to stay in tip-top shape, and that doesn't include drinking, drugs, or living off of very little sleep. I eat healthy and work out five days a week in order to be the very best driver out there at each and every race."

I swore I heard her say something along the lines of 'it shows,' but I wasn't sure, so I let it go. Attraction wasn't a problem between us—the fact that I was her patient and the half a million dollars she was being paid to be my on-site therapist for the rest of the season was.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Why am I here?” Her big brown eyes looked at me with confusion. “I could have stayed at the hotel and unpacked.”

I didn’t have a good excuse as to why I’d asked her to come with me. Only that I didn’t want to part company with her quite yet. “You won’t find any better food than these sponsorship dinners.” I leaned close until my lips were only a couple of inches from her ear. “And it’s free. You can’t get any better than that.”

Leaning her head back on her headrest, she turned to face me. She looked worn out, and I almost felt bad for dragging her with me. “Even though I’m sure I’m going to feel out of place, thank you for inviting me. I think I’m too tired to navigate a foreign country.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be your own personal tour guide. I know all the best restaurants.”

The car came to a stop, and before the driver could open Aspen’s door, I jumped out and held my hand out to her. Slowly she extended one leg out and set her black stiletto heel on the pavement and then repeated the action with her other leg.

It was a simple moment and yet the hottest thing I’d ever seen. When she walked out of her hotel room, I couldn’t tell her that her footwear was inappropriate for being on a boat. She looked too damn sexy in those heels, her tight-as-sin jeans, and her black halter top that showcased her breasts in the best way possible.

I knew that if I asked her to change her shoes, she’d probably end up coming up with an excuse and stay back at the hotel while I suffered through this boring as hell dinner.

Holding my elbow out for her to hold, I kept my steps unhurried as we followed the line of people making their way to the yacht owned by Galaxy energy drinks, which was the main sponsor for our team.

“You should have told me these were not boating shoes,” Aspen hissed as we walked up the ramp onto the boat.

“And miss how hot you look in them? Not a chance.” I smirked down at her by my side. “But if you need to take them off, I’ll carry them since I didn’t tell you to change.”

“It’s the least you can do since you failed to mention how difficult it would be for me to walk.” She narrowed her eyes at me but then gave me a shy smile. A smile I found way too endearing and wanted to see more of.

“How was I to know how hard it would be? I’ve never worn a pair of heels in my life.” I laughed at the annoyed look on her face.

Aspen’s hold on me tightened as she muttered. “Why are they looking at me like that?”

I took my gaze off her and turned to notice that almost everyone was looking our way. “Probably because I’ve never brought anyone to one of these.”

“Never?” she questioned with tight lips.

“Why would I? I’m not into prostitutes or escorts, and I don’t have time for a girlfriend.”

Stepping into me, Aspen whisper-yelled, “Are you saying the women here are prostitutes?”

“Some.” I placed my hand on her waist and was about to pull her closer when I saw Colton staring at me from the other side of the room. Taking a step back, I answered, “It’s pretty common for the guys to hire a woman for the night at events like these.”

Aspen looked down at herself and then at a few of the women that were affixed to their men. “These heels were definitely a bad idea,” she mumbled to herself. She chewed on her bottom lip before she narrowed her eyes at me. “They think I’m a prostitute,” she gritted out.

“That’s not it. It’s all me. They think it’s funny that I don’t have any friends, and now here you are on my arm.”

“You can’t know that,” she said with a downturn of her soft pink lips.

Lifting one shoulder, I responded with my own frown. “That’s what I think. All of these guys are assholes, and they’re always trying to get a reaction out of me. Don’t pay them any mind.”

Placing her hand on my arm, Aspen looked up, and her eyes searched my face. “Neither should you, you know.”

Someone rang a bell and announced it was time to eat. It was then I realized I hadn’t offered to get Aspen a drink. I mentioned I wasn’t going to have anything, but that didn’t mean she didn’t want something. Hell, if I was her, I would most definitely want a drink or three.

“Do you want a drink before we sit down?”

“Oh no,” she hid a yawn with the back of her hand. “If I have anything to drink, I’ll likely fall asleep at the table. I’m sorry I’m such a party pooper.”

She was far from what she described. Aspen would be what made my night tolerable.

We sat down at a table next to each other with Colton and Rylee across from us, and a couple of others I didn't know. Luckily, Udo and Eduardo were at a different table.

"Ms. Belle, I'm Rylee Donovan." She leaned over the table and shook Aspen's hand with a wide smile on her pretty face.

"It's nice to meet you. Mr. Donovan, it's good to see you again as well." Aspen nodded formally at her new employer.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“It’s good to see you as well,” he answered back and gave me a nod.

* * *

Aspen

Rylee stood and moved around the table until she was behind Callum. “Would you mind trading seats with me for a moment while I talk to Ms. Belle?”

He looked at me questioningly, and it made me appreciate his kind heart even more. I gave him a small nod and nervously waited as Rylee sat down beside me. She moved her chair closer and gave me a reassuring smile.

“These things can be a little intimidating when you first go to them, so I applaud you for coming. Especially on your first night here. Was your flight good?”

A bitter laugh bubbled out of me. “It had to be about the worst flight I’ve ever been on.”

“Oh, no!” She placed her hand on my arm. “I’m so sorry to hear that. What happened?”

“There was a terrible storm through most of the flight, and I thought we were going to crash. Callum, though,” I tilted my head toward him, “he was a trooper and believe it or not, helped me through my panic.”

“It’s not hard to believe if you know him. Most of the teams and drivers, ours

included, think he's an asshole, but once you get to know him, you'll find out that he's a real softy. And a charmer." Her red lips grew. "He'll definitely keep you on your toes."

I didn't want to mention how he'd flirted with me. Maybe that was his personality, but I didn't want him to get reprimanded, nor did I want to hear about how I was supposed to be the doctor helping him, and he was my patient. I knew that fact very well and didn't need the reminder.

"What I really wanted to come over here for was to thank you for essentially dropping your life to help Callum. Racing is his whole world, and for that to be taken away from him would have been heartbreaking."

Her eyes darted toward said man and her husband. When their eyes locked, my heart both swelled in my chest at seeing the love they had for each other and ached because of my lack of love life.

"I'm happy to help. I can't really say much to you because of confidentiality, but after what he's been through, he's done amazingly well."

"I'm shocked as well. I'm a counselor, and I've seen how long it can take someone to have a breakthrough. Hell, even to get help."

I nodded, agreeing with her one hundred percent. "If it was anyone else and someone who wasn't as dedicated to their craft as he is, I'm not sure they would have done nearly as well."

"I'm just so glad we found you, and he opened up to you. I was worried that he'd be out for the rest of the season or permanently. Sadly, we can't attend most of the races." Her face fell, and her eyes started to sparkle with tears. "When I found out the entire crew packed up and left without visiting him, it broke my heart."

It broke my heart, knowing he was alone. That he was by himself while he traveled the world year after year. If anything happened to me while I was in Barcelona, I'd have no one. Maria would probably come to visit me out of obligation, but that's not the same as having a friend or a loved one being there to worry or to make you feel better.

Servers poured into the room and started to place our plates in front of the guests.

"Again, thank you. He's special to us." Her eyes strayed to their other side of the table. "In a way, I feel like he's one of my kids."

"It's my pleasure. I had no idea I'd be going to events such as these. I'll have to buy more clothes if he insists I attend."

She stood and placed her hand on my shoulder. I hoped Callum knew how lucky he was and was grateful to have them care about him as much as they did. This wasn't a typical boss/employee relationship. "Good luck, there's a lot of great shopping here, along with a few other legs in the season. I wish I could join you, but we'll be heading back to California once the race is over. And don't let the guys on the team intimidate you. You're one of us now."

"Thanks," I gave her a tight-lipped smile. The crew hadn't given me the time of day the little I'd been around them. The same could be said about Callum.

Callum sat back down next to me, sipping his water. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, she was saying how happy she is that you're racing and that I'm helping. I told her you're doing well, but that's it. I would never tell her about our sessions."

He shook his head, making a lock of hair fall onto his forehead. I wanted to push it away but stopped myself. "Never crossed my mind."

A roar of laughter to our right had me turning to see two men with their heads together snickering in our direction. Callum's body tensed, but his face remained impassive to everyone else. He growled 'asshole' under his breath as the servers came out with our salad plates. I wanted to ask him what that was about but didn't feel like it was professional.

He must have felt my gaze on him, though, because he answered my unspoken question. "The guy with the pornstache is my teammate." He spoke out of the side of his mouth. I giggled at the mention of said pornstache. It really was bad. I wasn't sure why a young man would let such a thing grow on his face. "The other guy is our replacement driver. My replacement driver. While I was gone, they seem to have hit it off, and I'm the butt of all their jokes."

Instinctually, I wanted to ask him how that made him feel, but in that moment, I wasn't his therapist. I was his...I didn't know what. We weren't friends exactly, but more than acquaintances. Two people who were going to spend an immense amount of time together—unless he decided he wanted to set out solo at all of our locations.

When I remained silent for too long, he frowned at me. "I ignore them. All of them. It's better that way. I can't let them get in my head."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

I was sure he was more determined than ever not to let them get to him when he was already having problems driving.

“I bet you didn’t think there would be this much drama, did you?” He laughed out.

Taking a bite of my salad, I chewed before I spoke. “When I agreed to come, I hadn’t really thought about it. My decision was based on helping you, and not traveling around the world, attending yacht parties, or if the crew would like me or not.”

“I’m sure they’ll love you unless they dislike you because of me.”

“It’s not my job to be liked. Not even by you. It’s a perk to get along with a client.”

“Client,” he hummed. “I’m sure the money doesn’t hurt either, does it?” His tone was clipped.

I was shocked at his demeanor change but let it go. I understood he was under pressure, and I was sure it was hard to have your teammates laughing at you from across the room.

Aspen

Monaco

Strong, warm arms enveloped me from behind and picked me up off my feet. “You did it, Doc.”

Turning to look over my shoulder, I laughed. “I beg to differ. It was you who did all the hard work.”

Setting me down, Callum looked down at me with a smile so wide, it looked as if it might split his face in two. “If it wasn’t for you, I never would have been able to drive, let alone get first place. The track here is one of the hardest and...” He shook his head, speechless.

From the minimal amount of time I’d been in Monaco, I’d heard more than one fan talk about how difficult the track was and how being in the top three in that location was a high honor. I was sure it was extra special for Callum since he had missed five races after his accident and only raced once since.

“Congratulations, Callum.”

“I wish you had been up there on the podium with me. I would have told them it was all because of you.” He wrapped an arm around my shoulders and started moving us out of the small but luxurious room I’d watched the race in. “How about I buy you dinner and then we can visit a museum or something? Whatever you want. I think I’ve seen almost everything since I’ve been doing this for so long.”

The excitement on his face had me agreeing with him. It was infectious, and a little scary at how easily I melted at his illuminating smile and boyish charm.

“Let’s head back to the hotel to get changed. I’m in desperate need of a shower.” He pulled me closer with a squeeze of the shoulder and then let me go as he opened the door that led out to a waiting car.

The entire ride to the hotel, I could feel the vibration of his energy even with the couple of feet that separated us in the back of the town car. Every once in a while, I’d see his fingers tap against his knee, and his lips tip up.

Even though it was highly unprofessional, I couldn't help but think how cute it was to see him so excited. I couldn't imagine how difficult it would be to lose your dream job in a second. Actually, I could imagine because Callum was constantly hitting on me and definitely let me know that he wanted to hook up with me. Something that would have led me right back to Spain and quite possibly losing my license if they wanted to file a complaint against me. I couldn't let that happen just because the man had a pretty face and a smile that melted me like butter on a sidewalk in August.

"Why the face?" he asked as we rode the elevator up to our rooms.

"It's not important." I tried to school my face, so it didn't show any emotion.

"If it wasn't important, you wouldn't have looked like someone had pissed in your Cheerios."

At that comment, I had to laugh. "Where are you from?" I finally asked. I hadn't wanted to ask him where his sexy accent originated. I'd tried my best to ignore it up until now.

"Born and bred in Austin, Texas." He dipped his head as if he was tipping his imaginary cowboy hat at me. I couldn't imagine Callum as a cowboy, but I wouldn't mind seeing him in a pair of leather chaps. "Where are you from?"

"I'm from a small town in Colorado that no one's ever heard of."

He chewed on the inside of his lip and then hummed. "I've been wondering where you came from since you don't really have an accent. I have to be honest with you, I was shocked the first time I heard your voice, and there wasn't a Spanish accent."

He placed his hand at the opening of the elevator as I stepped out. Did he think I'd be slow to leave, or was he that much of a gentleman?

“That’s alright. I wasn’t sure what I’d get with you either. Most of my patients are local, so imagine my surprise when I got someone from the United States who doesn’t even live in Spain.”

We reached our rooms that were side by side, Callum’s on the corner and much larger than my own. Although I didn’t need a big room just for myself, especially since it didn’t seem I’d be spending much time in it with all the sightseeing we’d be doing. Plus, mine was nicer than any I’d stayed in before.

“I’ll come knock on your door once I’m ready. It won’t take me too long unless my mama calls to congratulate me.” His southern drawl came out even more when he spoke about his mom.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Take your time; I have no problem keeping myself entertained.” It wasn’t actually entertainment but checking in on my patients. I wanted to make sure they weren’t having any crises while I was gone.

It had been a difficult decision to leave them and not be updated on their wellbeing. I only had a couple of patients who I was on call for twenty-four-seven, and with traveling all over the world, that made it difficult to be there for them. So far, I hadn’t received word there were any problems, but I still wanted to check in while I had a chance.

Slipping out of my shoes, I curled into the comfortable chair that sat out on my balcony and opened my laptop. There weren’t any messages from or about my patients. Instead, I had an email from my ex. Why was he now trying to contact me when he’d been the one to wrong me? If he thought there was a chance in hell I was going to take him back, he needed a reality check.

I thought about deleting his message, but I was curious. Plus, whenever I read a book and the person deleted or didn’t listen to a message, it always came to bite them in the ass, and I wasn’t going to be one of those people.

Taking a deep breath, I clicked his email. I only saw a flash of words before I hit delete. Alejandro had seen me on some sports show with Callum and was enraged I was with another man. I’m not sure why and I didn’t care. First of all, I wasn’t with another man, and second, we weren’t together. I understood the hurt, but he had no right to be lashing out at me. Powering down my laptop, I sat it beside the chair and stared out at the city. Our beautiful hotel rooms overlooked the harbor giving me a breathtaking view. In all truth, I could have sat there for the rest of the day and been

happy, but I was sure Callum needed to expend some energy, and he seemed keen on being my tour guide even though he was used to seeing everything alone.

A loud knock on my door had me jumping in my seat before I scrambled to answer it. After Alejandro's email, I was unnerved about how he'd somehow seen me on television. Would others feel the same way? I knew how sports fanatics worked, and I didn't want to be on the receiving end of their ire.

Swinging open the door, I took a step back to take him in. He was in a pair of dark washed jeans that hugged his muscular thighs, and a white button-down shirt, he had rolled up to his elbows. As he walked in, I turned to grab my shoes, but the moment I turned to walk away, he asked with wrinkled brows, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Why?" I walked quickly over to slip on a pair of sandals and grab my purse.

"I may not be trained at reading people, but I'm observant and a good read of character, and I can tell something's wrong."

Looking back one last time at my computer, I wrapped my hand around his bicep. "Can we go to wherever you're taking me to dinner, and I'll explain then?"

He brought his hand to rest over mine. "Only if you promise you'll tell me what has you upset."

"I can promise you that I'll never lie to you." Liars and cheaters were my biggest peeves.

"Then let's go celebrate even though this is feeling decidedly less celebratory and more like a heart-to-heart." He patted my hand and then let go to open the hotel room's door. "Lady's first."

Callum's sweet, gentlemanly nature put me at ease. I wasn't one to be typically bothered, but even with that one line I'd read from Alejandro, I could tell it had set something in motion. What it was, I didn't know. Yet.

"You don't like opening up to people much, do you?" Callum asked as we set out on foot from the hotel.

"Not really, but especially not to my patients."

"Why not?"

"Because it's not professional. I shouldn't be telling you about my problems." How was that not obvious?

"So, you do admit there is a problem." His voice was light, but the expression in his eyes was the opposite. Callum was genuinely concerned about what was troubling me.

"I'm not sure how much of a problem it is, but something has me feeling a sense of unease," I admitted.

He nodded as if it all made sense to him when he knew nothing yet. Callum grabbed me by the wrist and pulled me to the right to where a little café had tables on the sidewalk. "It may not look like much, but I can promise you they make some mean food."

He pulled out my seat and pushed it back in after I sat down. I looked around at the cute little table spreads they had on each of the outdoor tables and the couples who were sipping their wine until he was seated across from me.

"Does this mean you're going to eat something maybe a little unhealthy?"

“What do you say we order a few things and share? That way, I can eat a little on the wild side and not hate myself in the morning.”

At least he was willing to try. If he could push himself to step outside his strict guideline, I could open up to him. I laughed at the notion. “Deal. I’ll let you pick.”

When our waitress stopped by our table, I ordered a white wine that would work with everything we would be eating while Callum ordered a sparkling water and four different dishes for us to share. He sat back once we were alone with his arms crossed over his chest and waited for me to speak.

Letting out a nervous laugh, I unrolled my silverware and placed my napkin on my lap to buy me a few more seconds. “I feel silly now. I’m sure it’s nothing.”

“Don’t do that.”

“Don’t do what?” I asked.

“Trivialize your feelings.” He tapped one finger on the crook of his elbow.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Are you sure you’re not a therapist or haven’t seen one before? You’re pretty good at this.” The way he asked was like he’d been seeing a therapist for years and not the brief time he’d been seeing me.

“Funny,” he cocked his head and stared at me while our server sat our drinks down in front of us.

“You’re persistent, I can give you that. Fine,” I huffed. “When I got back to my room, I wanted to check in with my patients, so I opened my email and saw one from my ex-boyfriend.” Callum sat up straighter in his seat as the muscle in his jaw ticked. “I thought about deleting it, but thought better of it. I only read one line, but he was extremely mad about seeing me on TV today before your race. I’m not sure why he feels he has any right to be upset if I’m with another man, which was his assumption. I deleted it, not willing to let it affect me. So far, I’m not doing a great job of that. I haven’t figured out yet why it causes me a sense of unease.” I lifted one shoulder as I looked out onto the street. “See, it’s silly.”

Leaning forward, Callum took my hand in his. “It’s not silly. Was he ever cruel when you were with him?” His thumb caressed over the top of my hand.

“No,” I shook my head. “He was always sweet.” Until I moved with him to Spain. “That is until he decided to cheat on me. When I found out, he didn’t try to fight for me. Not once, but right before you came to see me, he showed back up in my life. I didn’t handle it the best, refusing to talk to him, but I had nothing to say, and I wasn’t going to allow him to make me late to see my patient. It’s been months.” I added the last a little too loud, causing the people who were seated around us to turn their heads and look at us.

Our waitress brought out our dishes and placed them around our small table. It didn't leave us much room, but they smelled divine, and I couldn't wait to dig in.

Callum put a little bit of everything on his plate but waited until I took my first bite before he started to eat. Once I moaned at the heavenly gnocchi that hit my tongue, he seemed to be appeased and took his own bite.

"I wasn't wrong, was I?" He pointed his fork to the dish.

"Not wrong at all. I can't believe you don't eat this for every meal while you're here." I shoved in another bite and chewed.

"If I did that, I wouldn't look like this, and I'd be a shit driver. I've got to fuel my body with what it needs to be efficient out on the track."

"I have to say I don't think I've ever met someone as dedicated to their job as you. I really do believe it's part of the reason you've done so well with getting back behind the wheel." I was astounded after watching him compete against nineteen other drivers. I would have been a nervous wreck out there, but when he felt the smallest inklings of a panic attack come on, he had me talk him through it. There were only three instances, and the amount of time he had me speak to him was shorter each time.

"You're the other reason. If it was anyone else over the system, I would have lost it." The look on his face said he believed every word out of his mouth.

We had tried letting Kaspar talk to him, but after thirty seconds, Callum demanded in a desperate voice for me to come on the line.

"You didn't give Kaspar a chance. Maybe we can slowly work him in the routine. I—"

“No,” he interrupted me. He looked about ready to jump from his seat and run at the mere mention of having someone else talk to him. It wasn’t as if I was telling him my deepest, darkest secrets. Today, after he’d calmed down, I read some of the book I’d been reading for the last several days to him.

“Callum,” I said his name softly, “what would happen if I got sick and couldn’t be at one of your races? What would you do then, not race?” I wanted to say when I wasn’t around any longer, but I knew that would send him over the edge, so I kept that to myself. For now.

“We’ll buy you some good vitamins tomorrow and make sure you eat healthy. Then you won’t get sick.” The statement somehow didn’t sound desperate but more of a demand.

Not wanting to unnerve him any more than I already had today, I kept quiet with my observations and ate the amazing food he’d ordered for us. If this is what I got to experience at every destination, I was going to have to start doubling down on my workouts. Otherwise, I’d gain a hundred pounds by the end of the season. Now Callum’s early morning workouts made sense.

“I was thinking after this we’d go to the Oceanographic Museum. Does that sound good to you?”

My forehead wrinkled at the thought of a museum about water. It didn’t sound exciting, but since Callum had probably already gone there before, he must have liked it.

“Whatever you’re thinking, you’re wrong.” He laughed, throwing his head back. I couldn’t help but stop and watch. He had a laugh that drew you in. Even though Callum was a happy-go-lucky guy, I didn’t think he let himself laugh all that much.

“Tell me about this ocean museum.”

“Like I said, it’s not what you’re thinking. I’m not sure why they call it a museum when it’s an aquarium. What I do know is that it’s beautiful and peaceful. It will be perfect after our meal and to further bring me down so I can sleep tonight.”

That made me smile. I couldn’t get over how happy it made me see how much his win affected him. I had a feeling when he lost, Callum took it very hard.

“Sounds perfect. I need to walk off this food baby I’ve got going on over here.” I rested my hand over my stomach. If we had been back at the hotel, I would have unbuttoned my jeans, or better yet, taken them off.

Callum sat up straighter and acted as if he could see my food baby. His eyes flared before he settled back down in his seat. After taking a sip of his water, he cleared his throat. “Are you ready to go start an adventure?”

“I thought I already had,” I shot back.

“Good answer,” he stood, smiling down at me. “Let’s do this.”

* * *

“Do you see that building right there?” He pointed out over the water to what looked like a palace to me. It was spectacular. A broad smile broke out across his face. “That’s the museum.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me. That’s it? I never would have guessed. It’s one of the most beautiful buildings I’ve ever seen.”

While I stared out at our destination and watched as it came closer and closer, I could feel Callum watching me.

“Do you know how lucky you are that you get to travel the world for your job?” I asked as we sat side by side in our taxi, and I stared out the window in awe of our surroundings. Before moving to Barcelona, I’d never been out of the country. Looking back on the little time I lived in Spain, I wish I’d explored more. Instead, I’d been trying to mend my broken heart by working and isolating myself. Now I knew it would have healed a whole hell of a lot faster if I had been experiencing the beauty of the land around me. After this, I wasn’t going to take my location or time for granted. One gorgeous city and I wanted to explore the world.

Placing his hand on my knee, he squeezed. “I do know how lucky I am. I will admit, after having dinner with you tonight, it’s nice having the experience with someone.”

“Does that make you want to have a girlfriend?”

He moved away and rested his forehead to his window. “Even if I did, I don’t have time for one. When am I supposed to see her? I only have a few months I’m not traveling, and I can’t imagine any girl putting up with that.”

He had a point.

Slowly he turned to look at me. “Maybe you’d like to be my girlfriend.”

Callum

Austria

No matter how many times Aspen turned me down, I wasn't going to stop trying to convince her there was something between us. I knew she found me attractive. It was hard to miss the way she looked at me when she thought I wasn't looking. I only had to find the right way to convince her because so far, all I'd done was push her further and further away.

Aspen had started to retreat into only being my therapist after I mentioned her possibly being my girlfriend in Monaco. She still accompanied me around the city, but it wasn't the same. She always kept at least three feet between us, and with each new city, she went back to her room earlier and earlier, cutting our time together short. Somehow, I had to get the woman who had been easy to smile and wrap her hand around my bicep back, the woman who had started to open up to me on our first plane ride. She was there for me when I drove, but she'd stopped giving me anything that pertained to her life. Each day that passed, I worried about what would happen if I pushed her too far and made her leave.

She wouldn't leave, right? Aspen was too much of a professional to do that to me.

After coming in second today, when I came in for a hug, she backed away and held her hands up, stopping me in my tracks. She was further away than ever. Four countries and four races later and I was trying to get back the fun girl I'd traveled around Monaco with.

I could still hear her words after I mentioned she could be my girlfriend. "Callum," the veil had dropped over her face right then, "you're my patient, and I'm here for your well-being. You know we can't go there."

“Why fight it? Don’t pretend you don’t like what you see.” I knew right then and there, I’d said the wrong thing.

After my race, she’d gotten a ride back to our hotel by herself, stating that she had a headache and needed to go lie down. I didn’t fight her on it. At that point, I wasn’t sure if she was only saying it to get away from me, or she did indeed have a headache. That was how I found myself standing at her hotel room door with my hand in the air, ready to knock. I knew she wasn’t expecting me since our rooms weren’t on the same floor. There was no reason for me to come to her room.

Knocking, I held my breath as I waited for her to answer. I waited with bated breath and started to get worried when a couple minutes ticked by without a sound coming from inside. I knocked again and heard a loud bump from deep inside before her door cracked open, and one of Aspen’s eyes appeared in the sliver between the door and wall.

“Callum, now’s not a good time. I told you I had a headache and needed to come back to rest.” Her voice was quiet and raspy as she spoke.

“I know you did, and I wanted to check to make sure you’re okay.”

She winced at the sound of my voice.

“I’m obviously not okay. I need dark and quiet.” Her face was scrunched in pain.

“Have you taken any meds for it?”

“Yes, but not the good stuff. I ran out before I left and didn’t refill my prescription.” Her eyes became glassy before she shuffled away from the door.

I followed her inside and locked her door.

When she saw me, her shoulders slumped before she walked into her bedroom and crawled onto her bed.

Kneeling beside her, I asked in a quiet voice. “Do you, by any chance, have any Icy Hot?”

“No, Callum,” she said my name like I was the dumbest fucker to ever live.

“Okay, I’ll be right back.” I reached out and squeezed her hand before I went to the seating area and called downstairs to request anything that was remotely like what I needed. I wasn’t sure the equivalent in Austria. If I knew she’d let me back inside, I would have gone to the pharmacy myself; instead, I had to rely on what the concierge brought up.

Half an hour later, there was a light knock on the door to her room. With a quick glance through the bedroom door, I answered. Handing over a hundred, I took the bag and went back inside and into the bathroom.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

Slipping the cream out of the bag, I pulled the protective silver seal off and put the lid back on. I left the light on and closed the door until there was only a sliver of light shining out so I could see. Sitting down on the edge of her bed, I squeezed a small amount of the cream onto my index and middle fingers, placed them at her temple, and started to rub.

“What are you doing? I thought you left.” Her hand reached out and rested on my leg limply.

“I’m here to take care of you. Can you turn your head, and I’ll put this on the other side?”

“What is it?”

“A muscle relaxer type cream. It has menthol that will hopefully help your headache.” I’d never tried it, but I’d heard it could be a remedy and thought I’d try it on her.

“At this point, I’ll try anything,” she mumbled.

Moving around to the other side of the bed, I climbed up and leaned back against the headboard.

“Come over here and let me give you a massage. It will make you feel better.” Or at least I hoped it did.

She lifted up, and I helped guide her over until her head rested on my thigh. My

fingers slipped into her hair and started to rub over her scalp. The longer I rubbed, the more I felt her relax against me. Since she had a horrible headache, I kept quiet and let my hands work.

Her breath started to even out, and I thought she fell asleep until she spoke. “You’re such a good guy, Cal. Thank you for being here after the way I’ve been icing you out.” She moaned when I applied more pressure and snuggled deeper into my leg.

“That’s what friends are for, right?”

“You understand why, though, right?” she asked instead of answering my question. When I didn’t answer, she continued. “I like helping people, and if I was reported for sleeping with a patient, I could lose my license.”

“I don’t want you to lose your job, Doc, but I can’t help the attraction that I feel for you either.”

“All I can offer you is my friendship, Cal,” she mumbled. “I hope you can accept that.”

I didn’t want to be put in the friend zone, but I’d take what I could get. Maybe once the season was over and I was no longer her patient, she’d give me a chance.

“I like you calling me that.” My hand swiped down and massaged along her neck.

“I’ll call you whatever you want if you keep doing whatever you’re doing.” She let out a big yawn.

No matter what she said, I knew she wouldn’t call me the one thing I wanted.

Boyfriend.

* * *

Pressure lifted off my leg, causing me to wake up and groan at the stiffness in my neck. Cracking open my eyes, I watched as Aspen slipped off the bed and made her way into the bathroom. After a moment, I heard the toilet flush, and then the shower turn on.

I wasn't sure what to do. I desperately needed to take a piss, but I didn't want to head back to my hotel room until I talked to her and made sure she was okay.

This time when I knocked on her door and opened it, it was to a bathroom full of steam.

"I'm coming in," I called before I stepped inside.

"Cal, what are you doing?" she shrieked and stumbled as far as she could back into the shower.

"Peeing." I unzipped my fly and relieved myself, much to her dismay.

"Oh my God, Callum. This is beyond what our friendship is. Please leave."

"So, you're admitting we're friends?"

"Yes, of course, we're friends, but not the type of friends who pee in front of each other."

A smile spread across my face. "I'm going to head up to my room to get cleaned up, and then I'm going to take you to breakfast and on a little day trip. I'll be back down once I'm ready."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

She sighed loud enough for me to hear before she agreed.

Since she was otherwise occupied, I grabbed the keycard I saw on the dresser and slipped it into my back pocket. Afraid that she might try to give me the slip, I took a quick shower. I didn't bother to shave before I got dressed and slipped my Aviators on top of my head and went back downstairs.

Without knocking, I made my way inside her room. Aspen squeaked with her hand clutching her chest. "Are you out to give me a heart attack today?"

I rolled my lips in an attempt not to laugh. That was until I took in what she had on—or more like what she didn't have on. The tiniest pair of sleep shorts I'd ever seen hugged her ass, and a white cami that was becoming see-through from her wet hair dripping down her chest left little to the imagination.

"Keep moving, Cal," she growled out like a tiny kitten before she slammed the bathroom door closed.

Laughing to myself, I made myself comfortable on the couch and waited until Aspen slipped out of the bathroom, fully dressed and looking ready to go.

She looked at me warily before she grabbed her purse. "So, what's the plan for the day?"

"Would you trust me if I said I wanted to keep it a surprise?"

Her eyes lit at the word surprise, and I was taken aback when she agreed after she'd

been so distant the last month.

“I’ll tell you we’re going to eat breakfast at a little café just around the corner.”

Her stomach growled at the mention of food. “Good, because I’m not sure how much longer I can go without any food. I didn’t eat dinner last night, and now I’m famished.”

Placing my hand to the small of her back, I ushered her to the door. “Let’s not waste any time and get you fed then.”

The closer we got to the café, the louder Aspen’s stomach growled. It was comical, but it also reminded me of how she’d looked last night when I got to her room.

Holding the door open to the café, I watched as she practically salivated when the smell of croissants hit our noses.

Her eyes widened as she looked up at the menu over the counter. “Have you been here before?”

Pushing up behind her, I fought to keep my hands to myself. It was nearly impossible, but I managed to resist. There wasn’t a large selection, but nothing was in English. If you could order from smell alone, I would have ordered at least one of everything it all smelled so heavenly. “I have.”

“What do you suggest? I could eat a horse, I’m so hungry.”

“You probably shouldn’t say that while traveling because they might actually serve you horse meat.”

The horrified look on her face had me laughing.

“No,” she whispered.

“I can’t say it’s here in Austria, but it does happen in some countries.”

“Do not let me eat horse. If I find out you tricked me, I’ll kill you.” She poked me in the chest with each word.

With her eyes on the menu like she’d magically find the word horse in German, I put my hands on her shoulders and turned her around. “I won’t. I promise. Why don’t you go pick a seat outside, and I’ll order us an assortment?”

She nodded and mouthed, ‘no horse’ as she walked backward to the door. Why had I mentioned it? She’d probably freak out every time she ate from now on, trying to find it on the menu.

I ordered a dozen croissants with honey and a selection of jams along with two coffees before I went out to sit with Aspen as we waited for our food.

“Oh my gosh, I thought my stomach was going to eat itself while standing in there,” she held her hand to her flat stomach. “I’m so hungry.”

As if on cue, a little old lady walked out with a basket full of croissants and jars of jam and set it in the middle of our table.

“Is this normal?” Aspen questioned as she grabbed one of the buttery croissants and started to lift each jar to decide which jam to use.

“No,” I chuckled. “I wanted to bring some with us for my surprise destination, so I asked them for a to-go package.”

“Like a picnic,” she softly said as she opened the strawberry jam.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Is that okay? I wanted to make sure we had something for lunch since there isn’t any place close to where we’re going.” I wasn’t sure if she thought it was romantic. That wasn’t my intention, but when she mentioned a picnic, my mind went to a romantic picnic on the beach.

“It’s okay with me as long as you’re willing to eat all these carbs for breakfast and lunch.” She quirked her lips up.

“If it means I get to spend the day with a beautiful woman by my side, then I’m more than capable of throwing out my diet. I’ll just work out a little extra tomorrow.”

“Thank you for saying I’m beautiful,” she said shyly. “Today, I feel drained after my headache from last night.” She looked down as she slathered a thick layer of jam on her croissant.

Shit, I hadn’t thought she might not be up for what I had planned.

“Are you up to our adventure today?”

She bit her bottom lip as if she was contemplating saying no. “I think so.”

A slow smile spread across my face. “Good.” I looked down at my watch to check the time. “You should eat up because our car will be here in thirty minutes.”

I grabbed a pastry and took a large bite. The flaky, buttery goodness was divine. It was days like today that made me want to chuck my lifestyle into the wind and gorge myself on the goodness in front of me.

“Car?” she asked before she took a bite and moaned. That one little moan had all my blood pumping to my dick and leaving my mind blank for a few seconds.

Shifting in my seat to ease my pulsing cock, I cleared my throat. “I thought it was best to hire a car for the day. I wasn’t sure if I’d have any problems driving, and I wasn’t sure if you’d agree.”

I shoved the rest of my croissant in my mouth and chewed angrily. I hated that what I loved most in the world was so close to being taken away from me. I knew I couldn’t have Aspen with me every time I drove for the rest of my life.

“Hey,” she called quietly. Her hand reached across the table and grasped mine. “It won’t be like this forever. I promise. You’re doing an amazing job; maybe I don’t tell you that enough, and for that I’m sorry. I can promise you that it won’t be like this forever.”

The lump in my throat was hard to swallow. I hooked my index finger with hers and shook it. “Thank you. That means a lot to me. I’m not going to lie; this has been the hardest time of my life. I hate being this weak individual that can’t get behind the wheel of a car without losing his shit.”

She sat up straighter in her seat and squared her shoulders. “Do you think someone coming back from war with PTSD is weak?”

“No, of course not, but I didn’t come back from war. I was in a car wreck. Something that happens thousands if not millions of times every day.”

Aspen linked her fingers with mine. “You almost died, Cal. That’s a lot to take into your psyche, no matter how much you love your job.”

“I’ll try to keep that in mind.” Wanting this conversation to be over with, I put some

butter and some plum jam on my pastry to eat my feelings away.

We sat silently until my phone pinged, letting me know our driver was waiting for us at the hotel.

“We should go. The driver is waiting, and it’s a bit of a drive.”

“Oh?” She perked up. Her long brown hair swept around her shoulders in the light breeze. “How long?”

“About an hour and a half, but trust me, it’ll be worth it.”

Packing our food away, I texted the driver to come pick us up and swallowed the last bit of my coffee.

“Are you ready?” I stood and held my hand out to help her up.

“I’m kind of getting nervous.” She laughed apprehensively when our driver pulled up alongside where we were sitting. Opening her door, I let her slide inside before I set the basket between us. Once inside, I sat back against the cool leather seat.

The second the driver started driving, Aspen turned to me with excitement in her eyes. “Are you going to tell me where we’re going now?”

I couldn’t help but chuckle at her. I loved her excitement. “You’re like a kid seeing her presents under the Christmas tree for the first time, and can’t wait to open them.”

“I’m not that bad,” she laughed.

“Just be patient and enjoy the scenery. It’s a beautiful drive.”

Aspen lifted her hand as if she was going to touch me or hold my hand, but dropped it a second later. We stared out of our windows for the next thirty minutes before she broke the silence.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“It’s so beautiful here. Thank you for taking me on this journey.” She spoke with her forehead plastered against the window.

Leaning back in my seat, I watched out her window. “You’re welcome. It’s one of the most tranquil and stunning places I’ve been to.”

“I don’t understand why the others don’t sightsee while we’re in all these incredible locations. After this, I’ve promised myself that I’m going to travel whenever I can. There’s so much of the world that I’ve yet to see.”

“I can’t say why the others don’t get out of their hotel rooms more. I also can’t say what they do with their free time. Maybe they go home during the small breaks we’re given between races. For me, it’s too much going back and forth. I like to take my time and enjoy where I’m at and get acclimated to the weather and the time zone, so I’m more prepared for my race.”

“Seems like the best way to do your job and travel. Is this...” She chewed on her bottom lip and then glanced out the window.

“Is it what? You can ask me anything you want. No need to be nervous.” But even as I said those words, I was nervous about what she could want to ask me that would make her nerves show.

“I just don’t want to ruin our day, and I’m not asking as your therapist, but as your friend.”

“Okay, hit me.” I flashed her a smile that caused her lashes to flutter and her mouth to

part.

“Is it hard having someone else drive you when you’ve driven this before? I mean, I assume you’ve driven it since you made it sound like you’ve been wherever we’re going before.”

I chewed on the inside of my cheek as I thought about her question. If I had been alone and was headed to the Grüner See, then I had a feeling I’d be pissed the entire way. In fact, I doubted I’d be going anywhere if I couldn’t drive or if I didn’t have Aspen as my travel companion.

“Before you asked, I hadn’t thought about it, but yeah, if you weren’t here, it would be difficult to be in this situation. I don’t think I’d be making my way to our destination. I’d probably stay around town, and if it was too far to walk comfortably, I’d hire an Uber. Like I said before, I’m finding that I like having a travel companion and someone to be a tourist with. You’re definitely making this ordeal easier on me. Thank you for that.”

“It’s been a pleasure, and it’s opened my eyes as well to what I want to do. Maybe travel to one country a year or something like that. I can’t do anything on the level we’re doing, but I want to experience the world and people.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it. That’s all I wanted.” We both knew that wasn’t entirely true. I wanted more with Aspen, but I had to respect her wishes. And I did understand not wanting to lose the job that she loved. She was here so that I didn’t lose the career I loved so much. Once I was out, I knew I’d never be able to come back. There was an edge a person lost when they were away from the track too long, and I was clinging to the edge with one hand while Aspen spoke with her sweet voice and calmed every part of me.

For the rest of the drive, we spoke sporadically as we watched the trees, farms, and

countryside pass us by. I knew the moment she saw the water. Her mouth fell open as she took in the clear green water and the trees that surrounded it—their reflection, along with the clouds, made for a beautiful sight.

I was happy to see there wasn't a crowd. From where we were, I could see only one area was set up, and they were likely diving. Maybe next time I was here, Aspen and I would be diving in the water and exploring.

"Cal," she gasped, not taking her eyes off the sight before us, "this is beyond anything I could have imagined. It's absolutely gorgeous. I don't think I'll ever want to leave."

"We've got all day. Once the sun starts to set, we'll head back, but until then, we'll have lunch and hike on the trail."

She looked down at her sandal-clad feet. "I'm not sure I'm up for too much of a hike."

"We'll walk—nothing too strenuous or difficult in your shoes. I probably should have told you to wear tennis shoes, but I was too happy you agreed to come with me that I didn't even think. I'm sorry. If I have to, I'll give you a piggyback around the entire lake to save your feet."

Aspen cracked a smile. "What should we do first? Should I hop on now?"

I wanted her to jump on something, and it wasn't my back. It took everything in me to keep my comments to myself so as to not push her away again.

"Be my guest. I think a walk would be good, and then we can come back and set up to eat lunch." I bent over so she could hop onto my back if she really wanted to.

Instead of jumping on, she swatted my ass, causing me to let out a low moan. Yeah, I was in deep need of help. I wanted this woman so fucking badly. Maybe one night, I should find someone else so I wouldn't be on edge all the damn time. Maybe then every little thing she said or did wouldn't cause my dick to get hard.

Maybe that was all I needed, and she'd be out of my system. It had been just before my wreck that I'd been with a woman for the night, and now Aspen was the only woman around. It made sense why I wanted her so badly. I laughed to myself. I was fooling myself if I thought that was all it was that had me enthralled with her.

Keeping my pace slow so Aspen could easily keep up with me, I kept looking for her reaction as we walked down the trail. There was a cool breeze keeping the heat from the sun at bay.

"What's the name of this place?" she asked as she bent down and ran her hand through the clear water.

"Grüner See or in English, Green Lake," I answered, watching as the reflection from the sun made her face sparkle and look ethereal.

She stood and wiped her hands on her skin-tight jeans. I'd tried to keep my eyes off how they accentuated her curves. Walking around with a hard-on wasn't ideal.

"That's a perfect name." Her big brown eyes glittered as she took it in and started to walk again. "This country is so beautiful and magical. I definitely want to explore more of it someday. I'd be happy to stay in a cabin and stare at this water for a week."

Tucking that nugget of information away for another day, I was about to suggest we head back when Aspen tripped over a rock and landed on her butt.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Whoa there, Doc. Are you okay?” I held out my hand for her to take and helped her up. Once she was upright, something in me couldn’t let go of her hand. When she started to pull it away, my grasp on her hand tightened. “I better keep ahold of you, just in case you trip again.”

Her eyes narrowed, but just as quickly, she was back to her wide-eyed self as we started back the way we came. When my fingers laced with hers, she didn’t pull away, but said, “Friends, Cal. We can only be friends.”

“For now, Doc.”

Aspen

Singapore

We stood at the front desk of the Ritz-Carlton for what felt like forever. It had been at least ten minutes with the man on the other side of the counter typing away at his keyboard. Looking up at us, his gaze lingered on Callum for a few seconds, and then he went back to typing.

“What seems to be the problem...” Cal shifted his gaze to the man’s name tag. “Aiden?”

“We only have the one room. Your suite...I can’t find Ms. Belle’s reservation anywhere in the system,” he stuttered.

I pushed forward to lean against the counter. I didn’t care where I slept, but I needed

sleep. “It’s fine. I’ll take whatever room you’ve got available.”

“That’s the problem, Ms. Belle. Our hotel is full because of the Grand Prix. I can try another hotel, but I’m afraid they won’t have a room either.”

“How did this happen?” Cal fumed.

“I’m really not sure, sir.” He flushed and then went back to typing.

“What am I going to do? Do you think there’s an Airbnb available?”

“You can stay in my room. It’s a suite, correct?” He directed the last to Aiden.

“Yes, sir. It’s got two bedrooms and a living area with a view of the bay and the track.” He smiled nervously. I was sure he hoped I would take Cal up on his offer, so we’d get out of his hair. We’d taken enough of his time.

“I can’t do that, Cal. I’m sure I can find somewhere else to stay.” In all honesty, I knew that there was likely no place for me to stay since, during our travels, I’d learned how many fans traveled to come to the races. Some traveled around the world to every race. It didn’t help that we’d grown closer after he’d taken care of me while I had a horrible headache. No longer could I ice him out and only be professional with him. Each day that passed, it became harder and harder for me to tamp down my growing feelings for the man who was quickly becoming my world.

“Please stay in the extra bedroom. It’ll make me feel better about the price of what I’m sure is an expensive suite. I promise I won’t do anything untoward.”

“Are you sure?” I asked, hoping he’d change his mind.

“Absolutely positive,” he answered as a bellboy came and started to place our

luggage on a cart.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, but you don’t need to thank me. It’s what friends do for one another.”

* * *

Cal followed me around one of the shopping stalls as he looked at the figurines that were carved out of wood and stone. “Maybe if you told me what you’re looking for, this would go faster.”

The only problem was I didn’t want to tell him what I was looking for. I wanted to buy him something for taking me to Green Lake when we were in Austria, and I tried to keep it a surprise. I hadn’t been able to get it out of my head since we left. Secretly, I’d hoped he would have taken me back before we left Austria for Singapore. Instead, he took me to old but incredible buildings and told me their stories. I had a sneaking suspicion that he also loved history, going by the amount of knowledge he could rattle off about each location.

“I’d like a souvenir and a present for a friend,” I answered and walked further into the marketplace. It was busy with stalls everywhere. I could have easily spent hours there going down each row, but I had a feeling Cal wasn’t big on shopping if his constant need to look at his watch was any indication. “Are you in a hurry?” I smiled to myself when he only shook his head.

Cal took the lead as we weaved in and out of people. I saw a beautifully carved Formula One car with a green stone as the steering wheel. The green was almost an exact match to the color of his car and suit he wore when he raced. I tried to yell for Cal to stop, but he couldn’t hear me from the commotion all around us. Hopefully,

he'd figure out I wasn't right behind him and head back my way. Quickly I picked up the car and inspected it so I could get back to Cal. The body was smooth and shiny, and the stone was even more beautiful up close. It was so green it had to be an emerald.

"How much?" I asked the sweet old man behind the table.

He pointed at the car and seemed to tell me a story about it, except I had no idea what he was saying.

Not wanting for the distance between Cal and me to grow further, I didn't bargain with the man. Instead, I pulled out my wallet and paid probably too much money for the car, but I didn't care. I loved it, and I hoped Cal would as well.

Stepping away from the stall, I started to put my wallet back in my purse when I felt something sharp in my side. Gasping, I turned my head to see a man wearing an oversized hoodie that covered most of his face. He wasn't much taller than me, but I could feel the menace rolling off of him before he spoke.

Page 24

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Hand over your wallet, and you won’t get hurt,” a gruff accented voice demanded.

I didn’t want to give up my wallet and lose everything that was in it, but I also didn’t want to be stabbed to death.

“Stop thinking and hand it over,” he growled, pushing the knife against my skin until I felt a sharp bite of pain.

With shaky hands, I handed over my wallet only for the man to snatch my purse from my shoulder and run off.

I cried out, knowing all my important documents were in my purse. How would I travel without my passport? One moment tears were filling my eyes as I watched the thief zig-zag around the surrounding people, and the next, I saw Callum run past me hot on my attacker’s heels, disappearing into the crowd.

As my body started to shake, I wrapped my arms around my middle while keeping my eyes trained on the direction Cal ran off. My fingers brushed against the sting where the knife had broken my skin. I didn’t dare to pull my fingers away to check to see if there was blood on them.

After what seemed like an eternity, I saw Callum’s head pop up over the crowd. He was easily the tallest person here being over six feet. My body trembled harder when I saw the stern set to his jaw. When I saw my purse clutched in one of his hands, I wanted to sob. I watched as his steps ate up the distance between us, and when he was only inches away, I launched myself into his chest and hugged him. When his strong arms engulfed me, I let the tears loose.

His strong arms moved up my back and landed on my shoulders. He pulled back enough to look down at me. “Are you okay, Doc? I should have checked on you first before I went after that asshole.” When his eyes fell down to my side, they went wide, and his jaw ticked. “Shit, you’re bleeding. We should get you to the hospital.”

My hands came to rest over his rapidly beating heart. “I’m fine, Cal. I don’t need a hospital. Only a hot shower, a Band-Aid, and some antibacterial ointment.”

One of his hands moved to hover over the darkened fabric of my shirt. “I’d feel better if you went to the hospital.”

“It’s really not that bad. I promise.” I looked around the area and all the people who continued to move through as if nothing had happened. Nothing had happened to them, but for me, I wanted away from all the people and to be somewhere I felt safe. “But I do want to go back to our hotel. Is that okay?”

Wrapping his arm around my shoulders, Callum pulled me into his side. “More than okay. We can get you cleaned up and order some room service.”

I wasn’t sure I could be around a large crowd of people in that moment. My body still shook as we stood in the middle of the marketplace. Wanting to regain some sense of normalcy, I dug into my purse and pulled out the car figurine I’d bought only moments before all this happened. Smiling as best as I could, I held it out to Cal.

“Is this for me?” He took it in his big hand and inspected it with a large smile on his face. He looked so happy. I wondered when was the last time someone bought Cal something just because.

“It is. I hope you like it. I wanted to get you something, but I didn’t know what until I saw it.” I tried to smile, but I knew it didn’t reach my eyes. I was still reeling over the last twenty minutes of my life.

“You’re the best, Doc. I more than like it. Thank you.” He wrapped me in a warm hug and held me for a long minute before he started to guide us through the crowd.

I knew he liked to be constantly on the go, but I wondered if he stayed on the move to avoid the fact that he was alone when he didn’t want to be. Callum was a great catch. I couldn’t imagine it was hard for him to make friends or find a woman who wanted to spend time with him.

With my arm around his waist, we made our way out of the marketplace to a line of taxis where he found one who would take us to our hotel. As we rode up the elevator to our room, I locked eyes with him in the mirror. “You know you don’t always have to entertain me. I can explore on my own or stay in my room if you ever need a break.” Not that I wanted to venture out on my own after what happened tonight. From now on, I was going to keep my belongings close to me and where no one could see them when I was out. I needed to be a smarter traveler.

His lips quirked up. “I like showing you around, but maybe a night at each location, we could just chill.”

Callum guided me down the hall and into our suite. I still wasn’t sure it was a good idea for us to be sharing the same space. It was hard enough to keep my distance the more I got to know him, and now knowing he was only across the living area from me had my resolve weakening—especially after what had happened earlier.

“Why don’t you take a shower or a bath while I order us some food. Is seafood okay with you?”

He hovered close as if he was afraid I’d bolt at any second. The opposite was true. He was lucky I hadn’t attached myself to him like a barnacle. Cal made me feel safe and protected. I knew he wouldn’t let anything happen to me.

“You haven’t let me down so far, so show me what you’ve got. Order me some amazing food.”

Instead of taking a shower, I opted for a nice hot bath. I wanted and needed to melt some of the tension away. I could relax in the hot water and meditate to get myself in the right headspace. I didn’t like being afraid. I wanted to be able to continue traveling and not be looking over my shoulder for danger at every corner. The bathroom in my room was perfect. There was a large window in front of the big enough for four, bathtub.

Slipping into the hot water, I leaned back in the deep tub, stared at the sky in front of me, and visualized myself on a beach at sunset. It was what others would call my happy place. The sound of the waves crashing, the movement of the water, and the sky as it turned colors calmed my mind. It wasn’t hard to do with the view outside my window. The suite was amazing, with huge windows that overlooked the bay. All I had to do was imagine the sound the waves would make.

A soft knock on the door brought me out of my reflection before the door cracked open. “Hey, I just wanted to make sure you’re okay in here.”

Turning my head to look at him, I saw his eyes in the mirror as he looked in through the smallest crack. It was almost comical. He’d been hitting on me from the beginning, and now when he had the chance to get his fill, Cal kept his distance. It showed what a good man he was. Not that it was ever in question. Everything I learned about the dreamy racer made it harder and harder to keep our relationship professional.

“I’m okay as I can be.” I gave him a tight smile.

“Yeah, I thought so. You’ve been so quiet. I wanted to let you know dinner should be here in a few minutes.”

“I’ll be out soon then. I need to clean up this...scratch.” I wanted to say wound, but calling it that would worry Cal more.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Can I come in and see? You can cover up, but I want to see with my own eyes that it’s nothing serious and not beat myself up all night thinking I should have taken you to the hospital.”

Even though I knew it was a bad idea, I agreed to let him inside the bathroom. Taking the washcloth, I covered my breasts and waited with my eyes closed. I didn’t want to see the heat in his eyes as he took in my wet, naked body. I was holding on by a thread.

Even with my eyes closed, I could feel him moving in. My body thrummed to attention at his proximity. The water sloshed right before I felt his hand ghost along my side near the cut.

“It looks like it stopped bleeding,” he murmured too closely to my ear. I felt the energy shift right before he growled. “Don’t ever do that to me again, do you hear me, Doc? We stay together, no matter what. I don’t care if it’s to go tampon shopping, I’m going to be right by your side.”

There was a thump and then a groan, causing me to open my eyes. Cal was slumped against the side of the tub, staring at himself in the mirror. “If anything more had happened to you, I’d never be able to forgive myself. Hell, I want to kick my own ass right now for getting separated. How did I not notice you weren’t right by my side? And what the hell was wrong with everyone? Not a single person tried to help or protect you. How could they let a man put a knife to you and just stand there?” he growled and slammed his fist on the marble floor.

“They were probably as afraid of him as I was,” I answered quietly. Moving to the

side of the tub, I rolled to my side and placed my wet hand on his shoulder.

Turning his head to look at me, his nostrils flared. “I hate that you were scared. If I had been there, it wouldn’t have happened.”

Probably not, but we couldn’t turn back time. It was my fault for letting him go so I could look at the car. In the end, the only thing that mattered was no one was seriously injured.

My hand slid to cup the side of his neck. “I can’t believe you got my purse and wallet. Everything was in there.” Tears welled in my eyes, and I felt my body start to shudder. “I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to fly to Sochi, and then...”

“I wouldn’t be able to race.” He hung his head for a moment before it popped back up. “I can’t believe that’s what you were worried about while being held at knifepoint.”

He opened his mouth again, but before he could say anything, there was a knock on the hotel room door. I jumped at the noise, and Cal’s face tightened at the sight.

“That would be the food. I’ll go answer while you get dressed.” He hopped up and was out of the bathroom before I could even respond. I started to let the water out and turned on the sprayer to rinse off the soap. Looking down at my hands, my fingers were a prune mess. I hadn’t realized I’d been in the bath for that long. Putting the hotel’s fluffy robe on, I let it envelop me in its softness and slipped on a pair of hotel slippers.

In the living area of the suite, Cal had set up our food on the table in front of the couch and had the TV on and set to the movie *Dirty Dancing*.

Damn, he was a keeper. Too bad he wasn’t mine, though.

“You’re perfect,” I told him as I sat down next to him and took in the feast before us. The table had different crab dishes covering the entire surface.

“I don’t know about that, but I try. I wasn’t sure what you’d like so—”

“You ordered everything on the menu,” I interrupted.

“Something like that.” He let out a deep chuckle. “Singapore is known for its exquisite crab, and I didn’t want you to miss out.”

“And the movie?”

“Every girl loves Dirty Dancing?” His cheeks pinked up as he shrugged.

“I can’t attest for every girl in the world, but I love the movie. It’s one of my favorites, and I watch it every time I see it on. I can’t pass it up.”

“So, I did good?” One strand of hair fell over his forehead, making me want to brush it out of the way, but I held back.

“You did great. Thank you for doing all this for me. It’s more than anyone has ever done.”

“No grand romantic gestures from your exes?”

My nose scrunched up as I thought back to all my previous boyfriends. There hadn’t been many, but even the ones I’d had never did anything like this for me. It was always me giving and trying to do the things they liked.

“Not a one,” I answered truthfully.

Cal picked up the remote and started the movie before we filled our plates with crab. I didn't even want to know how much the bill was, nor did I want to find out how much this suite cost. It was the nicest place we'd stayed at so far, and I'd thought the hotel in Monaco was lavish. It had nothing on this place.

Cal held his forkful of food only an inch from his mouth as he watched me take my first bite of crab. I was expecting spicy since he'd told me the name of the dish was chili crab. Instead, it was sweet and delicious. I moaned around my mouth full of food.

"I'm going to have to come back to Singapore for this crab and dream about it for months," I commented as I shoved another bite into my mouth.

"It is damn good, and the way you...never mind." He moved to place his plate on his lap and hit play again on our movie. I hadn't even noticed he'd paused it for me. When I caught him re-adjust himself out of the corner of my eye, I realized my moans might have been affecting him in ways I didn't want them to. I couldn't help it, though. He kept introducing me to the most orgasmic foods on the planet. Maybe if he fed me the worst dishes the country had to offer, he wouldn't have a problem.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Watermelon,” I said at the same time as Baby.

“How many times have you seen this movie?” Cal asked on a laugh. “You know, like, every line.”

“Too many to count. A friend and I used to watch a little bit of it every morning before school because her parents wouldn’t let her watch it.” I sighed, dreamily thinking about Patrick Swayze mouthing the words to I Had the Time of My Life to Baby at the end of the movie. Finishing the last of my dinner, I asked. “Have you ever watched this movie before?”

Callum had finished eating long before me and had sat back against the soft cushions to watch the movie. Slinging his arm across the back of the couch, he glanced my way only to look back at the movie. I was giddy with excitement that he seemed to be enjoying it—or at least couldn’t take his eyes off it. “I can’t say that I have. It’s kind of a chick movie.”

I gasped, my hand to my chest. “I take offense to that. It’s a classic. I love that the good girl gets the bad boy, and what a bad boy Johnny is. It’s the perfect romance.”

“Is it sad that I’m jealous of Johnny? Maybe I need to be a bad boy, and you’ll give me a chance.” He murmured the last under his breath.

Turning, I placed my hand on his arm that lay on the back of the cushion. “Cal, you know that’s not true,” I said sadly. I hated that he thought that. “You know that’s not the reason why.”

Cal gave a fake smile that didn't reach his eyes. "I know. All my life, I've never wanted to be in a relationship, and when I do, I can't have her because she's my fucking therapist."

The words, 'I won't always be your therapist' were on the tip of my tongue, but I held back. I didn't want to make any promises I couldn't keep. Once the season was over, there was a possibility that he'd no longer be interested in me.

Once the movie was over, we went our separate ways. After the events of the day and a full belly, I was beyond tired. Slipping off my robe, I slid into bed and sighed as the silky sheets met my naked body. Pulling the covers up to my chin, I sunk into the bed and let the day go, falling fast asleep.

Callum

Singapore

A scream woke me from a deep sleep. My head was foggy as I tried to figure out where the noise had come from. Was it someone in another room? Another scream broke out from inside my suite. Flying out of bed, I ran into the other bedroom to find Aspen in bed, twisted in the covers. The soft light coming from the window illuminated her face that was contorted in pain.

Moving closer, I shook her shoulder, trying to wake her up to no avail.

"Cal," she whimpered, kicking her legs and catching them in the blankets, making her fight against them escalate.

Grabbing the covers at the bottom of the bed, I pulled them away from her legs. Aspen stopped kicking but fisted her hands in the blanket while letting out a high-pitched whine.

Sitting on the side of her bed, I loosened her hold on the bedding and tried again to wake her up by shaking her shoulder and calling her name.

“No!” she screamed and then sat up in a rush.

“Wake up, Doc.”

“Cal?” she cried.

Pulling her into my arms, I rubbed up and down her back, unsure if she was awake or still dreaming. When my palm only met warm skin, my hand stilled in the middle of her back. I was shocked to find Aspen without clothes.

Throwing her arms around me, she cried into my neck.

“I’m here. It was only a bad dream,” I kept repeating over and over again as her grip tightened. When she started to calm down, I asked, “What was your dream about?” I didn’t want to use any trigger words and potentially make the situation worse. I noticed Aspen had done the same for me when she asked her carefully worded questions. She nodded into my neck. Her hot breath skated over my skin. “What can I do to make it better?”

“Can you sleep in here and hold me?” she asked with a sniff. “I don’t want to be alone.”

I wasn’t a hundred percent positive she was naked under there, but I did know she was without a shirt. I also wasn’t sure I’d be able to resist temptation with her chest against mine, but when she whispered a broken plea, I couldn’t deny her.

“Lie on your side facing away from me,” I ordered as I smoothed a hand down her hair.

She drew back. “What? Why?”

“Because neither of us have shirts on, and I’m not sure I’ll be able to remain a gentleman if your breasts are pressed against my chest,” I answered truthfully, as I pulled away to slide underneath the covers with her.

All thoughts of being a gentleman went out the window when she pressed her ass into my already swelling dick. Why hadn’t I thought about my dick being nestled in her ass crack?

One snuffle and I forgot about the uncomfortable situation I was in and wrapped my arms around her. “Come here, Doc.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

She wasted no time turning over and encircling my body with her own. One leg went between mine as one arm went around my waist and the other under my neck. Scooting closer, she rested her head on my shoulder. The feel of her plump breasts against my skin had my cock hardening at a rapid pace.

Wetness slowly started to seep into my arm and chest. She was crying, and here I was getting hard and trying not to think about it. “Do you want to talk about it?” I asked like I was the therapist in this relationship.

She shook her head, clinging to me tighter. “It was scary and yet so surreal at the same time. I just want to forget about it. Please, Cal, make me forget.” Her body rubbed against mine. Was she asking what I thought she was asking? Did she want me to make her forget about it with sex?

“What are you asking for here, Doc? I don’t want you to regret anything in the morning.” I groaned as she hooked her leg around my hip. “I need you in my life, and while I want to sink into your sweet heat more than anything, I can’t risk losing you.”

“I can’t fight my attraction to you anymore.” She shifted, and that’s when I knew for sure Aspen was completely naked. In that moment, I couldn’t deny her anything.

I started by placing soft kisses up the column of her throat and then nibbling along her jaw. When I reached her mouth, I sucked on her bottom lip and then bit down on it until she moaned with pleasure. I licked along the seam of her pouty lips until she opened wide and let me in. Plunging my tongue into her mouth, I tasted every centimeter of her. When her tongue met mine, I moaned into her mouth. Never when I thought of bedding her, did I think it would be like this. Soft and warm. Passionate

and home. Nothing had ever felt so right in my life. Not even when I was on the track going at speeds of two hundred miles per hour.

Her fingers gripped my shoulders and slid along the contours of my back and down to my waist. Reaching the waistband of my boxer briefs, she dipped her hand inside and squeezed my ass. The bite of pain from her nails digging into my skin kicked my dick into overdrive.

Breaking our kiss, I nibbled on her earlobe while my palms cupped her breasts. They were the perfect handful. My thumb swept across her pert nipple and pinched it before I moved down to lick and suck on her other breast.

Aspen moaned my name into the dark room, and I'd never heard anything better. I bit down and then laved my tongue over the area to soothe the pain I'd just inflicted.

"I need more, Cal," she whimpered, arching her back and pushing her breast further into my mouth.

Letting go of her breast with a pop, I kissed my way down her body. Situating myself between her legs, I nipped one hip, causing her to squirm under my grasp. With my teeth, I placed little love bites along her inner thigh as I moved back up. Her hands tangled in my hair and guided me to where she wanted my mouth most. I placed a kiss on her mound before I lightly bit her bundle of nerves. Aspen shrieked but kept her hold on my head and pushed her pussy up into my waiting mouth.

Spreading her wide open with my thumbs, I licked from her tight rosebud all the way up to her already pulsing clit. Swirling my tongue around, I slipped two fingers into her hot, wet channel. The smell of her arousal was driving me wild. I ate her like I was dying, and she was my last meal. Driving my fingers deeper into her, I curled them on the way out. Each time she clenched around my fingers, it had my dick pulsing and my mouth licking and sucking faster and faster.

“Oh God, right there,” she moaned, arching into my mouth when I flicked her clit over and over again with the tip of my tongue. With one final lick and pump of my fingers, she screamed out my name while clenching her shaking thighs around my head and nearly pulling out a handful of hair.

I ground my erection into the mattress to get some type of relief as I brought her down from her release. I wish I could have seen what she looked like as she came from my hands and mouth. I was sure it was a sight to behold and would have had me coming on the spot.

When every last tremor had moved through her body, I made my way back up the bed, licking away the light sheen of sweat that covered her. Hovering over her with my arms on either side of her head, I dipped down and kissed her lightly.

Her arms wound around my neck. “You’re really good at that.” Her toes skimmed up the back of my legs until they reached the hem of my briefs and tried to push them down. She grunted when they only moved an inch and huffed out. “This isn’t going how I planned.”

“Would you like some help?”

“Yes, please.” She twisted underneath me.

I hated to leave her embrace, but I loved where this was going. I quickly divested myself of my underwear and was back in between her silky thighs in a matter of seconds.

Her warm hand wrapped around my shaft, and I nearly lost it then. She had my body running like I was a pubescent teenage boy ready to explode at the mere sight of a pair of tits. She squeezed the tip, making me buck into her hand.

“I want to feel you inside of me,” she said as she stroked my cock once more before she lined it up to her entrance.

I wanted nothing more than to be inside of her as well, but I didn’t have a condom. I groaned and rested my forehead to hers. “I never thought this moment would happen, so I don’t have a condom.”

“I have an implant, and I’m clean.” She kept moving her hand up and down my shaft. If she kept that up, I wasn’t going to last long.

“I’m clean. I’m tested every few races.” With the tip begging to push inside, I asked, “Are you sure this is what you want? Because once I’m deep inside of you, there’s no going back.”

Her heels pressed into my ass, giving me the sign I needed to proceed. With one push of my hips, I was deep inside of her, and I never wanted to leave her tight heat again. “Fuck me like I’m yours,” she moaned into the side of my neck.

Pulling back until my tip was all that was left in her, I slammed back inside. Our skin slapped as I drilled into her, finally letting go of all the tension I’d been holding back over the weeks since I’d met Aspen. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought she’d feel this good. It was like her pussy was made for me. With each thrust, her walls tightened and sucked me in further.

“Fuck, your pussy is so tight and needy. Does it like my cock pounding into you?”

“Yes, more,” she groaned, bucking her hips up to meet mine.

Picking up my pace, I slammed into her again and again until heat tingled down my spine, and I felt my balls tighten up. Gripping her leg, I placed her foot on my shoulder, and with the other hand, I ran my thumb through her juices and started to

circle her clit. With one touch of my digit, she keened as her walls started to pulse around me. I kept my brutal pace as she came undone. With her pussy milking my cock, I let go. I stilled, my grip on her leg tightened even as my thumb rubbed lazy circles, and I let myself erupt inside of her.

Rolling off her, I pulled her into my arms. “Wow, I’ve been missing out,” she said breathlessly against the side of my neck.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“How’s that?” I rubbed my hand up and down her back.

“If I would have known you were that skilled in bed, I would have made sure to not have a room to stay in sooner.” She laughed softly, her breath tickling my skin.

“You’re more than welcome to stay in my room anytime,” I offered.

“I might take you up on that.” She moved down to rest her head on my chest and slid one leg across mine. “Thank you for tonight—for everything. You’re my knight in shining armor,” she breathed against my chest. “You’re always there to save me.”

“It’s nothing. You save me every day.”

10

Aspen

Texas, USA

“And that’s Callum Crew with his fifth first-place finish of the season,” the announcer called.

I couldn’t help but jump up and down clapping. I was beyond proud of Cal and his win. He’d only needed me once during the race, and as I’d talked to him, he’d calmed himself down. It wouldn’t be long before he wouldn’t need me. I wasn’t sure what that meant for us. It had been a month and a half since Singapore and waking up with Callum in my bedroom. Since then, we hadn’t spent a night apart.

The moment I saw Callum, it took everything in me not to throw myself at him and kiss him all over his face. Instead, I waited back behind the crowd and let everyone congratulate him, wishing I could be the girl on his arm like the other guys with their wives, girlfriends, or flavor of the month.

Cal's eyes locked with mine, never breaking contact as person after person clapped him on the back, kissed him on the cheek, or hugged him. When Colton and Rylee came into view, he reluctantly looked away, smiling at them.

His bosses couldn't know we were sleeping together. If they ever found out, I'd be on the first flight back to Barcelona, and quite possibly lose my job if they reported me. It was easy when we were in other countries, but with CD Enterprises here, it was going to be difficult to look at Cal like the friend/patient he was supposed to be to me instead of my lover.

I left before Cal and the other two winners made their way to the podium and went back into the suite where I watched the race. I gathered my things, got on my phone to check my messages, and waited until someone came to get me when it was time to leave.

It was Rylee who peeked in the room about thirty minutes later with a sweet smile on her face. Cal had told me about Rylee and her company's work with children, making me admire her all the more.

"Is it time to go?" I asked, standing up with my own smile on my face.

"It is. I wanted to come up and get you so I could tell you what a great job you've done with Callum. There wasn't one sign he had any problems driving today. You don't know how much we all appreciate the work you've done with him. Not only that, but he seems like a happier person."

Was she saying she thought he was happier because of me or the work I'd done with him? I wasn't sure, but I wasn't going to say anything. If I did, it would be my job.

"He's improved by leaps and bounds. I'm so proud of him." I wanted to say more but thought better of it. If I gushed too much, it might clue her in to my growing feelings for Cal.

"If everything keeps going the way it has, I think he'll win the season. I don't want to jinx it, though." She flashed me a smile as we walked out of the room and downstairs.

"You guys and your superstitions. I love watching all the guys go through their routines before the races."

"How long has it been since you were in the States?" she asked as we rounded the corner to where a van was waiting to take us to our hotel.

"It would have been two years next month. Can you believe that?" I widened my eyes at her. When I was growing up, I never thought I'd live outside of the United States.

"No," she shook her head. "I can't imagine living anywhere but in California. Did you miss it?"

I hummed and tilted my head to the side as I thought about it. "In some ways, yes, but in other ways no. Traveling the circuit with the team, I've realized how much of the world I haven't seen and that I want to travel. I want to incorporate that into my life somehow, I just don't know how I'm going to do that."

She bumped her shoulder with mine. "I'm sure you'll figure it out. I don't know how the guys do it. I'd be homesick after one race."

"I'm not homesick yet." Although Callum had a lot to do with why I wasn't missing

home—that and the fact that I didn't have any friends there. I only had my work, and even though I loved it, it wasn't enough to fulfill me for the rest of my life.

The door to the van slid open to reveal Cal, Colton, and Beckett all in the back, leaving the front open for us. The men were in deep conversation as we were driven to the hotel. I had no idea what they were talking about, and when I looked over at Rylee, she only smiled and rolled her eyes. I had a feeling she was used to it and didn't mind it one bit.

* * *

“Don't forget dinner at seven. Your presence is required,” Colton ordered as we dispersed off the elevator toward our hotel rooms.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Ugh,” Cal groaned as we broke apart. “This dinner is going to be torture with Udo and Eduardo there.”

“Why?” My brows furrowed with confusion. “You won, and Udo came in tenth, what could he possibly say?”

“Oh, trust me, he’ll find something to say or do. Those two live to make my life miserable.”

When I stopped at my room and slid my card inside, Cal stopped behind me. I could feel his body heat, he was so close. I wanted to lean back into him, but I held back from temptation. “What are you doing? We can’t let anyone see us.”

“You don’t have to remind me,” he growled. “I can’t wait until we’re back at my place, and I’ll have you all to myself for almost two weeks.”

Stepping inside, I turned and placed my hands on his chest. “You can’t come in. If you do, you know what will happen, and we can’t risk someone coming to either of our rooms and finding us in bed together.”

“What? You won’t let me inside?”

“You need to take a shower and get ready for dinner,” I said as nicely as possible. He was sweaty and stinky from his race but still gorgeous. It wasn’t fair that he could still look good with his hair stuck to his head. I wasn’t sure why he wouldn’t take a shower until he got back to the hotel, and normally I didn’t have a problem with it since I helped get him clean.

“We can’t do that together?”

“Not tonight.” When he stuck out his bottom lip and pouted, I wanted nothing more than to give in. He was too damn cute. “Please, Cal, wait until we get to California.”

He hung his head and shook it. “You’re staying with me, and I’m not letting you out of my sight.” He lifted his head with a big smile on his face. “To know we’re going to be at my house before and after Mexico...” His smile grew wider. “I’ve never been this excited to be home.”

I wasn’t going to let on how eager I was to see where he lived when he was at home. I was expecting a total bachelor pad with very little furniture.

Grabbing the fabric of his shirt, I pulled him to me and out of the hallway before I gave him a chaste kiss and pushed him back out. “You’ll get more once we land in California.”

“It’s going to be a long night. I can’t even flirt with you,” he pouted.

“Maybe we can have phone sex. We haven’t done that before.” I tried to entice him to not be in a sour mood all night. I knew how much he disliked Udo and Eduardo, and how they liked to taunt him when in the same room.

“If that’s all I can get I’ll take it, but I’d rather have the real thing.” He looked up at me with puppy dog eyes.

“I feel like you want me just for sex,” I said in a joking tone. In reality, though, I wasn’t kidding around when every comment he made was about him missing out on sex with me.

His face screwed up in anger before he pushed into my room and slammed the door

shut. “Don’t say that about me. While the sex is nice, more than nice, I want you in my bed. I like falling asleep with you in my arms and waking up with you by my side.”

Instantly, I melted at his words and moved toward him. He knew exactly what to say. “Fuck, you deserve a blow job for saying that.”

His face went from pissed to lustful in the blink of an eye. “I’ll happily take you up on that after my shower. Or you could join me.”

“Not today.” I reached out and took his hand in mine. Running my fingers over the back of his hand. “I’m sorry for my words, but sometimes I do feel like I’m a convenience to you, and sex is all you want.”

“I never wanted to make you feel that way. If we can’t have sex, I still want to hang out with you. I hate that we have to hide our relationship, but I know we can’t be caught as well.”

Relationship? I liked hearing him call what we had a relationship.

Pulling me into a hug, he wrapped his strong arms around me and rested his forehead to mine. “For the first time in forever, I want someone by my side, and I can’t share you with the world. I hate that I’m your dirty little secret.”

“Oh, Cal,” I brushed my lips lightly across his. “You are in no way my dirty little secret. You are quickly becoming my everything, and someday we’ll be able to share it with the world.”

His blue eyes turned dark like a raging storm as his hold loosened, and he took a step back, clearing his throat. “Before I tackle you on your bed, I’m going to leave. May I escort you down to dinner?”

“Of course.” I wanted to kiss him and make him feel better. I wanted to tell him that I was falling in love with him. Instead, I stood strong and watched as he backed out of my room. I didn’t move until I heard his hotel room door slam shut. Only then did I let out a shaky breath and move to get ready for dinner.

* * *

The moment we stepped up to the table, I knew Cal’s other teammates were going to be trouble. They leered at me as I took my seat and kept their eyes on my breasts until Cal cleared his throat. It didn’t help that they were sitting directly across from me. Neither did the fact I couldn’t wear a bra with my dress. When I bought the slinky number back in Monaco, I hadn’t thought about a bra. Silly me. And the only other dress that I had for the occasion that everyone hadn’t seen was the one I had on tonight. It was champagne-colored with a deep V neckline that stopped only a few inches above my belly button. The hem ended mid-thigh, leaving a lot of skin showing. Too much for this dinner with Cal’s bosses and teammates. Now I was regretting not buying more clothes throughout the season. Callum always had so many amazing destinations for us to visit that I never had the time or even thought about shopping.

Colton looked at Cal with a furrowed brow. I was sure he was wondering what he’d missed or what the problem was now. I didn’t think Cal, Udo, or Eduardo had ever got along, and it made me sad to think of Cal always traveling alone without anyone to talk to. The only ones he seemed to get along with were Kaspar, who always seemed to be busy, and Colton and Rylee, who were only at a few races each season.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Where have you been hiding yourself?” Udo asked from across the table. Before I could answer, he smirked over at Eduardo, letting me know they were up to no good. I wasn’t going to play into their hands and have Callum get upset. They did a good enough job at that as it was.

“Today I was in my hotel room enjoying a book. How about you?” I asked sweetly before I took a sip of my water.

“Looking for you. I thought you might want someone to show you around,” he gave me his best fake smile.

“That’s nice of you, but I’m good. I’m from the US, so I don’t need to do the tourist thing here.”

“That reminds me,” Rylee interjected. “What are you going to do between now and Mexico?”

I felt Cal’s hand twitch against my thigh at her question.

“I’m going to be staying in LA so I can continue to work with Cal during the break.” That was true. He’d have his own car, and I wanted to make sure he’d be okay driving in California’s crazy traffic.

Rylee leaned over to him with a smile on her face before she whispered something only for him to hear. I loved how much she cared about him.

“Maybe we need to head out to sunny California, too.” Eduardo smirked at Udo.

“Yeah, maybe, then we can show the lovely doctor around town and get to know her a little better.” He wagged his eyebrows, and it took everything in me not to cringe. “Or if you want, we could take you out tonight. It’s such a shame a dress like that is going to waste on only dinner.”

It would be a cold day in hell before I met up with them anywhere.

Cal growled from beside me, making me want to kick him under the table. I’d watched enough movies to not follow through. Knowing my luck, I’d kick the wrong person, and then people would really be wondering what was going on.

“Stop it, the two of you,” Colton ordered. “I don’t appreciate you making our guest uncomfortable.”

I gave him a grateful smile, hoping it would work, and it did until we all left the table. Somehow, we ended up being the only two in the elevator with Eduardo and Udo. Cal and I were on opposite sides of the elevator looking straight ahead while their eyes roved over every inch of my body. Pulling my phone from my purse, I checked my email, and when nothing was there, I opened up Instagram. Anything to not meet their eyes. The more they watched me, the creepier they became. Were they whispering to each other and looking at me suggestively only to get at Callum, or were they really that damn creepy?

Since I’d left Barcelona, I’d been posting all the places I’d been to, but not interacting with any of my friends. I’d only post a few pictures and then go back to living in the moment. It was something Cal was good at. I learned quite a bit about myself from being in his presence, and once this was all over, I wanted to continue to change my life. To live in the now and appreciate the beauty of the world. The only thing I was uncertain of was if Cal would be around for those changes.

As I went through my notifications, I saw that I’d gained a few thousand followers

since Cal had appeared in a few of my pictures. All of them strictly platonic for the media. Along with all of those notifications were comments from Alejandro. He always had something nice to say on the pictures without Cal in them and then said how he wished he was with me. I guess he was no longer with the woman he cheated on me with. On the pictures with Cal in them, I noticed he didn't say anything except on the last one. His comment made my stomach churn.

Alejandro511: You used to look at me that way.

Could he see how much Cal had come to mean to me? Could others? I couldn't risk anyone coming to the conclusion we were together. With the creepy dynamic duo watching me and making me feel like I was under a microscope, I went through and deleted all the pictures on my account with us together.

When the doors slid open on the floor below ours, I was happy they stepped off the elevator, and I could no longer feel their eyes on me. I sagged against the wall for a moment as we ascended to the next floor. With his hand on my lower back, Cal ushered me out into the hall and toward our rooms.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah." I rested my head on his bicep as we walked. "I feel like I need a shower after the way those two were looking at me. I couldn't decide if they were only acting that way because of you or if they're really that creepy."

"I'm sorry they made you feel that way. If I had to guess, a little bit of both. I definitely didn't like the way they were watching you all night long, and I think that was the point. I'm not sure if they're on to us or if they just like fucking with me that much."

We stopped in front of my room, and I pulled out my card. "I hope you know I'm

going to miss you tonight.”

“Good.” He flashed me a devastating smile. “I’m glad I’m not the only one. If you get too lonely, you can call or knock. I’m only a phone call or a few feet away.”

I turned and leaned my back against the door, closing my eyes.

“What are you doing?” He chuckled lowly.

“I’m imagining myself kissing you good night,” I whispered and smiled with my eyes still closed.

“Why?” he asked quietly back.

“Because I know if your lips are anywhere on my body, I wouldn’t be able to fight the need to have you. To touch you. Feel you. This is all I’m giving myself for tonight.”

I opened my heavy-lidded eyes to find Cal only an inch away with his gaze on my mouth.

Page 31

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Fuck, Doc, you make me hard. You better get inside that room of yours before I say fuck it and take your mouth out here for anyone to see.”

He took my keycard from my grasp and slipped the card into the door behind me, bringing him even closer to my orbit. I could smell his expensive body wash with his chest against mine, and I wanted nothing more than to say the hell with it and pull him into my room with me.

When the door clicked open, he grabbed my arm, making it so that I didn’t fall into the room, and then just as quickly let go. His breath lingered against my skin as he moaned.

“Goodnight, beautiful.”

11

Callum

Malibu, California

Aspen’s eyes lit up, and her jaw hung open as we pulled up in front of my house. “This is your house? Does anyone else live here?” she asked in awe, not taking her eyes off of it.

“Only me,” I answered, feeling embarrassed by having such a place when I was hardly ever here.

After helping her out of the car and grabbing our luggage, I stayed back and watched her take my place in. It was different seeing it through someone else's eyes.

"Oh my God, Cal. If I lived here, I'd never leave. It's gorgeous and..." She stopped in the middle of the living room and cringed at what she was about to say.

"And?"

"While it's beautiful, it's not you."

"Did you expect it to be filled to the brim with racing trophies or something?" I laughed, unsure of what she thought it would look like. I did have a room with all my trophies and awards I'd won throughout the years.

"No, but I thought it might have things from your travels." She moved closer and rubbed one hand up my arm. "This looks unlived in."

"That's because it is. I'm here maybe three months out of the year. The rest of the time I'm on the road and traveling."

"Well, I hope you don't mind, but I'm going to enjoy the shit out of this place while we're here." She laughed as she spun around and made her way through the living room. She stood at the floor to ceiling window and looked out. "This pool and the view. Can we live out here until we head to Mexico?"

This was the first time I'd ever had anyone in my space other than the designer. I loved her excitement and what it brought to the place. I knew I'd never be able to look at the place the same way again if she wasn't by my side.

"If that's what you want." I chuckled as she slipped her shoes off and dipped her toes into the pool water. I was glad I'd had the forethought to have the woman who

cleaned the place once a month turn the heat on in the pool. I knew once the temperature dipped when the sun went down, she'd change her mind.

While I'd planned on taking her in every room in my house, now I was thinking about all the places outside I could lay her out or pin her to and fuck her without the worry of who might hear or find us.

Aspen started to shimmy out of her clothes as she walked around the backyard, taking everything in. Her hands were at her hips, ready to pull down her jeans when she looked over her shoulder at me. "Now I understand why you bought this place. If I had the money, I'd pay for this view."

"I'm glad you like it because I plan to fuck you until you can no longer stand, and then I'm going to carry you to my bed and fuck you unconscious." I growled the last part as I started to stalk toward her.

"I like the sound of that." She turned her head from side to side. "I also like the fact that you don't have neighbors close by. I don't know how the hell you managed to do that with such limited real estate space in Malibu."

"Lucky, I guess."

I stopped only a foot away from her, grabbing the back of my t-shirt and pulling it over my head. My eyes stayed transfixed on her as she wiggled her jeans over her hips and pulled them down her long, lean legs. Fuck, I couldn't wait to have them wrapped around my waist while I sunk deep inside of her.

My hands went to the belt of my cargo shorts while she slipped her shirt over her head, leaving her in only a tiny black lacy bra that her tits were spilling out of. I surged forward and latched my mouth onto one of her nipples and sucked both the flesh and fabric into my mouth. Aspen moaned, tangling her fingers into my hair and

holding me in place. I was glad she liked it when I played with her tits because I was a boob man all the way, and she had the most spectacular pair I'd ever encountered.

“More,” she moaned, pulling on my hair. That was my cue to lavish attention to her other breast but didn't leave the first without any attention. I pinched her nipple and then rubbed my thumb over her now diamond peak. My dick throbbed, wanting to break through my zipper. Why hadn't I taken off these stupid shorts before now?

Kissing up her chest and along the column of her neck, my hands went to work, removing the clothing from my lower half. When my shaft sprang free, one of Aspen's hands squeezed the tip until I let out a moan of my own.

Stepping out of my shorts, I wrapped her in my arms and took her down to the cool grass beneath us. My hips settled in between her silky thighs as I pinned her hands above her head. I nipped along her jaw until I could bite down on the shell of her ear. Without preamble, I thrust inside, and it instantly felt like home. I had no idea if it was the setting or just her, but either way, I never wanted to leave.

Her legs wrapped around my waist in a vice grip as I pumped in and out of her, kissing, licking, and biting every available inch of skin I could reach. There was no holding back for the first time since we started this. Here we could be lovers. Here we could explore what life was like as a couple, and I planned on relishing every moment of it while I could.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

I started to pump faster, my fingers moved down her body to rub her bundle of nerves, wanting to bring her to completion so we could move to the next spot I had in mind. The pool or hot tub would be fun. Hell, maybe even a lounge before we christened every inch of my house.

She ground against my hand, moaning my name louder than ever before. When her legs started to shake, I moved one leg up higher so I could hit her at a deeper angle, knowing she was close to falling over the edge. With one more thrust, she clenched around me. Her nails dug into my back, shoulders, and any available surface she could find for purchase. Her eyes slammed shut as her head tipped back, her entire body arching up into me. I slowed my movements, wanting to bring her down before I moved us into the pool, concentrating only on Aspen and not my impending orgasm. When her body went slack, I sat back on my heels and pulled her into my arms. Her head lolled to the side as her hot breath caressed my neck.

“You weren’t kidding,” she panted out.

“Not for a second. Now I’m going to take you in the pool and maybe again out here before we move inside. Wrap yourself around me, Doc.”

She did as I asked, although her hold was weak from exhaustion. Slowly I stood and walked us into the pool from the shallow end. When I had her up against the side of the pool, I turned her around and let her upper body sprawl out onto the edge of the pool.

Running my hand down the length of her back, I grasped her ass and squeezed before running my fingers along the seam. Oh, how I wanted to take that hole, but she

needed prep and for it to not be a quick fuck in my pool. I wanted to take my time with her and worship her body the way it deserved.

“Stick your ass out for me, baby,” I demanded as I plunged two fingers deep inside her cunt. Always obedient, at least in bed, Aspen gave me her ass. I gave it another squeeze with my other hand before I pulled my fingers out of her and replaced them with my throbbing cock. I wouldn’t last long after taking her out on the lawn and not being inside of her while we were in Texas for my race. Never before had I not wanted my bosses at a race until I found out she would be holding out on me until they weren’t staying in the same hotel. It didn’t matter that their suite was on the other side of the floor. She was afraid we’d be found out, and that would be the end of us.

“This is going to be fast, but I promise I’ll be slow and sweet later,” I growled into her ear as my hands clasped onto her hips to keep her steady as I plunged into her with deep, hurried thrusts. When her walls began to pulse, I fisted her hair in my hand and pulled her back into me as I licked up her neck and groaned as my dick started to pulse. “You feel so fucking good.”

Her hand came around and held my hip as I continued to piston into her, and when my hips started to jerk, her sweet cunt milked me for everything I had in me. Fucking hell, I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to walk us out of the pool with how light and free I felt in that moment. I wanted to sink to the bottom of the pool and look up into the sky with her by my side.

Instead, I slowly pulled out. My cock already feeling lost without being inside her heat. Aspen moaned and turned around to wrap her arms around my neck. She placed a soft kiss to my chin before she rested her head on my shoulder.

Moving my arms to rest under her ass, I walked us out of the pool and headed straight for my bed. Her face was pressed against my neck, her lips moving and kissing.

“Where are you taking me?” she murmured sweetly.

“To my bed. I have to have you in my bed.” I felt if I could get her into my bed, then what we were doing would be real. It wasn’t a fuck at a race stop. No, once I laid her down on my fluffy white comforter, she was mine, and I was never going to let her go.

“Cal,” she hummed, “I’m not sure I can go another round right now. You’ve just given me two of the best orgasms of my life.”

Pulling back the covers, I placed her down on my bed and crawled in beside her. I wrapped my body around her in a tight embrace, tangling our limbs together before I kissed her temple. “Sleep, Doc. We’ve got all the time in the world.”

She made some noise, but what it was I couldn’t say. I was already drifting off to sleep. Finally, being able to relax with her in my arms for the first time in my bed, in my house that now felt like a home.

* * *

“Is there ever a bad sunset when you live by the ocean?”

I hadn’t been looking at the sun or the water but at Aspen. I took in the water and the slowly setting sun with its oranges and yellows that were being chased away by the darkening blue before we found a table.

“It is beautiful. Wait until you see it from the house. It’s almost as breathtaking as you are, and one of the reasons I bought the place.”

Her hand convulsed in mine at the mention of her being breathtaking. She had no idea just how gorgeous she was.

“This is cute,” Aspen exclaimed as we sat down at a picnic table on the soft sand. “I think I’m in love with Malibu. I’ve only been to California a couple of times, but I never made it up here. It’s different. Less hectic.”

It was less chaotic if you weren’t out on the main drag. We’d walked along the beach to get to a little restaurant that served the best seafood I’d ever eaten here. Not in the world, but pretty damn close.

I wanted to say something about her staying here forever, but what would that do? I wasn’t home from March until the beginning of December year after year. What I needed was for her to continue to follow me around the world, even if it wasn’t fair to her and the job she loved so much. I still needed her to calm me down at least once a race, and I wasn’t sure if that would ever go away.

“We’ll have to explore more when we get back from Mexico. Whatever you want. You can go shopping on Rodeo Drive, or we can hit the road and travel...” I realized what I was saying, and the words dried up in my mouth.

“That sounds wonderful.” She reached across the table and clasped my hand in hers. “I know you think you’re hopeless without me, but I’m here to tell you that couldn’t be further from the truth. You have the tools you need, and you do a great job of using them to calm yourself down.”

“Logically, I know that, but when I’m behind the wheel, it’s different.” I cocked my head to the side and asked. “Would it be so bad to travel the world with me until I retired?”

Aspen sputtered and sat back in her seat. “And when would that be? How many more years do you plan to race because I can’t see us hiding a relationship or whatever this is for years on end.”

“Or whatever?” My voice was deadly quiet as I asked her to expand on what she said.

“Yes, I don’t know what this is. I don’t want to be that girl who asks to define what we have between us. Especially when we have to hide it. I won’t be a grid girl for the foreseeable future.”

My blood boiled at Aspen calling herself a grid girl. She wasn’t a groupie in any way, shape, or form. I hated the words that tumbled from her lips.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“I don’t have it all figured out, but I planned once the season was over, we’d go to Colton and tell him we’re in a committed relationship, and that I want and need you by my side all the time. I think he’d understand.”

“Committed?” She rolled the word on her tongue as if it was unfamiliar to her.

“It’s not like I expect him to pay for your travel or anything of that nature. I have plenty of money, so it won’t ever be a problem.”

“It would be if I don’t like men paying my way. Have you once thought about what I want? Did you think to ask me if I want to tell them about us or if I want to travel the circuit with you? What about my patients?”

I leaned back in my chair and took her in. Each word she spoke was said calmly as if she wasn’t upset, but I knew she was. Was it because I hadn’t asked or talked to her about this?

“I know you care very much for your patients, but I thought you cared more about me. You’ve said numerous times how you want to travel the world now. Why not do it with me?”

“It’s not a matter of caring, Callum. Of course, I care about you. It’s that you never once talked to me about this, and you were ready to tell your boss everything, and very soon for that matter. Would you have talked to me about this beforehand or just gone to him?”

Leaning forward with my elbows on the table, I looked her dead in the eye. “Of

course, I would have. I wanted to see how it went with you staying at my house and in my bed to make sure. This is the first time where we can just be us as a couple without hiding from everyone around us.”

She nodded, and when our waiter brought her glass of wine, she drank down half the glass in one go. She tapped her fingernail against the rim as she regarded me over the table. “Can I get another one of these, please?”

“Of course.” The waiter smiled and backed away.

The moment the waiter was out of earshot, I stood and brought my chair around the table to sit by her side. “Tell me what you’re thinking.”

“This is my fault for not opening the lines of communication. I assumed, and we all know what that makes me.” She gave me a tight smile. An ass, but I wasn’t going to say that. I wanted her to continue to open up to me because there was no way in hell I was leaving here without her understanding how I felt about her. “You’re not one for relationships or commitment.” I went to open my mouth, but she placed one finger over my lips and held it there. “Those are your words, and you haven’t expressed anything remotely different to make me think you changed your mind.”

She was right, I hadn’t, but I thought since she was so smart and seemed to be able to read just about every thought that passed over my face that she knew.

“That’s my fault. I guess I thought we were on the same page, but I can promise you that I was going to talk to you once we went to Mexico. I just wanted to see what it was like to have you living in my space and for us to be free before I said anything.”

“You wanted to make sure.” Her voice was quiet, and I couldn’t tell what she was feeling at that moment. Was she upset I wanted to make sure we were a good fit before I started waxing poetic words to her and telling her how I wanted to spend the

rest of our lives together?

“Yes, is that so bad? Are you sure about us?”

“Me?” she questioned in a squeaky, high-pitched tone. “No, I’m not sure because no one can ever be one hundred percent sure, but also because I thought there was a possibility you were going to be through with me once your last race was over.”

“Oh, Aspen, how I wish you would have said something.” I lifted her hand and kissed the back of it. “Not for one second have I ever saw you as just a fling. I’ve wanted you from the first moment I saw you.”

“Yes,” she said sternly. “You made mention of how you wanted to get in my pants many times, but that’s all I knew.”

I looked down at our joined hands. “I wish you would have said something before now. I hate that you’ve been walking around with me, city after city, thinking that I would throw you away because I’ve known since the moment I got you that I was never going to let you go. I’ve fallen down the rabbit hole, and I never want to get back out. You are it for me, Aspen Belle. Maybe things would have been different if we didn’t have to hide who we are to one another. You know I’m a straight shooter. I’m not going to lie to you. Now or ever. If you ever want to know something, don’t be afraid to ask.”

Her eyes darted from my lips to my eyes to my lips and back again. “Have I ever told you I love how open and honest you are?”

“Once or twice.” I leaned in and kissed the corner of her mouth.

“I’m not perfect, Cal. I’m human, and I make mistakes too. I carry baggage just like every other human being on the planet. Until now, I didn’t realize how much I’d let

Alejandro affect me and my trust. Normally, I'd like to think I would have talked to you and asked you what you wanted from me."

"I want you by my side until the end of time. I never want there to be a day where I don't see your beautiful face smiling at me, encouraging me to be the best man I can be. I want you always. Is that enough?"

"It's more than enough, but I'm not sure if I can give up everything to travel with you." She hung her head. "That's a lot of you to ask of me."

"It is." I tried to swallow the lump in my throat. "And I'm sorry I didn't ask you. I promise I won't say a word to anyone unless we decide that's what we want."

"Thank you."

"Let me say one final thing, and then I'll drop it so we can have a fabulous dinner together." She hooked her finger to mine and nodded. "Don't think for a single second that I like hiding us or what you mean to me. I'm falling for you. Some days you literally take my breath away. While I hate what brought me to you, I think it just might have been fate that brought us together."

"Oh, Cal," she cooed. Her hands cupped my face. She brought me close so she could smash her mouth to mine.

It was a desperate kiss. One that told me she felt the same about me as I did her. She loved me, but it was too soon to tell each other those three simple, yet significant words. Instead, she showed me with the way she held me in the palms of her hands, and her tongue danced with mine.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

When we pulled away, we were both smiling and panting. I wanted nothing more in that moment than to whisk her away in my arms, take her back to my house, and make love to her for the rest of the night.

12

Aspen

Mexico City, Mexico

Normally, I watched the races from a little suite set up for me. They had a TV on the wall, nice plush couches to sit on, and food service, but they didn't have one available for me this time. Today I was in one with Colton and his team. It was much bigger than the ones I'd previously been in, and the room was full of people I didn't know. Everyone was at work, looking over stats and speeds and who knew what else. None of it made sense to me.

A notification dinged in the air. I knew it wasn't my phone because it was turned off. I couldn't be distracted when, at any moment, Cal might need me. I watched from the other side of the room as Colton pulled out his phone, his brows furrowed as he read whatever was on his screen. When he looked up, his eyes landed on me, and they were blank. Gone was the happiness, the kindness, everything. They were void of all emotion. He stared at me for a long moment before he turned his head and went back to work.

Something had happened, but as I listened to Cal and his team over the system, I knew everything was fine on his end. He was in second place and was close to

passing and taking first. He truly was an amazing driver. In every race I'd been to, he was always in the top three. Maybe that's why the other racers disliked him so much.

On the TV, I watched as one of the cars spun out of control and hit the guardrail. Smoke filled the air. Kaspar relayed to Cal what had transpired, and the moment he heard the news, his breathing picked up. I waited and listened to see if he could handle it on his own, but when he croaked out a shaky 'Doc,' I pulled on my headset and put the mic in front of my mouth.

"I'm here, Cal. You're nowhere close to the wreck, and it will be cleared by the time you get there. Now, remember what I taught you. Clear your head of everything else but your driving. What your hands are doing, your feet, your breath. Take deep breaths and slow your heart rate."

"I can't." His voice shook, and it made me want to cry. I wasn't sure why he was having a setback. "Talk to me. Tell me something. Anything." It sounded like a demand, but I really knew it was a plea.

"Okay, but I want you to take slow and steady breaths. In through your nose and out through your mouth. If you stop, then I'll stop talking."

"I think I can do that," he said but didn't sound sure of himself.

"I know you can. You're safe. If there was any chance of anything happening to you, Kaspar and your team would let you know. You know they'd never put you in harm's way."

"Kaspar's the best fucking guy," he croaked out.

I saw the man in question dip his head and then look over at me. One corner of his mouth was tipped up in a smile.

“My favorite place in the whole world is Green Lake. I can’t wait to go back to it. I want to dive in the clear water, hike the trails, and lay out under the stars all night.”

“Oh, yeah? That’s your favorite place so far?”

He knew where my true favorite place was. It was his house in Malibu, but I couldn’t say that. If the team knew I’d stayed with him until we had to head to the next race, everything would be over. Green Lake was right on the heels of his oceanside house, though.

“It is. I’ve never seen a more perfect place. It’s a hidden gem.”

He let out a low chuckle. “I’m not sure how hidden it really is. I found it didn’t I? It’s just not a place most people know about unless they live there. But I agree, it’s pretty spectacular.”

Cal was back. His voice wasn’t shaky. His breathing was steady, and he was already joking around with me.

I stayed quiet for a few more moments to make sure he was okay. I didn’t want him to panic only because he stopped hearing my voice.

“Only ten more laps,” someone called out.

I took off my headset and stared up at all the TVs on the wall. It was strange how all of this had become my life in such a short period of time. In Barcelona, I had turned into a homebody who only lived to work, and now I had traveled to fourteen countries in the last several months. I was pretty sure I’d found the man of my dreams—my patient—and wanted to spend the rest of my life with him. I wasn’t sure how to make that happen, though. Could I give up my practice? I didn’t see any other way if I wanted to see him regularly. Maybe I could visit him once a month by going

to every other race. Or he could come to me during the breaks in between races. No, he loved exploring new places in each country. I couldn't ask him to come back to me only so we could spend a week together here and there.

We still had time to figure everything out, but I needed to decide what I could live with and what I couldn't live without.

I was broken out of my thoughts when Colton stood looming over me with a scowl on his face. "We need to have a meeting when the race is over, so don't leave this room. We'll wait for Callum to come up and join us."

"Okay," I gulped. That didn't sound good. I wasn't sure what he wanted to meet about. There were only two more races left in the season. Maybe he wanted to see about hiring me for next season as well. Even if he did, it didn't explain the scowl or the way he kept turning to look at me with narrowed eyes.

The after-race festivities took quite a while. There were the podium and interviews, along with all the congratulations from the team, and who knew what else since I didn't always stay for everything. It was nearing the one-hour mark by the time Cal came into the room with Colton on his heels. The moment they walked through the door, Colton closed and locked it. Cal leaned against the wall with his jumpsuit unzipped and pushed down to his waist. He was a sweaty mess with his white t-shirt soaked and his hair sticking up all over the place. Still, he was as handsome as ever. His blue eyes met mine for only a moment before he kicked one leg up on the wall.

"What's this meeting about, boss?" he tried to joke, but it was obvious he was just as leery about this meeting as I was.

Colton mirrored Cal's posture, leaning on the wall across from him. "During the race, I was sent a video."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Okay,” Cal drew out. “Is someone spying on us? Stealing trade secrets?”

“They spied something, alright. Not company secrets but your secret,” he gritted out. The muscle in his jaw ticked as his gaze went back and forth between the two of us.

All the blood drained from my face as I sat painfully still.

“How could you be so stupid? I had my suspicions that I tried to ignore because I know you’ve been going through a difficult time after your wreck. I understand that more than most, but we have rules, and you blatantly disregarded them.”

“What are you saying?” Cal pulled back from the wall and crossed his arms over his chest.

“You can’t be sleeping with your therapist. Both of you know better.” He turned then to look at me. “Do you want to lose your license?”

“No, of course not,” I answered hoarsely. “I—”

“Save it. I hate to do this, but...” He shook his head, and a look of sadness came over him. “We’ve got to let you go, Aspen. The message said that if you’re at another race, then they are going to send the video to the board and get you fired.”

Cal took two furious steps toward him but then stopped himself. “Who sent the video? How do you even know it’s us? I want to see it,” he barked out. His face turned hard as he stood in front of his boss.

Colton kept his eyes on me but handed his phone over to Cal. He hit play, and I heard our voices and waves crashing in the distance. Someone had caught us when we were in Malibu. That was the only possibility. I didn't want to watch it. Instead, I watched as Cal's face became every shade of red there was. At one point, I thought his head might pop off.

"You can't deny it," Colton said when Cal handed him back his phone.

"When did that asshole send this?"

"Does it matter?"

"It does to me. He's trying to ruin me. Ruin us," Cal's voice broke on the last word.

"It wasn't long after Udo had to come in. I hate to do this because you're the best driver out there, but what choice do I have?" Cal shook his head furiously before he stormed over to the door. "Where are you going?" Colton asked when Cal's hand was on the doorknob.

"I'm going to smash his fucking face in and get every copy of that video," he seethed. I'd never seen him this mad before. It wasn't something I liked coming out of him.

Colton stepped up behind him and placed his hand on Cal's shoulder. "It doesn't matter if there's a video or not. I know the truth, and there's no undoing that. Don't do anything that you'll regret and wind up ending your career."

Cal hung his head and nodded. When he turned around, he couldn't even look at me.

"Jon's already got you a plane ticket back to Barcelona for tonight. It will be waiting for you when you arrive at the airport. All you have to do is show your passport." Colton said before he turned away.

The look of disappointment on his face made my heart sink. I was going to be gone in a matter of hours and leaving Cal behind. I was supposed to go back to his house with him until we left for Brazil. Now everything was over. The man I'd fallen so deeply for couldn't even look me in the eye.

"What about me? How am I supposed to drive?" he asked in a voice that sounded so much like a child that I had to hold back a sob.

What would happen to Cal? Would he be able to race without me? Would he be in danger?

"You should have thought about that before you stuck your dick in your shrink." Colton let out a frustrated sigh. "There were very few stipulations, and the main one was to not sleep with your therapist. We can find you someone else. A male therapist, perhaps."

"Are you sure I won't fuck him too?" Cal gritted out. "I didn't sleep with her because she was convenient, Colt. What we have is real. We were going to come to you and tell you about us."

But not until the season was over. Our time at his place had been magical. Cal showed me he was a little bit messy when he doesn't have housekeeping coming in to pick up after him every day. He also showed me how loving, attentive, and sweet he was when we didn't have to keep our distance from each other. We walked along the beach each night as the sun went down, had sex on every available surface in his house, and fell asleep in each other's arms each and every night. I never wanted it to end, but now it was gone.

"I'm sorry, Cal. It's too little, too late. She needs to head back to the hotel and collect her things."

It was then he finally looked up and made eye contact with me. His blue eyes were sad as he took in my state of shock on the couch. I hadn't been able to move from the moment Colton started talking. He walked over and held his hand out for me to take. My shaky hand took his as he helped me to stand. Cal wrapped his arm around my shoulders and muttered how sorry he was into my ear as we stepped out into the hall.

It killed me that Callum couldn't even look at me for longer than a few seconds. For once, I had no idea what he was thinking. We headed back to the hotel in silence, and he didn't say a single word to me. He watched me from the couch with sad eyes until I had everything packed up and was ready to head to the airport. Alone.

When I wheeled my luggage to the door, he finally took action. Coming up behind me, Cal wrapped his arms around me and nuzzled his face in my hair.

"I hate this," he said on a choked whisper. "I won't let him report you if it's the last thing I do."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

Turning in his arms, I was shocked to find his eyes glassy and red-rimmed. Cupping his now stubbly cheeks in my hands, I fought back the emotion that was trying to overtake me.

“Don’t do anything stupid, Cal. Udo’s doing this because he knows it will affect you and hoping that he’ll beat you.” I tried with everything in me to keep my sadness out of my words, but I knew I was unsuccessful when his hand clasped around the back of my neck and pulled me into his chest.

“It doesn’t make any sense. Even if he beats me in the next two races, he won’t win the season. He doesn’t have the points. He’ll be lucky to be racing for CD Enterprises next year.” With every word, his arms tightened on me a little bit more until I was in the best bear hug of my life. “Fuck, Doc, I hate that you’re flying back to Spain tonight. How am I going to sleep without you in my bed?”

Before I could answer, he fisted my hair and pulled my head back to crash his lips to mine. This wasn’t a kiss I’d experienced from him before. It was desperate and rushed as if I might be pulled through the door at any moment.

A goodbye.

It felt like the end.

Our breaths hitched at the same time as we pulled away, and a single tear made its way down my cheek. I didn’t bother to brush it away. I knew once I stepped out the door, I was going to break down, and my face would be flooded with tears. This was the end of my happily ever after.

Resting his forehead to mine, we gazed into each other's eyes, unsure of what to say, yet they said everything with only a look.

I'm going to miss you.

I love you.

Goodbye.

13

Callum

Sao Paulo, Brazil

My eyes closed of their own volition as I stared out at my car. Formula One racing had been my entire life for the last ten years, and after giving up friends, companionship, and the love of my life for it, it didn't seem worth it anymore. I hadn't slept more than a couple of hours at a time since Aspen stepped out of our hotel room. I gave her a couple of days to get home before I tried to contact her, and maybe that was too long because now, she wasn't taking my calls or returning any of my messages.

I wasn't sure how I was going to race today without her. Knowing that if panic took over, she wouldn't be there to talk me down. To remind me of what I needed to do or to simply hear her voice. It didn't matter what she said, the instant her voice came over the system, my heart and breath slowed and then sped up for an entirely different reason.

Udo passed by me with a smirk that I wanted to punch right off his smug fucking face. He was lucky I'd stayed in my hotel rooms since I found out he was the one that

sent the video of Aspen and I making out heavily on the beach.

At first, I'd lain in the bed Aspen and I had slept in so I could take in her scent and pretend she was still by my side, but once it disappeared, I stared out at nothing hoping the nothingness would take me. With barely any sleep or food, I was in rough shape, but I knew even in my worst condition, I could beat Udo's ass out on the track. That was if I didn't have a panic attack.

Kaspar slapped a hand on my shoulder and then gave it a hard squeeze. "Get your head in the fucking game, man. Don't let that rat bastard win. When this is all over, you can go get your girl."

Keeping my eyes on my car, I asked. "How d'you find out?"

"I've known all along, man. It wasn't hard to see how much you changed since she joined the team." I swiveled my head to look at him. "Not your driving. That's always been stellar, except for..."

When I was all freaking out and losing my shit. Yeah, I knew.

"You smiled and talked more. Hell, you were friendly to everyone but Udo and Eduardo."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "I've always been nice to everyone but them," I amended.

"That's true, but you were different, and now," he frowned, "now you're sad all the time and barely give anyone the time of day."

"She won't answer my calls. I think she turned off her phone. None of the messages I've sent her are marked delivered."

“Are you sure she didn’t change her number?” he asked, hesitantly.

“I’d think the same thing if I didn’t get her voicemail and hear her voice. It fucking sucks, man. I get why she had to go, but at the same time, how am I supposed to drive without her?” I looked back out at my car. The object that used to mean everything to me, but was turning into resentment with each passing day. I never thought I’d feel that way about my career. “What am I going to do, Kas?”

“You’re going to go out there and kick ass. Show those assholes they can’t beat you no matter how hard they try.” He slapped my back again and then left to go over his checklist of things to do before the race.

I hadn’t eaten what I usually ate before every race, making my gut growl with hunger. I was hungry, but I couldn’t eat. Not since she left. I knew I should have tried to shove my ritual breakfast sandwich down my throat or even something for lunch, but I couldn’t bring myself to do it.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

One of the crew ran by me and asked if I was ready so fast, I couldn't make out who it was.

All I knew was it was time to get my shit together and race. Walking over to the green and white car, I ran the tip of my finger over each letter of my name before I squatted down, kissed my fingertips, and placed them on the hot ground. On autopilot, I got in my car and buckled in, waiting for my team to finish and attach my steering wheel.

Closing my eyes, I did exactly what Aspen had taught me. I'd already done my breathing exercises this morning, but I did them again as I tried to center myself. Once my mind was blank, I pictured my happy place. It used to be on the ranch I grew up on as the sun rose, but now it was of Aspen in my bed with her dark hair spread out over my pillow. She was looking right at me with a big smile on her face. It was so real I felt like I could reach out and touch her.

"You've got his, Callum," she whispered, her voice floated on the breeze. "I love you."

We'd never said those words to each other, even though I knew we both felt them. Why had I waited to tell her? I should have said something before she left that night from our hotel room.

She sat up, the sheet falling to her waist, exposing her beautiful naked breasts. Lifting her hand to her lips, she kissed it and blew. "Good luck, Cal."

A beep went off in my ear, signaling the race was about to start. The second my

steering wheel was attached, I grasped it like my life depended on it. The leather of my gloves flexed with the movement. The crew stepped away from the car a second before the engine roared to life.

The radio was silent as I watched the countdown. I was ready—or as ready as I could be. I was determined to show Udo up and come in first place this race and the next. I was going to shoot the fucking champagne right in his ugly fucking face as I stood on the podium from the top spot.

My tires spun as I took off along with my heartbeat. My grip tightened on my steering wheel, and my entire body tensed as the car on my right swerved into another car. Take off was the hardest part now, but I managed, even without hearing her voice through my headset. Kaspar updated me with everything going on around me but otherwise stayed quiet.

I wasn't sure what set me off. Nothing in particular happened. One minute I was fine, passing cars and starting to take the lead, and the next second, my vision went hazy for a moment. When it came back, I tried to focus hard. Breathing and trying to find my happy place, but my anxiety built from my stomach up to my esophagus in a nanosecond and completely overtook me. My breath turned into labored pants.

“What’s going on, Crew?” Kaspar asked. When I stayed quiet, he finally said. “It’s just you and me on here. I’ve blocked everyone else out. Talk to me.”

“I don’t know, man. I...nothing and something.” I managed to get out the stuttered sentence.

“Try what Dr. Belle taught you,” he rushed out as I slowed down.

“I did, but it didn’t work. Why didn’t it work?”

“Okay, okay. Give me a minute. Can you keep driving?”

“I’m trying,” was all I could say. I wasn’t even sure if I could make it around to the pit. At least wondering why he wanted me to give him a minute kept my mind slightly diverted and helped ease the panic slightly.

He came back on after what seemed like five minutes, but I knew he’d been radio silent for less than a minute. “Okay, Cal. How are you doing?”

“Trying to hold on. Where am I at in standing?” I knew I’d fallen some since I’d slowed down at one point.

“You’re sitting nicely in fifth, and Udo is eleventh.” The corners of my mouth tipped up at him including Udo’s place. He knew I’d want to know but wouldn’t ask.

“Are you ready?”

“I’m not sure right now is the best time to surprise me. I’m barely hanging on by a thread.”

“Cal?” Aspen’s voice called out. Maybe I was too far gone because I had to be imagining her voice in my head. I didn’t want to say anything and have Kaspar think I’d gone crazy.

“I don’t think it’s working, Kaspar,” she said. Her voice sounded defeated. “Is he okay? I haven’t talked to him since I left.”

“No, Miss Aspen, he’s not okay. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have called you. He needs you, and I thought if I held up my phone to the mic, he might be able to hear you, but...I’m not sure what’s going on. He was talking and now—”

“Aspen.” My voice cracked at the reality that it might actually be her and not my imagination.

“I’m here, Cal. Are you doing your breathing?”

“Not right now. I think I stopped breathing altogether when I heard your voice. I’m not doing so great here, Doc,” I confessed. Even as I said the words, my world started to right itself. I wasn’t sure how only hearing her voice could make everything in the world slow down, but it did.

“Can you hear me okay?”

“Yeah, you sound distant, but I don’t care. Your voice is music to my ears.” Emotion clogged my throat, knowing Kaspar called Aspen so I could continue driving.

“You sound like you’re already doing better,” her voice called lightly through the system.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Not enough. Don’t get off, Doc. Talk to me. Let me hear your sweet voice.”

“What do you want me to say?”

“For starters, why haven’t you answered any of my calls or texts?” I didn’t want to pick a fight with the off chance she might hang up on me, but I needed answers and now might be my only chance at getting them.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.” She sounded exasperated. Or it could have been my imagination.

“You’re not a liar. I know that, so tell me why. I’ve got nothing but time in here.”

“How long do you have?”

Was she wondering how long she’d have to be on the line with me in case I freaked out again?

“An hour and twenty minutes. Give or take,” Kaspar chimed in. “I’m sorry to eavesdrop, but I have to hold the phone up.”

“Kaspar, buddy, I don’t care if you’re breathing down the line. You got my woman on the phone, so I didn’t completely lose my shit. It means the world to me.” I took another corner and watched as a car tried to overtake me in my periphery. I wasn’t going to let another motherfucker get ahead of me. Now was my time to start making up ground; now that I was back to myself and had Aspen on the line.

He cleared his throat, and that was all I got. Kaspar was a stoic man, and he'd never let on that what I'd said affected him when I knew it did.

“It was one thing after another that snowballed into a shitstorm.” I wanted to laugh at her choice of words, but I refrained. I would listen to every syllable she spoke for as long as I could. “First, my layover in New York was delayed by a day because of weather. My phone was dead before we left, and my charger was in my suitcase, so I couldn't charge it up. Somehow my phone broke. I don't know how it happened, but it wouldn't turn on.” She let out a frustrated sigh so loud I could hear it. “When I got home almost three days later, my phone still wouldn't turn on. I spent a day with online customer service with them trying to fix it to no avail. Finally, they told me to take it into the store, which I did, only for them to say it was completely dead and I needed a new phone. You'd think it would be as simple as that, but no, it wasn't.”

Even though I hated hearing her trouble, I loved listening to her. I wasn't sure what it was about Aspen that made everything right in my world, but I would be eternally grateful she came into my life and for Kaspar giving me this.

She continued on with all the trouble she'd had and why I hadn't heard from her. “So, I have insurance on my phone, and they had to send me a new one. I'm sure you're wondering why then didn't I answer any of your calls or messages. Because it got lost. Can you believe that shit? Here I am waiting around without any way to contact you, and it gets lost in the ether. When it didn't come, I went back to the store, and they said I had to wait another forty-eight hours before they could reissue me a new phone. When I finally got the bastard, it wouldn't charge. It was seriously one thing after the other. But I finally have a new phone that works, and now I'm talking to you.”

“I thought you never wanted to talk to me again when you weren't responding to all my text messages and calls. I was prepared to fly to Spain once my final race was over and beg you to hear me out.”

“Hmm,” she hummed. “I kind of like the idea of you down on your knees begging me.”

And I liked it when she was down on her knees with my cock in her mouth. The sight of her pretty pink lips becoming swollen as she sucked me off, and it was even better when she took me down her throat. My cock thickened at the visual—like it did anytime I thought of Aspen.

“Why do I feel like you’re holding something back?” I asked as I took a corner and sped up coming out.

“Alejandro showed up at my apartment. I’m not sure how he knew I was in town, but he did.” I heard her take a deep breath. “He... he had a lot of questions about us. Questions he had no right to demand answers to. Our fighting got so loud my neighbor called the police, and they escorted him out of there.”

She was quiet for a few moments.

“Are you okay? Did he lay a hand on you?” I growled out. I would fly to Barcelona the second I got out of my car, find him, and beat the shit out of him if he hurt her.

“No, but it was scary for a moment before the police showed up. Since then, he’s stayed away. Enough about me, how are you? I’ve been so worried about how you’d do racing.” There was a pregnant pause. “Even though I know you can do it without me.”

“I hate to break it to you, Doc, but today proved otherwise. I’m fucked in the head.”

“You aren’t, Cal. You have it in your head that you need to hear my voice when you start to panic and when you knew you couldn’t and were triggered, you didn’t cope. But I know you can. I wish I wasn’t forced to leave, but I wouldn’t change anything.

I'm thankful for our time together and always will be."

Why did it sound like I'd never see her again? Didn't she hear me when I said I'd fly to Spain and track her down?

"I should have continued to treat you as my patient, and maybe you'd be able to cope better without me there."

Wanting to change the subject because I did not like the words coming out of her mouth, I said. "I'm sorry to hear you had such a shit time with your phone, but I'm glad that's the reason you weren't answering me."

When I talked to Aspen and drove, my body was on autopilot. It knew everything to do. When to decelerate, when I was about to take a corner and when to punch it as I came out of the corner. It wasn't easy, and yet it was. It made no sense when normally I needed every ounce of my concentration.

There was a long pause where I could hear Kaspar breathing down the line. He sounded like a creeper, but it was funny. I never would have thought that my life would come down to having to hear a woman's voice so I could continue on. Maybe it was a metaphor for my life because since she'd left, I'd barely lived.

"What have you been up to? What sights did you see? I've never been to Brazil."

"I've been a sad sack of shit. All I've done is lay around my hotel room and do nothing. Next season you can come with me, and we'll see all the amazing things Brazil and Sao Paulo have to offer."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“Maybe.” Her one-word answer was unsure.

I didn’t like it one bit. “Have you thought any more about what I asked you before everything went to shit?”

“It’s practically all I’ve thought about when I wasn’t dealing with my phone.”

“I hate to interrupt what you’ve got going on here, but you’ve got five laps left and you’re in third place. You’re coming up on Alfonso now, and that will put you in second place.”

And just like that, Aspen and I were quiet as Kaspar directed me through the last few laps. I was disappointed that I came in second when I was only seconds away from placing first, but at the same time, I was beyond happy I even finished the race. If it wasn’t for Kaspar, I would’ve been lucky to make it into the pit without wrecking or stopping out on the track.

“Congratulations, Cal. I’ll talk to you later,” Aspen said quietly.

“Did she hang up?” I asked, already knowing the answer. I hadn’t gotten to say all the things I wanted to say. How had I gone this long without telling Aspen I loved her? She needed to know how much she meant to me and not because I couldn’t race without her. Now I couldn’t live without her. I’d only been existing until I met her, but she made me feel alive for the first time in years, and I wanted to do the same for her.

“That she did, buddy, but maybe it’s late there.” He was only looking for an excuse.

Kaspar likely knew exactly what time it was in Spain.

“Thanks for looking out for me, man. If you ever need anything, and I mean anything, you let me know, and I’ll give it to you. You saved my ass today.”

“Will do, buddy.”

I wasn’t sure how I could convince Aspen to leave everything she’d worked so hard for behind so she could travel with me, but I was going to make a plan to see Aspen and have her by my side for the rest of my life.

14

Aspen

Monza, Italy

Kaspar waved me through a door and ushered me through another before he closed us into a room. “Here’s your headset. Do not say anything until I give you the code word.”

“And what’s the code word?” I kept myself from smiling. Kaspar had helped me get into Cal’s hotel room by romancing one of the maids, and now he was hiding me until the race started. I wanted to surprise Cal but wasn’t sure at first how I wanted to do it. Did I want to be waiting for him in his hotel room when he finally got done for the day, here at the race, or at his place in Malibu? The race won out. I didn’t want to risk my phone having bad reception or anything else of that nature if he needed me today. Either way, I was sure he was going to be surprised when he saw me standing in the pit when the race was over.

“Liebling,” he answered with his German accent. Most of the time, it was easy to

forget Kaspar was German; he spoke English so well and with very little accent but not when he said that word.

I wondered why he chose that word to use. “What’s it mean?”

“Honey, darling,” he shrugged his broad shoulders. “I must go before I am missed.”

“Thanks for doing this, Kaspar.” I wrapped my arms around his middle and gave him a quick hug. I was overcome with happiness and how much he cared about Cal.

“Anything for you, Miss Aspen.” He patted my back before quickly pulling away and slipping out the door.

I knew it was only a matter of minutes before the race began, so I turned on the TV that was in the room and sank back into the cushions of the couch.

How Kaspar got me a suite without anyone knowing it was for me, I’d probably never know, but I couldn’t imagine being stuck inside a room and not knowing what was going on.

I started up at the black screen, waiting for it to flicker on. It would only come on once the cars were on the grid. When it did, I jumped up from my seat and moved closer to the screen so I could find where Cal was in the lineup. His car was easy to spot. It was mostly green with some white and the number eleven on it. My heart soared at seeing it. It had only been a month since I’d last saw his handsome face, but it felt like an eternity. The next two hours couldn’t pass by fast enough. When I last saw Cal, he’d been just as devastated by my having to leave as I was. I hadn’t been able to get his defeated look out of my head the entire time we’d been apart, and after hearing his voice on the phone during his last race, I knew what I had to do.

We’d talked a few times over the last two weeks, but something felt off. Maybe it

was me and the plans I made without him knowing, or it could have been Cal realized he didn't need me any longer. I could be conferenced in at any location and not travel with him. I wasn't sure, but I hoped it wasn't the latter because I had turned my life upside down since the last race I'd been to for the man I now knew I couldn't live without.

The countdown began, making my pulse skyrocket. The beginning always had my nerves on edge with the cars moving so close to each other and looking as if they were about to careen into the one next to it. Formula One racing was a dangerous business, and I knew if I spent the rest of my life by Cal's side, I'd always be scared about the possibility he could be seriously hurt or killed.

For the next hour and a half, I stood with my eyes plastered to the television screen in front of me, watching only Cal's car. I listened in on the headset, and then I heard it. He mumbled something unintelligible, and his breathing sped up. I searched the screen for what could have possibly set him off but found nothing.

"Liebling," Kaspar said, cueing me to speak.

"You're safe," I softly said into the mic.

Cal's breath ratcheted up a notch before I heard it slow down into nothingness. Only two words from me and he was fine. I wasn't sure if I should say more or not since I wanted it to be a surprise I was there, so I stayed quiet on my end and continued to listen carefully in case he needed me again.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

Kaspar did his job, talking to Cal about what was happening with the car, his laps, and what place he was in. He was currently in second place and gearing up to take first place when the first-place car flew off the track and slammed into the guardrail. It put Cal in first, but I wasn't sure where it put him mentally.

"Fucking hell, that guy. What was he thinking? Dumbass" was all he said. Not once after the wreck of his opponent did he seem to have a hard time. I was elated for him to not need me more, and at the same time, wondered if it would mean he was done with me. I hated being an insecure woman, but we'd felt so off these last two weeks, I wasn't sure what to think anymore. I vowed right then I would tell him everything once I saw him. I couldn't hide what I'd been planning any longer.

"You've got it, Crew. Only two more laps to go, and you're this season's champion." I could hear how proud Kaspar's was in his elated voice.

I stumbled back to the couch and sat as I watched the rest of the race unfold, with Cal being the first to cross the finish line as the checkered flag waved. Everyone on the headset cheered and congratulated Cal on his win. Unable to wait any longer, I ran out of the room and down to the pit, where the entire team was patting each other on the back as they moved down to the podium. Time seemed to slow down and sped up all at once as everyone waited for the winners to move up onto the podium.

The moment Cal stood in the first-place spot, I started to push my way through the crowd. The need to be close to him overtook me. He was the moon to my tide. The wind under my wings and nothing could hold me back. I didn't care that almost everyone was bigger than me, jostling me around and nearly pitching me to the ground. I was a woman on a mission, and the closer I got to Cal, my body trembled in

anticipation.

Everyone was screaming and cheering as the announcer called out the third and second place winners, and when he announced Callum Crew as the winner of Formula One's racing in two thousand and twenty-one, the crowd went wild. For a one moment, I was scared of what might happen to me, but as Cal popped the cork on his giant bottle of champagne and sprayed it into the crowd, he spotted me. I wasn't sure about him, but my world stood still as our eyes locked from fifty feet away.

Cal handed the bottle to the second-place winner without breaking eye contact with me before he jumped down from the podium and strode toward me. People were trying to catch his attention, but he only had eyes for me as they touched, groped, and screamed that they loved him. I wanted to move to him, but I was stuck in place. My body would not respond no matter how much I begged it to move.

I didn't have to wait long, though. One second he was up above the crowd, and the next Cal took me in his arms and crashed his lips to mine.

If I thought the crowd was loud before, it was nothing like the uproar they emitted at seeing their winner kissing a woman. Our bodies were jostled to the side by one rambunctious fan, causing our mouths to break apart, but our bodies were stuck to each other like conjoined twins.

"I can't believe you're here," he yelled over the noise. "Were you here earlier when you—"

"Yes," I yelled, interrupting him. "I wanted to surprise you. Kaspar helped."

His arms crushed me tighter to his long, lean body as he spoke into my ear. "This is one hell of a surprise, Doc. It's better than winning the season."

“Really?” I asked, pulling back to look up at him with a smile that stretched from ear to ear at hearing his words.

He pulled me back into him as if he couldn’t stand the thought of even an inch separating us. “Best surprise of my life. Except maybe meeting you.”

My fingers of their own volition tangled in his hair. “You’re one smooth talker, Mr. Crew,” I purred in his ear.

“What do you say we get out of here?” he asked but was already pulling me away from the large crowd before I could answer.

“What about celebrating your big win?”

“I have a different kind of celebration in mind. One where I don’t want any witnesses.” His hand tightened around mine as we moved through the crowd that parted for him as if he was a god. And he was to them—and me as well. Cal had overcome unsurpassable odds earlier this season to come out on top as the champion.

His crew clapped him on the back as we passed by, but when he spotted Kaspar, Cal stopped in front of him, pulling me to his side. “Fuck man, you’re going to have me in your debt for the rest of my life.”

I swore I saw Kaspar’s stubbly cheeks pink up at Cal’s words. He pulled Cal into a manly hug and clapped him hard on the back before he said something only for them to hear. When they pulled apart, Kaspar tipped his head to me as I was whisked away down the corridor to where a car was waiting for Cal.

For a brief moment, I wondered how long the driver sat waiting for Cal. That was until Cal pulled me into the back of the waiting car and onto his lap. My arms circled his broad shoulders. It wasn’t until that moment, as I took in his tired face, that tears

welled in my eyes, and I realized how much I'd missed him over the last month.

Cal had some stubble on his face as if he couldn't be bothered to shave after he woke up this morning. His eyes were bloodshot, and his cheeks were sunken in only a slight bit, but I could tell. He'd lost weight during our time apart.

His eyes were taking in my appearance at the same time. Every few seconds, they landed on my mouth before he moved on. "Damn woman, you're a sight for sore eyes. You're so goddamn beautiful."

My fingers ran through the growth on his face. "You look good too, but also tired."

He shifted until I was straddling his lap, and his arms were a steel band around my back. "I haven't been able to sleep without you beside me. It didn't feel right." I felt the same way. "Tell me I've got you for more than tonight."

"For as long as you want me." I wasn't sure I was ready to tell him what I'd set into motion now that the time had come.

Leaning forward, he rested his forehead to mine. Our gazes locked on the other. "I was going to fly to you." His hand snaked up between the fabric of my shirt and my bare back. "Find out where you lived and not leave until you agreed to be mine." Those fingers started to slowly draw circles on my back. "I should have said something before you left, but I was in shock that Colton was sending you away, and I felt so damn guilty, I could barely utter a word. And then the whole fiasco with your phone." He shrugged. "Something felt off. I didn't want to say anything over the phone, so I held my tongue waiting until I could see you again."

"Here am I," I whispered against his touch. "I'm not going anywhere. In fact, I'm not sure how you'll feel about this, but..." I rolled my lips, unsure how much I should tell him. "I packed up all my things in Barcelona and gave my notice."

“Your notice, as in your job?”

“Yeah, they weren’t too surprised. I don’t think they thought I was ever coming back after the money Colton offered to pay me for the season.” I felt bad for taking his money when I didn’t abide by the rules they’d set out and offered to return the entire amount. I was shocked when they wouldn’t accept the money back.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

“So,” he drew the word out, “you don’t have a job anymore?”

“Not at the moment, since your season just ended.” I watched as he took in my words. His hands grasped me harder, and his eyes widened.

“Are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“I’m here if you want me, even though I know you can do this without me.” I ran my fingers through the waves of his brown hair that had grown out more since I last saw him.

“I don’t want to do anything without you, Aspen. I’m sorry I waited so long to tell you this, but I love you, Aspen Belle.” My breath stopped at his words while my heart started racing like a stampede of horses. “Say something.” He swallowed visibly as if he had a rock in his throat.

Leaning forward until our lips were only a breath apart, my hand moved down to the nape of his neck and held on. “I love you, too, Cal.” With each word I spoke, our lips brushed together, but on his name, he swooped in and gave me the most perfect kiss of my lifetime. It was soft and sweet one moment, and then hard and full of promise the next. When he licked along the seam of my lips, I opened to him, wanting to taste him again. To make sure this moment was real and not a dream with me back in the suite waiting for the race to start.

“Is this real?” I asked when we broke apart to breathe.

“More than real, baby. We need to get back to the hotel now before I take you in the

back of this car,” he groaned against my mouth.

For the rest of the ride back to the hotel, Cal kept me firmly on his lap as we kissed and whispered that we loved each other over and over again. I’d never heard sweeter words than those three words uttered by him in the back of the car after his championship win.

“I’m never going to let you go. Not now or ever,” he promised as he walked behind me over the threshold of the room with his hands on my hips. He hadn’t stopped touching me since we reunited at the track.

He guided me toward the bed, making us almost trip over the suitcase I’d left there earlier. Cal looked around the room for a second.

“Where’s the rest of your stuff? You had more than this when we traveled before.”

“That’s another thing I was going to tell you, but I wanted to make sure you still wanted me.”

He moved to stand in front of me and furrowed his eyebrows. In the next instant, he went down on one knee, holding my hand in his. “Aspen Belle, of course, I still want you. You’re the love of my life. The woman I can’t exist without, who I want to grow old with and to be by my side forever, will you please do me the great honor of becoming my wife?”

Overcome with joy, I fell into his arms, crying. “Are you sure about this?” I wanted to make sure because I was ready to take this leap with him, and I was only giving him this one chance to back out.

“I’ve never been more sure about anything in my life. Please grow old with me, have babies with me, and make me the happiest and luckiest man in the entire world.”

“Yes,” I cried out.

In one smooth move, he picked me up off the floor and stood before laying me out on the bed and removing my dress. “Fucking hell, you’re beautiful. I want to lick and kiss every inch of your body and then start all over again. First, I’ll start here.”

He pressed his nose into the fabric of my panties and made a dramatic show of taking a deep breath. “This right here is my home.” Hooking his fingers into the sides, he pulled them down my legs and threw them across the room.

His head disappeared between my legs, tongue licking up my center. “Heaven,” he muttered against my slick folds. My back arched up off the bed, wanting more, impatient for even a second without his mouth on me. Resting my foot on his shoulder, I opened up for him. Giving him all of me, and he took it. One hand gripped my hip, keeping me in place while the other spread my lips open as he dove in and assaulted my clit with his skilled tongue.

With each flick and swirl, my body climbed higher until I was shaking and begging him to fuck me.

“I want you to come on my tongue first, and then I promise to fuck you all night long.”

His words were music to my ears. I grabbed his hair and pulled him into me, desperate for his touch, his tongue.

When his lips clasped onto my bundle of nerves and sucked hard, I fell over the edge. Fireworks shot off into the night as fire whipped through my entire being. As I slowly came down, my body went lax as he lapped up every ounce of my release.

“Fuck, I can’t wait to eat you every day and night for breakfast and dessert.” He

moved onto his knees between my legs before he picked me up and sat me on top of him. Draping my arms around his neck, I lifted up and slowly sank down onto his thick cock. I loved how big he was. How he filled my core to almost painfully full. When I was fully seated, we both let out a groan.

“Fuck me with your sweet, tight pussy,” he ordered. His hands went to my hips. I started off slow, wanting to relish the moment of us finally being together again. Wanting the first time we made love as an engaged couple to be special.

The tips of my sensitive breasts rubbed against the hair on his chest, driving me higher and higher with each movement until I couldn’t take it anymore and started to move faster. With each downstroke, I circled my hips and ground my pelvis against his, causing the most delicious effect.

“I’m close,” I muttered against his mouth.

Sweeping his tongue into my mouth, he slid one hand up to pinch my nipple, sending me into hyperdrive. I lost all coherent thought after that moment. I was lost in a space of blacks, blues, and purples as I moaned into his mouth.

When I came back into myself, Cal pulled me down with one final thrust as he released inside of me. Holding him tight, I peppered kisses all over his face until he opened his blue orbs and smiled at me.

Page 42

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:15 pm

Slowly he slid his softening cock out of me before placing me down on the bed. He then went into the bathroom and brought back a warm washcloth to help clean me up. After he threw the cloth to the side, he climbed into bed and pulled me into his arms. Our slick bodies melded as we tangled our limbs together. Never before had I felt as close to someone as I did at that moment. My forever.

“Where’s the rest of your stuff?” he asked, nuzzling into my neck.

“At your place in Malibu.”

Epilogue

Grüner See, Austria

1 Year Later

For the last hour, I’d been staring at my wife’s beautiful form while she slept. Some might have called it creepy, but it was impossible for me to take my eyes off her whenever she was in the same room as me, and our bed was no exception.

“I can feel your eyes on me,” she muttered. Her eyes were still closed, but she pressed herself more firmly against me, her supple breasts against my chest, further hardened my already semi-erect cock. When she skimmed one foot along the outside of my thigh, I couldn’t hold back any longer.

My mouth met hers as I settled over her lush body. Hands to her hips, I aligned us until my cock was at her entrance. “I couldn’t help but look at my gorgeous wife. To

know that you're mine from now until the end of time does something to me that I can't explain."

Her big brown eyes softened as she looked up at me with only love and adoration shining back at me. "You've had me all along; didn't you know? You didn't need a piece of paper to prove that I'm yours, caveman."

Aspen sat up and nipped at my bottom lip, her arms going around my shoulders to pull me down as I slowly slid inside of her.

Her eyes fluttered shut when I was fully seated inside her. One foot settled on my ass as if to keep me there. There was no way in hell I was going to be able to stay still for much longer.

"Doc, I've got to—"

"Shh, just a second longer. I want to relish this feeling." Slowly her eyes peeled open to reveal them glassy and happy. "I love you, Cal. Thank you for bringing us back here. This place will forever hold a special place in my heart."

"Mine too," I moaned as I drew back and then pushed back inside. "I love you, my beautiful bride."

"I have a feeling you're going to be peeing all over me to stake your claim when we're out in public," she giggled, but it quickly turned into a long, breathy moan as I continued to slide in and out of her at a lazy pace.

Dipping my head down, I laved one dusky pink nipple with my tongue before I moved onto the next. Aspen's hips started to move faster, but I wanted this to last. To slow her down, I took both her hands in mine and pinned them above her head. My thrusts were slow and even, with a swirl once I bottomed out.

Aspen bit down on her bottom lip in the sexiest way imaginable, turning what I thought was going to be a morning of making love to my wife into me flipping her over onto her hands and knees so I could pound into her from behind. Holding her hips, I rammed my cock deep inside of her until I felt her entire body start to shake. She was close, and I couldn't wait to feel her come all over my cock and milk me to completion.

Pulling her up until her back was to my front, I draped one arm around her chest while my other hand moved down her taut stomach until I reached her nub. I slid my fingers through our juices and moved back up. With two fingers, I circled in fast, desperate strokes to bring her over the edge.

"Oh God, Cal, fuck me harder," she gritted out, throwing her head back against my shoulder only a moment before her walls started to quake. Her nails dug into my arm that was around her as she arched into me, moaning and shaking as she milked every ounce of pleasure from me. When she finally came down, I laid her out on the bed and kissed my way up her body.

Rolling to my back, I pulled Aspen on top of me. Her head rested over my rapidly beating heart while her fingers traced objects on my shoulder.

"What a way to wake up." She shifted and got herself more comfortable on top of me. "I kind of wish I'd let you take advantage of me when we were here before."

"Why's that?"

"Because I don't think there's going to be a day where we can do that outside and not get frostbite." She turned her head and laughed into my chest and then kissed it.

"Maybe not this time unless it's in the hot tub, but next time we come, I'll make sure we have prime weather so I can find a secret spot to fuck you out in the wilderness."

“I’m going to hold you to that.” She tilted her head and smiled sleepily at me. I had kept her up most of the night with my dick in one of her holes, but I couldn’t help the animalistic side of me that wanted to claim her as mine. Maybe I’d let her get in a nap while I wrangled us up some sustenance.

“We can always come during the season. Maybe this is where I should retire.” I hummed as the idea took hold in my gut.

“I don’t see that happening anytime soon.” Her long fingers found my hair and started to comb through the strands.

“Why do you say that?” I asked with a yawn.

“I think you’d get bored quickly if you’re not on the move. I’m not sure I’d want to live here all the time, but I’ll happily come back here anytime you want.” She looked up at me with her chin on my chest. “Maybe a vacation home?”

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“Possibly. Let’s travel the rest of the world before we settle on one place.” Running my hand down her back, I brushed my fingers along the crack of her ass. “We also need to think about the best place to raise a child.”

Turning her head, Aspen looked out the window to the snow-covered hill and the crystal-clear water. “Green Lake is a pretty great place, but you’re right.” She moved back to placing her chin on my chest to gaze up at me. “I thought we were waiting until you retired to think about kids. Traveling around the world from March to December wouldn’t be easy with a baby in tow, nor would it be fair for a child to not have roots.”

“I know, Doc, but know this—in five years’ time, I plan to have my baby growing in you.” I couldn’t wait to see Aspen round with my child. Just the thought had my dick twitching.

“Do you think you’ll be ready to give up driving so soon? I feel like you’ll be an old geezer behind the wheel, still kicking everyone’s ass out there.”

“More than ready.”

Before, she probably would have been right. I would have raced until I died or until I no longer had anyone willing to hire me. But now racing wasn’t what I lived for. I still loved to race, but I also lived to explore new places with her in each country we visited, to wake up with her warm body next to mine each and every morning, and to sink my dick into her tight heat every night before we fell asleep wrapped in each other. She made me realize my weaknesses didn’t make me weak. They ended up making me and our relationship stronger. Aspen woke up a part of me I never knew

existed. She made me feel what true companionship was after years of thinking I could only be on my own. And when my mind didn't believe in me any longer, she never stopped believing in me or being my champion. Aspen was always there for me, even if it was from half a world away when we had to be apart. Even now, when I occasionally started to feel an attack, which were few and far between, she helped me and reminded me how to heal myself.

Aspen Belle was no longer just my therapist. She was my everything.