



Sending Nudes to My Boss

Author: Jenna Cook

Category: Erotic, Romance

Description: One wrong email. One right temptation. And a workplace about to catch fire.

Dot

Working for William Lewis, Wild Bronco's best criminal defense attorney, is a daily exercise in patience.

He's brilliant, bossy, and insufferably arrogant.

We bicker like it's a game. I test him. He tests me right back. But beneath the sarcasm, there's a foundation of respect. Sometimes I think there's even something more. Not that I'd ever act on it. Until I accidentally email him a set of boudoir self-portraits instead of the legal brief he asked for.

Now my boss has seen me in lace and leather...and he's looking at me like he wants to rip it all off.

William

Dot is the best assistant I've ever had—whip-smart, fearless, and maddeningly defiant.

She drives me to the edge every day... and I've never once minded the view.

For years, I've kept our relationship strictly professional. That ends the second I open that email. Now, every buttoned-up moment in the office feels like foreplay. Every glance is a promise. Every word is a dare. She's the one woman I should never touch.

I've defended criminals with fewer sins than the thoughts I've had about her. And I'm about to become the most guilty man in Wild Bronco.

Total Pages (Source): 28

Page 1

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

CHAPTER 1

DOT

Once upon a time, I was violently attracted to my boss.

How could I not be?

All you have to do to understand my attraction is take a look into those eyes. Those light blue eyes. Sometimes they're so pale, they're nearly white. Like the sky on a winter morning.

Contrast that with his golden skin and jet black hair, and it's no wonder I had a crush.

William is what you would call striking. The kind of good looks that make people turn on the sidewalk and stare. I know, because I witness this phenomenon frequently.

So yes. For a while, when I first started my job, I had a huge crush on my boss.

But don't worry. It was a temporary lapse in judgment.

Because I'm not attracted to jerks. Obviously. And as I came to find out, William Hunter Lewis is a massive, condescending jerk.

Unfortunately for me, my good-looking boss is also the best criminal defense lawyer in the state of Texas. And because I'm not exactly rolling in piles of money right now, calling him when I'm in trouble just makes sense.

“Aggravated assault, disorderly conduct, and disturbing the peace,” William announces my charges to me through the bars in the jail cell.

I don’t know if it’s protocol for him to come back here and chat with me through the bars, but with William, everyone always seems to be willing to bend the rules.

They see his sharp suits and even sharper eyes, witness his bold charisma...and they fall to their knees. Willing to give him whatever he wants.

Once upon a time, Dot, you were eager to fall to your knees for this man too.

Ugh.

“Oh,” my boss continues, raising an unimpressed eyebrow. “I forgot. Also public intoxication. Seriously?”

“I wasn’t drunk!” I say. “I had maybe a sip of beer before that horrible woman started getting in my face.”

His expression softens a little.

“Did they do a breathalyzer when they picked you up?” he asks.

I shake my head.

“Then the judge will dismiss that one,” he shrugs, as though this isn’t the biggest deal in the world.

To me, though, it is.

I’ve never been in trouble before. I wasn’t exactly a “good girl” growing up – that

honorable title was always reserved for my best friend and now sister-in-law, Katie – but I've never been in any real, legal trouble.

Being put into the back of a cop car an hour ago was surreal.

I stared at the back of the police officer's head for the whole drive, wondering if he thought I was a bad person. Wondering what kind of people had sat in my same seat before, terrified and contemplating their choices during the quiet, lonely drive.

Before I became William's assistant a couple of years ago, I didn't know much about the justice system. I figured hey, if you don't want to go to jail, then don't break any laws. Simple, right?

But it's not.

Sometimes good people go to jail. People who are completely innocent. And also people who are guilty of the charged crimes...but they had a damn good reason for doing what they did.

In my case, I'm guilty. But I had a good reason. I swear, I did.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

And Heather is the one who hit me. All I did was defend myself.

“They’ve got CC footage of the whole thing,” William continues. “I’m doing my best to get a hold of that video, because the prosecution will definitely have it. Until then, I need you to tell me everything that happened. Leave nothing out. I’m your lawyer right now, not your boss.”

I bite my lip. As though that kind of separation can really work. No matter what, after tonight my boss will have a new view of who I am. I’m not exactly thrilled to have to relay this embarrassing story to William, or to anyone else for that matter.

William looks down the hall in aggravation, then raises his voice.

“Someone better get down here and release Miss Baker right now,” he barks, his voice echoing off the cinder block walls and metal surfaces that line the jail. “Every minute I have to stand here and talk my client through these bars is another minute of unlawful detention on the record.”

I hate how much William’s “I’m a big bad lawyer, and you’ll do what I tell you to do!” voice turns me on.

As his assistant, I have the pleasure of experiencing it frequently. It never gets old. No matter how many times I hear him talk like that, it still sends spine-tingling waves of pure “this man could take me right here, right now” arousal through my body.

I try to shove the unwanted feelings away as a police officer hurries down the hallway, scowling at my boss.

“Relax,” he grumbles. “There’s no need to raise your voice.”

William says nothing and I watch as the officer wilts a little beneath his icy stare, standing one inch shorter as he comes forward and lets me out.

“Thank you so much,” I say to the officer, because I feel bad that William shouted at him like that.

“Paperwork,” William says at the same time, cutting me off to bark more orders to the officer. “I want a hard copy. None of that digital bullshit.”

The officer glares at him before disappearing into the tiny office. Moments later, I hear a printer come to life.

I’m shocked at the way William is acting. As his assistant, I’ve witnessed William in hardcore lawyer mode many times. But he’s never been this aggressive before. Especially to some random cop who is just doing his job.

“Holy crap,” I whisper. “Why are you being so rude?”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” William replies flatly. “Would you like me to kiss the ass of the department imprisoning you for crimes that you did not commit?”

“I only said I didn’t do the public intoxication,” I reply. “The aggravated assault thing, though -”

“Please do not confess to a crime while on law enforcement premises,” William says through gritted teeth, his eyes lifting to the ceiling.

“Oh. Right.”

Against my better judgment, I look directly at William.

This is a mistake. I know this.

Whenever I look directly at my boss, my brain goes all stupid and my body fills up with this kind of nervous, buzzy energy that makes me want to blurt out whatever is on my mind.

“Thank you for coming to my rescue,” I tell him. “It’s really nice of you.”

He looks at me and there’s an odd expression in those intense blue eyes. But as soon as I begin trying to decipher what it could mean, it disappears.

“This is my job,” he says simply, looking away.

Of course it is. While I thought he was doing a kind deed, he views this trip to the Wild Bronco County jail as a mere obligation.

“Well...you could have told me no,” I shrug. “It’s two in the morning. Normally your clients have to stay in jail overnight if they’re arrested at this time of day. Honestly, I don’t know how you’re getting me out in the middle of the night like this.”

“A lot of people owe me a lot of favors,” he replies.

I stare at the boulder-like muscle formations on his shoulders and upper arms. Before tonight, I’d only ever seen my boss in long sleeves. Always a formal button-down shirt. Sometimes blue to match his eyes, but usually white. Sometimes with a tie, sometimes without.

But right now? Right now, he’s wearing a plain gray t-shirt and dark jeans with sneakers. His hair is ruffled and he hasn’t shaved. It’s the most casual I’ve ever seen

him and it's not doing me any favors in the whole "Don't have a crush on your jerk boss" department.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

Even though I've never seen William naked, somehow I know that he would look hot with his clothes off. He looks too good with his clothes on for this not to be the case.

It's probably because he's alarmingly obsessive about his physique. Always counting his grams of protein and looking at the nutrition labels of things.

As his assistant, I manage his calendar and see all of the appointments on it, personal and professional. Every morning, Monday through Friday, he's with his personal trainer in the gym. Cardio, weights, cardio, weights. Leg day, arm day, core day.

I can't imagine living like that, but I can certainly admit that it produces results. He's as regimented with his body as he is with his work, and it shows.

So yeah. I don't have to see William naked to know that he would look good. Which is why I try not to look at him much at all if I can avoid it.

But..even if he wasn't a jerk. Even if I was interested in him, which of course I'm not...guys who look like William don't go for girls who look like me. I know this.

William doesn't have a wife or a girlfriend, but he does date. I see a woman's name on his calendar from time to time, social events like dinner and drinks.

A few times, she's come into the office to meet him for lunch. That's when I was confronted with the harsh truth: William Lewis prefers tall, tanned, slender blondes.

In other words, the opposite of me.

The goddess meeting him for lunch had the bounciest hair, the clearest skin, the whitest teeth, and was wearing the prettiest lavender dress I've ever seen. To add insult to injury, she was also nice. Friendly and warm... basically the polar opposite of William in personality.

I can't really blame my boss for being into her. I mean, I was pretty much in love with her by the time she introduced herself to me at the reception desk.

"Well, even if it is your job to do this, I appreciate it. And I owe you one," I tell him.

"What can I do for you? Wash your car? Pick up your dry cleaning?"

"You already pick up my dry cleaning."

"Well... there has to be something," I say helplessly. "Something I can do for you to say thanks."

"It's fine, Dot."

My name sounds strange on his tongue, coming out in a scratchy, deeper than usual tone. Perhaps he sounds different because I woke him up so late at night.

Or because he's incredibly annoyed with me right now.

Yeah, probably that.

"I want to make things even," I tell him. "It's important."

He shakes his head.

"Please," I say. "Surely there's something you need done? Some kind of favor?"

CHAPTER 2

WILLIAM

I'd take a favor from Dot Baker, but not the kind she probably has in mind.

I never should have hired her. She walked into my office for that interview two years ago, with her tantalizing curves and glossy brown curls, and I went temporarily insane. I had to have more of her, and the only way I knew how was to hire her.

I couldn't have asked her out. How inappropriate would that have been?

No, you cannot have this job you're interviewing for. But I'd love to take you out for dinner and drinks before bending your juicy ass over every surface in my apartment.

Inappropriate. Lawsuit-worthy. As a lawyer, I know better. But as a man, apparently I'm only as evolved as my most basic needs.

So I hired her. And I've been punished for this choice every single day since then.

She was my first hire when I started my practice. Now I've got her, a paralegal, and an intern. Still, she's my right-hand person. Present for nearly everything I do at the office and in the courthouse.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

I didn't expect her to be so good at her job, but damn, she is. A few months ago, she was out sick for a week with the flu and my whole damn world fell apart.

Not only because I don't know how to manage my calendar. But because, without getting a daily dose of seeing Dot, I become a real asshole. A bigger one than usual, anyway.

It turns out, she's good for me. Not just making me productive but making me happier, a better version of myself. A little bit closer to the man I wish I was.

So when she called me, I answered. I always answer my clients, no matter what time it is, and when I saw the number pop up on my screen, I recognized it as the local jail. Thinking it was one of my repeat clients getting into a late night mess again, I picked up the phone.

Imagine my surprise when it was Dot's sweet voice instead.

I was out of bed in a fucking instant. Didn't hesitate. By the time she was telling me what was going on, I was dressed and in my car.

My line of work means I'm well acquainted with that jail and the people who are in it. An innocent little thing like Dot doesn't belong anywhere near that place.

She sounded scared on the phone. I'd never heard Dot scared before. And I don't fucking like it.

I still don't know the full story, but Dot promised to give me a full rundown today

after we'd both had some sleep. I cleared my morning appointments for her, even though Dot insisted I didn't. It doesn't matter. She's my most important client right now, whether she likes it or not.

Maybe I can't be anything more to her than her boss. Maybe I can't be her man. But I'll still defend her as though she's my woman.

Because in my wildest fantasies, she is.

I know she'd like me to give her a hard time about getting arrested, like I normally would. That's our relationship. It's always been that way. She gives me a hard time, I give her one right back. Giving each other hell is all that we know. And her getting arrested for brawling in a bar is the kind of thing I probably should give her shit about.

But I won't. I can tell she's ashamed, and worried, too. The last thing I want to do is make that worse for her. This isn't something she can joke about right now. There's no humor in it, only pain.

When I dropped her off at the bar to retrieve her car and drive home, Dot made me promise to figure out some kind of favor she could do for me to make things "even."

But I have no idea what I could possibly need from Dot that she either doesn't already provide, or wouldn't be completely inappropriate to ask of her.

Maybe I'll think of some stupid chore. She could dust my bookshelves. It would take forever and would come with the added bonus of requiring Dot to climb up on a ladder, giving me the benefit of a spectacular view of her ass.

That's sexual harassment, William. What the hell is wrong with you?

When I come into the office this morning, Dot's already there. I frown, glancing at my watch.

"Is it daylight savings and I forgot?" I ask. "You're not supposed to be here yet."

Dot gets up from her desk in the reception area, hurriedly bringing me a cup of coffee and a bag from Dolly's Diner.

"Here," she says, taking my briefcase. Her fingers brush against mine when she grabs the handle and this does terrible things to my already weak self-discipline when it comes to her. "I wanted to get here early and give you this."

I frown, looking at the warm coffee cup in my hand as Dot takes my briefcase into my office. She zips it open, unpacking my laptop and then my notebook and pen, placing them on the desk precisely where I'd usually put them.

It's no surprise that Dot knows my morning routine well. We've worked closely together for two years now. But she's not one to bend over backwards, or treat me like a helpless child.

This kind of treatment is over the top. I don't like it.

"You're not my personal slave, Dot," I tell her, coming into my office and putting the breakfast on the desk. I turn to her, crossing my arms. "How long are you going to punish yourself?"

Her blue-green eyes look up at me. Damn, I love them. We both have blue eyes. But while my eyes are cold and grayish, hers are earthy and rich. Sometimes they're the color of the ocean at sunrise. Sometimes they're the shade of moss after a rainfall.

And they're so big. Big and innocent and sweet, in sharp contrast to her shrewd mind

and quick mouth.

“I have to punish myself,” Dot says. “Because for whatever reason, you’re not doing it.”

“Why the hell would I punish you?” I ask her.

“Please,” she sighs. “Like you don’t know? You’ve gotten on my case about everything from stapling the reports the wrong way to forgetting to fill up your car with gas before an out of town trial. But for some reason you’re not scolding me about getting into legal trouble.”

Page 5

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

“I’m representing you,” I tell her. “You’re my client. When have I ever scolded a client?”

“Just last week. You got onto that college kid for forgetting to tuck his shirt in when he went before the judge.”

“That was different.”

“How so?”

Dammit.

I hate when Dot makes a point I can’t refute. This happens more often that I care to admit. I went to one of the finest law schools in the country and still, Dot regularly runs circles around me in a debate.

This is the whole issue with Dot Baker. She’s the full package. When I first hired her, I thought it was a physical attraction only. If that were all it was, I think I could handle it. Could get past it and move on.

But it’s not just a physical attraction anymore. My attraction hasn’t faded with time, it’s only grown. The more I learn about her, the more I like her.

I love her mind. Sometimes I think I even love her. Being in love with her seems out of the question though. There are too many reasons why it’s a bad idea. One of them being that Dot has only ever looked at me like her boss. Nothing more.

I understand why. I'm a grumpy uptight guy compared to her free spirited ways. I'm also ten years older than her. It's not old enough to be her father, but old enough that she can look at me and immediately rule me out as a romantic prospect.

We're too different. If I told her how I felt, I know my affection and love wouldn't be returned. All it would do is make our working relationship unbearably awkward.

So I will never dare to cross that line.

I go around the desk, sitting in my chair and looking across the display of morning offerings at my off-limits assistant.

"What punishment would you prefer to receive from me, Dot?" I ask her. "I'll let you pick."

Her eyes widen and I quickly clear my throat and continue.

"Do you want to pay me for representation?" I ask her. "Would that make you feel better?"

She bites her lip, driving my imagination wild.

"Not really," she says. "I can't afford you."

Good. Because I wouldn't accept her money even if she had it.

"Then what? You want me to hand you a mop and make you clean the floor?"

"Sure," she says eagerly. "I'm good at cleaning. Is that what you want?"

"Absolutely not," I sigh. "I don't want anything. I'm representing you for free."

Consider it a perk of working for me. We're going to get these charges dropped, and then we're going to move on like it never happened. That is what I want. But I don't think your guilty conscience is going to allow for that."

"Maybe not," she says.

The longer this woman remains in my office, the closer to insanity I get. My knee bounces beneath the desk, nervous energy unable to be contained any longer. I'm worried that any minute now, I'm going to break down and spill out confessions that I shouldn't.

"Forget it," Dot sighs, turning to the door. "You don't have to tell me what you need me to do. I'll think of something myself."

"You do that," I reply dryly.

CHAPTER 3

DOT

"Ho-ly shit. I can't believe you got arrested! I always thought if one of us ended up in jail, it would be me."

Ever since I broke the news to Darren, he's been speaking with a mix of admiration and disapproval.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

It must be confusing for him, being my older brother and yet also sort of my friend. Ever since he married Katie, my lifelong best friend, he's been hanging out with the both of us more. He gives us our space, of course. But any time I go to their house for a girls night, Darren crashes the first fifteen minutes, catching up with me and stealing some of our food before disappearing upstairs.

"Are you going to tell Mom and Dad?" I ask him.

"You're a grown woman," Darren replies. "What are they going to do? Punish you?"

There's that word again. Punish. My brother and my best friend don't seem to notice the way my cheeks heat up at this word. I'm thinking about William again, and the way he offered to carry out whatever punishment I could think of.

My mind went to the gutter immediately. I thought of Christian Grey, of leather whips and handcuffs. Of my boss glaring at me with those icy blue eyes while he teased and tormented me.

Where the hell did all of that come from?

I haven't crushed on my boss like that since the early days of working for him. Before all of our verbal sparring, when I realized he's a jerk who would never be interested in me the way I was interested in him.

Since then I've gone on lots of first dates and the occasional second date. Trying to...I don't know? Make my body forget that it's attracted to William?

Sometimes I think this has worked. And then I make the mistake of looking directly at him again and poof. All progress is lost and I'm back to being hopelessly lovesick...or in this case, hopelessly horny.

Katie walks into the room holding a bag of tortilla chips and a bowl of homemade guacamole. She looks at my big brother – her new husband – and clears her throat.

Darren glances at her and rises from the table.

“That’s my cue to go,” he says, giving my best friend a kiss on the cheek.

I watch them with barely contained envy. I’m glad they’ve found one another, and I’m genuinely happy for them. But honestly, my brother and best friend falling in love has served as a frequent reminder of how I’m lacking that kind of thing in my own life.

“Go,” Katie says to Darren. “We need girl time! I’ll text you when the enchiladas are done and you can come down and fix yourself a plate. Then we need you to disappear again.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Darren says. “I get it, no boys allowed.”

Katie nods approvingly. My brother looks at me.

“If you need anything,” he says. “Let me know. I won’t mention the arrest situation to Mom and Dad, but you should know they’ll probably find out anyway. This is a small town.”

“I know,” I sigh. “I’m just...trying to figure out how to explain myself.”

He nods.

When Darren is gone, Katie looks at me.

“So,” she says. “Heather, again?”

“Heather, again,” I confirm.

“God, what is her deal?” Katie groans. “It’s like her sole purpose in life is to spread misery wherever she goes. I don’t know why.”

“Because she’s a miserable person,” I reply. “Miserable people go out of their way to spread more misery. And that’s exactly what she’s done. She gave my photography business a bunch of one-star reviews under different profiles.”

“How do you know it was her?”

“It was something she said at the bar,” I explain. “A phrase she said. ‘Your photography business is an utter failure.’ An utter failure. That’s the same phrase that the reviewers used over and over again. Utter failure. It’s been repeated way too many times for it to be a coincidence. So when Heather said ‘utter failure’ to me in the bar, that’s when I realized it was her. She’s been trying to sabotage me for months.”

“What a bitch!” Katie says.

“Yup.”

I load a chip with a healthy dose of guacamole and salsa, then shove it in my face. Tonight I’m eating my feelings, filling up on Tex-Mex and homemade margaritas.

“Katie?” I say when I swallow my oversized bite.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

“Yeah?”

“I have a confession. I think I have a crush on my boss.”

Her eyes widen and she claps her hands together.

“I knew it!” she says with glee. “I knew a man could only drive you that crazy if you cared about him. Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“I don’t think I understood my own feelings,” I reply honestly. “Maybe I’ve been in denial? Because I don’t want to have a crush on him. I don’t want to want him. But I do.”

“What’s so bad about William? He’s a successful guy. Good-looking too.”

“But he’s a jerk.”

“A jerk who got out of bed in the middle of the night to come to your aid?”

“Yeah...”

She has a point. If my boss is really such a jerk, why did he do that? And why hasn’t he been acting all smug and superior about it since he did it, the way I expected him to?

Today in the office, we went over every detail of the incident that led to my arrest. Starting with Heather approaching me in the bar and “accidentally” spilling her drink

on me. Then making fun of my curvy girl boudoir photography business. And then shoving me against the bar, so hard that the back of my arm scraped painfully against the wood.

That's when I lost my cool. I'll admit, I used way more force against Heather than was necessary. There's no way you could call what I did self-defense. More like finally letting out all of my pent-up anger I've held towards this bully since she used to tease me in 9th grade gym class.

Yes. Just like my friend Katie, Heather and I go all the way back to high school. We have a history, and it's not a good one.

Bullies never expect you to stand up to them. And when you do, they cry victim. That's exactly what Heather did. She spilled that drink, insulted me, then shoved me.

So I hit her.

Hard.

Is it my fault she was so confident that she didn't expect me to retaliate? Is it my fault she lost her balance, hit the floor, and then burst into a pathetic puddle of tears so that everyone around us stopped dancing and looked at the scene?

To every onlooker, it seemed like I just randomly attacked her. But that's not the truth.

The next thing I knew, I was being put into the back of a squad car while a crowd of Wild Bronco locals gawked.

Katie and I spend the rest of the night getting buzzed on margaritas and brainstorming ridiculous revenge plots against Heather that we'll never actually act upon. We

imagine replacing her shampoo with Nair and slashing her tires, all of the immature high school acts that we wish we'd had the guts to do back in the day.

By the end of the night we've decided we're too damn old for those games. We're strong, independent women. Confident women.

And we don't need revenge...because the best revenge of all is a life well lived.

I don't know if someone famous said that, or if we just saw it on a bumper sticker one time and decided it's our new motto. All I know is that it rings true.

"To self-confidence!" Katie lifts her glass for a toast. It's probably our tenth toast tonight. We keep inventing progressively more outlandish ones.

"To William's tight butt," I say, tapping my glass against hers.

"I would toast to that, too, but my husband is probably eavesdropping upstairs and he has some serious jealousy issues," Katie replies. "But I'm happy that you found a toast-worthy butt to admire."

"If only it was attached to a man I had a chance with. Or who liked me."

"How do you know that he wouldn't like you?" Katie asks me.

"Please. He's...him. Look at him! And I'm...me."

"Dot, you literally own a photography business that is meant to give plus-sized women confidence in their bodies. You sexually empower women for a living. Don't tell me you think you don't have a chance with this guy because of your weight."

Page 8

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

“I’ve met the woman that he’s gone out with a few times. I look nothing like her. Even though I like my body, I can’t force other people to. Everyone has their preferences, and I’m definitely not William’s.”

Katie nods understandingly.

“Speaking of sexual empowerment,” I continue. “I finished my self-portraits.”

As a boudoir photographer, it’s amazing I haven’t already taken any photos of myself until now. So last week, I got my camera out and went crazy. Multiple outfits, all sorts of poses. Experimenting with new lighting and props.

And I have to say, I love the way they turned out. Taking these photos gave me a new appreciation for my body and all that it can do.

Katie sits up on the couch excitedly.

“No way. Can I see?”

“Sure,” I reply. “Um...they’re pretty revealing. Some of them are full nudes. Boobs and butt and all. Are you sure?”

“You’re acting like we’ve never seen each other undressed before,” Katie says. “I’ve known you since you were six years old and liked to go streaking through the water sprinklers. You saw pretty much everything of mine when you went with me to try on wedding dresses. And when I have a baby you’re definitely going to be in the hospital room with me, holding my hand. So I think I can handle looking at some smutty

photos without clutching my pearls.”

“Alright then,” I say reluctantly.

I take my phone out, searching through my many photo albums.

“I can never remember how to share these things with people,” I mutter. “I usually do this on my computer, not my phone...”

I find the button and click the share button. At least, I think I clicked it. But then the screen flickers and the app shuts down.

What the hell?

Weird.

I blink at my home screen for a moment, then pull the app back up. I click share again. This time, it seems to go through. Whatever.

Katie looks at her phone, opening the photo album and scrolling through the images. They get progressively more revealing as she scrolls, until she’s finally to the nudes. They’re tasteful, I think, with most of my explicit body parts concealed by the poses or my hair.

“Oh my god. You. Look. So. Hot.”

“Thanks!” I say with a smile.

“How could William not be attracted to you? Seriously?” Katie asks me. “I think you should shoot your shot with him. The worst that could happen is he could say he’s not interested, right?”

“The worst that could happen is that I ruin our working relationship and make things so awkward that I have to find a new job,” I reply. “And I can’t afford to quit my job right now. Not when I’m so close to hitting my savings goal for my photography business.”

“Fair,” Katie sighs, closing her phone. “But after you quit? I think you should ask him out. Take charge and see what happens.”

“Maybe. I’ll think about it.”

Really, I have no intention of ever doing anything like that.

William’s not into me. That much is certain.

CHAPTER 4

WILLIAM

My phone buzzes with a notification from Dot.

I always know when a message is from her, because she’s the only contact in my phone who has their own special notification sound. That way, even if my phone is across the room from me, I always know when it’s her trying to get in touch with me.

This is, of course, only practical. She’s my assistant, always giving me important details about my work that might be time sensitive.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

What isn't practical is the way that my cock automatically comes to life every time I hear the stupid sound. Like I've trained my dick to respond to the chime of the whimsical bells, or something.

Why? Why is Dot the only woman in the world who does this to me? It could have been anyone else but it had to be her, my assistant, a woman ten years younger than me who is absolutely off limits.

I shouldn't have hired her. It's pure masochism to dangle temptation in front of my own nose like this, day in and day out. Knowing that I want her but can never have her. That, in so many ways, she's everything I want and need in a woman.

Sometimes, what I feel for Dot seems like it could be love. Could I be in love with my assistant? Over the last two years, my feelings towards her have evolved. From pure, needy lust to...something more complicated. Something that goes beyond mere sexual attraction.

I look at my phone screen.

Dot has shared a cloud drive link.

Not unusual. This is the way she shares case notes and other sensitive documents with me. But this looks like it's a photo album. And the title of the album catches my eye immediately.

“Unwrap Your Gift”

Unwrap my gift? What gift? Is this how Dot intends to “repay” me for representing her?

I open the photo album and understand right away why the title mentioned unwrapping a gift.

On my screen is a photo of Dot wearing a giant red satin bow.

And nothing else.

My mouth goes dry as I stare at the image on the screen. My cock was only semi-hard at the sound of Dot’s notification. But now it’s rock solid and straining against the zipper of my pants, demanding to be attended to.

If this is the way Dot repays favors, I’m going to need to do more favors for her from now on.

I unzip my pants, pulling them down and letting my stiff cock go free. This is wrong, and I should probably stop. Should delete this link and then reprimand Dot, possibly fire her, for the inappropriateness.

But I’m a weak man when it comes to her. And the paper-thin restraint that I’ve exercised for years with Dot has officially been shredded to pieces.

I wrap my fingers around the base of my cock and then stroke upwards as I look at the photo. It’s the first of a set of twenty. Dot didn’t have to send me a single image to “repay” me for representing her, but the fact that she sent me twenty? It’s too damn much. A single photo would have been enough to drive me insane for the rest of my fucking life.

The loops of the large satin bow cover her nipples...barely. All of that pretty pale

cleavage is fully exposed around the ribbon. The bottom of her tits are fully visible, the sides peeking out around the ribbon wrapped around them. And of course the tops of her tits are fully visible, the same cleavage that I've seen more than a few times whenever Dot would bend to pick something up and accidentally give me a glimpse down the front of her shirt.

Here it all is. Everything I've longed to see, willingly bared to me. Dot's long brown curls hang over one side of her face and spill over a shoulder. Her blue-green eyes look seductively at the camera.

This is the best gift I've ever received. The only problem is, I can't actually unwrap it. Or can I?

My thumb swipes to the next photo while my other hand continues to stroke my cock. Fuck.

The bow is off now, but she's wearing a tiny top and a matching thong now. Bent over on all fours, back arched, matching high heels on her cute little feet.

I swipe again. Dot kneeling in a red lace teddy, looking up at the camera.

Swipe again.

More Dot. More curves.

I swipe again and again. Faster.

I reach the last few photos and really lose my shit when I see Dot fully nude laying on a bed draped in satin sheets, red like the ribbons from the first photo. Her legs are crossed, concealing her pussy from view. Her hands act as a makeshift bra, cupping massive tits that spill out over her delicate fingers.

This is the picture I finish to.

I imagine my hands on those beautiful tits instead of hers. I imagine holding those thick thighs open and sucking her little clit until she's screaming my name. I imagine getting her on all fours, like that picture from before, this time with me behind her driving my cock into her slick pussy until I fill her with my seed.

When I'm done, the reality of what I've done hits me.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

Dot Baker sent me her nudes as a thank you gift. And then I masturbated to those nudes.

I have no idea what the hell I'm going to say to her at work tomorrow. But I know that things will never be the same between us again.

This changes everything.

CHAPTER 5

DOT

Tuesday morning comes and with it, a slight headache.

Probably too many margaritas. But I needed that girls night desperately. Chatting with my best friend made me feel better about this whole situation.

Sure, I'm in some trouble now. But William is the best defense lawyer in Texas for a reason. I've seen him get his clients out of much worse situations than mine. I'm sure this will be resolved soon. And as Katie pointed out, the whole town knows that Heather is a nasty person. Nobody will fault me if they hear about what happened.

In Katie's words: "Girl, you'll probably be sent flowers and thank you cards. You're not the only one who would like to give Heather a piece of your mind. You're just the first person to actually do it. You're a Wild Bronco hero."

I don't know about being a hero...but this definitely put things in perspective, and

helped me let go of the shame and guilt I've been dealing with since that night.

Except, of course, when it comes to William. I still feel embarrassed when I think about how I called him for help. The way he got me out of jail that night, and how I had to relay the whole embarrassing situation to him so that he can defend me.

Ugh!

But at least I only have to keep this job for a couple more months.

Then I can say goodbye to him, forgetting this whole legal mess as well as my crush on him.

No matter what Katie says, I definitely will not be asking William out after I quit working for him. I don't need any more embarrassment than I've already suffered from. It would be so awkward.

Nope. Things are much better if I hold our professional boundaries firm.

I walk into the office at my usual time today, meaning William is already here. Rhonda, our paralegal, is out of office today. And Zachary, the law student that William took under his wing, completed his internship last week and is back at SMU for the fall semester.

This means it's just me and William in the office for today.

The Law Office of William Lewis is a small but luxurious place located in downtown Wild Bronco, at the heart of everything. The courthouse is not far from here, making filing paperwork easy, and my favorite coffee shop Fiction & Foam isn't far either. Today I've bought a cinnamon roll latte for myself, as well as a black coffee for William.

I'm not quite in full butt-kissing mode anymore like yesterday. But I still want to show him my appreciation for defending me. Whether it's a big deal to him or not, it does mean something to me.

I put my things down on my desk in the reception area. Out here is where Rhonda and I sit. Beyond our desks there's a little lobby with leather sofas and bookshelves, plaques with William's awards and qualifications displayed beside them.

William could practice law anywhere in the world, with the reputation he's earned for himself. He could also charge much, much more than he does.

But for some reason, he stays in Wild Bronco, the same place he grew up.

I always thought people like William – talented, worldly, and “fancy” for lack of any better word – wanted to leave their little hometowns and never come back. William left Wild Bronco for a while, earning his education at fancy Ivy League schools on a full ride scholarship.

After graduation, he had his pick of opportunities at the best law firms. But instead, he returned here. Opened up his private practice. And he's been here ever since.

After depositing my coffee and bag on my desk, I walk to the back where William's enclosed office is. It's got fogged glass windows, so I'm always able to see where he is back there. But never quite what he's doing, or what the expression on his face is.

This is good, because it reduces any temptation I have to stare at him. Without that fogged glass, there's a good chance I wouldn't have survived my first week on the job. My crush on my boss was so debilitating and all-consuming back then.

I open William's door, and then freeze in the doorframe.

He looks terrible.

As terrible as a guy as hot as William can ever look, anyways. Even on his worst day, I think he's a ten. Today is no different. But I can't help but notice the pronounced shadows under his eyes. The stubble around his usually well-groomed, neatly-trimmed beard. And his hair. His jet black hair is ruffled and ungelled, sticking out in odd directions in the back like he just rolled out of bed.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

He's wearing his usual button down shirt without a tie, but it's not buttoned to the throat as it normally would be, leaving three inches of chest exposed at the top. His sleeves are rolled to the elbow and the shirt, overall, looks wrinkled. Like it was pulled from a laundry hamper this morning.

While I'm certainly not complaining about seeing all of this extra skin, I'm concerned immediately.

"Are you okay?" I gasp, setting his coffee down. His head is in his hands, fingers raked through his hair. He glances up at the coffee, then at me. Those icy blue eyes look wild. A little unhinged, a little panicked.

My first thought is that something terrible must have happened.

"I received your gift yesterday," he says. His voice is raw and hoarse.

"Oh," I say, remembering the Edible Arrangement that I had delivered to his home. "Right. Um...did you like it? Was something wrong with it?"

He looks at me like I've gone insane.

"Of course I fucking liked it," he says with emphasis. "How could I not?"

Wow.

I expected a polite thanks at most from my boss when I placed the order online yesterday. I also expected that my health-nut boss would probably discard half of it in

the trash immediately. You know, since all of that chocolate covered fruit contains more sugar than he allows himself to consume in a calendar year.

But still, it felt like sending him a thank you gift would be a nice gesture.

“Well...good. I’m just trying to say thank you,” I say awkwardly.

William rises from his desk, coming around and approaching me. I back away a few steps, but he doesn’t stop coming towards me until I’ve backed all the way into one of his shelves of leatherbound reference books. My butt hits the shelves and I gasp when William closes the remaining distance between us, pressing the front of his hips against my stomach.

He’s hard.

My boss is pressing his rock hard erection against me.

What the hell is happening?

His large, warm hands grip my hips, pressing us even closer together. My heart is beating one million beats per minute now. It’s like the stuff of my dirtiest dreams, the smuttiest things I’ve ever hoped for in my years of crushing on my boss, are happening.

A literal dream coming true.

“I told you,” he says quietly. “You don’t have to keep thanking me. But if you insist on giving me a gift like that, I’ll accept it every time. I’m too weak to resist the temptation.”

“That’s surprising,” I breathe. “You’re not normally one to indulge.”

“Indulge,” he repeats. “That’s the perfect fucking word, isn’t it? Oh, I indulged, alright.”

One of his hands glides up my side. He lifts his hand, letting the backs of his knuckles graze my breast before cupping my face in his palm.

I am so confused. I want to say something, to ask a question, but the way he’s touching me has caused my brain to basically shut down. I don’t think I could form a sentence right now if my life depended on it.

“I’ve always wanted you, Dot,” he says.

“You have?” I breathe.

His fingers are reaching for my shirt buttons now. I don’t take my eyes off his face as he pops them open. One. Two. Three. Four.

“Of course,” he says. “But as your boss, I can’t be the one to make the first move.”

Isn’t that exactly what’s happening, though?

Maybe he finds fruit bouquets erotic. Or...maybe he’s saying he doesn’t mind being the one to make the first move anymore. Maybe being my legal defense has caused him to see me in a new light. Learning about my long-standing feud with some mean girl from high school. And about my boudoir business.

That’s got to be it. He’s seen me in a new light!

Page 12

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

I'm not just his assistant anymore. He sees me as a whole woman. A woman with a rich life outside of these four walls.

"I've always wanted this too," I say. "I just never thought that you would be... that you would look at me in this way."

"Oh, I've looked at you, all right," he replies darkly. "And now I want to see it for myself, in real life."

I don't know what he means, but then his mouth is on my throat, and my brain shuts off again – this time for good.

For years, just looking directly at my boss was enough to make me forget my own name. Now I'm being touched by him and it's more than I can handle. I don't have the ability to think about how crazy or sudden this is. Maybe I should slow down and demand explanations for my many questions. But...all I can think about are the sensations he's causing to radiate through my body.

My nipples are hard, erect against the lace of the bra I picked out this morning. A bra that he is very much able to see right now, thanks to unbuttoning my blouse.

I'm standing here, pressed between my boss and the bookcase, shirt open, skirt hiked up as his hand wanders up my bare leg. His fingers trace my inner thigh upwards until they find my underwear, pushing it aside and then pressing two fingertips against my soaking wet clit.

"You're ready for me," he growls in my ear. "Aren't you?"

“Yes,” I breathe.

Yes. Yes I am. I’m soaked and my pussy is begging for more. His hands stroke my folds and draw rough circles around my clitoris but it’s not enough. I need him inside of me. I need to feel his cock stretching me.

“More,” I beg.

He backs up for a moment, looking at me with that same wild, unhinged expression in his pale blue eyes. Like he can’t quite believe I’m real.

“Please,” I whisper. “I need it now.”

He shakes his head in bewilderment but doesn’t make me ask again. Hiking my skirt up, he fists my underwear in his hands and pulls abruptly. I hear the fabric tear and then the cool air hit me between the thighs, my damp desire adding to the sensation. He tosses my ruined underwear on his desk behind him and I stare at it while he backs me into the shelves again, this time gripping my thighs and lifting me clear off the ground.

If I were in my right mind at all at the moment, I might insist he put me down. Don’t lift me! I’m too heavy! I might protest. But I don’t, I can’t, because I’m not in my right mind. I’m not able to translate thought to spoken word and even if I could, I don’t want him to stop.

He lifts me easily, like I’m no heavier in his arms than a stack of books or a bag of groceries. The way he slams me into the shelves makes the books rattle. One of them falls. We ignore it. No time. Who cares? We can clean up later. Or maybe we won’t. Maybe we’ll just do this all day long, locking the doors and lowering the blinds so nobody can see.

I don't see his cock but I feel it at my entrance when he unzips his pants. The head brushes against my clit for a moment and then it ventures lower, slipping inside of me.

"You feel so fucking good," William grunts. "I knew you'd feel this good, Dot. Ever since I first laid eyes on you. I knew if I ever got the chance to get you naked in my office..."

How long has he been thinking about sleeping with me? I wonder.

Could it be that I've been wrong all along? Every verbal spar, every exchange of sarcastic, biting words...was he turned on? Has he wanted me, all along?

I can't think straight. I'll sort it out later, because right now I just want him to fuck me again and again. I say please two or three or four more times, I think, and with every time I say the word, William gets a little rougher, a little wilder.

I wrap my arms around his neck, cradled between him and the bookshelf. He bites my nipples through the lace of my bra. I scream.

He sinks his cock into me, all the way, then stays like that and grinds against me, letting the pubic hair above his cock graze my sensitive clit again and again, up and down, side to side. I grind back against him, knowing that I am only seconds away from release.

When I come, I scream so loudly that William clamps a hand over my mouth. At the same time, he kisses my neck. I feel his hot tongue sweep over my collar bone. A hand gropes my breast roughly, the thumb flicking my nipple. My orgasm lasts forever, exhausting every inch of my body, my limbs going limp. If it weren't for William's immense strength, I'd fall to the floor right now.

Without pulling out of me, he brings me to his desk, throwing me down on top of the paperwork. His hands pull the cups of my bra down. He grabs my tits in his hands and begins pumping his hips harder than ever before. Hard, rough, needful, primal. I watch with hazy vision, gasping for air, still quivering from my climax.

His blue eyes aren't cold right now. No. They're onfire.

The legs of his desk scrape against the floor with every powerful thrust. His hips collide loudly with my inner thighs. I think he's close to finishing when he abruptly pulls out, coming round the desk and pumping his cock over my chest.

And then it happens.

My boss – the same boss ten years my senior who, until today, I was sure would never look at me in this way – comes all over my breasts.

CHAPTER 6

Page 13

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

WILLIAM

It's over too soon. It feels like it only took a few minutes, but when I look at the clock, I realize that nearly an hour has gone by.

Nearly an hour of the workday has already passed this morning, and I haven't gotten one bit of work accomplished.

This lack of productivity would normally bother me to no end. But how could it right now, when I've just been inside of my curvy assistant, her beautiful body bared for me to see?

I have fantasized about fucking her on this desk more times than I can count, usually while she's walking away from me in that sexy pencil skirt and has no idea that I'm staring at her.

But to be able to do it for real, to make this fantasy a reality...it's all that matters to me right now. It just might be the end of my highly controlled work ethic, because I don't know how I'll ever focus on anything again after what I just experienced.

This woman is mine now. Dot Baker belongs to me. I don't know if she realizes this yet, but she will in time. She gave herself to me today, and I have no intention of giving her back.

She'll never love another man. I will be her last, the one to enjoy her for the rest of her days. Her mind, her smiles, her body. All of Dot Baker, soon to be Dot Lewis once I give her my name.

Do I sound insane? If so, it's because she drove me there. She drove me there slowly, gradually, over these last two years. And then she drove me insane all at once, in a single night, by sending me those photos.

I don't need a thank you gift from Dot for representing her. It's something I'd do for her again and again. But I'll never regret the fact that she sent me those pictures in an attempt to even the score, because it's what started all of this.

Maybe it's the push we needed.

"Your body is beautiful," I breathe, stroking the outer curve of one of her breasts while I kiss her softly on the lips. After we recovered from our orgasms, I ran to the bathroom and fetched a wet towel for Dot. Then I watched my girl slowly clean my DNA from her round, juicy breasts...while I mentally planned out exactly where I'll do it next time.

Until we figure out a birth control situation, I'll paint every inch of her body with my come. Or maybe we won't figure out a birth control situation at all. Maybe we'll decide to hell with it, and I'll plant my seed deep inside of her every night until she's knocked up with my baby.

The thought of that is more than I think I can handle. My cock is already fully hard again. I don't think I've ever been ready for a second round so soon after a first.

This is what Dot does to me.

"Thanks," Dot says with a bashful smile.

"I mean it," I insist. "It's beautiful, Dot. It's even better than in the pictures."

"Pictures?" she frowns. "What do you mean?"

“The photos you sent,” I murmur, kissing her throat.

“What photos?” Dot asks, a bit of panic in her voice.

“The photos you sent to me as a gift last night,” I clarify, wondering if in my post-orgasmic bliss, I suddenly started speaking a different language that Dot’s unable to understand.

“I didn’t send you any pictures last night,” Dot says. “I don’t know what you...”

Her eyes widen.

“Wait. What...what pictures did you receive from me last night?”

“The nudes,” I say. “Of you. Your nudes.”

What part of this isn’t she understanding? Did she mean to send me some other file? Different photos of something else?

“Oh my god,” Dot breathes. “Oh no. Oh my god.”

She’s up from the desk, scrambling to find all of the clothes that she’s discarded and putting them on in record time. She sloppily pulls a bra strap over her shoulder, but her large breasts don’t quite make it into the cup, spilling over the edges of it.

She doesn’t bother to fix this before putting on her blouse, which means her tits are still fully out, nipples visible through the white top.

Even in this confusing moment of realization, I’m still turned on. Still want to go bite and suck those pink nipples through the fabric.

Page 14

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

Her hair is askew. Her makeup is smeared. She doesn't seem to be too worried about that right now, though, as she exits my office, going to her bag at her desk and retrieving her phone before coming back.

She scrolls through her phone.

"Oh no," she groans. "Oh no no no no. I was wondering why it didn't send properly the first time."

I'm putting my clothes on now too, horrified at what we both seem to be realizing at the same time: Dot didn't mean to send those photos to me.

Which means she was trying to send them to someone else.

Who were the photos intended for? I'll fucking kill him.

She looks at me.

"You thought I sent you my nude photos as a way to pay you back for representing me?" she asks in disbelief.

"I..."

Fuck.

I'm speechless.

I know how this must look. But...she sent me her nudes. With a message about them being a gift. Right after she said she was going to figure out a way to repay me for representing her.

Did I think it was a questionable gift?

Yes.

Did I think the wise thing to do would be to delete them and reprimand her for the inappropriateness the next day?

Also yes.

I should have known it was too easy. My deepest desire for Dot, fulfilled, handed to me on a silver platter. Like a starving man being offered a free steak, I didn't question why. I didn't think too hard about it. I just took.

And it turned out to be the worst misunderstanding of my life.

"Dot, I don't know where to begin," I tell her. "I...I'm sorry. But also -"

She shakes her head, adjusting her clothes while backing out of my office.

"William, I think I need to take the day off," she says shakily. "If that's okay."

"Of course it's okay," I frown, following her. "But we need to talk about this. It's not how it seems."

Except it's exactly how it seems, you fucking asshole. You took advantage of your assistant. This is quid pro quo 101 and you are an asshole. A stupid, horny, love-drunk asshole.

“Later,” Dot says. “I can’t talk right now. I...I need to process this.”

There’s nothing for me to do right now but give her space. So I just nod, stuffing my hands in my pockets because if I don’t, I’m afraid I’ll reach for her. This is already a sexual harassment lawsuit waiting to happen and I no longer trust my ability to restrain myself when it comes to her.

“Okay,” I say. “Okay. Go. Take the day. We’ll talk later.”

She nods. Then she leaves. When the front door closes, I slam my fists on my desk in frustration.

How could something that began so perfectly, end in this wreckage?

CHAPTER 7

DOT

Page 15

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

After over two years of working for this man, I know I should do better than quitting on the spot via an email. Even if he's been a pain in the butt to work for, he deserves a normal two weeks' notice.

But I can't do that. So I hit send on my resignation email, with the word effective immediately included.

I just can't imagine going into work again tomorrow after all of this. I feel so stupid. I can't believe I didn't put all of this together until after we already had sex. I should have been more careful when sharing those photos, and then they never would have ended up in William's hands to begin with.

He thought I was trading favors. He thought I was saying "Here you go. Have my body in exchange for legal representation."

Not that he had any real attraction to me. No romantic feelings towards me.

My crush never really ended, did it? I convinced myself I was past my feelings for my boss, but really I was just suppressing them. As soon as that man put his hands on me, my brain scrambled and I melted beneath him like butter.

I don't know what he must think of me now.

And honestly? I'm not sure I know what to think of him, either. If he really thought that me sending him nudes to repay the favor was okay...

I never thought of William as that kind of guy before, I guess. He's always been a

grump. A perfectionist with a tendency to be condescending and gruff. But he's never been a perv. He's always treated me with professionalism and respect.

But then, he thought I was the one coming onto him, didn't he? So maybe I'm being unfair to him.

I am so mixed up, I don't even know what to think. All I know is that I cannot work for him anymore. Not for one more day.

My savings will hold me over for a while, until I find a new nine to five job. But it kills me that this means I probably have to start over, using the savings to pay my bills that was meant to help me expand my studio and buy more equipment.

My phone dings and I look at it with a mixture of excitement and dread. Any minute now, I'm guessing I'll get a text or a call from William, some response to the email I just sent with trembling thumbs. But instead it's a text from my newest client, Amy.

"Looking forward to the shoot later! Question: Should I curl my hair or leave it straight?"

Oh, crap. In all of the chaos of today, I forgot I've got a client coming into the studio today. I shoot her a reply, telling her to do whatever she wants to her hair. I've got a dressing table at the studio and we can always change things up as we go.

Then I rise, wash the streaky makeup off my face, and throw my shoulders back.

Maybe I've messed up my job at William's law firm. But that job was never my dream, anyway. Photography is what makes my heart full. And I'm not going to let this horrible day ruin a photoshoot. Amy is counting on me.

"Thank you so much. I was so nervous when I came in but after a couple of minutes,

I was comfortable right away!”

“I’m so glad you had a good experience,” I beam at Amy. “It’s hard, taking your clothes off for a virtual stranger.”

“It’s hard taking my clothes off in front of anyone,” she shrugs. “Even my husband. He swears he loves me the way I am, but I still hide when I change my clothes.”

“But you’re giving him this gift?” I raise my brows. Amy booked the Anniversary Album shoot. Basically, a photoshoot in several outfits. I take the photos, make the prints, and assemble a sexy scrapbook for the client’s husband’s eyes only.

So far, there have been no complaints from the men in my clients’ lives. One said it was the best damn gift they’ve ever gotten.

Men who love their curvy women make my knees weak. I always feel a little bit of envy for my clients, even though I’m also happy for them. One day, maybe I’ll have a man in my life who adores me like that.

“This is a beautiful space, too,” Amy continues. “I love how you’ve got all the different rooms. It looks like a honeymoon suite.”

“That was the vibe we were going for,” I grin.

This studio is above my friend Katie’s plus-sized clothing boutique. Together, we make a good duo, sending each other business back and forth. They buy their outfits downstairs, then book a photoshoot upstairs. All of it caters to the needs of plus-sized women and their comfort levels.

My brother, Darren, owns the whole building. Right now, I don’t pay him any rent for the space. The perk of being related to the landlord. Otherwise I wouldn’t be able

to afford a place like this.

He gave me three months of free rent to help me get things off the ground and scale my business. Those three months are almost up, and I'm not ready. And now I don't even have a day job to keep me afloat.

"This space used to be an apartment," I explain. "So it has that at-home kind of vibe. Last week, one of my clients did a whole photoshoot in just the kitchen area. The theme was sexy baking. She made actual cookies in the oven and everything."

"Oooh, that's such a good idea," Amy says. "Luke loves cookies."

Page 16

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

“Next time,” I promise.

“Maybe for a Valentine’s Day shoot?” she wonders, looking around the studio.

I try not to get too excited, but I can’t help it. Amy just finished one shoot, and she’s already wanting to schedule another? That’s amazing. If I could just get a little bit more business, I could make a full-time thing out of this.

“Thank you again,” Amy says after getting dressed. We’re standing by the door, preparing to lock up and go. “I...really needed this.”

“I did too,” I say honestly. “Now, go home and give your husband a strip tease! He wants to see you, Amy. Give him a show!”

“Ha. I’ll do my best!”

I wave goodbye and watch her walk to her car. As she gets into her car, another pulls into the mostly empty parking lot. I recognize it immediately as William’s.

“Shit,” I mutter, ducking back inside the studio and closing the door. I watch him through the window. Of course, he knows exactly where to find me...a minute later, he’s knocking on the door. Or maybe pounding on the door would be a more apt description.

“Let me in, Dorothy,” he shouts.

My original plan was to pretend I wasn’t in here. But him using my dumb

government name sets me off.

“Don’t you dare call me Dorothy!” I snap, unable to help myself.

“Then let me in!” he growls, banging on the door with his fist again.

“Fine!”

I unlock the door and swing it open, glaring at him.

“What?”

“You’re not quitting.”

“Texas is an at-will employment state. I can quit whenever I want.”

“I know the law, thanks.”

I roll my eyes, retreating to the kitchen where there’s still a bit of coffee in the pot from earlier when Amy and I shared some. I pour myself a lukewarm cup, only to have something to do and some excuse to turn away from William.

Must. Not. Look. Directly. At. Him.

He’s too beautiful. And now I know exactly what’s been hiding underneath those professional clothes. I know the outline of his abs , the color of his nipples, and exactly how thick his male appendage is.

Things you shouldn’t know about your boss, in other words.

“How did you know where I’d be?” I ask him.

“You told me about your photography business when you explained what happened at the bar, remember? All I had to do was Google it and this studio location popped up,” he says. “By the way, did you know someone is leaving fake one-star reviews on your business page? There’s dozens.”

I groan, turning around but careful not to lift my eyes to his. I’m not sure what will happen if I allow myself to look into those pale blue eyes right now but I’m pretty sure it involves crying.

“Heather,” I mutter. “She’s been doing that for months.”

“Heather? As in the same woman who is pressing charges against you for the other night?”

“That’s the one.”

William paces, something he tends to do when he thinks. Then he pulls out his phone and hammers out a message to somebody before putting it back in his pocket.

I don’t know what that was all about. But when he turns back to me, I do it. I make the mistake of looking directly at him and oh, was it a mistake.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

My brain immediately replays the scene from his office earlier. His powerful hands, his hips thrusting against me, his tongue on my breasts...

I don't have to look in the mirror to know I'm turning red.

"I want to figure this out," he says. "I considered referring you to someone else for a job, but that felt wrong. Like I was punishing you for my own sin."

"What sin?"

"Crossing that professional boundary," he says.

"I think we both did that, not just you," I tell him.

"Yes. But I am your boss. Which makes it my responsibility," he says. "But I don't want you to quit, Dot. And I sure as hell don't want to give you over to someone else. You're too good at this and...I think I've fallen in love with you, too."

"What?"

"Who did you take those photos for?" he asks me, his eyes fierce. "Who is he? A boyfriend?"

"No," I say quickly. "I took them for myself. I don't have a boyfriend."

"But you said you didn't mean to send those photos to me," he replies. "They were meant for someone else. Who?"

William looks absolutely murderous right now. As though, if I gave him the name of a man right now, William would bolt out of the door in search for that man, ripping him apart for daring to be the object of my desire.

Could he really have such strong feelings? How long has he felt like this?

“The photos were supposed to be sent to my friend,” I say quickly. “Mystraight, femalefriend. She knew I was doing self-portraits and wanted to see how they turned out.”

William’s shoulders relax a little.

“So there’s no man?”

“Sadly, no,” I reply flatly. “There’s no man in my life. Hasn’t been one in quite a while. I’m not sure why you care, though. Since you’re always going on dates with that blonde.”

“What blonde?”

“You know. She came by the office a few times. I see her name on your calendar all of the time. I don’t know why you’re acting jealous that I might have sent my photos to a different man, when you’re clearly involved with someone else.”

William shakes his head, a small smile on his lips.

“Jessica is my sister,” he says.

I blink.

“Your sister? But she looks nothing like you!”

“Well, she’s not my biological sister. Or even my adoptive sister. We were...in the same foster home at the same time, for a while. She’s a few years older than me and when she turned eighteen and moved out, she stayed in touch with me. Just checked on how I was doing from time to time. She’s...the closest thing to any real family that I’ve got. I make a point to see her whenever she’s passing through Wild Bronco.”

“Oh,” I whisper, trying to absorb this information even though my brain has gone mushy with a mixture of embarrassment and need.

“Wereyoujealous?” William challenges me.

“No,” I say quickly.

“Did you know I’m an excellent lie detector, Dot?”

“So I’ve noticed,” I reply.

It’s true. One of William’s gifts as a lawyer is sniffing out dishonesty. Both in his own clients, and the other side. Rhonda, the paralegal, once accused him of having psychic abilities.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

William pulls a chair out from the dining room table and gestures to it with one of those large hands.

“Why don’t we both sit down, and tell each other the truth? Thewholetruth.”

CHAPTER 8

WILLIAM

“You first,” Dot says, crossing her arms.

I smile.

I should have known this wouldn’t be easy. Dot has always challenged me, from the first day we met.

It’s what I love about her.

“Fine,” I agree. “Do you remember the day that we met?”

Her eyes flash for a moment.

“A little,” she shrugs.

“We said we’re telling the truth, Dorothy.”

“Stop calling me that,” she scowls. “I told you I don’t like it.”

“I’ve always loved your full name,” I say.

There. Another confession. Another truth I can give her, however small. She bites her lip.

“I’m named after my paternal grandmother,” she says. “I...don’t like her very much. I don’t like my dad very much, either.”

“Why?”

“You know immigrant families...” she sighs. “It’s just a different culture, you know? I was born here, but my grandmother and father weren’t. They have another mentality about life. Work is everything to them and if you’re not doing exactly what they think you should be doing with your life, you’re a failure.”

“That’s hard,” I say.

“It is,” she agrees. “My brother, Darren, bore the brunt of their expectations. He’s the eldest boy in the family. So when he dropped out of pre-med, they flipped out on him. When they realized they weren’t going to break him down, they turned all of that attention on me.”

“Let me guess. Your dad is a doctor, and wanted his kids to be doctors too?”

“A surgeon, actually,” she says. “And yes. It had to be medicine. If not medicine, he probably would have accepted engineering or...law.”

She grimaces at me.

“You know. One of those stable, boring fields.”

“Extremelyboring,” I agree wryly.

“Well, my grandmother Dorothy is awful,” Dot continues. “She’s like a female version of my dad. But while my dad always focused his attention on Darren, she had her own expectations of me. Darren was supposed to grow up and be a surgeon. I was supposed to grow up and...marry a surgeon, I guess. Or an engineer.”

“Or a lawyer?” I ask her.

She laughs.

“Sure, yeah. Grandma Dorothy would probably accept a lawyer, too. But in her mind, how was I supposed to catch a man like that, at my weight? I needed to be thin and beautiful.”

“Youarebeautiful.”

Page 19

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

“To her, thin and beautiful are the same thing. Can’t be beautiful if you aren’t thin, too.”

“That’s bullshit,” I growl.

This earns me an appreciative, glowing expression from Dot. Damn, she’s beautiful. Beautiful and not-thin, at the same time. It’s how I like her, it’s how she’s always been. Why would I want some other version of Dot when she is perfect how she is?

“Well, now you know why I don’t like my real name. Or my grandma,” she laughs.

“Or your dad.”

“Dad never bothered me about my weight,” she shakes her head. “I’m not happy with him for other reasons. Long story short, he cheats on my mom.”

“Cheats? As in, he’s currently cheating?”

“He’s been having affairs for their whole marriage, basically,” she says. “And my mom knows about it and just...stays.”

“That’s horrible.”

“It is. It’s horrible. And complicated. I don’t like to talk about it much. I love my mom, and part of loving her and being in her life is accepting that I can’t control what she chooses to do. Even if her choices make her unhappy. But my dad?”

Dot frowns.

“It doesn’t bother me as much as it bothers my brother, Darren. But sometimes it drives me insane. Just, certain times. Like we’ll be at Christmas, and our dad will be sitting at the end of the table in a sweater my mom knitted for him twenty years ago, holding a glass of eggnog, cracking jokes and pretending he’s this awesome husband...and I want to just shout in his face that it’s all fake. It’s all pretend.”

“It’s hard to hold back feelings like that,” I say. “And it doesn’t feel natural to pretend things are normal. Especially for someone as direct as you are, Dot.”

Dot clears her throat.

“Sorry. Let’s talk about something else,” she says tightly. “This isn’t my favorite subject. You were asking about the day we met?”

“Yeah. Do you remember? Be honest.”

“I remember that day like a movie,” she admits. “It was the first time I saw your face. I wasn’t expecting you to be so damn good looking.”

This information sends a thrill through my body. It travels downward, straight to my cock, which stiffens at the news that Dot was also attracted to me as soon as we met.

“I remember what you were wearing, and I remember what you said to me because it was so...so sexy. I couldn’t tell if you were flirting with me or what, but it was a turn on.”

“What did I say?” I ask her.

I need to know this information like I need oxygen.

“You asked some normal interview questions. And then...you asked if I’m a good student,” she smiles. “And I said yes. And so I asked you if you’re a good teacher. And you said that you can be, but only if a student is motivated.”

She looks at me.

“Motivated,” she repeats. “It was like you were daring me to prove myself to you, or something. And it worked. I wanted to please you and impress you after that. I wanted that job so bad, and when I started, I was so damn motivated.”

“Not anymore?” I ask her.

“I always aim to do good work,” she says. “But that kind of motivation? I kind of tried to push it away. I was so obsessed with you. I was desperate for you to notice me on some kind of deeper level. I wanted you to want me, not just approve of my work. But then I realized this was a crazy fantasy, and that it wouldn’t happen in a million years.”

“Because you thought I had a girlfriend?” I ask her.

“No. Also because you weren’t attracted to me.”

Her eyes flutter downward.

“I was always attracted to you,” I say urgently. “What we did today in my office is something I’ve been fantasizing about for years.”

She shakes her head, so I tip her chin up to look at me.

“We said we’d tell the truth. Well...this is the truth. Dot, I’ve wanted to take you on my desk since I first saw you that day. I’ve held back until now because I didn’t think it was a good idea to cross that line. But then you sent me those photos and what little self control I had disappeared. And I don’t think it’s coming back. Not where you’re concerned. It’s selfish, but I want you. I don’t want to let you go. I love you.”

She blinks at me with a bewildered expression on her face.

“You love me?”

“I do.”

“How? This just began. You can’t love me,” she argues. “It’s too soon.”

“Too bad,” I reply simply. “Because I do love you. I don’t care if it makes sense, Dot. The things I want with you, I’ve wanted for two years. It seems soon to you because you’re just finding out. But I’ve dreamed of making you my wife ever since you stumbled into my office for that interview.”

She looks down.

“What?” I ask her.

“How do I know you won’t get bored of me?” she asks.

“Bored?”

“If there’s one thing I’ve learned from my parents’ marriage, it’s that men get bored. They want variety. They want new things.”

Anger boils inside of me, but not at Dot. I’m angry at her father, for giving her such a bad example of what she could expect from men.

“That’s not what men do,” I say. “That’s what cowards do. Dot, I haven’t gone on a single date since you came to work for me. I had opportunities but why would I want to go on some shallow date with a woman who doesn’t compare to the one my heart actually wants?”

She bites her lip.

“You’ve held my attention nonstop for two years, before I ever laid my hands on your body. Does that sound like I’m a man who would get ‘bored’ of you?”

She shakes her head slowly.

“I guess not,” she says softly.

“I’m going to prove it to you,” I say solidly. “Starting now. And I’ll prove it for the rest of my life, if that’s what you need me to do.”

I drop to my knees on the kitchen floor. Dot’s eyes widen as I hike her skirt up over her hips and dive between her legs. I’ve thought of doing exactly this for so long. Having her thighs pressed against my ears, her scent in my face, is everything.

Her underwear are still in my desk drawer at the office. I can see she never bothered to replace them after she came home. Maybe because, like me, she wanted a physical

reminder of what happened between us.

“William!” her hands rake through my hair, trying to pull me back. I won’t budge, though. I need her to know that I’ll never get tired of her body, of her mind, of everything about her.

My tongue presses into her folds, finding her little clit just like my fingers did before. She tastes sweet and salty and like I’m never going to be able to stop.

My cock is begging for a release but it’ll have to wait. This is about her. Showing her that even if I don’t “get off”, gettingheroff is enough for me. I need to give her pleasure just as much as I need my own. Need to watch her fall apart at my own doing, again and again.

I’ve already given her one orgasm. Now, with her thighs pressed against my ears, I give her another. Her hands go from pulling me away...to pushing me inward, closer. I suck and lick her harder, fingers digging into her hips as I pull her to the edge of the chair. She bucks her hips, screams my name.

I don’t care if anyone hears. In fact, part of me hopes someonedoeshear. From this day onward, Dot belongs to me. Soon enough, everyone in Wild Bronco will know that.

This woman is mine.

CHAPTER 9

DOT

I rise from the chair,kneeling in front of William like he did for me. He puts a hand on my shoulder, stopping me.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

“No way,” he says. “This was just for you, Dot. I feel bad about what happened in my office earlier.”

“Why?” I ask, surprised. “I don’t.”

“I don’t want you to ever feel like I’m taking advantage of you or using you,” he says firmly.

“I don’t think that,” I respond. “Maybe I felt that way for a minute, before we cleared up this misunderstanding. I thought you believed I was trading sex for your legal services, and that felt bad.”

“I’d never do that,” William swears. “It’s like I told you. I don’t need you to return the favor. When you sent those photos to me, I kind of...I kind of lost my mind a little bit, Dot. I’d never ask you to send me photos like that, but since you just sent them over without being asked, I thought maybe you were saying you saw more between us than just a professional relationship. And that’s all I’ve ever fucking wanted. I just couldn’t be the first to say that aloud. I’m your boss. It wouldn’t be right.”

“What about now?” I ask him. “I’m still your assistant.”

William nods.

“And you don’t want me to quit, right?”

“I don’t,” he admits. “You’re amazing at what you do, Dot. I’d never be able to

function at this level without you. I've got so much on my plate, I need all of the help I can get and you're my right hand person. You keep things running like a machine."

This unrestrained praise from William makes me feel like I'm glowing from the inside. William's never been the kind of boss to hand out compliments. Not where I'm concerned, anyways. Now maybe I realize why. It's because all of this time, he was attracted to me and struggling to maintain propriety in the office.

Guess that's out the window now. And so is his restraint. I've never heard him speak about my work in this kind of way. It feels good to know I've been valued and recognized all of this time.

I rise from the table, adjusting my clothes back into their proper position. William's eyes flicker to my collar and then my cleavage as I button up my shirt, hiding everything away again.

"You said you didn't want me to reciprocate," I remind him. "Are you changing your mind?"

He exhales roughly.

"No," he says. "I want you. So bad. But I think for a while, sex needs to be all about you, Dot. I need you to see that I care for you."

"I think I see that now."

"You're afraid I'll get bored," he says, reminding me of our discussion from before.

"Yeah. Maybe," I reply.

"I'm going to erase that fear from your mind. Permanently. I just have to figure

outhow.”

I shake my head.

“It’s not your fault that I’ve got some trust issues,” I say. “It’s just me. I’m damaged.”

William pulls me into him, holding me firmly against him and kissing me gently on the lips.

“Don’t ever call yourself that in front of me again,” he says. “You’re not damaged. We’ve all got our stories, Dot. This is yours. I’ve got one of my own.”

“I want to know about it.”

“Let’s just say I became a criminal defense lawyer because I’ve personally experienced what it’s like to need one. I got into some trouble during undergrad and went to jail.”

“What kind of trouble?” I ask.

“Fighting,” he says simply. “Guys who were asking for it, but the police don’t care who was doing what. They show up and make the arrests. I shouldn’t have been in the situation to begin with. It was a bad crowd. I think I was attracted to fighting because of how I grew up. But spending a week in jail was enough for me. I had a public defender who thankfully cared enough to go the extra mile and get me out of it. And that’s when I decided what I’d be doing for a living.”

“How did I not know this?” I ask with wonder. “William, you should definitely tell this story more. Think of all the clients who would relate to you.”

He nods.

“I’ve considered it. But for now, it’s just my story. I’m not sure if I’ll ever want anyone else to know. I spent a lot of time and a good amount of money getting that story wiped clean from my records. To voluntarily tell it, after all of that, feels wrong.”

Page 22

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

“Like you said,” I say. “Everyone has a story. This one is yours.”

“It is.”

I just have to absorb this information. My uptight, control freak, perfectionist boss was once a rough and tumble kid who went to jail for getting into a fight. And here I thought he was judging me for ending up in a jail cell after defending myself against a bully.

“I think that I really like you,” I tell him accidentally. That sentence was supposed to be an inside thought only, but William doesn’t seem to mind my confession at all.

“Good,” he says. Then he gives me another urgent, hot kiss before releasing me. I back up against the kitchen counter in a makeout-induced haze as I watch William get his car keys. He looks at me from the door.

“I’ve gotta go,” he says. “Lots of work to do.”

I shake my head. He’s always working. Maybe it’s the one flaw I’ll find in this man. With the important work he does, I can’t really be mad about it.

“I’ll see you tonight.”

“Wait, what?”

Tonight? Where? When?

He doesn't explain. Just waves goodbye and rushes out the door.

CHAPTER 10

WILLIAM

"Are you serious? She attacked me!"

Heather's outburst is so loud that several diners at nearby tables turn to look.

There's no such thing as discretion in a small town. Especially not in a place like Dolly's Diner, where every busybody retiree likes to congregate in the early evenings, taking advantage of Dolly's java happy hour deal.

I picked this place intentionally, knowing that Heather would gladly accept. She wouldn't mind an audience, another stage to tell her story.

Until I turn it around on her, of course.

"My client defended herself after you instigated a physical altercation," I say calmly. "And we have the footage to prove it."

Heather's eyes widen.

I just told a lie. Sometimes it's necessary in my line of work.

I don't actually have the footage from the bar. Not yet. But I know what it will show. I trust Dot's recollection of events, and by Heather's reaction, she remembers the events of that night well, too.

She clears her throat uncomfortably, straightening in the black-and-white checkered

vinyl booth and looking around.

“Shouldn’t you be talking to the prosecutor about this or something?” Heather asks.

“I don’t know why I have to be further traumatized by th -”

I laugh aloud when she says traumatized.

Bullies like Heather always like to weaponize therapy language. If anyone is traumatized, it’s Dot from Heather’s years of cruelty.

But still, Dot doesn’t play the victim. She stood up for herself the night she went to jail, and she’s always stood up for herself. Even to me, in some cases, in the years she worked as my assistant.

Now I’m standing up for her. From now on, I’ll be the one to defend her.

For life.

That’s what husbands do, right? And whether she knows it or not, the title of Dot’s Husband is already mine. It’s not official yet, but that’s just paperwork.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

Paperwork plus that annoying little detail about getting Dot to agree to marry me.

But one thing at a time.

“I’m speaking to you directly because I thought I would spare you the expense and embarrassment of a lawsuit.”

“Excuse me?” she narrows her eyes. “What are you saying?”

I pull the paperwork from my briefcase and slap the stack down in front of Heather. Her birdlike features seem to sharpen even more as she glances down. I see recognition in her eyes as she scans the dozens of screenshots.

One star review after one star review. Under fake names. On every platform possible.

I can’t believe a person could have such a bone to pick with Dot that they’d spend their precious time doing something like this. But after confirming it with my cybercrimes guy – just another person who owes me a favor – it’s the truth.

Heather’s IP address is behind every single one of these accounts.

“So Dot is a shitty photographer,” Heather rolls her eyes, trying to affect a dispassionate expression. “You’re going to sue me because she can’t run a successful business?”

“I’m going to sue you for fraud, defamation, harassment, and anything else the judge lets me throw at you,” I snap, dropping all pretenses. “I’m going to run you into the

ground using all of my resources, and believe me, I've got more time and passion for this than you do. You'll lose the lawsuit, but not before you drain your savings account defending yourself."

Her eyes widen. She doesn't look so tough now. Like every bully I've ever met, she folds quickly and easily.

She shoves the screenshots back at me. One of them flies off of the pile, fluttering and landing by my shoe.

"This is extortion."

"Is it?" I ask. "I don't think so."

"Of course it is. What kind of lawyer are you?" she snarls. "You're obviously extorting me. You want me to remove my reviews in exchange for -"

"Your reviews?" I raise a brow and Heather realizes what she's just said.

I straighten the rumpled stack of screenshots, picking up the one from the floor.

"I mean, those reviews. I didn't write them. I just mean, you want me to -"

Once again, I push the stack of papers in front of her, rising from the table. Then I lean down, quietly speaking my next words in her ear.

"You have twenty-four hours."

Fuck, I've always wanted to say that to an opponent.

I grin at Heather's wide-eyed expression before grabbing what's left of my croissant

and heading out the door.

There's one more thing on my to-do list tonight. And then I can finally see my girl again.

Dot's eyes widen when she sees the bouquet in my hand.

I'm standing outside the photography studio, where she said she'd still be when I called her earlier. Here I am, waiting for that big, warm glowing smile to break across her face. Any minute now.

But it doesn't. Instead, she's staring at the dozen red roses like she's just seen a ghost.

"What's wrong?" I frown. "Are you allergic?"

She shakes her head, slowly reaching for the roses and taking them from my hand.

"No, no," she murmurs. "It's really thoughtful of you. Thank you so much."

Immediately, I can sense that something's wrong.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

“What’s wrong? Did something happen after I left?”

“No,” Dot says. “It’s stupid. I’m sorry. I’m not trying to be ungrateful...”

“But?”

She looks at me with those earthy blue-green eyes with a pained expression.

“I told you, I’ve got baggage,” she says. “It’s not your fault. I can see your heart was in the right place and I appreciate that.”

“Dot, if you don’t tell me what’s going on, I’m going to use your real first name again.”

Her eyes narrow.

“Don’t you dare!”

“Then tell me what’s up. We said honesty, right? What’s the baggage?”

She waves me inside the studio. I follow her into the kitchen. The memory of eating her out at that kitchen table is probably permanently burned into my brain, but I’m too focused on getting to the bottom of this flower situation to be too distracted by the table and chairs in the corner.

I watch as she carefully retrieves an old water pitcher from one of the cabinets and fills it with water, gently inserting the rose stems into the pitcher. Then she exhales,

bringing them to the center of the kitchen table and setting them down.

“Okay,” she sighs. “Roses are what my dad would always bring my mother after a work trip. I always wondered why he did it. He never put much effort into birthdays, anniversaries, or Valentines Day. But whenever he got back from a work trip, it was always red roses and chocolates and all the usual cliché romantic gestures.”

Fuck. I think I know where this is going.

“I thought it was just their thing. His way of saying he missed her while he was traveling. Now I know.”

“Those work trips weren’t actually for work, were they?”

My girl shakes her head and I can see she’s fighting for her life trying to contain the emotions inside. I wish she wouldn’t. She has no reason to put up a wall when she’s with me. I’m with her, every step of the way.

“I guess he felt guilty or something. Or maybe just overcompensating so my mom wouldn’t be suspicious. Either way, once the truth about his infidelity came out, I realized every time I’d ever seen my dad come through the door with roses, it meant he’d just cheated on my mom. Every. Single. Time.”

She looks at me.

“You’re gonna think I’m crazy. But when I saw you with these roses just now, my first thought was ‘He cheated on you.’”

“I would never betray you, Dot.”

I go to the roses on the table, picking up the water pitcher and going towards the

trash.

“What are you doing!?” she gasps, yanking on my arm.

“Dumping the roses,” I growl. “Anything that makes you feel that way isn’t welcome in your presence. Don’t worry. I’ll replace them with something else.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Dot insists. “And please don’t throw those away! That’s so wasteful. We can donate them to a hospital or a retirement home, or something.”

Reluctantly, I abandon the kitchen trash can and return the cursed roses to the kitchen table. Then I sit down and pull Dot into my lap, wrapping my arms around her and inhaling the fresh scent of her hair the way I’ve wanted to do since I last left this building.

“I wanted to get you a gift,” I murmur in her ear.

“I know. I appreciate the intention, even if it didn’t turn out how you’d hoped. The fact that you thought of me is more than enough.”

But it isn’t.

“What’s your favorite flower, baby?” I whisper into her ear, pulling her hair back to expose her delicate neck. “It’s obviously not roses. Or do you dislike getting any kind of flowers from men? I can work with that. No more flowers. I can buy you one of those Edible Arrangements. Do you like fruit? If not, I’ll make you a bouquet out of chicken nuggets or...or...”

Dot is belly laughing now and I’m relieved that she’s feeling better. The last thing I ever want is to be the reason Dot is sad. I’ll always be the man to wipe her tears, but I don’t ever want to be the reason for them in the first place.

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

“A bouquet of chicken nuggets?” Dot asks through peals of laughter. “Who does that?”

“Me. If that’s what you wanted.”

“But how?”

“Step one: Acquire chicken nuggets and wooden skewers. Step two: Stab chicken nuggets with the skewers. Step three: Arrange chicken nugget skewers in a bouquet. Pretty simple, actually.”

“Wow. That’s...an actual plan. You’ve really thought this through.”

“I’m just creatively inspired whenever you’re around,” I reply.

And I’d move heaven and earth just to make you smile.

I kiss Dot deeply on the lips, tongue caressing hers. My cock grows hard, but I have no intention of changing my mind about only giving Dot pleasure for a while, not receiving pleasure. The first time we had sex, it happened the wrong way. I want to wait a while before we try that again. I want to show her that I’m not using her...and that hell will freeze over before I’m ever bored of her.

When we finish the kiss, Dot looks dazed.

“I like bluebonnets,” she says.

“Bluebonnets?”

“My favorite flower. The state flower of Texas. Easy to find them on the hills, just growing wild wherever they want, the spring.”

I nod. I’ve lived in Texas all my life, so I’m well aware of bluebonnets...but it’s not a flower people give as a gift. I don’t think I’ve ever seen them in a flower shop.

“But I don’t want flowers from you,” Dot clarifies. “I’m not really a ‘receiving flowers’ kind of woman, to be honest. There’s just...too much history there. I just wanted you to know my favorite. So that you have one more bit of information about me.”

“Thank you for sharing that. I want all of the information there is to know about you,” I tell her. “I’ll spend the rest of my days learning about you, Dot.”

“You really mean that, don’t you?” she asks with bewilderment.

“I do. And I intend to show you. I just need you to give me time. Deal?”

She nods.

“Deal.”

EPILOGUE

ONE WEEK LATER

“I love you.”

It’s only been a week since I sent those pictures to my boss, and I never imagined

being able to say these three little words to him so soon.

I was set on taking things slow. But William doesn't seem to understand the meaning of slow when it comes to us. Within a couple of days, he was practically moving me into his house. Not that I'm complaining, because William lives in a beautiful ranch house just outside of Wild Bronco, far out enough that the lights of the city don't conceal the twinkling stars. At night, we've been sitting on his porch. My uptight, formal boss is all relaxed in the evenings with me, and I'm still getting used to seeing him in a pair of worn out jeans and cowboy boots.

I had no idea that he owned a place like this.

Just like he had no idea about my photography business and my big dreams.

Now that he does, though, he keeps trying to get me to let him help me with my business. After I let slip that I was trying to buy a specific kind of camera and lighting setup, the equipment arrived at my studio the very next day. He must have placed the order after I fell asleep in his arms and sprang for express shipping.

When I said my business's website was a huge mess, he got the person who did his law firm's website on the phone and now I've got a meeting with them next week to talk about it.

The biggest thing he's done, though, is get Heather Mayes to take down all her fake negative reviews. I didn't realize how badly those one star reviews were hurting my business until they were deleted. Suddenly, I was receiving so many emails and phone calls that I didn't know how to keep up. At this rate, I'll need to raise my prices. And I'll still be booked until the middle of next year!

I'm scared, though. What if this is all a temporary phase? What if William stops loving me? Then I'll be without a lover, without a job, and without all of this added

support for my small business.

Page 26

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

I've never had an easy time trusting anyone, especially romantic partners. I've seen what my parents have been through. I've watched as my mother endured disappointment after disappointment, broken promises stacked on top of one another.

The thing about having a father like mine, is that it shatters your illusion that there's such a thing as perfect. For most of my childhood, I believed my parents had the perfect marriage. And then that belief was struck down, wiped away in an instant.

Things change.

People lie.

William squeezes me tightly.

"What did you say?" he asks with a grin.

"You didn't hear me?"

"I heard you. I just want to hear it again."

"I love you."

We're in the porch swing right now, still only half clothed after a session of the most mind-blowing sex I've ever had. There's nobody around for miles who could see us, and I'm in no hurry to watch William put his shirt back on.

"I love you too," William whispers into my hair. It's not the first time he's told me he

loves me, but now that I've said it back, it feels different. "I want to marry you."

I jolt, looking back at him.

"I'm not proposing," he says hurriedly. "I'm just telling you what I want."

"I'm not ready."

Although, as I say these words, I'm not totally sure they're the truth. Am I ready for that commitment? What would it feel like, if William made that vow to me? Would it assuage some of my fears? Or would it magnify them?

The bigger the promise, the harder the fall.

Marrying William would be handing him my heart and trusting him not to drop it. Would be listening to him vow to love me all his life and...believing him.

I'm not ready for that yet.

But to his credit, William's not asking. He's just letting me know. Hewantsto marry me.

"I'll wait until you're ready," he promises me, squeezing my hand. "I know you need time. I'm going to be here regardless. You're waiting for the day that you wake up and I tell you that I don't want you anymore, but that day will never come. Never."

I close my eyes and rest my head back against his chest. The breeze sweeps over us, gently ruffling the grass in the darkened pasture.

"It's enough just to know you love me," William says. "I don't need a ring or a ceremony. I just need you."

I close my eyes and doze off. I only wake up when William's phone buzzes from the pants he discarded on the porch beside the swing.

"Okay if I get this?" he asks.

I nod. I'm used to William taking work calls in the evening. I don't expect that to change just because we're dating now, although I appreciate that he always asks me if it's alright.

William eases me off his lap and picks up his pants, grabbing the phone. He frowns when he sees the screen.

"What is it?" I ask.

"Your friend Katie," he says, tapping the screen. "Hello?"

William hands his phone to me.

"She needs to talk to you."

Page 27

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:38 am

I'm fully alarmed now, getting up from the porch swing and trying to right my underwear and bra. This must be an emergency. Otherwise, Katie would just text me and wait for me to respond when I had the time. For her to call William, it must mean she'd already tried my phone.

"Hey," Katie says. "I know you had a night planned with William, but it would be great if you could head to your parents house. Like...soon."

"What?" I gasp. "What's up? Is someone hurt?"

"No. Well technically yes. Darren punched your dad."

Shit.

I've been waiting for this day. It's not even a surprise, really. My older brother has had a major problem with our father ever since we discovered his pattern of infidelity. My brother is ordinarily a gentle giant, but the exception is when it comes to the women in his life. He'd fight anyone for me, for Katie, and for our mother.

But I thought that once he found love with Katie, that his anger towards our father would subside.

I guess I was wrong.

"Is Dad okay?" I ask.

Behind me, I hear William's belt buckle and the sound of him donning his t-shirt

again, grabbing his keys and ready for whatever I need.

“He was bleeding and said he needed to go to the hospital. But it wasn’t an emergency. More like he needed a reason to get away from Darren. Honestly, if you don’t come quickly I think Darren and Sam are going to fight, too.”

“Who’s Sam?”

Katie hesitates.

“Who the hell is Sam?” I repeat.

“Your half brother,” she says timidly. “We just found out. He came by the house to talk and that’s when all hell broke loose.”

I don’t respond. I need to process what I’ve just heard. I can put the pieces together without Katie needing to explain anything further. Our dad is a cheater. It’s not impossible at all that he fathered other children outside of his marriage.

“I’ll be right there,” I say, hanging up the phone. I look at William apologetically. “I’m sorry. I think I need to go.”

“So I heard. I’ll drive you. Do you know if the police were called? Darren shouldn’t speak to anyone without me present.”

I hadn’t even considered this. Surely our idiot dad wouldn’t press charges against his own son. Then again, he’s not really loyal to family, right?

“Katie didn’t mention the police. I don’t really know what’s going on. Just that Dad’s choices are imploding our family. Again,” I add bitterly.

William takes my hand.

“It’ll be okay,” he says.

I don’t know why, but I want to believe him. And even if it’s not okay, even if this is finally the thing that breaks my already-splintered family...I know I’ll still have him.

That’s just enough to keep me strong.

EPILOGUE

ONE YEAR LATER

My future brothers-in-law stand behind me at the altar like armed guards.

I never had many friends, especially when I became so invested in my career. But joining the Baker family, I’ve learned, means gaining a whole lot of new friends.

Darren stands behind me as my best man, rings in his front pocket, patiently waiting for the moment he can be useful. Behind him is Sam, a man I’m currently defending against several charges. He’s not the toughest case I’ve ever worked, but he’s definitely in the top ten.

He also happens to be a great guy.

Page 28

Source Creation Date: June 24, 2025, 7:39 am

Maybe Dot's dad isn't in her life anymore – his loss, not hers – but she has no shortage of strong, loyal men who would do anything to protect her.

We all love her. But only I get to have the title of husband. And I can say without a doubt that I'd lay my life down for her.

The wedding procession feels like it takes hours, though it's relatively short. I watch Dot's friends come down the aisle, ending with her friend Katie in a blue dress. That means any second now, I'll see my bride.

The music changes. Everyone stands and turns. And then there she is.

Her white dress clings to every curve of her body, only widening out at her feet like a mermaid's tail. It's tight with a plunging neckline. It's a daring dress, and I'd expect nothing else from the woman who took those daring photos and sent them to me by accident.

I don't mind the dress at all. And the fact that every other man here gets to see her in it only bothers me slightly. Because even though they get to see all of this, I'm the one who is about to put a ring on her finger. I'm the one who will take her home tonight, and every night after that.

My eyes don't leave hers as she walks towards me. Once again, it feels like it takes fucking forever. The wait is agony. I reach for her as soon as she's at the altar.

“Who gives this woman to be married to this man?”

Dot's eyes widen. The minister wasn't supposed to say that part. We discussed it at rehearsal. Without missing a beat, Darren speaks up from behind me.

"I do," he rumbles.

Dot relaxes and I remind myself to say thanks to my brother-in-law later for thinking quickly.

The rest of the ceremony slips by. Dot and I opted for the traditional vows. Nothing fancy, nothing customized. I'm far too introverted to spill my heart in front of hundreds of people like this. I've confessed my feelings to Dot nearly daily since we first got together, and she said that was good enough for her.

"I do."

"I do."

The rings are on. I'm finally allowed to kiss my woman. My wife.

I take her into my arms and dip her in front of the cheering crowd. Maybe I kiss her for a beat too long, because soon the cheers turn into whoops and whistles. I put Dot back on her feet and she's grinning ear from ear, her cheeks pink, brown curls askew.

This is everything. All I've ever needed or wanted is right here, beaming from my arms. She's wearing my ring. She's bearing my name. And soon, my children, too.

"I love you, Mrs. Lewis," I growl in her ear. "And as soon as I get you alone, I'm going to..."

"Shhh. Later," she says breathlessly.

"Later," I promise.