







# Strictly Yours

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**Category:** Romance, Adult

**Description:** I had strict rules while watching my sister's cat in her luxurious NYC condo.

Give Munchies ALL of his medication no matter how vicious he gets.

Use coasters on ALL surfaces.

And definitely do not talk to my sister's grumpy boss.

I've never been good at following rules.

And once I have the chance to tell off Mr. Strickland for working my sister to the bone...

You better believe I take it.

Mr. Dragon-In-A-Suit has no idea what hits him.

I come in like a Tomahawk missile and leave him shaken.

In more ways than one.

But here's the thing.

He leaves me shaken too.

Those heated eyes... That possessive touch... That oh-so-delicious suit...

I can't stay away.

We're complete opposites—He's structure, I'm chaos. He sets rules, I break 'em.

He's twenty years older, off-limits, and completely wrong for me in every possible way.

So, why does his touch feel so right?

And why do I keep coming back for more?

She's all sunshine and chaos. He's twice her age, twice as grumpy,

## CHAPTER ONE

Amber

“Amber!Amber!!”

I turn around and look through the crowd of travelers, some looking excited, most looking cranky, until I see my sister’s frantic arm waving back and forth.

I grin as my older sister Willow pushes her way through the crowd, pulling her giant suitcase behind her.

“Oh my god!” I shout as I drop my bag and leap into her arms. I squeeze her body until she whimpers. I miss my sister so much. I can’t believe it’s been since Christmas, or about eight months, since I last saw her.

Her lawyer husband Greg comes up behind her with a forced smile on his face. He’s a little stuffy for my taste but he seems to be good for my sister.

“Hey, Greg,” I say as I release my sister and hug his stiff body. “It’s good to see you.”

“You shouldn’t leave your suitcase unattended in an international airport,” he says, frowning at my suitcase lying on the floor behind me.

“Oh, it’s fine,” Willow says as she quickly picks it up and pulls it over. “I was hoping we’d get to see you before we left.”

“Yeah, what a nice surprise,” Greg says with a swallow. “We should probably go through security though. You know how long the lineups can be.”

Willow and I both ignore him and turn to each other with big smiles on our faces. My sister is twenty-six, but you’d swear she was at least a decade older with all that she’s accomplished. My girl moved to New York City with zero contacts and in five years has become a COO of a huge tech company that I’m still not sure what they do even though she’s explained it to me numerous times, gotten married to a rich, blue-blooded lawyer from one of those families so wealthy they have an assortment of yachts and sailboats, and she bought a penthouse suite in a luxurious Upper West Side building.

It hasn’t come without a cost though. It’s mid-August and she’s as pale as if it’s the middle of January. I’ve heard horror stories about her boss. Apparently, he does nothing but work and expects all of his poor, suffering employees to adopt the same lifestyle. The prick.

“I’m so sorry about your job,” she says as she grabs my arms and tilts her head sympathetically. “I know how much you loved it.”

“Yeah,” I say with a sigh. Being a travel agent was a pretty sweet gig, but we’re like dinosaurs, and the Internet, with all of its fancy discount booking sites, is the asteroid. I got laid off last month. It still hurts.

“It’s an opportunity to try something else,” I say, forcing out a smile. “The next big thing for me is around the corner. I can feel it.”

“That’s the spirit,” Willow says. “Maybe you can treat the next two weeks like a jolt to your system. Have some new experiences. Learn about yourself.”

“Babe, we really got to get going,” Greg says, glancing at the security area.

Willow holds her breath and her tongue as she turns and gives him a warning look. Hopefully, this vacation will do them some good. I'm the one who booked it for them. Two weeks in Kauai, Hawaii. A beautiful villa on a secluded beach. If that can't unstress a couple then nothing can.

"I wasn't sure if we were going to cross paths," Willow says, turning back to me. "So, I don't have my extra key on me. I left it at my office, right on my desk. You can pick it up, the building is only two blocks from my condo. You have the address, right?"

"Yeah," I say as I open my purse and start rummaging through it, looking for that little paper. God, why do I keep so much stuff in here? I'm pulling out old receipts, gift cards with less than three dollars on them, a phone number (I don't recall whose), and dumping it all onto the ledge on the column as I frantically look for the address.

"You sure you can handle this?" Greg says, looking at me wearily. He thinks I'm a total airhead who can't do anything right. Just because I accidentally put salt instead of sugar in my Christmas cookies one time... I did think it was strange that the recipe asked for a whole cup of it, but the two glasses of wine I had made me go with the flow.

"I think she can handle watching a cat," Willow snaps.

"Munchies requires a lot of medication," he says defensively, "and Amber can be..."

We both put our hands on our hips and raise our eyebrows, giving him a practically identical patented Fletcher stare-down.

"...flighty," he says, swallowing hard. "In a good way."

Willow stares him down hard. "Why don't you go check the status of our flight?"

“It’s on time and that time is ticking away,” he says, checking his watch instead.

“I found it!” I say as I triumphantly pull out the addresses scribbled on the back of an overdue phone bill. “Homeandoffice.”

I zip up my purse and toss it over my shoulder. “See? I can do some things right.”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

Greg frowns as he points at the shelf on the column. “You forgot your passport.”

Shit.

I go bright red as I grab it and stuff it into my pocket.

“Go,” Willow warns him. “Now.”

Greg drops his head with a sigh and shuffles away.

“Have a great trip!” I call out to him. He doesn’t turn around.

Hopefully, some sun and Mai Tais will lighten him up a bit or my sister is in for a rough two weeks.

“I left all of the detailed instructions for Munchies on the kitchen counter,” she says, playing with my hair. “If you have any questions, you can call me day or night.”

“I’ll be fine. And so will Munchies.”

“Thanks for doing this,” she says, giving me one more hug. “Don’t forget to get the key at my office first.”

“Why didn’t you leave it with a neighbor?”

She snorts out a laugh. “This is New York, Amber. We don’t talk to our neighbors.”



I try to stop the frown from forming on my face. That sounds awful.

“I told the front desk you’ll be coming by, so they’ll let you up no problem. Just try to stay out of the path of Mr. Strickland.”

“Your asshole boss?”

“He’s not an asshole,” she says with a sigh. “He’s just...”

“Grumpy, strict, mean, overbearing, intimidating?”

“Yeah, pretty much. Just... Don’t engage. Grab the key and leave.”

“I’ll be fine,” I say with a smile. “Mr. Cranky Pants won’t scare me.”

“I don’t know about that,” she says with a wince. “He scares everybody.”

“It’s almost eight o’clock,” I say looking at my watch. “He’ll be long gone by the time I get there.”

“I doubt that,” she mutters under her breath, a haunting look in her eyes. Geez, she looks like she has PTSD from working with this guy. What has he done to her?

I spot Greg by the security entrance with his hands on his hips, muttering angrily to himself, and I cringe, hating that I’ve made their vacation start off like this.

“You should go,” I say with a grin. “Before Greg has a panic attack.”

She laughs and then hugs me again.

“Take this,” she whispers as she reaches into her purse and pulls out a wad of cash.

“No,” I say as she shoves it into the pocket of my jeans. “Absolutely not.”

I try to take it out, but my sister has a steel grip on my wrist. She’s still got her volleyball strength from all those years on the varsity team.

“You’re doing us a service,” she says, staring me down, “and we insist on paying you.”

“Willow, I don’t...”

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

“Stop,” she says, her tone signifying that this is not up for discussion.

My shoulders drop as I pull out my hand, keeping the money inside my pocket. It’s not like I’m in a position to argue about free money. My bank account has been on life support for as long as I can remember. “Thank you.”

She smiles and hugs me one more time. “I gotta go. Have a great time. Enjoy the city, but be careful. Don’t be so trusting. This isn’t Vermont. A healthy dose of skepticism goes a long way out here.”

“I’ll be fine,” I say as I give her one last squeeze. “And please don’t spend your week fighting with Greg. Go topless on that secluded beach I found for you. It should help.”

She laughs as her cheeks blush a little, finally showing some color. She’s so pale she might be mistaken for a resident of Transylvania while going through security.

I watch her rush through the crowd to catch up to Greg. They both turn and wave to me before heading in.

I take a deep breath as I watch them disappear.

I’m on my own now. Big Apple here I come.

First stop...

Shit!

I look around and see the address on the floor, a few feet away. I quickly rush over and grab it from under someone's shoe before Greg sees and comes back to call me irresponsible and flaky in addition to flighty.

First stop... Strickland Innovations Group. 480 Eastmont Center, Floor 47.

It's time to get the key to my home for the next two weeks and see this mean, grumpy boss that my sister is always complaining about.

And maybe, just maybe, put him in his damn place.

## CHAPTER TWO

Logan

When the clock hits nine, I loosen my tie. It is my birthday after all. I should allow myself some luxury.

Forty-three. I still have the energy and vitality of a twenty-year-old and if it weren't for the gray hairs meeting me in the mirror every morning, I wouldn't believe I was already this old.

The sun is just about finished its beautiful descent behind me, and as usual, I missed it all. When you've seen one New York City sunset, you've seen them all. The world's greatest city is sprawled out on the other side of my spotless floor-to-ceiling windows, lit up in all its glory, but I don't tear my eyes away from my three computer screens to admire it.

Not tonight.

I'm combing through the financial records of a struggling division named

VANTAGE. It stands for Visionary Advancement of Next-gen Technology And Growth Engine. Every advisor I have has told me to cut it loose, but there's something in my guttelling me to keep it. Thirty-three employees would be laid off. Jobs lost. Families ruined.

But still, the project is bleeding money. Eva is a virtual avatar that's supposed to help employees integrate new technologies into their workflows. Only, no one is using it. And it's costing us a fortune.

I sigh as I scan the records, hoping I see something that prevents me from making that tough call.

My secretary Cassandra steps into the doorway and lightly taps on the doorframe.

"I'm heading out, Mr. Strickland."

"Alright, I'll see you tomorrow."

I glance at her between swipes of the PDF. She has her laptop bag slung over her shoulder and a little white box in her hand. She walks over, places it on my desk, and then retreats like it's a bomb about to go off.

"I know you don't like anyone making a fuss," she says, "but it is your birthday. So, happy birthday."

A heaviness hits me as I open the box and see one lone cupcake sitting inside. Now I regret snapping at her over the Jones' report this afternoon. I can be such an asshole without even trying. It comes so damn naturally.

"Dark chocolate bourbon ganache from The Wellness Bakery," she says shyly. "Just in case you feel like celebrating after you finish with those financial records."

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

“Thank you,” I say with a sigh as I stare at it. “Very thoughtful.”

“Do you have birthday plans tonight?”

“Birthday plans?”

“Yeah,” she says with a shrug. “Maybe meeting your family for dinner or hooking up with some friends for drinks?”

My jaw clenches. “Not this year.”

“Oh,” she says when she realizes how pathetic I am.

“I think there’s a box of birthday candles in the break room,” she says, glancing over her shoulder. “I can run over and get them if you want to blow out some candles.”

“That’s not necessary,” I say as I close the box. “Get home safely.”

I turn back to the computer screen and she gets the point.

“You too,” she whispers under her breath as she ducks out.

I hear her heels clip-clopping down the hall and I stare at my screen until the elevator arrives and takes her away.

When I’m finally alone, I lean back in my chair, grab the box and open it.

It's a nice thought, but I don't eat sugar.

Fine, maybe one bite since it's my birthday. I take a small nibble and then with a sigh, I toss the box into the garbage can, turn back to the reports, and get back to work.

Happy birthday to me.

### CHAPTER THREE

Amber

"Good luck with the baby," I say as I get out of my Uber in front of Willow's office building. "I'm sure it's gonna go great. Don't forget to send me those pictures!"

"I will!" Amir says, smiling widely as he pulls my suitcase out of his trunk. "And have fun in New York. Remember, anything can happen in The City That Never Sleeps!"

"You think?" I say, getting shivers from all of the exciting possibilities.

"I know," he says as he hands me my luggage. "Good things are in your future, Amber, I can feel it."

I know it's probably uncommon to hug your Uber driver at the end of a trip, but me and Amir have been through a lot in the past hour long car ride. He told me all about his pregnant wife and how excited he was for the baby to come along. How could I not hug the guy?

"Bye, Amir," I say as I open my arms. "It was nice meeting you."

“The pleasure was all mine,” he says as he gives me a warm hug. “And don’t forget to leave a review.”

“Five stars,” I promise as he gets back into the car.

We give each other one last wave as he drives away. I watch him merge into traffic and then look around with a deep breath, wondering what this city has in store for me.

Right now, I think as I turn and look up at the towering skyscraper in front of me, what’s in store for me is a long ass elevator ride.

This is probably the tallest building I’ve ever seen up close. I crane my head all the way back and I still can’t see the top.

I look at the paper in my hand and grin. Strickland Innovations Group. 480 Eastmont Center, Floor 47.

It’s time to see where my sister works.



## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

I open the glass doors and walk into the empty lobby that I'm sure was teeming with busy men in suits and women wearing the finest corporate fashions only a few hours ago. But it's nearly ten o'clock at night and the only person in here is a skeptical old security guard looking at me over his glasses.

With my shoulders back and my chin in the air, I roll my suitcase right up to the front desk and give him my most winningest smile. "Hello."

"Bathrooms are for employees only," he grunts.

"What about sisters of employees?"

His frown deepens. "Come again?"

"I'm Willow Fletcher's sister."

I'm expecting that frown to turn into a smile after my sister's name drop, but it stays frozen on his unamused face.

"Willow Fletcher," I repeat. "She works here at SIG. COO of Strickland Innovations Group. She's kind of a big deal."

"Everyone in this damn city thinks they're a big deal," he says.

"Not me," I say with a grin. "I'm a tiny deal. Not really a deal at all. More full price."

"Huh?" he says as my metaphor goes off the rails.

“I’m here to grab a key,” I say, reeling my crazy back in. “My sister left it on her desk upstairs. I’m cat-sitting for her while she’s in Hawaii and it’s kind of time-sensitive. Munchies is on a very strict medical timetable.”

“Munchies?” he says, blinking for the first time.

“I know right?” I say, leaning in. “I suggested Meowzart, but no one ever takes my opinion.”

The corner of his mouth twitches up. Just for a second.

“So, can I grab that key? She said she left my name with one of your colleagues.”

He sighs as he opens a file and starts cycling through some papers.

“Name?”

“Amber Fletcher.”

His eyebrow raises. “You got ID?”

I grab my driver’s license and hand it over, waiting for him to comment on my pink hair. It was a phase. An ill-advised one. I really wanted my head to look like cotton candy, but I’m back to my natural brown now.

“Alright,” he says as he hands it back to me with a visitor pass. “You got one hour. Don’t touch anything you don’t have to.”

“You got it,” I say as I grab my suitcase and head to the gate. “Hands to myself. Eyes only. Very professional. I can do that. At least, I’ll try really hard. No promises.”

He shakes his head like he's rethinking his decision, but there's a buzzing click and the security gate slides open. I walk over to the big luxurious elevators, swipe my visitor pass, and head up to the forty-seventh floor.

"Wow," I whisper when I step out into Strickland Innovations Group. If the strategy is to look rich and successful, they've succeeded admirably.

A huge, gold-plated sign of their boring logo greets you over the empty reception desk. I look around, peeking down the hall at all of the glass doors to the many offices and conference rooms where big deals surely happen on a regular basis. They have to in order to afford a place like this. It's spectacular, but I just wish it had some big tropical plants, or some funky art on the bland walls, or something with a bit of character. It's corporate chic in here and it's boring as hell.

This place is probably buzzing with ambitious, motivated people just like my sister during the day, but right now, it's completely empty. I run my fingertip along the reception desk as I saunter past it, looking for Willow's office. If I know my sister, she's got the corner office, so I head there first.

I grin when I see her name etched onto the glass door. Willow Fletcher. Chief Of Operations. That's my girl! I love it.

The door is locked until I swipe my visitor pass on the keypad and it clicks open. So high-tech. Super cool.

Willow's office is unreal. It's the corner, just as I expected, and the view of the city is incredible. I can see the Statue of Liberty from here and I give her a little wave.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

My sister is so impressive. She always has been. Valedictorian in high school, star volleyball player in college, and now this. She never ceases to amaze me.

I smile as I walk in and run my finger along her polished desk, not a speck of dust in sight. My sister built this from nothing. No shortcuts, no rich parents greasing wheels. Just ambition, caffeine, and pure, relentless Willow-ness. I don't know how she does it. I couldn't accomplish a tenth of what she does, even if I was trying my hardest.

But at the same time, I wouldn't want to. That's why I'm not jealous of her accomplishments. This life is great for her, but it's not a life I would ever want. One month of being cooped up in this intense corporate environment and I'd be trying to open the windows to swan dive out.

I pull out her luxurious leather chair, plop into it with a soft oompf, and swivel around to face the stunning view.

It's my first time in New York and I'm excited to see it all.

And holy shit.

New York City stretches out like a dream—twinkling lights, honking taxis, all that energy pulsing through the streets below like veins. My heart does this fluttery thing. Like it knows something's coming. Something good.

I toss my legs up on the desk, crossing them at the ankle like a true boss.

Then, I grab Willow's highlighter and puff it like it's a big fat Cuban cigar.

I don't want Willow's life, but the fantasy is fun.

I picture myself as a high-powered executive, but I know I'd be horrible at it. I'd be constantly getting into trouble.

I'd hand out raises like Oprah on a season premiere and cancel all meetings before 10 a.m. I'd fill the office with bean bag chairs and therapy puppies and I'd place a giant jar of peanut M&M's on the reception desk. The dress code would be non-existent and of course, everyone would have Fridays off.

I puff on my cigar highlighter as I stare at the spectacular skyline.

"Who the hell are you?"

The voice is deep. Sharp. 100% not amused.

I freeze mid-highlighter puff and slowly turn in the chair, feet still propped on the desk like I own the place.

And wow.

There he is.

The grumpy boss. The terrifying Mr. Cranky Pants himself.

The man that Willow has complained endlessly about every time I've seen her in the past five years. The man who's shaved years off her life. The man who's about to get an earful from her overprotective younger sister.

"Amber," I say as I stare into his dark brown eyes. "And who the hell are you?"

“The owner of this company,” he says in a razor-sharp tone that would have most people scrambling in panic. I’m not most people. I stay nice and relaxed as I hold his bullying gaze.

“Well, whoop-de-doo for you,” I say between puffs of my highlighter cigar.

He steps into the office and holy hell this man is a looker. Mean, but a looker nonetheless. His suit is fitted like a glove on his tall, muscular frame. His tie is loose—the only thing loose about him—and I get an urge to take it off and slide it from his neck. Or, maybe I’d like to hang him with it. I’m not sure yet.

Those scorching brown eyes are something though. Deep, intense, a little bloodshot, and focused right on me. From there, it just gets better with his perfectly styled brown hair and the subtle wisps of gray mixed in, his symmetrical facial features, and his five o’clock shadow that gives his sexy jaw a nice shade of darkness to match his soul.

His back straightens as he steps into the office, glaring at me.

“You shouldn’t be here.”

I grin at him. “I get that a lot.”

He stares, silent. Calculating. Like he’s trying to figure out if he should call security or toss me over his big broad shoulder and throw me out himself. I’d prefer the latter.

“Don’t get your panties in a bunch,” I say, batting my eyelashes at him. “I’m just here to pick up a key from my sister.”

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

“Your sister?”

“Willow Fletcher. Do you know her? Blonde. Brilliant. Currently on a plane to Kauai looking like she just escaped a hostage situation. Ring any bells?”

“Of course, I know Willow!” he snaps. “I hired her.”

“Then what the hell is your problem?”

“Excuseme?” he says, rearing back in shock.

I glare at him as I grind my highlighter cigar onto the desk, stubbing it out on the expensive oak.

“You work her too much.”

He scoffs.

I slowly rise, digging my fists into the desk as I glare at him.

“Do you get off on working your employees to the bone?”

“Do you know how much Willow makes in a year?” he shoots back.

“I’m not talking about money,” I say. “I’m talking about basic human decency. She’s a human being, and unless this office runs on human sacrifice, you might consider letting her leave before midnight once in a while.”

His mouth opens. Then closes. Then opens again. No sound comes out.

I just stunned the dragon.

His mouth is in a straight line, but oh my god, does he look good not smiling. The tension in his jaw is practically vibrating. He's got that whole stormy silver fox alpha thing going—dark tailored suit, silver at his temples, that perfect mix of old-money polish and simmering rage.

“Do you know what she does when she gets home at those ungodly hours?” I ask now that I have him on his heels. “She scarfs down a protein bar, watches eight minutes of a trashy reality show she'll tragically never finish, and then falls asleep sitting up like a Victorian ghost. That is your fault.”

“My fault?” he says, staring at me in shock. “You make it sound like I'm forcing her to be here. She loves this job!”

“Sure,” I say with a fake smile. “The way people say they love marathons. Or colonoscopies.”

His lips press into a hard line.

I take a step closer, head tilted. “Look, I'm just saying... if someone looks that tired all the time, maybe the boss shouldn't be proud of it.”

“I'm not—” he starts, but I raise a hand.

“It's fine,” I say, smiling sweetly. “I'm not here to unionize. Just picking up a key. But for what it's worth, if I see her name in a company Slack message timestamped after midnight, I will fly back here and stage an intervention. Possibly involving glitter.”



He stares at me. Still not speaking. But his ears have gone pink.

And I think...oh.

I got to him.

Mr. Iceberg-in-a-Tom-Ford-suit is on his heels.

I tear my eyes off him and look for the key because I shouldn't be noticing how the fabric of his shirt stretches across his chest just right. Or how the sleeves of his jacket cling to his arms like they were custom-tailored for the sole purpose of testing my devotion to my sister.

I spot the key next to Willow's nameplate and grab it, swinging it in circles on my finger.

"You got it all wrong," he says as he steps forward. "Willow is an essential part of the company."

"Sure," I say with a breezy nod. "So essential she's apparently not allowed to sleep or see the sun. Or eat food that didn't come from a foil wrapper."

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

His eyes narrow. “I don’t?—”

“She’s too ambitious or polite or brainwashed by this place to say it,” I cut in, stepping around the desk, “so I’ll say it for her. Whatever pace you’re setting around here? It’s too much. You’re gonna drive my sister into an early grave. Just a heads-up. If you care.”

I walk right up to him, staring the six-foot monster down with zero fear. I swear, he actually leans back an inch.

That’s what’s got him so thrown. I’m not scared of him.

And that might be the most confusing thing that’s happened to Logan Strickland all year.

I offer a small, innocent smile. “It’s okay. Not everyone knows how to take care of people. You strike me more as a spreadsheets-and-profits-over-feelings type.”

“I’m not?—”

“You are,” I say, sweetly cutting him off again. “But hey, someone has got to pay for this stunning view and that ugly-ass gold-plated sign in the front. I get it. So what if your employees’ health is the trade-off, right? It’s all worth it for those sweet dolla dolla bills ya’ll.”

I swing the key around my index finger and then catch it in my fist.

“Nice meeting you, Mr. Cranky Pants. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have an old diseased housecat to medicate.”

I give him an exaggerated smile, give him a wink because I know it will drive him crazy, grab my suitcase, and then head to the door.

Behind me, there’s nothing but stunned silence.

Poor Mr. Logan Strickland has no idea what just hit him.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Logan

What the hell wasthat?

Seriously. My heart is pounding as I stare at the door with my jaw hanging open.

That woman...

Amber Fletcher.

She just left without looking back. She tossed a wink over her shoulder, like this is her office and I’m the one who was intruding.

I’ve never met anyone like her. She burst into my life with a suitcase, a smirk, and zero boundaries.

And it shook me to my core.

I start to get this twitchy, panicky feeling now that she’s gone. I need to see her again.

I need those stunning hazel eyes back on me, judging me, goading me, demanding me to be better.

I want more of her sharp tongue. I want it to lash me—verbally and physically.

I want her.

I'm rattled. Too rattled to think straight.

She got under my skin in less than five minutes.

No. She got into my bloodstream. Into my soul. I feel the obsession taking over like a drug—instant, addictive, and already coursing through my veins.

It's been a long time since someone has talked to me like that.

Has challenged me like that.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

I'm a CEO of a Fortune 500 company. I dominate any boardroom I'm in. I strike the fear of god into anyone who shows up late to a meeting. I am the master of this place.

But apparently, Miss Amber Fletcher didn't get the memo. She didn't care one single bit.

And I liked it.

It made me feel... human.

It's lonely at the top. Heavy is the crown. Those are sayings I've heard over the years, but you don't really understand them until you live it.

I'm always at work, so I'm only ever surrounded by people who see me as the boss. As someone to obey. To fear.

But not Amber. She didn't fear me at all.

And she didn't see me as a CEO. She saw me as a man. A man who was being awfully mean to her sister.

And the thought of her seeing me in that negative way has my hands shaking.

"Fuck," I mutter as I rush out the door with my pulse racing.

I hurry down the hall and catch up to her near the elevators.

She's just standing there, rolling her suitcase back and forth as she stares at my huge gold-plated sign with a look of disgust on her gorgeous face.

Seeing her staggers me. It feels like a hand is gripping my soul.

She's the type of beauty you could stare at every day for decades and never get tired of. Ten years of admiring her and you could still find something new, like the adorable faint freckles across the ridge of her nose and upper cheeks, or the captivating way her chin tilts up just a little bit when she grins, or the way her long curved lashes can bring a man to his knees.

I swallow hard as I drag my eyes down her luscious body from her army green tank top, low-rise jeans, down to her scuffed-up Converse sneakers. She looks like she could be the girl next door. She's so different from the prim and proper women I'm constantly surrounded by with all of their expensive high heels, pencil skirts, and crisp blouses. Amber looks like she could play baseball with the guys and then give you a kiss under the bleachers.

Just the thought of those soft tempting lips touching mine has me breathless. It has me desperate to get her eyes back on me.

"Amber," I call out as I make my way over to her.

She turns slowly. Casually. Like she knew I'd come after her.

Of course, she did.

But of course, I would. We belong together. There's no other way to explain the storm brewing in my chest.

"You got me all wrong," I say with a crack in my voice.

Her mouth curls up in amusement as she tilts her head to the side. “Oh, do tell. This I gotta hear.”

“You said I work my employees too hard,” I say as I approach, feeling shaky all over. “But you don’t understand. I don’t take this responsibility lightly.”

Her eyebrow raises skeptically, that sexy grin still on her succulent lips.

“All of these people that you think I torture,” I say, keeping my eyes fixated on her, “they rely on me. They have kids, mortgages, sick parents. I know their stories. All of them.”

I know the elevator will be here soon to take her out of my life, so I talk fast.

“I’m trying to save a department right now,” I continue. “It’s underperforming and everyone wants me to shut it down, including your sister, but I can’t. That’s thirty-three people I’d have to let go. Thirty-three people who would lose their income. It’s costing me an ungodly amount of money, but I’m keeping it open. For them.”

She lets out a low breath as she watches me.

“Just so you don’t think I’m a total monster,” I whisper, dropping my eyes.

I hate making layoffs. I refuse to do it unless absolutely necessary.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

I still remember when I was nine years old. Sleeping in the backseat of a Toyota Camry with a wet winter jacket for a blanket. My mom crying quietly behind the wheel.

I can't do that to my people. I won't.

"I've seen what it looks like when someone loses everything."

Her expression softens, and I hate how that hits. That look—gentle, kind, pitying. Like she's just found a dent in the armor I spend every damn day polishing.

The elevator opens with a ding, but she doesn't move.

"Are you going inside?" I ask, desperately hoping she doesn't.

"Another one will come along," she says as it closes. "You bought yourself a couple of minutes."

For the first time today, I smile. She smiles back and the sight is staggering. I nearly lose my balance.

She looks me up and down, although there's no sarcasm or witty comments this time. Just eyes full of curiosity. Like she's seeing me—not the CEO, not the suit—but the man underneath it.

I swallow hard as her eyes come back to mine.



“When you put it like that,” she says quietly. “It doesn’t seem as draconian. Maybe you aren’t a total monster.”

“Thank you?”

She puts her hand on her hip and looks at me, and for the first time, I see the resemblance between her and her sister Willow. I’ve seen Willow give people that exact same look countless times.

“So, what do you do for fun, Logan Strickland? Or is this it?” She gestures around at the empty office. “Staring down spreadsheets alone at ten o’clock on a Tuesday night in a three-thousand-dollar suit. Living the dream.”

“Fun?”

“Yeah,” she says nibbling her bottom lip. “Fun. Has it been that long? Do you remember what fun is?”

I sigh. “It has been a while. I’m too busy for fun.”

She shakes her head like she can’t quite believe that someone as pathetic as me exists.

“Excuse my bluntness,” she says, “but you strike me as someone who has more money than they could possibly spend in a hundred lifetimes.”

I do. It keeps piling up in my account and I never really have time to spend it. I invest it, but that just gives me more money I don’t know what to do with.

Something tells me this woman wouldn’t be impressed if she looked at my bank account. She seems like she couldn’t care less if I was a billionaire, which I am, or if I was dead broke, which I’m definitely not. To her, my worth as a person has nothing

to do with my net worth. That's a big change from the people I'm normally surrounded by.

"I do okay," I admit.

"So, you have enough money to have any experience you'd like, in a city where you can do pretty much anything, and all you do is work? Do I have that right?"

I swallow hard. "It's not all bad. I did let loose earlier."

She leans in with a scandalous grin. "Do tell."

"I had a cupcake. Well, a bite of a cupcake."

Her face falls like I just told her I kick puppies. "Onebite of a cupcake? Who doesn't finish a cupcake?"

I just stare at her.

"What, was it someone's birthday or something?"

"Yeah."

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

She looks around with her arms up. “Where are the decorations?”

“We don’t do that around here.”

“Right,” she says with a roll of her eyes. “Because balloons wouldn’t be businessy enough. Whose birthday was it anyway? Did you reward them by letting them leave at eight o’clock?”

I tense. Just for a second.

But she notices.

“Wait... it’s your birthday, isn’t it?”

I go still.

“Oh my god. It’s your birthday. And you’re still working! You’ve been here all day. Alone. Working. On your birthday?”

“I like working,” I mutter.

“On your birthday?!”

I let out a long sigh. “It’s just a day.”

Shit. I shouldn’t have said that. Her hazel eyes go all wide and crazy.

“It’s not just a day. It’s your birthday. The day Logan Strickland burst into this world and graced the universe with his presence. It’s the first day you took a breath. The first day your mother smiled at you. The first day some lucky doctor smacked your cute little tush. If that’s not worth celebrating, then what the hell is?”

I can’t help but smile as I watch this girl. We couldn’t possibly think any differently, but for some reason, I’m inexplicably drawn to her. I can’t look away.

“We’re going out,” she says, reaching forward and tapping the elevator button continuously with her finger. “We’re celebrating.”

“We are?” I say, my smile turning into a grin.

“It’s your birthday,” she says. “We’re in New York. We’re friends. We’re going out.”

“We’re friends?”

She looks at me and gives me a firm nod. “I’ve decided it. Sorry, but you don’t get a say.”

If I had a say, we’d be more than friends. I do have a lot to say on the matter, but for now, I’ll take what I can get.

“You don’t have to—” I start.

“I know,” she says, tossing a glance over her shoulder. “I want to.”

And just like that, she’s in charge.

The elevator doors open and she steps in like she owns the damn building, her suitcase rolling behind her with a cheerful little squeak.

She's so confident. So sure of herself. There's no hesitation even though she just arrived in this city. It's like dragging strange men out into the night is just another thing she does between breaking and entering and feline medication schedules.

I wonder if she knows she just tilted my life on its axis. That she's shaken me to my core.

"Coming, Mr. Birthday Boy?" she asks as she holds the door open.

"I like that better than your last nickname for me."

"You have three seconds to join me or we're back to Mr. Cranky Pants."

I grin as I step in.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

Like it was even a choice.

I'd follow this amazing woman anywhere. I'd do whatever she asked.

She's got her hooks in me and there's no going back now.

The doors close and she looks up at me with a smile so stunning, I forget how to breathe. "Next stop, the best night of your life."

I have no doubt about that.

It already is.

### CHAPTER FIVE

Logan

I offered to take her anywhere.

Pearl & Vine in Tribeca, The Tonic Club in Midtown, Velvet Jack's in the Upper East Side. She could have been dining with celebrities and eating caviar flown in from Madagascar, but this is what she chose.

A small greasy pizza shop in Hell's Kitchen called Vito's on 47th. There are no tables, only overturned milk crates scattered on the sidewalk to sit on—if you're lucky enough to get one.

We're stuck in a line that curls around the block, but at least it's moving.

"I can't believe you've never eaten here," she says as she tucks a strand of silky brown hair behind her ear. I notice she does that every few minutes and it drives me crazy. I can't wait for the day I get to reach over and do that for her whenever I please. "If I lived in New York, I'd hit up every famous pizza shop there is."

"I normally order from the place down the street," I say, hoping she doesn't ask me any more questions about it.

"What's it called?"

Dammit.

"Pizza Hut."

She just shakes her head in disgust. "I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that."

The line moves and we shuffle forward. We're behind a group of firefighters who look like they just battled through hell with all the grime, ash, and water coating their suits. Their pizza is on me.

"So, what do you have planned for me after this?" I ask, unable to take my eyes off this incredible girl. I feel alive whenever I look at her. My whole body tingles with excitement and possibility as I roam my eyes over her sexy lips and adorable cheeks. I just want to sink my hands into her hair and pull her mouth to mine. When she asked me where I wanted to go on my birthday tour, I almost said my bedroom.

Instead, we're here getting pizza, and I have no idea what we're going to do next. She left her suitcase in the lobby of my building with the security guard, because she wanted 'to be totally free to do anything we pleased'—her words.

“That’s the fun part,” she says with a grin. “There is no plan. We’re going to go wherever the wind takes us.”

Right now, there is no wind. It’s August in New York and it’s hot as fuck. Hell’s Kitchen is definitely living up to its name. I take off my jacket and roll up my sleeves. Amber’s eyes dart to my thick forearms, her breath hitching for a second or two.

Apparently, I’m not the only one with more than just pizza on my mind. I take my time rolling my sleeves up, giving her a show. When she finally turns away, her cheeks are an adorable shade of pink and my hunger is stronger than ever.

I want her.Badly.

I haven’t wanted something for my birthday in ages, but I want her.

She grins when I pull out my tie and stuff it in my pocket.

“There you go,” she says, nodding with a smile on her face. “That’s more like it. I knew you had it in you to loosen up a little.”

I don’t want to hold my suit jacket throughout our whole date, or whatever this is... I might need these hands free if what I’m fantasizing about comes true.

“If you think that’s impressive,” I say with a grin. “Watch this.”



*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

I walk across the street and toss my jacket into the big garbage bin on the other side. I have a closet full of them at home and if I had to choose between having another Italian suit jacket or sinking my hands into this girl's silky hair while we kiss at the end of the night, well, that's hardly much of a choice in my mind.

She's smiling like she can't believe I just did that as I jog back over.

"Now we're getting somewhere," she says when I return.

My adrenaline is so fired up that I take a risk and reach for her hand. She lets me take it. I can feel my heart pounding in my chest as I swallow her hand with mine and hold it like I'm never going to let it go.

Her gaze flicks up to mine—just for a second—but it's long enough to spot the burning heat in her eyes. Damn. If she keeps looking at me like that, I'm going to get rock hard, and this is not the place—in public surrounded by firemen—to pitch a trouser tent.

She clears her throat and drops her gaze. "Anyway," she says, pretending she wasn't just mentally undressing me with those beautiful hazel eyes, "I think birthday nights should be spontaneous. No plans, no schedules, and definitely no spreadsheets."

"You say that like spreadsheets are a bad thing."

"They are," she says, deadpan. "They're joy-killers. Fun assassins. If a spreadsheet were a person, it'd be wearing khakis and saying 'let's circle back.'"

I laugh. I actually laugh. God help me.

Amber's smile is full of delight as she looks up at me. "Was that an actual, legitimate laugh, Mr. Strickland? Careful now, what if someone saw you?"

"Don't worry, it won't happen again."

Fuck, I don't remember the last time I felt this... loose. This light. I'm standing in the middle of a New York City sidewalk in one hundred-degree heat and somehow I don't want to hail a taxi and race home.

And it's all because of Amber. She's making it fun.

I'd go anywhere, and do anything with her.

The firefighters ahead of us cheer when it's their turn to order. Amber hoots and hollers like she's part of the team. One of them offers her a fist bump, which she accepts without hesitation. Somehow she knows everyone and no one at the same time. It's effortless for her. She's magnetic. It's like she belongs here. In this city. In this moment. In my life.

I've been here for twenty years, she's been here for twenty minutes, and somehow she's more of a New Yorker than me.

This girl is unreal.

I raise my hand, flagging Vito or whatever cousin is working for Vito tonight. "All the firemen are on me," I say.

Now, they're all cheering and fist-bumping with me too. They slap my back and thank me in their thick New Yorker accents. I can't help but smile, feeling like a real,

legitimate New Yorker for the first time in my life.

Amber whispers something to the pizza guy and when I get my slice, there's a single birthday candle sticking out of the crust.

I laugh as she starts singing Happy Birthday at the top of her lungs. The firemen join in and so does everyone in line. Even the pizza cooks are singing as I go bright red, the whole street serenading me. It's the best birthday of my life.

"Don't forget to make a wish," she says, bright smile, wide eyes, so unbelievably perfect.

There's only one wish I could dream up. Only one thing I want.

Her.

I wish for her.

I blow out the candles and everyone cheers. Amber wraps her arm around my neck and plants a kiss on my cheek. I feel lightheaded as her kiwi-scented shampoo fills my lungs and her perky boobs press against my shoulder. That can't be the last time those luscious lips are on me. I need to feel them again or I'll die.

The firemen ask us to sit with them, but we both want to be alone so we grab two milk crates and sit under a street light off to the side.

Goddamn, even under the bright city lights, this girl looks like a dream. I want to see her in every kind of lighting—candlelight, sunsets, early morning sun waking up in bed... Hell, I even want to see her under those harsh fluorescent lights in McDonald's. I want to see it all. I want to experience her in every way.

“What do you think?” she asks when I take a bite of the pizza. It’s good. Really fucking good.

“Better than Pizza Hut,” I say before taking another bite.

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

“Told you,” she says with a big grin. “There’s more to life than just your condo, commute, and office. You gotta get out more, Mr. Cranky Pants.”

I kind of like that name now. I’d like anything she calls me.

After the pizza, we wander around and end up in some underground salsa club.

Normally, I’d hate a place like this, but I get to dance nice and close with my girl. This time, I can’t stop myself from getting rock hard as she grinds against me, the music blaring in our ears. She must feel it on her hips, but she doesn’t stop or hesitate. She keeps that sexy little body gliding up and down mine as she shakes her hips in the most mesmerizing way.

We’re surrounded by sweaty, half-naked people on the dance floor doing some of the dirtiest dancing I’ve ever seen, but I only have eyes for her. Her hair is sticking to her glistening temples and when she comes in close, I tuck her hair behind her ear.

She looks up at me with the most breathtaking shy smile and I know in my heart, soul, and every damn cell in my body that this is the girl for me.

She’s the one I want. The only one I want.

Now, tonight, forever. She’s it. She’s my soulmate.

I just hope it doesn’t take her too long to realize it.

A slow song comes on and the wild dancers come together in pairs all around us,

tangling limbs and getting in close.

I take Amber's hand and pull her against my body where she belongs. She moans as she looks up at me, those beautiful eyes lingering on my mouth before rising to my heated gaze.

"What did you wish for?" she whispers as we start to sway to the nice song.

It's hard to focus on words with her breasts pressed into my chest and her hips so close to mine.

"No, wait," she says, shaking her head. "Then it won't come true."

I look down at this perfect girl in my arms and let out a low breath. "Don't worry. It already has."

She smiles shyly and then rests her head on my chest. I can't believe I'm here right now, experiencing this. A few hours ago, I was at my desk saying goodnight to Cassandra, and my entire world has changed since then. It feels like a lifetime ago.

I believe there are rare moments that happen in life that completely change you. Moments so intense, they crack your lifeline in half, so there is only the time before the moment and the time after.

This here, tonight, with Amber, is one of those moments. I could be one hundred years old on my deathbed, thinking back over all the long years I've lived, and I know that my first thought will be this night. The unexpected encounter in the office, the birthday singing over pizza, the dance, the switch in my mind when I realized it can't all be about work. A life has to have some fun in it too otherwise what's the point?

“Am I going to see you again?” she whispers.

“I sure as fuck hope so,” I say with a laugh. “Otherwise, I might not know how to go on.”

“I’m only here for two weeks,” she says. “Until Willow and Greg—Shit!”

I lean back as she goes rigid in my arms. “What is it?”

“Munchies!” she says with panic in her eyes. “I need to get him his medication!”

“Okay,” I say, trying to calm her down.

But she’s too wound up to listen.

“I gotta go!” she says, pulling away. Every instinct in my body is urging me to stay with her and keep her in sight, but she’s as slippery as she is fun. “I’m not flighty. I’m responsible.”

It’s the last thing I hear her say before she dissolves into the packed crowd, moving with impressive speed.

I’m much larger, so it’s harder for me to follow and get around everyone.

“Amber!” I shout over the music. “Amber, wait up!”

My heart is pounding when I finally get to the door, and I feel like I might be sick when I see her slip into a taxi and disappear from my life as quickly as she crashed into it.

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

No...

It can't end like this.

But it won't. I have to know it won't.

We're soulmates, and this is just the beginning.

I'll make damn sure of that.

I'll burn down the world before I let that girl slip out of my life.

My birthday wish will come true.

Amber will be mine.

## CHAPTER SIX

Amber

By the time I burst into Willow's condo, I'm sweaty, out of breath, and dangerously close to having a panic attack.

"Munchies?!"

Silence.



I kick off my shoes, drop my luggage, and run through the place like my life depends on it. “Munchieeeeees!”

He finally waddles into view down the hallway, looking exactly how I remembered him from the pictures Willow is always sending me—like a grumpy little warlock who got trapped in a shag carpet.

“Holy Fancy Feast,” I whisper, pressing a hand to my chest. “You’re alive.”

He blinks and then flops onto the floor with a demanding look. If he could talk, I’m sure he would be hissing, ‘Pet me now, woman.’

I hurry over and drop onto the hardwood floor beside him. My heart is still pounding from all of the panic, but it’s winding down now that I know he’s okay.

Muchies is so odd-looking. I love it. His face is so flat it looks like it was ironed at birth, his fur is unruly, like a haunted mop, and his pungent smell is like a complicated blend of tuna breath and something I can only describe as musty vintage carpet.

“Hi, buddy,” I say as I pet him. “I’m your Auntie Amber.”

He licks his paw. Then coughs.

Right. Meds.

I dig around the kitchen until I find the extensive list Willow left me on the counter, and my jaw drops.

The list goes on for pages. Plural.

I scan the list as I mumble to myself, holding it out at arm's length like it has personally offended me. "Three pills, two droppers, and a shot? How are you still alive, cat?"

I get everything in order, line it all up, and look at him. He looks at me. We both know this isn't going to end well.

Ten minutes later, I've been clawed a dozen times, drooled on, and hissed at more times than I can count.

He's got drool on his whiskers. I've got blood on my wrist.

This is my life now. For the next two weeks, anyway.

"Okay," I say with a sigh as I collapse onto the massive sectional in the living room.

"We survived. Barely."

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

I look around and finally take in the place. Holy. Crap.

It's stunning.

Glass walls. A full skyline view. A grand piano in the corner, because apparently my tone-deaf sister now plays piano? There are bookshelves taller than my childhood home and an old modernized La Cornue Range oven larger than my car in the kitchen.

I'm exhausted, but I have to see the rest of this place. It takes a while.

There are four bedrooms. Four bathrooms.

"What the hell?" I mutter as I stick my head into another luxurious walk-in shower with a giant rain showerhead mounted from the ceiling and all sorts of jets and nozzles for the perfect steam.

Now, I know why rich people never leave their houses. If Logan's place is half as nice as this, I understand him more and feel bad for shaming him about never seeing the city. Why would you when you can steam in this thing until you turn into a human prune?

"This is insane," I whisper as I wander into a guest bedroom that has enough room for a king-sized bed, a bunch of furniture, and has a bathroom and walk-in closet on top of it. "I thought New York apartments were supposed to be the size of a shoebox."

This one's a department store.

But even with all the jaw-dropping finishes and the tub in the ensuite bathroom big enough to host a pool party, my mind is somewhere else.

It's on Logan.

I lean against the doorframe of the guest room and smile to myself. That night... It was perfect.

The pizza. The way he laughed—unrestrained and real. The way his eyes warmed every time I said something weird and he pretended not to like it. The weight of his gaze when I wasn't looking. The intensity when I was.

And how he didn't even hesitate to follow me into that elevator like I was a new form of gravity he couldn't quite figure out.

I like him.

And not just the "he's hot and older and could ruin me in one night" kind of like. Even though... yes, I'll take a heavy helping of that too.

I mean like-like.

I'm crushing hard on Mr. Cranky Pants. Although, now I'm thinking a more fitting name for him would be Mr. I Want To Get In Your Pants.

I wander around, taking my clothes out of my suitcase and getting settled in, and the whole time, my mind is on him.

I've never felt this way about a man before. Hell, I've never had this effect on a man

before.

Usually, it's not long before they tell me to go away or pretend to get a call on their phone.

But Logan... He was captivated by me. He was intrigued by me. And it felt good.

He's twenty years older than me.

But maybe that's what I need.

Someone grounded. Someone solid. Someone who knows who he is and what he wants.

I've spent so much time floating through life, chasing ideas and vibes and feelings. Maybe it'd be nice to have someone who makes the ground feel less like lava and more solid.

Maybe Greg was right. Maybe I am flighty.

And maybe Logan can be my anchor.

I groan and flop onto the bed, staring up at the ceiling as Munchies jumps up beside me and curls into my armpit with no shame.

"Oh man," I whisper as I think about the end of the night.

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

The guilt creeps in fast.

I hated leaving him like that.

The stunned, shattered look on his face... That's going to stay with me for a long time.

But when Munchies' insane medical routine suddenly popped into my head, I panicked. I heard Greg's voice in my head—judging me, blaming me, hating me—and I bolted. I didn't even get to say goodbye properly.

I'll make it up to Mr. Sexy Silver Fox CEO tomorrow.

I'll think of something good. Something unforgettable.

Because Logan Strickland deserves to be celebrated. And now that I've had a taste of him?

I'm not done.

Not even close.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Logan

"I'm telling you," Charles says, adjusting his tie for the third time in two minutes, "the numbers don't lie. We've sunk twelve million into VANTAGE over the past two

years and haven't seen a single viable product come out of it."

I stare at the screen behind him. Charts. Graphs. Projected loss curves. It all blurs.

"Users drop off after the first onboarding module," Denise adds from across the conference table. "The assistant, Eva, is too mechanical. There's no stickiness. No emotional hook. We've tried four relaunches and it's still not connecting."

Four execs. One clear message: shut it down.

If Willow was here, she'd agree with all of them.

I shift in my chair, my shoulders tight with irritation.

VANTAGE was supposed to be our future-facing division. The Visionary Advancement of Next-gen Technology AndGrowth Engine. The team was put together to launch Strickland Innovations Group from the Fortune 500 into the Fortune 50.

Instead, it's become a punchline in budget meetings. They're struggling and it's a mess. They're corporate quicksand, sinking every dollar I give them.

"Look," Charles continues, "we all know why you're hesitant. You care about the team. We get it. But VANTAGE is dragging down our Q3 outlook. Investors are watching."

I nod slowly. I'm trying to pay attention, trying to think of a solution, but my brain isn't fully in the room.

It's with her.

Amber.

Goddess of chaos and bringer of light. The girl who managed to rattle my foundations and shake me to my core. All in a moment.

I barely slept last night. I was up all night thinking of her.

Those lips... That mouth...

God, I must have stroked myself five times while thinking of her body pressed up against mine last night before I finally collapsed into sleep.

Where the hell did she even come from? I didn't know women like her existed.

I've had my share of women throwing themselves at me. I know I'm good on paper—looks, money, CEO title. It's what a lot of women want. The lingering touches on my arm, the exaggerated laughs, the flicks of hair—I know what they're doing. I just never had any time or desire for any of it. I didn't see how a woman could fit in my life. To be honest, I had no need for one.

But with Amber...



## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

I don't know how she can fit in my life. It's like trying to shove a square peg into a round hole. We couldn't be more different. I'm structure and order, and she's chaos and disarray. It shouldn't work.

But it does.

I want it to work. I want her to fit. Hell, I'll turn into a square hole. I'll do anything I have to in order to be around that angel I'm already obsessed with.

I rub my jaw, tuning back into the meeting just in time to hear Denise say, "...severance packages would be generous. We'd retain the top three engineers and lay off the rest."

"No," I say, standing.

Everyone freezes.

"No," I repeat. "We're not closing VANTAGE. Not yet."

Charles clears his throat. "Sir, with respect?—"

"I said no." My voice is quiet, final. "We'll figure something out. Dismissed."

They hesitate, but I'm already walking out of the room.

I'm not doing that to thirty-three people. I'll figure out a way to make it work.

As soon as I'm walking down the hall, my thoughts turn back to Amber. I guess this is my life now. My focus, gone. My attention, obliterated. Every thought and feeling revolves around her.

I should be terrified, but the feeling is electric. It's incredible. Like something's shifting inside me. Something that's been dormant for way too long is waking up.

I can't stop thinking about where she is, what she's doing, who she's talking to.

New York is a big dangerous city and the thought of my Amber, all innocent and trusting, wandering through it alone is making my pulse race. It's making me all twitchy inside. Some primal need to protect my girl is twisting in my chest and making my hands shake. I should be next to her, protecting her, watching out for her. I hate that I'm here.

I should have gotten her number. What was I thinking?

I think about calling Willow up to get it, but Amber would skin me alive if I called her sister on the first morning of her vacation.

Cassandra looks up as I pass her desk, letting out a heavy sigh.

She smiles, but the smile doesn't reach her eyes. I walk by her, but then stop as she types on her computer. Amber's words are floating in my head.

Do you get off on working your employees to the bone?

"Do you need something, Mr. Strickland?" Cassandra asks as I turn around and stand beside her desk.

I'm talking about basic human decency. She's a human being, and unless this office

runs on human sacrifice, you might consider letting her leave before midnight once in a while.

“I want to apologize for snapping at you yesterday,” I say. “Over the Jones’ report. That was uncalled for and mean. I’m sorry.”

Her mouth drops open as she blinks up at me, not sure what to do.

“Oh. Um. That’s okay.”

“I know you’ve been working a lot.”

She nods cautiously.

“Take Friday off.”

Her eyes widen in panic. “Am I fired?”

Jesus. What the hell have I done to this poor girl? Amber was right. She’s right about everything.

## Page 19

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

“No, you’re not fired,” I say in a soft tone. “You’re a valued employee and I’m glad we have you.”

Now, she’s blushing.

“Thank you, Mr. Strickland,” she says as she plays with her necklace.

“Go to a spa or somewhere nice,” I tell her as I pull out my wallet. “And put it on the company card.”

I drop it on her desk and have to hold back a laugh because she looks so stunned. She’s staring at the credit card like it’s about to burst into flames.

“Bring a friend if you’d like. And have some fun.”

I walk away before she can find her words.

I push open the door to my office and?—

Holy hell.

There she is.

Amber Fletcher.

At my desk.

Spinning slowly in my chair.

Grinning like she owns the place.

“What are you doing here?” I blurt out.

It’s the wrong choice of words, but I’m just so shocked to see her. I feel like I need to touch her to make sure she’s real.

“I’m here to bust you out.”

My lips curl up into a smile despite myself.

“Bust me out?”

“Yeah,” she says as she stands up, looking even more incredible than I remembered.

“You ever play hooky?”

“I can’t say that I have.”

My heated eyes roam up and down her stunning body as she walks around my desk. She’s wearing a white sundress with sunflowers all over it and I don’t know where to look—her long bare legs are in the lead, but those round breasts and her thick luscious hips are definitely in the running too. I can’t take it all in fast enough.

Her brown hair is loose and wavy. Fuck, I just want to sink my hands into it and pull her mouth to mine. There are so many things I want to do to her, but I can’t do any of them in my busy office with these goddamn glass walls and doors.

“Well, that changes today,” she says as she steps up to me, looking radiant in the afternoon light. I’m in awe of this woman. How can she be real? “We’re going out.”

I'd go anywhere with her.

Her smile fades. "I'm sorry I left like that last night," she says in a resigned tone. "Duty called and I kind of panicked."

I gently take her wrist in my big hand and turn her arm. I wince when I see all the fresh scratches all over her perfect skin.

"I'm guessing Munchies didn't want his medication?"

"No," she says with a laugh. "He did not. But the furry little fucker got them anyway."

I laugh. Happiness and relief to see her floods into my chest like a warm wave. I can't believe she's here. I can't believe I get to spend another magical day with this woman.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

“Where are we going?”

“First, to a clothing store to get you out of that suit,” she says, looking me up and down, and taking her sweet time with it. “Although, we’re not going to throw this one in the garbage. That would be a crime against masculine hotness. After we get you into some normal civilian clothes, we’re going to a Yankees game.”

I raise my eyebrows, unable to stop the smile spreading across my face. “I’ve never been to Yankee Stadium.”

She rolls her eyes playfully. “Of course you haven’t, but that changes today.”

My girl grabs my hand and pulls me to the door. I don’t fight her one little bit.

Two hours later, I’m in shorts, running shoes, and a Yankees T-shirt, and we’re sitting in the best private box the stadium has to offer. I pulled a favor with one of my rich contacts to get it.

But Amber, looking sexy as hell in her new Yankees hat, is not impressed.

“This is not what I had in mind,” she whispers as she looks around the box at all of the other businessmen and women in suits.

“This is the best private box in all of baseball!”

“It’s boring,” she says with her shoulders slumped. “I want to go to the cheap seats where people know how to have fun.”

I can't say no to her.

So, we take off and sneak into the bleachers. We grab big beers from the guy selling them in the stands and slip into some empty seats surrounded by Yankees fans of all ages and types. The Yankees pitcher strikes out a batter when we sit down and Amber gives the kid behind her a high-five.

"This is more like it," she says, her eyes alive with excitement as she scans the crowd. I'm only looking at her. She's fucking perfect. I can't take my eyes off her.

I thought she looked good with her brown hair loose, but that Yankees hat is really doing something for me. This girl is irresistible.

I watch her lips touch the plastic glass as she takes a sip of beer and I groan, picturing those lips wrapping around my hard cock. God, the things I would do to that mouth...

"So, what was your meeting about?"

"Huh?" I say, getting yanked out of my dirty thoughts.

"Cassandra said you were in a meeting," she continues. The pitcher throws a strike and Amber high-fives the girl beside her. "Was it about world domination? Which continent is Strickland Innovations Group going to take over first?"

"It was about a program we've been developing, but it's been an epic failure."

I tell her a little bit about it, trying to keep it easily digestible.

"So, no one likes poor Eva?" she says with her bottom lip puffed out. "Do you have her on your phone? Let me see her."



I pull up the interactive avatar and hand the phone over.

“Hi Eva,” she says in a cheery voice. “I’m having trouble with my grumpy boss. He keeps yelling at me about spreadsheets.”

“Here are three efficient ways to handle spreadsheets in an appropriate manner,” Eva’s robotic voice spits out. She continues droning on, speaking corporate jargon that I can tell is going over Amber’s head.

“Yeah,” Amber says with a laugh as she hands the phone back. “I can see why no one uses it. Eva sucks.”

“She’s efficient and can help increase productivity if people use her properly,” I say defensively.

“But they’re not using her,” she says like it’s so painfully obvious. “Because she’s boring. Companies are filled with normal people. Normal people like to have fun. Even at work. Make her fun and people will use her.”

There’s a loud crack and the entire section around us jumps up to their feet.

“It’s coming!” Amber says, grabbing my arm and pulling me up.

My heart starts racing as I stand up and look into the air. The baseball comes plunging down and I reach up to grab it. I’m taller than everyone around me, so I have an advantage. I knock the guy in front of me down, spilling his beer, but I catch it. The ball smacks into my palm and I wrap my fingers around it, pulling it into my chest as everyone cheers.

## Page 21

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

Amber's mouth drops open as she looks up at me like I'm a superhero.

I give her the ball and she stares at it in awe before turning back to me. She grabs my shirt, yanks me down, and plants those soft scrumptious lips right onto mine.

I moan as I taste her for the first time while everyone cheers around us. We must be on the jumbotron because the whole stadium erupts.

I wanted our first kiss in private, but I gotta admit. This is pretty darn cool too.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Amber

Dinner isn't what I expected.

After the chaos of the stadium, I thought we'd end up grabbing hot dogs from a cart or eating noodles on the sidewalk. But somehow, here we are—sitting in a quiet little Italian restaurant tucked into a West Village side street with string lights above us and fresh herbs growing out of terra cotta pots along the windowsills.

It's lovely. And romantic.

And way too nice for the Yankees hat I was wearing. I stashed the baseball Logan caught for me and my new cap in the Rolls Royce Logan hired for the day, complete with a driver who is probably playing Soduko on his phone right now.

I can't believe we just found this place by wandering around, walking down random streets while holding hands. That's the beauty of this city and something Logan never realized until I crashed into his life—there's magic tucked away in every corner. You just have to get out and look for it.

This little restaurant was tucked into the corner of a quiet windy street, like it's been here since the invention of marinara. The walls are warm brick, worn with time, and lined with black-and-white photos of what I assume are generations of the same family—laughing around long tables, holding babies, and twirling pasta like it's an Olympic sport. The smell alone could heal childhood trauma: fresh basil, simmering tomatoes, and roasted garlic.

There's a small trio of musicians playing in the back. One has an accordion, the other a mandolin, and the last is an older man with a velvet voice singing soft, slow Italian ballads. He looks like he should be someone's grandpa yelling at his grandkids in a vineyard, but his voice is beautiful and a little bit heartbreaking. It makes the whole place feel like it's floating slightly above the ground.

It's the kind of restaurant where the waiters kiss your cheeks and argue about who makes the better meatballs—Mama or Nonna.

It makes me think of family.

Not just mine now, but the kind I want someday. The loud, warm, overly involved kind that hugs too much and eats even more. I can't wait to see my parents as grandparents, hugging my little toddlers and spoiling them at Christmas. And in my fantasy, this man is standing right there beside me.

I glance across the table at Logan.

“What's your family like?”

He takes a slow sip of his red wine and thinks about it. That's what I like most about him. He's slow and deliberate. He chooses his words carefully and thinks before he speaks. He's the opposite of me with my rambling mouth that won't ever shut up.

"My mom lives in Florida," he says. "With her boyfriend, Mitch. I don't see her nearly enough."

"How come?"

He shrugs those big sexy shoulders. He looks delectable in his black collared shirt with his perfectly tailored charcoal pants, sleeves rolled up those tantalizing forearms. I have the best view in the city.

"I'm not the biggest fan of Mitch and he's not the biggest fan of me."

"Oh," I say, not wanting to push him further than he wants to go. I can tell this man isn't the type to open up easily. But I am curious about his childhood. I'm curious about everything having to do with this man. "What was your mom like when you were growing up?"

The nice song finishes and everyone in the restaurant claps politely.

There's silence until Grandpa begins another song and the quiet conversations continue.

"It was hard for her," he says. I can see the heaviness filling his body. No doubt, it was hard for him too. "My father left us with nothing. Just up and vanished. My mom tried, but... The world isn't too kind to single mothers with no money and no education. She got a job working in a manufacturing plant making car parts, but when she got laid off, it hit us hard. We didn't have family to help and we had no safety net. One month we were living in a tiny apartment in Philly. The next, we were

sleeping in her car.”

My chest tightens. “Logan...”

He shakes his head, not looking for pity.

“It lasted nine months,” he continues. “She’d park at the church or in department store lots. Kept wet wipes in the glove box. Tried to make it feel normal, like it was just temporary.” His voice drops. “But I knew we were there for the long haul.”

## Page 22

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

I can barely breathe. I had no idea. When I think of Logan Strickland, I think of wealth and luxury, not of a scared littleboy living in the backseat of a car. I didn't know this side of him existed, but I want to hear more. I want to know every side of him.

"I've never told anyone that." When he looks up at me, something breaks open in my chest.

It's not just that he's been through hell. It's that he trusts me enough to show it. To let me see the scared little boy behind the man. The wound behind the armor.

I reach across the table and place my hand over his. He doesn't move for a second, but then he turns his hand palm up and curls his fingers around mine.

"I'm sorry," I whisper.

"That's why I take work so seriously," he says. "Why I work so hard. I don't want that to happen again and I definitely don't want to do that to anyone else."

"You're a good man, Logan," I say, just because I think he needs to hear it. I don't think he hears it often enough.

I shiver when those dark brown eyes meet mine.

There's something about the way he's watching me—the hunger and possession in his eyes... It makes me think, maybe... Maybe this could work for real.

Maybe we do belong together. Maybe opposites don't just attract, but they can meld into one.

"You're full of surprises," I say.

"I thought I was boring," he says with a teasing grin.

"You are anything but boring, Mr. Strickland." He was vulnerable with me and now it's my turn to be vulnerable with him. "You just might be the most exciting thing that's ever happened to me."

He smiles. It's a dangerous smile. It's a drop everything and move to New York kind of smile. He's relaxed in a way he wasn't yesterday. Still sharp, still commanding—but there's something unguarded about him now. Like he's letting me see the man underneath the title.

And I like what I see.

"Tell me something intimate," he says as he rubs gentle circles on my wrist with his fingertip, giving me goosebumps. "Something no one else knows about you."

I take a deep breath, wondering if I want to go there.

I realize I do. I want to go everywhere with him.

I lean in close and keep my voice low. "I'm a virgin."

His jaw tightens and his dark eyes fill with a reverence that makes my toes curl as he watches me.

It just never felt right. I never felt like I could trust someone to be that intimate and

vulnerable with.

I used to think there was something wrong with me for being so picky. For waiting. For wanting more.

But now I know—I was just waiting for him.

My type isn't some party boy with abs or a grungy skater with a cigarette hanging from his mouth.

My type is this.

A grumpy, obsessive, boss man with a work addiction and a heart that only opens for me.

I love that I can make him smile even when he doesn't want to. And making him laugh? That feels like winning the lottery every single time. I wish I could bottle up that deep booming sound and play it whenever I need a boost of energy.

I feel like we were made for one another. Like we just fit.

“What do you think about that?” I ask him shyly, hoping he doesn't laugh in my face.

He rubs his sexy stubble-covered jaw and leans in close. “I think you won't be able to say that for a very long.”



*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

My whole body tightens at his words.

I touch his leg with my foot and he lets out a low possessive growl. Heat swirls from my core and pulses between my thighs at his promise.

Our table suddenly feels electric. The air thickens with lust.

“Can I get you some dessert?” the waitress asks as she picks up our plates.

“No,” Logan says with his heated eyes locked on mine, his voice low and rough. “We’re going to have dessert at my place. Check, please.”

I swallow hard as she leaves me alone with this way-too-sexy alpha of a man.

A shiver rolls through my tingling body. I don’t know what that dessert he’s planning to eat at home is, but I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s me.

He pays quickly and then stands, offering his hand.

I could leave now. I could run and never look back.

But where’s the fun in that?

I take his big strong hand and stand up.

Outside, he pulls me tight against his side, his arm around my waist like he owns me already. Like he’s not letting me go. Like my chance to escape has come and gone.

I'm his now.

We don't speak. We don't need to.

Our eyes say everything—hot, hungry, inevitable.

He opens the car door and I slide in with my heart pounding.

Because I know exactly where we're going.

I know exactly what we're about to do.

And I've never wanted anything more.

## CHAPTER NINE

Amber

We don't even make it two steps inside Logan's penthouse suite before our mouths are back on each other, kissing hard as I get pushed up against the wall.

I moan on his tongue as I grip his big bicep, holding on for dear life.

His hands are everywhere like he can't help himself—gripping my waist, sliding down to cup my ass, curling around the back of my neck like he owns me. I whimper into his mouth and he groans, deep and rough, sending a shiver all the way down to my toes.

He's all heat and muscle and need. Every inch of him is hard—his chest, his arms, his firm thick cock pressing into my stomach like it's desperately trying to find a way to get to me through all these layers of clothing.

I can't get enough of any of it.

Of his hot mouth, of his powerful hands, of the sensual way he growls when I tug at his hair.

Of the way he kisses me like he's been starving for this. Starving forme.

He's so fucking hot.

I've never been kissed like this before. Never felt this level of passion. It's like I'm a drug he's been craving and he's finally getting his first real hit.

When I roll my hips into him and feel just how hard he is, he breaks away with a curse under his breath.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

“Hold on,” he mutters, breathing hard as he steps back.

I stand there, stunned and flustered and about two seconds away from combusting as he hurries to the fireplace and flicks it on. An orange glow lights him up and if I didn’t think Mr. Logan Strickland could be any sexier, I was dead wrong.

I lean against the wall, trying to catch my breath with my thighs clenched tight because my core is throbbing. It’s pulsing. Everything down there is aching for him.

He hurries to the control panel on the wall and hits another few buttons. The lights turn on—a soft, sexy, golden glow.

Oh.

Okay.

This is much better. When you’re with a man as sexy as Logan, you want to see what you’re working with. You want to admire every detail.

I tear my eyes off him to quickly scan the room. I’m in the dragon’s lair and I want to take it all in. I’ve been so curious to know everything about this mysterious man and I’ve been wondering what his place looked like. It’s even more luxurious than I imagined.

It’s spectacular... and so him.

Huge windows overlook the city skyline, glittering lights stretching for miles. The

furniture is dark and sleek, but still comfortable, like something out of a billionaire bachelor pad fantasy. The fireplace crackles softly beneath a giant abstract painting, and the kitchen—holy crap—is nicer than any kitchen I’ve seen on any of those celebrity mansion walk-through videos or in any fancy magazines. Sub-zero fridge, funky retro-looking oven, quartz countertops, and a matching wine fridge built into the wall which must have at least two hundred bottles in it.

This is nothing like my tiny place back home with the overgrown plants, cracked kitchen tiles, and squeaky cabinets.

But somehow, it already feels like home.

I can picture myself here.

Waking up to this view. Cooking in that kitchen. Cuddled up on that huge couch with a certain grumpy CEO wrapped around me like a weighted blanket.

I wouldn’t mind that at all. My body pulses harder at the thought.

I’d miss the stray cats that come and visit, but something tells me Logan Strickland would be perfectly happy curling up in their place—and hissing at anyone else who got too close.

With the room ready for loving, my hot crush turns and wrecks me with the world’s most heated gaze.

I swallow hard as he struts over, as smooth and sleek as a prowling panther. God, this man is going to devour me whole, and I’m going to relish every second of it.

He looks so good. Too good. His black shirt sleeves are rolled up, forearms flexing. Hair tousled. Eyes hot as sin. He looks like a man who’s two seconds away from

pinning me to the nearest surface and ruining me for life.

Yes, please. I'm fully on board for that.

I'm up for whatever those dark simmering eyes have planned...

"I've been wanting to do this since the second I laid eyes on you," he says in that low, gravelly voice that makes my knees weak. "You walked into my office and turned my whole damn world upside down."

I bite my lip while my heart pounds. "I want it too. I want you."

His mouth crashes down on mine and I melt into him, arms winding around his neck, hands running over his broad shoulders. His needy possessive hands grip my waist, then my ribs, and then they slowly slide up to cup my breasts over my sundress.

I whimper when his thumbs brush my nipples through the fabric. I'm so sensitive, so ready for him. They're tingling like never before.

He pulls down one strap. Then the other.

I moan as my dress falls to my waist. He takes a long hard look at my breasts spilling out of my bra and then leans down to put his mouth on me. I drop my head back when I feel his hot lips kissing my collarbone and my shoulder, making my whole body light up like the Fourth of July.

He unhooks my bra and slowly pulls it off as I sink my hands back into his hair, holding his mouth against my burning skin.

My breasts tumble free, and he growls—actually growls—as he cups them in his big hands.

“So fucking perfect,” he mutters as he stares down at them. I wonder if he can see my heart thundering in my chest. It’s pounding like never before.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

“Oh,” I gasp as his hot mouth closes over one nipple, sucking and licking while he palms my other breast. My head drops back with a moan, fingers fisting and pulling his thick hair.

Holy shit, I love New York.

He switches to the other breast, and I arch my back, pushing my breasts against his hot, perfect mouth and blissful tongue.

I slide my tingling hand down, needing to touch him, to feel him. I want to know if he’s as turned on as I am. The moment I touch the long thick cock straining in his pants, he groans—and just like that, I have my answer.

I add some pressure, pushing against his erection with my palm and he hisses on my bare breast like the intensity is too much.

I’m not sure if I’m doing it right, so I pull my hand away.

“No,” he growls, grabbing my wrist with a steel grip. He puts my hand right back onto his cock. “Please don’t stop.”

I’d smile if I wasn’t so turned on as I start stroking him over his pants, wondering if it’s as big and long as it feels, and wondering how that can possibly be the case.

He groans right onto my bare chest, his hot breath teasing my hard nipple. Now, I have this man shaken. I’m making his knees go weak.



With my mouth watering, I lower my eyes.

I want to see him.

I want to taste him.

I drop down to my knees, heart racing, hands working his belt.

“Goddamn,” he hisses, dropping his head back while he grabs a fistful of his hair.

His eyes quickly drop back down as I yank out his belt and pull down his zipper like he doesn’t want to miss a second of the erotic show I’m about to give him.

I can’t believe this is happening. I can’t believe I’m about to do this.

But with no hesitation, I pull down his pants and reach into his boxer briefs, wrapping my eager hand around his big thick cock.

He hisses when I pull it out.

“Whoa,” I whisper as it springs up in front of my face.

With my tongue aching to taste him, I hold him in my hand to admire every long powerful inch.

He’s so hard. So beautiful. This cock is breathtaking.

Literally.

I can’t breathe as I stare at it in awe.

It's huge. So huge.

Long, veiny, and thick enough that my fingers don't come close to touching around it. And the head—God, the beautiful head—is swollen and slick, flushed a deep shade of pink that makes something flutter low in my belly.

A drop of precum swells at the tip, then spills over, sliding down the ridge and catching on one of the thick, raised veins trailing his shaft. Another drop follows, dripping hot onto my knuckles.

He's gorgeous. Every inch of him.

His big masculine balls hang below, tight and full, swaying with every heavy breath he takes like they're seconds away from releasing all that heat. Forme. Intome.

I shiver with the tempting thought.

He's so hard it looks painful. So thick it makes my mouth water. So perfect I feel it in my toes.

## Page 26

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

And the way he's looking at me—like I'm his next breath, like I'm the reason he's straining like that—has me aching all over.

“Fuck, Amber,” he grits out, his voice hoarse as his back hits the wall. “You're gonna kill me, girl.”

I squeeze my hand and start stroking—once, twice—watching his sexy jaw clench. Three times and then I lean forward and lick a drop of precum off the tip.

His whole body shudders.

“You're so big,” I whisper. “So hot...”

“You're the fucking hottest thing I've ever seen,” he growls.

“Can you take off your shirt?” I moan. I want to see his chest and abs and those delicious arms. I've been dreaming about that torso for days.

He doesn't hesitate. He undoes two buttons, but it's taking too long, so he just yanks his shirt open, sending the rest of them scattering down the hall.

I suck in a breath when I see his perfectly sculpted abs in front of me. That massive chest... Those shoulders... Those arms... Fuck, I don't know where to look.

I slide my hand up his abs, feeling the deep ridges on my palm and on my tingling fingertips until he squeezes his eyes shut and groans like I'm causing him pain by getting distracted from the task at hand. I realize he needs a release as badly as I do,

so I bring all of my focus back onto his big throbbing cock.

And I slowly put it in my mouth.

We both moan as I slide him between my lips, his girth stretching my jaw out to the point where it's aching. But I fight through the pain, for him, for me, and because I couldn't stop if I tried.

It's all so good. So erotic.

The taste. The heat. The weight of him on my tongue—it's all so much. I moan around him as I start to move my mouth back and forth, licking and sucking, and exploring every inch.

He watches me with that desperate look gleaming in his sexy eyes. They're brimming with a dark, possessive hunger that says I belong to him now. I fully agree.

"You have no idea what you do to me," he groans, gripping my hair but not hard enough to hurt me. Just enough to let me know I'm his. "You have your hooks in me, girl. I'm a little obsessed with you."

Just a little... I think I can remedy that.

After this, he'll be one hundred percent, completely obsessed. Just the way I want it. Just the way I am with him.

I start working my mouth up and down his shaft, using my tongue to coat every hard inch. I go slow at first, trying to figure him out, letting his guttural sounds guide me—those deep, wrecked groans, the sharp hisses of breath, the dominant growls.

And the desperate whispers of my name. I love that the most. Hearing him

say ‘Amber’ like I’m making him lose control.

My pussy aches as I push him in deeper, his muscular thighs tensing under my hands.

I want to make him cum. I want to feel him lose control because of me.

I want to taste him. All of him.

When he gets close, I stroke and suck and do whatever I can to push him over the edge.

“Fuck, Amber,” he hisses through gritted teeth as he’s about to erupt.

His grip on my hair tightens as he throws his head back, thrusts his hips, and lets out the sexiest growl I’ve ever heard. My pussy pulses as he cums in my mouth, filling it with hot delicious cum.

I moan as I swallow him down, feeling the heat warming my chest as I keep him in my mouth as long as he’ll let me.

But before I can catch my breath, he hauls me to my feet like a crazed man, lifting me like I weigh nothing. I don’t even know what’s happening as he carries me across the room and then drops me onto the couch.

Oh. This.

He drops to his knees in front of me as he grabs my knees and spreads my legs open.

## Page 27

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

My pussy aches as he lifts my dress up, exposing my damp underwear. That look in his eyes... fucking hell, I might cum from that alone.

“Oh,” I gasp as he leans down and kisses my pussy over my panties. It sends a quaking shiver rippling through my body.

“You’re mine,” he growls, looking up at me as he grabs my underwear on both sides of my hips.

“I know,” I whimper. “I always have been.”

He yanks my panties down and tosses them aside, spreading me open like a gift.

My breath catches in my throat as I watch him looking at my most intimate area for the first time.

Lust fills his dark sexy eyes. But it’s not just lust. It’s awe. It’s reverence. It’s thick unyielding need.

I always thought I would be shy when a man finally looked at me like this, but I’m not shy. I’m turned on. So turned on. I want him to look. I want him to see.

He runs his hand down his face, looking at my bare pussy like he’s never seen anything so intimate. So perfect. So his.

Then he lowers his mouth...

And I break apart.

“Fuck!” I scream, grabbing his hair, my thighs locked around his head, as his hot perfect mouth touches me down there for the first time.

It’s pure bliss. It’s mind-shattering. It’s all-consuming.

I hold my breath as I feel his hot tongue sliding up and down me, in me, over me. My legs start shaking. I cry for more.

His tongue brings me higher and higher until there’s nowhere to go but down.

“Logan,” I scream as he brings me to new heights I never knew were possible.  
“Fuck!”

He doesn’t stop. He doesn’t answer.

He just keeps licking and sucking and devouring me whole.

## CHAPTER TEN

Logan

This pussy is divine. I’ve never tasted anything this addictive in all my life.

Amber’s legs are hooked over my shoulders while my face is buried between her soft, trembling thighs. I’m devouring her pussy like it’s the only thing I’ve ever wanted.

And right now, it is.

My sexy girl is whimpering, her fingers clawing at the couch cushions while her hips

roll and buck against my mouth. I lick her clit, circling it with my tongue before I suck on it just to feel her jolt.

“Logan,” she gasps, her voice already wrecked. “I can’t... It’s so...Fuuuccckk.”

I grin between licks, loving how I’m making her as crazy as she made me.

But the grin quickly fades and I’m back on her, spreading her soft wet lips and licking the pink inside.

She’s mine now. That desperate little voice. This tight, virgin pussy. All fuckingmine.

I’m never letting this girl go. If she leaves my city, she better believe I’m following her. I’ll give up my company, give up my home, give up my whole damn life for her. I’ll give it all up just so I can do this every, single, night.

She starts giving me a show, playing with her naked tits—squeezing and massaging them while I taste her wet heat. This girl has set my soul on fire. I’m rock fucking hard.



*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

I moan as I lean back to admire the perfection between her legs once again. Tight and glistening, her pussy's the prettiest thing I've ever seen. It's pink, swollen, and soaked from my mouth. It looks like it was made to be fucked. Made to take every thick inch I have for her.

My whole jaw is wet with her honey and her delicious taste on my tongue is making my obsession grow deeper. I can smell her arousal with every deep breath I take. I don't think I could live without her. Not anymore. I don't know how I survived this long without this beauty in my life.

Those sexy hazel eyes are watching me as she plays with her tits, her lustful gaze roaming over my shoulders and arms, dipping down to my cock.

Her white sundress is bunched up around her waist, her tits rising and falling with every panting breath. Her nipples are hard, her chest flushed, her lips parted and glossy from our last kiss. She's the picture of wrecked innocence.

And I'm not even close to being done. She'll sleep for a week when I'm done pleasuring her.

I reach up and grab her sunflower dress, pulling it over her head and tossing it aside.

Now, she's completely naked on my couch, glowing in the firelight like a goddess.

She's so fucking beautiful it hurts.

And she's mine.

I still can't believe that amazing fact. Only I get to experience her like this. Only I get to touch her and kiss her and taste her. Only me. Forever.

No one else.

They'll never see this angel in the flesh looking this sinfully sexy. No one but me will ever touch her here. No one will ever taste this succulent sweetness between her legs. No one will ever make her cry out or make her fall apart.

It will only ever be me.

And I couldn't be more grateful. That she waited, that she's giving herself to me, that she trusts me enough to let me take control.

I dip my head back down and kiss her clit, slow and soft. She moans and starts rolling her hips as I lick a long, teasing stroke up the length of her soaked folds, flattening my tongue against her pussy and growling like a man possessed.

Because I am.

I swirl around her entrance, teasing her tight little virgin hole, flicking and sucking until her whole body starts to shake.

“Logan—oh fuck—I'm gonna?—”

I seal my mouth over her clit and suck hard, just as I slide a finger into her slick heat. She cries out and arches off the couch, her thighs locking around my head.

She cums like an angel—loud, reckless, shaking, and screaming my name like it's the only word she's ever known.

I lap up every last drop her pussy gives me, watching her and memorizing every stunning detail.

After the heated bliss is done traveling through her body, I lift her into my protective arms and cradle her to my chest. Her eyes are all glassy with lust and she's still trembling and dazed, not knowing what just happened.

I hold her close as I kick off my pants from around my ankles, and then I carry her to the bedroom. Her arms wrap around my neck and she tucks her face into my jugular. Her soft moans wash against my heated skin.

I'm in love.

I don't want her to ever leave my place. I want her to move in. I want to wake up to her beautiful sleeping face and come home from work to her dazzling smile.

I want to tell her all that, but now's not the time. I have a job to finish.

I lower her onto my King-sized bed, take one long look at her, and then I grab the fireplace remote. One click and the flames roar to life, bathing her naked body in golden light.

She opens her legs for me. No hesitation. No fear. Just trust. Just want.

She's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

Her gorgeous hair is spread across my pillows. Her lips are parted and puffy from my rough kisses. Her gorgeous breasts rise and fall with every quick breath she takes. Her thighs are slick, her pussy is glistening, and her legs are still twitching from the intense orgasm I rocked her with.

## Page 29

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

And her eyes... God, her eyes... They're locked on me like I'm everything.

I grab my hard cock and stroke it as I climb onto the bed between her legs, hovering over her.

She clings to me as I bring my head to her tight virgin entrance.

This is it. Her first time.

I'll never forget this. I'll never take it for granted.

I push the thick head of my cock into her opening and grit my teeth as her virgin heat grips me.

She's so tight. So warm. Soperfect.

Her fingers dig into my arms as I add some pressure, slowly pushing in, inch by inch, taking her, claiming her.

"Breathe, baby," I whisper as I rub her clit with my thumb. "You're doing so well."

She pulls me down, breathes into my neck, and clings to my shoulders as I sink deeper. Her pussysqueezesevery inch of me as I struggle not to lose control. I have to go slow and steady, no matter how fast I want to take her. It is her first time after all. I have to be gentle.

Her pussy is as tight as a fucking glove. Its grip on me has my pulse racing.

She whimpers as I push all the way in, buried to the hilt, my pelvis pressed against her engorged little clit.

I could stay like this forever. I might never leave this warm, perfect place.

“Logan,” she whispers, her voice shaking. “You feel so good. Big, but good.”

I press my forehead to hers and then crush my mouth against her lips. She gasps when my tongue slides in, and then she moans, melting into the kiss like she’s starving for it.

“You’re mine,” I growl onto her open mouth. “This body. This pussy. It’s mine forever.”

She shivers under me, wrapping her legs around my waist.

“Show me what you’ve wanted to do to me,” she whispers. “I’m ready for it.”

I pull out slowly and slide back in, her tight little pussy clenching around me. It feels so damn good. I can’t focus on anything else.

I keep my strokes slow at first, but it’s not long before I ramp up the rhythm, building the speed and power until I’m giving her deep, steady thrusts of my cock. She likes it. I can tell by the way she pushes her hips into me, meeting every hard thrust. Her nails are digging into my back. Her moans are giving me shivers.

“Yes,” she pants as I fuck her harder and faster. “Oh, yes...”

I kiss her neck, her breasts, her jaw—everywhere I can reach. I sink my hands into her sexy hair and whisper dirty things in her ear.

“Your tight little cunt was made for my cock,” I growl. “You’re soaked like you’ve been waiting your whole life for this big dick.”

When her moans start to get louder, I lift her legs onto my shoulders and fuck her even deeper, hitting sensitive spots that make her cry out.

She gasps when my cock hits her G-spot, her nails digging into my shoulders.

“Yes,” she screams. “Rightthere. Rightthere.”

I grip her thighs and watch her take it, her whole body dipping into the bed from my weight. The headboard starts slamming into the wall with the merciless rhythm of my hips, but I don’t care. We might break through the drywall and bust into the next room at this rate.

I drop my eyes to where we’re connected, watching my big dick plunging in and out of her hot little cunt. My shaft is coated in her virgin cream. I can’t look away.

Until the thought hits me...

Breed her.

## Page 30

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

I want to fill her womb with my seed. I want to make her mine in every way.

I watch her tits bouncing with every thrust, feel her pussy milking my cock, and the primal urge takes over. I need to breed this sweet angel.

She cries out in frustration as I suddenly pull out from her pussy and flip her over. I haul her hips up and quickly sink back into her from behind.

She screams into the pillow and pushes back, taking everything I give her like she was born to take my huge dick.

“Fuck, baby,” I hiss through gritted teeth as I pound into her fast and hard. “Whose pussy is this?”

“Yours,” she cries out, wild and breathless. “All yours, Logan. It’s always been yours.”

“Fucking right, it has.”

I grab her perfect ass and fuck her hard and deep while I stare at her tight little asshole. It looks so fucking tempting.

She grabs a fistful of sheets and screams, her cheek on the mattress, her mouth open, her eyes squeezed shut. My girl is about to cum. I can feel her ready to burst.

“Do it,” I growl as I fuck her faster and harder, plunging my hard dick in and out of her tight little pussy at a furious pace. “Cum on me, baby. Cum on my cock.”

She erupts.

The whole damn city might hear that scream as she cums all over a man's dick for the first time. Her pussy grips me like a fist, wet and wild and pulsing, trying to make me cum too.

It feels so good that I can't hold it back.

I grab her ass—way too hard—thrust in deep, and release inside her, unloading every drop of hot cum I've built up for her. Her virgin pussy squeezes and milks me as it takes every hot pulse from my cock.

“Oh, Logan,” she moans.

My body shakes as my cock pulses one last time inside her, transferring every drop of seed into her ripe little womb.

She collapses into the pillows and I collapse beside her.

For a moment, there's only the sound of our breathing—ragged, unsteady, and completely spent. Her skin is flushed, glowing in the firelight, and her eyes flutter closed like she's drifting off somewhere between dreams and bliss.

I slide my arm under her body and pull her against my chest. She curls into me like she belongs here. Like she always has.

I stroke her back, slow and gentle, grounding us both.

“I've got you,” I whisper into her ear. “I'll always have you.”

Her hand slides down my arm and I can feel her smiling against my chest.



“I know.”

This wasn't just sex. It was the farthest thing imaginable from a casual hookup.

It was everything. It was soulmates expressing their love.

I press a kiss to her temple, letting gratitude and love swell through every inch of my body.

She saved me. She opened my eyes.

She's changed everything.

And for all that, I'm never letting her go.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

Amber

“Munchies,” I whisper as I crouch down beside the kitchen island like I’m negotiating with a tiny, furry terrorist. “Please, buddy. Just one more bite. There’s no way you tasted the pill I crushed in there. You’re being dramatic.”

He stares at me like I just tried to poison him—which, I guess, from his perspective, I did. His flat, smushed face is stone cold.

‘I cannot be tricked, stupid human,’ I imagine him saying.

I sigh and flop onto the tile floor, still holding the dish of organic duck pâté infused with a tiny, barely-there sliver of thyroid medication. Willow gave me a full booklet of instructions on how to medicate this drama queen. None of them are working. I try another gentle nudge and Munchies responds by dramatically flopping on his back beside me. What a diva.

It’s been six days since I arrived and Logan and I have been inseparable. If I’m not in his bed, he’s in mine. If I’m not riding in the passenger seat of his fast Italian car, I’m riding him on his couch while a movie plays in the background. We haven’t gotten to the end of one movie yet. His mouth, hands, and big firm cock are much more entertaining than anything Hollywood can offer.

He’s coming over for dinner tonight after work, which is why I’m currently sweating in Willow’s intimidating kitchen. It’s fit for a chef, but unfortunately, all it has tonight is me. I’m trying really hard not to mess up a pot of spaghetti.

“I can do this,” I whisper to myself as I stare at the wooden beams running along the ceiling.

Munchies frowns at me as if saying, ‘No, you can’t. You really can’t.’

It’s only three ingredients and boiling water. But I didn’t strain the noodles fast enough and they’re looking a little soggy. Plus, the sauce smells tangy in a way that makes me nervous.

“Dude,” I say, turning back to the cat. “Are you going to take your pill or what?”

He flicks his tail like it personally offends him that I’m still talking about this.

“Fine, whatever,” I say as I get up and look at the gooey monstrosity in the pot again, wincing because it somehow looks even worse. “Have your thyroid explode. See if I care.”

Munchies slowly gets up like he’s doing the world a favor and then starts to eat his organic duck pâté as I watch, holding my breath.

“Yes!” I whisper when he actually eats the pill. He must taste the bitterness because he stares up at me like I’ve betrayed him.

“Don’t get mad at me,” I say as I wash my hands and wipe them on a dishtowel. “I’m not the one who broke your thyroid.”

My phone dings and I grab it as fast as humanly possible, hoping to see Logan’s name on the screen.

It’s from Amir. My new Uber driver friend I made when I arrived in New York.

“Awwwww.”

Yusuf wants to say hi!

Attached is an adorable picture of an infant boy all swaddled up lovingly in a blue blanket.

Something inside me shifts as I stare at the precious baby.

I realize I want that.

And for the first time in my life, I actually believe I can have that.

A family. A real one.

With a stable presence like Logan in my life, I believe I can do it. I can do anything.

I lean against the counter, imagining having a baby of my own, and a smile spreads across my face. My eyes water.

Logan keeps asking me to stay. He keeps telling me he can't live without me.

And I'm starting to wonder... Can I live without him?

I try to picture myself returning to Vermont and I can't do it. It doesn't seem like home anymore. The life I enjoyed before feels like a lifetime ago. It feels bleak and boring and... gray.

## Page 32

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

I can't believe I was happy with that life. It feels so small now.

Logan has changed everything.

He's color and heat and possibility.

He's excitement. He's everything.

I send a congratulatory text back to Amir and right after I hit send, my phone buzzes again.

This time, it's him.

I'll be there in ten. Can't wait to see you.

I smile as I reread the text about twenty times.

I'm buzzing around the condo until he walks in, looking like masculine perfection in a tailored suit.

Now, this I can get used to.

My heart pounds as he walks up to me, all six-foot-something of broad-shouldered, alpha male sugary goodness in a dark navy suit. He's loosened the tie—which always does it for me—and his top button is undone.

My eyes are unable to blink as he takes off his jacket, a move that looks so natural to

him, but feels so erotic to me, and drapes it over a chair.

Those sexy dark eyes find me as he slowly rolls his sleeves up his thick muscular forearms.

Mama Mia.

“I missed you.” That deep voice slides straight between my thighs and makes my pussy tingle.

“I saw you this morning,” I say, biting back a smile.

“It wasn’t enough. I can’t ever get enough of you.”

I have to turn to the sink so he doesn’t see my cheeks burning worse than my sauce.

He walks up behind me, wraps his big possessive arms around my waist, and buries his face into my neck, breathing in my scent. I melt like a stick of butter on a hot pan.

“Mmmmm,” he hums before peeking into the pot. “What are you cooking?”

I laugh. “A mess.”

“I’m sure it will be delicious.”

He’s too sweet, but he’s a horrible liar.

“I blame Munchies,” I say, as I turn around in his arms and gaze up into those loving brown eyes. “It’s hard to focus on cooking when there’s a cat in the shadows plotting your murder.”

He laughs and then gives me what I've been dying for all day—a soft passionate kiss. I'm dripping wet by the time those delicious lips pull away.

I dump the soggy noodles into the compost and try again, but I barely get them into the pot before we start cooking up something entirely different.

Logan's hand brushes my ass, I lean into him, and suddenly the stove is the least important thing in this room.

We lunge on each other, kissing and grabbing and knocking over spatulas and pasta boxes. Munchies flees out of the room with a screech when the metal tin hits the ground.

Logan has my shirt off before I remember to turn off the burner. I reach out and switch it off as he kisses my neck and massages my breasts with those big perfect hands.

The noodles will be soggy.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

Again.

Fuck it, we'll order something.

Speaking of soggy noodles... This noodle is not.

Logan's cock is rock hard, pressing against my hip and taking my breath away. My mouth waters as I press against it harder...

I fumble to take it out of his pants while he's in the process of getting me out of mine.

We don't make it out of the kitchen.

He both slip out of our pants and shirts, but we don't get to removing our underwear before he lifts me onto the island like I'm weightless. My pussy aches as he comes between my spread thighs, that rock hard cock making his tight gray boxer briefs stand up like a tent. His hands are everywhere. Mine are too.

We kiss like we're starving for each other. Like the eight hours we were apart was a lifetime of longing.

Something crashes to the floor—might be a wooden spoon or an entire basil plant, but I don't stop to check. I can't. This feels too fucking good.

Our underwear joins the cooking utensils on the floor and we have wild, fast, hungry sex right on the granite countertop.



There are dried spaghetti noodles spilled everywhere and chopped basil in my hair by the end of it, and I've never felt more completely devoured and satisfied in my life.

He picks my limp body up off the island and cuddles me on the floor, both of us panting and glistening with sweat.

He kisses my temple and strokes my hair as the city glows behind us.

"Don't leave me," he says quietly, his voice rough with something deeper than lust. "Stay. Please stay."

I look up into his loving brown eyes and see nothing but vulnerability and need. It makes me fall for him just a little bit more.

I'm about to answer, but Munchies interrupts us. He comes strutting back over with a look of complete disdain on his flat furry face.

'I'm telling,' he seems to be saying.

"Munchies, meet Logan," I say, presenting the two men in my life to one another.

Munchies struts over and gives Logan a quick whack on his arm, just to let him know who's the boss of the house.

We both laugh as the drama queen turns with a hiss and struts back down the hallway.

Everything feels too good to be true as Logan's deep rumbling laugh vibrates through me.

How can I leave this?

How can I say no to this?

I don't think I can.

Maybe I will stay.

Maybe being in this man's warm comforting arms in this amazing city is where I'm meant to be.

It sure feels that way.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Amber

Isaunter into Logan's office, swaying my hips seductively as I pull out a chair in front of his huge mahogany desk. I eye him without saying a word as I sit down, crossing my legs and keeping my back straight.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

He looks up from his papers and lets out a little groan when he sees my breasts thrust out.

“Thank you for seeing me on such short notice, Mr. Strickland,” I say in a throaty voice, my hands folded primly in my lap. “I’mveryinterested in being your new secretary, although I’ll settle intoany positionyou want me in.”

His dark eyes narrow hungrily on me.

“I like to workhard,” I say, licking my lips seductively. “In fact, nothing would please me more than to be on your desk while you work me as hard as you can.”

He sits back and crosses his arms, his eyes lifting, dark and slow, as they rake up my body, clearly undressing me.

“And what qualifications do you bring to the role, Miss Fletcher?”

I grin as I roam my eyes over Logan’s sexy suit.

“I’m great atdictation,” I say, nibbling on my bottom lip. “I prefer to work one-on-one with the boss and you’ll find that I’mvery goodat taking direction.”

“What about multi-tasking?” he asks in a low gravelly voice.

“Excellentat it,” I say, running my hand along my thigh. “I can use my mouth and my hands at the same time.”

“That will come in handy,” he says as his heated eyes drop to my legs. “I’ll be working that mouth and those hands very hard.”

“Sounds right up my alley,” I say, wiggling my shoulders. “Can I get a hands-on demonstration of your leadership style?”

He grins as he stares me down. Uh oh. I know that look. It usually ends with me bent over, sweaty, and screaming his name.

Logan stands, his chair sliding back as he rounds the desk, his heated eyes fixated on me.

I shift in the seat, heart pounding as I watch him prowl closer. I’m trying to act like I’m not completely breathless. “I’m proficient at spreadsheets, spreading in the sheets, and anticipating my boss’ every, single, need.”

“Sounds like you’re perfect to work under me,” he says as he stops right in front of me and cups my jaw. God, my heart is pounding...

“And how are you at handling long, hard, demanding projects?”

I look up at him with an innocent look. “I don’t mind staying late to make sure the boss is satisfied.”

He groans, his gaze dropping to my mouth. “Do you follow instructions well?”

“Very well.” I lean forward just enough to show him some cleavage. “You say jump, I say how high. You say take off your panties, I say I’m not wearing any.”

His lips twitch like he’s holding back a groan.

“And what is your greatest weakness?” he asks, voice husky as he slides his hand to the back of my neck and into my hair. It gives me goosebumps.

I rise from the chair, dragging my hand up his red tie as I do. “Tall, grumpy CEOs. I can’t get enough of them.”

He closes the space between us in one step, his hand sliding to my hip as he growls, “You’re hired.”

I grin as I press up on my toes and whisper against his mouth, “I accept.”

My cheeks flush, and I try to play it cool, but the truth is—I’m completely in love with this man.

We’ve spent the past two weeks together, not missing one day. His real secretary Cassandra told me he’s taken more time off in the past two weeks than he has in the past decade. I loved hearing that.

But as amazing as it’s been, we both know it’s coming to an end. Willow and Greg return today. In fact, they may be in the city at this very moment.

We haven’t really talked about what’s going to happen next, but I know he wants me to stay.

He’s already made New York feel like home.

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:21 am*

His lips are a breath away from mine when there's a knock at the door.

"Fuck," he grumbles as I step away, cheeks flushed, pussy aching. "Go away."

I chuckle as I hurry over to the door and open it.

"Oh my god!" It's Willow. She's standing in the doorway with a fresh tan, looking refreshed and more well-rested than I've seen her look in a long time. She has a breezy linen jumpsuit on, sunglasses perched on top of her head, and a very startled look on her face.

I jump on her, wrapping my arms around her shoulders.

"What are you doing here?" she whispers in my ear. "Are you in a hostage situation or something?"

I lean back and chuckle as I look at her. "Nothing like that."

She hasn't blinked once. She looks at me, then at Logan, and then back to me, not knowing what to think. "What is happening?"

"Logan and I hit it off," I tell her. "We're... dating."

Her mouth drops. "Shut. Up."

"It's actually more than that," Logan says as he comes over and puts his arm around my waist. "We're in love."

She's staring at us in stunned silence. I'm trying not to laugh at the crazed, confused look in her eyes.

"You can close your mouth now," I whisper to her.

She shuts her mouth, walks over to the chair, and plops down into it, holding her forehead. "Wait. What? Can someone please explain what the hell is going on? You're dating?"

I sit beside her, take her hand, and tell her everything from the beginning.

"I go away for two weeks and the entire world flips upside down." She turns to Logan, blinking. "You look... happy."

"It's good to see you, Willow," he says. "You look so relaxed. It suits you well."

"Thanks," she says, clearly suspicious. "Hawaii was amazing."

"I'm glad you had a good time," he says. "You should take at least one vacation a year. Actually—starting now, I'm making it mandatory."

She narrows her worried eyes on me. "What did you do to him?" she asks me under her breath.

"I smiled at him once," I whisper. "He never recovered."

Willow shakes her head like she's in some kind of rom-com fever dream. "Okay, well... What else did I miss? Is VANTAGE officially dead?"

"No," Logan says, leaning against his desk. "I found a solution."

Willow and I say the same thing at the same time. “You did?”

He turns his attention to me. “You gave me the idea.”

“I did?”

“She did?”

He nods. “Eva isn’t the problem. She just needs to be less robotic. More human. More... fun.”

Willow squints. “So, what? You want to give her a makeover?”

“I want Amber to be her voice,” he says. “Her personality. Her everything.”



## Page 36

*Source Creation Date: July 8, 2025, 4:22 am*

I freeze. “Wait—seriously?”

He nods. Wow, I guess I did better on my fake interview than I thought...

Willow studies my face as the wheels in her mind turn. “That’s... actually... a good idea. I can see it.”

“You can?” I say, shocked that I can actually contribute to this giant complicated company in a meaningful way.

“I think it will work,” she says. “I’ll have to ask Greg if she can stay with us?—”

“She’ll stay with me,” Logan says like it’s not up for discussion.

Willow looks at me like she still can’t believe it.

But I can.

Logan and I are meant to be together.

We fit so perfectly.

I’m not going back to Vermont. Not now anyway. Not without him.

I’m staying right here as long as this hot, sexy, grumpy CEO will have me.

EPILOGUE

Logan

Twenty-Five Years Later...

It's the perfect weather for a family weekend.

There's not a cloud in the sky or a drop of rain in the forecast. The ducks are gliding on the lake, following the two kayakers who are paddling by. I love Vermont. It just feels like home in a way that New York City never did.

I finish adjusting the string lights over the back patio, making sure the last bulb is secure. Amber loves them. She says they make the yard feel like magic. She's always been right about the small touches that make a house feel like home or a moment feel like forever.

She's inside, humming along to the oldies playlist she's had on since this morning, probably slicing fruit into a Pinterest-worthy pattern. I can hear her off-key singing drifting through the screen door and it makes me smile. It always does.

After two and a half decades, she's still my dream girl.

I love her more than I ever thought a man could love anything.

And I still can't believe she's mine.

We've been through a lot over the years and I cherish every moment of it. Three kids, two dogs, and one fuzzball cat who Amber is convinced is a reincarnated Munchies. I don't ask questions.

My company is long gone. I sold it fifteen years ago, shortly after our third child was born. I built an empire, but it was all-consuming. There was no time for the new

priorities I had, so I traded it all in for bonfires, Saturday morning pancakes, soccer games, and fall hikes through golden woods.

But mostly for her.

I'd give up everything for her.

People told me I'd regret it. That I'd get bored. That I'd miss the thrill of running a company.

But they don't know Amber. Not like I do.

She's the only thrill I need.

I'm so grateful for this woman. She's given me joy, peace, laughter, and a home full of love and muddy boots and noise and warmth. I would've worked myself into a heart attack alone on the 47th floor of Eastmont Center if she hadn't crashed into my life, causing chaos in a sunflower sundress.

She saved me.

And I never forgot that.

I hear the creak of the screen door and turn to see her stepping outside, barefoot on the deck, a dish towel tossed over her shoulder. Her hair is a little longer now, streaked with gold from the sun, and she's still the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

"Lights look perfect," she says, lighting up with a smile.

I roam my hungry eyes all over her. "You look perfect."

She walks over and stands beside me, tucking herself under my arm like she's done a thousand times on a thousand evenings just like this. I kiss the top of her head and breathe her in as she gazes out at the lake.

"They should be here any minute," she says. "Willow texted. She's bringing that weird bean salad again."

I chuckle. "Greg still pretending to like it?"

"Oh, he's fully committed to the lie now. There's no going back."

I take one last look at our yard and smile. It's ready for a big, fun family weekend. Our kids are staying until Sunday night, and so are Willow, Greg, and their two kids. It's going to be a blast.

The massive coolers are full of ice and drinks, the lake is warm, the beds are set, and the BBQ is full of propane. All we're missing are the people.

Although, now that I have my hands on my hot wife, I kind of want to cancel and keep her all to myself.

I turn her in my arms and look down at her perfect little mouth.

"Mmmmmm," I moan as I kiss her.

I must be the luckiest man in the world.

"Think we have time for a quickie?" she asks, pushing her hip into my erection.

"Here or upstairs?"

"Upstai—"

The front door opens and our oldest daughter Katrina yells out. "Hello!"

I drop my head with a frustrated groan as our two grandkids come bursting onto the deck. "Papa! Nana!"

It's hard to stay frustrated when you're surrounded by so much love. We split apart and welcome them all, giving hugs and kisses and grabbing bags. As soon as we're inside, Willow and Greg show up with their kids and their golden retriever who immediately belly-flops into the lake. Our middle child, Aaron, shows up next with his new girlfriend on his arm.

The weekend-long party is in full swing, but I still have my eye on my girl.

Amber and I will sneak away and have that quickie before the night is over. We

always do.

I let her know it when we catch each other's eye in the middle of the circus.

I give her that look.

Those adorable cheeks flush and she raises her eyebrows letting me know the message is received.

Willow steals her attention away, showing her the bean salad she made, but I don't take my eyes off her.

I adore my Amber.

She gave me all this.

She turned my life into something real.

Something worth living.

And I'll spend every moment of the rest of it loving her for that.

The End!