



The Catcher

Author: *Kate Raven*

Category: Romance, New Adult

Description: "What it means, Em, is that you're going to do what I want, whenever I want, or I'll tell everyone your dirty little secret." Art therapist Emrys Finnegan thought she'd left the fast-paced world of Public Relations behind when her old boss calls to offer her one last job. And it pays the kind of money that could change Emrys' life forever.

There's only one catch. She'd be working for disgraced major league baseball superstar Tanner Courtenay. And he's a legendary PR nightmare, a violent and unstable athlete with a rap sheet a mile long. Emrys has no choice but to grit her teeth and put up with Tanner's contemptuous treatment and malicious cruelty. But when one day he goes too far, everything changes. Suddenly, Tanner would do anything to get Emrys to stay with him. And with his wealth and ruthlessness, it's only a matter of time before he gets what he wants...

Total Pages (Source): 59

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

1

“Now, Emrys, I know you don’t do this kind of shit anymore,” my old boss said. “But we are talking about alotof money.”

“Why is a major league baseball team this desperate for a Public Relations flunky?” I asked, juggling my phone so I could finish packing up my art therapy classroom for the summer.

“It’s a special case,” Jeff said.

“What kind of special case?” I asked suspiciously.

“You wouldn’t be doing PR for the whole team,” he said. “Just one of the players.”

Shit,I thought. I knew what that meant.

The team was desperate. That was why Jeff was calling me. AndIwas desperate. That’s the only reason I was still on the phone.

Five years ago, when I was fresh out of college, I had been an energetic, hardworking Public Relations professional, spinning recalled dog food, secret mistresses, and placebo herbs for a variety of soulless employers. I was good at it, but the work had begun to depress me, so two years ago I went back to school for an art therapy degree.

It had left me with a mountain of debt, but summers off, and it was on one warm July

morning when my old boss Jeff, now a powerful corporate headhunter, called me.

“It’s just for a few months,” he said. “You’re off for the summer anyway. Maybe you won’t be needed by the time school starts again. And it would pay off all your loans. . .”

I bit my lip as my hands moved on autopilot, putting the crayons, glue, markers, scissors, and paper away in their proper spaces.

“You know I don’t do the PR stuff anymore,” I said. “I don’t have that shark personality.”

“Don’t bullshit me, Emrys Finnegan,” Jeff said. “You were good. Damn good.”

I sighed.

With that money I wouldn’t have to rent shitty apartments anymore. The only downside to my job as an art therapist at Oak Parks Elementary School was that it didn’t pay very well, and with this money I could put a down payment on a house.

“What’s the client done?” I asked suspiciously.

“I’m not going to bullshit you, Em,” Jeff said, bullshittingly. “It’s the Phoenixes’ superstar catcher Tanner Courtenay. Last year he tested positive for steroids for the second time in his career, which meant he spent the entire last season in suspension. One more positive test, apparently, means a lifetime ban from baseball.”

“That seems easy enough,” I said. “Put him in front of the camera. He says he’s really sorry. He got too stressed. He made a mistake. He is going to focus on a better work-life balance. Big donation to carefully-selected charities. Elementary school circuit so he can warn the kids about the dangers of steroids. You don’t need me to do this.

People will give a major-league star a lot of leeway.”

There was a short silence on the other end as Jeff hemmed and hawed. Well, it turned out that Mr. Courtenay could be a bit difficult. Mr. Courtenay didn’t seem to want to do an apology tour.

“You’ve worked with difficult clients before,” Jeff said.

Yeah.

You always gave me the most difficult clients because I’m such a doormat.

I didn’t know the first thing about baseball.

But that much money was tempting.

“You won’t let me down, will you, Emrys?” Jeff asked.

“I’ll think about it,” I said, but I heard the triumphant crow in his voice.

“I’m doing it for the money,” I added. “And I expect to be back by the time school starts at the end of September.”

The first thing I did when I got back to my apartment was google Tanner Courtenay to find out that he was currently in prison for a few days on a drunk and disorderly charge. Apparently he had gotten drunk and pissed at a hotel bar and smashed up the elevator, rendering it inoperable.

Great. My new client.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

How the fuck did one person destroy an entire elevator?

I clicked on a gossip site and saw a picture from the night he was arrested. Tanner Courtenay was a very tall man around 30 years old, broad-shouldered and lean, with messy ink-black hair and uncanny-looking gray eyes that stared down the photographer. In the picture he had his arm slung around two beautiful women and he looked drunk and arrogant. Like he was used to getting whatever he wanted.

Great. Always my favorite kind of client. But it wasn't like I hadn't dealt with this kind of guy repeatedly back when I worked in PR.

Classic jock, I thought dismissively, flicking through various gym selfies he had posted on Instagram.

My goal was to get this job done as quickly as possible so I could be back at Oak Park in a few months to prep for the new school year.

2

The Phoenixes had their home stadium about two hours away, and the next week I packed up my reliable old Subaru and headed over to the hotel room I planned to stay in until the job was done. The goal was simple: improve Tanner Courtenay's reputation so it didn't draw focus from the team. The Phoenixes were struggling, 10 games out of the second wildcard spot, plagued by defensive errors and poor playing. The local sports media had been lambasting the team, and Tanner in particular. His five-year contract was up this fall, and he was looking for another one. I looked up his statistics. He was hitting .197 which, according to my googling, was bad.

After I checked into my basic and impersonal, but luckily roach-free, hotel room, I organized all my professional clothes and looked out the window. My hotel balcony faced the stadium directly. A game was just ending, and I watched as the crowd streamed out, half-heartedly waving big foam fingers. The Phoenixes had lost again.

I slept all right. Ever since breaking up with my ex Noah several months ago I hadn't slept very well. No matter what TV shows or podcasts I listened to, I always heard his voice in my head before falling asleep.

God, you're shit at that, Emrys. You're lucky you're skinny. Otherwise I wouldn't give you the fucking time of day.

You want a baby? God, that's so fucking embarrassing. If you want to have a baby get a better fucking job. It's embarrassing telling people you're a kindergarten teacher.

I squeezed my eyes tight, trying to ignore his voice, and I turned over and went to sleep with the hotel's air conditioning humming in my ears.

The first morning of my new job I examined myself carefully in the mirror. I hadn't worn these kinds of professional clothes in a while, since I got to dress so casually as a teacher, so I smoothed the pencil skirt over my legs self-consciously. I had long thick honey-brown hair, the blonde streaks more visible now because it was summer. I had braided my curls into a long plait down my back. I usually wore dramatic winged eyeliner to school because the kids loved it, but today I had just settled for a quick swipe of eyeliner and a brush of mascara. I had soft hazel eyes and a pale heart-shaped face with a touch of sunburn on my cheeks. My pin-striped pencil skirt and white top looked neat enough. I reluctantly shrugged into a suit jacket, even though it was going to be hot, because I wanted to make a good impression on the first day. People often wanted to dismiss me because I was tiny and had a soft voice.

When I arrived at the stadium, I waded through the endless paperwork, hearing the faint crack of a bat as I signed form after form. Then I was given a cursory tour of the facilities and dumped in a big conference room to wait for my client.

The room was beige, with a huge dark wooden conference table, the walls covered with different framed baseball memorabilia. I eyed them without much interest and didn't bother looking closer. I was just here to do a job, collect my money, and go back to my real life.

There was a television on in the room, and I was watching the highlights of the game that had just ended, cocking my head curiously at the screen. It was a little more interesting than I had thought. The Phoenixes' uniforms were a striking black, with silver lettering and white feathers spread over the backs of their jerseys to represent the mythical bird.

"This was the only highlight of the game for troubled catcher Tanner Courtenay," the announcer reported, and I watched my new client throw out someone trying to steal, the mask flying from his face with the power of his arm. I didn't think I could read lips very well, but I could read the string of curses he let out before jamming his mask back on.

Christ, he looked like a real asshole.

"Otherwise, the catcher went 0-for-4," the announcer continued, and I saw Tanner absolutely swing for a pitch that was in the dirt, spinning around in a circle, then slamming his bat on the ground.

"Yikes," I said out loud.

Suddenly, I saw a ball fly by my face and the television screen exploded in front of me, the picture disappearing with a sickening crunch. Glass sprayed everywhere,

filling my lap and covering my legs.

I gasped, stumbling out of my chair, and whirling around.

And there was my new client Tanner Courtenay. In person, he seemed much bigger than he had on television, maybe almost 6 and a half feet tall, with broad, powerful shoulders and an angry face with glittering eyes. He was still wearing his uniform, the jersey unbuttoned, the undershirt sticking to his chest.

“Who the fuck are you?” he snapped. “Baseball dickriders aren’t allowed in here.”

My mouth dropped open. “I-I-I’m not a dick rider,” I protested, horrified to hear my childhood stammer coming back.

“I-I-I-I,” Tanner mocked, stepping closer to me. “Answer my question.”

I backed up until my ass hit the big table, my nice high-heeled shoes crunching on all the glass.

“I-I was hired to help you with your image,” I said, struggling to keep my voice from trembling.

He cocked his head and I felt frozen in place. His eyes were such an uncanny shade of silvery-gray, cold and unfeeling.

“What, are you some kind of PR person?” he asked. “We already have a whole team of them here.”

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“Yes, I said. “I was hired to help y-y-youspecifically.”

Tanner’s lip curled up. “You’re the one that’s supposed to get my endorsements back when you can’t even speak?”

I felt my cheeks flame.He was even worse than I thought. I stopped and forced myself to slow down, remember my mindfulness techniques I’d had to practice as a kid. But it was hard when my heart was pounding so hard I thought it would burst out of my chest.

“Yes,” I said. My voice still came out almost at a whisper, but at least I didn’t stutter.

“Get the fuck out of here,” he snarled. “I don’t need this.” I felt like I was trying to press my bodythroughthe table, attempting to scrape by him and get to the door, but he stepped sideways and cut me off.

He frowned and I saw him grab his crotch, the muscles glistening with sweat moving in his strong arm. “Wait. Not so fast,” he said. I’ll fuck nobodies too. As long as you’re here, come suck my dick and I might give you some cock afterwards.”

My face flamed and I tried to scuttle sideways. “You’re a pig,” I hissed, afraid to turn my back on him.

“Oh no, not that,” he said mockingly, but I saw his lips turn down as I tried to get away from him.

“You need help,” I said, trying to bring the conversation back to a professional level.

“I know you’ve lost all your sponsors after your suspension and if you don’t try to play nice and improve your reputation, you might not get a contract this year.”

Tanner Courtenay’s frown deepened, and he pointed his bat at me, making me choke down a gasp.

“They’ll come back when I get out of my slump,” he said dangerously. “And I don’t need your fucking advice to ‘play nice.’”

Then he swung his bat, not at me, but at the lamp directly above me. It shattered too, into a million shards. My breath caught in my throat and I was frozen in place. For one searing second the pieces hung in the air, then they all descended in sharp, crystalline fragments over my hair and body. I closed my eyes tightly, feeling myself cringe inward in painful fear. I felt my breath begin to rasp in harsh, jerky pants, panic threatening to overtake me. The shards were so thick in my hair that I was afraid to brush them off for fear of cutting myself. I tried to gently shake my arms, but only succeeded in jabbing my finger on a sharp shard pointed up on the table.

“You’re a psycho,” I said, my voice low and throbbing with fear.

“Yes,” he said, and I realized the asshole was laughing, the action transforming his sharp, sculptured face into something that looked savage, “so don’t fuck with me.”

Just as I was about to try to sprint for the door in abject terror, it opened and the team manager came in.

“Oh good,” he said. “You’ve met.”

The manager’s name was Lou Hernandez, and he was a grizzled septuagenarian of the old-school variety, with a thick head of salt and pepper hair, a big bristly moustache, and a mouth full of chew.

“Lou, what the fuck is this,” Tanner bit out.

The older man ignored his question. “What the fuck happened to the lamp?” he demanded instead, his eyes darting between us.

“Accident,” Tanner said, fixing his eyes on me, daring me to object.

I saw the way a muscle moved in his jaw, and I was frightened. Who knew what Tanner would do to me? I nodded wordlessly in agreement.

Lou humphed angrily, then motioned us closer and out of the glass. I walked carefully, the shards falling from my clothes at each step, feeling glass pieces in between the bottom of my foot and my shoe. I stood as far from Tanner as I could, but I still felt his cold gaze all along my body, the sharp shards scraping along my skin as they fell off.

“This is your last chance, Tanner,” the manager said. “Emrys Finnegan is the only person I could find willing to take you on as a client. The team is paying for her exclusive services. I’d be nice to her, because if this doesn’t work the owner is talking about dropping you.”

“Dropping me?” Tanner asked sharply. “I haven’t been that bad. And the backup catcher is shit. Plus, my money is guaranteed. You’d be paying to bench me.”

“That’s right,” Lou said. “You obviously don’t realize how fucking toxic your brand is, Tanner. No one wants to touch you with a 10 foot pole. You’re a goddamn headache for us to defend and justify. Emrys is your last chance. So I hope you were nice to her.”

“I don’t want this job anymore,” I interposed, my voice shaking. “I don’t need this.”

Lou flicked his eyes over at me, then dug in his pockets and handed me a grubby piece of paper. “I was authorized to go this high if you were reluctant.”

His face looked grim. I glanced down at the paper.

Holy shit.

It was twice as much as even my old boss Jeff had offered me!

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“50% of that up front,” Lou said, punctuating the sentence by spitting into his can.

I didn’t want to look at Tanner, but I couldn’t help glancing over at him. He was leaning up against the door, his face expressionless.

But I could feel the contempt and dislike radiating off him.

“50% upfront now,” Lou repeated. “Then you can leave anytime, no questions asked.”

“I accept,” I said, before my fear could catch up with my mouth.

“Were there any mitigating circumstances for your steroid usage?” I asked.

We were sitting opposite each other at the table in the meeting room, and if I turned sideways I could see all the shattered glass at the other end. Lou had gone to go find someone to clean it up. I thought I had gotten most of it off, but I still felt an uncomfortable crunching under my feet, and itchy prickling on the back of my neck where the glass had landed.

“What, like a traumatic childhood?” Tanner scoffed. He had taken off his uniform shirt, and was sitting across from me in his dirty white T-shirt. “No luck there. I grew up filthy rich in the Philly suburbs.”

What about your parents?” I suggested. “Maybe they could say what a good boy you were growing up.”

“Nope,” he said. “My father bribed teachers to get me through high school and college and stay in college sports.”

I frowned. “Charming,” I said. “What do they do for work?”

“My father owns an oil company,” he said. “My mother runs a luxury fur company called Sexy Pelts.”

I suppressed a groan. I couldn’t put any them in front of the cameras.

“What about any siblings? A grandma? Rabbi? Anyone to make the fans feel sorry for you?”

“Nope,” Tanner said, not looking at me. I saw his hands reach out across the table for a few pieces of the shattered glass.

“Why did you do steroids?” I asked.

He flicked his eyes over to me and shrugged. “Thought I’d be able to flush them out of my system faster than I did. Everyone does them now and again for a little boost. I just had shit luck.”

I felt nettled at how blasé he was. “Don’t you want to get your endorsements back?” I asked. “Sign a long-term deal?”

Tanner’s eyes narrowed to two angry slits in his face and I saw him turn a big, sharp piece of glass around in his fingers. He was so strangely magnetic. Even though he was across the table from me, my skin prickled in fear just from his proximity. It was the terrifying feeling of unpredictability, that he would do what he wanted.

“I do,” he said, his gaze sharp. “I just don’t think you can do shit.”

I swallowed. Tanner cocked his head, considering me, and I felt flushed and uncomfortable under his gaze. He had such a perfectly chiseled face, his cheekbones looking as sharp and strong as glass themselves.

“Before I tell you my suggestions,” I said, “I have to know if there are any other unpleasant PR surprises out there. Felonies in other countries? Unpaid speeding tickets? Secret babies?”

He laughed, but there was nothing light in his voice. “A secret baby? Fuck that shit. I double-bag it. I don’t want to be tied to some bitch for 18 years.”

“OK,” I swallowed, making a note of it in my notebook. I couldn’t help remembering what my ex Noah had said to me.

Now you want a baby, Emrys? Get a real job and then we’ll talk. I don’t know if I want you losing this tight little ass, either.

A little shower of glass fell onto my paper and I wiped it away carefully.

“I have a lot of suggestions,” I began. “I’ve contacted some charities that would be happy to accept a giant check in return for allowing you to make a little speech on camera.”

“I’ll send a check,” he said, getting up out of his chair, lean and fluid like a panther. “But I’m not going to make a speech.”

“The speech is necessary,” I insisted, eyeing him nervously as he started to stalk around the table. “It will show that you are a good guy who made a mistake.”

“But I’m not a good guy,” Tanner said, and I let out a sudden, panicked yelp as he came up behind me, shoving my rolling chair forward so my belly was jammed

against the table. He suddenly extended his arm out, the piece of glass flashing between his fingers, and his hand hovered over my arm. I froze, too frightened to do anything, feeling the hair raise on my neck, goosebumps going down my arm.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“Scared?” he asked, and I couldn’t suppress a shiver.

“No,” I whispered.

Tanner bent closer and put the sharp glass piece on one of my wrists, drawing it up my arm, not deep enough to cut, but deep enough to leave an angry red scrape behind.

“Stop,” I gasped, the blood rushing in my ears.

“Don’t distract me,” he said mockingly. “Or I might slip.”

I felt my palms begin to sweat, my body wanting to sink through the table to escape him. He ran the glass all the way up my arm, then circled back down.

I pressed my lips together to keep the whimper inside. When he got down to my wrist again, he dropped the glass piece with a clatter. But I didn’t have a chance to relax, because he pulled my long honey-brown hair up in his fist, tugging painfully at my scalp.

“If you’re going to stay,” he hissed, his breath swirling all the little curls on the back of my neck. “I own you. You’ll do what I say. Got that?”

He didn’t wait for an answer, just gave my hair another painful tug, making me yelp in pain, then he left the room.

I was given a cubicle in a big open office with a bunch of other employees, and on the first day I stayed as long as I could, taking my first few calls from reporters and researching different charities for Tanner to donate to. I struggled to control my voice, the panic at how Tanner had behaved taking a long time to dissipate. And when I finally began to breathe normally again, I saw him walk down the hall and I felt my heartbeat spike again, even though he didn't look at me.

Suddenly the remaining glass crunches in my hair, on my neck, down my shirt, under my ass, and in my shoes were excruciating and I got up to leave.

On my way out, I noticed a tiny little turtle in the parking lot, making its way slowly across the hot pavement.

Worrying it was going to get run over by one of the players or team employees, I hurried over, encouraging it with soft clucks to get on a big leaf, and I carefully carried the turtle to the sidewalk and let it go in the patchy city grass.

I heard a derisive noise, and whirled around to see Tanner, leaning against the stadium smoking.

"You're too fucking soft," he said. "It'll just get eaten by a hawk now."

My heart started pounding again and I tightened my fist, trying not to look at the long pink scrapes on my arm.

"They're stronger than you think," I said.

Tanner laughed again. "A predator gets what it wants. If a hawk decides it wants something weak, it takes it."

I turned away, feeling uncomfortable.

“See you tomorrow,” I said, hastily moving away, but I felt his gaze all along my back like a warning sign.

Danger

Run away

Do not move closer

Avoid at all costs

Back in my hotel room, I brushed myself carefully off on the balcony, still amazed at the amount of glass shards that came falling off me.

He was a dangerous psycho.

I should probably quit this job and go home. I already had half of the money just by sticking it out for one day.

But I kept remembering Noah’s voice in my head.

Get a better job. Your 401K looks ridiculous.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

I felt silly complaining about him sometimes. He had never been physically abusive. He just made me feel like shit, wore me down until I felt scraped and whittled down so thin that I wondered I didn't blow away on the breeze.

I washed myself off in the shower, relieved when my hair finally felt soft and clean, and I felt much better.

I could do this. All I had to do was minimize my contact with Tanner Courtenay and keep our interactions perfectly professional. It was only for a few months.

I was disgruntled to realize that I was also expected to go to all the games. I hadn't realized this would be part of the deal, and I settled into one of the team's reserved seats behind home plate, the sweat already trickling down between my breasts and pooling in the small of my back. Luckily, a couple in their 70s had taken pity on me sweating profusely in my pantsuit and handed me a fan and told me a little bit about the players.

I had already met the rest of the team a few days before, but their names had blurred together. Tre was the Phoenixes' star pitcher, a tall, lean man with blonde hair, blue eyes, and a wholesome grin. Hewas a PR dream. Handsome, open, friendly, charitable, a team player, and engaged to a veterinarian.

Steak was a great refrigerator of a man with chestnut brown hair and a dark beard. He was a journeyman who had been transferred mid-season. He played first base and had a wife and kids that were spending the rest of the year in Indianapolis, where he had previously played.

There were various similar-looking brown-haired, clean-shaven relief pitchers I had a hard time distinguishing between because multiple of them were named Matt.

DeShaun was the best relief pitcher in baseball, a tall Black man with a gentle smile. He was nearing retirement and hoping to coach when he was done.

Alex was a big jovial ginger outfielder and Kenji was an extremely appealing beefcake himbo from Japan. The quick, clever Miguel rounded out the outfield. According to my new friends in the stands, on paper the Phoenixes were one of the strongest teams in baseball, just Not Living Up To Their Potential.

“What do you think about Tanner Courtenay, the catcher?” I asked as he walked up to the plate. In a team of tall men, he still stood out, impossibly broad-shouldered, with the black jersey stretched across those wide shoulders, the eye black smeared across his strong cheekbones.

“He’s pulling,” the man beside me said as Tanner swung at a pitch. 0-1. “He’s swinging at everything. I’ve never seen him swing at such shit as he does this year.”

Tanner connected, sending a foul ball arcing into the stands. 0-2.

“He’ll come out of it,” my other seatmate said, her face pink as she fanned herself. “He always does.”

Tanner swung at another pitch deep in the dirt. Strikeout. He turned and headed back to the dugout, slamming his bat over his knee so it broke with a sickening crunch, sending a gasp of thrilled horror through the crowd.

“Oh, he’s bad news,” she said with the delighted relish of someone who didn’t have to interact with Tanner every damn day.

“I think so too,” I said in a low voice, and I saw his eyes flick up suddenly, even though he couldn’t possibly have heard me. I thought his dark eyes might have met mine, but I wasn’t sure.

Lou had requested a one-on-one meeting before the first week was barely done. They were now 10 games out of the second wildcard spot, and Tanner had gone 1-for-10 in that time.

I sat across from Lou and began to run over the charities I had already gotten Tanner to donate to. The problem was that these charities, although worthy, were expected, and, since Tanner had refused to go present his checks in person, had not moved the needle to improving his PR. I hated that I was already beginning to think like a PR person again, but I knew we needed a new approach.

As I laid out the data in front of Lou, I saw a few of the players shuffle inconspicuously in behind us. Lou looked around irritably.

“What are you boys doing here?” he asked, pointing his ever-present spit can at them.

“It’s an off-day, Coach Hernandez,” Miguel said cheekily and Lou turned back around with a humph.

I had just begun to lay out our most pressing problems when Tanner himself walked into the room.

“What are you doing here?” I cried, before I could help myself.

“Isn’t this whole goddamn meeting about me?” Tanner said, and I saw his eyes flick up and down my gray silk top, in a way that looked aggressively bored. My top suddenly felt too-tight, the buttons digging into my skin.

“It is about you, but it is not for you,” I said.

But Tanner only leaned against the window, putting his big arms across his chest and looking at me.

I took a deep breath and began, trying to focus on Lou.

“My idea is that we are going to have to lean into the asshole thing. He will acknowledge he was an asshole, but he is working to not be an asshole. There is no point in trying to convince the public that he hasn’t been an asshole. We will focus on charitable works, discreetly recorded acts of meritorious goodness, and anti-steroid use PSAs and so forth. And,” I said, “The public will forgive a lot more if he can be better at baseball.”

There was a sudden, unpleasant silence, and I didn’t look up.

“And what if I don’t want to do all this shit?” Tanner said.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“Then I quit,” I replied, my heart beginning to beat faster.

“You can’t quit,” he said. “Your job isn’t done until I get some good PR.”

“I can quit whenever I want,” I said, my voice low.

He stared at me, like what I just said and what I wanted hadn’t mattered at all.

“You can’t quit until I tell you you’re done.”

He glared at me, big arms crossed over his chest. He was leaning back arrogantly against the window, his big legs spread wide.

I waited to see what he’d decided.

I felt a shiver of something go through my body as I saw those big legs spread open. I hoped he’d refuse, say no.

Because then I could avoid facing the fact that there might be something sick and stupid threading through the fear that pulsed through my body when he looked at me.

But he said, “Fine. But you will film the PSAs. You will deal with the donations. You will talk to the reporters. You will get my sponsorships back.”

I hesitated. The last thing I wanted was more time with Tanner.

But when I saw everyone’s faces looking curiously at me, I knew I was trapped.

“It’s a deal,” I said.

He jerked his head, keeping his eyes on me.

“Everyone else out,” he said. “I’ll film my first PSA now.”

He held out his phone so I could film him, and I reluctantly reached for it. His hand was big, and it felt strangely frightening even for my fingers to brush his, like he could crush me if he exerted the smallest pressure.

“She gets to go wherever she wants,” said Lou, pointing at me. “Anywhere. Her job is to do PR for Tanner. We need the media and fans off our backs so we can focus. Here’s the ranking of how important everyone is. Here’s me,” and here he raised his arm high in the air. “Here’s you all,” and here he lowered his hand as low as his knees could go, spitting for emphasis. “And here’s Ms. Finnegan,” and here he put his hand directly underneath where his own had been.

I wanted to smile at the touching faith he had in me, but also groan. Tanner taken barely any of my suggestions except for donating some money and a few Instagram PSAs about how steroids were bad. It was going to take a lot more than that to change his reputation and make people forget about the juicing.

Getting to go wherever I wanted meant I was allowed on the field for warmups, and at the beginning of my second week I did an on-field interview in my navy-blue pantsuit with the little white bow in my blouse.

Mr. Courtenay just wanted to focus on baseball. Mr. Courtenay was looking forward to getting back to his regular rotation of charitable volunteering. Mr. Courtenay was thrilled to be with the Phoenixes this year, and hoped for many more years here in this vibrant and beautiful city.

God, I was getting sick of wearing pantsuits and hose, I thought, pulling my long braid off my neck as the humidity from the vibrant and beautiful city clung to my neck in the August heat.

One of the Matts wandered by and handed me a ball and a glove. “Here, see what it’s all about,” he said with a roguish Matt smile. I hesitated. I was angry at myself, but I flicked a glance over at Tanner to see what he’d say. I shivered as I realized he was already looking at me, his catcher’s face mask in his hand.

Matt began to toss the ball lightly to me.

I fumbled with my mitt and miraculously managed to catch the first throw.

“Nice work,” Matt said, his eyes lingering appreciatively on my legs. “Now throw it back,” he added, smiling and modeling the correct form for me. When I did my best to mimic his throw, he grinned and reached his hand out for a high five.

“Good throw,” he said. “You’re a natural.”

I thought I could still feel Tanner’s eyes on me.

“No civilians allowed on the field,” he called out abruptly.

“She’s not a civilian,” Matt said. “She’s staff now.”

“I want to catch,” Tanner snapped back, jerking his face mask on. “Get the fuck off the field, Emrys.”

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Matt turned to me and shrugged apologetically. "Sorry," he said.

I was frightened of Tanner, but for some reason it irritated me that Matt was, too. Someone should stand up to him. Not me, of course. I tried to avoid Tanner, which was hard since I was hired to be his personal PR agent.

Matt mitigated my annoyance by leaning closer. "Can I get your number?" he asked.

I didn't feel anything in particular for him, but it was flattering and he seemed like a nice guy. I faced him and started reciting my digits. I had reached the last one when I felt a shadow fall over my arm.

Startled, I jumped. Tanner put a hand on my shoulder, gripping it so tightly that I yelped with pain.

"Ouch!" I cried. "Let me go!"

But he only twisted me around and began to march me out, propelling me in front of him with swift, angry strides.

Matt followed us for a few seconds. "You don't have to do that," he said, but Tanner didn't even bother to look at him. "Don't interfere unless you want the shit beaten out of you," he said harshly.

I glanced back behind me, and I saw Matt hesitate indecisively. I felt a cold clutch of fear, and I tried to wiggle away, but Tanner held me too tightly.

He marched me to the entrance and then shoved me through it. I staggered and had to grab the door to regain my balance.

“Stay off the field,” he said, blocking the entrance with his body.

“God, you’re such a bully,” I said, goaded into speech, even though I tried to avoid speaking directly to him as much as I could.

“You’re here to fucking serveme, Emrys Finnegan,” he said. “Not the other way around.”

I opened my mouth to protest again but he glared at me.

“And don’t think you’re going to be a team dickrider,” he snarled at me, before slamming the door in my face.

“I don’t want to be a team dickrider!” I howled, but he was already walking away, his arrogant ass not even bothering to turn around to acknowledge me.

4

The next day I hurried into the usual conference room, juggling a big stack of binders and printouts, my nerves already twisting at the prospect of having to be alone with Tanner. It was so boiling today I had skipped my usual pantsuit, and was only wearing a light pale pink shirt, and I could feel it sticking to my skin, a trickle of sweat rolling down the small of my back.

As I shut the door behind me, I stopped short. For once, Tanner was there already, leaning back in a chair and getting his dick noisily sucked by a blonde woman on her knees in front of him.

“Oh, s-sorry!” I stuttered, rapidly backing out of the room, my face flaming with embarrassment, but Tanner stopped me.

“Get back in here.”

“You’re b-busy,” I said, trying to make my voice come out louder than a whisper. I wasn’t going to sit around waiting for him to get his cock sucked.

“Get thefuckback in here, Emrys,” Tanner said. “This is the only time I have all day. Take it or leave it.”

I gritted my teeth. I knew that absolutely wasn’t true, and my hand twisted the knob of the door to escape. I could hear her loud, enthusiastic slurps, and there was a strange, tight heat in my chest.

He had done this on purpose to humiliate me.

“If you don’t get back in here, I’m not going to do whatever your dogshit suggestion is,” he warned, leaning back in his chair and putting his hands behind his head, with that stupid cocky smirk that was the only amusement that seemed to cross his face.

I hesitated. If he would just do what I suggested, I could be on my way to finishing this job and leaving the Phoenixes stadium never wanting to see or hear about him ever again in my life. I gritted my teeth and edged slowly back into the room, my hands convulsively clutching my binders. Why did Tanner always seem like he took up all the oxygen in the room? I could barely breathe with that mocking smirk on his face.

The woman in front of him turned partway around as if to stop, but he knocked her with his knee and said, “Keep going.”

I suppressed a gasp, but I sat as far away as I could get from him. He rested his long hand on the table, tapping impatiently and looking at me.

I would make this quick.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“J-j-just doing a regular charitable act won’t help your image,” I said. “It has to be something unexpected, something unusual.”

“J-j-j-j-j,” he said, mocking my stutter. “Can’t even get the words out to tell me what shit I’m supposed to be doing.”

I felt the tears spring to my eyes, blurring my vision as I looked down at my notes.

I hadn’t stuttered in so long. So many years of speech therapy. Finally getting confident to try doing something like PR.

All thrown away, all my techniques lying in shattered pieces because of one asshole. I dropped my eyes so I wouldn’t have to see his face, those perfect, high cheekbones, the messy black hair somehow looking impossibly attractive, the contemptuous curve to his lip.

I forced myself to breathe, my palms feeling sweaty. I could do this.

“Well?” Tanner snapped. “I’m waiting for this genius idea that’s going to make it so I can get my sponsorships back.”

I glanced up. He had the most casual approach to getting a blowjob I’d ever seen. He wasn’t even looking at her. His eyes were fastened on me, burning my skin like a fire.

I could hear her enthusiastic slurps as she sucked his cock, her breathy, fake-sounding moans as she tried to get some attention out of him, but all he did was continue to tap his fingers on the table, the other hand locked behind his head, and look at me with

narrowed eyes.

“Pull my hair,” she gasped, but he ignored her, impatiently jiggling one of his big thighs, his strong tanned fingers tapping harder on the table, in a rhythm that felt like it dug into my skull.

I may be having a shitty day, but at least I’m not sucking Tanner Courtenay’s dick, I thought.

“The first thing you’re going to do is become a vegan,” I said, taking a deep breath.

And that did get a reaction from him as he jerked in his chair.

“Fuck no,” he said, his big fingers curving into the table.

“Oh, yes, you are,” I said, with more confidence than I felt. “You are going to get in front of a reporter and say you are going plant-based to help the earth. That will get you some positive attention. Or, at least, some different attention.”

“No,” he said, his eyes flaring at me, not even attempting to pretend to pay attention to the woman in front of him now.

I felt a little stab of fear, but I ignored it and shoved my list of 10 bullet points for going vegan across the table in front of him.

“According to Lou you have to do what I suggest.”

His big hand shot out and he grabbed my wrist, trapping me over the paper.

“Come up with something else,” he growled.

“Ouch, Tanner! You’re hurting me!” I cried, his fingers tightening painfully on my wrist.

“I’m not fuckinggoing vegan,” he said.

“It won’t be that bad,” I argued, trying to tug my wrist away. But he held me in a steel grip.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the woman in front of him on the floor twisting her body at an odd angle, her arms outstretched, trying to keep Tanner’s cock in her mouth as he spun to face me.

“No,” he said, yanking my whole arm then, so my body was jammed against the edge of the table.

I felt a throb between my legs as he ground my breasts against the hard wood of the table, the woman’s slurps sounding desperate now. I cursed my choice not to wear a suit jacket, my nipples hardening painfully through my thin shirt as he kept me trapped in place.

“You can do a little video on Instagram every day showing what you’re eating,” I suggested, still straining to get away from him.

Tanner’s eyes narrowed and suddenly he pushed the woman in front of him impatiently away with one hand, continuing to trap me with the other.

I saw a flash of his big cock, thick and long, as he shoved it back in his sweatpants, and my mouth went dry for a second.

“Want me to finish?” she asked uncertainly, and he waved her away, yanking up his sweats.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Then he abruptly let me go. I only had a moment to cradle my wrist when I saw him get up and head toward me around the table. I stumbled up hastily, backing away and putting my chair between us.

“This isn’t a discussion, Tanner,” I said breathlessly. “You fucked up. You agreed you would do what I said.”

He shoved the chair away, sending it tumbling to the floor with a quick, fierce motion, as I tried to back away to the door. I suppressed a scream, not wanting to admit I was frightened of the expression on his face. He put a hand on my arm, yanking me closer to him.

My arm and wrist ached from his rough touch, and I wondered if I’d have bruises the next day.

“I don’t like being disobeyed,” he said. “I told you to come up with something else.”

The tension felt so tight between us that I was frozen in place, afraid to move for fear something would shatter.

His gray eyes were so cold that the air seemed to chill around him, falling onto my skin like invisible ice shards.

The spell was broken when the other woman asked again, “Want me to finish you off?”

“Go find someone else,” Tanner said without looking back at her, and she stood up

awkwardly and left.

I broke away from him, my wrist aching, and I straightened my clothes and tried to focus. I moved further away from him as the door shut behind the other woman.

I was frightened but furious.

“It’s a miracle you can get anyone at all to suck your dick,” I said. “You’re not supposed to be able to have a whole conversation during a blowjob.”

I shouldn’t have opened my big mouth, because I felt his powerful hands grabbing me, and he flipped me around, then pinned me against the window.

“You think you can do it better, you frightened little mouse?” he growled in my ear, his knee shoved into the back of my thigh. “You want me to give your nice little ass a chance? That’s what this is about, isn’t it? You want on your knees in front of me, gagging on my cock, don’t you?”

I gasped, the window cool against my cheek, his hands digging into my flesh.

“Never,” I hissed. “Get off me, Tanner.”

I ground my teeth down to control the wail of fear as I realized I couldn’t get away from him. In this position, he could do anything he wanted with me.

I was startled to feel his big cock on my back, an unmistakable power and threat. My breath started coming faster, in such short pants that I was afraid I was going to hyperventilate.

“Maybe I’ll let you, starfucker,” he said, his lips so close to my throat that I felt the loose hair from my thick updo swirl around my neck.

A shiver went down my spine, and I struggled wildly in his arms, only succeeding in wrenching my elbows and scraping my face across the window lock. Tanner laughed and shoved his hips forward so I was squashed against the window, my breasts painfully flattened against the cool glass.

“Or maybe I’ll take you whether you want it or not,” he growled, his lips closing on my ear, teeth digging into the soft flesh there, then yanking back so I felt the pain radiating down my neck.

“Help!” I suddenly cried, and I heard him hiss in displeasure, clamping his hand over my jaw.

“Shut yourmouth, Emrys. I’m not done with you.”

But then the door opened and Tre was there.

I could have cried with relief as I saw the other man’s forehead wrinkle.

“Let her go,” he said.

“Get out of here,” Tanner said sharply. “This doesn’t concern you. She’s not yours.”

But I was relieved that Tre didn’t leave, and then I saw Steak poke his head in for backup.

“Let her go,” Tre said again, and I wriggled out of his arms, Tanner’s big hands unclenching only slowly from my shirt. I breathed a shaky sigh of relief. But I looked around and Tanner’s eyes were burning as he loomed over me. This wasn’t over.

“You OK there?” Steak asked me.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“Don’t touch me again,” I hissed to Tanner, my voice trembling.

But Tanner’s hand shot out again and he pulled me back to him briefly, his hand hard on my hip. “Don’t scream next time,” he growled in my ear. “Or I’ll thrash your ass.”

Then he finally let me go and I didn’t look at him again as I hurried out the door and down the hall.

“Do you want me to tell Lou?” Tre asked, loping along beside me.

“No,” I said shortly, straightening my blouse where Tanner had twisted it in his big hands.

“If he bothers you, come tell me,” Tre said, his blue eyes sharp as they looked at me.

“Thanks,” I said, “but it’s fine.”

Tre was sweet. Steak was nice. All of the guys on the team had been nothing but welcoming.

But.

I didn’t think any of them could doshitto stop Tanner if he wanted to do something.

5

Tanner was still in a slump, and I was still required to watch the games in my seats

right above the dugout, looking for something, anything to use to spin his stats to make them look better. I was so bored I had begun to keep score with a scorecard and a pencil just for something to do, and I began reluctantly to pick up terms and understand the game better. And so I flicked between my tablet and the scorecard, trying to find anything that made him look better. According to the many angry comments on all the social media videos of him, which were my job to monitor, he was pulling his head on his swing. But the pitching coach was in despair with every attempt to fix it.

The Phoenixes had a road trip to the nearest other major league stadium, which was only a few hours away, and Lou requested I join the team. Since they were going to be traveling all weekend, I decided to go to the Friday game and then take a flight back to my hometown for a quick weekend break. A Matt, who I had learned could be distinguished from the other Matts by calling him Matt B., joined me in the seats on Friday afternoon.

“I like your hat,” he said, pointing at the huge straw monstrosity covering my head. It was 104 degrees in the shade, and I felt like Satan’s asscrack.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, taking a sip of the only perk of the job so far—ice-cold ballpark lemonade.

“I’m on the 7-day injured list,” he said, sitting down beside me.

“Wooo,” I said listlessly. It had to have been the weakest team woo in the history of the Phoenixes, but I saw Tanner flick his eyes over to us.

At the next inning, I felt a tap on my shoulder and it was one of the assistant coaches.

“Mr. Courtenay needs you in the dugout,” he said.

“Who, me?” I yelped, jolted out of my lethargy, my heart starting to beat faster. “I’m not allowed in there.”

He shrugged. “He says he wants you there.”

Feeling nervous, I followed him back and sidled into the dugout, expecting to be thrown out at any moment, but Lou only grunted when he saw me.

“If anyone asks, you’re an athletic trainer,” he said.

OK. I suddenly felt uneasily like they were playing a dangerous game, using me as the cookie to get Tanner to do what they wanted. That was all very well. But. Except. There was something I didn’t like in his eyes when he looked at me.

The game seemed so close and personal from in here. I eyed Tanner as he caught for Tre, strong thighs spread over the ground. There was a slick sheen of sweat on his tanned arms. From this distance it was easy to admit to myself that my mouth got dry when I saw his arm snap out to trap a wild pitch.

But when he headed back into the dugout after the inning was over, I felt the same flush of searing fear as he stalked into the dugout. He looked at me, then threw his helmet, so close beside me that I felt the whistle of air on my skin. Around him, I felt like I was prey and if I stayed still and frozen enough he wouldn’t take notice of me. Nothing good could result in someone like Tanner Courtenay taking notice of you.

“I told you not to throw your fucking fastball at him,” Tanner snapped at Tre.

“You almost hit Emrys,” Tre said, casting a worried glance over at where I stood frozen.

But the volatile catcher was right in his face. “Don’t tell me what to do with her,”

Tanner snarled. “She’s mine to do what I fucking want with. I’ll throw what I fucking want at her. You need to stop throwing dumbass pitches.”

I felt like my cheeks were on fire. What did he mean I was his?

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Tre tried to object, and they began yelling at each other, and one of the assistant coaches had to come in and break it up so the cameras didn't pick up on it.

I should have tried to move away, but my heart was still hammering in my chest.

"And you," Tanner said, grabbing my chin with his hard hands, "You're not allowed to sit in the stands during games anymore. Get your ass in the dugout instead."

"W-why?" I asked, feeling my hands start to tremble. His grip on my chin was so tight my jaw ached. Up close he smelled like sun on skin, his body so big he blocked everything out around me.

"You're not here for some third-stringer to try to grab your tits," he snarled, shoving me back so that I stumbled a bit. "I want your ass in the dugout from now on."

He moved to get his batting helmet on, but all I could do was back away, my jaw aching, wondering how I was supposed to do my job when I was so frightened of my client.

Half the money was already in my pocket.

If I could only hang on a few more weeks, I'd get the other half.

Tanner somehow managed to hit 2-for-4, which was his best game in weeks, but he insisted on me coming with him to the post-game interview. Maybe it was for the best. Maybe it was just practical, because I'd seen footage of some of his interviews and they were not great. I'd seen him storm off, break the microphones in his face,

curse out the reporters. Maybe that's all this was, just a tactical choice to get his endorsements back.

The ESPN reporter was a tall, stunning auburn-haired woman named Genevieve. "Are you nervous about the random steroids testing?" she asked.

The question annoyed me for some reason, and I jumped in indignantly, even though I had wondered myself if him testing positive for steroids meant I wouldn't get the other half of my money.

"Mr. Courtenay undergoes the same rigorous testing regimen as every other major league player," I said, adding, "in fact, he's willing to be tested right now if you doubt him. We are just interested in moving forward and talking about securing a playoff spot."

I stopped, feeling the trickle of sweat make its way down the small of my back, but she didn't seem to notice my nerves.

"Why should Phoenixes fans trust that you're clean now?" she asked, balls-bustingly. It was a more than fair question, but it wasn't my job to agree with her.

"Mr. Courtenay is dedicated to making sure no other athletes make the same mistakes he did," I said, with much more confidence than I felt, as Tanner's hands tightened painfully on my back, digging into my flesh, pulling the shirt so tight against my breasts and ribcage that I had to take short, hasty breaths.

"Is that true?" Genevieve asked, looking behind me.

"Yes," he said. "My focus is on making the playoffs."

My heart was fluttering as he didn't let my shirt go, but Coach Hernandez

unexpectedly came to my rescue.

“No more press!” I heard Lou bark behind me, and I had never been so relieved to hear Coach Hernandez’ vibrant spit as it rattled around his ever-present can.

I was happy to be leaving to go back home and visit my friends for the weekend. I needed a little break from Tanner, even if it was only for a few days.

My car was parked at the team hotel, and by the time I made it back to the parking lot, the guys had also arrived from their post-game meeting.

“See you at tomorrow,” Steak said, giving me a high five. He had gone 2-for-5, with a solo shot, and the win had made them buoyant. Only 5 games out of the second wildcard spot now.

“I won’t be there Saturday,” I said, “I’ll see you Monday.”

Tre came over to give me a hug. “Ugh, you’re all sweaty,” I said, and he teasingly rubbed his chin on my head.

I laughed. I didn’t want this job, and honestly the other guys were one of the few good things about it.

The team all high-fived me and headed up to their rooms to shower. I turned to leave, but there was one person blocking my path.

Tanner Courtenay.

“I didn’t say you could miss a game,” Tanner said, his eyes boring into mine. “You will be there to do my interviews.”

“I’ll only be gone for a few days,” I retorted, my feet aching. I shouldn’t have worn such high-heeled boots.

I saw his eyes flick up and down my body. He was still in his game uniform, the shirt unbuttoned so I could see the corded muscles on his chest, the sheen of sweat from the hot day.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“You’re dressed up,” he said abruptly. “Are you planning to go on a date tonight?”

“What business is it of yours?” I asked sharply.

It was enough that Tanner thought he could control me at work. I’d be damned if he thought he could control me off hours, too.

“Tell me,” he demanded. “Is that why you can’t come to the game tomorrow?”

He grabbed my arm, yanking me closer to him. His eyes glittered at me.

“No, Tanner,” I said, trying to pretend I was braver than I was. Maybe if I told the truth he’d let me go. “I’m just going home to visit my family. It’s my great-aunt’s birthday.”

His silvery-gray eyes flashed contemptuously at me.

“I don’t believe you,” he said. “And I don’t want you going.”

“You’ll be fine without me,” I said. “You don’t need me. I’ll be back on Monday.”

“I don’t want you to be back on Monday,” Tanner snapped, twisting my arm so it was caught painfully behind my back, my body stumbling against his. “I don’t want you going anywhere. Tell me now if you plan to go out on a date.”

“Yeah, Tanner,” I said, starting to get angry even though I was still afraid. “I’m going to be out all weekend having sex with all the New York Knicks at once.”

His face darkened and I felt his grip bite into my arm.

“That’s not funny, Emrys.”

“It’s notnotfunny,” I retorted lamely. I was uncomfortably aware of how close Tanner was to me, and how powerful his body was.

“You better fucking stay here,” he said.

I froze, glaring up at him. It was one of those things that I couldn’t pretend didn’t change the fabric of the universe, didn’t twist the orientation of everything I knew.

“You can’t tell me what to do,” I said, although I felt my legs trembling. “I’m not at work anymore. Lou approved this.”

“I don’t give a fuck who approved what,” he said. “Ididn’t say you could go.”

“Or what, Tanner?” I asked, even though it would have been smarter to say nothing.

His hand tightened on my arm, and he pulled me closer to him.

“Or I’ll make you stay in,” he said.

I reached up and yanked that thick unruly black hair as hard as I could, trying to make him let me go, struggling madly in his arms.

But instead of letting me go, he raised one hand and spanked me on the ass. I hadneverbeen spanked before and I was furious, kicking him and trying to rake my nails down his face.

“Stop this shit and go to your room, Emrys,” he said, picking me up around the legs,

and his voice was so cold and unemotional that I was spurred into bolder action than I ever took—throwing myself wildly sideways.

Our bodies collided with some shrubbery that was in a huge cement planter. I got lucky. I was so short it was easy for me to throw myself through the small gap in between the sharp, prickly branches of the tree and the dirt. The branches shredded my hose, but I kept going. I could hear feet pounding on the other side of the hotel embankment, but I ignored them. I knew exactly where the car was, and I ran as fast as I could, not stopping until I slammed the heavy door behind me and put the key in the car lock with trembling fingers, spinning out of the parking lot so fast that the kicked-up gravel spattered erratically on my windshield.

I breathed a sigh of relief as I headed down the highway, but I was startled to hear a buzzing sound from my cellphone. I looked over, my heart starting to race again.

Get the fuck back here, little girl

I kept my hands on the wheel, my fists clenched tightly as I navigated my way to the airport.

How the fuck did he get my number? I had never given it to him!

I had been very careful not to give it to him, in fact.

Page 14

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Even though every mile I went took me farther and farther away from Tanner, I felt more nervous, not better.

It wasn't over.

6

After an uneventful flight, I was at my favorite hometown bar with my friends later that night when I realized I had forgotten to turn OFF my phone's push notifications for major league news.

Tanner Courtenay's offensive woes continue, but his defense is stronger than ever

I jammed my phone on silent and shoved it in my back pocket.

This was my weekend to forget about Tanner and relax without having to worry about him. I had already blocked his number and I wasn't going to think about him until Monday.

But I was only one mojito into my dinner out when I got a call from Lou.

"You gotta get back here, Emrys!"

"Why? What's happened?" I cried.

"It's Tanner," he said unnecessarily. "He's been arrested."

After spending all night in airports and taking red-eye flights, I spent Saturday morning doing interviews until my head was aching from the phone pressed against my ear, and I was exhausted.

The bar was not pressing charges. The other gentlemen involved in the alleged incident were not pressing charges. Mr. Courtenay just wanted to put the whole thing behind him and focus on baseball.

But all the time my eyes were burning, aching with tiredness from my overnight flight and lack of sleep.

He did this on purpose.

He did it just to fuck with me, just because he had told me not to go home and I did anyway. Just because it would be more work for me. Because he wanted to control me. Because. . . I didn't want to think about any other reason why.

I rested my head on the side of my cubicle. I had come directly from the airport to work, and I was still in my clothes from yesterday. I could hear Tanner as I walked down the hallway to one of the clubhouse rooms. He was leaning back in his chair, balancing on one leg, the whole set of his body cocky. From my angle, I could see the whole length of his body, the endlessly long legs, casually propped up on the table, the broad width of his shoulders. I knew his face would have that shit-eating grin.

Suddenly, I was filled with a cold rage. I knew he had done this on purpose, just to ruin my weekend, to ensure that I came back.

I walked up behind him. He was such a cocky motherfucker that he never bothered to listen for anyone coming. I saw a few of the other players' heads start to pop up and look cautiously at me, but I ignored them.

I wanted to grab his dark hair, gouge those cold gray eyes out, but before I could get up the courage to do anything, Tanner snapped his head around, and I saw that malicious smile cross his face. He jumped up, putting an elbow on my arm and steering me out the door into the hallway to the stadium.

“Damn you,” I said, forcing my voice not to tremble. “I had to be on a plane all night.”

“Itoldyou not to go, Em,” he said, his voice silky with malice. “I told you very distinctly and you disobeyed me. And this is what happens when you disobey me.”

He grabbed my hair and shoved, driving my head directly into the big bucket of ice water the team kept in the hallway.

I cried out, my breath burbling in the frigid water, and felt the suffocating terror of my head being held forcefully under the water.

I struggled, trying to push up with my hands, but he was too strong for me, his grip like iron. He drew me out, my face throbbing with the sharp pin-pricks of cold.

“You ok, baby doll?” he asked, that malicious quirk to his mouth. He stroked my head, in a terrifying parody of comfort.

I gasped for breath, taking great, shuddering gulps of air, and Tanner drove me down into the ice water again.

The water felt even colder this time, the waves slopping out of the bucket and all down the front of my dress. He didn’t let me up until my lungs were bursting.

“You could have fucking killed me!” I choked fearfully, wiping the water from my eyes. I could feel my teeth start to chatter.

Tanner was so close that I could see the jagged scars from sliding into home plate on his face, the muscles standing out across his broad chest in his loose raggedy sleeveless shirt.

Page 15

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“Oh no,” he said. “I have no intention of killing you, Emrys Finnegan.”

Somehow, him saying that was more frightening than if he had said yes, I want to kill you.

“Then why did you do that?” I croaked, trying to scuttle away from him, my teeth chattering uncontrollably, but his hand was still on me, tangled up in my wet hair.

“Because I told you not to leave, and whenever you don’t do what I say, you’re going to be punished,” Tanner said.

I gasped in pure rage and fear, a cold fury ripping through my body as I kicked out at him as hard as I could, connecting with his shins. I tried to shove him off with my hands, twisting to try to kick him away. He still had that shit-eating grin on his face. The asshole didn’t flinch at any of my blows either, shoving me against the wall.

“That’s not doing shit except making me hornier,” he growled, making the hair on my neck stand on end.

I realized with a start that I could feel his big dick pressing on my back.

Shit.

This made everything so much worse.

“Let me go,” I said.

“No,” he said. “You came here to help me and you’re going to help me, the way I want.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I asked, hoping there was some other explanation.

“I’m tired of shitty blowjobs,” he said. “I want you working my dick with all that sweet teacher’s pet energy.”

“Fuck you,” I cried.

“Do a good job, baby, and maybe I will,” he sneered, and I felt my knees buckling, almost falling hard on the ground in front of him.

“No, Tanner, I’m not going to fuck you,” I said, trying to back away from him, but he was bearing me down to my knees, putting a hand on my shoulder, and in desperation I grabbed one of the bats that was littering the hall. I didn’t have enough room to swing it, but I jabbed him as hard as I could, scraping my cheek, but landing a blow on his knuckles.

He loosened his grip the slightest bit with a curse, and I jerked away, leaving a chunk of my hair in his fist and stumbling down the hall away from him. My heart was hammering in my chest, and I was still soaking wet with a frozen face. But I shot down the hallway.

I could hear him following me immediately.

“Emrys,” he growled.

I didn’t care. I was flooded with a hot, searing panic at the sound of him chasing me.

I had always been a fast runner, on the track team in high school, and still loved to

depress by running for an hour after a particularly bad day at work. But I barely made it to one of the rec rooms before he was on me, his strong arms whirling me around and trapping me against the fridge. He put one arm around my waist and with the other he fisted my hair, yanking my head back so that my neck was bared to him.

“Bad girl,” he said, and his voice sounded rough and out of control. “I’m going to put you over my knee until your ass looks like a fucking stop light, and then I’m going to fuck you until you can’t stand anymore.”

I gasped, my heart starting to race. I struggled in his arms, but he held me tight.

“Give in, Emrys,” he said, and his lips were on my neck then, not a kiss, but hard, angry bites, his hands tightening in my hair and around my waist.

“This is not conducive to a professional working relationship,” I said, trying to keep the panic out of my voice.

“I don’t want a fucking professional working relationship,” he said. “I want my cock down your throat.”

I felt beads of sweat break out on my chest at my efforts to escape him. My wet clothes felt pressed against my chest, but he still held me tight.

“Go get your cock sucked then,” I gasped. “I’m sure there are dozens of women here in the clubhouse who’d do it for you.”

“I don’t want them,” said Tanner, licking his way down my neck until his tongue curved and curled around the hollow at the base of my throat. “I want you, Emrys, you on your knees in front of me, my cock so far down your throat that you’re gagging and crying. But you don’t stop because you fucking love it there.”

“Tanner, you’re such a pig!” I cried.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“I’m not stopping,” he warned me, and I could feel that big cock through his sweatpants, pressing on my lower back. “I am going to do what it takes to make you fucking bow to me.”

His hands were hard on my back, slipping under my shirt, and he suddenly ripped something off my body, making me shriek with surprise.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“My b-birth control patch,” I stuttered. “What are you doing? Put it back on!”

But Tanner’s breathing was harsh and angry as he crumpled it in his fist. “I don’t think I will, Emrys Finnegan,” he said. “I don’t think I want anything between us.”

I screamed then, the terror snaking through my skin, when the door opened and this time it was Alex who came in.

“Tanner!” he said, though I could see in his eyes he was nervous. “Stop.”

I heard a low growl in Tanner’s chest, reverberating through my back.

He didn’t like being told what to do with me.

“Get the fuck out,” he said.

Alex didn’t leave, and I saw Steak curiously poking his nose in. “There’s a bunch of reporters coming down the hall,” he said warningly.

I elbowed Tanner as hard as I could in the throat, but he still only released me reluctantly and piece by piece, like it was a necessity for him to have his hands on me.

I felt trapped and ensnared.

What would happen when I didn't have anyone around to save me?

7

Stay back after the game, Tanner warned me before reluctantly letting me go. I need your help with the post-game interviews. I had absolutely no intention of doing that, so when Matt asked if I wanted to come with the team to Ace's Bar, I said yes.

The team often went to Ace's, which was a less than reputable establishment a few streets away from the stadium. I knew Tanner had an apartment in one of the high rises nearby, and I was nervous he'd stop by later, so I determined to only stay for a little bit. I walked over with Trey, Steak, Miguel, and various Matts, including Matt B, who had asked me out. Matt was kind and gentlemanly. He clearly admired me, asking me eager questions about myself, and letting his arm brush by mine as he opened doors for me. But I couldn't relax as long as I worried that Tanner would show up later.

Ace's was a dark and dirty bar, but in a not at all picturesque way. It was crowded, but there was an area over by the wall that was clearly the unofficial VIP area for the players.

For a moment I scanned the room and didn't see Tanner, and I heaved a huge sigh of relief.

Then, my stomach plummeting, I saw him.

He was leaning back on one of the couches with a beer in his hands, his arrogant face looking bored. There was a pretty woman beside him nuzzling his neck and another one between his knees. It looked like she wanted to give him a blowjob, but he wasn't looking at her.

I saw him flick his eyes over to me and take a drink of his beer, the muscles in his throat working.

Why the fuck did he always have to be watching me? I might be able to have a good time for once if he wasn't there. Why couldn't he take the women all back to his luxury apartment like a normal celebrity? God.

I turned away to find somewhere, anywhere else to sit, but Matt took my hand eagerly, leading me to the only open spots, which were on a couch directly opposite the one Tanner was on.

Matt nodded and greeted Tanner in a friendly fashion, but Tanner ignored him completely.

I sat down, trying not to look at Tanner. Why did he always have this effect on me?

I tried to ignore him, but I felt him looking at me, and his gaze was like a burn on my skin, those gray eyes somehow on fire despite their chill.

He said nothing, but the woman between his legs tried to reach for his pants and he batted her hand away impatiently. The other one was making breathy gasps and groans, trying to get closer to him, but he wasn't looking at her either.

I felt my face flaming. Obviously what Tanner had said to me didn't mean that he was only interested in me. He wasn't really interested in me at all. He just wanted to control me and taunting me that he'd fuck me was one way to do that.

My hands were trembling as I took a drink of the very indifferent wine at Ace's, but my nervousness meant I took either huge gulps of the sour tasting wine, or barely got any at all. I wanted to ask Matt to get me something else, but I didn't want to be left alone with Tanner so close.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

I tried to concentrate on what Matt was telling me about his latest relief outing, but it was hard knowing Tanner's eyes were on me. All I could hear were the breathy moans of the women beside him as they laughed and giggled.

Then Matt put his arm around me. Not even really around me, just lightly on the couch behind me.

"Move your arm," Tanner said, his voice landing like a steel bar, and Matt jerked around as if he'd just been shot in the leg.

"Tanner, stop," I said in a strangled voice, my throat feeling so tight it choked me.

"I'm not talking to you, Em," Tanner said coldly. "You, backup, move your arm away from her or I'm going to break your jaw."

Matt jerked his arm as if it burned him to be on the sofa and I was infuriated.

"You can put your arm around me if you want to," I said.

"You don't want that, Emrys," Tanner said, and his eyes were like glittering coal in his face, his cheekbones looking sharp enough to cut glass.

I whirled around on the seat to face him.

"Butt out, Tanner," I warned. "This has nothing to do with you."

The women beside Tanner had both stopped drinking to look back and forth between

us curiously. He looked disgustingly attractive, deceptively attractive, with that ink-black hair over his ears and his big arms out on the sofa.

If you didn't know he was an absolutely fucking psychotic nightmare.

"It has everything to do with me," Tanner said. "I don't want anyone touching you, so don't encourage it unless you want me in jail again."

"What's the problem here?" Matt asked nervously, and I watched the cold sheen of sweat on his generically handsome face with a twist of disgust. Any potential attraction to him plummeted when I saw how he submissively rolled over and offered his belly up to Tanner.

"The problem is your arm around her," said Tanner. "I want it gone. Now. In fact, why don't you just get up and find another woman to rub your dick on? You won't be doing that with this one."

I saw Matt's face flame red as I darted a glance at him.

"Ignore Tanner," I said sharply, putting my hand on Matt's thigh. "He can't make you do something you don't want to do."

I saw Tanner's face darken and I felt the tang of violence on my tongue as he looked pointedly at where my hand rested on Matt's thigh. "Remove that hand," he said harshly. "Unless you want me to throw him out the window."

"Oh, go back to your blowjob and stop bothering me," I said.

I saw the gleam in Tanner's eyes, and he pushed by the woman on her knees in front of him.

“You’re shit at that,” he snapped at her. “Go away, I don’t want you.”

As she huffed with disappointment, Tanner looked up and his eyes met mine. I felt a shiver of fear go down my spine.

I squeaked and removed my hand from Matt’s thigh.

He watched me and settled back into his seat. “Good girl,” he said.

So really it was his fault.

I knew it was stupid, reckless really, to test him, but I put my hand back, higher this time, my fingers curving toward Matt’s inner thigh.

For a moment I couldn’t breathe as I saw the expression on Tanner’s face, then I snatched my hand away as quickly as I could.

But it wasn’t fast enough.

He was faster than me, lunging over the table, his fist landing a solid blow on Matt’s face, the two players crashing into each other and knocking over the side table and nearby chair. The others at the bar started looking around. Tanner had Matt on the floor, his fist smashing repeatedly into the other man’s face. I saw a burst of blood, and I leaped up to tug at the back of Tanner’s shirt. His whole body felt frenetically heated, like he was on fire, and I pulled, feeling the lean bands of muscles underneath his thin T-shirt. My hands felt heated too, like they were going to combust.

Tanner ignored me, but then Steak and Tre were there, yanking Tanner off Matt. Miguel and Alex stepped in between them.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“You’re a psycho, man,” Matt was yelling. “Fucking psycho.”

“I told you not to fuck with her,” Tanner roared back. When he was usually so cold and uninterested, it was a shock to hear him sound so hot with fury.

Miguel waved for everyone else to go back to their drinks and motioned for the barkeeper to turn up the music.

“Do that again and I’ll kill you,” Tanner said, and I was startled by the malice in his voice.

Matt raised his hands. “Fine, whatever, I’m not doing this shit. She’s yours, man.”

“She always was,” Tanner said sharply, and I wanted to run my nails down his stupid face, but when I tried to he grabbed my wrists laughingly and pinned me against his body.

“Careful, tiger,” he said mockingly. “You’ll hurt yourself, little mama.”

I shook my head to clear the shiver that went down my spine at how close he was and I drummed my heels back as hard as I could on his shins, but he didn’t put me down.

I wanted to scream. I knew it was ridiculous to feel this frightened in the middle of a bar, with dozens of people there, but with Tanner’s arm around me, tightening around my waist, I was.

Then I heard a voice I had hoped never to again, and I glanced up to see him.

It was Noah McConnell, my ex.

8

I felt my stomach twist uncomfortably. Ugh. We were not on good terms.

“Hello, Emrys,” he said.

Noah was blonde and blue-eyed, with a bright perfect white smile, and he had on a perfectly-pressed shirt and slacks. He made a big contrast with Tanner, who was dressed in a T-shirt and lazy athletic pants slung over his hips.

Tanner put me down beside him, as the other guys melted back into the bar to get drinks.

“I understand you two dated,” Tanner said. “You’ve mentioned an ex.”

“H-how did you find him?” I asked, trying to shrink away, melt into the wall and disappear.

Tanner gave me a dark, low glance. “It’s my business to find out whatever I want about you,” he said.

I couldn’t speak.

It so was not.

“W-w-what is he doing here?” I finally managed.

“I’m thinking about making him my assistant,” Tanner said, watching me narrowly.

“Would you like that?”

My mouth went dry. It was the only thing that could possibly make my situation even worse.

“Why would you do that?” I croaked.

“I didn’t say I was going to,” Tanner corrected, cocking his head at me. “I asked if you wanted me to.”

Noah flicked glances between us. “Emrys, you wouldn’t stand in between me and getting a job like this?” he asked. “You know I’ve always wanted to work in the major leagues. I would’ve gone pro myself if I hadn’t gotten injured.”

I hesitated. I didn’t want to look at Tanner, but I had absolutely no clue what his game was here. I had just seen him beating the shit out of Matt for daring to sit next to me, and now he was forcing me to see my ex?

Miguel came up and whispered something in Tanner’s ear, and Tanner turned his head for a moment.

Noah took the opportunity to draw me down the dark hallway a few steps.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“Emrys, I’ve been thinking a lot about you,” he said.

My hands felt sweaty, my body frozen with fear. How did things just get worse and worse with Tanner? I didn’t think even he would be so horrible. Sometimes, the way he acted, it was like he wanted me for himself. But that obviously wasn’t true if he was bringing Noah around.

Then my ex had his hand on my arm.

“This is silly,” he said. “Once I get this job, you don’t need to work at all. Come back with me.”

I shook my head.

It didn’t take Noah much time at all to transform from a smiling personal trainer to the same emotionally abusive guy I’d always known.

“Are you hanging out around here to try to get a celebrity husband?” he snarled. “I never picked you for a starfucker, Emrys. You always pretended to be so good and sweet. But really you’re a little slut, aren’t you? Hanging around here hoping to snag some baller?”

I closed my eyes, his words making the tears start to my eyes, his breath hot on my ear.

My stomach sunk when he grabbed my arm, but he had barely touched me when I heard a hard, angry sound and he was ripped away.

I twisted around in surprise and saw Tanner with his hand around Noah's throat.

"I didn't say to touch her," he growled. "I brought you here formeto fuck with her. Not foryouto try to fuck her."

Noah was a tall man, but Tanner still towered over him.

Noah reached for his throat. "What are you doing, man?" he gasped, but Tanner tightened his fingers, slamming Noah up against the wall.

"Tanner!" I croaked. "Stop!"

He didn't look at me. "Emrys, he wasn't fucking brought here to be my assistant," he snarled, and Noah let out a strangled gargle. "He's here to show youthere's no fucking escape from me."

"Let him go!" I cried, watching as Noah's face turned a hideous shade of purple.

Tanner gave an irritated grunt, but he let Noah go. I could tell by Noah's red face that he was pissed, and he charged at Tanner.

I didn't even get a chance to call out that this was a stupid mistake, and obviously the fight Tanner wanted. Tanner let him charge, then grabbed his shirt and twisted, running Noah into the opposite wall. When he staggered back, Tanner hit him in the face.

"I told you to come here, not touch her," he said.

Noah had his arms around Tanner. I knew Noah worked out a lot and was very strong, but he was no match for Tanner. The big player twisted and kicked out viciously at Noah, knockingthe other man off balance. When Noah staggered, Tanner

was on him, his fist connecting with a sickening crunch. I saw a bright splash of blood on the wall behind Noah, but Tanner didn't stop.

I began to feel panicky. Tanner was still my goddamn responsibility.

"Stop, stop, Tanner! Please!" I implored, grabbing him around the waist, and trying to drag him off.

He felt so hard, uncompromising corded lines of muscle. His skin felt hot under my touch, or maybe it was my skin that was hot.

He reached back to pluck me off, but I hung on.

"You're going to get in trouble," I gasped. "They'll kick you off the team."

I was relieved when he stopped. I still had my arms around Tanner's waist and I could feel his chest heaving under my hands.

But he turned to Noah and grabbed him by the collar. Then he began to drag him down the hallway.

I wanted to turn and run away, but then Tanner said, "Follow me, Em," and I knew I had to.

9

When we got outside, Tanner said, "Get his keys."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

I dug in Noah's pockets as he groaned. At least he wasn't dead. But he looked like absolute shit, his nose a mangled mass in the center of his face, blood dribbling down his chin.

I pressed the button, and Tanner turned and began to haul Noah grimly over to where his car was parked.

The car was a sleek cream-colored sports car, and Tanner threw Noah up against it.

"What the fuck," Noah said, reaching a hand up to his split lip.

"If I see your face again, I'll kill you," Tanner snarled. "I'm psycho. Ask anyone." I bit my lip so hard I tasted blood as I saw him rip the sideview mirror from Noah's car in a shower of sparks and throw it in my ex's face. Noah's eyes widened, the fear in them sending an almost erotic flush of heat through my body as he backed into the front seat. Tanner slammed the car door on him, then there was a loud squealing noise as Noah peeled his little sports car out of there. Tanner watched him leave, his hands in his pockets.

"Fucking pussy," he said.

Then he turned around to me. I took a hasty step back, then another, until my ass hit another car behind me.

There was blood on Tanner's lips and he walked toward me, unhurriedly, but I felt flushed and frightened when his eyes didn't leave my face. He stopped in front of me, and I felt a strange prickling over my skin, the fear and thrill over seeing Noah get the

shit kicked out of him making a strange mix in my stomach.

“Aren’t you going to say thank you?” Tanner asked. He brought out his pack of cigarettes and tapped it on his palm, his eyes never leaving my face.

“Thank you?” I croaked, tightening my hands behind my back. My body felt hot and flushed, my breasts heavy, the nipples hardening as they rubbed against my bra. “You’re the one who brought him here in the first place!”

“Yeah, but I also removed him,” Tanner said. “So where’s my reward?”

“Reward?” I cried, trying to slide sideways on the car to get away from him, but he took a step forward, blocking my exit. “You hired my emotionally abusive ex-boyfriend to torment me!”

“I didn’t know he was emotionally abusive,” Tanner said, lighting his cigarette and looking at me with narrowed eyes. The flash of his lighter illuminated his face briefly, the sharp lines of his cheekbones and the harsh slash of his mouth. “Whatever the fuck that is.”

He blew a ring of smoke at me, and I struggled not to react. I didn’t want him to know how he’d affected me. I said nothing.

“But,” he continued, “I intend to be the only one touching you. So don’t worry about him bothering you anymore.”

Then he leaned forward, closer to my ear. I smelled the blood on his lips and teeth, the scent strong like iron in my mouth.

“So where’s my reward?” he said again, and he took another step closer. This time he stepped between my two legs, forcing them apart, and I felt one lean strong thigh

pressing on my core, making heat pound down to my cunt.

“Reward?” I squeaked, trying to back away from him. But his knee between my legs trapped me.

“You,” he said. “On your knees with my cock in your mouth.”

“No,” I said, feeling the panic creep in my voice.

“Oh yes,” he said, and took another drag on his cigarette, and reached out for me with his other hand, his fist closing around my ponytail.

He leaned forward with his hips then, trapping me even more fully against the car, and I felt the unmistakable pressure of his hard cock on my belly.

My heart started to hammer in my chest, the movement hard and painful.

I felt the pressure on my belly as he leaned into me. “Get on your damn knees, Em,” he said. “And maybe I’ll put my cock in you afterwards.”

“I don’t want that,” I gasped out.

His cock was so hard that it seemed to dig into the soft skin of my belly, making me feel weak and frozen.

“Yes, you do,” he said, and the familiar scent of his cigarette seemed to fill my nostrils, his proximity making it hard to think.

As Tanner watched me, I saw his eyes glitter in the darkness. There was the soft pop of his cigarette, and the feel of his smoke on my cheek.

“I didn’t ask if you wanted it,” he said, and I felt his big fist tighten in my ponytail. “I said get on your knees.”

I finally got my voice back and I screamed as loud as I could, shrill and piercing.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Tanner had one hand tightened in my hair and the other on his cigarette, his hips pressed forward, digging into my flesh, and when I screamed he threw down his cigarette with a curse and put his hand over my mouth.

But it was too late. The bar security had begun to shoo patrons out at the end of the night and they had heard me scream. I tried to scream again, but this time Tanner's hand was covering my mouth.

However, the security guards were already moving over. "Hey, there!" one called. "Let her go or we'll call the cops."

Tanner only let me go at the threat of the cops, reluctantly peeling himself off from me.

"You're a bad girl for screaming," he said as I started to walk away, back to my car.

"Why wouldn't I scream?" I yelped back.

"Because there's no fucking point, Emrys Finnegan. I'm getting you either way. But I'm going to make it so you come to me nice and easy," he said.

10

The next morning, I hoped some early-morning exercise would clear my head. There weren't very many people at the players' gym, since it was a late game today and they were traveling out of town. I tried to force my brain to focus on my to-do list. The problem was that everything on my to-do revolved around Tanner, and I did not

want to think about him. In particular, I did not want to think about how I had gone back to my hotel room last night with my knees and thighs trembling, but a throb and ache in my cunt.

I ran for 30 minutes on the treadmill, then lifted a few weights, greeting some of the players and training staff. I had just decided I was going back for a shower when I saw Tanner. There was a frown on his face, and I hastily wiped down my equipment and started scooting out of the room, hoping I could get out without him seeing me. But by the time I dared to look at him, he was already heading over to me.

“Where are you going?” he asked, pushing me back behind the towel rack.

“To get a shower,” I said, hating how I wasn’t strong enough to bulldoze past him.

He flicked his eyes up and down my body, as if he was debating whether to allow me to take a shower, and I felt anger growing in my belly.

“Have a good trip,” I added.

His eyes flashed. “You’re coming with me.”

Me. Not “the team.” Or “us.”

Dangerous.

“It’s only a t-two-day trip,” I stuttered, trying to look around to see who I could call to come extricate me.

Tanner noticed what I was doing, and his eyes darkened. He stepped closer to me so that he was right in front of me, his chest and shoulders so wide that he blocked out the rest of the gym.

“Emrys, if you were fantasizing about finding another man on this team, you can fucking forget it. You are mine and no one else’s. Don’t bother looking for help. I’ve warned everyone not to fucking get between us.” He reached for me, his big fingers tightening on my T-shirt, pulling me closer to him. The tips of his fingers brushed my sweaty sports bra.

“I’m not yours,” I said.

“Yes, you are,” he said. “Whether you realize it or not.”

“I don’t want you,” I shot at him, trying to untangle my T-shirt from his fingers.

“I don’t give a shit what you want or don’t want,” Tanner growled, putting his other hand on my chin, his thumb pulling down my bottom lip. “This pretty little mouth is going on my cock only.” He moved his fingers slowly down my body, ending on the waistband of my shorts. “And this wet little cunt is mine to use, if you do a good job sucking my cock.”

The breath caught in my chest and I felt heat rush to where his fingers pulled at my waistband. I dropped my eyes so he wouldn’t see the expression in them.

He stepped closer and I felt the brush of his sweats on my bare legs, as he leaned into me, bending down so he was all I could smell—sharp, smoky, wild. Then I felt his mouth open over my throat, and my body prickled with a combination of fear and something else I didn’t want to identify. His hot, wet tongue licked up a drop of sweat that had rolled into the hollow at the base of my neck. It was so strange and unexpectedly erotic that I gasped.

He made an unhinged noise deep in his throat. “Fuck, you taste good,” he said in a different voice than I’d heard him use before.

I struggled to get away, shove him off me.

“Let me go, you weirdo.”

But he curved his fingers around my waist, his other hand grabbing my ponytail, trapping me in place. His tongue moved out again and he licked another drop of sweat on my neck, tracing its path all the way from my shoulder up behind my ear.

Page 22

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Each movement of his tongue on my throat sent a throb right down to my cunt. He twisted a hand in my loose ponytail, searching for more, his tongue running eagerly up and down my neck and shoulder.

I struggled ineffectively in his arms, trying to get away.

“You’re acting like a psycho, Tanner!” I cried.

“Goddamn, Emrys, I can’t stop,” he said, tightening his hold on me, his grip making my scalp prickle, the other hand grabbing my waist so tightly it squeezed the breath from my body. “You taste like nothing I’ve ever had before.”

“It’s just sweat, Tanner!” I cried.

“It’s not,” he hissed, putting both hands on each side of my face so that he could lick and flick his tongue up and down the front of my neck. I felt his cock against my stomach, so hard that it felt like it was punching a hole in his pants. “It’s you.”

I tightened my lips, but I couldn’t help a moan as his tongue reached that hollow again and my core turned to liquid.

“See?” he said arrogantly. “You want it too.”

I was so infuriated by this that I opened my mouth and screamed as loudly as I could.

“HELP ME!” I shrieked.

He immediately covered my mouth with his big hand, but it had been effective.

“Tonight, Em,” he said, before moving away with a growl. “No more running away.”

Tanner Courtenay went 3-for-4 tonight

Is the game’s biggest catcher superstar finally coming out of his slump?

Is it enough to win back his fans?

After the away game I was sitting cross-legged on my hotel room bed in my pajamas stupidly watching the local sports news. This was a bad idea since I didn’t want to think about Tanner, but now that I had gotten in the habit of monitoring baseball news it was hard to stop.

I was jolted out of my thoughts by a knock at the door.

Maybe it was a mistake.

Maybe it was housekeeping. But I hadn’t called housekeeping.

Maybe it was room service. But I hadn’t called room service.

“Emrys?” a deep voice rumbled from the other side, and I clenched my fists in anger.

“Tanner? What are you doing here? Go away!”

He knocked again. “Let me in.”

“Are you crazy? No!”

There was only silence, and after several minutes had gone by I steeled myself to look through the peep hole.

He wasn't there.

I tried to take a deep breath. The door was locked.

Then I heard a rattling from the balcony, and Tanner was there, trying to force the French doors open.

For a moment I was frozen in place. My room was on the seventh floor. How in the world had he gotten on the balcony? His room was on the sixth floor! Had he climbed up the balcony from below? I felt sick to my stomach.

"Don't run," he warned as he looked up at me through the glass. "You know I hate it when you run away from me."

Page 23

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

I felt a cold trickle of fear. Maybe this was more than just teasing and bullying me. I thought by now he would have given it up.

It might've been smarter to say nothing, but I said, "Why?"

He said nothing, and I asked again, "Why, Tanner?"

I didn't think I wanted to know the answer to the fucking question, but it hung in the air, heavy.

"Because I won't stop until I take you," he said, his voice cold and devoid of any scrap of sympathy or emotion.

The lock scraped and complained under his fingers, and I turned and ran out of my hotel room and down the hallway.

Stairs or elevator? Surely he'd be able to hear me going down the staircase.

The question was decided for me when the elevator opened with a soft ding in front of me.

I hurried inside, pressing myself against one wall, and jamming my thumb into the close button.

After a moment of hesitation, I selected the eighth floor. I didn't want to be trapped in the elevator for long.

This eighth-floor hallway was quiet and deserted this late at night. I slipped down it as quickly as I could, keeping close to the wall, hoping the shadows would hide me.

He wouldn't know which floor I had gotten off on. If I was lucky, I could hide for a bit, then go down one floor. I would check carefully, then sneak down to my hotel room, barricade both entrances, and not leave until the next morning.

A door opened behind me.

It might not mean anything.

It might be someone else going to their room.

Or a late-night cleaner.

I froze in the shadows, hoping I was hidden, waiting for the sound of a hotel room door opening.

But I didn't hear it.

Should I try to move? If it was him, should I try to run or hope the darkness of the hall and the shadows would hide me?

Wouldn't I hear if he was moving?

I tried to listen, but I was so panicky that all I heard was my blood rushing in my ears.

Were those soft sounds behind me?

Suddenly I felt a hard hand grab me by the shoulder and spin me around.

“I found you,” Tanner hissed. “I win, you lose. Get used to it, Emrys.”

For one pivotal moment I was frozen in fear, the smell of him, the game, the uniform, dirt and smoke and heat, and by the time I drew in a breath to scream for help, it was too late.

He had his hand firmly over my mouth.

“Do I have to fucking impregnate you to get you to stop running away from me?” he growled.

I screamed as loud as I could, screamed until I didn’t have any more breath left, but his big hand was clamped across my mouth so tightly that not a sound came out. He drug me down the hallway, backing into random doors to test them, and one of them opened to a lounge area. This late at night, it was dark and deserted, just some sofas and chairs surrounding a quiet TV and some tables.

My skin began to prickle with the certainty that I wasn’t going to be able to escape him this time, and he drug me to the couch and shoved my face down on it, still keeping his hand on my mouth. With the other hand he ripped off my pajama shorts.

“Be a good girl,” Tanner ordered, and I screamed again, as hard as I could against his hand, but once again it was muffled.

Page 24

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

He gave my ass a sharp, quick spank, and I heard the sound of his zipper. I tried to tense and tighten my thighs together to keep him out, but he drove a knee unmercifully past my defenses, grabbing a handful of my ass that forced me to open for him. I felt his cock between my legs, thick and heavy like a warning of what was going to come. He was bending over me because he had to keep a hand on my mouth and his game uniform felt scratchy on my lower back, smelling like dirt and game and Tanner.

“Condom?” I gasped tremulously, flinging my head back and forth to get even a millimeter of space.

“With you, Em? Fuck no,” he snarled, and he tightened his fingers on my ass and jerked his hips forward savagely, forcing his cock deep inside me.

I whimpered at his size and how rough he was. I was crushed under him, my hips shuddering at how hard he took me.

“Ohfuck,” Tanner groaned, and he was harder and rougher than I had even dreaded. “Shit, you feel good.”

I didn’t, couldn’t respond, but I felt something between a sob and a moan catch in my throat. Then he bent his head and bit me on the neck. I yelped in dismay, his bite hard and domineering, his teeth sinking into my flesh like he wanted to imprint himself permanently on me. I felt like I was shoved into the couch, the panic sizzling along my spine, and he suddenly tightened his hand on my mouth and ass.

“Shit fuck no no nofuck.”

I gasped as I felt his cock jerk and his release fill me. I was not expecting him to be so loud, every time I had seen him before he had been quiet, bored, and contemptuous. But he released in me with a low groan, getting louder with each pulse as he came inside me.

Finally, I heard his loud, ragged sigh. I let out my own, waiting with baited breath for him to let me go. When he didn't immediately, keeping his cock inside me, I shook my head against his grip with increasing desperation and he moved his fingers a fraction, his thumb possessively pulling down and feeling my lower lip again.

"OK, you fucked me," I said, trying to keep the tremble out of my voice, the side of my neck throbbing from where he had bit me. "Let me go now. Stop bothering me."

"Oh, Em," he said. "It's not over at all. It'll never be over. I liked that too much."

I felt pure terror, and I couldn't get the words out. "W-why—" I began, and to my horror I felt his cock hardening in my cunt.

"Can you shut the fuck up?" he said, interrupting me, moving his hand to slide rough fingers down to my nipples, pebbled and needy from being ground into the hard sofa. I was jolted into speech, and I began to shriek, but as he had before, he slapped his hand over my mouth again, and I felt his cock hardening further.

"Bad girl, Em," he said warningly, giving my ass another slap, which made mewl with the sharp savage sting. He let out another low, urgent groan as he began to fuck me again, hand on mouth, hand on ass, yanking my ass cheek up so he could pound in and out of me. I heard the sharp slap of our flesh connecting, and I felt a low, reluctant heat growing in my belly. But Tanner wanted one fucking thing, and he tightened his hold on me as he got it, exactly how he wanted and as long as he wanted this time. He pulled my thin T-shirt up with his hand, and he bit and sucked up and down my back, like he wanted to consume me, mark up every inch of me.

“Fuck, this cunt feels like it’s fuckingmade for me,” he groaned. “Tight sweet pussy.”

I didn’t make a sound, and he rode me, fucked me until I felt his thighs tense against my trembling flesh, and his release was long and low and loud, the drips of sweat from his neck and chest dropping like tiny barbs of fire along my back. His cum filled me and I felt some slide against my thighs as he finally pulled out. He let my ass go, and I immediately felt the throb and ache as he released me. My back ached and I started to get up, but he slapped my ass again, hitting between my cheeks so that his spank landed partially on my sore cunt and I moaned, my knees almost giving way, as I clutched the side of the couch.

“Ouch,” I moaned feebly.

“Don’t make me put my hand over your mouth again,” he said coldly. “I want to fucking hear you next time, not have to hold you down.”

The wordsnext timesent a weak but driving panic through me, and I didn’t even bother to grab my sleep shorts, just forced my weak legs to propel me through the door and down the hallway while he was still grabbing our clothes.

I didn’t see anyone as I ran down the stairs, almost crying with relief as I pressed the code to my room and fell in the doorway, dragging myself to my bed. I knew I should get in the shower and clean myself up, but I was too exhausted to, my neck, and back aching from the bites of his kisses, and my cunt and ass aching with the violence of his control.

11

Phoenixes win, 5-2. Is Tanner Courtenay finally heating up? He went a remarkable 4-for-4 today, and caught two lazy runners on the basepaths. Do the Phoenixes have time to turn this ship around and make the playoffs?

When I got back to the Phoenixes home stadium, I escaped to my hotel and began to pack my bags. I knew it was too dangerous to stay. I already had half the money, and half of the money was still a pretty damn big amount of money, definitely enough for a big down payment. I could be back home tomorrow and still have a little bit of the summer left to enjoy.

Was that still Tanner's fuckingcumrunning down my leg? I was lucky that after he had ripped off my birth control patch I had been regular about taking the pill. Or I might've gotten pregnant, and that would've been a nightmare, when Tanner would probably get bored long before the baby was born. I didn't want to have a baby with an absent father, anyway, and there was no way Tanner was serious about trying to get me pregnant.

Even if he did eventually get bored, it was still dangerous for me to stay here as long as I was still his shiny frightened plaything.

I stayed up late to try to cram everything in suitcases, looking for a moment at all the scoring sheets I had accumulated while I'd been here. For a second I flicked through them. I could see where Tanner had finally decided to take the batting coach's advice. He could've been out of his slump way earlier if he wasn't such a stubborn asshole who never took advice.

Suddenly, I heard a terrifically loud vibration, my phone sounding deafening in the stillness of the room with its soft air-conditioned hum. I had kind of gotten used to that hum.

I flipped my phone over before I could be afraid.

Come to the stadium, Tanner wrote.

Or I'll tell everybody what you did.

Page 25

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Surely he was bluffing? What could Tanner possibly know about me? I ran over my list of sins I had committed in my life.

I was thoroughly blameless. I had always been a good girl. Too good. Boring, even.

There was one thing. . . one time. . . I had been so anxious and nervous I had done something wrong. . .

But he couldn't possibly know about that. My teachers had never guessed. Not a good girl like me. Sibyl was the only one who knew. And we had sworn never to tell anyone.

Still, I had an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach as I threw on leggings and a T-shirt. The last thing I wanted was to be around Tanner again but. . . what if? And surely the stadium crew would be arriving soon, so it wasn't like I'd be totally alone with him.

I tried to comfort myself, but I was only partially successful as I got in my car and headed over to the stadium. For the thousandth time I bitterly regretted ever taking this job.

When I got out of my car at the stadium, the parking lot was dark and quiet. The stadium crew wasn't there yet, but I could hear the distant crack of a bat. Tanner was in there doing batting practice at 3 am.

I forced myself to walk toward him, sure to keep far enough away that I could see him coming if I needed to run.

He saw me coming horribly early, turning and leaning on his bat to watch me. He was half in and half out of the shadows, but I saw the malicious smirk on his face as I drew closer. “Afraid I’ll chase after you, baby girl?”

“No,” I lied. “What do you want, Tanner?”

“I want to not have to chase after you all the fucking time,” he said coldly. “I want your mouth open for me because I say so. Not because I have to chase you down.”

“Well, you are never getting that,” I said.

This close, I could see the sheen of sweat on his chest and neck, his shirt sticking to the corded muscles. He put the bat behind his head, resting his hands on it and keeping his eyes fixed on me.

Fuck, but he was big. I felt myself flushing as I remembered how he had pinned me down last night and fucked me. But I was still far enough from him that I could sprint away if I had to.

“I know you cheated on your exam,” he said.

“I-I-I,” I was horrified to hear myself stutter.

He waited.

“I-I did not,” I got out, my face flaming.

“I have proof,” Tanner said. “Your friend Sibyl.”

Sibyl! Why the fuck would she do this? How the fuck did Tanner even know to look her up?

“It took a while,” Tanner went on, his uncanny eyes holding me frozen in place. “Calling all of your friends to find one with a dirty secret. Luckily your friend Sibyl is such a starfucker she was happy to give me proof of your secret in exchange for some money and the numbers of some of the guys on the team.”

“Are you g-going to report me to the art therapy board?” I asked, my heart in my throat.

I’d never work again. I’d be humiliated if my coworkers knew what I had done.

His smile was slow and cruel.

“I’m not going to report you, Em. As long as you do what I want, whenever I want it. And I fucking mean whenever I want. Late at night, early in the morning, no matter where you are or what you’re doing. When I text you, you will comethat fucking second, your mouth and cunt open for me. No more having to run across the fucking town to chase you down and fuck you. You’ll fuck me when I want you to. Got it?”

I felt ice-cold fear down my spine. My heart began to pound in my chest. I wanted to open my mouth, plead with him, but I knew he was waiting for me to beg. I thought he’d enjoy watching me beg. So I didn’t. We stood there, looking at each other. City noises echoed outside the stadium, but it was silent in here.

I felt rooted to the spot.

The stadium was dark now, but I could see flickers of light flash over Tanner’s face and what I saw made my heart sink. My mind was racing, but I couldn’t think of any way out.

“And we’re going to start right now,” he said. “Get the fuck over here in front of me so I can see you.”

I walked toward him, looking at his face, trying to see if there was any mercy there, but I knew even as I did it that it was pointless. When I stood in front of him, he took a second and looked me up and down.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Up close, he smelled so good, like salt and heat and dirt.

“Well?” he asked. “You know how to do it, don’t you? You aren’t a blowjob virgin, are you?”

“Of course I’m not a blowjob virgin,” I snapped, flaring out with sudden anger.

“Then get on your knees and put my cock in your mouth,” he said.

He could have shoved me down, held me between his legs with one big hand, but right now he wanted to make me do it myself. I went slowly to my knees in front of him, the dirt feeling hard and crumbly under the thin fabric of my leggings.

I knew I would get no mercy from Tanner, so I forced myself to put my hand on the drawstring of his athletic pants, pulling them down. I kept swallowing convulsively, and I tried to drive my panic down. His cock felt like it burned my hands, and I was embarrassed to feel that it was already hard.

My sore cunt already knew how big he was, but there was still something shocking to feel his cock in my hands. He was so thick and big. I didn’t dare look at up him, but I lowered my head, running my tongue around his big tip, before quickly trying to shove the whole thing in my mouth.

I heard him make a noise and I sucked rapidly up and down, trying to get it over with as quickly as I could. I forced myself down as far as I could on his cock, sucking desperately hard and fast. I thought I heard him say something, but the blood was rushing so hard in my ears I couldn’t hear what he said.

Then I felt him grabbing my hair, yanking me painfully off his dick. I came off with a shockingly loudpop.

“Ouch!” I cried.

“Slow down,” he warned me. “I want to enjoy you being forced to do this. And look up at me when you suck my cock. I want to see your face.”

I glanced up at him, those dark curls casually falling over his forehead, his eyes glittering at me.

I lowered my mouth over the head of his cock again, forcing myself to slow down even though my senses were screaming at me to finish and run away as fast as I could. It would be easier to grab his legs to stabilize myself on the rough ground, but I didn’t want to touch him, so I hovered in between his big thighs.

His cock was big and I didn’t want to think about the feel of him in my mouth. I closed my eyes and drove my head down on his cock, forcing it down my throat, feeling drool pool in my mouth. I closed my lips, his skin heated and unexpectedly velvety. He groaned and it frightened me so much that I increased the suction, my heart pounding so fast I thought it would burst from my chest. I was surprised when I felt his cock twitch and a hot jet of cum shot down my throat. I involuntarily jerked away, but his big hand was there, trapping me in place as he fisted my hair. I was forced to swallow his cum, almost choking as it dribbled out the sides of my mouth.

When I had gulped what I could, I leaned back and sat panting on my legs, wiping the cum and saliva from my cheeks.

He had forced me to watch him get his dick sucked for the length of an entire meeting, and now he was coming this fast? Goddamn Tanner.

I could hear his heavy breathing.

“What was that, your first time sucking cock?” he asked harshly, yanking my long braid. “Swallow all of me down next time.”

I was stung by the accusation. I fucking had swallowed all of it I could.

“Maybe some damn warning next time,” I said.

“I’m not giving you a warning,” Tanner said, and I saw the city lights flash by, illuminating the frown on his face. “Swallow my cum or else.”

I bit back the angry words I wanted to say.

I tried to stand up, but he still had a hand in my hair.

“Ow!” I complained. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Did I say you were done?” he growled, each word a chill reminder of his power over me.

“I gave you a blowjob!” I protested, feeling the fear twist in my gut.

“Oh, it was very nice, baby girl, nicer than I thought it would be. But it was over too soon. I’m not done yet.”

My stomach plummeted to the ground.

His cock was in front of me, and I could see it move from half-erect to fully erect in front of my eyes. I wanted to scream, bite his dick off, run away, but I knew none of that could help. I moved apprehensively back toward his cock, but his hand tightened

painfully on my hair again.

“And look up at me the whole time,” he ordered, a cruel smile twisting up his lips. “I want to watch you.”

Page 27

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

I looked even more apprehensively at his cock, but I obeyed, looking up under my lashes at Tanner.

He loosened his fingers so he wasn't fisting my braid, but even the fingers that were threaded through my hair felt like a reminder of what he could do.

His cock was thick and hard.

I put it in my mouth again, feeling the velvety skin underneath my tongue.

His eyes felt like they singed me with how intently he stared at me. I ran my tongue around the underside, suddenly dropping my eyes as I felt my cheeks burning in shame at the look on his face.

He stopped again, pulling me off his dick as I tried to wipe the drool off my face. He put his big cleated foot between my legs, yanking and scraping my leggings with the dirt and spikes.

"I said look at me," Tanner hissed, dragging me closer with his cleats, then putting one big leg on either side of me.

I wanted to die with the shame and embarrassment, but I obeyed him, licking my lips, then sinking down on his cock, feeling that velvet cruelty in my mouth again as I looked up at him.

"Yes, just like that," he said, sinking his dick further in my mouth, so hard I felt my throat constrict.

I gulped, choking on my own drool, and I felt it roll down my chin and throat.

He liked that, because I heard him make a low groan and the fingers on my head tightened.

He began to shove his cock deeper, and I gagged, trying to force my throat to relax, but Tanner barely gave me a chance. I gulped for air in the brief second he pulled his hips back, only for him to slam into me again.

“Eyes on me,” he grunted, and I looked furiously up at him, but he only curved his mouth up in a cruel smile.

I wanted to be defiant as I looked up at him, but it felt inadequate, fake, like he obviously wouldn’t be convinced. I was caught, pinioned, and he knew it.

I struggled to take his whole dick in my mouth, my gulping noises growing louder, and he broke eye contact for the first time, his head going back so that I saw the muscles moving in his strong throat and jaw. His thighs and hand held me brutally tightly.

This time I was so close that I thought I felt his thighs tensing, and I had a second to prepare before he shot his cum down my throat again. He groaned, low and throatily, and I couldn’t help the uncomfortable throbbing in my pussy at the same time.

He doesn’t give a shit, I reminded myself.

I was able to swallow it all up this time, tears streaming down my face.

I turned away, and I didn’t see him put his cock back in his pants, but I heard the snap of lights in the building that meant the cleaning staff had begun to arrive.

“Keep your phone on you,” Tanner said coldly. “I’ll text you when I want you to be available for me.”

I said nothing, finally lurching to my feet, my legs feeling sore. There was dirt on my leggings. As I began to look away, I heard him call. I turned around, and he was half in shadow still. Tall, dark, cold eyes, folded arms.

“Em, are you on birth control?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said nervously.

“Get off it,” he snapped, bending down to grab his bat again.

I turned and ran then, not caring that it made me look weak. I just had to get away, had to figure out what to do.

How could I escape him? As long as I worked at the stadium. I was his. He could order me, control me, and he had access to me all day long.

12

I took my birth control pill as usual later that morning, after a short and unsatisfying few hours of sleep. I looked at it dubiously for a second before putting the pill resolutely in my mouth and shoving the pill pack back in the bathroom drawer.

I felt a little twinge in my belly, but I ignored it.

The last thing I wanted was to get pregnant with a guy who would probably try to pay me off when he got bored.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

My neck still ached from where Tanner had sucked and bit at me and I examined myself in the mirror. The marks were dark, an angry red and purple against my pale skin, and I felt an unwelcome heat pool deep in my belly to see them.

He marked me up like he wanted them on there permanently.

It was an early 10 am game today, and after Tanner keeping me out until 4 am I felt like I had been run over with a dump truck. I threw on some clothes and sleepily brushed my teeth as I picked up my phone.

You better be at the game

It was like a shot of espresso to see a text from him, jolting my body awake, my adrenaline thumping through my guts. I tossed my phone down on the bed in disgust. I was going to the game anyway.

There was a new trainer for the Phoenixes at the game today, and he frowned as he saw me in the dugout.

“No unauthorized personnel allowed here!” he barked.

I opened my mouth, because I would have liked nothing more than to either go back to my office or watch the game from the relative safety of the stands like a normal person, but then I heard Tanner’s harsh voice. He was stretching, the black of his uniform only emphasizing the darkness of his hair and those unearthly silver eyes.

“She stays in the dugout,” he said, in a voice that meant don’t fucking mess with me.

The trainer darted his eyes at me, probably wondering what was so indispensable about a quiet girl in a wrinkly and drooping pearled pantsuit, but he nodded and raised his hands in submission.

Everyone always rolled belly-up to Tanner. I wished I had the guts to call his bluff. He wouldn't bother to actually report me for cheating, would he?

But I didn't know. I saw his lips quirk up as he looked at me, his smile uncomfortably assessing, possessive. I felt my face flush. Surely he couldn't tell that my lips burned from how roughly he had taken me.

Tre wasn't pitching today, so he loped over to me, lean and relaxed. Matt who had been punched in the face by Tanner was studiously ignoring me.

"If Tanner's bothering you, you can tell me," he said.

I forced myself to smile and shake my head, even as my neck ached, my long hair carefully arranged to hide his marks.

Tre was sweet and nice. But he couldn't stop Tanner. Tanner didn't talk to me in between innings, but I could feel his eyes on me anyway, like they were assessing what he owned now.

It was the bottom of the 9th and they were down by 3 with 2 outs when Tanner walked out to the plate.

And the hometown crowd was restless. This was a game against a big divisional rival. They didn't want to lose. The Phoenixes were only one game out of the wildcard spot now.

Tanner swung way out of the strike zone at the first pitch.

Shit. That wasn't even close.

Despite myself, I was more invested in the game than I had expected to be. Tanner had the same ritual before each pitch. And he performed it once again. Right shoe-left shoe-tap-tap-tap with his bat. At this point it seemed impressed on my eyelids, painted in permanent marker on the inside of my skull.

Surely, he would be smarter this time. I had heard Steak warn him about this pitcher's fastball.

But no. The next pitch came, once again outlandishly out of the strike zone, and Tanner swung at it again.

I heard the scattered boos from the crowd getting louder. "What the fuck was that, Juicer?" I heard someone yell, and I felt popcorn and peanuts hit the back of the dugout.

I felt myself tensing. I don't care who wins or loses, I reminded myself, but Tanner sucking would make my job harder.

And harder to escape.

He fouled off the next pitch. The stadium groaned. I saw Kenji twitching at third. He could steal home, I'd seen him do it before, but it wouldn't win them the game.

And here we went again with the ritual. Right shoe-left shoe-tap-tap-tap. I gritted my teeth. I had to figure out some way of getting out of here. I wanted to rip my hair out. I couldn't do this shit anymore.

The pitcher threw an absolutely outlandish changeup way out of the strike zone, and for some inscrutable reason Tanner didn't swing at it. I clutched my tablet tighter.

The next pitch was practically in the ground. The count was now 2-2. Right shoe-left shoe-tap-tap-tap. The pitcher signaled for more time. The stadium groaned in unison, beginning to boo the pitcher now. I saw Steak twitch at second base.

Stay on the fucking bag! I wanted to shriek at him. He could and had gotten picked off.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

And of course the whole ritual had to begin again. Right shoe-left shoe-tap-tap-tap. Then the next pitch was in the dirt, again.

The stadium was pounding and pulsing with energy now, and I could feel the shaking as the fans drummed on their chairs. Tanner didn't appear to be affected. Right shoe-left shoe-tap-tap-tap. His big shoulders squared up carefully at the plate. I could see the opposing coach waiting twitchily on the side. One more pitch and they could put the game away without having to use another relief pitcher.

I felt the blood rushing to my ears. If he swung at something stupid again, the stadium was going to be out for his blood. Oh please, I begged to any available deities. Just let him walk. Let someone else be on the hook for the loss.

I wanted to look away, but I forced my eyes to stay on the field.

And I thought I could tell what the closer was going to throw, good lord, not a motherfucking fastball, he could never hit those, but it was right across the plate and Tanner connected. I felt the collective intake in the stadium as the ball lifted in the air, but it wasn't even close, clearing the fence by several rows. And then I heard a rush of sound as the stadium exploded.

Of course Tanner couldn't run around the bases like a normal person, watching the homerun just that bit longer than was necessary and then flipping his bat.

But the home crowd ate it up with a spoon, pounding on their seats. The noise rang in my ears. Kenji hit home plate, then Steak, and finally Alex, immediately turning to high-five Tanner. The rest of the team and trainers streamed out onto the field too,

and I saw Tre lugging the big container of Gatorade. The stadium was so loud I felt like the noise was reverberating through my ribcage.

I tried to think about it dispassionately. This was going to make my job a hell of a lot easier. This town would tolerate any amount of jackass behavior if you were good at baseball. And hitting the game-winning grand slam against their hated rivals constituted being good at baseball.

Tanner was so tall that it was easy to spot him in the jostling, jumping team. He broke free from the guys, shaking the Gatorade droplets out of his hair with a laugh, and I saw him turn toward the dugout. I looked down quickly before he could meet my eyes, my fingers moving blindly over the tablet, the stats blurring in my vision.

I wasn't sure if I could hear him calling me, but I retreated back further into the dugout.

Tanner had an on-field interview after the game, with Genevieve, the same stunning auburn-haired sports reporter, and I was annoyed to find I was wondering if he was going to fuck her. Suddenly I felt ridiculously overdressed and stuffy in my collared shirt and pearl buttons. I gathered up my things to go, but Miguel tapped me on the shoulder as I went to leave.

"Tanner said to stay here, he has to tell you something," he said, smiling cheerfully at me and moving down the hallway to the locker room.

I gritted my teeth. Miguel was too sweet to know what this meant. And now I was supposed to come and goat Tanner Courtenay's pleasure, too. I leaned against the wall of the dugout, flicking through Tanner's stats on the tablet, highlighting the better ones, seeing how today's game had improved them. A walk and a walk off grand slam. Not too bad.

I didn't look at Tanner as he stepped down into the dugout, even when he threw his bat aggressively in the corner. I didn't know what he was going to do but I didn't expect him to come up to me and close his fingers around my throat, loosely caging me but making sure I felt the threat.

The tablet dropped from my fingers and I was forced to look up into his angry eyes.

"I didn't see you look at me," Tanner said, and I knew what he was referring to. "I want to see your eyes on me during the game."

"I was looking at you," I gasped, trying to keep from panicking. Tanner's fingers weren't tightening on me, I could breathe easily, but he could be tightening them, could be making it hard to breathe.

I couldn't help reaching my hands up to his, trying to pull him off me. His lip curved up contemptuously. "Afraid I'll choke you, baby doll?"

"No," I said, trying to be braver than I was.

He moved his hand to my chin, his fingers biting down so hard that my jaw ached. He stepped closer to me, and I felt the hard edge of his hip digging into me.

"Keep your eyes on me," he said warningly.

Then he bent his head and kissed me. I was shocked and frozen, all the heat rushing from my angry face down through my body. His kiss wasn't soft and tender, but hard and demanding. One hand was on my chin, trapping me in place, the other tightening on my waist. He stepped so close that it felt like a new force field, coiled danger right in front of me. He smelled like salt and tang and masculine power. I could feel the tips of his cleats crowding me.

His tongue was at the entrance to my mouth, demanding admittance, and I shook my head. He didn't like that, and I felt a growl erupt from his chest. He moved a hand from my waist and placed it over my nose, cutting off my air supply. I felt a quick, shattering panic, then I gasped, opening my mouth wide to get air in.

Tanner immediately forced his tongue in my mouth, letting my nose go to cup my face with both big hands. His hands felt dirty and gritty on my face.

I complained against his mouth, trying to pull away.

"You're a psycho," I gasped.

"Don't make me do it again," he growled, shoving me against the wall of the dugout, so I reluctantly opened my mouth for his tongue, and he tangled it against mine with a groan that was frightening. I could feel the hard length of his cock pressed against me, closer and then harder as he kissed me, his hands tightening possessively on me.

"I want your mouth open," he said warningly. "And your cunt open," he added, reaching one big hand down to my skirt, ripping at it and hitching it up to run hard fingers up my trembling flesh. It wasn't gentle and he wasn't trying to turn me on. He was reminding me that he had the power to do whatever he wanted to me. He plunged his fingers harshly into my pussy, then slapped my lips with the wet fingers. "So don't close yourself off to me, ever."

I thought for a terrifying moment he was going to fuck me in the empty dugout, but then I heard Lou's voice calling for Tanner, and he let me reluctantly go.

"Did you do what I told you?" he asked harshly, moving down the hall for his team meeting.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

When I looked blankly at him, my legs weak, an uncomfortable heat and pressure pounding down to my cunt despite his rough treatment, he added impatiently, “your birth control, Em. Are you off it?”

“Yes,” I lied, not knowing what else to say. “I’m off it.”

And he nodded curtly at me, and turned and walked down the hall to the locker room.

I stopped by the grocery store on the way home, still feeling an almost-painful throb in my cunt that I tried to ignore. My hotel kitchen was tiny but I should really try to cook more and eat out less if I was stuck here until Tanner got bored. I picked up frozen lasagna and some refrigerated tamales, feeling jittery and on edge. I kept looking down nervously at my phone, but Tanner didn’t text me. I breathed a careful, ragged sigh of relief. He must be going out with the guys to celebrate after their win. There were always plenty of women who wanted to fuck him at the bar, so he wouldn’t likely be contacting me until tomorrow.

Women like that beautiful reporter.

I shook off my feeling of insecurity at how I looked and paid for my groceries. On the way home I stopped by my favorite Thai place and grabbed takeaway. I had gotten groceries, so I was being very good. But I really had a craving for spicy peanut sauce.

I had just kicked off my high-heeled boots at home and sat down with my carton at the table when I heard a ding.

I’m at Ace’s

My fingers hovered over my phone, debating what to answer, but finally I just ignored the text. Maybe it was just a random drunk text from him. I unsnapped my chopsticks and dug into my meal. It was sweet and salty, perfectly savory on my tongue and I wished I could enjoy it without my stomach twisting into a ball of anxiety about Tanner.

I started to unbutton my collared shirt when I heard another ding, and I felt my stomach drop.

That means get down here

Shit.

He couldn't expect me to be on demand for him literally 24-7, could he?

I just got home I texted him back.

Maybe that would be it.

Did I really think that would be it? No, I didn't.

He texted back immediately, before I even had a chance to put my phone away.

Get fucking down here Em

I sighed and felt a shiver of fear down my spine.

Maybe he would just be satisfied with a quick bj and then I could come back home and get in my pajamas.

Maybe.

I shoveled several more bites of pad thai into my mouth, regretfully putting it back in the fridge. I'd have to finish it later. I went downstairs and started walking over to the bar, wishing I had thought to take off my hose and change my clothes. Tanner texted before I had barely made it outside.

I don't see you here

I'm walking over!!!I texted him in annoyance.

As usual, Ace's was dark, noisy, and packed. Tre was near the door and he gave me a high five. The Golden Boy held up his O'Doul's non-alcoholic beer and said he was the designated driver.

"Do you want anything to drink?" Steak asked, looking sweaty and red. "I have to follow Miguel around to make sure he doesn't drunk-call his ex-girlfriend."

"Maybe," I hedged, realizing that my eyes were unconsciously scanning the room.

As usual, my eyes reluctantly, begrudgingly found Tanner. He was in the middle of the floor with a beer in his hand, two or three women dancing near him, trying to get close enough to grind up on him. I saw him lean his head back and take another drink, the muscles moving in his lean throat. One of the women in front of him curled into him, reaching up to whisper in his ear.

I felt my stomach plummet, even though it was stupid. I knew just because he was blackmailing me, it didn't mean he wouldn't be fucking other women.

I turned to Steak. "I'll have a mojito. A big one."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Just as I reached down for my purse I saw a flicker of movement. Tanner had noticed me. He pushed the woman in front of him aside and walked toward me with that tall predator's walk. He was wearing a T-shirt and athletic pants.

"No drink for her," he called out, and Steak paused in his order. "Why not?"

"Because she's here forme," Tanner snapped, putting a hand on my neck and pulling me into a corner of the room.

I was feeling irritated at the sting of his big hand on my neck.

"OK, so I'm here. Now what?" I snapped at him, feeling like I had to almost scream with how loud the bar was.

He ignored me, moving closer and putting a big finger on my collared shirt with the pearl buttons. He ran a finger under the collar, his calloused fingers skimming my soft skin, sending prickles down my spine.

"You should wear this more," he said.

Silently vowing to throw it in the back of my closet, I asked, "What do you want, Tanner? What do you need me for? Seems like there's plenty of women here who want to fuck you."

"Yeah," he said, and his eyes were cold but they didn't leave my face. "But I want to fuck you. That's why you're here."

He took my arm and led me down the dark and grimy hall to the bathroom, suddenly turning and pressing me up against the wall, his lips hard on mine, his hand on my chin to make sure my mouth opened to him.

“Not here, Tanner!” I begged, twisting so hard in his grip that my chin ached. “Everyone can see us.”

Tanner rolled his eyes, but he put his hand on my arm and let me down the hall to the manager’s office. Then he knocked on the door. The manager was a thin, harassed man who looked like he was about to tell off whoever knocked on the door, but when he saw it was Tanner he closed his mouth shut with a snap.

“Get out,” Tanner said. “I need your office for a while.”

The man did, and Tanner pulled me impatiently inside the small office and locked the door.

I was trapped in there with him, and I knew there was not a goddamn thing I could do about it. He flicked his eyes up and down my body, then without preamble he said, “On your knees.”

I wanted to get it over with, so I immediately dropped to my knees in front of him. He put one big leg on either side of me, and I felt him caging me in. I went immediately to the drawstrings of his athletic pants, and his cock sprung out, already thick and hard. I gritted my teeth and put my hand on it, bringing the head closer to my mouth. Tanner sucked in his breath, a hard intake of air.

“Not too fast,” he warned me. “If you rush you’re just going to have to do it all over again.”

I felt anger flare through my chest, but I ran my tongue around the head of his cock,

hating how he felt like silky velvet under my fingers. Silky cruel velvet. I felt his hand on my head, caressing my hair in a way that sent goosebumps and prickles of fear all along my skin.

“That’s it,” he said. “There’s no point in fighting me, baby girl. I’m going to get what I want.”

I ignored him and took his cock in my mouth, closing my lips around his thick length. As much as I wanted to get it over with, I didn’t want to give him too much suction or go too quickly because then I’d have to do it all fucking over again. So I moved slowly, heat beneath my tongue, my lips stinging with the stretch. I hated how I felt something warm and dirty flare in my chest.

He groaned loudly. “Fuck. You’re so good at that.”

I ignored him again, one hand stroking the base of his big cock while I took as much as I could in my mouth, my tongue swirling around him as I moved in and out, trying to set the perfect pace so I wouldn’t have to do it again.

I felt uncomfortable heat growing between my legs, and I shifted so my thighs wouldn’t rub my cunt with each movement.

“Em,” Tanner said, “Look at me while you’re doing that.”

It felt extra wrong and bitter that he wouldn’t just be satisfied with my mouth on his cock or his cock down my throat. He wanted my face looking up at him. I knew if I didn’t, he would grab my face with his strong fingers and force my chin up, the smirk on his face because he knew he could. So I looked up at him, and his fingers threaded through my hair.

“Good girl,” he said. “Don’t fight me.”

I felt him position my chin, then he bent forward with his hips, shoving his cock further down my throat. I fought my gag reflex again, the panic sizzling over my skin.

He thrust down my throat several times, and as he watched me, he bent down and flicked open the buttons of my shirt, his hand rough on them. I heard one snap off under his fingers.

“You have nice tits,” he said. “Show them more.”

I must have looked angry, because I saw his lips twist up in a smirk. He ripped my shirt further away from my breasts, and then he popped his cock out of my mouth and yanked up on my braid so I had to stagger to my feet, trapped in place.

Page 32

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

I only had a second to squeak in surprise and dismay as he shoved his wet cock in between my breasts.

“Stay right there.”

I cried out again in distress as he rubbed his cock back and forth roughly on top of them, and suddenly I felt a hot spurt of cum between my breasts, splashing across my collarbones, and filling my cleavage, dripping down to my belly.

I looked down in shock, but he grabbed my chin and forced me to look at him as the muscles moved in his jaw and he groaned, low and feral.

My breath sounded ragged and low to my ears.

I had seen this man get a blowjob for thirty fucking minutes while eating a cheeseburger and not come.

“You’re such a jerk,” I said, when he was done and had pulled out. My lips trembled as I fell back against the desk. “Now I’m going to smell like fucking cum.”

“Good,” he said, tucking his cock back in his athletic pants and pulling out his pack of cigarettes. “That’ll keep other assholes away from you.”

I didn’t say anything. Since I was only in a skirt and hose, my knees were a bit sore. Disgusted, I turned to leave.

“Who said you could go?” I heard his cold voice from behind me as my hand hit the

doorknob. I whirled around. He was leaning against the big, messy desk in the center of the office with a cigarette in his mouth.

“But I sucked your dick,” I protested.

“Yeah,” he said. “I still didn’t say you could go. Come here and talk to me.”

I closed my mouth, and leaned against the door, feeling furious and helpless.

For several long moments we eyed each other.

“Won’t the manager be mad you’re smoking in this office?” I asked as Tanner lit his cigarette.

“Maybe,” he said. “I don’t give a shit.” He blew smoke out in satisfaction, then he said, “so does it look like I’ll get my sponsorships back?”

“Not yet,” I replied, leaning back against the door but not trying to open it. Tanner looked relaxed and at ease now, but I knew he was very capable of chasing me down brutally.

“Aren’t you supposed to be my PR consultant?” he asked. He looked so dangerous, leaning back against the filing cabinets, the messy shock of dark hair, the corded muscles standing out under his T-shirt.

“It’s hard when you won’t take half of my suggestions,” I protested.

“Maybe you should make them with your mouth around my cock,” he said, and I felt flushed with annoyance.

“Keep hitting better,” I said. “Sponsors will be more forgiving if you’re not sucking.”

I saw him take another drag of the cigarette, his silvery-gray eyes on me. He always seemed to have his eyes on me, making me get flushed and prickly under his stare.

“My batting average is fine,” he said.

“Teams are going to be looking at the slugging percentage now,” I said. “You need to get that up if you want a long-term contract at the end of the season.”

We began to go back and forth about his stats. I should have shut up and tried to surreptitiously jimmy the lock, but I didn’t know how to do that. I just stood with my back to the door and watched Tanner Courtenay smoke, the long lean lines of his throat, the way his sharp cheekbones were sucked in with each drag he took on his cigarette.

“Get over here,” he said.

I was debating how far I dared to push him when he slipped off the table and walked toward me, long lean steps making my insides clench. He hoisted me up without preamble and set me on the desk, stepping between my legs.

“I want to come again,” he said. “And you’re not on birth control?” he added harshly, his voice low and gravelly. It was the second time he’d made that order today. His hard fingers felt around my waist and back for a patch.

“No,” I lied again, like I had before.

“Good,” he said. “I’m going to fill up your cunt so spread your legs.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“What happened to double-bagging it?” I asked, my breath catching. I tried to squeeze my legs together, but he was still forcing my thighs open.

“No,” Tanner said, trapping both my arms between my back, holding both wrists with one big hand. “You’re pissing me off by wanting to run away all the time. And I can see it in your big eyes now. If you could, you would run down this hall and back to your hotel room. And I want to make it so you can’t do that. I’m going to fucking fill you with my cum and make you pregnant so you can’t get away from me.”

With the other hand he ripped down my hose, yanking my ass forward on the cold desk. He impatiently threw my hose away, knocking my shoes off in the process, then settled between my legs, running his hands up my thighs.

“Shit, you’re so soft. Such a good little girl for me to fuck as much as I want to.”

He yanked my underwear painfully to the side and began to push his cock in me. I was still a little sore from the last time he had taken me, but the ache was almost pleasurable now. I had to bite my lip to stifle a moan.

“Oh fuck yes, Em,” he said. “You’re so tight.”

I dropped my eyes in embarrassment, but once again he captured my chin in his hand.

“Remember, eyes on me,” he said, giving my chin a quick, painful pinch as a reminder.

I felt like I would die having to look him in the eyes as he gripped my thighs tightly

and pressed his cock in me. It was even worse being this close, nothing escaping his fallen angel's face, those silvery-gray eyes feeling like they pinned and trapped me like steel bars.

"Fuck, you're so wet," he said, and I felt my cheeks burning.

There was heat down there, and I wondered shamefully what would happen if he tipped my hips up, just a bit, so his cock would hit my clit. But he didn't care about getting me off, just my wet cunt, and I could feel his urgency as he held me right where he wanted me, slamming into me painfully, my ass scraped across the desk. I felt jolted and savagely used, and finally his head fell back as he released into me and I wanted to sigh in relief, but I was too sore.

Tanner buried his head in my neck as he came.

"Mine," he said, his lips nipping at my neck, making me squeal in pain. "Mine."

13

Nobody look, but the Phoenixes have clawed to within a game of the second wildcard spot! After spending most of the summer looking like absolute shit, are they heating up this fall at just the right time? All the city can talk about is Tanner Courtenay's game-winning home run! Now, Jim, I've got a panel in the studio here to talk about his bat flip. Number 86 has never been a guy who cared much about the unspoken rules in baseball. Do you think his bat flip crosses the line, or does it make the game more exciting? Let's go to--

I flicked the radio off with a snap of my fingers. It was my job to see what they were saying about Tanner but the tide was beginning to turn. For the first time, I had actually gotten a call for a new endorsement offer.

It was only for some protein powder that sounded like a scam, and at maybe 1/4th of what he would have gotten before he had tested positive for steroids.

But.

He wasn't getting booed during his walk-ups. His jerseys were selling again.

He probably didn't need a PR agent anymore.

If only that meant he'd let me go.

Today was the last home game before another two-day road trip. Thank God I didn't have to go on this one. They were only taking the bus, only gone Sunday night and coming home late on Monday.

I was sick of uncomfortable clothes, and it was hotter than Satan's balls outside, so I came to the game in leggings and a T-shirt, my long thick honey-brown hair still lying in its natural curls wrapped around my neck because Tanner's marks were still very visible.

And every day he made more.

He usually didn't speak to me during the game, which made me wonder why he had to have me in the dugout so urgently.

Today, though, he walked up to me before the game, eyes flicking up and down my body. He placed one hand on my belly, curling his fingers up under my shirt, making me shiver with the feel of them, rough from the chalk and dirt and wood.

"Soon," he said, his fingers splayed over my belly.

I felt a cold sweat break out. What would he do if he found out I had never gotten off my birth control? I forced myself to meet his eyes. There was no way he could find out, though.

His fingers moved down to the waistband of my leggings, jerking me to him suddenly so I was flush against him, his big body pressed against mine. Then he bent and kissed me, quick and hard, tongue in my mouth, and I didn't dare deny him the pleasure of my tongue reaching for his.

I heard the low noise in his chest, the blood pounding in my ears, and he let me go and went to stretch.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Tre's eyes were concerned, and he came over to me, standing beside me, leaning against the wall, and we both watched Tanner stretch on the field, long strong legs, asshole stance, big broad shoulders.

"Are you OK?" Tre asked.

No

"Can I do anything to help?" he tried again.

Also no. I've tried everything I can think of to stop Tanner Courtenay and none of it is strong enough.

"No," I said, trying to smile at him.

It was only 1 pm, but the crowd at the ballpark already seemed half-drunk, wildly drunk. We were in the homestretch of the season now. The next few weeks would determine if the Phoenixes made the playoffs.

The tension stretched as the game settled into a pitcher's duel. Tre was pitching well. The Phoenixes were hitting well, but unable to bring anyone home. The game was tied at 1-1 at the top of the 9th, and Tre had finally been taken out in favor of our light's out closer, DeShaun. DeShaun was the best in baseball.

But I watched in horror as the opposing team hit a single. Then another single. Then a walk. The stadium was so loud Tanner called for timeout, walking out to the mound to talk to DeShaun. I couldn't see what Tanner was saying with his glove over his

mouth and I started chewing my lip nervously. DeShaun nodded, and Tanner went back behind the plate.

Whatever he had said worked, because DeShaun smoked the next batter. 1 ball, 3 strikes, out swinging.

But there were still three men on base, and even a pop fly would put the opposing team in the lead.

The next guy hit a little bloop of a single, right by Steak. I saw the runner at third start to sprint toward home. Steak was not the most agile defensively, but he miraculously managed to snag the ball and I heard Tanner call for it. Steak threw the ball, a bit wildly, and I saw Tanner throw off his mask to catch it.

But the guy at third was almost home and Tanner turned, hurling himself toward the runner. They collided and rolled over home plate, the collision sending up puffs of dirt in the air. The stadium was shaking with the roars of the crowd as we waited to watch the replay, all the Matts like a surround-sound in my ears.

The angle of the replay on the big screen was perfect.

Tanner had beaten him by an inch, maybe two.

My ears rang with the noise. I wanted to look away, not absorb the sight of Tanner covered in dirt, spitting blood on the ground, but I couldn't.

The player he had tagged out was pissed. This was a division rival and they were barely ahead of the Phoenixes. And Tanner had flipped his bat. The other player yelled something at Tanner, getting in his face and grabbing his shirt. Then the other guy swung wildly at him.

Well, I could have goddamn fucking told him that testing Tanner was a stupid idea. Tanner hit back, but he didn't miss. He connected with the other player's jaw, sending him staggering back, and I heard the outraged squawks of all the Matts as the benches cleared around me, Lou leading the charge onto the field.

The crowd screamed even louder, and I started hearing them chant Tanner's name as he grappled with the other team, both teams out on the field now in a wild maelstrom of angry fists.

This, from a PR perspective, is very good, I thought to myself, trying to pretend that my heart hadn't been in my throat when the other player had swung at Tanner.

Tanner's punch had been the worst of the fight, though, and the other player was ejected from the game since he had thrown the first, ineffective haymaker.

As the whole stadium buzzed with nervous, frenetic energy, the next player grounded out and the inning was over.

I knew better than to look away, so I kept my eyes on him, and when Tanner stepped down into the dugout, he smiled at me, bared teeth, his smile bloody and vicious, and I didn't have the strength to resist as he came over and kissed me again, his blood coppery and warm in my mouth.

Comehere

Comehr

Em

It almost seemed like there was no other option for that game, no other way it could have gone. With the stadium in near-hysterics, Miguel had hit a leadoff double and

Steak, who was only hitting .209, had knocked him in with a single. The guys had rented a few of the rooms at the top of the hotel I was staying in to celebrate their win.

I was lying in my pajama shorts and top in bed.

I got up and wrapped myself in a big thick bathrobe. Let him try to fuck me through that.

The hotel room they were in was dark, the music loud. The table next to the door was crammed with every type of vodka, beer, whiskey, and wine bottle. There was an DJ in the corner, Steak and Miguel standing beside him toasting each other with beer bottles. Kenji nodded affectionately to me, his arm around his latest model girlfriend.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“Good game,” I said, drawing my robe tighter around me.

I wanted to pretend like I wasn’t looking for Tanner, that I didn’t feel his presence in the room like an itch on my skin.

But I couldn’t. I took one step and saw him, sitting in a chair at the very back of the room smoking, his eyes glittering at me in the dark. He jerked his chin, and I knew it meant come closer.

I could tell he was very drunk, even though he wasn’t slurring or stumbling.

He watched me walk toward him, dipping and zigzagging between the other partygoers.

“How are you not setting off the fire alarm?” I asked irritably.

He stubbed his cigarette on a table beside him. “I disabled the smoke detector.”

“It would serve you right if you burned yourself to a crisp!” I cried indignantly.

“Maybe,” he said noncommittally. He looked me up and down. His eyes looked lazy.

“Why are you wearing that ugly-ass bathrobe?”

I only clutched it tighter around my body, and I saw a flash of malicious humor in his eyes.

“If you think wearing that is going to make me not want to fuck you, you’re wrong.”

I said nothing.

“Come here, Emrys,” he ordered.

I wanted to stay in place, but his eyes had an almost hypnotic quality.

“There’s plenty of other women here who would fuck you,” I said, even though I felt my legs almost trembling. “Get them to do it.”

Tanner’s fingers were wrapped around a bottle beside him, and I saw him tilt his head and look at me.

“I don’t want to fuck them. I want to fuck you. Now get over here like I told you to.”

I took one step toward him, then another.

“I don’t want to fuck here in front of everyone,” I whispered.

“No one’s even looking and it’s dark,” he said, suddenly turning to yank the plug to the lights out of the socket. The room was plunged into darkness.

It was true. The noise from the game they were playing was deafeningly loud with incessant explosive rat-a-tat-tat of gunshots, and the room was big and dark. I had almost reached him now, and I saw Tanner slide his fingers away from the bottle and lean back, almost imperceptibly, to shift back in the chair. I took another step, willing myself to run away. I could call Tanner’s bluff. There was no way he cared enough to actually go through the steps of reporting me to the educational board.

“You’re drunk,” I said weakly. “Aren’t you too drunk for sex?”

“Too drunk to get it up for you? Never, baby,” he said. “Get here and ride me.”

I obeyed him, crawling into his lap. He smelled like alcohol and salt and cigar smoke.

But I could tell he was right. He was hard and thick underneath me.

He yanked the bathrobe off, groaning as he saw my body, with a sound that seemed to go directly to my core. He pulled me into his lap, running his hands over my stomach. “I can’t wait until your belly is big,” he said.

I tried to drive down the traitorous throb and pulse in my cunt at his words. This close it was so hard to deny the wetness that ran between my thighs. And I didn’t try to deny him at all when he yanked my sleep shorts aside and pulled me down onto his cock with a groan.

I let him fuck me in the pitch-black room that pulsed with music, and it was deafening in there but all I could hear was his voice in my ear telling me my cunt was his and he was going to put a baby in me.

My body seemed to buzz with need and I gasped as he lowered his head to my throat, my breasts, yanking my top down to suck and bite harshly at my nipples. I groaned, feeling the pressure twist in my body, but his fingers bit down as he came inside me with a grunt. There was a line of heat and sweat on my chest and I tried to remember that he didn’t really care about me as he pushed me between his legs to suck his cock.

14

The first night Tanner was gone I refused to watch the game, resolutely keeping the TV off, the radio off, and muting his texts. I would have to unmute them when he came back but the second night the team wouldn't get home until late. Two nights where I didn't have to worry about him.

But after falling asleep early after a glass of wine, I awoke to hear the terrifying sound of my door lock being forced open.

For a second I was frozen in terror, my heart thudding and pounding.

Should I stay silent and hope the intruder would go away? Or scream for help, even though that would draw his attention to me?

Then I saw in the dim light the unmistakable bulk and width of Tanner's shoulders, and I screamed, and he was on me, ravenous, insatiable, dirty, smoky.

"Why didn't you answer your phone?" he growled, hard hands grabbing me, roaming over my body, gripping handfuls of the big T-shirt I was wearing, searching for my curves underneath, the skin he loved to grab and pinch and bite.

"I fell asleep early," I cried, fully awake now.

He clearly hadn't even been back to his own apartment to shower. His hands were gritty as he rubbed them on me, flipping me over so I was on my belly.

“When is our agreement going to be over?” I whimpered, struggling in his arms. He ground my face into the bed, his big body pinning me in place. “I’ve done everything you wanted me to.”

“Our agreement was for me doing whatever the fuck I want to you,” he said. “And from now on I want you to stay with me so I can breed you and do whatever the fuck I want with you without you running away all the goddamn time.”

I opened my mouth and started to scream, suddenly not giving a shit about our agreement, but he clamped his hand over my mouth.

His hands shoved up my big sleep shirt, groaning when he ran his fingers roughly over my ass.

“Don’t yell,” he warned me, moving his hand, “or I’ll spank this sweet little ass until it looks like a stoplight.”

“Asshole,” I whispered furiously back at him, but he only laughed.

I saw his steel-gray eyes flick over me then and he grabbed my wrists and pinned them above my head as he bent to kiss me, his kisses hard and punishing. He reached back with the other hand and I heard the sound of his zipper, then I felt his hard cock on the soft skin of my ass.

He raised my hips, tipping me up so my head banged into the headboard, then he spread my thighs as wide as he could and I felt his thick cock in between my legs.

It nudged at my cunt and I was embarrassed and furious to realize I was wet there, the tip of his dick already wet just from rubbing on my lips. He grunted with satisfaction behind me and then, without warning, drew his hips back and thrust them so hard into me that his hips slammed into mine.

He was so big that I mewled in protest and he drew his cock out and thrust into me again, jostling my whole body. My breasts felt dragged against the bed, my nipples hardening.

“Fuck, you’re so tight, Em,” he grunted behind me, and my arms strained against his grip, trying to brace myself on the bed, but I had no way to, and he slammed in me again, grinding my pussy down.

I cried out, his big cock tearing into me like he was going to rip me in two. For a moment I felt a shattering, overwhelming panic as my cunt seemed to tear and rip open to accommodate him. Then he moved and his dick began to stroke against my sensitive clit and I rolled my head back in ecstasy.

His breathing sounded heavy and ragged and I felt his mouth on my neck, tearing and ripping and sucking at my sensitive skin there. My neck burned pleasurably and I shrieked as I felt his teeth pull at me.

He growled with pleasure as he drove his dick into me. His hand tightened on my wrists and he dug the other one into my hips, yanking me toward him. Each stroke lifted me, jolted me, filled me.

But he had my hips tipped up just right, so that I felt the heat begin to pool deep in my core, flaring out to envelop my cunt in a heavy, needy pressure. The urgency built like a fire inside me, and I grabbed his big arms, the pressure building with such feverish intensity that I dug my fingernails into his skin.

The action only seemed to make him more ravenous, my neck lowered submissively for his hard mouth.

“Yes, Emrys,” he growled, moving his hand to tighten his fingers in my hair. I tried to shake my head back and forth, not wanting the pressure to peak, afraid of what

would happen if I came. But he ignored my protests, and his cock tipped me over the edge, the pressure on my clit breaking me apart on a wave of pleasure.

I moaned helplessly, feeling my body tighten and convulse painfully around him. And my peak lasted as long as he wanted, Tanner making a feral animalistic sound as he released my wrists to jerk my hips hard against his and release in me.

I gasped, trying to recover my breath, trying to get some oxygen back in my lungs, trying to return to sanity. He must have broken my skin, because he smelled like blood and iron, his guttural groans loud in my ears.

My legs felt like jelly, and I felt the shame of coming for Tanner Courtenay, who was blackmailing me into sex.

I heard him make satisfied noises as he breathed hard, pulling out and flipping me on my back.

“Fuck, I liked that.”

He finally peeled off his T-shirt, never taking his eyes off me. I felt boneless and limp, the back of my neck sticky and wet, and I only had the energy for a soft protest as he settled himself between my legs again, thrusting into my sore pussy, his mouth down again to my skin, already sore and marked from his ravenous mouth.

I stumbled out of bed the next morning, and almost bent double on my way to the bathroom. My cunt ached and throbbed with how long and hard he had taken me and I shoved the door behind me as I used the bathroom. Once I had washed my hands, I looked at myself in the mirror. My nightshirt was covered in dirt and my hair looked like I had gone through a hedge backwards. The familiar marks stood out even more on my neck and chest. I touched one gently. It throbbed, but it was such a tender pain that it was almost pleasurable.

I reached absent-mindedly for my birth control pills and popped the foil, putting one in my mouth.

But I forgot the door was still open a crack.

And that he was always fucking watching me.

“What are you putting in your mouth?” he bit out.

I froze, turning to look at him. Either my brain or my mouth couldn’t come up with a plausible lie and I saw his face darken with anger as he got smoothly up from the bed and stalked into the bathroom. Tall, lean, totally fucking naked.

“Spit it out, Emrys, or you are going across my fucking knee,” he growled.

I tried to swallow the pill dry, but I was shitty at that, and his hand was on me before I had a chance to, yanking my jaw open and reaching impatiently into my mouth.

“No, Tanner,” I tried to say. But he had never ever stopped when I told him to, his fingers ripping my jaw open and swirling around my mouth until he found the pill. With a low curse, I saw him crush it between his fingers and throw the powder down the sink.

“Emrys Finnegan, you arenotsupposed to be on birth control!” he said angrily.

“Why?” I shrieked. “WhynotTanner?”

“Because you’re fuckingmine, and I want you goddamn bred and pregnant so you’ll stay in one fucking place and stop running away from me!”

He whirled around and ripped open my toiletries bag, upending the contents all over the sink and counter.

“Tanner, what in the world—” I cried, but he ignored me, yanking open all the drawers until he found my packet of pills. He whirled on me with furious eyes.

“I told you not to, Emrys.”

I felt my jaw drop and he tore open the package, sending the pills flying everywhere, and each one he crushed with his bighands. I felt rooted to the spot, and he grabbed me, shoving me against the bathroom counter. He yanked up my big shirt with one hand and spanked my ass, so hard it knocked my knees into the hard wood of the counter. Then he gripped me even tighter and spanked me again.

He pinned me tighter as I struggled, and he knocked my thighs apart with his knee, spreading my cunt so he could see it, then he sunk his cock in me. I yelped with pain, struggling against his hold, but he took me hard and fast, his hands so tight on my hips that I knew there'd be more bruises there tomorrow. He yanked me back against him and then his mouth was on my neck, savage and cruel, sucking, biting, pulling at my flesh.

He was so furious with me that his big hand landed several more times on my ass, making me shudder and shrink every time, but sending a wild, illicit thrill through me. If he would only tip my hips a bit. . . my face burned. But he never cared about that, only about taking me as hard as he could, leaving as many marks as he could on my skin.

When he was done, I still kept a hand on the sink to make sure I didn't slip to the floor as he went through the rest of my things, grunting in satisfaction when he didn't find any other pills.

"No more," he said warningly.

"Why, Tanner?" I asked, my lip trembling, my knees feeling like they were jelly. "You said you never wanted a baby! Why are you doing this?"

His eyes glinted dangerously. I saw a long swipe of dirt on his neck, the marks of the grease the players smeared under their eyes on sunny bright days still on his face.

"The first time I saw you run from me," he said. "I changed my mind. Now get on the bed."

I turned around on my trembling legs and he followed me, long, lean body catching up quickly. He put a hand on my throat, tracing a finger around the purple bruises there that were already showing from how hard he had sucked and bitten me. My

breath caught in my throat.

Then he pushed me down on the bed on my face and he climbed over me, gripping my ponytail in his fist and then pounding into my sore and throbbing cunt until he was satisfied.

But I knew it wouldn't last long. It never did. He would want more, always more.

He kept me on the bed when I was done, bending over to poke and prod my aching lips, make sure no cum dripped out. He put a pillow under me and tipped my hips up in the air.

“Stay there until I’m out of the shower,” he warned, giving my ass another slap. “I want that cum stayinginyour cunt. I want to put a baby in your belly.”

Page 38

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

So I lay on the bed the whole time as he directed, my face in the bedspread, and when he came out he grunted in satisfaction.

“Good girl.”

I turned my face away, and I felt his hands run down my spine, the callouses scraping possessively at my flesh.

“Oh you need to be fucked again,” he said. “You need to be so filled with my cum I can’t fit any more in and it’s dribbling down your leg and I have to stuff it back in your wet cunt. But we have to go to the stadium now.”

I went in to shower without another word, and when I got out, throwing on leggings and a T-shirt, he was still there, scrolling through his phone. I felt a little lurch in my heart to see him, but I drove it down.

Just because he was waiting for me didn’t mean anything. It didn’t mean he liked me. It didn’t mean he’d be tender.

“Your place is shit,” he said without preamble. “You should probably move into mine.”

“But—“ I began and he raised an eyebrow at me.

“You say that a lot for someone whose ass I own.”

“Why are you doing this?” I burst out.

Tanner stood up beside me. He'd apparently brought his bags with him, since I saw his gear thrown by the door, and he was in a clean pair of athletic pants and a team T-shirt. His dark ink-black hair was still a little wet from the shower, and if I didn't know any better, I'd be fascinated with the way it curled over his collar and across his forehead.

But I did know better. There was nothing soft about Tanner Courtenay.

"Out the door," he said.

And I went.

15

A week later, Lou, Tanner, and I were scheduled for another State of Tanner meeting but these had proved so popular that most of the team was also there, in chairs around the table or hanging around the outskirts.

There was a much more buoyant atmosphere now that the Phoenixes were tied for the second wildcard spot with a few weeks to go until the playoffs, and I wished I could join in with the general jollity. But it was hard with my cunt throbbing from his rough cock and my long honey-brown hair combed carefully and pulled to my side so the curls could hide the deep purplish-red marks where Tanner sucked savagely on my throat. As I stood in front of Coach Hernandez and what felt like most of the team, I felt a little drop of Tanner's cum drip from my cunt onto my panties, making me feel wet and flushed.

I tightened my hands on my papers, ignoring Tanner's fixed stare. Everyone on the team knew about his claim on me now. The Matts were friendly, but they were all very carefully not-TOO-friendly.

“The good news is that at least 62.5% of the comments on this video are not about him using steroids!” I said, starting myPower Point. “They are about his game-winning home run or his recent strikeout.”

The guys except Tanner all cheered lustily at this.

I highlighted several of the top comments on the video, such as “damn, that swing looks like shit, bro. Almost as shit as your hitting this season you dickhead.”

“The beauty of this comment,” I said, helpfully blowing it up at 75% magnification. “Is that it does not mention his steroid usage once, merely the fact that his hitting sucked. We obviously cannot change his past steroid suspensions, but hehaschanged his hitting. Progress!”

They all nodded enthusiastically again.

“What about my fucking endorsements?” Tanner asked. “Any word on extending my contract? I don’t give a shit about Instagram comments.”

I brought up the most recent highlights for the team on YouTube. “You may compare these statistics to his most recent highlight two weeks ago when he threw a runner out, which are 95% about his steroid usage. Now, only 45% of his comments reference the suspension.”

They all cheered again, and Steak gave me a high five.

I brought up several other recent videos and compared them, then some of the highlights about his walk off homerun. It was obvious that this was the way back into the public’s good graces.

Tanner twisted his head. I could see a muscle working in his jaw as he considered me.

But I was determined not to let him intimidate me.

“Emrys, good work,” Lou said, giving a vigorous spit into his cup for emphasis. I stifled the urge to vomit and said, “Thank you.”

Lou patted me awkwardly but affectionately on the shoulder and left the room.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Behind him I saw Tanner, glittering dark eyes still fixed on me.

“Everyone else get the fuck out,” he said. “Your attendance is not necessary at this meeting.”

I waited, trying to force myself to relax. I was proud of the job I had done.

Once all the other guys had left, Tanner got up and stood in front of me. “I don’t care about this shit, Emrys,” he said, and each word landed like a stone in my gut. “The only things I care about are getting that 7-year deal and getting my endorsements back. Not any of this other shit you did. What have you done to get me closer to that?”

My cheeks burned.

“I’m working on that,” I said defensively. “I’m doing my best. I’m seeing more companies put feelers out about endorsements again.”

“It’s shit,” he said.

I could feel the tears burning at my eyes, but I refused to cry, turning my head away so I could swallow the lump in my throat.

“What is wrong with you?” he said, but I ignored him.

“Just go away,” I whispered.

“I need to come,” he snapped.

My jaw dropped. “Well, you don’t need me for that,” I hissed back.

“Oh yes, I do,” he said grimly, taking me by the arm and leading me into the hall. “I don’t do shitty blowjobs anymore. I need your mouth.”

“Can’t you go jerk off?” I asked weakly.

He tightened his grip on my arm.

“Jerk off?” he laughed coldly. “What, go in the bathroom and jerk off to some shitty porn? Oh no, Em. That doesn’t do shit for me anymore. Why would I jerk off when I have you?”

He flicked his card in one of the doors down the hallway and pulled me inside after him. It looked like one of the physical training rooms, but I didn’t have any time to look before he whirled me around in front of him.

“And don’t mess around. I need to be at batting practice in 10 minutes.”

I knew there was no escape with his big hand on my shoulder, bearing me painfully down to my knees. I put a hand on his sweat, slowly pulling them down so his dick sprung free. I heard him exhale, a sudden whoosh of air.

“You get off on forcing me to do this, don’t you?” I asked sourly.

“I can only get off on your mouth on my cock,” he said. “So get going.”

I was surprised he didn’t yank my hair and drive me down on his dick, but he let me swirl my tongue around the head, and when I took it in my mouth, running my tongue

around the underside, he groaned loudly.

“That’s it, baby girl, just like that.”

I wanted to grit my teeth or, even better, bite his dick off, but I didn’t do either of those things, just knelt between his thighs and took his cock in my mouth. Tanner threaded his fingers through my hair, grabbing my braid almost lazily, wrapping it around his fist as if to demonstrate his power over me.

He didn’t need to do that, I thought irritably. I was very well aware of his physical power over me and his ability to make me sink to my knees without using any force at all.

When would he get tired of blackmailing me? I wondered. How long could his obsession possibly last?

He didn’t slow me down as I increased the suction, trying to suppress my gag reflex, my lips stinging as they stretched around him.

I felt his fingers tighten on my hair, and he didn’t give me any warning before coming down my throat, unloading his release like he hadn’t just fucked me twice this morning before allowing me to head in to work. It was so unexpected that I jerked away, and then he did grab my head, forcing me to stay on his cock as I choked on the cum, gulping down what I could.

I wiped the drool and cum from my face with my hand as he pulled out of my mouth, but he grabbed my chin.

“Good girl,” he said.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“Stop calling me pet names,” I said, trying to pull away. “We aren’t like that.”

“I’ll call you what I like,” he said, helping me roughly to my feet.

When I tried to turn away, I was surprised when he grabbed me again.

“I’m tired of running after you all the damn time,” he said, reaching in his pocket and handing me a key. “Be in my apartment when the game is over.”

“What is this?” I asked stupidly, staring down at it.

“My key, dummy,” Tanner said. “I’m tired of going to your crummy ass hotel room. Just put your stuff in mine.”

“I’m-I’m-I’m not moving in with you,” I said, finally goaded into speech. I had hoped he had forgotten about that.

“Are you disobeying me?” he snapped, reaching down and striking like a snake, grabbing my chin in his big vice grip and glaring down at me.

I looked up at him with big eyes, but I couldn’t just agree to move in with him. I couldn’t. I’d have even less ability to escape him then, but he was tightening his fingers even further on my chin.

“OK, OK,” I said.

“OK what?” he snarled, stepping closer to me. It felt like there was a dangerous

forcefield around him, something that would sting and consume me until I was ashes.

“OK,sir,” I said, silently gritting my teeth.

“Good girl,” he said, bending close and kissing where the big bruise on my neck was, flicking my hair away from it to look at it.

“Keep your hair off this,” he added, tapping my ass with the other hand for emphasis. “I want everyone to see it.”

“I’m not doing that,” I said, although my legs were trembling.

Tanner’s face looked angry, and he raised his big hand, sending my papers and files and phone clattering noisily to the ground.

“You’re a cunt for me to stick my cock in,” he said roughly. “I’m tired of your lip, Em. Do what I say and add a fucking ‘sir’ to it or I’ll drop you off at Noah’s house and let him do what he wants to you. Now be in my apartment after the game with your cunt in the air or you’ll be sorry.”

Then, without a backwards glance, he was gone.

And I picked up what he had knocked on the floor, left the stadium, went to my hotel room, hastily packed my bags, and drove out of town.

If Tanner was threatening to hand me over to Noah, he didn’t care at all. I’d call his bluff. He wasn’t going to do shit. He wasn’t going to tell my secret to anyone because he didn’t care.

And that was a good thing, I reminded myself as I wiped my eyes. Because it was dangerous to be the person Tanner wanted to mark up and fuck.

16

Get the fuck back here

Seriously, get the fuck back here or I'm going to tan your ass

BLOCK

What the fuck are you playing at

Where the fuck are you

This isn't cute

BLOCK

Where are you

Page 41

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

BLOCK

Em I swear to god

BLOCK

Where are you

Get back here

You are going to be so fucking sorry when I find you

BLOCK

BLOCK

BLOCK

BLOCK

17

Two weeks later I was sitting in my group art therapy classroom, the sun slanting lower in the sky as I put the finishing touches on a collage.

“Really wonderful job!” I told Francisco as he presented his collage proudly to me. “I see you have iguanas, a very fancy red sports car, and two demon bears. I like it, very

creative.”

“Look at mine,” Sarah cried, pressing hers into my lap. It was still very sticky with glue, and I held it gingerly but with affection.

“What do we have here? Lots of unicorns, I love those! An otter and a dolphin, very good! What’s this?” I turned the collage slightly sideways. “Ah, a baseball player.”

It wasn’t Tanner, but it was a player from the Phoenixes, probably from a few years ago.

I gave her an encouraging smile, ignoring the sharp stab to my heart I felt seeing their uniforms again, and I clapped my hands. “Five more minutes!” I called. “Let’s clean up our stations.”

I got up to put away magazines, paper, scissors, and glue, so much glue. I looked out the window, rubbing my eyes a bit tiredly. I hadn’t been sleeping very well and I needed a cup of coffee.

I glanced down at my phone, feeling the same sick anxiety I did every time I’d looked at it for the last two weeks. One of the first things I had done after I left was get a new number. Tanner didn’t have my new number. But no matter how many times I blocked his accounts on Instagram, he was still finding a way to contact me. I hadn’t heard from him yet today and, rather than being relieved, my stomach still twisted with anxiety.

Maybe he had finally given up. I hoped so. I could barely eat.

I heard a firm tap at the door.

“Ms. Finnegan?” Mr. Wagner, my boss and principal, called.

“Yes?” I said, twisting around.

“Can you come with me?” he asked, and his normally mild face looked stern. I began to feel prickles of fear.

“Can it wait?” I swallowed. “I’m almost done this group session.”

“No,” he said. “It can’t wait.”

And then I knew.

Numbly, I told my teaching assistant to take over, and I left the room after my boss. The whole way down the hall to his office I tried to talk myself out of it.

It was something totally innocuous.

It was just some paperwork I still had to fill out.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

It didn't necessarily have anything to do with Tanner.

But when I sat down across from Mr. Wagner, I couldn't sustain the hope. It all melted away at the look on his face.

"Ms. Finnegan," he said. "I have received some very disturbing information. A young woman known to you, a Ms. Sibyl Taylor, has come forward to confess that the two of you cheated on your art therapy examinations. Her evidence, and admissions, are very damning. I'm afraid there is no possible explanation that can make this right, and I will be forced to submit this information to the official licensing board after our internal review. I wanted to warn you that you will most likely be stripped of your certification."

I could feel my face flushing as the shame suffused me.

The worst thing was. . . it was all true. I had been so nervous and panicked about my exams that I had cheated, had smuggled that piece of paper in. Just a tiny piece of paper, really. But it had hung over my head for the past three years, the guilt eating away at me. I had done a shitty thing, but I was still a good teacher!

Mr. Wagner was looking at me like he wanted me to say something, but there was nothing to say.

But one thing was true.

There was no denying Tanner Courtenay. There was no escaping him when he could lay down money and get whatever he wanted. I wondered dully how much he had

paid my best friend to confess.

“I’m s-sorry,” I said, furious to hear myself stuttering a bit.

“I would never have imagined you could have done something so shameful,” Mr. Wagner said sternly. “Why did you not study hard instead of cheating?” He shook his head sadly.

I felt the words tangling in my mouth, trapped inside.

I had studied. I had studied until my eyes ached. I was just so anxious to do well, not to fail, that I had cheated. The stupid thing was that I probably hadn’t needed to. After my first few minutes of panic were over, all my notes and lectures and reading had come back to me.

There was no help for it now, though.

I left the building with all my belongings shoved hastily in a box, the shame flushing my cheeks. The humiliation burned and tore at me. I felt tears blurring my eyes, and I walked on autopilot to where I had parked my car. I just wanted to get back to my tiny apartment and burrow under my covers for the foreseeable future.

But my car wasn’t there.

I looked up in baffled surprise to where my car should have been, and there was Tanner Courtenay, leaning against his car with crossed arms. Gray sweatpants, T-shirt stretched across his chest, messy ink-black hair, hard, cold gray eyes.

“Get in the car, Em,” he said.

Somehow I had known it would always end here.

He had made good on his threats. He had taken everything away and now he was here to collect.

“Where’s my car?” I asked.

“It’s gone,” Tanner said. “Get in mine.”

I could run, couldn’t I?

And he would chase me. He’d done it before.

He’d even like it. And then he’d fuck me when he caught me, no matter where he caught me.

I put my box in the backseat and got in the front.

A smirk crossed his face as his eyes rested on me. He put his sunglasses on, sliding his big body into the seat beside me.

I turned my head away from him, sitting on my trembling fingers. I felt frozen with shock, trying vainly to keep my body from shaking.

I heard Tanner’s low laughter as he put the car into gear, punching the gas so hard that my body slammed back onto the seat.

I tried not to look at him, but I couldn’t help it. He had the seat all the way back, his tall body barely fitting in the small sporty car, his big legs casually spread open.

I said nothing. The nightmare twisted my belly, and I remembered the looks of distress and confusion on my students’ faces as I was unceremoniously escorted from the room. The fact that I wasn’t going to be allowed to go back, would never be able

to see the tall towers of my students' projects or the smiles on their faces as they forgot their anxiety with a really damn good dragon papier-mache, made me bite my lip hard so I wouldn't tear up.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

I had barely relaxed enough to lean back in my seat when Tanner suddenly pulled the car abruptly off the road. The sun had sunk down past the horizon and twilight sent shadows slanting across the hard planes of his face.

“What are you doing?” I cried, jolted out of my frozen state as we jostled off the highway and onto a bumpy side road.

“What do you think?” Tanner asked, shoving the car into park and taking off his sunglasses. “Get over here and suck my dick.”

I tightened my lips together. “You’ve got nothing on me now, Tanner.” My mouth tasted bitter. What could he do to me now? He’d already destroyed my life for his own selfish reasons.

“Put your mouth on my fucking cock, Em,” Tanner said.

I made the mistake of glancing over at him. His eyes gleamed like silver in the dark car. He looked relaxed now, his legs open, his arm resting casually on the console between us. But I knew his casual pose was deceptive. When he wanted, he could strike fast with those hard, cruel hands.

I sighed, trying to ignore the pull in my stomach at the look in his eyes. I crawled reluctantly over the console.

“Get it out,” he said, and I did, pulling at his drawstrings and taking out that big cock. It was already hard and thick in my hands, and I felt a bead of precum at the tip. My fingers swiped automatically at it, and I saw his chest start to heave.

“In your mouth,” he said sternly, and I did, popping my finger in my mouth, feeling the sweet sticky burst on my tongue, my eyes automatically raised to his, because I knew he liked that.

My heart started pounding at what I saw, the muscles in his jaw clenching and throbbing. I bent my head to his cock so I wouldn’t have to look at him anymore.

He made a low noise in his throat as I ran my tongue over the head of his dick. I took it in my mouth, sucking shallowly, trying to work myself up slowly to going deeper. If I didn’t relax my throat I’d gag at his size and thickness.

“Stop teasing me,” he growled, and I looked up at him. His eyes were burning on me, a muscle working in his jaw.

“You want to come down here and do it yourself?” I asked sourly, and he took a handful of my hair in his fist, tugging it, forcing me to look up at him as my scalp prickled.

“Em,” he said. “I won. You lost. You’re not getting away from me again.”

I felt the breath hitch in my chest, somewhere between a moan and a sob.

I bent my head again, not wanting to look at him, taking his cock in my mouth.

“That’s it, baby,” I heard him groan as I moved deeper, sucking him from the base to the tip.

He twisted my hair up in his fist and I could feel him watching me.

“Deeper,” he growled, like the asshole he was, and I gagged around his cock as he shoved it down my throat.

I looked up and saw a muscle working in his tanned throat and I felt that tug and pull in my belly again, the uncomfortable feeling of wet panties.

The only warning I got was a tightening on my hair, his fingers digging into my scalp, as he released in my mouth. I felt his warm seed hit the back of my throat and I gulped it down hastily, forcing myself not to choke as I licked and sucked the last of it from his dick.

When I crawled back to my seat, he put his dick back in his sweatpants and took another swig of his energy drink.

“Nobody has ever sucked my cock like you,” he said, yanking the car into gear again. “I could get hundreds of willing starfuckers to suck my dick, but it’s all shit compared to you.”

I tightened my mouth and said nothing, staring out the window blindly as the lights began to rush by the car. It was better that he thought that I got no pleasure out of anything he did to me.

My lips felt tight and pulled, and I suddenly felt tears started to my eyes, convulsively swallowing so I didn’t sob out loud. I tasted Tanner on my tongue.

I tightened my hands together, trying desperately to cry silently so he didn’t notice. I knew now that he’d do anything to keep me cruelly under his thumb.

The thump of his bass throbbed into the night air as we sped along the highway. I kept replaying the horrible moment the principal had told me my license was going to be suspended. Would they make me come to the hearing? Was there any way to beg and plead to get my license back? What if he told my kids I had cheated on the licensing test? They would all hate me. I swallowed, gulping down my sob.

I didn't think Tanner would care that I wasn't talking to him, but he asked abruptly, "What's wrong with you? Why are you avoiding looking at me?"

"Nothing," I said dully.

"Don't give me that shit," he said, reaching over to clamp a hand on my upper thigh. "Look at me. I didn't come get you for you to not look at me."

Page 44

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“What do you think is wrong?” I said, letting the heat and anger into my voice. “You’ve gotten me humiliated and fired from my job and now I’ll never teach again.”

“Good,” he said. “I don’t want you away from me. It was shit when you were gone. I want you where you’re supposed to be. With the club. Your legs spread open for me after every game.”

I said nothing, tightening my mouth and staring out the window. We drove for a little bit, then he jerked the car off the road again.

I didn’t say anything, thinking he wanted me to suck his cock again, but to my surprise, he reached for my shirt, yanking me over the stick shift with a sharp ripping sound. He settled me onto his lap, my ass against his thighs.

“What are you doing?” I cried, struggling in his arms as he reached down, his fingers at my stomach, then the waistband of my long skirt, then the waistband of my panties.

“What do you think I’m doing? Making you come so you’ll talk to me.”

I felt a sharp stab of uncertainty. Since when did he care about that?

Tanner wasn’t like other people. He didn’t do things for unselfish reasons. When I felt his rough fingers reach my pussy lips, I began wiggling, trying to escape them as shards of panic trickled down my spine.

I was afraid he’d feel that I was wet, and I struggled against him.

“Stop it, Em,” he said sharply, grabbing my chin, his arm like a bar of iron across my chest. “I don’t ever do this shit, so you have to stay still.”

He ran his fingers speculatively across my pussy, then dipped into my cunt, wet and noisy.

Tanner grunted with pleasure.

With one arm across my chest, he kept me trapped, with his other fingers, he brought wet slickness to my pussy lips, his fingers moving until I couldn’t help betraying myself with one little gasping moan.

He paused, running his fingers carefully back where he had been, and when I shivered, I felt his lips curve up.

“Nice fucking try, Em. Now spread your thighs wide and be still like a good girl.”

I whimpered. “Stop it, Tanner. Don’t touch me.”

He opened his mouth and bit my ear, not gently either.

“You tried to run away from me. You’re going to sit here and be a good girl and come for me exactly when I tell you to.”

And his slick fingers began to circle my clit.

I threw my head back, trying to headbutt him, shoved against his arm as hard as I could. But of course, it was no use. Tanner Courtenay had me and he was going to do exactly what he wanted to me.

That steady, firm pressure on my clit sent me spiraling to my release embarrassingly

quickly, a soft cry escaping my lips. But he didn't stop, pressing a big finger into my wet cunt as he continued to rub my clit, and I realized with horror that he wasn't going to stop until I came again. I was so hypersensitive that it rode the line between pain and pleasure. I tried to shake my head back and forth, wanting to escape, but he was strong enough to do what he wanted to my body, plunging another finger into me.

"Ride me, Em," he growled against my back. "I want to see you come again."

And I did, riding his hand as he circled my clit with strong fingers, his arm trapping me, forcing me to accept the pleasure, and then I came, throwing my head back into his chest, the sweat running down my neck and lower back, clenching and releasing painfully against his hand.

Only then did he let me crawl back to my own side, my release slick and wet on my thighs, my legs trembling and weak.

"Damn, that was hot," he said, and he sucked each finger into his mouth, noisily cleaning his fingers of my cum. "Fuck, that's good. Now get in your seat. We're almost home and I want to fuck you in my apartment where I can see all of you."

He yanked on the stick shift and sped off down the highway with a peel of tires.

I tried to get my breath back inconspicuously, my thighs still weak and trembling as I tightened the seatbelt around myself.

"You were so wet, Em," he said, glancing over at me. "That's perfect, since you'll be ovulating in a few days."

Despite my vow to ignore him, I couldn't help looking at him, startled.

“You don’t know when I’ll be ovulating,” I said.

Page 45

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

He reached into his back pocket and pulled out his phone, tossing it over to me. I caught it clumsily.

“I’ve got it narrowed down. I put the dates of your last period in the tracker app. Put in there how wet you are.”

What the fuck I thought, looking blindly down at his phone. The bubbles to enter the passcode lit up.

“It’s 2021,” he said. “The year Salvador Perez hit 48 home runs. I want to beat that record.”

I put in 2021.

“He only hit 33 of those as a catcher,” I said, and his mouth curved up. “Clever girl, Em. You know baseball. But don’t give me lip.”

I flicked through his phone to see what he was talking about.

“Did your old phone break?” I asked, remembering how I’d seen him hurl it more than once in the corner of the dugout after striking or grounding out.

“No,” he said. “Too many people knew my old number, and I don’t want to fuck any of them anymore.”

I felt a sudden, unwelcome flash of excitement mixed with fear. Did that mean he didn’t want to have sex with anyone else? On the one hand, it was frightening to

think he was still obsessed with breeding me. On the other hand, I couldn't help feeling a tiny flare of pleasure.

"There," Tanner said, pointing at the app. I flicked it open and found the start and finish date of my last period, as well as the projected date of my ovulation, signs to watch for that I was ovulating, and tips to get pregnant. I clicked out of it rapidly and handed the phone back to him without looking.

After what had happened the last time Tanner Courtenay had me, I had gotten approved for a NuvaRing, so I wouldn't have to worry about him tearing through my stash of birth control pills or patches.

I felt a sinking sense of déjà vu as we pulled into Tanner's private garage, and into his personal parking spot. I followed him silently to the elevator. I had absolutely nothing with me—no clothes, no toiletries, nothing but a box of school supplies and my purse.

But that was what he wanted, wasn't it? Me totally under his power.

Tanner grabbed me as soon as we got inside his big penthouse apartment, peeling my shirt off, pulling down my skirt. Oh, I remembered what it was like to be overpowered by him—torn at with strong, angry hands, hair and clothes pulled impatiently until I was where he wanted me.

We fell onto the bed, Tanner on top of me. He pounced over me, caging me in, his hands ripping at my bra. I began to feel that squirming sensation in my panties, still wet from the car. His mouth fell on my neck, his hands running up and down my body. I heard his groan vibrating from his chest into mine and his lips took my sensitive flesh in his mouth again.

"Shit, Emrys," he said, his hands moving from grabbing and pinching my nipples to

rip at my panties, jerking them off and throwing them down. My pussy felt like it was vibrating with expectation. I tried to keep my wet thighs together, in a last-minute desperate bid, but he drove his knees through them, parting me savagely. I felt a brief moment of terror and anticipation, then he sunk his cock into me.

“Fuck yes,” he called out, loud in my ear, glorying in how he sunk into me and he pulled out and thrust again, as hard as he could.

“You’re not going to leave again,” he warned me over the slaps of our flesh connecting. “I won’t let you.”

He took me so hard and fast that I didn’t know if he could stop, pinning my arms, his lips and teeth falling greedily to the skin that had been unmarked.

“Mine,” he growled, his mouth opening to suck my nipple, then bite the soft skin at the hollow of my collarbone, my back arching off the bed with the contact, and I could feel his thighs already tensing, releasing into me with a harsh guttural groan that reverberated through my skull and seemed to flay me alive with the power of his obsession.

“Fuck, I needed that,” he said, rolling off me.

I watched Tanner through sleepy eyes, swinging his tall, lean body into his sweatpants again, then grabbing his pack of cigarettes and stepping onto the balcony, the lights of the city glittering behind him. He left the door open, settling into the chair, his eyes still on me.

I felt self-conscious and hyperaware of his gray eyes on me. I didn’t want to stand up to let him see my naked ass, so I slipped into the big T-shirt he had been wearing, then crossed my legs underneath me.

That was probably the wrong thing to do when I saw his eyes sharpen.

“Come over here,” he said.

I hesitated, but I knew I would do what he said. I always did.

I got off the bed and walked slowly toward him. He still sat in his chair on the balcony. No shirt and his low-slung sweatpants, his legs fallen open. He watched me with narrowed silvery eyes as he sucked in on his cigarette, the motion hollowing his cut-glass cheekbones.

When I stopped in front of him, I saw his eyes look me slowly up and down.

“What are you waiting for?” he said. “Sit down.”

Page 46

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

I turned and sat on his lap, leaning back against his hard chest. There was no other option really.

“Why did you leave?” he asked.

“You blackmailed me into giving you blowjobs,” I said. “You forced me to have sex with you.”

“Tell me the truth,” Tanner said sharply.

“I just did!” I cried, goaded into speech.

I was lying against his chest, my head tucked under his chin. His smell was so familiar, cigarette smoke mixed with that rich scent of his cologne.

“I didn’t ask for your little pretend reason, the reason you told yourself,” he said harshly. “I asked for therealreason.”

“What makes you think that isn’t the real reason?” I asked.

“Because you liked what I did to you,” he said in a chilling voice, blowing a ring of smoke past my ear. “Youlikedbeing taken. Youlikedbeing dominated.”

I felt a little shiver go down my spine.

“You said I was just a cunt to fill,” I said in a low voice. “So I don’t know why you went to all this trouble instead of finding another cunt to fill.”

There was silence for a moment, and he took another drag of the last of his cigarette.

“You’re a little fool, Emrys,” he said harshly. “I didn’t mean that. You should have known I would come after you.”

Maybe I had.

Suddenly I felt very sleepy. I shouldn’t have felt sleepy in Tanner’s lap, but I did feel drowsy. And it was very late.

The last thing I heard as I fell into an exhausted sleep was his growl. “Do not try to run from me again.”

“What’s the point?” I mumbled sleepily back.

If Tanner Courtenay could get my teaching license suspended, he could do anything. There was no escape for me.

I woke up when he was carrying me to the bed. I was a little startled, but when we got there, he rolled me onto my belly, gripping my ass with painful tightness, and slid his cock into me. He groaned again to feel how wet I was and then he took me hard, his hands grabbing my ass and hips so he could pound his cock into me, force me and bend me and master me until he was done, and not a moment before.

18

The next morning I stumbled up to go to the bathroom.

I saw Tanner roll over, looking at me, his cock already hardening against his long tanned legs.

“Come here,” he said. I hated how his voice always felt on my skin, raising the tiny hairs on the back of my neck in a mix of fear and arousal.

“I have to pee,” I said, locking the door behind me. “I need a shower.”

“Hurry up,” I heard him growl.

I noticed that he had clearly been planning for my arrival. There was a bag of new toiletries on the long, marbled countertop, and I took a petty pleasure in being as messy as I could brushing my teeth, smearing the toothpaste all around the sink and on the mirror.

But I had barely gotten the water running when I heard a loud knocking on the door to the bathroom.

“I’m in the shower,” I called out, carefully soaping my sore cunt.

But I began to hear loud noises and thuds, barely muted by the shower, then there was a sudden loud crack and the door slammed open. I yelped in surprise.

“You broke the door!”

Page 47

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

Tanner was angrily jerking his clothes off and preparing to come in with me.

“Get the fuck over here,” he bit out, stepping in the shower and grabbing me with a hard hand. With the other he spanked my ass.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” I cried, and he pressed me bodily into the side of the shower, so tightly that I felt the air forced from my lungs and I could barely breathe.

One hand pressed my head into the hard shower tiles, the other one was now snaking around the front of me. He knocked my knees apart.

“Spread your legs,” he ordered.

I did, feeling myself slip on the cold floor.

Since I was naked, he was able to shove his fingers right up my pussy and I couldn’t resist a pained squeak as his fingers brushed my NuvaRing. I thought maybe he’d keep going, piston his fingers roughly in and out of me. But he put his fingers firmly around the ring and yanked it out. He examined the ring in his fingers, wet from my cunt.

I had nothing to say, feeling my eyes widen and my breath start to catch at the look on his face.

When he spoke, his voice was cold and menacing. “I told you not to be on birth control.”

“H-how did you find out?” I asked.

“Your phone,” he said shortly, yanking open the window and throwing the ring out of it, as far as he could as my jaw dropped.

“You looked through my phone!” I said indignantly.

“Damn right,” he said. “Baby, you don’t get anything private from me. I want to control everything about you. I want to make sure you don’t run away from me again.”

I screamed, and he put his mouth over mine, muffling the sound, his fingers stroking my jaw, making sure I knew he wanted my mouth open for him, my thighs spread so he could press his hard cock into my sore cunt.

“Do I even have a job still?” I asked as I buttoned one of the outfits he’d had dry-cleaned and hanging in the closet for me.

“Always,” he said. There was an infinitesimal pause, then he asked, “do you want more money? I can make them give you more money.”

“No, Tanner,” I said, slipping my high heels on, my eyes fixed on the door. “I don’t want more money.”

I started to head out but Tanner grabbed me and pulled on my long hair, forcing me to look at him. “You’re still not looking at me,” he said.

“Why do you care?” I flared at him.

“I don’t like you not looking at me,” he said.

“Again, why do you care?” I retorted bitterly. “I know you’ve trapped me into

fucking you whenever you want, so why do you need me looking at you?”

“I’ll cut this hair off,” he threatened, stepping so close to me that I could see the muscle throb in his jaw. “You have to look at me and talk to me even when we’re not fucking.”

I huffed in annoyance. “You can’t make melikeyou, Tanner.”

His silvery eyes darkened, and he stepped close to me, running a finger along my jawline, then through one of my curls, twining it around his finger and pulling my heavy hair aside so he could see my neck, his eyes lighting up with pleasure to see the marks he had made.

“Yes, I can,” he said. “I am going to make youloveme.”

When I looked at him, gobsmacked, he said, “let’s go. You have to run the camera. Day 1 of going vegan for the playoffs.”

If I thought everyone would ask where I had gone and why, I was mistaken. They were all caught up in the thrill of making the playoffs and relieved to see me. It was just accepted as a given that Tanner had drug me back.

“Tanner was hitting absolute shit while you were gone,” Steak said, his cherubic bearded face creased up in a smile. “And Miguel called his ex. The whole place was in shambles.”

“It can’t have been that bad,” I smiled. “You won the wildcard game. And you’re hitting .285.”

“Don’t memorize his stats,” Tanner said. “Mine are the only ones you’re supposed to be worried about.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“I don’t remember yours,” I lied.

So far in the playoffs, Tanner Courtenay is hitting .325. Can he leverage this into a big contract extension in the offseason?

“So you got convinced to come back?” Tre asked, a smile on his handsome face.

More like I got kidnapped.

“I did,” I replied, sliding a sideways glance over at his girlfriend Jessica, who was visiting for a few days.

She was a stunning veterinarian with white-gold hair and was dressed with perfect style, looking cool and relaxed. I was trying to cover the fact that my cunt was sore from how many times Tanner had taken me, and how roughly he’d ripped out my NuvaRing, and keep the deep scarlet and purple marks of his insatiable lust hidden by my hair and shirt.

“And who are you?” she asked, her lips curling up. I felt discomfited, and even more by the fact that Tre didn’t say anything. I adjusted my dress in what I hoped was an inconspicuous manner. I didn’t think the fabric was so rough, but it was really rubbing against my ass.

It felt like that asshole had left literal welts there.

“This is Emrys,” Tanner said. “She’s mine.”

I was surprised despite myself to see a whole table in one of the meeting rooms set up with a tablecloth, plate, and fancy, heavy silverware.

Tanner twisted his baseball cap backwards, and we both looked at the vegan bacon, sausage, and eggs on his plate. The eggs looked like something you might have seen bursting out of an alien's chest cavity in a movie.

"All right," he said. "What do you want me to say about this shit?"

"I-I don't know," I said. "I didn't think you'd actually do this. Maybe you should just eat some and then tell the camera why you're doing it."

His eyes pinned me. "I'm doing this because everything about you is mine, Emrys Finnegan. I want everything. I'm going to fuck your cunt and your mouth whenever I want to, put my baby in you. And you're going to love me."

"I will not," I said, clenching my fists on the table. "I hate you."

"No you don't," he said, shifting in his chair so I could see the lean muscles of his arm contract. "Now be a good girl and get this shit on live."

So I got out my phone and recorded him, watching as his face didn't move a muscle as he took a bite of the fake bacon, the fake eggs, and the fake sausage.

Tanner spoke about going vegan the way I imagined someone in the Mafia would order a hit.

It was better for the planet.

When the fuck had he ever given one shit about the planet?

It was kinder to animals. Better for humans. Everyone should try it.

Again, what the fuck? I could barely believe he was doing this.

He and his fiancée had committed to going vegan for the rest of the playoffs to show how healthy it was.

I almost fumbled the phone in shock, my jaw dropping as I looked at Tanner, and I saw his lips curve into a smile, possessive and predatorial.

I stopped the video abruptly.

“What do you mean, your fiancée?” I cried shrilly. “You better not mean me.”

He frowned, getting up from his chair. “Of course I mean you. Why would I marry anyone else? I love you.”

I gasped, my breath caught in my throat as I backed away from him.

His frown deepened, and he reached me quickly. “I don’t like it when you back away from me.”

“You don’t love me,” I said.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

“Yes, I do,” he said harshly. “Why do you think I’m goingfucking vegan? There’s only one woman ever going to be my wife, and that’s you.”

“B-b-b-ut,” I stuttered, feeling my cheeks flame with embarrassment that the stutter was coming back.

But this time he didn’t say anything, just stood angrily watching me, his big arms crossed across his chest. I struggled with my words, trying to calm down so I could get them out, and he stood silently waiting. When I realized he wasn’t going to say anything, just wait like a cold and angry statue, my tongue untangled.

“Why?” I asked.

Tanner looked like he didn’t understand the question. “Because you’re the only one I’ve ever wanted. Because I can’t see your skin without wanting to mark it and make it mine. And because you’re soft and sweet and a smartass and all that is mine.”

“But—” I began, but he cut me off.

“Why did you run away?”

When I hesitated, he said warningly, “You’ve already got a cherry red ass, baby doll. Want to push your luck?”

I sighed in uncomfortable embarrassment. “It was what you said about Noah,” I whispered, not wanting to meet his eyes.

“What did I say?” Tanner growled.

“You said you were going to take me to his house and give me to him,” I said, twisting my hands in front of me. I eyed my high-heeled boots. The last time I had worn this outfit I had options. A job to go home to. A possibility of never seeing Tanner Courtenay again.

I didn’t think I had that anymore.

He made a sound of annoyance. “I wasn’t serious about that. I was just trying to scare you.”

“Well,” I said. “I was scared.”

There was a beat of silence for a moment. I tried not to look at his body in front of me, the long strong legs standing wide apart, the big arms crossed over his chest.

He put a hand out and on my chin, tipping my face up.

“I would never have done that,” he said. “I’ll fucking kill anyone you touch. Because you’re going to be my wife.”

“No,” I said, starting to struggle a bit, but he looked sternly at me, shaking my chin gently but firmly.

“Open your mouth,” he said.

I looked at him, my eyes wide.

“Open your mouth, Emrys,” he ordered again, and his hand tightened on my jaw, forcing my mouth to pop open.

“You’re mine,” he told me. “Don’t forget that. I can do what I want to you, and you’ll take anything I give you and you’ll like anything I give you.”

Then he bent over and spit in my open mouth.

I felt my heart almost stop. I already knew Tanner could do whatever he wanted to me. I couldn’t stop him, and I didn’t even know if I wanted to stop him sometimes. But I felt my cheeks burn with shame as I tasted him in my mouth.

“Swallow me down, baby,” he said, and I heard the sound of him pulling his cock out.

I closed my mouth and obeyed, gulping down the sweet depraved taste of him in my mouth.

Then I didn’t even wait for him to tell me to get on my knees, I just sunk to the ground in front of him.

19

The Phoenixes were one game away from winning the divisional round when the first turtle came. I was in my cubicle, fielding calls for Tanner. Like I had predicted, Tanner’s live video about going vegan had led to a flood of curious, mostly positive coverage, although I had hung up on one angry call from a beef farmer’s association complaining that he was making them look bad.

But I also had several tentative offers from vegetarian companies anxious to get even the unhinged and psycho Tanner as the celebrity face of their product.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

So when a UPS driver came up to the cubicle with a big box I was so distracted that I signed for it without thinking.

And without noticing that there were holes in the box.

I was scrolling through my email, thinking that the popular Inconceivable brand veggie burgers were probably going to be the big winners in getting Tanner's celebrity face when I heard a rustling from the box at my feet. With trepidation, I grabbed scissors and carefully opened the box.

Inside was a small, perfectly shaped tortoise with a beautiful tan and brown shell, blinking up at me with sleepy eyes, and a huge terrarium.

For a moment I stared in incomprehension, and then I heard Tanner beside me.

"There you go, Em," he said.

"There I go, what?" I cried.

"You like them. Now you can't be pissed."

I liked. . . tortoises?

I wracked my mind for what thefuckhe had been thinking and remembered the first time we had met, the turtle I had saved. His hard, taut coldness leaning against the building, watching me, wanting to take everything that was soft about me and submit it to him.

“I am still pissed!” I said. “You can’t think buying me a tortoise means I’m not pissed. You took my job away.”

I heard the sides of my cubicle start to crack as he gripped them in his hands. “You can’t be at that job. Your job is being here with me.”

I clenched my fists together. “Not that you give a shit, but I loved doing that job and I can’t bear that everybody is going to hate me there.”

There was a few seconds of silence, and I expected him to railroad over me like he always did.

“You can’t have that job,” he said. “I’m never letting you leave me again. But if you care about that other shit, I’ll fix it.”

I looked up, startled, and while the tortoise ate a leftover leaf from my lunch salad, Tanner called Principal Wagner in front of me.

When I heard the other man’s voice on the phone, Tanner said, “This is Tanner Courtenay. I came and took Emrys Finnegan from your school last week. Yeah. I paid someone to lie to you that she had cheated on a test. She didn’t. Don’t try to take her license or do any other shit or I will come up there personally to fix it.”

Principal Wagner’s loud and outraged squawks were audible even to me, but Tanner only said, “I’ll send you the proof. But she won’t be coming back.”

I was torn between crying and laughing.

“There you go, Em,” he said sternly. “Now be at the game early today. I need someone to make sure my swing isn’t dipping and I don’t trust anyone else.”

He turned to go. And that was how Tanner Courtenay operated. No requests, no negotiations, no give-and-take. He told me what to do and expected I would do it.

As he left, he turned halfway back, his silvery eyes pinning me in place as they always did.

“I’m moving you out of that cubicle,” he said. “You’re the best PR agent they have and my wife is getting her own office.”

The next day there was another tortoise.

And the day after that there were two more.

And as the Phoenixes went into the league championship, Tanner Courtenay was hitting .345, slugging percentage .619, and I had five tortoises and a new office.

Of course, I traveled with the team. There was no other option. But the tortoises came too.

The Phoenixes lost the first game, and I waited for Tanner in the luxurious hotel room the team was in for the next three days.

I was feeding cut-up carrots to the tortoises when I heard a ding and I looked down to see Sibyl’s name.

I’m sorry

Page 51

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:54 pm

I stared at the text from my friend. Or, really, my former friend. What could I fucking say to that?

You know I really need the money

I have loans

The messages seared their way into my brain.

I have loans too, I wanted to write. But I didn't. So that's what our friendship was worth to her.

When Tanner came back, I was still staring at the screen and his presence seemed to shatter the last remnants of my resolve to be cold and aloof. There really wasn't anywhere to go, but as soon as I saw him, I shot out of bed and bolted for the other exit. He immediately gave chase, catching me before I made it to the door, his arms hard around me, pulling me back onto his chest so his body encircled mine.

Surrounding me, trapping me, pulling me so close his harsh heavy breathing felt like my own.

"How long are you going to be like this?" Tanner snarled.

"Like what?" I snapped.

"Fighting me," he said.

“Forever,” I retorted, more boldly than I felt.

Tanner gritted his teeth audibly together and he shoved me belly-first onto the bed and climbed over me so that his thighs were clamped around my shoulders. I heard the rustling of bags and a box getting ripped open, then something clattering noisily.

“What are you doing?” I shrieked, trying madly to wiggle out from under him, but he had me pinned tight.

“Ovulation test,” he growled, sticking a little glass slide in my face. “Spit on this.”

“What is this, high school A&P?” I cried. “I’m not doing that.”

But he put one hand on my braid, yanking my head up. “Get your tongue out, Em,” he growled, shoving one of the slides in my face. I kept my lips tightly closed together.

No way. I was not going to participate in his obsessive breeding. No fucking way. He kept shoving it in my face and finally I rubbed my nose over the slide to ruin it. He hissed angrily, and he threw the slide so it shattered in the corner.

“I’m not fucking playing, Em.” He fisted my braid, yanking my hair up even tighter. With his other hand, he turned and knocked my thighs open. Then he reached down and gave my tilted-up pussy a sharp hard slap. I was only wearing a thin pair of leggings and it fucking hurt. He tore open another slide with his teeth, squeezing my shoulders so painfully that I yelped with alarm.

“Do it,” he said, holding out the next slide in front of me. My eyes were prickling from how tightly he was holding my hair and my pussy was kind of throbbing now. I put my tongue out and licked the slide.

“Good girl,” he growled in satisfaction, turning to give my ass a stinging slap this time. I saw him reach over and put a fucking microscope on his bedside table. He placed the slide on it and then let my hair go as he crawled off to me to look at it. I lay furiously stewing on the bed.

For a few minutes he fiddled with the knobs and magnifiers, then I heard his sharp intake of breath, and he desperately grabbed for the instructional pamphlet. There were another several tense seconds of silence and then his growl was low and feral.

“It’s a fern, a fucking fern,” he said, his voice exulting.

“What’s that mean?” I asked, looking unwillingly over at him. He was bent over the microscope, staring like he’d never seen anything so good in his life.

“Your spit forms a fern-shaped pattern when you near ovulation,” he said, straightening up. Then he raised his big arms and pulled his T-shirt off with one lean, fluid motion. His chest was sculptured like a Greek god, all corded muscles and tense, coiled power.

I felt my cunt make a sharp, traitorous anticipatory pulse, and I sat up, suddenly scrambling away from him like a crab until my back hit the wall. But there was no escape from Tanner. When he grasped my ankles and yanked my legs down to him, I knew he would never let me go. I turned away, focusing on the haze of the city laid out in front of me in the big glass window of the hotel suite.

He leaned over me, and I could smell everything I remembered—heat and smoke and musk and wild sharp obsession.

“You know I don’t like you not looking at me,” he said warningly.

“Go away, Tanner,” I said angrily, turning away from him.

I heard him make a guttural noise in his throat and he grabbed my chin, forcing me to look at him.

“What’s it going to take, Em?” he snarled. “What do you want?”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:55 pm

I sniffed disdainfully, and focused my eyes on the ceiling, refusing to look at him.

“Come on,” he said again. “Just tell me what I can fucking do so you aren’t mad at me. I can’t stand it when you won’t talk to me.”

I ignored him, but he yanked my leggings down suddenly, with one savage motion.

“Don’t even think about it,” I said furiously.

“I’m going to fuck this out of you,” he said warningly. “I want you wet then filled and fucked like a good girl so I can breed you today.”

I tried to kick him in the shoulder, but it made no impression as he settled in between my thighs.

My panties he ripped off with a stinging tear, and he ran his hands possessively up my legs. My cunt was forced open in front of him, and as I felt his heated breath on my sensitive skin I shivered.

“Damn, this is a pretty pussy,” he said.

I clenched my fists together, my heart starting to beat faster. I would not let myself be charmed by what he was saying to me.

He dipped his head and swiped my cunt with his tongue, across my wet lips, his tongue teasingly dipping inside, then swirling around my clit.

I let out a strangled gasp, and if I could have I would have crawled away from him again, desperate not to let him see the flush rise in my chest. But I couldn't. He had both big hands on my thighs, forcing them flat on the bed, forcing my cunt to rise up to meet his mouth.

I couldn't help looking down at him, the shock of dark ink-black hair standing out vividly against my pale legs.

And damn, I tried as hard as I could to not give him my orgasm. I didn't want to give it to him, didn't want him to have the pleasure of it.

But he got it anyway, like Tanner got everything he wanted, the pressure and need rising in my body, making my skin flame with desire. His hands trapped me and when he moved to suck my clit in his mouth, I came undone underneath him, grinding my cunt into his face and crying out loudly with my release.

"Fuck, Emrys," Tanner said, licking his lips, tasting my release. "The sound you make when you come is the best goddamn thing I've ever heard in my life. From now on, you'll come first every time. Shit, that's good."

He flipped me over so I was on all fours on the bed, my legs still trembling. I thought he'd drive into me, but he looked speculatively at me, putting his hand appreciatively on the marks on my ass with a pleased grunt. Then he spread my cheeks.

I jolted with surprise as I felt his tongue hit my asshole, and I wiggled, squeaking as his tongue tickled me.

"Stay still," he warned, snaking a hand under me and pressing it into my soaking cunt. I was hypersensitive and I kept squirming, trying to get away. But when Tanner Courtenay wanted me, he didn't let me go, one hand tight on my ass, the other stroking in and out of my cunt, his fingers brushing against my clit, sending shards of

sensation down my spine.

I arched my back with the pleasurable pain, and he rumbled approvingly, eating my ass with hungry flicks and sucks of his tongue.

I moaned, not caring if he knew how much I wanted him, and I felt the breath catch in his throat. I dropped my head, watching him between my legs, unable to look away from his strong tanned fingers. I felt a jolt of lust as I saw the front of his gray sweatpants. There was a wet patch there, and I knew it was his precum. I suddenly felt my legs begin to tremble, and I moaned loudly, clutching at the bed with grasping hands, hovering on the precipice. I wondered if he'd stop. But he didn't, and when I heard his low, ragged groan and heard his teeth grit and felt his thighs tremble holding back his release, I came, hard and tight, crying out with the force.

The he flipped me on my back again, and I was too weak to protest. He entered me with one swift thrust, raising my leg up and settling in between my thighs. I was too boneless to give him any resistance at all, and he gripped my hips and thighs and ass painfully, groaning loudly.

“Say you want my baby,” Tanner said. “Say it, Em.”

I looked at him, my sticky hair clinging to my face and neck and back, and he brushed it aside, but his voice demanded obedience.

“Say it,” he repeated, his voice like steel.

“I want it,” I whispered, and I wasn't sure if it was a lie or not. “I want you to put a baby in me.”

And he closed his eyes, leaning his head back.

“Fuck, Em.” he groaned. “Yes, you do. You take whatever I give you because you’re mine.”

I felt him hard and fast in me, releasing with a grunt, burying his head in the soft skin of my neck and sucking on me, pulling my hair, like he had to tear into every piece of me as he filled me with his cum.

I whimpered in weak submission, and when he was done he kept his cock in me so he could do it again until there was no more room in my cunt for his cum and it was dripping down my legs, his release filling me and spilling onto my belly, my thighs, my legs.

Page 53

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:55 pm

The next day Tanner took my temperature, his fingers tight on my chin, his eyes locked on mine.

“You definitely ovulated,” he said. “Good girl. Now we wait for two weeks. Get up and get dressed. We’re going out.”

“Where are you taking me?” I asked.

“Does it matter?” he said, and he looked at me, his eyes glittering. “I know you’ll come with me either way, baby girl.”

I felt my heart start to beat faster, and I looked away from him.

I knew it was true. I followed him out to the garage and was surprised to see him head toward a big black Jeep.

“For the baby,” he said. “It’s safer.”

“Tanner. . .” I said, my voice fading away.

“Now let’s go pick you out an engagement ring,” he continued with some satisfaction after we were sitting inside, the leather seats soft and luxurious.

“Engagement ring?” I cried, a sinking feeling in my stomach, mixed with a sick excitement.

“Yes, engagement ring,” he frowned, taking us back on the main road.

“You can’t really be serious,” I said, with more firmness than I expected. “I’m just waiting until you move on to the next thing.”

There was a cold silence in the car, and I felt a sudden stab of fear.

“There is nonext thing,” Tanner said, his voice like chipped ice. “There’s no escape for you, Emrys.”

I risked a glance over at him. His eyes were on the road, but he looked furious. He reached over and put a hand on my thigh, big and possessive.

“You’re going to be my wife, and there’s not a goddamn thing you can do about it.”

He wasn’t looking at me, and I opened my mouth to protest, but he jerked the Jeep into a parking garage and spun into an open space. Then he put a hand on my shirt and drug me with him over the console and into the back seat.

“Tanner!” I yowled, but he only pressed me up against the hard backseat, already reaching for my pants.

“This isn’t groveling,” I protested, wiggling in his arms, but he only gave my ass a sharp spank.

“Groveling is for making you love me,” he growled. “I’m still going to fuck you whenever I want, however I want.”

He held me too tightly to wiggle away and I heard him spit into his hands, twice.

“Your body is mine, and I will make you come any way I choose,” he said.

“No, Tanner!” I protested as I felt his big hands spreading my ass, each one gripping

my skin tightly. "I've never done this before."

"Stop wiggling, Em," he said, moving one hand to slap my cheeks. "You come when and how I want you to."

He gripped my hips then, beginning to press his cock into my tight virgin asshole.

"Christ, you're tight," he said.

I felt my heart pounding so fast I thought it might burst out of my chest. Every inch was an agony, his hands so tight on my hips they ached. I felt pinned and trapped, my hands convulsively grabbing at something, anything to escape and he forced his cock inch by inch into my asshole. He reached to my cunt, swiping slick liquid and rubbing it across his cock, shoving it in further despite my protests until he was almost all the way in.

His cock was so big and my flesh was so virgin that it stung and burned to have him that deep inside me.

"Shit, that feels good," Tanner said. I was too afraid to move, my palms feeling clammy against the seats in the Jeep.

Then he bent closer to my ear as he ran fingers down my belly and the curve of my hip. "This is my cunt," he said. "And I can make you come with my cock any way I choose."

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:55 pm

I let out a low gasp and he ran his tongue down my neck, sending shivers down my spine.

His fingers slipped down to my pussy, moving through the soft wetness to circle around my clit. I couldn't stop a low whimper. How did he know unerringly what sent sparks of unwilling heat and desire through my body?

"See?" Tanner said, and I felt the corded muscles of his arms on mine. "I know what you want. I know what you need."

He began to move back and forth in my asshole and I squeaked with fear.

Tanner moved his hand from my clit and gave my cunt a short spank, the sound embarrassingly wet and loud.

"Stop tensing," he commanded. "Relax your body."

I tried to relax, but it was hard when my asshole throbbed. But I was able to do it gradually, by degrees, and he rumbled approvingly at my back.

"Finally. Good girl, Em." I thought resentfully that his words shouldn't work, shouldn't turn me on. But they did.

Tanner pushed one finger into my cunt, then another, and I gasped when he fit a third one in.

"Ride my hand, baby," he ordered.

I didn't dare to move much, but I started slowly, my hands trying to get some purchase on the slippery back of the Jeep. There was no point in trying to get away from him. I felt the scrape of his pants on my legs, the strength of his arms, his body as he pinned me.

I began to ride his fingers, feeling them curl inside me, his thumb firm on my straining clit.

And I whimpered with the need, the feeling of pain and pleasure unlike anything I had felt before. The pain ran down my legs and up my back, but my core throbbed, each heartbeat like a pulse of heavy urgency.

"Come," Tanner said, his voice now thick and heavy, his fingers a command on me.

And I did, my thighs trembling as the peak of my pleasure seemed impossible to survive, and he sent me over the edge, every cell on my body alive with sensation, searing throb and liquid release. It was so intense I sobbed with the way I felt my release crescendoing through each limb and up through my spine.

"You take my cock so good," Tanner grunted approvingly, and without thinking I rolled my neck submissively back for him, mewling as his lips fell on my skin, hungry for my flesh in his mouth as he came inside me.

The jeweler's shop was the fanciest place I had ever been in, each employee practically in black tie, and when they recognized Tanner, they bent over the sparkling rows of diamonds, opening the displays all up eagerly.

Since he was an asshole, he flicked his hand impatiently past all the offerings, his hard eyes scanning the rows. Then he pounced on one, holding it out for me.

"It will look exquisite on m'lady's finger," one of the employees said, his eyes

turning into dollar signs at the sight of a major league player picking the biggest one in the store.

Tanner took my hand, the callouses on the tips of his fingers scraping the soft skin on mine, and he pushed the ring on my fourth finger.

I shook my head, trying to take a step back.

“You don’t like this one?” Tanner asked sharply.

“I . . . it’s too big,” I said, feeling self-conscious.

If I picked and had preferences, did that mean I accepted I was going to marry him? That I wasn’t fighting against him anymore?

“You’re going to be very rich,” he reminded me. “I want you to have something that shows your status.”

“I don’t care,” I said, looking down at my hand where the huge rock was. “I don’t want one like this.”

He was still for a moment, and I forced myself to meet his eyes.

“Which one do you want?” he asked.

Before he changed his mind, I said quickly, “nothing here.”

“Fine,” he said. “Then tell me what you want. Whatever you want, I’ll get it for you. You’re going to be the mother of my children and you’re not ending today without telling me what ring you want on your finger.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:55 pm

It was so overwhelming that I turned away, opening the door so I could get some air.

Of course Tanner was right behind me. He always was.

“Pick a ring,” he said.

“What if I don’t want to get married?” I asked instead.

“You don’t get that option,” he said harshly. “I love you and you’re going to be my wife.”

I didn’t say anything.

“Come on, Em,” Tanner said. “Fuck. I’m sorry for what I said about Noah.”

I had never heard him saying he was sorry in my life, but I still couldn’t make my lips say those words back.

“Moonstone,” I said. “I want a moonstone ring.”

He made a satisfied grunt, then put his hand on my bottom lip and pulled my mouth open, forcing his fingers on my tongue.

I tasted myself on his fingers, sweet and warm.

“Lick it off,” Tanner ordered. “Then you’re going to march back to the Jeep and give me a blowjob. And you’re going to taste you in your mouth when you do it, so you can

fucking remember that my cock goes in your cunt. Then you're going to be a good girl and direct me to where I can buy you a goddamn moonstone."

I licked myself off his fingers, and then I turned and marched.

I couldn't deny I was his to command.

21

The National League Championship series had returned to town, and the Phoenixes were down 0-3. It was a seven-game series and they were close to elimination. They had lost all the games narrowly and the mood in the clubhouse was resentful of the Matts who had let key runs in with their relief outings.

The morning of Game 4 I got up and stuck a pregnancy test midway through my pee stream, something I'd done every day at Tanner's insistence since a few days after I ovulated. There was never anything on the tests, but it didn't stop Tanner from buying them in huge quantities and insisting I test several times a day.

But this time when I put the test lazily on the bathroom counter I glanced down at it and gasped.

Two lines.

Two pink lines, clear as a bell and getting darker every second.

I stared uncomprehendingly at the test, and I couldn't lie to myself anymore. My heart had given a little involuntary leap of joy and it was pounding now, not with fear, but with excitement.

After years of Noah laughing at me for wanting a baby, saying he didn't want my

body to change, I was finally pregnant! And Tanner wanted this, wanted our baby.

There was a loud banging on the door, and I was startled into dropping the test with a clatter.

“What’s going on in there?” Tanner barked. “Try another test.”

I didn’t trust my voice; I just picked up the test and went to the door, opening it and showing him the two lines wordlessly.

His lips curved up in triumph, and he bent down to kiss me exultingly.

“Good fucking girl!” he growled, sending shivers of pure pleasure down my spine. “I can’t wait to see your belly round and full and your tits leaking with milk for my baby. Good goddamn girl,” he said again, capturing my face in his hands and kissing me.

After the game, Tanner was inundated with interview requests. Everyone wanted to know how he had managed to hit a homerun powered by Inconceivable burgers. Meanwhile, a buoyant Steak was pulling on my arm, trying to get me to come to the bar with them. Tanner looked around in annoyance, shaking his head at me.

“Come on, man,” Steak said. “It’s just down the street. Your interview won’t take that long. Let her have a little fun.”

Tanner flicked his eyes over my face, slowly, appraisingly, and he took my chin in his hand.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:55 pm

“Are you going to be a good girl?” he asked, shaking my chin gently.

“Yes,” I said.

“I’ll be there as soon as this is over,” he warned. “Be sure I find this ass exactly where it’s supposed to be.”

When we arrived at Ace’s, I politely declined Kenji’s and then Steak’s and then Alex’s enthusiastic offers to buy me drinks. I had no intention of drinking, and of course if Tanner caught me even near any alcohol he would flip his shit and probably make us go home.

“Come on, Emrys, you have to havesomething,” Alex said. “We wouldn’t have made it this far without you. Tanner would probably be in jail if you weren’t here.” He stopped to think for a moment. “Or dead in a ditch,” he added.

I laughed and accepted an iced tea, saying I didn’t feel like drinking. Inside, I felt a little shiver of excitement knowing I was pregnant. The team was all there, and the pub was packed with enthusiastic fans buzzing after their win. Now we were down 3-1, but the mood was buoyant. The Phoenixes could turn this series around.

Steak groaned as he saw Miguel with one of the team tablets, slugging a beer as he watched replay after replay of one of his ground outs. “Turn your brain off,” Steak complained, plucking it from his hands. “Let’s just enjoy this victory and go into Game 5 tomorrow ready to win.”

I saw Tre and Jessica walk in. Tre didn’t look very happy, a frown on his normally

sunny face, but I saw him paste a smile on as he came up to us. Jessica always looked like she'd just smelled something unpleasant, and she only tightened her lips as she looked at me and didn't say anything.

Steak was already halfway to being totally shit-faced, which was impressive considering how little time we had been there, and how big he was, and we were just trying to convince him to keep his shirt on when I saw movement by the entrance. I looked over and it was a few of the guys from the opposing team, including their pitcher, a big guy named Dex with a cleft in his chin and a pink scrubbed face.

"Hey, Tre," he called out. "have you been hanging around my girl? My boys said they saw you two together last night."

I noticed he had a very pretty, tiny woman with pink hair with him. I recognized her immediately as the fill-in physical therapist Tre had said was helping him with his tight calves.

Oh shit.

"No," Tre said, and I saw his blue eyes flick from Dex to Jessica to the woman with pink hair.

"Wherewereyou last night?" Jessica asked, her voice tight.

"I wasn't with her," Trey said. "I was with Emrys. She does PR for the Phoenixes and we were going over our strategy."

And here he grabbed me and pulled me beside him. I could guess why he did it. He was hoping Jessica knew very well I was too jealously guarded by Tanner for Tre to be cheating with. And that I would back him up.

But I felt my stomach begin to sink.

Oh shit.

“No, you weren’t!” Dex said angrily. “Weren’t you actually fucking my girl?”

Jessica turned and her eyes bore into Trey.

“Is it true?”

“No!” Trey insisted, and I saw a flush on his cheeks. “I was with Emrys, wasn’t I?”

He turned to look at me.

I suddenly wished Tanner was there. I didn’t know what to do, and with Tanner there would be absolutely no question of me lying and saying I was with Trey. Every night since he had brought me back, I had been with Tanner, getting fucked. Over and over again. I had been fucked unmercifully, filled and fucked and filled and fucked until the cum dripped down my legs, his growly voice in my ear hissing that I was getting bred like a good girl.

All day my cunt had been sore and throbbed, and when Tanner had come up to check me for birth control patches before going to his interview he had patted my pussy lips complacently.

“You looked good getting filled by my cum last night, baby. I’m going to do it all over again tonight.” And, instead of the fear I should have felt, a little thrilled tingle went through me.

I wanted to back Tre up but I didn’t know what to say. Before I could decide, the pink-haired woman spoke.

“Baby,hecame ontome,” she said.

Double shit.

Dex turned to Tre and punched him in the face.

Page 57

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:55 pm

I started instinctively forward to try to put a stop to it and Dex elbowed me in the face.

“Get out of here, bitch.”

I stumbled back against the bar counter, tripping over my own feet and tumbling into a stool, luckily managing to slide to the ground and not hurt myself.

Then something shorted a fuse and the entire bar was plunged into darkness.

I felt a sudden horrified terror as people began madly stampeding for the exits around me, stumbling over me and stepping painfully on my toes. I backed up, curling around one of the stools, desperately trying to avoid being trampled.

My stomach clenched with fear and I thought it again.

I wish Tanner was here.

Then, with relief, I miraculously heard his voice.

“Em!” he shouted, arrogant and expecting to be obeyed.

“I’m over here,” I croaked, but my voice was so tiny and squeaky I didn’t think he could hear me.

“Tanner!”

He shoved aside several stampeding figures, sending them crashing noisily into other bars and tables, and he knelt in front of me.

My eye was already quite painful and swollen, and I gently probed where Dex had elbowed me.

“Who did this to you?” Tanner asked, the rage flashing in his eyes. They looked like chipped granite.

I started crying.

“Baby, it’s ok,” Tanner said, his hands surprisingly gentle on me, drawing me into his arms. “Just tell me what happened.”

When I did, he picked me carefully up and brought me out to the hallway, dragging Steak with him.

“Stay with her,” he ordered, then he disappeared down the hallway.

“Poor bastard,” Steak said. “He’s going to hate that he can’t pitch for the pivotal game tomorrow,” and I looked past him to see Tre on the ground, cradling his arm that seemed to hang at a sickening angle from his body. I heard sirens begin to sound in the distance.

By the time I remembered Tanner absolutely shouldn’t be left alone, he had disappeared.

I raced after him, my heart in my throat, trying doors randomly.

Shit. I couldn’t let Tanner go to jail this close to the end of the season.

One of the doors finally opened, and I looked wildly in both directions.

Nothing to the right.

I whipped my head around.

At the end of the alleyway to my left was a figure I recognize very well. I'd know those broad shoulders anywhere, that lean cocky set of his neck, and the black hair that blended into the shadows.

There were four men on him, and I raced down the alleyway, heedless of danger.

"Tanner!" I cried, grabbing a brick that had fallen off the bar.

When I got closer, I saw him slam someone against the brick wall, and realized it was Dex. Dex with a broken nose and bloody eyes. Tanner had his big fingers around Dex's throat and it looked like he was squeezing the life out of him. There was a smear of blood on the wall behind Dex and when Tanner turned toward me there was a smear of blood across his face too, making him look even more savage and untamed.

The other players on the opposing team were slumped against the wall or on the ground.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:55 pm

“Stop!” I demanded. “You can’t kill him. I don’t want you to go to jail.”

He paused, tossing Dex down. “Is that so, baby doll?”

I gasped, realizing I had given my feelings away at last, but not caring.

Tanner walked toward me. Tall, lean, predator. But this was my predator, and the sliver of fear I felt at the look in his eyes was drowned out by the rush of lust and desire I felt.

“You love me,” he said, and it wasn’t a question.

“I love you,” I agreed.

“Put that brick down,” he said. “What were you planning to do with that?”

“I thought you might need help,” I said, and he tossed it aside, pulling me into his arms and kissing me.

I tasted the blood from his cut lip in my mouth, iron and metal and fire and it was Tanner Courtenay over and over again, his mouth claiming me, his cock digging into my belly, and I submitted to his fingers and his tongue and his hands with a moan.

EPILOGUE

I practiced my patterned breathing.

Pant-pant-blow

PANIC

Pant-pant-blow

PANIC

Dr. Jansen had promised he would make it to my baby's birth but when I called to tell him I had gone into labor unexpectedly early at 37 weeks, he had sent a message back through his secretary to say he regretfully could not make it.

There was a roar from the TV, the only thing keeping me company at the moment, and I looked over to see a now fiancée-less Tre fan the opposing batter, striking him out in only three pitches. With Tre's broken arm, the Phoenixes had lost Game 5, so this season it was Tre's job to win the fans back. Tanner's contract had been extended for seven more years and his jersey was the best-selling one on the team.

My husband had left in the middle of the inning when I texted him, and it shouldn't have taken him this long to get to the hospital.

What if he had gotten in a car accident? What if he was lying dead in a ditch?

I twisted my moonstone ring around my finger and tried to be calm.

Pant-pant-blow

PANIC

Pant-pant-blow

PANIC

Suddenly, the door to my hospital room exploded open with a bang, and Tanner was there, holding Dr. Jansen in one big hand, dangling the poor man so his feet could barely reach the ground. The doctor was wearing Hawaiian shorts and flip-flops and I paused in my breathing.

“What did you do, Tanner?” I shrieked.

“Dr. Jansen said he was going to deliver our baby, and he is going to fucking deliver our baby,” Tanner said, shaking the other man so hard his visor that said HANG LOOSE fell off.

“I was at the beach,” Dr. Jansen said, trying to muster some dignity. “I could have you arrested for this.”

“Fucking do it then,” Tanner said, his hand around Dr. Jansen’s throat now. “I paid for you to be here during my wife’s labor. You can go on vacation when she’s done.”

“All right, all right,” he rasped.

Page 59

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:55 pm

Tanner let him go. “I paid you extra because you guaranteed you were going to be here for her labor,” he said. “So you will be here for her labor.”

“All fucking right,” Dr. Jansen said irritably. “You know, some husbands faint during this part,” he added nastily.

“Not me,” my husband said grimly, coming up with my go bag and handing me a cup of the good ice to suck on.

He still had his baseball uniform on and he smelled like dirt and smoke and slick sweat, and I let out a sigh of relief.

Time seemed to move oddly, and my world narrowed to only

Pant-pant-blow

Pant-pant-blow

Pant-pant-blow

Pant-pant-blow

And the feel of my husband’s hand on me, the dirt from his fingers ground into my shoulder, the little grit and scrapes focusing my breathing.

I felt the low, painful pressure and an irresistible urge to push.

“That’s right, Mrs. Courtenay,” the doctor said. “You can push now.”

I pushed, crying and sobbing with each attempt, but I was so exhausted and weak.

It seemed like no matter how hard I pushed Dr. Jansen and the nurses said it wasn’t hard enough.

“You better push, Mrs. Courtenay,” Dr. Jansen said. “Or we are going to have to prep for a C-section.”

“I can’t,” I cried, “I can’t push any harder.”

Then I felt my husband’s hands on me, tightening on my shoulder.

“Yes, you can,” he said sternly. “Now, push on my count, Em. Push as hard as you can.”

Tanner counted to three, then he said:

Push

And it was my husband and it was Tanner Courtenay, and I did what he said, clutching his hand as hard as I could and bearing down until I didn’t recognize my own voice.

“Good job, baby girl,” Tanner said approvingly, and I pushed again, even harder, feeling my legs tremble and the pain sear through my body.

“That’s right, I can see the head!” Dr. Jansen yipped, but I was only listening to my husband’s deep voice.

“One more time, Em. Do it now.”

And I bore down and I felt a wet pop and then a relief so intense I gasped in joy.

“That was perfect, Mrs. Courtenay,” Tanner said, and he dropped a kiss on my sweaty forehead, moving to get our baby from the doctor and put her in my arms.

She looked perfect, head full of dark curls, and I snuggled her under my chin.

“God, she’s beautiful,” I cried, and I was delighted to see her little eyes open and they were a distinctive silver-gray. I rubbed my chin on her soft head as my husband bent down to put his arms protectively around both of us, growling “my good girl” and “my sweet breeder wife” over and over in my ears until I was shivering and laughing with joy.