



The Stars Over Hollywood

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Ada's voice drifted down the stairs, and it sounded like she was talking with the wedding planner from the few words that Tracy could make out, so she kept wandering through the house, her small suitcase rolling across the marble floors behind her.

Tracy rarely thought about what might have been, what her life might have looked like if she'd stayed in the business long enough to have a career like Ada's, but it was hard not to think about those things when she was spending the next week here, in this amazing villa, with Ada and Sydney picking up the tab.

Tracy couldn't even begin to imagine what this place must cost to rent out for the week, and they'd rented it for two, because up until about a month ago, their schedules were still changing, and they weren't sure which dates they'd actually be here.

And then there was the honeymoon they'd just planned the other day, the two of them renting a yacht to sail around the Mediterranean.

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planned to keep exploring the house, but the French doors that opened up from the bedroom onto the back garden drew her towards them.

She unlocked them, pushing them open, the fresh sea air coming up to meet her as she took in the meticulously landscaped gardens, her feet carrying her outside before she could think about it.

It wasn't that she was jealous. She was so happy with her life now. Her surf school was considered one of the best in the state. She had hundreds of private messages and reviews saved on her phone of people praising her personally for her instruction skills or her team.

But as successful as her business was, it would never allow her to fly a dozen friends out to Spain for a week or more or to be able to rent a place like this for much more than a day or two, if even that.

Tracy ran a hand through her long brown hair as she ducked under one of the fruit trees on her way out to an outdoor seating area tucked away in the corner of the lush garden, the sun warm against her skin.

The forecast was for mostly sun with temperatures in the low seventies, and there was no sign of rain for the ceremony that was taking place somewhere on the grounds of this sprawling estate.

Tracy was just about to see if the white outdoor couches were as comfortable as they looked when she heard voices behind her, and a smile instantly came to her face when she saw Ada.

"Hey," Ada said with a smile as she pulled Tracy into a hug. "I'm so glad you're here."

Sydney was right there to wrap her arms around her when Ada pulled away. “Welcome to Spain,” Sydney said her blond hair pulled back in a loose ponytail, sunglasses on top of her head.

It was hard to believe that it had only been a year since Lara had stopped her on the street, saying that she knew who she was and when Tracy hadn’t believed her Lara had said that she was Ada’s manager.

Tracy had lost touch with all of her friends from that era of her life. And while Ada and Charlotte had gone on to have just unfathomable careers, Tracy had slipped into normal civilian life, putting her dreams of becoming an award winning actress behind her. Kerri might not have become a world famous actress like Ada and Charlotte had, but she’d had a long and successful career as an agent.

Tracy tried not to dwell on the fact that she was feeling that twinge of regret, of doubt about the way her life had turned out, because surely it was normal to feel that way. Especially when she was here, and Kerri would walk through those doors any moment. Charlotte too.

In the last year, Tracy had slowly found herself slipping back into her easy friendship with Ada and Charlotte. Tracy continued to give Lara surfing lessons, and she naturally ended up at Lara’s house for dinner parties or nights by the pool.

Lara and Charlotte had been together for the last year, so Tracy had spent the most time with them, but more often than not Ada and Sydney were there too, and it was easy to reminisce about old times, about their early days acting, fumbling their way through, pretending that they knew what they were doing.

Tracy had only seen Kerri three in the last year, twice in L.A. when she’d come back to help with the wedding prep, and once when Tracy had flown out to Colorado to visit her and Rachel.

But Kerri was such an easy person to be around that it didn't take long for them to remember why they all had so much fun on set when they were filming that law series all those years ago.

Kerri was actually going to be officiating the ceremony. Ada and Sydney technically got married legally last week in California with a confidential marriage license and a ceremony in Sydney's backyard that was just the two of them and the woman who officiated the marriage.

They wanted to do something special, like come here, to Spain, and have everyone together, even if it was entirely symbolic.

"This place is something else," Tracy said as they led her around the grounds.

"It was all Kerri," Sydney said, sliding her shades on. "I told her, you know, we have a wedding planner. It's fine. Don't worry about it. And she just kept insisting. No, you gotta check out this place. Somehow she knows the owner? I can't remember how. It was like a former client's ex-husband's sister's place, and he owed her one."

"What?" Tracy asked with a laugh as they walked along the pool area.

"I don't even know," Sydney said. "It was something complicated like that. Anyway, Kerri said that it didn't matter how good our wedding planner was, she would never find us a place like this. Kerri knew we wanted to have everything onsite and be able to accommodate anyone who wanted to stay. But when she showed me the photos... I knew this was it. This was exactly what we were looking for."

"When is she getting in?" Tracy asked.

"Tomorrow," Ada said. "Everyone really is arriving tomorrow. Except Lara. She should be here any minute."

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“And Charlotte?”

Ada exhaled. “She couldn’t get away. She knew she would be mid filming, but she was certain that she had it under control, and that she’d be able to get away for a few days, but they’re behind. They had some weather delays, and I know she’s disappointed, but I told her not to do anything stupid.”

“She’d walk out?” Tracy asked as they walked away from the house to the edge of the property, the lawn stretching out in front of them, the grass immaculate, and she wondered how many people it took to keep this property looking this pristine.

“Yeah,” Sydney said with a laugh. “She’s got this thing going on now, where she’s like, ‘This could be my last movie. I’m not going to do whatever it is.’ She’s been saying that for the last two years, and she’s still getting really good scripts. So, yeah. It wouldn’t surprise me to find out that she said fuck them and left.”

“Except,” Ada said, “I made her promise me that she wouldn’t.”

“So, Lara’s coming on her own?” Tracy asked. “I’m surprised she didn’t tell me. We could have got the same flight.”

“She’s bringing Hayden.” Sydney said as they got to the bottom of the property, the sea coming into view now.

Tracy stood at the railing and gazed out at the sea, a few fluffy white clouds dotted against the brilliant blue sky. “This is where the ceremony is taking place?”

“Yeah,” Ada said with a smile.

“It’s perfect.”

Tracy took in the view, a pang of loneliness coming out of nowhere as she glanced at Ada, wrapping her arm around Sydney’s stomach from behind and resting her chin on her shoulder while they looked out across the ocean.

She was forty-eight years old, and while she rarely felt it, knowing she was in great shape and that she took care of her skin, she was starting to wonder if she was ever going to meet someone who she could see herself spending more than a few months with.

It wasn’t something she thought about much, because day-to-day she genuinely loved her life. She got to wake up and head to the beach for the day. She got to teach people how to do the thing she loved most. That was something she thought about. How lucky she was.

And the thought that always followed it, was that she couldn’t have everything. Maybe she wasn’t the kind of person who would settle down.

But whenever she was at Lara’s or Ada’s, she was surrounded by happy couples, and it was hard to ignore that she was often the only single person there.

Well, Hayden too. She never mentioned anyone she was seeing. She always seemed too focused on her career, on making something happen, to be distracted by dating. There were always rumors about her and another male actor she was working with at the time, but Hayden had always brushed them off, promising Lara that she’d be the first to know, as her best friend and agent, if she was seeing someone.

And Tracy respected Hayden’s ability to focus on her career and what she wanted,

although it was hard to imagine that Hayden seemed to be worried about her age. That at thirty-three she felt like she was getting too old to chase the acting dream.

But apart from Hayden, Tracy always found herself in the company of at least one couple, and she'd just ignored that feeling that she was missing out on something. She had to. What other choice was there? She wasn't one to wallow. She could have done that when she realized that she wasn't cut out for the movie business, but she never did.

And she definitely wasn't going to start now.

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Hayden Dent followed Lara outside the villa, the sky a breathtaking pink and purple, and if she wasn't already so impressed with the interior of this house, the gardens were even more spectacular. They hadn't meant to give themselves a tour, but Lara said that Ada had sent her a text with the code to the gated entrance and to make themselves at home.

Hayden didn't know if that meant that Ada and Sydney were out, or if they were busy with wedding planning, but she just followed Lara around the exterior of the villa, moving through one secluded courtyard to an outdoor lounge with a fire pit to an orchard, the sweet scent of apricots hitting her nose as she passed by, all without bumping into any of the other guests.

"This is easily the nicest house I've ever seen," Lara said as she stood with her hands on her hips, taking in the gardens, the squawk of seagulls coming from somewhere in the distance. "Malibu who? This is so much nicer."

"I know," Hayden said, standing beside her, taking it all in, the fresh smell of the sea mixing with the sweet aromas of the orchard.

Lara tilted her head. “Hear that?”

“Parrots?” Hayden asked.

“No.” Lara laughed. “Well, maybe, but I meant voices. I think if we keep going, we might come across Ada and Sydney. Come on.”

The fatigue that had come over Hayden in the back of the taxi on their way here seemed to evaporate as they explored the house, and now as the pool came into view, her eyes landed on Ada and Sydney before she spotted another increasingly familiar face. Tracy Carrington.

A twinge of guilt settled in her chest when Hayden remembered that the last time she saw Tracy, probably about three months ago now, she’d taken Tracy’s card and told her that she was definitely going to call her to arrange some surfing lessons. But she never had.

Sydney noticed them first. “Hey!” She pushed herself off the couch and came over to them, hugging Lara first and then Hayden.

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Hayden still had to pinch herself that these were the people she spent the most time with lately. She'd clicked with Lara instantly, even when Kerri was her agent, but Hayden could easily say that Lara was not only her best friend but a positive influence on her life.

So many times Hayden wanted to give up. She had thought when Kerri had noticed her and signed her that she was on her way, but the roles she'd been getting were still for side characters who only appeared in a few episodes a season.

Lara had kept her from walking away and giving up more times that Hayden would like to count. She didn't want to quit, but some days it just seemed so hopeless. And while nothing had changed in the last few months, she felt like the experience she'd gained and the company she'd been keeping lately was only a reminder of how much she loved this business.

Hayden might have been starstruck the first time she met Charlotte Dixon, but after working with her and playing her paralegal, it didn't take long for Hayden to realize that while Charlotte was an amazingly talented actress, she was also a normal human being who tripped over things and forgot why she walked into a room.

And in the last year, Hayden had spent so much time with Charlotte and that meant that she'd gotten to know Adelaide Atwood and Sydney Lockett almost as well. When she spent time at any of their homes for dinner or a game of poker it felt so normal, but for some reason it struck her as a bit surreal this evening.

Maybe it was being here, at this lavish home and in such a beautiful location. Maybe it was the fact that she was one of a dozen people who would witness Ada and

Sydney's wedding.

She'd gone on social media while they'd waited to board their flight, and the internet was buzzing with speculation. Some people were saying that they'd already gotten married, which technically they had, but plenty of people somehow knew that they were getting married in Spain this weekend and the general consensus was that they wanted the photos, the video clips, anything really.

Both Ada and Sydney had such loyal fans.

Someday. Someday, she'd have that.

"How was your flight?" Sydney asked, taking Hayden away from her thoughts as they went over to the outdoor seating area, taking turns greeting Ada and then Tracy.

"Good," Lara said with a smirk. "I appreciate the fact that I can breeze through airports without anyone noticing me."

"Me too," Hayden added with a wry smile.

"No. You had that girl ask for a photo."

"One person." Hayden covered up her embarrassment with a smile. She didn't want to sound like she was complaining, but Lara had no idea that she'd touched on a sore spot. Hayden would only love to need a private security detail to get her through an airport. But unfortunately, she could walk through an airport with only the occasional person recognizing her.

Ada threw her arm across the back of the couch as she sat down again, letting out a soft sigh. "I'd love to have no one notice me. Even for just a day. I don't even remember what it was like."

Hayden took a seat beside Tracy. “Hey,” she said to Tracy who had an almost sad look on her face, like she was thinking about something else. Hayden wished she’d thought to text her about those lessons, but hopefully Tracy wouldn’t take it personally that she hadn’t been in touch.

The conversation continued around them, and Hayden spoke directly to Tracy. “Looks like we’re the only single people here again,” Hayden said to lighten the mood.

Tracy’s lips slid into a smile as she ran a hand through her hair. “As long as they don’t start setting me up, I’m okay with it. I know better than to believe the latest tabloid headings, but I thought you were dating what’s his face. Your costar. Harry? Henry?”

Hayden laughed. “Close. Harris.”

Tracy angled her body towards her, as if she was studying her reaction. “And?”

Hayden’s eyebrows rose. “Not true. But Harris’s agent kind of loves the idea so I think he’s been fueling the rumors.”

“Hayden and Harris,” Tracy said with a bit of a smirk. “That’s a bit much.”

“Oh, I know.” Hayden thanked Sydney as she offered her a bottle of beer. Tracy declined, and Sydney came back with a bottle of water a few seconds later.

Hayden sipped the Spanish beer, savoring the new taste. She didn’t spend nearly as much time with Tracy as she did with Lara and Charlotte, but they’d developed this easy rapport where they always found something to talk about. At the same time, Hayden didn’t feel like she actually knew that much about Tracy despite all those easy conversations.

She'd done a basic Google when they'd first met at Lara's house, because even though Hayden had loved watching reruns of the show that Tracy had been on with Ada, Charlotte, and Kerri, Hayden knew that she'd only had eyes for Charlotte Dixon back then.

Hayden could admit that she had a crush on a woman even though she was straight. And a lot of it was Hayden realizing that she wanted to be just like Charlotte, an actress who could bring a character alive and be a role model to young women.

But it still was so surreal to call Charlotte a friend now.

"What have you been up to since I saw you last?" Tracy asked, taking Charlotte away from her thoughts.

"Not much to be honest. Lara's always finding parts for me to audition for, but I feel like I'm in a bit of a rut. Like I've plateaued, and I'm never going to move beyond playing a minor character on a kind of popular TV show."

"Well," Tracy said with a lopsided smile. "I know you probably don't want to hear it, but there is more to life than acting. I'm not suggesting that you give up, but I was like you when I was in my early twenties, taking just about any job, trying to get a foot in the door. And if someone back then had told me that I'd be happy without being an actress, I wouldn't have believed them for a second."

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“No, I get that. And I have thought about quitting. A lot, actually. But I don’t know.” Hayden ran her thumb over the damp label on her beer bottle. “I don’t want to be that person who gave up too soon. You hear it all the time. One role, one meeting, one introduction and it changed everything for someone.”

“Hey,” Lara said, coming over to stand in front of them. “You two were away in your own world. There’s a local chef inside that’s going to cook some authentic Spanish food for us.”

“Now?” Hayden asked.

Lara chuckled. “Yes. Right now.”

“Let’s go then,” Tracy said, pushing herself off the couch and heading back inside ahead of them.

“What is it with you two?” Lara asked, playfully bumping her shoulder as they walked towards the house. “Anytime we’re all together, you two always end up in some deep conversation.”

Hayden shrugged. “I like her. She’s easy to be around, and you know, she’s normal. She doesn’t drive a sports car or live in a mansion.”

“Do you know where she lives?”

“No,” Hayden said, feeling her cheeks heat up.

“It might not be a mansion, but it is an ocean front property. She got in early. Probably about twenty-five years ago.”

“Oh.” Hayden didn’t know why she assumed that Tracy would live in a modest home. She did own a successful surf school, and she had been on a popular TV series, even if it was a long time ago.

“I’m not complaining, by the way,” Lara said. “I’m happy you two get along. In fact, if you weren’t straight, I’d say you’d make a really beautiful couple.”

Hayden opened her mouth but nothing came out.

When Hayden didn’t answer, Lara kept talking. “I hope Tracy does meet someone though. I know she doesn’t think she needs to, but she’s one of the most genuine, real people I’ve ever met. I guess that’s why you two always seem to pick up right where you left off. Do you hang out with her away from all of us?”

“No,” Hayden said, the delicious aromas of garlic and seafood hitting her nose as soon as she stepped inside the house. “I was supposed to get in touch with her about surfing lessons.”

“You should. I wish I’d started sooner, but if you stick with it, it shouldn’t take you more than a year to really get good at it. Less if you can get more lessons in. Tracy is a fantastic teacher.”

Hayden caught Tracy’s eye as they entered the open kitchen and dining room, the massive table full of bowls and dishes of seafood, salads, and what Hayden hoped was paella. Tracy’s chestnut brown hair was streaked with blond highlights, tossed over one shoulder, her skin a golden bronze from so many hours spent in the sun.

Hayden took a seat beside Lara, the room humming with chatter and the clinking of

plates and cutlery, but Hayden's thoughts wandered as she tried to figure out how Charlotte had been the one to capture her attention on that TV series and not Tracy.

Yes, Charlotte was a beautiful woman. She wasn't doubting that. But there was something about Tracy, that quality that casting directors looked for. That indescribable bit of magic, that glint in someone's eyes, that magnetic presence.

Tracy had all of those things. Hayden knew that much from talking to her anytime they both ended up at Lara and Charlotte's house. She'd have to go back and watch the show again, but Hayden would bet almost anything that Tracy had all of that back then.

So, why hadn't she had a career like Ada's or Charlotte's?

Hayden could see why Kerri left. She wanted to be out and not worry about covering up who she was for the sake of her career. She was also a savvy businesswoman who knew how to represent her clients.

But what happened with Tracy?

As Hayden added some shrimp to her plate, her mouth salivating at the delicious smells surrounding her, she wondered if Tracy really was happy with the way her life turned out or if she would gladly trade places with Ada or Charlotte.

3

Tracy padded into the kitchen the next morning after having an early night, the jet lag catching up with her. Now, she was feeling surprisingly refreshed as she made herself a cup of coffee, the sun already flooding the patio in the front of the house.

She carried her cup outside, about to slide her shades on, when she heard a car

driving up the hill and a sleek silver sports car appeared a few seconds later with blacked-out windows. Tracy put her mug down on the glass table, ready to greet Kerri, but the passenger door opened first, with blond hair tumbling across the woman's shoulders from beneath a gray fedora hat.

Tracy's lips slid into a grin. "Charlotte?"

Charlotte returned her smile as she strode over to her, black boots clicking against the paved driveway, and Kerri emerged from the driver's side, both of them wearing black pants.

Tracy had barely wrapped her arms around Charlotte when the rest of the group appeared, Lara the first to come outside, her eyes wide.

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“You know I’ve always happy to see you,” Lara said as she jogged over to Charlotte and stepping into her arms. “But please tell me you didn’t do anything stupid to get here.”

“I promised Ada I wouldn’t.” Charlotte turned to Kerri, extending an arm. “You know she likes to pull strings. Even if she isn’t my agent.”

Kerri tucked a lock of black hair behind her ear. “I just made a phone call to the director who happens to be a very old friend and explained the situation. If she’s back on set in seventy-two hours, there’s no problem.”

Ada followed Sydney outside, still in her cream silk robe, sharing a long hug with Charlotte while Tracy said hello to Kerri.

“It’s good to see you,” Kerri said, her arm around Tracy’s waist as they carried the bags from the trunk inside, and Tracy slung Kerri’s garment bag over her shoulder.

“Are you nervous about tomorrow?”

“No. I think I was for the last ten months, ever since they asked me if I would officiate, but now? I honestly can’t wait. It’s such a privilege.”

“I heard you were the one that recommended this place,” Tracy said as they followed Lara inside.

Kerri lowered her voice as they went down the hall. “I had to call in a few favors, but I think it’s worth it. Sydney was pretty sure what she wanted for this week didn’t

exist. Maybe the location and the view but not the right dates or not enough space to have everyone stay. I knew this was what they were looking for. It's so private."

"And Rachel?" Tracy asked as she hung up Kerri's garment bag.

"She couldn't leave the horses. The two people she would ask to cover for her are both away, so..."

"Is she good?"

"Great." Kerri's smile said it all. "I still have to pinch myself sometimes. You should come back again. I know your schedule's busy too, but you know you're always welcome."

"I know. And thank you. Although, I wish you'd let me teach you how to surf."

"I'm too old for that."

Tracy rolled her eyes. "You know I hate that excuse."

"I know, but it's true. The horses keep me in shape, plus I don't want to get into something that I can't do more than a few times a year. I don't exactly have an ocean nearby."

"True."

"What about you?" Kerri asked as they went back out to the front of the house and took a seat at the glass table that was surrounded by pink and white flowers, the sound of birds chirping all around them.

"What about me?"

“Are you seeing anyone?”

“No.” Tracy reached for her mug, the coffee still warm. “No. I’m not really looking so...”

Lara and Charlotte joined them with their own coffees, bringing one out for Kerri.

“Thanks,” Kerri said, taking a sip before she spoke. “Do you think we ever would have caught up again if Lara hadn’t spotted you in that coffee shop?”

Tracy sucked in a breath, completely taken aback by the question. “Honestly? No. If we haven’t stayed in touch all those years, there’s no reason to think that anything would have changed.”

“Well then, thank you Lara for being a student of television and going back to watch our little old show, because I am so glad to call you a friend again, Trace. I mean it.”

Charlotte chuckled. “I wouldn’t exactly call drooling over me being a student of television, but—”

“Hey,” Lara said, playfully hitting Charlotte’s arm. “I loved that show. I just also happened to develop a crush on one of the actresses.”

“Thank you, Lara,” Tracy said. “I was a bit of a diva that day too, but I’m glad that you recognized me and didn’t let me just walk away. I was thinking about it last night, about how lucky I am to be here this week. And it’s really because of you,” she said to Lara. “Even if you were just trying to sign me on as a client.”

Kerri laughed. “I taught her well.”

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Tracy shook her head as she smiled, catching Hayden's blond hair out of the corner of her eye, and she wondered how long she'd been there, standing outside the front door maybe unsure if she should come over.

Tracy waited for Hayden to see her and motioned her over while Charlotte was telling them about that time that Ada and Kerri nearly burnt down the set.

"You sleep okay?" Tracy asked, lowering her voice so that just Hayden could hear her now that she was sitting on the chair beside Tracy.

"Yeah. Like a log. I went to bed just a few minutes after you so I had plenty of sleep. I still feel a little off, but I'll be fine by tomorrow."

Tracy couldn't help but notice how attractive Hayden was without any makeup on. She'd only ever seen her with smoky eyeshadow and mascara, smooth foundation perfectly applied. But this morning, Hayden looked just as good, her dirty blond hair longer than the last time Tracy had seen her.

Lara couldn't take her eyes off Charlotte as she told them another story as Ada and Sydney joined them, and Tracy was aware of the fact that as long as Charlotte was there, Hayden might feel a little lost now that Lara had her partner here.

"Are you nervous about tomorrow?" Hayden asked, her voice low as the conversation continued around them.

"No. Are you?"

“Yeah. I feel like I shouldn’t really be here.”

Tracy took a sip of coffee waiting for Hayden to continue, but she didn’t. More laughter erupted around them, and Tracy didn’t want to get into a conversation like that now with everyone here.

“Do you want to come to town with me today?” Tracy asked her. “I don’t want to be in the way when they’re going through things with the wedding planner and making sure everything is ready to go for tomorrow.”

“Yeah. Into Marbella?”

Tracy nodded. “We’re the only two, well besides Lara, but she’ll want to spend time with Charlotte while she’s here, but we’re the only two who can go out without worrying about getting mobbed.”

“Yeah.” Hayden smiled. “I guess, I should really be glad that I can still go out and not worry about things getting out of hand.”

“Hey, I hope you didn’t think I was doubting you when I said there was more to life than acting. There’s dozens of examples of people who made it in their thirties despite what a lot of people would lead you to believe.”

“I think you might have found that balance.”

“What do you mean?” Tracy asked as she angled her body towards Hayden, taking another sip of coffee.

“You had a taste of acting, and I assume you decided it wasn’t for you even if it was what you thought you wanted. And now you have a business doing something you’re passionate about.”

Tracy let out a long breath. Decided wasn't what she'd call what happened, but she wasn't going to get into that with Hayden. "Maybe."

Before Hayden had a chance to ask her any more questions, Kerri started telling them about the dinner plans for tonight.

"I know Charlotte was talking about renting a boat today, or whatever you guys want to do," Kerri said, stifling a yawn. "Just be back by seven. We're having a rehearsal dinner, without the rehearsal."

Tracy caught Hayden's eye as Sydney listed off the things she needed to get done today, and Charlotte got up to make a phone call about finding a boat to rent on such short notice. "I'm going to have a shower," Tracy said before she finished her coffee. "And then I'm ready to go whenever you are."

"Yeah. I'm ready now. Did you rent your own car?"

Tracy nodded. "Yeah. I came on my own, so I picked up one at the airport."

Hayden stood up and helped clear the table. "I'll be out here whenever you're ready," she said to Tracy before heading inside.

Ada arched an eyebrow when it was just the two of them left outside. "Should I be reading into this?"

Tracy stared at her for a second. "Hayden?"

Ada nodded.

"No." Tracy shook her head. "She's easy to be around, but no. Too young for one, and she's straight, right?"

Ada shrugged. “She’s never really said.” She pushed herself off the chair and gently squeezed Tracy’s shoulder on her way back inside, leaving Tracy alone with her thoughts.

The sound of laughter and the lilting tones of locals speaking Spanish surrounded Hayden as she spent the day walking through the quaint streets of Marbella's old town beside Tracy. The scent of saltwater was in the air as they got closer to the port.

"Are you getting hungry?" Hayden asked when they arrived at the famous port, Puerto Banus, a flashy red Ferrari driving by as Hayden took in the yachts and the bustling atmosphere of the port.

"Yes. I was just about to ask."

"I found a few places this morning, and one of them was here. Hold on." Hayden slid her phone out of the pocket of her shorts and found the right tab. "What do you think?"

Tracy leaned over her shoulder to get a look, both of them turning to avoid the sunlight hitting the screen, the warmth of Tracy lightly pressing against her back as Hayden flicked through the photos.

"Yeah. I'm craving seafood which they have plenty of," Tracy said as she tapped on the screen to bring up the map. "And it's right over there." She pointed off to their right, and Hayden could actually see the sign from where they were standing.

Hayden was surprised to find that she missed the feeling of Tracy being so close for those brief few seconds, but she pushed that thought away as they headed for the restaurant.

When they climbed the steps to the upstairs restaurant, the mouthwatering smells of garlic and fish hit her nose as soon as they reached the waiting area.

Hayden blinked when Tracy took the lead, speaking in what sounded like fluent Spanish with the waiter who showed them to a table right at the edge of the balcony, overlooking the port.

“I had no idea you spoke Spanish,” Hayden said once the waiter was gone. She’d only managed to catch the occasional word.

“I was pretty good at it in high school, but one of my first clients before I had the surf school, back when I was just doing private lessons, was a young man who spoke very little English. We muddled our way along, speaking some combination of the two languages and using plenty of gestures, with me showing him how to get up on the board more than telling him. But by the end of it, he said he had a cousin and a friend who were both interested in learning but they had even less English so they didn’t think they could. You know, they didn’t comfortable getting lessons in English.”

The waiter returned with some water and went through the specials in Spanish and then English.

“But yeah, it’s how I got started,” Tracy continued as she took a sip of water. “And I’ve always had probably about twenty-five percent of my clients who preferred to speak Spanish during their lessons, so I managed to gradually improve, and I ended up finding a little niche for myself at the same time.”

“Wow. That’s pretty impressive.”

Tracy tilted her head, as if brushing off the compliment. “It just kind of happened.”

“It’s still impressive.”

“Speaking of lessons,” Tracy said, propping her chin up on her hand as she leaned forward. “Are you still interested?”

“Yes.” Hayden reached for her glass of water and took a drink. “I did mean to get in touch with you.”

“No, it’s okay. I know people get busy. But the offer is still there. I’ll say the same thing to you that I said to Lara. We can work around your schedule. I have enough people working for me that I can let them take over the group classes if that’s the time you happen to free and we can find our own spot further down the beach.”

“I could just join the group class,” Hayden said with a half smile. “Seeing as I’m not a world-famous actress yet.”

“Sure, but if I give you one-on-one lessons, I’ll get you to a proficient level in... Maybe, a third of the time it would take you if you just did the group lessons.”

“I like this confidence,” Hayden said with a grin as the waiter returned to take their order. She’d been so busy talking that she barely glanced at the menu, although she had an idea that she wanted to get two starters and try out some of the local seafood.

“Are you surprised by it?” Tracy asked when he left.

“Honestly? Yes. I saw it with Kerri, when she’s on the phone negotiating or holding her ground for a client. Not as much with Lara. She’s more laid back in her style of management. But it’s easy to see with Ada or Charlotte. They just walk into a room, and it’s like they own it. Not in a conceited kind of way. I guess, that’s part of what got them to where they are. This natural... I don’t even know what to call it. There’s an aura about them almost.”

“I know what you mean.”

“Everything they do is with extreme confidence,” Hayden said with a sigh. “I’m in awe of it. Sorry. I don’t want you to think that I’m jealous or envious. I’m impressed by it. It’s an attractive quality to have. Something I’d like to think I’m working on. But today is the first time I’m seeing it with you. Between the Spanish and the confidence you have in your ability to teach someone how to surf... It just makes me wonder how you didn’t end up with a career like Ada’s or Charlotte’s.”

Hayden thought she saw Tracy’s expression drop slightly, a hint of sadness in her eyes, but then it was gone again. Maybe she’d imagined it.

“Is this about what you said this morning? About feeling like you don’t belong here?”

Hayden exhaled. “I guess? I just feel like I’m Lara’s plus one, which was fine. She’s often come with me to events and dinners, but now that Charlotte’s here... I do feel a bit out of my depth.”

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“Don’t.” Tracy’s eyes searched hers, and Hayden found herself getting lost in Tracy’s hazel-brown eyes.

“It’s just... I feel like I’m in the company of people who really have their shit together,” Hayden said, taking another drink, forcing herself to look away from Tracy for a second, to break that intense eye contact. “And it’s not about being famous. You’ve got a successful business. Lara, who’s the same age as me, is really making a name for herself, and she’s still so new to being an agent, but she’s made so much progress since I met her.”

“I think you’re too caught up in the chase,” Tracy said, leaning back in her chair. “I asked Charlotte about you, one of the first nights we were all together.”

“Yeah?” Hayden’s heart started beating a little faster, unsure of where this conversation was going.

“Hm. I remember you were in the pool with Lara that night, and I was just wondering where you fit into their lives. And she explained how you worked together and how Kerri had found you and Lara was your agent now. But she had nothing but praise for you and your acting skills.”

“Really?” Hayden could feel her mouth falling open.

“Yes. Don’t look so shocked,” Tracy said with a smile. “Yes, she said that if you hung around long enough, the right role would come along. I know that was a friendly jab in my direction, but I know she meant it and that she wouldn’t have said it if she hadn’t. So, I think as hard it is, you just need to keep going and stop worrying

about how and when it's going to happen."

A warmth spread over Hayden as she took in Tracy's words. The idea of Charlotte believing in her like that gave her a boost in confidence she hadn't realized she needed, but having the woman she looked up to most as an actress say those kinds of things? It was enough to make Hayden look forward to that audition she had lined up for next week, the one she'd been debating even going for, because she thought it was out of her league.

Their waiter returned with their lunch, and Hayden couldn't remember the last time she'd had such a relaxing day. She hadn't realized how much she needed to talk to someone. And while she did talk to Lara, it wasn't the same. Lara was fighting for her. She would always say something encouraging, but Hayden had a hard time being entirely honest with her, not wanting her own agent to give up on her.

But for some reason with Tracy, Hayden felt like she could open up. She just wished that Tracy felt the same way. Hayden would love to know more about her, about why she never pursued acting further, about why she never stayed in touch with Ada or Charlotte or Kerri.

When they were finishing their meal and leaving a tip for the waiter, a couple in their sixties were being led to their table and the woman stopped short, her eyes wide.

"I'm so sorry," the woman said, her cheeks flushed. "Are you Vicky West?"

"I was once upon a time," Tracy said, her lips sliding into an easy smile.

The man chuckled. "I think she meant to say, are you Tracy Carrington?"

Tracy nodded. "I am."

The woman covered her mouth with her hand. "I still watch the reruns. They don't make TV like that anymore. You were my favorite," the woman gushed.

"It was a great show," the man chimed in.

Hayden stood back watching the scene, warmth spreading across her chest. "Would you like a photo?" Hayden asked them.

They looked from Hayden to Tracy, and Tracy nodded, coming around the table to stand between the two of them while the woman handed Hayden her phone.

"Smile," Hayden said as she took five or six photos, catching the woman turning as they thanked Tracy, her smile wide, but Hayden found it hard to look away from Tracy who spent a few moments with them, talking about their travel plans and where they were from, everything about Tracy genuine.

They said their goodbyes, and Hayden waited until they had left the restaurant, falling into step beside Tracy as they walked along the port, the yachts gently bobbing up and down in the water.

"You just made their day," Hayden said, unable to keep the smile off her face. "That was really sweet."

"That hasn't happened... Well, I won't count Lara. But that hasn't happened in probably three, maybe four years?" Tracy slid on her shades. "It's easy to take the time when it happens so rarely. But it is nice. That people still enjoy that show. Nearly thirty years later," Tracy said with a sigh. "Jesus."

"I might have to do a rewatch."

Tracy's steps slowed. "You've seen it?"

Hayden nodded. “Yeah. A few episodes here and there, but when I started working with Charlotte, I watched the whole series. Twice.”

“I had no idea,” Tracy said softly.

“You were really good. And that woman’s right. They don’t make shows like that anymore.”

Tracy didn’t say anything more, and once again Hayden was biting back more questions, sure that Tracy wouldn’t want to answer them.

“Will we go back to the car?” Tracy said after a few moments.

“Sure.”

Hayden tried not to dwell on the mysterious end to Tracy’s very short career. She’d had a really nice day with her, and the more time she spent with her, the more Hayden could see why Tracy had fit back into Ada and Charlotte’s lives so easily.

There was this almost magnetic energy about her, but it was always in an entirely laid-back way, and it was so refreshing to be around.

5

Tracy stood back from the full-length mirror, smoothing her hands down the front of her navy dress, her hair loosely curled and tossed over one shoulder. She sucked in a breath, unable to even remember the last time she’d worn a dress. It had been years since she’d been to a wedding, and any nights out hadn’t been formal enough to wear one.

But as she turned, still in her bare feet, she was actually pretty happy with how she looked. Sometimes, she couldn’t believe that she was so close to fifty. She didn’t feel it. She didn’t think she looked it either and this afternoon, standing in front of the mirror dressed like this only reminded her how much of it was down to her attitude about herself and life.

She’d given up on some dreams, but things still turned out okay. Better than okay. And this evening, she’d get to celebrate Ada’s big day with her, one of the very few people to.

So far, everything about this trip had been amazing. Last night's dinner had been like a family gathering with old stories coming out, plenty of memories that someone had forgotten about, and Tracy heard a lot of new stories too, things she'd missed out on by not staying in touch.

From start to finish, yesterday had been a really good day. Tracy knew she'd go back to California recharged. She hadn't realized how much she needed a few days away, and getting to spend so much time with friends who were like family was just an added bonus.

Today had been a lazy day for Tracy who'd gone for a drive before coming back to read outside for a few hours. She hadn't wanted to get in the way of any last-minute preparations, but the day had flown by and it wouldn't be long before the ceremony started outside on the lawn.

A light knock on her door took her away from her thoughts, and she padded over to the door, hoping there was nothing wrong, that the weather hadn't changed or that Kerri wasn't feeling well.

When she pulled the door open, her breath caught. Hayden looked absolutely stunning in a turquoise dress, her long blond hair swept up in an elegant up-do that made her seem more mature.

"Hey," Hayden said, her blue eyes dazzling. "I'm so sorry to bother you, but I can't get the clasp to close." She pointed behind her neck.

"Yeah, sure. Come in." Tracy closed the door behind her, shaking off the somewhat dazed feeling that had come over her.

"You look great, by the way," Hayden said with a smile, her eyes openly looking her up and down.

“Thank you.” Tracy swallowed down a similar comment, not knowing why she was afraid to say what she was thinking, that Hayden looked amazing.

Hayden turned her back to her, and Tracy’s fingers fumbled with the clasp for a second, needing a few attempts to get it, aware of the way her fingers were brushing over Hayden’s warm skin.

Tracy’s hands fell away, and Hayden turned to face her.

“Thanks,” Hayden said softly. In her heels, she was the same height as Tracy was in her bare feet.

Tracy searched her crystal blue eyes. “We should probably head outside,” she said.

“Yeah.” Hayden held her gaze for another second before moving past her to open the door.

Tracy took one last look in the mirror, holding the door open for Hayden who had an odd expression on her face.

“You going barefoot?” Hayden asked, glancing down at Tracy’s feet. “Nice tattoo though.”

Tracy exhaled, looking down at her feet and the sea turtle tattoo that covered most of her right foot. “No. But thanks.” She left Hayden by the door and sat on the edge of the bed to slide her feet into her heels.

Hayden was smiling as Tracy got up to join her. “You nervous?”

“No. I don’t what that was about.” Tracy swallowed down the lump that had suddenly formed in her throat as they made their way to the kitchen to head outside with Lara

and Charlotte.

As she followed the path down to the edge of the property, the sun sinking lower in the sky, Tracy struggled to process what had just happened.

Yes, she could acknowledge that Hayden was attractive. She thought she had. But whatever just happened in her room was not that. Tracy's breath had stalled, her mind blank as she took in Hayden standing in her doorway.

Tracy couldn't think about any of that now. She was filing into the second row alongside Hayden to the right of the path that had been covered in white carpet for the ceremony. Lara and Charlotte sat on the other side, with Sydney's three friends. Behind Tracy were two women that Ada had worked with for years, a director in her fifties and another actress who Tracy had only spoken to for a few minutes since they'd arrived.

Sydney came outside a few minutes later, chatting with all of them. She was glowing in all black, dressed in skinny slacks with a perfectly tailored suit jacket over a thin, lacy black blouse, her hair flowing across her shoulders in waves.

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Kerri appeared next, wearing an emerald green jumpsuit, her dark hair straight, coming around the corner where the shrubbery and trees kept Ada out of sight.

“All good?” Sydney asked Kerri, and Tracy couldn’t miss the way Sydney shifted her weight from one foot to the other, the light breeze moving through her hair.

“Yes. We’re on schedule.”

Hayden leaned in as they sat down again. “I see you don’t have a bag. I have tissues if you need some.”

“I’ll be fine.” Tracy breathed in the fresh sea air, the sun fading behind the mountains in the distance. “But thank you.”

When Ada did walk down the short aisle the smile on both Sydney and Ada’s faces alone had her blinking back tears never mind the hauntingly beautiful music the lone violinist provided throughout the brief ceremony.

“Here,” Hayden whispered at one point, handing her a tissue.

Tracy silently accepted it, too caught up in listening to Ada’s heartfelt vows to be embarrassed that she somehow thought she wouldn’t need one.

As the sun set behind the happy couple, the photographer captured every single moment, and Tracy leaned in as Hayden wrapped her arm around Tracy’s waist, both of them caught up in the moment, delighted to see their friends so in love.

Hayden clinked her glass of champagne against Sydney's, their dresses swapped for something more casual, both of them wearing black jeans as they watched the logs in the fire pit catch and spark, the popping and hissing of the timber mixing with the sounds of laughter coming from the kitchen behind them as everyone came back outside after having a buffet dinner and getting changed out of their formal wear.

"That was such a lovely, laid back way to commit to someone," Hayden said by way of a toast. "I know I kind of came as Lara's plus one, but thank you, for allowing me to be here and share such a special day with you and Ada. I feel really honored."

Sydney smiled. "I'm glad you came, and please don't make it sound like you don't belong here. Well, other than being the only straight woman among us. But other than that? I'm so glad we've gotten to know you in the last year, and I hope we can work together soon. Charlotte has nothing but great things to say about you and your acting abilities."

Hayden bit her lip. She didn't even know what to say to any of that.

"Who's straight?" Ada asked as she joined them with her own glass of champagne, dressed in white capris and a halter top. "And who let them in?"

Hayden could feel her cheeks heating up, but then Charlotte and Lara came outside, followed by Tracy, and not for the first time today, Hayden found her eyes focusing on Tracy and forgetting about everything else around her.

Tracy raked a hand through her hair as she took a seat on the outdoor couch, dressed in army green skinny pants that clung to her hips, and a black tank top highlighting her bronze skin and toned arms.

The conversation moved to Charlotte who took over DJing duties, placing a Bluetooth speaker on the table beside her, smooth jazz notes surrounding them.

“Because these two didn’t want a traditional reception,” Charlotte said lifting her own glass. “And I feel like dancing, I’m putting on some music. Feel free to add to the playlist. But I think Sydney and Ada should show us how it’s done.”

Sydney held out her hand and led Ada away from the fire pit and couches to the more open area of the patio. Charlotte ducked inside to switch off some of the lights, leaving just the fire and the decorative white lights strung through the trees around them to illuminate the space.

Hayden sipped her beer, watching them sway to the music, the soft brass weaving its way through the night air, and it wasn’t long before Charlotte and Lara joined them with Lara taking the lead, resting her hand in the middle of Charlotte’s back.

Hayden was still standing and she took a sip of beer before making eye contact with Tracy as the rest of the guests got up to dance. Her first thought was that it was awkward that they were the only ones not dancing, but it didn’t take her long to realize that she actually wanted to dance with Tracy, and she was afraid that if she asked, Tracy would say no.

Tracy stood up and crossed the space, silently holding out her hand, and Hayden left her beer down, her hand moving across Tracy’s shoulder, gently brushing her hair out of the way as Tracy’s hand settled in the middle of her back.

Hayden inhaled a shaky breath as they started to move slowly to the music. It was such a soulful, relaxing piece of music that anything more than swaying wasn’t possible, and Hayden hadn’t accounted for the fact that being this close to Tracy could make her feel things, things she had no idea what to do with.

A chill chased up Hayden's spine despite the mild night and the fire pit just a few feet away. The feeling of Tracy's hand holding hers, her thumb occasionally moving lazily over her skin made her stomach somersault.

And when Hayden dared to turn her head to look at Tracy, her eyes were closed, her lips parted slightly, lost in the music, a streak of golden brown hair falling across her eye, and Hayden almost reached out to tuck it behind her ear, but in her peripheral vision she saw Lara looking in their direction, her eyes wide with surprise although she might have been trying to keep herself from smiling.

That sent Hayden's heart racing.

Because Lara knew what she'd just seen.

And Hayden's feet slowed, her mind jumping from one thought to the next.

She hadn't just looked up to Charlotte when she was filming with her. She'd had an actual real-life crush on her.

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Hayden's extremely awkward on-screen kisses with guys over the years wasn't because of the crew watching them or the director's voice booming instructions across the set.

Those feeble attempts at dating through the years weren't really because she was more focused on her career than dating.

She hadn't wanted to date.

Because she'd never been interested in any of the guys she'd been set up with.

Hayden's hand felt clammy as it slipped out of Tracy's, the music thankfully moving into a more upbeat song, and she chose that moment to get away, to give herself some space.

"Thanks," Hayden managed to say as she reached for her beer and strode across the grass in her sandals, using the light from her phone to guide her until she made it all the way down to where the ceremony was held, to where the water glistened underneath the glow of the moon.

The music was faint now, the waves drowning it out, and Hayden held onto the railing with one hand, the metal cool beneath her fingers.

Thoughts continued to bounce around her head. Was she bi? Was this just a side of herself that she hadn't realized was there?

Hayden reached behind her head, sliding each bobby pin out of her hair and into her

pocket, the tension of her updo starting to ache, and as she removed each one, she went back as far as she could remember, to school, to her friends, to her teachers.

She couldn't honestly say that she'd ever been attracted to any of her male friends, to the guy she went to prom with or her best friend's brother.

She had been drawn to a girl who'd been a year ahead of her in school, who'd gotten the lead in the play two years in a row, who had the most amazing voice and striking green eyes.

"Shit," Hayden said with a loud exhale.

How had she not realized this?

She'd just assumed the role of ally, because she'd always had gay friends, especially since she came to Los Angeles.

She knocked back what was left of her beer and set it on the ground, running her hands through her hair as she leaned her arms against the railing, her heart still pounding in her chest.

Hayden didn't even know what to think or how to feel.

Relieved?

Terrified?

Blindsided?

She didn't have much time to think about it, because when she heard footsteps behind her, she sucked in a deep breath, knowing that Lara had seen it. She'd seen the

moment that sent Hayden's head spinning. And she'd want to talk about it. She was Hayden's best friend, and she'd want to make sure that she was okay.

7

Tracy had watched Hayden walk away, mentally replaying the last few moments, wondering if she'd done something wrong.

"You should go after her," Lara had said when Charlotte had gone back to her playlist and Ada shouted out a request over the music playing.

Tracy didn't ask why. She took her time walking across the grass and finding the path that led down to the lookout.

Hayden's back was to her, the rhythmic sound of the water hitting the rocks below rose up to meet her as she got to the bottom of the property, Hayden just a few feet away.

Her blond hair was down now, full of waves, the light breeze lifting it as she stared out across the water.

"Hey," Tracy said softly, just loud enough to be heard as she closed the distance between them. "If you want to be left alone, I'll go."

Hayden turned, an eyebrow arched. "No. No, it's okay. I just needed to get some air or something," she added, her voice low.

"I just wanted to make sure you were okay." Tracy stood beside her. Something had changed, but she wasn't sure what or why. The easiness of yesterday, of spending the day in Marbella together, was gone.

“Yeah. I’m fine.” Hayden cleared her throat. “Just thinking through some things.”

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Tracy nodded, not entirely convinced, but she didn't know Hayden well enough to push her. "Okay, well, you can talk to me if you'd like to. Now or when we're back home."

"Thanks." Hayden's index finger tapped the railing impatiently before taking a deep breath. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure." Tracy waited for Hayden to continue, her heart beating a little faster, because she had no idea what Hayden wanted to ask her.

"When did you know you were gay?"

Tracy's mouth fell open. That was not what she'd been expecting. If she'd had to guess, she would have said that Hayden wanted to ask her for acting advice or find out what happened with her own career. But this? This was out of left field.

"Eighth grade," Tracy said as she got over the shock of Hayden's question. "It took me until maybe March or April to realize it, but I had a massive crush on my Spanish teacher."

Hayden's lips slid into a grin. "So, that's why you're so good at Spanish."

Tracy returned her smile. "Looking back, I have no idea why it wasn't better. I think I was too focused on her and not on what she was saying. I had it so bad," she said with a laugh. "It took me months to realize why I wanted to impress her so much or why bumping into her unexpectedly in the hallway gave my mood such a boost."

“Wow. So you were really young.”

Tracy shrugged. “Yeah. I guess. Things weren’t as easy back then. I didn’t officially come out to my friends until I was in my early twenties.”

“When you’d left acting?”

Tracy pursed her lips. That was her own fault for getting into her career. “Yeah.”

Hayden shook her head. “Did you have any idea that Charlotte or Ada or Kerri were queer too?”

Tracy opened and closed her mouth, her mind temporarily short-circuited by a word that for so long had been a slur. “Kerri had told us. But Ada or Charlotte? I had no idea. Looking back, I think that’s why we got along so well, why there was this bond between us.”

“Is that why you quit acting?”

Tracy bit the inside of her cheek. “It’s kind of related but not really.”

Hayden searched her eyes. “I feel like I shouldn’t ask you what you mean by that.”

Tracy looked away, the water shimmering beneath the moonlight. “It was a strange time in my life.” Even all these years later, her heart raced thinking about those few months.

“Okay. I’ll say the same thing to you.” Hayden turned to face her. “You can talk to me if you want to. Now. When we get back home.”

Tracy ran a hand through her hair. “I had an affair with one of the producers on the

show.” She had a sense that if she opened up to Hayden, then maybe, with time, Hayden would feel like she could tell her whatever was on her mind. “I was head over heels. For the first time, really. I wouldn’t count that crush on my Spanish teacher as anything serious. This was my first relationship with someone, and it shouldn’t have happened.”

“Because you were working together?”

Tracy nodded. “She was in a position of power. She was twelve years older than me. And she was married. To a man.”

“Oh shit.”

“Yeah.” Tracy let out a heavy sigh. “It just kind of happened. I couldn’t even say who pursued who. But it was thrilling. Heartbreaking. Every kind of emotion. And I somehow thought we were going to end up together. That all the sneaking around we did wouldn’t last for long.”

“She was going to leave her husband?”

“That’s what she told me,” Tracy said, hearing the sadness in her own voice all these years later. “Maybe I was naive to believe her, but it never happened. Her husband found out about us and threatened to out her to her boss.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah. And somewhat understandably, she chose her career over me.” Saying it all these years later still stung, but she had to believe that she was better off. “I was devastated. The show ended, for other reasons, but I don’t know how I would have come back the following season with her still there.”

Hayden's eyes never left hers, waiting for her to continue.

“I took a few weeks off, auditioned for other roles, and I did have some small parts here and there, but my heart wasn't in it anymore. I drank way too much. I was famous then, easily recognizable. So, I went out. A lot. Got great seats at games. But anytime I thought about getting caught up in acting again, I could never allow myself to let go. Not fully. And that made for some pretty shitty performances. Add to it that I was constantly hungover.” Tracy shrugged. “So, I quit acting.”

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“I’m sorry,” Hayden said quietly. “I had no idea.”

“No one does. I think Charlotte knows. I never talked to her about it, but she saw us arguing in the hallway once, so caught up in the moment that we forgot that someone might overhear us. But Charlotte never said anything, and I hadn’t come out yet. I wasn’t ready. I think that was one of the many problems with that whole situation. We were so insulated from everyone and everything. Our affair couldn’t affect the show. It couldn’t get out because it might ruin my career, and it would have definitely ruined her marriage. She couldn’t be seen having a relationship with one of the actors. It was such a crazy time when I think back on it now.”

“And you went through it alone?”

Tracy met her eyes. “Yeah.”

“Thank you for telling me.” Hayden exhaled softly. “I know we don’t know each other that well, but I’m glad that you felt that you could trust me with that.”

Tracy nodded. “I’m not sure why I did, but somehow, even after all these years, saying it out loud... It’s kind of like I’ve released it. Like I had it locked away in the back of my mind, always threatening to come out. That’s why Lara’s attempt to get me back into acting with that surfing movie just... I couldn’t even contemplate it. I’m done acting. And it’s not because of her, although she is still in the business, and our paths would cross again. But it’s more that... That part of my life is over.”

“I get that.” Hayden looked up towards the house. “We should probably get back.”

“Yeah.”

Hayden bent to pick up her empty beer bottle. “I noticed you don’t drink. Not even the champagne.”

“I don’t think I had a problem, but I just associate alcohol with that time in my life. If I had a glass of wine now... It’d take me right back.”

Tracy walked alongside Hayden, a lightness in her step, a weight lifted from her shoulders. She did still wonder what was going on with Hayden, but that would have to wait for another day.

8

Hayden’s eyes fluttered open, and she gave up on sleeping, her eyes focusing on the screen in front of her, the map showing their plane making its way over the United States. She should be exhausted after all the traveling, but she still couldn’t sleep.

She glanced over at Lara who was typing away on her phone, the hum of the plane drowning out the conversations going on around them.

Hayden wore a baseball cap and no makeup, just in case someone might recognize her, but so far, no one had. She exhaled, a different kind of tiredness setting in. She was going back to reality, those relaxing days in Spain already fading into the distance.

She had an audition to go to, one that she really wanted. It would easily be her biggest job yet. One of four lead characters in a sci-fi series. It would be unlike anything she’d ever done before, with more action scenes, more digital effects. It would be a challenge, but it would also be a nice payday, and she’d love to stop worrying about paying rent each month.

Hayden looked over her shoulder, the couple behind them fast asleep, the young boy sitting in the middle glued to the screen in his hands.

“Lara?”

“Hm?” Lara didn’t look up from her phone for a few seconds, still typing. “Yeah?”

“I’m not sure that I’m straight,” Hayden said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Lara tore her eyes away from the screen, dropping her phone in her lap, blinking at her.

“You don’t seem shocked,” Hayden said slowly when Lara just stared at her.

“Where’s this coming from?”

Hayden shrugged. “I never really thought about it. I mean, I’ve always had gay friends. There were always rumors about me and some guy I was working with, and I’ve never really dated anyone for more than a few weeks. I always ran. And now I think I know why.”

“We shouldn’t be talking about this here,” Lara said, her voice low. “Just in case.” She gave Hayden’s forearm a squeeze. “Come back to mine when we land?”

“Yeah.” Hayden swallowed, her heart racing. She’d said it out loud, and the world hadn’t ended. She felt like she’d said something honest instead of the usual way she had to dodge questions from the media about her personal life and even Lara.

Hayden had no reason to hide who she was. She just hadn’t known who that was.

And for some reason, those few days in Spain seemed to give her the answers she

hadn't even realized she was looking for.

* * *

Hayden left her suitcase and backpack inside the door to Lara and Charlotte's home. She was tired now, but she wanted to have this conversation with Lara more than she wanted to sleep.

“Drink?” Lara asked.

“Just water.”

They sat down in the living room, and Lara handed her a bottle of water.

“So,” Lara said. “You said that I wasn’t surprised.”

“Yeah.”

“I would have been if you told me a month ago. Well, maybe not. Charlotte always thought you were gay, but I could see the way you looked at Tracy these last few days. More than once. And it was so subtle that I had to question whether I was seeing things, but then when I saw you two dancing... It seemed kind of obvious. Are you two dating or thinking about it? I mean, at least you live in the same place.”

“What?” Hayden nearly choked on her water. “Dating?”

“Yeah. Aren’t you two a thing now? I thought that’s why you were telling me.”

“No. I’m telling you because I’m trying to figure out who I am.” Hayden’s heart skipped a beat. If it was so obvious, had Tracy seen it too? Is that why they hadn’t spent as much time together in the last few days?

Hayden thought that maybe Tracy had been avoiding her, but she’d just assumed it was because of everything Tracy had told her.

“Hayden,” Lara said softly. “What’s going on?”

“Charlotte thought I was gay?” Hayden asked, wiping her sweaty palms over her jeans. Could everyone see it? How had she not?

“Her gaydar is pretty decent, and she thought you might have had a crush on her when you two were working together.”

“Oh my god.” Hayden covered her face with her hands.

“Hey. No. Not like in an annoying way. She was flattered. Honestly.”

“I can’t believe this.” Hayden blew out a breath.

“Forget about Charlotte. What’s going on with you? Are you just realizing all this now? You almost seemed like you had an epiphany on the plane now that I think about it.”

Hayden leaned back against the couch. “I honestly had no idea until I was dancing with Tracy. I don’t know how to describe it. Something just changed. I was so aware of how close we were, of how romantic it felt in that moment, and then I just got overwhelmed. I had to get away. But we had a good talk when Tracy found me a few minutes later.”

“About how you felt?”

“No. Not about me at all, actually. It was about her.”

“So, wait,” Lara said, her eyebrows furrowing. “Nothing happened between you two? No confessions?”

“No.” Hayden shook her head. She wasn’t even sure how to feel about that. Yes, she found Tracy attractive. Extremely attractive, but she didn’t think she had a chance of dating someone like her. She also doubted that Tracy had any feelings toward her whatsoever.

“But you are into her?”

Hayden sighed. “Yeah. I mean, I haven’t seen much of her since then. And now I probably won’t until you guys or Ada and Sydney have some kind of dinner party or something. I don’t know. I said, I’d get in touch about surfing lessons.”

“You should. It’ll be good for you on every level. You can see if there’s something there, between you two, and there’s just something about surfing that I think, if you give it a chance, you might love.”

“I will definitely text her. This’ll be the second time that I’ve said that I would, so I really do need to.”

“So,” Lara said, playfully shoving her shoulder. “You’re one of us?”

Hayden smiled. “I’m very late to the party, but yes. I am. I spent the whole flight thinking about it. That’s why I blurted it out like that. I just couldn’t keep it in any longer. And once I said it... There was no more ‘I think.’ I know. And yes, looking back, I did have a crush on your girlfriend. Past tense, though. I promise. So, maybe I’ve got that older woman problem too.”

“Oh, it’s not a problem,” Lara said with a grin. “Not even close.”

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Tracy put her back to the sun as she watched Hayden try to pop up from the surfboard for the first time, her wetsuit covered in sand.

Hayden landed on her feet, but she'd made normal mistakes for a beginner, using her knees rather than her arms to get off the board.

"That felt really clunky," Hayden said, a few strands of hair slipping from her messy bun as she held out her arms to balance herself.

"And it will for a while. That's why we're out here on the sand." Tracy got down on her board and talked her through what she needed to improve on. "See how I used my arms? That's where we need to get to. When you've got it down on the sand, we'll jump right in and get you catching some real waves."

"Yeah? That soon?"

Tracy nodded, motioning for Hayden to give it another try. "Once you have the basics down, it's better to get out there before you start overthinking it."

They'd spent almost two hours together this afternoon, going through all the health and safety before doing some warm up exercises and learning how to paddle.

"Better," Tracy said as Hayden looked smoother this time as she popped up. "Do another one like that and try to position your feet a little more like this," Tracy said, showing her the proper stance, pointing down to her back foot. "Then you'll have it."

They spent another fifteen minutes getting Hayden to nail her pop up and get the

position of her feet down.

“Tired?” Tracy asked with a smile.

“Exhausted, and that’s before even getting in the water.”

“That’s normal. It’s all new. When we have our next lesson, you’ll be out in the water, and the adrenaline will take over. I know today was long and a bit monotonous, but it’s crucial to get the fundamentals down. You don’t want to get out there without having the pop up down. And you do. Today was good.”

“Thanks,” Hayden said with what sounded like a happy sigh. “And thanks for doing this on such short notice. I have that audition I was telling you about in Spain tomorrow, and I’m driving myself crazy with it. I thought something like this might help me use some of that nervous energy and take my mind off tomorrow.”

“No problem. And did it?” Tracy asked, bending to pick up her board and tuck it under her arm.

“Yeah. It really did. I feel tired, but in a good way. Like I might actually sleep tonight, even if I’ve never been this nervous the night before an audition.”

“Will you let me know how it goes?”

“Yeah.” Hayden glanced over at her as their feet sunk in the sand, a smile curving her lips, almost as if she was surprised that Tracy had asked.

After they got their boards put away and Tracy introduced her to a few members of her team, Hayden got out of her wetsuit. “I think I’m going to go for a swim while I’m here and dressed for it,” she said looking down at her bikini.

“Mind if I join you?” Tracy asked. “I’m rarely out there without a board. And it’s going to be a little chilly,” she said. “That’s why I suggested the wetsuit in case we got out there today.”

“No. I know. But I think I need it. I live so close to the ocean, and I never seem to make the time to actually go swimming. I feel like I could do with a mental test like that. Pushing through. For tomorrow, I mean.”

Tracy never liked to give acting advice, because she had so little experience, but as they strode through the sand, she tried to reassure Hayden. “Just be yourself tomorrow. Don’t let the size of the role change anything. There’s a reason you’ve gotten every part that you have so far. You did something that caught the attention of the casting director.”

They reached the tide, letting it wash over their feet as they kept walking.

“Yeah. I know I’m overthinking it.” Hayden sucked in a breath as a wave crashed into her legs. “Maybe that is cold.”

Tracy kept going, knowing that if she stopped walking, she’d get too cold. “Come on. Once you get in, you won’t feel it.” She took another few steps before diving in, moving her hands through the water as she came to the surface, another wave crashing into her as she stood up.

She pushed her hair away from her face, unable to miss the way Hayden was looking at her, as if she was starstruck almost, but Tracy knew that wasn’t the case, so...

Tracy looked away before Hayden could see that Tracy had noticed, but she couldn’t unsee it.

Hayden had looked at her with lust. There was no other way to describe it. Some

mixture of lust and awe.

Tracy shook that thought away. Maybe that was entirely innocent, and maybe Hayden was just admiring her figure. Maybe Tracy wanted Hayden to look at her like that, and maybe she really did need to put herself out there again and think about dating if this was where her mind was going.

A wave came out of nowhere, barreling into her, nearly knocking her off her feet, bringing her back to her senses and forgetting all about what she thought she saw.

Hayden had jumped the wave, diving in after it had gone by and swimming out a little further.

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Tracy swam out to her, a hint of a smile on her lips as she thought about how ridiculous it would be for someone like Hayden to be interested in her. She was straight.

Tracy floated on her back between waves, letting the water move her, the sun's warm rays hitting her cold skin.

Her mantra had always been the same whether it was dating or acting. There was more to life. She'd had enough bad experiences when it came to both, and while she knew she was done with acting, she probably should come to terms with the idea of being done with dating.

10

Hayden had been on such a high after her audition, that as soon as she called Lara, the next person she wanted to tell was Tracy. She'd sent her a text, thanking her for the lesson and letting her know that she thought the audition had gone well.

And Tracy had responded a few hours later, inviting her to her house if it wasn't too short notice.

Now, Hayden was standing outside her front door, the beach house painted a slate gray, the sounds of the ocean greeting her as soon as she stepped out of her car.

She didn't even have anything to celebrate, not yet anyway, but for some reason she felt like today had been a shift. It might have something to do with her recent discovery, and she'd stayed up later than she'd intended to last night, writing

everything that was swirling around in her head onto paper.

The habit she'd picked up to try and improve her acting skills, getting her worries down and out of her head had turned out to be exactly what she needed right now at this point in her life.

Hayden had hesitated to write it last night, her pen hovering over the page, even after filling three pages with her thoughts, but once she did write it down, it was like a weight had been lifted off her shoulders, and as she stared at the words, she'd never known anything to be more true about herself. It was so plain to see.

I'm gay.

She spent another page writing the next thing down that had been bothering her, almost as much as the audition, and that was regret and the fear that she'd wasted all this time.

Hayden worked with people of all ages, and she always thought she had a healthy relationship with her own age, despite what this business can do to people, making them feel old once they hit forty, specifically women.

But this was the first time that Hayden felt like she was old. Thirty-three.

She was thirty-three, and she'd never even kissed another woman.

That thought made her shut her black journal, tucking it away on the bookshelf opposite her bed. If she hadn't had the audition in the morning, she might have been brave enough to tackle that thought, but she didn't trust herself not to have a complete breakdown.

It was such a strange mix of emotion, so much of it happy. She knew who she was

now, and it filled in a lot of gaps in her life, places where she'd felt like such an outsider, like in high school when all her friends were boy crazy and she had zero interest in any of that, throwing herself into that year's school play instead.

But in the last few days, that happiness had started to fade, and the realization that she was thirty-three and not only had she not had any meaningful relationship, she didn't even have a career that she could at least justify the time and energy she'd put into it instead of her personal life.

Not that she thought she would have realized she was interested in women any sooner.

But it would have made it a little easier to swallow if she was getting the kinds of roles that she wanted and thought she deserved.

The door swung open, almost startling her, even though she'd knocked a few seconds ago. She'd been so lost in her own thoughts that she'd forgotten where she was.

"Hey," Tracy said with a smile. "Come in."

"Hi." Hayden couldn't stop herself from taking in Tracy's white shorts and navy tank top, her skin perfectly tanned, her hair falling across her shoulders in loose waves.

And then Hayden remembered what Lara had said, how she'd seen the way that Hayden had looked at Tracy, and she snapped herself out of it, hoping that Tracy hadn't noticed.

"Your house is beautiful," Hayden said as Tracy brought her down the short hallway and out into the spacious living and kitchen area with rustic wood floors. The color palette was beach-inspired, a mixture of tans and blues with plenty of white. Huge glass windows looked out at the sea, taking up nearly the entire wall. "And the

view...” Hayden found herself being drawn to it.

“It’s even better outside,” Tracy said, opening a white door with glass windows.

The sun was disappearing into the ocean as Hayden followed her out onto the deck. The water was right there, just a few feet away, and although Tracy had neighbors, there was a wooden privacy wall painted white to separate the decks. Two loungers were on the left side and a jacuzzi on the right.

“I got lucky with this place,” Tracy said, joining Hayden at the wooden railing. “I’d never be able to afford it now. But after everything that happened, I still had enough money in the bank to put a down payment on the house and swallowed my pride and got a steady job which allowed me to get a mortgage and own a home like this.”

“This view is just... It’s so peaceful out here.”

Tracy nodded, the gentle breeze ruffling her hair. “Occasionally, I think about selling. Not seriously. But I know I could get probably five million for this property. And then I’d be set for life. Except that I love it here, and I’d never get another place like this, right on the coast, and still have something left over. So, I ignore the offers that come through every few years.”

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“And this is just a few minutes away from your surf school,” Hayden said, turning to meet Tracy’s eyes.

“Yeah. There’s that too.”

“Oh, I meant to ask you,” Hayden said, her cheeks burning as she remembered waking up in the middle of the night last night with this thought. “I never paid you for that lesson or the next one. How does it work? Do you want me to book ten or twelve with you and pay in advance?”

Hayden didn’t really have the money for surfing lessons, but Lara had raved about them, so she just figured she could cut down on eating out for a few weeks. She had some savings she could use if she had to.

Tracy’s eyebrows furrowed. “Lara told me she’d pick up the tab if you ever started taking lessons.”

“What?”

“Yeah. She said it on maybe her second or third lesson. She’d said you wanted to join her, but your schedule was too busy at the time. Probably when you were right in the middle of filming. So, she said, if you ever found the time, to send her the bill. Is that okay?”

Hayden looked out across the ocean, the sky a beautiful canvas of pinks and purples. “Yeah. I had no idea.”

“You two are close though, right?”

“I’d call her my best friend, but she’s also my agent, so it is a little tricky at times. More so because we’re getting to the point now where we both would have thought that I’d have achieve more, if that makes sense?”

“But you’re confident about today?”

“Yes.” Hayden breathed in the salty sea air. “Yeah. I’ve honestly never walked out of an audition feeling like that, like I couldn’t have possibly done anymore. It clicked. It felt like I was meant for that role.”

“Did they say how long it would be before you heard back?”

Hayden exhaled. “Soon. Some day this week. They’re anxious to get started, and since it’s a smaller production, there’s more control, you know, less hoops to jump through. So, it makes it even more... Stressful isn’t the right word. But knowing that I’ll find out any day this week has me on edge. In a good way.”

“Tell me about the show or the part you auditioned for.” Tracy motioned towards the loungers. “And we can watch the sunset.”

Tracy went inside to get them something to drink, coming back with non-alcoholic cocktails when Hayden said she didn’t mind what she had, and Hayden told her what she knew about the show and her potential character with the sounds of the waves hitting the shore beneath them and the sunlight fading until the string lights hanging from the railing came on.

Hayden already knew that she was attracted to Tracy, but it was getting harder and harder to ignore now that she was comfortable with who she was. Thankfully, her crush on Charlotte had been fleeting, because that would have been extremely

awkward, but this almost magnetic pull she felt with Tracy was safe.

Hayden didn't think she had a chance with her, and it was just so easy to be around her, that Hayden could accept the friendship that was growing between them without feeling like she was missing out on anything more.

11

Tracy came back outside with a blanket, pushing the lounge chairs together while Hayden was on the phone, pacing the other side of the deck. She didn't want to eavesdrop, but there was a lot of silence on Hayden's part, and for some reason, Tracy's senses were heightened, sure that there was bad news on the other end of the phone.

Tracy was about to slip back inside when Hayden put her phone in her back pocket of her jeans, gripping the railing with both hands as if she might fall over.

Tracy strode over, ready to pull Hayden into a hug, almost certain that someone had died, but Hayden raked a hand through her hair, an infectious grin on her lips.

"I got it," Hayden said, her eyes almost sparkling in the dim light. "I got the part."

"What?"

It took Tracy a second to register that there was nothing to worry about, and she didn't think. She just wrapped her arms around Hayden's waist and lifted her off the ground, spinning her with Hayden's hand on her neck, their bodies pressed together until Tracy put her down.

Tracy wanted to congratulate her, to tell her how happy she was for her, but when Hayden's feet hit the wood, they were still standing so close together, Hayden

beaming with excitement and probably relief too.

Neither of them spoke, and their eyes locked in an intense daze, both of them smiling, and before Tracy even knew what happened, Hayden's warm hand was on her cheek, bringing their lips together.

Tracy sighed into the kiss, too stunned to think or move, her hands still resting on Hayden's hips as their lips parted, and Tracy kissed her back, the sensation of being wanted, of having someone's body pressed against her own, their lips craving hers so foreign to her at this point in her life that all she could do was give in and match that passion no matter how surprising this situation was.

Hayden's fingers were splayed across her cheek, her lips hungrily kissing Tracy, and both of them moaned when their tongues met for the first time, a wave of heat and desire washing over Tracy, still unwilling to process why this was happening, too caught up in the moment to allow herself to question it.

Tracy's hand slid higher, up along Hayden's ribs, staying outside her shirt, gripping the fabric as they deepened the kiss. When Hayden's fingers grazed her scalp, combing through her hair, Tracy could feel it everywhere, her skin tingling.

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Finally, her senses caught up with her, and Tracy broke the kiss, taking a step back as she took a deep breath, her eyes searching Hayden's.

“What just happened?” Tracy breathed. “I thought you were straight.”

Hayden stared at her, her cheeks flushed. “I'm not.”

Tracy struggled to put her confusion into words. “I don't—”

“It's new,” Hayden said wrapping her arms around herself as she spoke. “I didn't know. I only told Lara on the flight back from Spain.”

“Okay,” Tracy said, her mind still catching up with this information. So, she hadn't been seeing things when she thought Hayden had checked her out yesterday. “When did you know or how did you? If you don't mind me asking.”

Hayden's lips slid into an easy smile, and she shook her head slightly as she spoke. “I don't know if I should say.” She sighed, that smile still lingering. “But I guess after that, there's no point pretending. I don't know how it took me so long to realize. But do you remember when we were dancing? Outside by the fire pit?”

Tracy nodded, the memory coming back to her in a flash. She remembered exactly what it felt like to have Hayden so close, and she could still recall the sweet scent of her perfume.

“Something happened in that moment,” Hayden said softly. “It just felt... Good. Too good. Being in your arms like that, swaying to the music. It just hit me. The way I felt

in that moment... It was something that I'd never really felt before, and then it didn't take me long to realize what that actually meant, which was why I practically ran away. I just had to think, to get away for a few minutes."

Tracy shook her head. "And we ended up talking about me." She still couldn't believe that she'd opened up to Hayden like that, and now she felt almost embarrassed, because they should have been talking about her.

"No, it was actually perfect," Hayden said. "I wasn't in anyway able to talk about it then. And I'm glad I didn't, because I needed the last week to really process it."

"I had no idea," Tracy said still in disbelief.

"I'm sorry for just kissing you. I know you probably don't think of me like that... You were just happy for me, and I kind of ruined it I guess by jumping on you."

"I kissed you back." Tracy pursed her lips. "And I only thought the same thing about you yesterday. I thought I saw you checking me out, when we went swimming, and I dismissed it, because I thought there was no way that you would be interested in me."

"Are you kidding?"

"No."

"I seem incapable of being discreet around you," Hayden said with a chuckle.

"What do you mean?" Tracy asked, putting her arm on the railing as she looked out at the water, glistening in the moonlight.

"When I told Lara... She said she saw the way I'd been looking at you. And I thought there was no way that you could have noticed me yesterday. I really hadn't meant to

do that, to check you out, but I'd never seen you in a bikini before, and..." Hayden ran her hand through her hair as she looked away. "So, Lara assumed we were seeing each other. Which I told her we weren't. That nothing had happened."

"I'm sure Charlotte knew too." She'd always been the most observant of them, always the first to pick up on something that just about everyone else missed.

"Well, apparently, she thought I was gay from when we worked together."

"Oh yeah?" Tracy asked with a smile.

"I do remember telling Lara that I'd have a crush on her even though I was straight, and I somehow just kept going with that assumption that I was straight. That surely, I would know something like that about myself at this point. I feel so late to all of this."

"Please don't tell me you feel old, because I'll have to ask you to leave." Tracy reached for Hayden's hand, gently tugging her closer. "And I really don't want you to."

"Good. I don't want to either."

"So, you'd really be asking Charlotte out if she was single, wouldn't you?"

Hayden shook her head. "No. Honestly. It really was more about admiration than attraction, but the attraction part did exist. It just took me a long time to accept it. But no, not anymore, thankfully. That would be the end of my friendship with both of them, with Lara especially. And it turns out, I seem to have an even bigger crush on one of Charlotte's friends. I think she's single though, so maybe it's not that bad?"

Tracy bit back a laugh. "Can I assume you're talking about me?"

“Yes.” Hayden smiled. “But I would completely understand if you weren’t interested. And I think we can still be friends if that’s the case.”

“Well, it’s not.” Tracy knew she shouldn’t. But she kissed her anyway, leaning in, slowly brushing her lips over Hayden’s, savoring the softness of them, the way they seemed to fit so perfectly against her own. “That’s why you asked me,” Tracy murmured between kisses, without fully pulling away. “After I found you, after that dance.” She leaned back far enough to meet Hayden’s eyes. “You asked me when I knew I was gay. I should have realized why you were asking.”

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Hayden shook her head. “I wasn’t ready to say it then. And even though I can talk about it now, there’s other things I’d rather be doing.”

Hayden’s hand slipped behind her neck, pulling her in to a heart-stopping kiss. There was no shyness, no uncertainty. Just desire. And Tracy could barely remember what it felt like to have someone want her like this.

Tracy sighed into the kiss, her hand sliding underneath Hayden’s top this time, feeling the muscles beneath Hayden’s skin jump as her hand glided up along her ribs.

Tracy could feel Hayden shudder against her when her thumb grazed over the thin fabric of Hayden’s bra, and it struck Tracy in that moment that Hayden had never done this before. Not with a woman anyway.

Tracy’s hand moved to Hayden’s lower back, kissing her for a few more seconds before pulling away, knowing that they needed to take this slow.

“What just happened?” Hayden asked, her eyes fluttering open as she met Tracy’s eyes.

Tracy wet her lips, deciding it was better to be honest with her than to make up some excuse. “It hit me that, you know, this is all new to you. That you’ve probably never slept with a woman. I just didn’t want to rush into anything or...”

Hayden gave her a half-smile. “That’s really sweet, and I...” She exhaled. “I really wanted to say that I was fine. That I know what I want. And while I definitely do. Maybe, you’re right. Maybe, we shouldn’t rush into anything.”

“Yeah.” Tracy brushed a piece of hair away from Hayden’s eyes.

“I should probably call Lara. Give her the good news.”

“Your news.” Tracy laughed softly. “Would that have happened without that phone call?”

“I’d like to think that I would have found the courage,” Hayden said, but then she shook her head. “Although I doubt that it would have happened tonight.” She leaned in to kiss Tracy again, taking her time. “I should go.”

Tracy reached for her hand, interlacing their fingers while she kissed her once more.

“I’ll show myself out.” Hayden’s hand slipped away, and Tracy watched her go, still not quite believing everything that had happened today.

12

Hayden now understood why Lara raved about surfing, and it was only her third lesson. She’d fallen off the board more times than she could count, but Tracy was so encouraging, and Hayden felt more determined than she had in years when it came to learning something new.

She caught one wave for probably all of two seconds, but it felt like so much more than that. She came up from beneath the water, Tracy paddling over on her own board.

Neither of them wore a wetsuit today, the temperatures outside a little warmer, although the water was still chilly, but Hayden liked challenging herself to handle the cold.

Hayden treaded water, the afternoon sun warm against her skin, and between the successful audition and the way Tracy was looking at her right now, with that gorgeous smile, Hayden thought she had to be dreaming, that this was all a little too good to be true.

After her second lesson, she'd gone home, but Tracy had invited her out to dinner that same night, saying that it wouldn't be long before they couldn't, that after this new show she'd be too famous. Hayden wasn't so sure, but she was more than happy to go out with Tracy, although she was afraid to ask if it was a date.

And then Tracy drove her home. Hayden had wanted to invite her in, but they'd agreed to take things slow, and she was kind of embarrassed that she shared a house with another actress a few years younger than her.

Tracy had kissed her goodnight, but the kiss wasn't quick or fleeting, neither of them willing to be the one to end it, and Hayden could finally see what all the fuss was about, how the softness of Tracy's lips against her own could make every single cell in her body hum with desire.

Hayden might be inexperienced, but she knew how much she wanted Tracy, and if the way they kissed was anything to go by, she knew she shouldn't be nervous about when they did decide to sleep together. She probably would still be, but there was a part of her that felt so at ease with Tracy that she was confident that this chemistry would carry over.

"You did it," Tracy said with a grin, bringing Hayden back to the present moment.

Hayden rested her hand on Tracy's leg once she was close enough, and Tracy leaned down, brushing her lips across Hayden's, somehow balancing herself on the board.

"You were right about the adrenaline," Hayden said as she eased away, floating

towards her board and taking a few attempts to get back up on it. “But I feel like I should be better at that considering how often I fall.”

“You’re doing really well,” Tracy said with a smile. “I mean it. Surfing is fucking hard. For your third lesson, you’re kicking ass. Seriously.”

“I’m afraid I’m not going to have time for this when I start filming.” Hayden wasn’t sure if Tracy had heard her, but it was something that had kept her up last night. She was worried that as much as she wanted to learn how to surf, and much more importantly, get to know Tracy, to potentially start something with her, the timing wasn’t great.

“We’ll find the time.” Tracy held her gaze. “Come on. Let’s catch a few more before we call it a day.”

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Tracy held the flashlight out in front of her, the light dancing across the dirt path. “We’re nearly there.” Tracy took a breather as they got to the harder part of the trail, glancing up at the night sky, the endless sea of stars above her reminding her why this hike was worth it.

“I thought I was in better shape than this,” Hayden said, but Tracy could hear the smile in her voice without looking back as they kept walking, following the path as it narrowed, and then they were at the lookout point, the path widening again, a few boulders surrounding a picnic table marking the spot that Tracy always came back to.

“Wow.”

Tracy turned to see Hayden looking up at the sky. “I have to come up here a few times a year to remember what the stars look like.”

“This is amazing.”

The dirt and twigs crunched beneath their feet as they went over to the picnic table, and Tracy took a blanket out of her backpack and spread it out across the table.

“Is this where you bring all your women?” Hayden asked as she climbed up, and in the dim light from their flashlights, Tracy caught the smirk on her lips.

“All my women? Did you forget the part where I said I’m just as out of practice as you?”

“No, and you know that’s not true,” Hayden said softly.

Tracy got comfortable beside her, both of them on their backs looking up at the huge expanse, the specs of lights twinkling, some brighter than others.

Tracy found her hand, interlacing their fingers. They'd been keeping things light between them when it came to talking about sleeping together. It was a strange balance that Tracy couldn't remember ever trying to maneuver, but she knew she had to get it right. She was all for taking things slow, and making sure that there was more to this than a growing friendship, although with each passing day, Tracy could feel herself falling, feel herself looking forward to the next time she'd get to see Hayden.

"So, who do you normally bring up here then if it's not all your women?" Hayden asked.

"Just me. I used to come with Kerri if she could find the time. She was the one who brought me here for the first time, when the show ended, and there was this kind of feeling in the air that things weren't going to be the same, that we wouldn't be spending nearly as much time together anymore. And we spent hours up here, talking, not talking. Just trying to take it all in."

"Did you see that?" Hayden asked, pointing up to the right. "Was that a shooting star?"

"Yeah. Tonight's the peak of the Lyrid meteor shower."

Tracy could feel Hayden turning beside her, and she was half sitting up as she spoke. "What? You planned this?"

Tracy nodded. "That's why I wanted to come this late. The best show can sometimes be towards dawn. If you're up for it."

“Yeah.” Hayden got comfortable again, leaving no space between them this time as they stared up at the sky, and Tracy saw a burst of light coming from the left.

Tracy knew things would change in a few weeks, when Hayden started filming, but she felt really good about where they were. She’d take things slow for as long as Hayden wanted or needed, but the tension was definitely building, their kisses longer, more intense, and even thinking about falling into bed with Hayden sent a shiver up her spine, her heart beating a little faster whenever her imagination went there.

14

Hayden thanked Lara for cooking dinner as she helped Ada clear the table. Tracy’s hand brushed over the small of her back as they passed each other coming in and out of kitchen while Charlotte opened another bottle of wine and poured everyone glasses except Lara and Hayden who were driving, and Tracy.

“Okay,” Lara said once they were all in the living room. “I know this was a welcome home party for Ada and Syd, which it definitely still is.”

“But,” Sydney said joining Lara who was standing in front of the coffee table, everyone’s attention on them. “Congratulations are in order.”

“Hayden,” Lara said. “You deserve this show, and I know it’s the first of many meaningful projects in your future.”

Sydney lifted her glass. “To Hayden getting behind her first paywall!”

Hayden could feel the heat radiating from her as they all congratulated her. She had not been expecting any kind of fuss, but Lara had been acting kind of weird when Hayden had said she might not make it tonight.

Charlotte sat down beside her on the couch and gave her hand a squeeze. “Sorry.”

“Thanks guys,” Hayden said. Her phone buzzed in her pocket, and she ignored it as she got up to hug Lara. “And thank you for getting me that audition. I know you called in a favor even if you won’t say it.”

“That’s what agents are for,” Lara said with a smile.

Hayden’s phone kept vibrating in her pocket, and she couldn’t ignore it anymore. As she slid her phone out of her pocket, Tracy’s started pinging too. Hayden’s eyes moved to her before she even looked down at her own phone, Tracy’s expression unreadable as she checked hers.

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“Oh,” Lara said, bumping her hip. “That didn’t take long. You’re trending.”

“Why?” Hayden asked as she saw all of the alerts and mentions waiting for her on just about every social media app.

“Not only are you joining a cast of well-established actors for a new sci-fi drama,” Lara said, reading from her phone, “But you’re also getting lessons from a renowned surfing instructor, because a biopic is in the works—”

Hayden struggled to read through the comments that were flying in while Lara read some headline, her eyes drawn to the photo of Tracy and her on the beach, walking towards the shore, surfboards tucked under their arms.

Charlotte wiped a hand across her face. “Lara, what did you do?”

Ada looked up at them from where she was sitting. “Did you fund this project or something, Lara? I’ve never seen someone work so hard to find an actress for a movie. Seriously. Me, then Charlotte, then Tracy, and now you’re feeding the press this rumor judging by the look of absolute disbelief on Hayden’s face?”

Charlotte pushed herself off the couch, holding out her phone to show Lara what she was reading before she could answer Ada. Then Charlotte looked at Tracy. “I assume this isn’t true.”

Hayden felt as shocked and disorientated as Tracy looked.

Lara exhaled. “Look, this might not have been the best way to get the idea of Tracy

and Hayden taking this movie on together out there, but it's fucking genius. I drove down to the beach to see how Hayden was doing with her lessons, and once I saw it, I couldn't unsee it. It's not that you two look alike, it was just... Seeing you side by side, walking along the sand. Tracy was always perfect for the part, but Hayden? If this movie was split into her early surfing career, you would be the woman for it. And that would take the pressure of Tracy. It wouldn't even have to be a fifty-fifty split. They only wanted one actress, but two is so much better. I know if the studio sees this—"

Tracy didn't say anything. She just grabbed her bag and left the room while Lara was mid-sentence, the door slamming in the distance.

Hayden shook her head in disbelief. "Lara..." She didn't even know what to say. Lara wouldn't know what Tracy had told her about why she'd stopped acting, but Lara had asked Tracy about this movie months ago, and she'd declined. Hayden remembered how disappointed Lara had been, but she should have left it at that.

Charlotte sighed. "Lara, what is the story with this movie? I told you to drop it when it came to trying to get Tracy involved."

Lara pressed her lips together. "Fuck it." She blew out a breath. "I told her I wouldn't let anyone know, but if it's just you guys... It's Kerri's screenplay."

Charlotte groaned and Ada's mouth fell open.

Lara put her phone away, her hands on her hips now. "And she wrote it when I met Tracy for the first-time last year, after you all reconnected, and she found out what Tracy was doing now. Right around that time, she heard about this story and read everything she could about this woman and her historic career, and that's when Kerri started writing the script, completely inspired. And she wrote it with Tracy in mind."

“When is she going to stop doing that?” Charlotte asked. “Writing parts for her friends. It just doesn’t work.”

“I wanted to say yes,” Ada said softly. “For Dreaming of Home. It was just bad timing.”

“I should go,” Hayden said, her mind all over the place. “Thank you, for this evening.” Lara had the right intentions; she just had no idea that pushing Tracy and blindsiding her like that was not the way to go. Hayden felt a little betrayed too, but she’d deal with that another day.

Hayden said her goodbyes, and then she was driving to Tracy’s, hoping that she wasn’t too upset, but her photo was out there, all over the internet, and Hayden needed to tell her that this was Kerri’s screenplay.

Hayden didn’t want to defend Lara completely, because what she did was wrong, but that bit of information did add some context to her almost desperation to get Tracy involved.

15

Tracy was unlocking her door when she heard a car pull up behind hers, blocking her in. She was about to tell them to keep going, that they couldn’t park there, but it was Hayden who got out of the car. In the dark, Tracy hadn’t recognized it.

Tracy had taken the longer way home, needing the drive to calm herself down, because she knew as soon as she got home, she’d scroll through social media, and there would undoubtedly be comments about her and her acting history, about whether she was still relevant, maybe even rumors about the two of them dating.

And Tracy planned on putting that off for as long as she possibly could.

She pushed open her front door, flicking on some lights, and Hayden was there, hovering in the doorway.

“Can I come in?” Hayden asked.

“To apologize?”

Hayden arched an eyebrow. “Well, I’m not sure that I have a reason to apologize, unless you mean for getting you mixed up in all this, but even then... I didn’t have anything to do with it.”

Tracy searched her eyes. They were still standing in the doorway, her heart pounding in her ears. “You’re telling me that you didn’t ask me for surfing lessons so you could do this movie?”

Hayden’s mouth fell open. “What? Are you being serious? No! No. Why would I do that? I had no idea... Can I come in?” Hayden asked, lowering her voice and looking around her, but there was no one walking by.

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Tracy blew out a breath and stood back from the doorway, drumming her fingers against it until Hayden was inside, and she locked it behind her.

They silently went into the living room, neither of them sitting down. Tracy perched herself on the arm of the sofa, her arms folded across her chest.

“Okay...” Hayden pursed her lips. “I came here to check on you and make sure you were okay. I wasn’t expecting this kind of reaction.”

“But you can see how it looks, right?” Tracy wanted to believe Hayden, but it just looked like such a set up.

“Tell me what you think it looks like.” Hayden’s voice was surprisingly calm.

“It looks like Lara roped you in, telling you that if you learned how to surf that you could be the star of this movie, and maybe you didn’t know about trying to get me involved. Maybe that was Lara’s idea.”

Hayden started pacing. “It was all Lara’s idea. We were all as stunned as you were.”

“And you’re not here to try and change my mind?”

“No. After what you told me? About why you left acting? No. Never.”

Tracy bit the inside of her cheek, taking in everything Hayden was saying. “So, you had no idea that was going to happen?”

“None. And that’s what I wanted to tell you. Lara explained after you left the reason why she couldn’t let this movie go, why she couldn’t seem to take no for an answer from you. And it’s because Kerri wrote the screenplay.”

“What?” Tracy stared at Hayden who kept pacing.

“Yeah. I couldn’t believe it either. But that’s not even the craziest thing.”

“What is?”

“She wrote it specifically for you. After Lara bumped into you and you got to know them again. I don’t know. That’s what Lara said, and it’s not that I think she’s lying. I just know that it’s not relevant. I know you don’t want to get back into acting, and that’s fine. I have a lot of things I need to sort out with her tomorrow, but I wanted to just come here and make sure you were okay first.”

Tracy reached out, stopping Hayden from pacing, her hand on Hayden’s arm. Tracy slid her grip lower, until she was holding Hayden’s hand and firmly tugged her closer, her hand gliding up Hayden’s neck and into her hair as she kissed her, harder than she ever had, trying to put every emotion she was feeling into it.

Hayden sighed into the kiss, dipping her head to kiss Tracy back, her fingers splayed against Tracy’s cheeks as they deepened the kiss.

Tracy might have been upset leaving Lara’s, certain that the whole thing had been a set up, but when she heard Hayden defending her, when she heard Hayden say with so much confidence that the circumstances around this movie were irrelevant, because she knew nothing would convince Tracy to get back into acting, it was like a switch had been flipped, and everything she’d been feeling towards Hayden in these last few weeks took over.

And then all she could think about was kissing Hayden.

Tracy barely broke the kiss as she sat down on the couch properly, sinking into the cushions, Hayden coming with her, straddling her waist as they continued to kiss.

And Tracy knew this was different. There was more emotion, more passion tonight, a desperation almost, and when Tracy thought about how she'd felt just a few moments ago, they'd been on the brink of a misunderstanding that would have ruined them before they'd even begun.

That was how this kiss felt. Relief. Anger. Lust. All wrapped up in this moment, because Tracy had been so close to not letting Hayden in. She'd wanted to be strong enough to tell her that she didn't want to see her or talk to her, and what a mistake that would have been.

Tracy moaned when Hayden's tongue danced with her own, her hands sliding up Tracy's arms to rest on her neck, her thumb trailing along Tracy's jawline.

Tracy's hands slid down Hayden's back as their lips parted again and again, and Tracy found herself unable to hold back, groping Hayden's ass, the well-worn whitewash jeans smooth beneath her palms.

"I want you," Hayden panted, her lips finding Tracy's again, and Tracy arched up into her, moaning into the kiss, her grip on Hayden tightening.

Hayden rocked back against her as they kissed, and she broke the kiss, her breath hot against Tracy's ear. "You're driving me crazy," she murmured, Tracy's hands encouraging another roll of her hips, and the moan that left Hayden's mouth left Tracy aching for more.

Tracy placed open kisses along Hayden's neck, nipping at her ear before Hayden

turned to capture her lips in another searing kiss, goosebumps breaking out along Tracy's arms as a shudder ran through her, and Hayden's hand disappeared beneath her shirt.

Tracy groaned into the kiss as Hayden's hand palmed her breast through her bra, her thumb swiping over her nipple, and Tracy felt it everywhere.

Hayden sat up straight, breaking the kiss to lift her shirt over her head, revealing a white bra, Tracy's eyes drawn to the swell of her cleavage and how smooth her skin looked.

Hayden dipped her head to find Tracy's lips again, and Tracy slid her hands up Hayden's bare back, her skin soft, her fingers skimming over her bra strap, gently pushing it off her shoulder before pressing her lips against her tanned skin, her hand gliding up Hayden's neck, bringing their lips together in another intense kiss.

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“Take me to bed,” Hayden whispered when they finally came up for air, her eyes searching Tracy’s.

Tracy met her gaze, about to ask if she was sure, but the way Hayden was looking at her... There was so much in that look. Hayden was trusting her, and after everything that had happened this evening, Tracy couldn’t go much longer without telling Hayden, showing her, how much she meant to Tracy.

She simply nodded, and Hayden stood up, tousling her hair as Tracy got up, reaching for her hand.

16

Hayden could have kissed Tracy for hours, but standing beside Tracy’s bed as they stepped out of their jeans, leaving them both in just their bras and underwear, Hayden felt like she might combust with want.

She’d never been this aroused in her life, and as she let her eyes rake over Tracy’s toned body as she came back into her space, in her black bra and underwear, Hayden knew she had it so bad.

She’d already felt it in Spain, and if she really thought about it, there had been more than one occasion when they’d all been together at Charlotte’s or Ada’s that Hayden had found herself drawn to Tracy, getting lost in her hazel-brown eyes.

“You are so beautiful,” Hayden heard herself whisper, thinking aloud as Tracy smiled, her lips brushing over Hayden’s as she kissed her so slowly, with so much

emotion that Hayden thought the ground had shifted beneath them.

Tracy's fingers popped open the clasp of Hayden's bra as they kissed, her hand replacing the fabric, cupping her breast, and Hayden swayed into her, a soft moan escaping her lips as Tracy's thumb toyed with her nipple.

"Fuck," Hayden panted as Tracy's fingers rolled her nipple now, forcing Hayden to break the kiss, her own hands fumbling with Tracy's bra, finally freeing it and easing the fabric away.

Hayden forgot to breathe when Tracy kissed her again, their bare breasts pressed together, and Hayden's hands roamed over Tracy's back, her sides, her hips, until she had her fingers splayed across her ass.

Tracy broke the kiss, her lips hot against Hayden's neck, moving over her chest, and then her mouth was on Hayden's breast, her tongue flicking over her nipple, and Hayden's fingers threaded through Tracy's hair, keeping her there, the sensation of Tracy's tongue battering over her sending shots of electricity right to her core.

"Oh my god," Hayden moaned, her free hand clutching Tracy's ass, not knowing what to do with herself, she was so turned on.

Tracy's fingers danced up the inside of Hayden's thigh as her hot lips wrapped around her other nipple, and it was all Hayden could do to stay upright.

Tracy must have sensed it, because she kissed her way back up Hayden's neck, finding her lips once again before guiding her back onto the bed, her eyes moving over Hayden's body.

"Stunning," Tracy murmured before pushing her underwear down her legs. She joined Hayden on the bed, her hands on Hayden's hips, her fingers gripping the

fabric. “Is this okay?”

Hayden met her eyes. “Yes. I can’t take much more.”

Tracy slid Hayden’s panties down her legs, letting them fall off the edge of the bed. “I don’t even know where to start.”

The reverence in Tracy’s voice made Hayden shiver in anticipation. “Come here,” Hayden said, tugging Tracy down on top of her, their legs intertwining as their lips parted and their tongues swirled.

Hayden was rocking back against Tracy before she even realized what she was doing. It just felt so good, the pressure building with each roll of her hips.

“Fuck, Hayden,” Tracy said, her voice rough. “It’s so hard not to lose control.”

“Then lose control,” Hayden dared, their lips inches apart.

Tracy pushed herself up on one arm, her fingertips skating down Hayden’s stomach, over her hip, and down her thigh before retracing her path, lazily skimming over her skin with the lightest touch.

“What are you thinking?” Hayden asked, her voice husky as she looked up at Tracy. And when Tracy’s eyes wandered up and down her body, her lips parted, Hayden continued. “Do it. Whatever you’re thinking.”

“I want to be inside you,” Tracy said, her voice breathless as her fingers brushed along the inside of Hayden’s thigh, palming her sex. “You’re so wet,” Tracy practically moaned as her fingers parted her folds. “Hayden.”

“I need you, please.” Hayden couldn’t keep her hips from lifting, from searching for

more, and when Tracy's fingers circled her clit, lightly at first, then adding more pressure, Hayden could feel the tension building inside her, the ache between her legs almost too much.

Hayden's body was on fire, her pulse thumping in anticipation as Tracy's fingers moved lower, and then she entered Hayden, slowly, finding a gently rhythm, but Hayden needed more, her hips rocking back.

"Oh Tracy," Hayden moaned, her hand lost in Tracy's hair as their lips crashed together, sighing into the kiss.

Tracy picked up the pace, and Hayden swore she saw stars as her body arched up into Tracy's, clinging to her, her nails raking across her back as she shook, her breathing ragged, and Hayden might have even blacked out.

Tracy's gentle touch on her cheek, brushing Hayden's hair away from her eyes brought her back to the moment.

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“I have no idea what just happened,” Hayden said, a smile playing at her lips, exhaustion threatening to take over, but her desire to pleasure Tracy won out.

“You are unbelievably sexy right now,” Tracy said, propping her head up on her hand, her fingers combing through her hair as she let her gaze wander over Hayden.

And Hayden felt it. She wasn't sure she'd ever felt this alive, this full of emotion, and all she could think about now was making Tracy feel as good as she felt right now.

17

Tracy smiled up at Hayden as she pushed her back against the sheets, her long hair tickling Tracy's chest as she straddled Tracy's leg, her fingers finding Tracy's arousal.

Tracy threw her head back against the bed as Hayden explored her sex, her fingers barely grazing Tracy's clit before coming back again, teasing her, and Tracy's grip on Hayden's hips tightened.

“I really feel like you're holding back on me,” Hayden said, a glint in her eyes. “Like you're afraid of letting me see this aggressive side of you.”

Tracy opened her mouth to say something, but she could only whimper as Hayden's fingertips circled her clit for the briefest few seconds before disappearing again.

“Am I right?” Hayden asked, her fingers lingering a little longer this time.

“Yes,” Tracy panted.

“I can tell by the way you’re looking at me right now. There’s this fire in your eyes. And I can feel it. The way your fingers are digging into my skin,” Hayden said, glancing down at her hip.

Tracy released her grip, but Hayden’s hand covered her own.

“Don’t stop,” Hayden said, her hips rocking a little as her fingers returned to Tracy’s sex, moving through her folds with purpose this time, thrusting two maybe three fingers inside her easily.

“Oh fuck,” Tracy moaned, holding onto Hayden’s hips as they found a rhythm, and Hayden started moving her fingers a little faster, full of confidence, grinding against Tracy’s thigh. “You feel amazing,” Tracy managed to say, her breathing coming out in gasps now. “I’m so close.”

Hayden’s hips moved faster now. “Me too,” she said, her voice hoarse.

Tracy’s fingers dug into Hayden’s hips, encouraging her, and it was the sound of Hayden’s low moan that sent her over the edge even as her thrusts slowed.

Tracy’s eyes slammed shut, her body trembling, her orgasm taking over.

Hayden’s cheeks were flushed as she looked down at her, slowly removing her fingers, and when she brought them up to her lips, Tracy wasn’t sure she’d ever seen anything hotter.

Tracy watched her lick them clean, and then she reversed their positions, easily getting Hayden on her back, kissing her way down Hayden’s body before she even knew what was happening, a throaty laugh filling the air.

Tracy's hands eased Hayden's legs apart and the musky scent of her arousal surrounded her. Tracy leaned in, her tongue gliding through her sex, circling Hayden's clit, teasing it with the tip of her tongue, before taking it into her mouth.

Hayden writhed beneath her, a string of curses on her lips, her grip on Tracy's hair tight until her hips were rocking, and her entire body tensed before it shook, Hayden's tanned skin glistening in the dim light.

Tracy kissed her way up Hayden's body, taking her time as she recovered, Hayden's breathing slowly returning to normal.

"Will you stay tonight?" Tracy asked, and Hayden answered her by pulling her down into a sweet, sensual kiss, but it didn't take long for Hayden's hands to roam, finding the slick heat between Tracy's legs, and she had a feeling that they weren't going to get much sleep tonight.

18

Hayden woke the next morning, needing a second to figure out where she was, and why she wasn't in her own bed, but as she stretched her arms over her head, she felt an ache in her shoulders and back, reminding her of everything that had happened last night.

Hayden rolled over, the space beside her empty, but the delicious aroma of coffee and toast got her out of bed, slipping on a robe hanging on the back of Tracy's bedroom door.

Hayden found Tracy in the kitchen and as she turned, Hayden could feel a warmth spreading over her chest, Tracy's smile almost taking her breath away, her hair slightly mussed, tossed over one shoulder. She was wearing gray pajama pants and a black tank top, the image of casual, and Hayden thought it was incredibly sexy.

“Hey,” Tracy said. “I was just about to come get you.”

“Morning.” Hayden probably should have felt shy or maybe a little uncertain about where they stood and if last night was just a one-time thing, but she had to go with her gut feeling and her instincts told her that she wasn’t the only one feeling like this.

Tracy’s hand rested against Hayden’s cheek as she kissed her. “Morning,” she murmured against her lips.

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“So,” Hayden said while they were eating breakfast at the table, her eyes moving from the view of the ocean to Tracy.

“So...” Tracy’s lips slid into an easy smile.

“I had a really great time last night.” Hayden couldn’t decide whether this conversation was silly or not, but she didn’t care. After the misunderstanding they nearly had last night, she wanted to let her feelings be known.

“As did I.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Hayden said with a hint of a smile. “And while we’re sharing, I just wanted to say that...” She sat back in her chair, not even sure of what she was trying to say. “I would never do what you thought I might have done.” Her words lingered in the air, and she wondered if they made any sense.

Tracy shook her head. “That was entirely my fault. I jumped to conclusions, and I’d like to apologize. I shouldn’t have made any assumptions. We’re okay,” Tracy said, reaching for her hand across the table, gently swiping her thumb along the back of it.

“Yeah?”

Tracy nodded. “And while we’re sharing...” She gave Hayden a half-smile, using her own words. “I’d hate for last night to have been a one-time thing.”

“It won’t be.”

Tracy felt her smile grow. “I know this is all new for you, and maybe you want to keep your options open...”

“I don’t,” Hayden said matter-of-factly.

Tracy inhaled a shaky breath. “Well, then I was wondering if you’d consider dating, you know, officially.”

“Are you asking me to be your girlfriend?” Hayden asked, an amused look on her face.

Tracy smiled to herself. “I can’t believe I’m so nervous asking you, but yes.”

Their conversation was interrupted by a knock on the door. Tracy got up to answer it, and Hayden could hear Lara’s voice drifting towards her.

“Hayden,” Lara said, stopping short when she entered the living area. “Oh.” She glanced between the two of them, a smile forming. “This makes me happy.” She exhaled. “And that’s why I need to apologize. To both of you. I got so caught up. I wasn’t thinking. I shouldn’t have done any of that.”

Hayden nodded, and Tracy agreed. “Hayden explained,” Tracy said. “About Kerri.”

“Yeah,” Lara said. “And she’d kill me if she knew about all this drama I created. She just wrote a screenplay. I’m the one who made a mess of things.”

“Well,” Tracy said with a sigh. “I could have just said yes.”

Hayden frowned. “Let’s just move on.”

“So, I know that Tracy’s out,” Lara said, her eyes moving between them. “But I never got an official no from you, Hayden. Do you want this movie? Because I’m pretty

sure that your stock has risen enough in the last few weeks, plus you seem to be getting good at surfing, so that's not even an issue, or at least it won't be in a few more weeks."

Hayden blew out a breath. "I don't know. I mean, I haven't even started filming the show yet."

"We can work on that. It'll be months before everything is ready to go with the movie, if the studio is still interested. It could actually work out really well."

"You should go for it," Tracy said, completely surprising Hayden.

"Look, I didn't come here for an answer," Lara said. "I just wanted to apologize, in person."

"Do you think I could get there?" Hayden asked Tracy. "With the surfing."

Tracy nodded. "Without a doubt. You've already made so much progress."

Hayden looked from Tracy to Lara. "Yes."

"Yeah?" Lara asked, disbelief in her voice.

"Yes." Hayden couldn't keep the smile off her face. "Yes, to both of you," she said, her eyes locked on Tracy now.

Tracy held her gaze, and Hayden forgot Lara was even there, she was so lost in Tracy's eyes, in the idea of this being her new reality.

In the idea of Tracy being her girlfriend.