



# Wet Paint

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**Category:** Erotic, Romance, Adult, New Adult

**Description:** Ivy didn't plan to fall for her art professor. But after one night in the studio, boundaries blurred, and desire took over. Will Novak was off-limits, yet some lines aren't meant to stay uncrossed. In a world of secrecy, art, and temptation, wet paint isn't the only thing that leaves a mark.

## TROPES

forbidden

student/professor

secret relationship

age gap (13 years)

obsessive devotion

intense physical chemistry

artists

quiet yet spicy hero

virgin heroine

**Total Pages (Source):** 31

# Page 1

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## Chapter 1

### IVY

“Happy birthday, Ivy!”

I smiled at Ruby, and watched as she skipped down the steps to come sit next to me in the lecture hall. Her red hair was pulled back into a slick ponytail, showing off her perfect face. Her freckles were darker than usual, because the sun had finally started shining after a dark and gloomy April.

“Thank you,” I replied, hugging her back as she wrapped her arms around me. “Where were you this morning?” I asked, wondering why I had been alone in our apartment earlier.

“I took an extra shift at the bakery because I wanted this weekend off,” she explained, then quickly changed the subject again. “I’d ask you what it feels like being twenty-one, but I already know: it sucks, and nothing changed.”

I laughed and looked at her, pursing my lips as I evaluated her words. “You’re right. It’s still the same. But it doesn’t suck that much. I can finally and officially buy my own drinks at the bar without having guys pay for me.”

Ruby rolled her eyes. “I know you’re like super independent and all that, but I’d rather have men spend their money on me, than spending my own on things that won’t last. A hangover is more fun when you realize the next morning that you haven’t spent one dollar on drinks.”

She wasn't wrong, but I also didn't like the idea of continuously having men offer me drinks, which would mean I'd have to talk to them, which, again, wasn't something I liked. Especially not lately.

"Besides, now that you're twenty-one, and I'm twenty-one, we can totally hang out in that other bar we never got into. You know, the one on campus everyone keeps talking about."

I looked at her and raised a brow. "You mean the bar that only students with an invite are allowed into?"

"Yeah, I'm sure we'll get an invite sometime soon."

"That bar sounds like a cult. I've heard women aren't treated well in there. And only frat guys are welcome. And we—"

"Hate frat guys. Gosh, you're right." She sighed heavily and leaned back in her seat. "Never mind. But we'll go out tonight. Good thing your birthday is on a Friday. Unless you want to hang out at home, order in, and watch movies."

"We could do both. Go out, then go back home," I suggested.

"Perfect. And who are we inviting?"

We spent the whole lesson whispering and planning for tonight without getting caught by our professor. After class ended, we headed to our next one and kept planning.

By lunch, which we went to grab at our favorite little diner right off campus, I had sent four other friends an invite to my little birthday get-together. They all replied within ten minutes. When we got back to campus, I said bye to Ruby and headed to

my next class.

Normally, whenever I got to go home early from school, I took the free time and spent it in the art room where nobody else would be. I grew up drawing and painting, so it made sense that I ended up spending more time with canvases than people growing up. It changed when I started college and met Ruby, who my mother made me contact after telling me that her friend had a daughter who would also go to the same college as me.

We ended up texting, then FaceTiming, and finally, we decided on a pretty apartment ten minutes from campus. We became best friends immediately, and sometimes I wished our mothers would've got us to meet each other much earlier.

Instead of going straight back to the apartment and get ready for the night, I walked past the student center and down the quieter hallways that led to the art wing. It always smelled like old books, paint thinner, and something vaguely metallic. Probably from the rusted pipes above the sinks that never quite stopped dripping.

The walls were covered in half-finished student projects, some of them brilliant, others just loud. I liked that, though. The whole vibe this part of the college had. It was almost as if the faculty knew us artsy students needed messy.

I pushed open the heavy door to the art room, the hinges groaning like they always did, and stepped inside. The lights were already on, but I didn't see anyone else inside. Maybe they just left, which was just as I'd hoped.

In the far corner, covered in a loose cotton sheet, was the painting I'd started weeks ago. I hadn't touched it since mid-April, mostly because finals had crept up on me and I'd convinced myself it wasn't a priority. But now, something about it felt like it was asking for my attention again.

I walked over and gently pulled back the cover, revealing the canvas underneath. It wasn't anything revolutionary. Just a dark underwater scene, with tall strands of kelp rising up against a dull, grayish-blue background. I hadn't realized how much I missed it until I saw it again. It looked unfinished, like it had been paused mid-thought.

Well, it probably had.

I sat down on the stool in front of it and stared for a while, letting the silence surrounding me. In that moment, it was just me and this frozen version of whatever I'd been feeling when I last held a brush.

Eventually, I pulled out my sketchbook and flipped through a few pages until I found the notes I'd made about this piece. The palette. The shapes I still wanted to add. The texture I hadn't quite nailed. I didn't plan on painting today, I just needed to be here. Needed to remember that not everything in my life had to be loud or fast or shared, like they would be tonight. Some things could just be mine.

But the universe had other plans. It didn't want for me to be alone in that moment.

The door behind me made that same creepy sound, and I turned around to look who it was.

## Page 2

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The shivers running down my spine and all the hairs on my arms standing up was not the reaction I intended to have, but it always happened when he came into a room.

My art teacher, Mr. Novak. Or, Will. Because he wanted us students to call him by his first name. Not many did, though.

He didn't like being referred to as a professor, simply because he wasn't one. He was an artist. One who many in the States knew. His paintings are displayed in a couple of museums, and I know of many people who own his art at home. He was at this college to teach art, which he was exceptionally good at, and maybe he was one of the reasons why I chose this college.

"Hi," I said, smiling at him as he just stood there.

"Hey." He eyed me for a moment before his gaze moved to my unfinished painting. "I figured that was yours," he said, the corners of his mouth curling up slightly. The sleeves of his dark green sweater were pulled up to his elbows, and his black jeans hung perfectly from his hips. Will was a handsome man. No doubt about that. And that's why I had been crushing on him since my freshman year. Though, it wasn't just his looks that kept my eyes turn into hearts whenever he was around, it was his character. Truly. Will was kind, caring, and funny. And what pulled me toward him the most was his calmness.

He was extremely pleasant to be around, and every time we were close, he reminded me of slow, rainy Sundays, where you would just wrap yourself in a cozy blanket and watch Netflix all day. Come to think of it...that's exactly what I'd want to do with him.

But it wasn't possible. He was my teacher, and as his student, I knew better not to get too close. Even if it was very tempting.

I pursed my lips and turned back to my painting. "I couldn't finish it, but I hope I can get back to it soon."

He stepped closer, his gray eyes taking in the painting again, while I took in his face. The stubble covering his jaw was thicker than usual, and his light brown, wavy hair looked like he had been running his hands through it all morning.

"Do you not have time now?" he asked.

"No, sadly. I have plans tonight, and I have to prepare a couple of things. It's my birthday."

"Yeah?" He smiled at me, placing a hand on my shoulder. "Happy birthday, Ivy."

"Thanks." His touch sent another shiver down my spine, and I wished I could've leaned into him more. But I didn't, and he pulled away.

"Going out, then?" he wondered, taking a few steps aside to grab three clean brushes from a table.

"Yes, with a few friends. But first we watch a movie and order pizza or something," I told him, smiling. "You? Any plans for the night? It's Friday, after all."

"I have a painting to finish, so I'll be here." That meant, he'd be here all night. Maybe even until the morning.

"What are you working on?" I asked, turning toward him, and tilting my head to the side.

I watched as he walked over to a bigger canvas that was covered, and before he pulled the cotton sheet off of it, he said, “It’s a piece I’m doing for the hospital. They requested it February, and I told them I would finish it by May. So, I better hurry.”

My eyes locked on the painting. A serene landscape in different shades of green, a flower field in the distance, and also a lake. The sky wasn’t painted yet, but without having to ask, I knew exactly what color it would end up being.

“Oh my...” I stood up and walked closer to him, taking in every little detail. “This is beautiful, Will.”

He didn’t reply right away. He knew how talented he was, and what kind of emotions his paintings could spark in people. He just watched the painting, the smallest smile on his lips. “It’s a memory,” he said, his voice quieter now. “From when I lived in Montana. I was only a kid, but I remember sitting right there, looking straight ahead until the sun went down behind the lake. They told me it didn’t matter what kind of landscape I painted, as long as it put a smile on people’s faces.”

I noticed then that I was smiling, too. “It definitely does.”

His eyes locked on mine, and his smile grew. “Glad you like it. I must say...” His gaze moved to my unfinished painting, then back to me. “Yours put a smile on my face too when I peeked under the sheet. It looks...calm yet uncertain. Like a storm slowly brewing.”

I pressed my lips together and shrugged. “To be honest, I’m not so sure what I was feeling or thinking when I started it. But I like where it’s going.”

“That’s what’s important.” He gave me another smile. “As long as you don’t lose the inspiration, it’s all good.”



Just hearing him talk could make me reach a climax.

I bit my tongue to not say something stupid. I cleared my throat instead and took in his painting again. “Can I come see the painting when it’s done? Before it goes to the hospital?”

“Of course. It’ll be here until Wednesday, I’m sure.”

I nodded, smiling at him again. “Okay. So...I should go.”

“Yeah, no worries.”

## Page 3

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I headed back to my painting, ready to cover it again, but Will stopped me. “Leave it. I like looking at it.”

With surprise and maybe a bit of excitement written across my face, I left the sheet on the stool and grabbed my bag. I was silent for a moment, looking at Will as a kind of comfort settled between us. “See you around,” I finally said.

“See you around,” he repeated with a nod. “Enjoy your birthday, Ivy.”

“Thank you.” With a tight smile and a strangely aching heart, I stepped out of the art room to head back to my apartment.

Will stayed on my mind for the rest of the evening, and I couldn’t stop thinking about him looking at my painting, possibly taking inspiration from it, while he continued to work on his own masterpiece.

## Chapter 2

### IVY

I had three shots, half a beer, and one Espresso Martini.

I wasn’t fully drunk, but I wanted to leave.

I wasn’t tired or anything. Actually, I was having the time of my life with Ruby and the others, dancing in the bar, singing karaoke, and letting everyone know that it was my birthday. Not that they needed to be told. It was written on the cowboy hat Ruby

made me wear. It lit up all around, and the words “BIRTHDAY GIRL” flashed in bright pink every now and then.

I wasn’t much of an attention seeker, but on my birthday, I was allowed to be.

At some point between one song and the next, I felt myself start to drift. The fun was still there, but I wasn’t. My body kept swaying to the beat, but my mind had wandered off to somewhere quieter. Somewhere I didn’t have to smile so hard or prove I knew every single word to every song.

I told Ruby I was stepping outside for air. She nodded, distracted by the bartender pouring shots. I didn’t mention I wouldn’t be coming back, but I sent her a quick text before I walked down the road and back to campus. It was a short walk, and it sobered me up fast. It was late, probably close to two, and the paths were empty. A few dorm windows were still lit, but most of the school had shut down for the night. I kept walking, toward the one building that might still have someone awake inside.

The art wing.

Will usually stayed late when he was working on something. Sometimes all night long, just painting, music playing softly in the background, the rest of the world shut out. Earlier, he told me he’d be there all night, and I hoped he still was.

When I pushed the door open, the hallway lights flickered on automatically. The building was dead silent except for the low hum of the two vending machines at the end of the hall. I made my way toward the back studio, and as I reached the doorway, I paused.

Will was there, and I watched him through the glass window in the door.

He stood in front of the canvas, brush in one hand, and a palette in the other. He was

studying his artwork, which now had a beautiful, light blue and grayish sky.

I thought about turning back around and leaving, not wanting to interrupt him while he worked. But I was selfish in that moment, and I wanted to be around him. Talk to him. Just...be there with him.

He turned just as I pushed open the door and stepped into the room.

He didn't look surprised. Just...pleased. Like he had expected me to come but never got his hopes too high.

I smiled and moved closer, my gaze shifting to the painting one more time. "Hi."

"Hey," he said, setting his brush down.

I felt a little breathless, and my heart was beating faster. But I wasn't nervous. Just happy to be there with him. "You're still here," I stated.

"Yeah." He huffed out a laugh and turned his head toward the painting. "I won't leave before it's finished." His eyes met mine again, and a smile tugged at his lips as he took in my glowing cowboy hat. "How was your birthday celebration?"

"Fun." I pressed my lips together, wanting to dump all my thoughts on him. But I didn't. I wanted to hear him talk. Hear his thoughts. Mine didn't seem so important. Nothing did when he was around.

"Did you drink?" He looked amused, but he wasn't making fun of me. He genuinely wanted to know how my evening went, and I figured a little dumping wouldn't hurt.

"I turned twenty-one, so...drinking is mandatory. Not that I will drink every weekend now," I corrected with a soft laugh.

“Didn’t think you would. I’m glad you had fun.”

I nodded, looking around for a second before meeting his eyes again, and leaning against the table next to me. “How did you celebrate your twenty-first birthday?”

## Page 4

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He studied me for a moment, then said, “I went on a trip to Vegas with a few close friends. Cliché, I know. But I didn’t have much of a choice.”

“How so?” I smiled at him, wanting to hear the whole story. God...I could listen to this man forever.

“They blindfolded me and took me to the airport. Before we boarded the plane, they put headphones on me so I wouldn’t hear the announcements before takeoff and landing. I practically sat in that airplane with only my senses of touch, taste, and smell. The latter was the worst because the friend who sat next to me kept eating horrible garlic chips.” He chuckled at the memory, his lips curling upward.

“So they kidnapped you?”

“Pretty much. But we had a good time.”

“I’m glad.” I smiled back, tilting my head to the side. “How long ago was that?”

I had always been curious about his age, but I knew he was somewhere in his thirties.

“Thirteen years ago.”

So he’s thirty-four. Good. That’s fine. That could work.

I bit my lower lip and looked back at his painting. It wasn’t finished, but I wasn’t sure how much longer he’d take. As artists, a painting could be finished anytime. We didn’t know it ourselves, and any brushstroke could be the last.

“I don’t want to bother you, but would you mind if I stayed?” I asked, my eyes meeting his again.

He thought about it, and at first, I was sure he would ask me to leave. Then, with the tiniest smile, he said, “I don’t mind. But you have to continue your painting.”

I pursed my lips. “I’m not sure I can paint right now.”

“Try. Sometimes, getting back to a painting in the most unexpected moments will help you finish it. It might lead you down a different path, but you just gotta try.”

His words hit me harder than they should’ve. He always said things that made me think long about them, even if they seemed like normal phrases at first. Like he was planting seeds in my mind that wouldn’t bloom until days later. This one, though...it rooted itself instantly. Maybe because I knew he wasn’t just talking about painting.

“Fine. I’ll try.” I turned around to head to my painting which had been there uncovered since I left earlier. Had he actually looked at it throughout the evening? He said he liked looking at it.

“Bring it over here,” he suggested, nodding to the empty easel next to his.

I didn’t hesitate. I grabbed the painting with one hand, and a few brushes with the other to head over to him. I could use the paint he had already opened.

“Do you read?” I asked.

He looked at me with a raised brow. My random question surprised him. “Yes, I read.”

“Poetry?”

He shrugged. “Sometimes. Why?”

“Because you always talk so poetically. It’s not a bad thing,” I assured him with a smile as I picked out a brush. “You just...have a way with words.”

He chuckled, his gaze fixed on his painting again. “I reflect on everything I want to say before I open my mouth. I think that’s something not many people do.”

“Well, they should.” I laughed softly and dipped my brush into the wet paint on his palette. “Some people, especially certain men, should definitely count to ten before they open their mouths.”

“Did you have bad experiences with guys?” he asked. Normally, I wouldn’t talk to guys about other guys, but Will wasn’t just a guy. Will was a man. My art teacher at college. A man I shouldn’t hang out with late at night at the studio. But he was a man who made me feel comfortable and heard.

I shrugged. “Indirectly. I never really dated anyone, to be honest. I just had a few guys be very disrespectful after they were told no.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, letting out a heavy sigh. “Men can be assholes.”

It didn’t surprise me that he truly felt sorry. Will was a feminist. I knew because he often told our class about the protests and marches supporting women he attended. He also once told us about his childhood, and how his parents often took him to several demonstrations all across the States. Safe to say Will was raised by good people, which made him a good man, too.

And all of that didn’t make it one bit easier to stay away from him. I didn’t want to. He was like a safe space. A safe person. One I always feel comfortable around.



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I nodded at his statement about men being assholes, agreeing with him. “It’s fine, though.” I thought about a subject to switch to, wanting to keep the conversation light. “It’s trivia night at Barkley’s Saturday night. Have you ever been?”

We both continued to paint, focusing on our canvases as we kept the conversation going.

“I’ve been a couple of times, yes.”

“You should come tomorrow night. It’ll be fun. The past few Saturdays, they asked a lot about art history. I’m sure they’ll keep the theme going.”

He chuckled softly. “You think?”

“Maybe. Even if not...you should still come. Ruby, Lenny, and I need another teammate. Carly had to pass because she’ll be leaving in the morning to go visit her parents back home.”

“Hm.” He didn’t say anything else as he studied his painting.

I stopped moving my brush across the canvas and watched him, waiting for a response.

“Are professors even allowed to play?”

“Well, technically... Barkley’s doesn’t belong to this school. So, you wouldn’t be our professor. And we wouldn’t be your students.”

“Fair enough.” He squinted his eyes, then looked at me with a smile. “Fine, I’ll come.”

I couldn’t hide my smile, and I was glad he couldn’t hear my heart hammering in my chest. “Perfect. It starts at eight.”

## Chapter 3

### WILL

The sky I was painting was inspired by her.

I used light blues and grays, and white for soft clouds, and where the sun was going down, I added hints of the lightest orange and purple. The whole painting was finally coming together the way I had imagined it, but it was more beautiful than I had hoped.

And it was all because of Ivy.

I never expected her to come back tonight, but deep down, I hoped she would. Getting involved with students was never something I intended on doing, but Ivy intrigued me. She challenged me. Made me calm down by simply being around.

I noticed it the first time a few weeks ago in class, when she presented her artwork. It was an oil painting of a forest. It was fucking beautiful. And the way she spoke about it, the way she explained why every brushstroke was done the way it was, only made me appreciate her even more. She wasn’t just creative. No, Ivy was a whole damn force. One you wanted to be around, to see where her exceptional mind would take her next.

She often expressed how my class was her favorite, and in the beginning, I knew it

was because she appreciated me as an artist. She looked up to me, and she often took inspiration from my art. But, lately, she watched me with different eyes.

It didn't bother me when it definitely should've. I was still her professor, after all. And getting involved with a student would get me fired. Frankly, I thought about quitting a while ago, simply because I was close to reaching my next life goal which was to open my own studio and art gallery. I had too many students who would be upset about that choice. Especially Ivy. But they'd always be welcome.

For now, I was staying.

Ivy had dropped her brush almost an hour ago. She was sitting on the stool, leaning forward with her arms folded on the table. Her head rested on top of them, turned slightly to the side, brown curls falling over her face. She was still, her eyes were closed, and her breathing steady.

I didn't want to wake her, but it was almost five in the morning, and I wanted her to sleep comfortably.

Setting my palette and brush down, I took the two steps to her and placed a hand on her back, gently caressing her. "Ivy. Come on, let's get you home."

Her shoulder twitched slightly under my hand, but she didn't move right away. For a second, I thought she might already be too far gone in sleep to hear me.

"Ivy," I said again, softer this time.

She stirred, shifting her head so her cheek pressed more firmly against her arm, and then her hazel eyes blinked open slowly. Groggy, unfocused at first. When she saw me, her expression relaxed. She didn't lift her head, just looked up at me from where she lay.

“What time is it?” she murmured, her voice low and raspy.

“Almost five,” I said, my hand still resting lightly on her back. “You should sleep somewhere with a mattress.”

## Page 6

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She exhaled a long, slow breath and closed her eyes again for a moment. “I didn’t mean to fall asleep.”

“I know.” I smiled, giving her shoulder a gentle squeeze to encourage her. “But you were tired, so it’s okay.”

Her brows furrowed as she sat up, rubbing her face with both hands before brushing the hair from her eyes. The cowboy hat she’d been wearing earlier was on the floor by her feet, the words “BIRTHDAY GIRL” still blinking faintly.

“I wanted to stay up with you,” she stated, her gaze moving to my almost-finished painting. “It’s finished?”

“Not yet. It needs a few more strokes,” I told her, smiling at her again. “Come on, now. I’ll walk you home.”

“You don’t have to.”

“But I want to.” I didn’t give her the chance to fight me on this. I already hated the thought of her walking to the studio all by herself in the dark earlier, and I wasn’t going to let her walk across campus and to the apartment buildings on her own again.

She looked at me for a second, like she was weighing whether or not to argue. But she didn’t. Just nodded quietly and pushed herself off the stool.

“Alright,” she said, her voice still sleepy.

I picked her hat off the ground and handed it to her. She took it with a small smile, then turned to our paintings. "I'll have to finish it another time. I liked painting with you next to me," she told me, her eyes meeting mine again.

Her words shouldn't have sent shivers down my spine or make my heart beat faster. But they did. The smallest smile touched my lips. "I enjoyed it too."

We were both silent for a while, just looking at each other the way I had caught ourselves looking at each other a few times before. Something was growing between us, and while I knew it was wrong, I had no intention of stopping it.

The lights in the studio were dim, and the air smelled of paint and paint thinner. And her. So damn sweet, so damn calming. I switched off the lights over the workspace, leaving just the hallway glow to guide us out.

We walked in silence down the corridor, our footsteps echoing faintly. Ivy pulled her jacket tighter around herself as we stepped outside. If I had mine with me, I would've given it to her. Or maybe I would've changed my mind, not giving into the idea of getting to touch her even for the slightest moment.

The sky was starting to shift now. Dark blue bleeding into something lighter near the horizon. It looked like her painting, though it was water, not a sky. Still, it was yet another thing that reminded me of her. It was quiet out, just before the sun would rise.

"You really don't have to walk me all the way there," she said as we passed the campus library.

"I know," I said, pushing my hands into my pants pockets.

Silence came between us, but only for a second. "But I'm glad you are," she added.

I glanced at her. She wasn't looking at me. Just walking, slowly, with her arms crossed over her chest like she was holding in something. Like she wanted to say more but couldn't. I didn't push.

We reached the street corner near the apartment buildings, where the sidewalk split. My instinct was to stop there, not wanting to intrude her privacy by finding out exactly where she lived. But she kept walking, and I didn't hesitate, following her up the path.

When we reached her door, she paused in front of it. her keys were already in her hand, but she didn't unlock it right away.

"Thanks for walking me," she said, turning toward me.

"Of course."

"And...for letting me crash in the studio."

"You can crash there anytime," I said, and I meant it.

She smiled faintly, then looked down, then up again. Her eyes a little clearer now. "You know," she said softly, "when I walked over tonight, I didn't expect anything. I just...didn't want to be anywhere else."

My chest tightened a little. There wasn't anything romantic in her tone, but there was something real. In her gaze, though, there was more than friendly appreciation. Something romantic. Something...needy. Something that tugged at every line I was supposed to be holding.

I nodded, because I wasn't sure what else to do.

She stood still too, but after a moment of silence, she stepped closer and wrapped her arms around my neck. I held my breath as she pressed her body against mine, with one of her hands gently resting at the back of my head.

My first instinct was to push her away. To tell her we couldn't do this here, not with others possibly seeing us. But there was nobody around, and I gave in to the temptation. Lifting my arms, I wrapped them around her waist, holding her close as we both took a deep breath.



## Page 7

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“I’ve been wanting to do this for a long time,” she whispered, her voice soft and sweet.

I smiled at her words and rubbed the small of her back with one hand. “You know we shouldn’t be doing this though, right?” I asked, my voice just as quiet.

“I know. I’m sorry.”

Neither of us let go, and we kept standing there, arm in arm, with the sun slowly coming up behind us. Fuck...how was I supposed to move on after this?

“Don’t be sorry,” I told her, moving my hands to her hips to gently move her away from me. Our eyes met, and I studied hers for a while.

God, she’s beautiful.

“Just know that we can’t do that in public.” Or ever. “People will start to talk, and we don’t want to get in trouble.”

“No, we don’t,” she agreed, her smile telling me just how truthful she was. Still, there was a glimpse of mischief flashing through her eyes. “I should go upstairs.”

“Yeah, you should,” I encouraged her. “I’ll see you tonight.”

She furrowed her brows for a split second, then she remembered that she invited me to join her team at trivia night. “Right! Oh, it will be fun! See you tonight.”

I chuckled and gave her a nod. Before she went inside though, she stood on her tiptoes and kissed my cheek. It was in that moment that I wanted to grab her and push her against the wall. To kiss her hard and show her just how much I wanted her too.

But I stayed composed, my jaw clenched to not cuss in front of her.

She gave me another knowing smile before disappearing, and I urged myself to walk away before I ran after her like a mad man.

## Chapter 4

### IVY

He stayed on my mind all day, and he even appeared in my dream.

I knew I might've crossed a line by hugging and kissing him, but I couldn't help it. I had been wanting to do it for a while now, and earlier this morning, it felt like the right moment. He hadn't pushed me away. Hadn't told me not to get too close.

No, he enjoyed it. He did give me a small warning, but it wasn't one he took too seriously himself.

After sleeping for a few hours in the morning, and then getting some chores done in the afternoon, I finally got ready for trivia night at Barkley's. Ruby was in her room, and since we always did our makeup in front of her large mirror, I headed over to her bedroom with my makeup bag.

"Hi," I said as I stepped into her room.

"Hey. You totally missed out last night," she said with a smirk. "We kept getting drinks from those guys, and Carly had the funny idea of sending them a round of

shots. But instead of Vodka, we made the bartender put in water. They drank it, and didn't even realize it was just water. They were so wasted." She laughed at her story.

I chuckled and sat down on the floor next to her in front of the mirror. "Guys are so weird. What else did I miss out on?"

We both started to do our makeup while Ruby told me everything that happened while I was hanging out with Will in the studio. As fun as she made it all sound, I was glad I left once I'd had enough. That night in the studio with Will had felt incredible, and I wanted to do it all over again.

"I still can't believe you dipped out early," Ruby said, applying mascara. "I miss when we used to be the last ones standing."

I only ever stayed because of her. To make sure nothing would happen to her. Last night, though, I knew she'd get home safe with Lenny and Carly around.

"I just wasn't feeling it. Needed a rest."

She gave me a look in the mirror, her eyes narrowing ever so slightly. But then she nodded and moved to the next subject.

We finished our makeup, and when we were finally satisfied with our faces, we bundled up and headed out into the cool night air toward Barkley's.

The bar was already buzzing when we got there. Groups huddled over trivia sheets, and the unmistakable scent of old wood and fried food was in the air. We spotted Lenny near the back, holding a half-finished beer and waving us down with the other.

"Look who finally showed up," she grinned as we approached. "I've been here alone, fending off creeps and holding this table like it's a sacred altar."

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Ruby rolled her eyes and slid into the booth before me. “You’ve been here for ten minutes.”

“Ten minutestoo long,” Lenny said dramatically. “Also, I already signed us up as Trivia Newton-John. You’re welcome.”

I laughed and took the seat beside her, heart thudding a little louder now that we were settled in.

Lenny turned to me. “You okay? We missed you last night.”

Ruby glanced at me, too. I could feel both of them looking, waiting.

I hesitated. “Yeah, I’m fine. There’s uh...something, though.” There was no smooth way to say it, no casual way to deliver the bomb I was about to drop.

“I uh...” I cleared my throat. “I might’ve invited someone.”

Lenny blinked. “What kind of someone?”

“Like aguy someone?” Ruby added, already leaning in. “Ohmygod. Did you meet up with someone last night when you left?”

I furrowed my brows. I didn’t really meet up with him. It wasn’t planned. But I did hope to meet him at the studio.

Pressing my lips together, I waited a moment before telling them. “I invited Will.”

Lenny tilted her head. “Will who?”

“Professor Novak,” I said, only confusing them more.

They frowned at me.

“Our art teacher?” Ruby said, her voice half a gasp, half a laugh. “You invited him here?”

“To trivia night?” Lenny added, looking between us like she wasn’t sure she heard right.

I nodded slowly. “Yeah.”

“Is this, like...” Ruby trailed off, eyes narrowing. “Is he the reason why you left early last night?”

“No,” I said quickly. “I mean...kinda. I wanted to go home, but then I remembered him saying he would be at the studio all night. So I went too.”

“Ivy, girl, don’t tell us you’re secretly dating Will Novak.”

I looked at Ruby’s wide-eyed and amused face.

“Definitely not dating,” I stated with a nervous laugh.

“But there’s something,” Lenny added.

“I guess...”

“Holy shit.” She looked at Ruby and they both grinned.

“That’s kinda hot. I mean, he’s hot. And you two have, like, so much in common, so...I get it.”

I bit my lower lip. Ruby’s words made my heartbeat settled a bit. Their reactions were better than I hoped. Then again, they’d support anything I did. Well, maybe not everything. But most things.

“He’s smart, and they keep asking these stupid art history questions. So, maybe it’s a good thing you invited him,” Lenny said. “I want to win tonight. First prize is a gift card to that fancy restaurant next to the country club. Wait...if we win, will you bring Professor Novak too?”

“Of course, she will. Especially if he helps us win.” Ruby grinned at me. “What happened at the studio last night?”

“Nothing,” I exhaled, nervous laughter slipping out. “We painted. We talked. Then he walked me home around five in the morning. I kissed him on the cheek,” I added quickly. “It was innocent.”

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Ruby and Lenny both made the exact same face: equal parts shock, amusement, and a dash of you go girl.

But before either of them could respond, I saw Will stepping into the bar, looking as handsome as ever. He scanned the bar like he wasn't totally sure what he'd walked into. He wore a navy blue sweater under a black coat, and when his eyes moved around the bar, they finally met mine.

He smiled.

Lenny leaned in, whispering, "Okay, yeah. He's hot. But this is still insane."

"We're gonna need food. And maybe shots. Does your boyfriend drink?" she asked with a teasing grin.

"I don't know," I said, then murmured, "and he's not my boyfriend."

"Hm, not yet. We'll make it happen somehow."

Ruby giggled, nudging my side just as Will started weaving through the crowd toward our table. My stomach flipped. I couldn't tell if it was from nerves of excitement. Or both.

"He looks a little too cool for trivia night," Lenny said, sipping her beer like she was watching a movie. "Like he belongs in a loft with jazz music and expensive wine."

"Or a moody gallery opening," Ruby added, leaning closer. "God, Ivy, you so have a

type.”

I ignored their teasing and sat up straighter as he got closer. Will gave the three of us a polite nod before settling his eyes back on me.

“Hey,” he said, voice low, like it was meant just for me.

“Hi,” I replied, trying to sound casual and completely unflustered. I failed.

Will glanced around the table. “Hope I’m not crashing.”

“Not at all,” Ruby said, her voice way too cheerful. “We could use the help. Art questions are our downfall. Most times, at least. Ivy here knows quite a lot too.”

“You are exactly the kind of man we need,” Lenny added, scooting over and gesturing for him to sit beside me.

He chuckled, then shrugged off his coat and slid into the booth, the space between us suddenly feeling much smaller than it had a second ago.

Ruby raised a hand to get the server’s attention. “We’re gonna need a round of something. Beers? Or...” she looked at Will. “Do you drink, Professor?”

I hated that.

Tonight, he wasn’t a professor. He was Will.

Just. Will.

He smiled politely. “Beer’s fine. Thanks.”



I could feel Will glancing at me while Lenny and Ruby talked to the server. I kept my eyes forward, but looked at him when he asked, “Who chose that name?”

He pointed to the sheet on the table.

I chuckled. “Uh, Lenny did. She’s pretty creative. And funny.”

“Trivia Newton-John. That is pretty damn funny.”

Lenny must’ve heard him say that, so she turned her head and grinned at him. “Thanks, Professor.”

God, I really needed for them to stop calling him that.

“Please, call me Will.”

Lenny’s grin widened, and she gave me a knowing look. “Will do.”

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I bit the inside of my cheek, hoping he wasn't feeling too out of place. After clearing my throat, I turned to him and said, "Thanks for coming."

"Of course," he said softly. "Wasn't sure if you were serious."

"I wasn't sure if you'd actually show."

"I couldn't say no. You asked."

My heart did that annoying flutter again.

Ruby returned her gaze to us just in time to catch the tail end of whatever look was passing between us. She smirked.

"So, what exactly did you two paint until five in the morning?"

Will raised an eyebrow in amusement. Clearly, it didn't bother him that I told my friends about last night. Still, I needed for him to know that they would never tell anyone.

"You can ignore them. They won't tell anyone though."

He chuckled, placing a hand on my thigh, giving it a tight squeeze. "I figured I was walking into some friendly interrogation."

"Oh no," Lenny said. "This isn't friendly. This is full-on investigation mode."

He narrowed his eyes, glancing between them, then turning to me. “Should I be worried?”

I smiled, a little embarrassed, but warmed by how calm he was. “They’ll get bored eventually.”

“Never,” Ruby said.

Will laughed again, then leaned back in his seat just as the trivia host’s voice crackled through the speakers, announcing the first round.

He kept his hand on my thigh as I looked at him, meeting his gaze. Although it was loud around us, the most comforting silence came up around us. Our eyes stayed on each other, and the moment felt like forever before he moved his hand away from my thigh.

He gave me a soft, reassuring smile, and though I already missed his touch, I knew it was for the better.

The first question went up on the screen, and we both turned our attention to it.

“Surprise, surprise,” Lenny muttered, shaking her head at the notoriously tricky art history question that always came up first. She turned to face us, her brows raised, and her expression full of expectation. “Do you know the answer?”

I shook my head. I was interested in what Will taught, but I didn’t know everything.

“I do,” Will told her, then answered the question with conviction. After she wrote it down on the answer sheet, Ruby and Lenny both gave me looks.

Lenny mouthed, we’re winning this.

Ruby mouthed, you're in trouble.

And I just smiled to myself, knowing that I was.

We were definitely winning.

We knew every answer to every question, and by the time the answer sheets were collected to be graded, we were certain that we'd win first prize.

"You want another drink?" Will asked, leaning in closer, and placing his hand on my thigh again. His knee had been touching mine this whole time, but I figured it was because of how tight it was sitting in this booth. A small, delusional part of me liked to think that he did it on purpose, though.

I looked at my empty glass, then met his gaze with a smile. "I'm fine, thank you."

He gave a small nod and gently squeezed my thigh.

"I think we got this. Everyone else looked confused from the beginning. The questions were pretty damn easy, though," Lenny stated.

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“Will answered most of them for us,” Ruby reminded her. “So, if we do win that gift card, he should have it and take our girl here out on a romantic date.”

My cheeks heated, and I gave Will an apologetic look. “You really don’t have to listen to them.”

Will chuckled and shook his head. His fingers stretched on my leg, then patted it gently. “It’s fine, really. They’re just teasing. And, to be fair, I’d tease my friends too if they were in my situation.” He looked between Ruby and Lenny, then said, “You keep it. I gotta make my own efforts to take her out someday.”

Ruby squealed, grinning like a child. “Aren’t you a charmer. Honestly, out of all the guys Ivy has ever been interested in, you’re the first one I’m happy about. And the whole professor-student thing makes it even better. It’s so forbidden. And hot. Because you’re both hot.”

I pursed my lips and gave Ruby a look that said stop it, but I took it as a compliment. And her words made me feel more relaxed about it all. Even though I had no clue what this thing between Will and me was growing to be.

Before either of us had the chance to say more, the announcer tapped on his microphone to test it before talking into it. We all turned our attention to him.

“Alrighty, folks,” he said, holding up a small piece of paper. “The winner of tonight’s trivia night has been decided. The group winning a gift card for a fancy dinner at The Modern is...”

Lenny and Ruby clasped each other's hands, muttering to each other as we all waited for the winner team to be announced.

"Trivia Newton- John!"

Everybody clapped as Lenny ran to the front to grab our prize. She held it into the air, jumping up and down as if we had just won the lottery, and we cheered, laughing at how silly this all was.

When she came back to our table, Lenny pointed at Will and said, "I would totally kiss you right now, but I'm a respectful friend."

I pressed my lips together and looked at Will as he chuckled, giving Lenny and Ruby a simple high five.

"Thank you," I told him. "For coming. And for helping us win."

"It's nothing," he assured me, his smile softening just for me. "It was fun."

I reached for his hand under the table and gave his fingers a squeeze. "I'm glad you came."

We had our little moment before the music got louder, and people started to order more food and drinks. Will leaned in closer. "I'm going to the restroom," he told me.

I turned my head to look at him, and something flashed in his eyes. Something I wasn't sure I read right. Did he want me to follow him?

I watched him leave the table, and before he could disappear around the corner, I got up and followed him. It was probably stupid. I was imagining things. That's what I told myself when he was already halfway through the men's bathroom's door.

But when he looked back and saw me, he stopped and smiled, pleased to see me standing there.

He took a step toward me, slowly. “You know we’ll get in big trouble.”

“Not if we don’t get caught,” I replied quickly, my voice a bit too shaky for my liking.

He nodded, watching me closely as he evaluated everything. But it didn’t take him long to decide what to do. He looked behind me, then back at me, before reaching for my hand. He pulled me to him, walking backward until his back hit the men’s door. He pushed inside, pulling me with him, and once the door closed behind me, he pressed my back against it.

His hands came up to cup my face, and he eyed me carefully, taking another moment to take me in. The kiss came slowly. His lips pressed against mine, careful and steady at first, until I opened for him.

He kissed me deeper, and I felt myself give into him fully. I leaned back against the wall as his body followed mine, not crushing but solid. His lips moved against mine slowly and passionately. He wasn’t trying to impress or get me to keep him there. He was just...there. With me. And that made it so much harder to think.

My fingers slid under the hem of his sweater before I realized I was doing it, palms grazing the warmth of his skin. He sucked in a breath at the contact, then kissed me harder.

I tilted my head, letting him in deeper, our mouths moving in a slow, measured exchange that felt less like lust and more like something inevitable. His hands were still on either side of my head, his fingers curling in my hair. He kept me in place with quiet confidence, and I wanted to stay like this forever.

After sliding the tip of his tongue along my bottom lip, he dipped it into my mouth, curling it around mine in the hottest way possible. I let out a moan, pulling him even closer by grabbing his sweater by the hem. My other hand was pressed against his hard abs, and I made a mental note to remind myself to ask him how often he worked out. Because between all the teaching and painting, I wasn't sure where he got the time to work out.

When we heard voices outside the restroom, he slowly pulled back. His breath was shallow, and he rested his forehead against mine.

Words didn't come easy. He had taken them away from me, but he seemed pretty speechless too. His thumbs gently caressed my cheeks as a small smile appeared on his lips.

“We're walking a thin line.”



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“Yeah,” I said knowingly. But I also didn’t care, not in this moment.

He pulled me closer to kiss me again. Slower this time. Like he wanted to memorize how it felt.

He looked at me for a second longer, like he wanted to say something else. Then, he let out a laugh with a shake of his head.

“What?” I asked, furrowing my brows gently.

“It’s nothing,” he said, scratching his left temple as he watched me. “You’re just so damn beautiful.”

My heart skipped a beat and almost stopped pumping. That came out of nowhere, but I loved hearing him say those words.

“Thank you,” I whispered, feeling my cheeks flush.

Silence filled the space between us again, then he tucked a strand of hair behind my ear and stepped back, straightening his sweater.

“We should probably go,” he said.

I nodded, even though I didn’t move.

“You okay?”

“Yeah,” I said. “You?”

He gave a small nod. “Ask me again once we survive the night.”

I knew what he meant.

The second we’d get back to the table, Ruby and Lenny would start teasing us. They’ll know what we did. There was no reason to hide it.

## Chapter 5

### IVY

On Monday, I went to Will’s class not expecting anything.

I didn’t want to get my hopes up. Didn’t want to get jealous or mad if he didn’t give me attention. I would’ve understood. And because of that mentality, I didn’t second-guess our kiss on Saturday when he didn’t even look at me in class.

I couldn’t imagine how he must feel. He had a great responsibility. He was a professor, and being with a student wasn’t allowed. I got that, and I didn’t want to risk him getting fired, or me getting expelled.

Will seemed content. Happy. He taught the way he always did, and didn’t seem distracted or confused. I was glad. It made staying composed much easier.”

Once class was dismissed, I packed up my notebook and walked down the few steps to head out the door, and when I looked over at him to give him a smile, he lifted his hand and said, “Ivy, a word, please.”

He sounded serious, and, suddenly, my body went numb.

Oh god...he's going to tell me that it's over.

Whatever we started is already over.

Fine.

That's fine.

It's for the better, anyway, right?

This is way too risky.

I swallowed and looked behind me as the last student left the room, closing the door behind them. And when I turned back around, Will was standing right there in front of me.

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I didn't have a moment to realize what was happening before he cupped my jaw with one hand, placed the other on my lower back, and covered my mouth with his. The kiss was deep, and I melted into him instantly.

Will broke the kiss but stayed close, the tip of his nose brushing mine. "Sorry I ignored you," he said first.

They surprised me almost as much as the kiss.

"It's okay. I understand," I replied, keeping my voice low. "I had trouble sitting back there too. I didn't want to stare."

"You didn't," he assured me, smiling gently before he pressed another kiss to my lips. "I just wanted to make sure that you know Saturday night wasn't just a random hookup. I want to be around you. We just have to be careful."

I looked up at him, unable to stop a grin from spreading on my lips. "We're not being very careful right now."

"Yeah, I know." He chuckled, brushing aside a strand of my hair, then stepping back. "What are you doing tonight?"

"I don't know yet. I still have a painting to finish."

"Good. Then meet me at the studio. I'll be there at six."

"Okay."

He watched me for another moment before placing one more kiss to my lips, then he nodded toward the door. “Go. You’ll miss your next class.”

I didn’t want to leave, but I also didn’t want to risk getting caught by the next students walking into his classroom. Giving him a smile and gently squeezing his hand, I left the room and walked down the hallway to get to my next class.

Will stayed on my mind for the rest of the day, and I wished that kiss he gave me could’ve lasted longer. Everything I already felt for him before intensified, and this thing growing between us would soon bloom into something bigger. I couldn’t wait.

I wanted to embrace every feeling I felt.

I wanted to embrace him. Wanted to embraceus.

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At six-thirty, I finally made it to the studio.

After all my classes and dropping my books off at home, I headed back to campus to meet Will. Nobody else was around the art wing. Good. I wanted to be alone with him.

When I pushed open the door, Will turned toward me with a smile. “There you are.”

I looked from him to one of the tables which had food on it, and a bouquet of yellow, orange, and pink flowers. I opened my mouth to say something, but couldn’t.

He looked at the flowers too, then picked them up before walking toward me.

“Are...those for me?” I asked, finally taking my eyes off them to look up at him.

He nodded, smiling again. “Do you like them?”

“I do. They’re beautiful.” I was too stunned to say more. He got me flowers, and it looked like he also got me dinner. I didn’t plan on eating tonight. Simply because being with him was enough to distract me from anything else. Food became secondary when I was with him. I didn’t have a bad relationship with food, and I definitely would’ve eaten something once I got back home.

He chuckled as I stayed quiet, just staring at the flowers. Reaching up one hand, he cupped my cheek and leaned in to kiss me. I melted into him, still trying to realize what was happening.

Is this a date?

Please...let this be a date.

When he pulled back, he asked, “Are you hungry? I got us dinner.”

“You did?”

“Yeah. I figured it was only right to get you something to eat after asking you to come here this evening. I got us sushi.”

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“Risky choice for someone who doesn’t really know me,” I challenged, pursing my lips.

A smirk tugged at his lips. “I know you like sushi.”

“How?”

His hands were on my waist now, pulling me closer, but not tight enough to squeeze the flowers between us. He leaned in and kissed my cheek before saying, “I overheard a conversation you had with Ruby in class a few weeks ago. You were listing your favorite foods to make a meal plan together, and you mentioned how much you loved sushi quite a few times.”

I parted my lips to protest and tell him that it wasn’t nice to eavesdrop. But that’s not what that was. Ruby and I often talked during classes, and he probably just listened absentmindedly. Still, he remembered. “I do love sushi,” I finally admitted.

His grin widened. “Good. Now, come sit.”

“Wait.” I grabbed his waist and looked back at the door behind me. “What if someone comes in?”

“I’ll lock the door. Don’t worry.”

That didn’t make my worries go away. But it did make this situation more exciting.

The idea of getting caught and the possible consequences were scary to think of, but

this was thrilling. God, dating a teacher was fucking thrilling.

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“I will be dreaming about this sushi forever. Where did you get it?” I asked after swallowing the last California Roll.

“It’s a place called Yooji’s in the city center near the train station. It’s a small little restaurant. Very quiet and cozy.”

“I’ve never heard of it. I should really start going further than campus,” I said with a laugh. “That was amazing. Thank you, Will.”

He smiled and reached for a napkin to wipe his fingers. “Thank you for wanting to be here. I know this can’t be easy.”

“Oh, it is very easy,” I said quickly, looking at him wide-eyed. “I’ve been wanting to be alone with you for a long time. God, this is going to make me sound so weird, but I’ve had a crush on you since the first time I came into your classroom. If anything, it’s you this can’t be easy for. You have so much responsibility, yet you did all this for me.” I looked around the table, at the empty sushi containers, at the flowers he got for me. “I don’t want to get you in trouble, but I don’t want to stay away from you, either.”

He watched me closely as I spoke, and all kinds of emotions and thoughts flashed through his gaze. He was thinking about this. Trying to figure out if I was still worth the trouble. And when he smiled, the ache in my heart eased a little.

His hand came up to cup my cheek, brushing my thumb along my cheekbone as he leaned in. “Let that be my worry. Let’s not make this hard. We’re here now, and I want us to enjoy every moment.”



I studied him for a while. I had no issue believing him. I trusted him. But I was still worried. “Maybe we just keep this a secret. For now.”

We had to, anyway.

“Yeah, for now.” He smiled before moving closer to kiss me. His lips parted and his tongue slid into my mouth, gently curling around mine.

I moaned into the kiss, reaching up my hand to place it on his shoulder. I didn’t want this kiss to stop, but I also didn’t want him to think that I was here for only one thing. Sex hadn’t been on my mind in a while. Though, every now and then, whenever I looked at Will, I thought about all the possible moments that could turn into something more.

This kiss, for example.

But he broke it before I could fantasize about him touching my body and taking off my clothes.

“You wanted to see the finished painting,” he stated, getting off his stool.

I held my breath to stop myself from arguing with him. I did want to see it, but I also wanted him to keep kissing me.

God, I’m desperate.

Will walked over to the covered painting to reveal it, and I looked at it, taking in every detail, every perfect stroke he made to create that masterpiece.

“It’s...” My mouth was dry, and words didn’t come easy. “It’s so...peaceful.”

It already had been the first time I saw it, but now that it was done, it was perfect. He added texture, and the colors had darkened just slightly. It was still cheerful, but maybe only to people who didn't know what that place meant to Will. He had told me that the landscape was one he saw often as a child. One he remembered almost daily. And without having to stand in the exact spot in real life, I knew it would look just like this painting.

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“The sky,” I said, admiring the darker shades of blue in the distance, while in the front, they were lighter.

“Reminds you of something?” he asked, watching me instead of his painting.

I nodded. “Yes, I just don’t know of what.”

Then it hit me. I turned my head to look at my unfinished painting. The ocean. The water I painted in dark blues, almost blacks. But the colors weren’t exactly what reminded me of Will’s painting. It was the way he painted it. The way he moved the brush across the canvas. It was painted in a similar style as mine.

“I was inspired by your work.”

I looked at him, my eyes wide again. “But...you’re my teacher. Everything I learned...everything I’m capable of doing is because of you.”

“That’s not true.” He leaned against the table and crossed his arms. “You’re talented, and you have been all your life. You didn’t know me when you were little. When you started painting and decided that’s what you wanted to do later in life. You have a gift, Ivy. I’ve noticed the first time you did a painting in class.”

He smiled and looked at my painting. “Unlike everyone else, you kept staring at the white canvas, your mind working hard to figure out what to do with it. It took you thirty minutes before you moved on to the colors, carefully picking them out. Even the brushes. You didn’t go for the new and unused ones. You picked older brushes, knowing the effect they’d have on an empty canvas. You envisioned what you

wanted it to look like before you even made a single mark. That's not something you can teach."

I felt my face grow warm. Not from embarrassment. More like...being seen. And not just by anyone. By him.

"You remember all that?" I asked.

"Of course I do." His tone was matter of fact, not trying to flatter me. "It was the first time in a long time I got excited about teaching again."

That made me pause. "Because of me?"

He shrugged lightly, like he hadn't meant to say it out loud, but didn't regret it either. "Yeah. You cared in a way I hadn't seen in a while. Not just about the grade or what I thought. You actually cared about the process. About getting it right."

I looked back at the painting, suddenly unsure what to say. It felt weirdly intimate now, like we weren't talking about art anymore. Not just.

"You know," I said after a moment, "that day in class...I was terrified."

Will raised an eyebrow. "Really? You didn't look it."

"I was," I said, laughing softly. "I thought everyone would think I was too slow. That I didn't belong in the program."

"Well, they were wrong," he said. "And you were wrong, too. You belonged more than anyone."

We stood in silence for a second.

“I don’t know what this is going to turn into,” I said quietly. “Us. This. But I like it.”

“Me too.”

He took a step toward me, and I met him halfway. It all came naturally. We kissed, and I felt every hesitation and every worry melt away as I pressed myself closer to him. He ran his hands into my hair, his fingers pulling gently at the roots, and I moaned, feeling my knees go weak. This time he didn’t stop. Didn’t break away. His hands traveled down my back, and he grabbed my hips and lifted me onto the table.

I wrapped my legs around his waist and pulled him into me. His mouth moved from my lips and trailed down my neck, kissing, biting, and sucking. I gasped, feeling him hard against my thigh. My hands were on him, everywhere. In his hair, on his neck, running down his chest.

“Fuck, Ivy,” he groaned, sounding desperate. “You have no idea how much I want you.”

I smiled against his skin, feeling bold. “Show me,” I whispered, wanting him just as much.

He let out a breathless laugh and tugged at my shirt, pulling it over my head and tossing it onto the floor. He paused for a moment and looked at me, his eyes dark. “God, you’re perfect,” he said, tracing the edge of my bra with his fingers.

I shivered and reached for his sweater, sliding my hands under it and feeling his warm skin. “Take this off,” I said, tugging at the fabric.

He obeyed, the sweater joining my shirt on the ground. I couldn’t stop staring at his body. At his hard chest, and those perfectly shaped abs. I took in his arms next, and my panties were instantly wet. He definitely worked out, and probably never skipped

arm-day.

God, those veins...

He pulled me closer, and his hands were everywhere again. On my waist, feeling the curve of my ass, sliding up my back to unclasp my bra. He pulled it off and closed his mouth around my nipple, sucking gently, his tongue flicking over it. I moaned, pleasure shooting through my body.

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He moved to the other breast, and I thought I was going to explode. Then his hand was between my legs, rubbing me through my jeans. “You’re soaked,” he murmured.

“Will,” I sighed, my voice shaky. “Please...”

He unbuttoned my jeans and pulled them down, taking my panties with them. I lifted my hips, letting him slide them off my legs and onto the floor.

“Lean back, Ivy,” he ordered. There was lust in his eyes, in his voice.

I placed one hand behind me in the table and leaned back, giving him all the access he needed. He knelt in front of me, and kissed my thighs, inching closer and closer, until his mouth was on my pussy. I arched my back and cried out, my hand in his hair, holding him there. His tongue moved slowly at first, teasing me, but soon he was going faster, sucking gently at my clit, then harder, until I couldn’t take it anymore.

“So fucking sweet,” he muttered, licking through my folds before he flicked his tongue against my clit again.

“Will, oh God!” I pulled at his hair again, pushing his face more against me. I wanted him to stay right there forever. Wanted him to make me come over and over again.

Funnily enough, I never wanted a man down there before. Never did I come across a guy and think, huh, I want that man’s mouth on my pussy.

No, that thought only ever occurred with Will on my mind.

I do, however, use my vibrator every other day. Whenever I felt like it. And whenever I dreamed about Will being the one making me come.

It was really happening now, and I almost couldn't think straight.

I also never had sex.

Wasn't sure how to tell him that, but all of this was definitely going in that direction.

I still had time to tell him. To prepare him.

I was ready, though.

So fucking ready.

A few more flicks of his tongue, and I came. My whole body tensed, then relaxed all at once.

"Fuuuck," Will growled as he stood up. He moved his hands along my thighs and leaned in to kiss me. I could taste myself on his lips.

"Will," I said, breathless. "I need more."

He chuckled, giving me another kiss before moving back slightly. "You sure?"

"Yes. Please."

I watched as he unbuckled his belt, his jeans falling to the ground. His boxers were still on, and my eyes dropped to the large bulge in them.

Suddenly, I didn't feel as confident anymore. Would it fit?



God, yes, it had to. I had sex-ed in high school, and I knew a thing or two about sex. It would fit. He would just have to go slow.

“So uh...” I started, laughing nervously. “There’s something I need to tell you.”

He raised a brow, his hand cupping his cock through his boxers. “What’s that?”

“I...” I swallowed hard, watching as his cock hardened under his touch. “I’ve never...you know. I’m a virgin but I totally want this.”

He looked worried for a second, but it vanished shortly after. There was a flash of possessiveness in his eyes. Challenge. Excitement. “No man has ever been inside you?”

I shook my head. “No.”

He moved one hand to my inner thigh, caressing my skin gently until his fingertips touched my clit again. “And you want me to be your first?”

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“Yes.” And my only.

“Ivy.” His voice was quiet as he continued to circle my clit with his finger. “I need you to be sure about this.”

“I am sure. I don’t want anyone else to be my first. I want it to be you.” My heart was hammering in my chest as I spoke those words. “Please, Will...”

“Fuck.” His jaw tightened. “Okay. But if you need me to stop, tell me. I don’t want to hurt you. I want to make this unforgettable and good for you.”

“You already have,” I promised. “I want you.”

He started to nod slowly, but instead of taking off his boxers, he closed the space between us and placed kisses on my neck while he gently slid two fingers into me. “I need to make sure you’re ready. Gotta prepare this wet pussy.”

## Chapter 6

### IVY

We kept making out as he fingered me, and I felt my body relax more and more with each thrust of his fingers. When he pulled away, he looked at me with so much passion in his eyes. His eyelids were lowered, and the tip of his tongue came out to lick his bottom lip.

“Open your mouth,” he demanded, and I did as I was told.

He lifted his hand, then slid the two fingers he just fingered me with into my mouth. I wrapped my lips around them, keeping my eyes on his as I sucked.

“Goddamn,” he murmured, watching me closely before pulling out his fingers, and kissing me again. When he pulled back, his pupils were wide. “You taste like heaven,” he said.

I couldn’t judge that. I never tasted myself, or anyone else.

But I wanted to taste him.

“I can give you a blowjob,” I said, my voice way too quiet.

He smiled and shook his head, cupping my face with both hands. “No, baby, we’ll save that for another time. I wanna truly cherish having your mouth around my cock for the first time. Right now, I want to make you feel good.”

I eyed him for a moment, wondering how any man could ever say no to a blowjob. Then again, Will wasn’t just any man. He was special. So fucking special.

“Okay,” was all I could say.

He pressed a kiss to my lips, then peeled his boxers down. His cock sprang free, thick and heavy against his abdomen. My eyes went wide. “Jesus,” I breathed. “How is that...” I didn’t finish the sentence.

His grin was cocky. “It’ll fit. I promise.” His thumb traced my cheekbone, and then he was kissing me again, deeper, hungrier, like he couldn’t get close enough. He was between my legs, guiding himself to my entrance with one hand while the other was placed on my hip with reassurance.

I held my breath as the head of his cock slid against me, slick and hot and terrifying, but I wanted it, wanted him, more than I ever wanted anything in my life.

“I’ll be gentle,” he promised me.

He watched my face, every micro-expression, as he pressed in an inch, then another, stretching me. It stung, but it was good, and I felt myself get even wetter, my body eager to accommodate him.

“You okay?” he asked, voice hoarse.

“Yes. Don’t stop,” I said. “I want all of you.” My voice cracked a little on the last word.

He groaned, his control visibly slipping as he thrust inside, filling me completely. My entire body arched off the table and he steadied me, hands gentle but firm, holding me together while I shattered around him.

I cried out, tilting my head back more before looking up at him again.

“Holy fuck...so tight,” he ground out, pressing his forehead to mine. “You feel so fucking good.”

He moved slow, every stroke measured and deliberate, making sure I felt every ridge and vein. The pain faded, replaced by a full, sweet ache that built into something better. He kissed me through it, one hand tangled in my hair, the other massaging my clit in steady circles.

“Will,” I whimpered, nails digging into his back. “Harder. Please.”

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He growled and obliged, hips snapping into me with more force, the slap of skin on skin echoing through the studio. The table creaked beneath us. I wanted him deeper, wanted him everywhere, wanted to be ruined and rebuilt by this man.

“You’re so fucking perfect,” he rasped in my ear, biting my earlobe. “I want you to come for me, Ivy. Can you do that?” His thumb on my clit never stopping its rhythm.

I nodded frantically, vision going white at the edges. “Yes, yes, don’t stop, please—” The orgasm hit like a wave, pulling me under. He kept moving, fucking me through it, drawing out every last bit of pleasure until I was twitching beneath him.

He stayed buried inside of me as for a while, leaning in to kiss me hard and deep, before he pulled out and moved me off the table.

“Turn around,” he demanded. “I need to see that ass bounce for me.”

His words never ceased to surprise me. He had such a dirty mouth, and I loved it.

He turned me around and bent me over the table, with one hand gripping the back of my neck while the other led his cock back into my pussy.

He thrusted into me harder this time, and I moaned louder, loving how he felt even better in this position. His grip on my neck tightened just enough to make me lose my mind, his other hand spread my cheeks as he watched himself disappear into me over and over. “Look at you,” he said, voice gone jagged. “Goddamn beautiful.”

He pushed my head down so my cheek pressed to the table. Every inch of him, every

slap of our bodies, every filthy thing he growled at me made my body react instantly.

“You were made for this,” he said, fucking me harder. “You were fucking made for me. No one’s ever going to fuck you like this. No one but me.” I believed his words, and I loved his obsessive side.

I could feel myself start to tighten again, the pressure mounting, and he seemed to sense it too.

“That’s it, Ivy,” he panted, squeezing my ass. “Come for me again. I want to feel it. Milk my cock, baby, just like that.”

His words pushed me over the edge without a warning.

I screamed as I came, my legs shaking, my arms barely holding me up. He kept going, even rougher now, like he was chasing something in me he needed to catch, and when he finally pulled out he groaned, “Don’t move.”

I stayed as I was, face down, ass up, while he fisted his cock and stroked himself, breathing heavy, until he finished all over my back, heat pooling and dripping down my spine. He watched it happen, watched himself paint my skin.

Before he helped me up, he used a towel to clean my back. Once I stood in front of him, he wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me against his body. I let my body melt against his chest. His skin was warm, his heartbeat steady beneath my cheek.

He kissed the top of my head first, then my forehead, then finally my lips, slowly, like he had all the time in the world. It wasn’t rushed or desperate. It was grounding. Real.

“You’re mine,” he whispered against my mouth.

The words didn’t sound hostile.

They weren’t a threat or a claim made out of pride. They felt like a promise. A vow holding all the words we hadn’t yet spoken.

I looked up at him, and for the first time in a long time, I didn’t feel like I had to guard my heart. His eyes searched mine, soft but sure, and when he tucked a strand of hair behind my ear, I leaned into his touch like it was the most natural thing in the world.

## Chapter 7

### WILL

I spent the rest of the week trying not to get hard just at the thought of her and what we did on Monday in the studio.

When she sat in my classes, I didn’t look at her. I couldn’t. It would’ve only reminded me of how fucking much I needed her. I couldn’t focus with her around, and whenever I caught a glimpse of her, I knew she felt the same. That gave me some kind of comfort, and she understood why I tried not to watch her all the time.

It was Friday morning, and most students only have voluntary classes. They’d spend the day working on projects, did study groups, or simply sat in the library reading whatever book they needed to read. I was on my way to the studio, knowing Ivy would be there, and when I entered the art wing, I saw her standing by the vending machines in one corner.

I walked up to her, my footsteps catching her attention as I got closer. When her eyes

met mine, they immediately lit up. I smiled back, and after we both looked around to make sure nobody would see us, she walked right into my arms.

Our lips collided, and I held her tightly against my body as she melted into me.

“I fucking missed you all week,” I muttered between kisses. My hands moved from her lower back to her ass, squeezing it tightly.

She moaned into the kiss and pushed her hands into my hair, tugging at it, making me want to undress her right here. Fuck, I wanted to sit her down on one of the benches next to us and kneel between her legs and bury my face between her legs.



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“I missed you too,” she told me as we broke the kiss to look at each other. “I hated being so distant.”

I reached up with one hand to brush a strand of her hair away from her face, admiring her beauty. “Me too. But we got all weekend. Or do you have plans with your friends?” I didn’t want to ruin anything, and I especially didn’t want to be a possessive asshole. Even though I liked the idea of locking her up in the studio, or maybe my apartment, and keep her there forever. To have her all to myself.

She shook her head. “I don’t have plans. I was hoping we could hang out. You know...like we did last time.”

I nodded. I wanted that too. So damn much. “Were you headed to the studio to paint?”

“I’ve actually been here all morning,” she told me, taking a step back to show me her hands which were covered in dried paint. A grin appeared on her lips. “I finished the ocean painting and started a new one. You want to see?”

“Of course.”

“Great! Let me grab a snack first. You want something?” She turned back to the vending machine and took in her options before reaching into her overalls’ back pocket.

“No, thank you.” Before she could pay, I pulled out my phone and used it to pay for whatever she was going to choose.

“Oh, you don’t have to—”

“Take whatever,” I offered.

She turned her head and sighed, unhappy with the idea of me paying a few bucks to get her a snack. “You better get used to this.”

“But—” She was ready to argue, but she stopped herself, scrunching up her nose in the cutest way possible. “Fine.”

She put in the numbers of the snacks she wanted—a Twix bar and a pack of sour candy—and after taking them out, she turned back around to say, “Thank you. I will share.”

I chuckled and reached out to touch her waist. “Come on. Show me what you’re working on.”

We started walking toward the studio when someone called out my name.

I froze, wondering for how long that person had been there for. Hoping we didn’t get caught.

“Professor Novak.” It was a student of mine. A Freshman.

“Yes, Eleya.”

She looked between Ivy and me, then gave me a tight smile. “I was hoping to find you here. I have a few questions,” she said before looking back at Ivy. “Hi.”

“Hey,” Ivy replied, sounding as friendly as ever.

“Am I interrupting something?” she asked with a shaky laugh.

“No, you’re not. What can I help you with?” As much as I wanted to send her away, I couldn’t. it would make this look weird. I didn’t spend time alone with my students. Well, not unless it’s Ivy.

“I, uh...” She watched Ivy for another moment before her eyes met mine again. They softened, and I started to feel uneasy. I hated the way she looked at me. The way she always looked at me during class. I didn’t want to flatter myself, but I knew Eleya had a crush on me.

Unlike with Ivy, though, I didn’t feel the same.

“I was hoping you could help me figure out what color scheme I should go for. For my next project, I mean. I saw you did a painting. The landscape,” she said, keeping her bright blue eyes on me. She looked nervous, but she didn’t let Ivy intimidate her.

“I really like the colors you used, but I was wondering how you managed to make it all blend so nicely together. The darker blues and...and the lighter greens. And then you added shades of purple and orange. I just can’t wrap my head around how well it works, even if you used so many different colors. Your art truly amazes me.”

I needed her to shut up.

As much as I appreciated her words, I couldn’t listen to them knowing she intentionally talked to me that way to make me notice she was into me. She was trying way too hard, and it made this situation so much harder.

I was being a hypocrite. Wasn’t going to deny that. Because whenever Ivy complimented my work and talked to me that way, I took it all in. Appreciated it all without flinching.

But it just sounded wrong coming out of Eleya's mouth.

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I cleared my throat and tried my best to stay composed. I couldn't show my annoyance. "Thank you, Eleya. I was planning on showing the painting in class next week, and I will tell you all about it then."

I came up with that plan on the spot. I didn't want to take it into class and show it off because I didn't want to lie about it. About the inspiration for the colors. About how all the colors matched simply because they reminded me of Ivy.

Eleya's smile faltered for a second. She nodded slowly, trying not to show disappointment. "Oh. Okay. Yeah, that makes sense." She looked like she wanted to say more, but instead she glanced one more time at Ivy. "I'll see you next week, then."

"Yeah, see you then," I said with a nod.

As soon as she left the building, Ivy looked up at me, one eyebrow raised. "She likes you."

I exhaled through my nose, half amused, half annoyed. "Yeah. I know."

"She's not subtle."

I didn't reply. Didn't want to give Eleya more of my time when she wasn't even around anymore.

"Do you think she saw us?"

“I don’t know. I didn’t hear her before she called out to me.” I clenched my jaw, then sighed. “I hope she didn’t.”

“Yeah...” Ivy took a deep breath, and when I turned to face her, she had this strange look on her face.

One I couldn’t quite place at first but then understood it was distress.

“Ivy, darling,” I said slowly, liking how that word rolled off my tongue. Yeah...I will only call her darling from now on. “It’ll be fine. She probably didn’t see anything.”

“What if she did?”

“She didn’t.” I wanted to believe it myself, so I repeated it once more. “She didn’t, and I’ll talk to her about the way she keeps trying to impress me.”

That sounded so fucking wrong. And, again, extremely hypocritical. Self-absorbed, even.

Ivy’s brows furrowed, challenge flashed through her eyes. “I talk to you the same way sometimes. Why wouldn’t it work for her?”

“Because she’s not you.”

It was a simple statement which meant a whole fucking lot. And I hoped she understood.

Ivy held my gaze, and I could see it in her. How deeply she wanted to believe me. But I could also see the shadow of doubt flickering in her eyes. That worry of being compared, of being temporary. And fuck, that made my chest tighten.

“She’s not you,” I said again, stepping closer. I placed my hand on her waist, needing to keep her close. “She doesn’t make me feel like I’m coming undone every time she walks into a room. You do. And believe me, if you didn’t mean this much to me, I wouldn’t put my job and reputation on the line. I want you. Fuck, Ivy, I want to be with you.”

That earned me a breathy little sound. A kind of sigh, one she didn’t mean to let out. It was sweet. So damn sweet, just like her expression.

Her lips parted slightly, and she leaned into me, eyes drifting shut for a second, embracing the closeness.

“I hate this part,” she whispered, sighing as she rested her hands on my chest.

“What part?”

“The hiding.”

I swallowed hard. “I know, darling. I hate it too.”

But it was inevitable. We had to.

She looked up at me. “I want to be around you and not feel like we’re doing something wrong.”

I nodded slowly, brushing my thumb across the waistband of her overalls. “We’re not doing something wrong. But we are doing something risky.”

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Her mouth twisted with a conflicted smile. “You think I don’t know that?”

“I know you do. I also know that if someone found out...” I didn’t want to say it. She already knew. We both did.

But she just shrugged. “So what? People do stupid shit for love all the time.”

The word hit me like a sucker punch.

Love.

She didn’t say it lightly, and I knew it. She didn’t say it like it was casual or just part of the moment. It sat between us, heavy and real, even if she didn’t say it.

I didn’t respond right away. I just looked at her. At her messy paint-streaked hair, rosy cheeks, and that damn fire in her eyes. The one I couldn’t look away from. The one I’d chased in my own work for years and never quite found until her.

“Come on,” she said softly. “Let me show you the painting.”

She took my hand gently and led me into the studio. The door shut behind us with a quiet click, and I locked it just in case.

Inside, soft music was playing from the speakers, and the smell of paint and Ivy’s perfume lingered in the air. She guided me to her easel, then stepped aside to show me what she was working on.



The canvas was big. Taller than her. Almost as tall as me, and I was six-foot. A stormy sky blended into a rough water below, but the colors weren't angry. They were full of ache. Extremely detailed and realistic raindrops were splattered all across the top part of the canvas. Deep violets blending into soft gray blues and flashes of ochre light burst at the horizon.

I stared at it, and she patiently waited for my reaction without saying a word.

"Ivy..." My voice came out low. "See, this is why I think you're an exceptional artist."

She gave me a smile. "Thank you, Will."

I wrapped my arm around her shoulders, pulling her in front of me. She leaned back against me, placing her hands on my wrists as I wrapped my other arm around her shoulders too. I pressed a kiss to the top of her head while still looking at her unfinished painting. "You've only been working on this for a few days," I stated, amazed.

"Yes, but this time I knew exactly what I wanted to paint. It came easy."

"That's good." I smiled and tightened my arms around her. "Want to tell me about it?"

She nodded, then leaned her head back against my shoulder, her voice quiet and soft as she began.

"It reminds me of lazy, rainy Sundays. My favorite type of days. You know, when the world just slows down and makes you feel safe. Where there's nothing to do, and nowhere to be, and all I want is to be curled up under a blanket with a cup of tea, some romcom movie on, and...someone I love beside me."

I held my breath. There was that word again.

But she didn't backtrack. Didn't correct herself. She let me know that love is what she longed for. Maybe she didn't even realize it, but that's what she wanted. What she deserved.

She kept talking, her tone growing more thoughtful.

"When I painted the ocean, I didn't want it to feel violent. I didn't want the storm to look destructive. I wanted it to feel like...like it's always been there. Like it's part of the calm. You know?"

I nodded slowly, my chin brushing the top of her head. "Yeah. I see that now. And I can hear it, too."

She turned her head and looked up at me, her eyes wide with surprise. "You do? That's what I was thinking of when I painted these." She pointed at the raindrops hitting the ocean's surface. "I love the sound raindrops make when they hit a body of water."

"You captured it all perfectly, Ivy. It's amazing," I complimented her, kissing the top of her head again. "Everything you said...I can feel it. See it."

She turned in my arms, her eyes searching mine for something. Reassurance, maybe. Or recognition. She already had all of that, though.

"You're in it," she said, voice almost a whisper. "Not just in the colors. Not just in the feeling. You're the reason I knew what to paint. I kept thinking about you. About that night in the studio and everything I felt afterward. You made everything quiet for a little while. You made me feel...held."

I clenched my jaw. My arms were around her waist now, her body tight against mine.

“You did the same for me, Ivy,” I said quietly. “You still do.”

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She smiled then, small and shy. “I want lazy Sundays with you. Even if we have to hide. Even if we can’t tell anyone. I want those quiet, stolen moments. I’ll take every one of them.”

I didn’t respond with words. I just leaned down and kissed her, slow and deep, and full of everything I hadn’t said yet. Everything I was starting to feel.

And in that kiss, I promised her my Sundays. All of them.

### Chapter 8

#### IVY

That same night, I snuck away to drive to Will’s place.

He lived in a small house just ten minutes away from campus. It wasn’t far, but it was secluded enough. His house stood at the edge of a small forest. I never came out here, but I would from now on.

I parked my car next to his and got out to head over to the front door, and before I could even reach it, he opened it.

I smiled. “Hi.”

“Hey.” He looked around before reaching for my hand, pulling me inside without giving me a moment to think about what was happening.

“Is everything okay?” I asked as he closed the door behind me.

He still didn’t say a word. Instead, he pushed me back against the wall and kissed me.

I sighed in surprise but melted into him immediately.

His tongue pushed into my mouth, curling around mine as his hands wrapped around my thighs to pick me up. I put my legs around his hips, moaning as he deepened the kiss by tilting his head to the side.

“I’m so fucking glad you’re here,” he murmured into the kiss, grabbing my ass tightly as he pressed his middle against mine.

I was glad too. Here, we didn’t have to hide. We could just...be.

He kissed me slower, his lips moving gently with mine before he pulled back to look at me. He smiled, then slowly let me back down. Lifting both hands, he cupped my face and brushed my cheeks with his thumbs. “Nobody will bother us here.”

I nodded slowly, smiling gently. “I know. I’m happy.”

“Good. Me too.” He leaned in to kiss me again, and when he moved away, he added, “I cooked us something. You’ve not eaten all day.”

That was true.

I only had a couple of snacks from the vending machine, and once I got home, I had a sandwich. I loved how much he cared about me.

“What did you make?” I asked, admiring him as he simply stood there.

“Chicken breast with beans. Nothing fancy.”

“Sounds good.”

He smiled back and pressed another kiss to my lips before guiding me through the living room and to the open kitchen. His home was exactly how I imagined it to be.

There were canvases and three easels standing around in the corners, with finished paintings hanging on the walls, and a large bookshelf on the wall across from the couch. He had a fireplace, and it looked—and smelled—like he recently used it. Most of his furniture was made of dark wood and leather, and the mostly muted colors scattered all around made the place feel cozy.

“I like it here,” I said as I sat down on one of the stools.

“Yeah, me too. I moved in here three years ago. It’s quiet around here.”

“I can imagine.” I looked out the kitchen window, seeing only trees. “I wonder what it’s like when it storms.”

Will smiled and looked at me over his shoulder as he stood in front of the stove. “It’s the most beautiful thing. The trees scratch around the roof and sides of the house, and the rain splattering all around is the perfect white noise to fall asleep to.”

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I watched him as he spoke, unsure if he knew how poetic he sometimes sounded. “Sounds dreamy.”

“You might be in luck tonight. Just heard on the radio that a storm is rolling in.”

I had heard that too on my drive here, but the sky was so bright that I believed the weatherman was wrong. “I hope so.”

He glanced back at me again with a crooked grin. “Me too. I want you to hear it from here.”

A flutter stirred in my chest. I looked around again, taking in every little piece of him that lived in this space. His brushes in a mug by the sink, sketchpads piled near the fireplace, his jacket slung over the back of a leather armchair. It felt like him. Warm. Grounded. Thoughtful. And now, quietly, mine.

Dinner was ready a few minutes later, and we sat at the small wooden table by the kitchen window. The sky was dimming, and the soft light of the lamps in his house warmed up the place. He poured me a glass of wine, and we ate slowly, talking about everything and nothing. Music hummed low in the background, some old bluesy guitar piece that fit the mood perfectly.

He made me laugh, and I made him pause mid-chew when I said something that surprised him. We shared a plate of fresh fruit afterward, and when I told him the chicken was perfect, he gave me this little boy grin, proud and bashful all at once.

He told me he rarely cooked for a woman, but that he was going to cook for me more

often in the future. I liked that.

When we were done, I started gathering the plates, but he reached for my hand.

“Nope. Sit. I’ll clean up.”

“You sure?” I asked, already sliding off the chair.

“I cooked. You relax.”

I didn’t argue. Instead, I hopped up onto the counter near the sink, crossing my ankles as I watched him rinse the plates and stack them into the dishwasher. The sleeves of his button-down were rolled to his elbows, and his forearms flexed every time he reached or moved.

“You always do your dishes right away?” I teased.

“Old habit,” he said without looking at me. “My mom used to hate waking up to dirty dishes. Guess it stuck.”

I tilted my head. “You lived with your parentsong?”

“Until I left for college. My dad wasn't around much because of his work, so it was mostly my mom and me. She worked a lot too, but she was the kind of person who made a home feel like home, you know?”

I nodded, even though he wasn’t looking at me. “You’re like that too.”

He paused. Glanced at me over his shoulder, brows slightly lifted. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. You make things feel...safe.”



The silence that followed was thick with something unspoken. Something real.

He turned back to the sink, rinsing the last plate before placing it carefully on the rack. “You do that for me, too,” he said after a moment, quieter now.

Outside, the first few drops of rain began to fall. Soft, scattered, tapping lightly on the windowpane. I smiled.

“You hear that?”

He turned the faucet off and wiped his hands on a towel. “Told you it was coming.”

I reached out my hand and touched the side of his face to get him to face me. “Then it’s the perfect night.”

He stepped between my legs and put his hands on my hips, then leaned down to kiss me. His lips moved slowly, and they felt warm and tasted faintly of wine. The storm was just beginning, but everything else...this kitchen, his touch, the weight of his hands on my body, was already everything I needed.

He carried me to the couch where he sat down, making me straddle his lap. My skirt bunched up over my thighs, and I could feel the outline of his cock through the thin cotton of my underwear. I rolled my hips, shifting over him, letting the friction build and heat pool in low, secret places. His hands tightened on my hips, then slid under my t-shirt, up my ribs, thumbs pressing softly on the undersides of my breasts through the bra.

“You’re so fucking gorgeous,” he said, words muffled by the kiss. His tongue traced my lower lip, and I let him in, opening for a long, wet kiss.

I ground against him, feeling the rigid outline of him grow even harder. For a second

I just wanted to keep going, to ride the pressure until I broke, but I wanted to take my time, to savor his body and the way he looked at me as if I were the only thing that mattered in the world.

“I want to taste you,” I said. The words surprised even me. It was a reckless confession. His face changed into a twist of lust, pride, and complete lack of apology.

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“You tasted me, now I want to taste you.”

“You ever done that before, darling?” he asked, and I quickly shook my head.

“No, but I want to try.”

He leaned back, giving me the space to slide off his lap and kneel between his legs.

“You can’t do anything wrong,” he assured me, brushing aside a strand of my hair.

The lightning through the windows turned his skin a strange, pale blue for an instant. I ran my hands up his thighs, feeling the soft, faded denim against my palms, then worked the button and zipper. He arched his hips up a little to help, and I tugged both jeans and boxers down at once, exposing him.

He was already fully hard, thick and flushed, and I wrapped my hand around the base, thumb pressing gently into the sensitive underside. I liked the way he looked at me then. Half-pain, half-anticipation, as if he couldn’t quite believe this was happening. Or, letting it happen.

I bit my lower lip before leaning in. I had seen this in movies. Yeah, those kinds of movies. I wasn’t a prude. I knew about porn and sex and everything dirty. But this would be the first time I gave a man a blowjob. One of many I hoped to give him. And only him.

I licked a slow trail from the base to the tip, then back down, savoring the way he shuddered just slightly under my mouth. He hissed in a breath when I took him in, slowly, letting my lips slide down the length of him, tongue pressed flat against the

ridge. I started with a lazy rhythm, dragging it out just enough, pulling back to swirl my tongue around the head before sinking down again, deeper each time. His hands slid into my hair, not to control, just to hold on, his fingers flexing with each pass.

“Fuck, you feel so good,” he groaned, voice ragged and naked. “You look so fucking good on your knees for me.”

I hummed in response, and he jerked a little, the vibration making him grip my hair tighter. I worked him with my mouth, hands stroking what I couldn’t take, tasting salt and skin and the knowledge that I was undoing him. He started to rock his hips, small at first, but growing lost in the pleasure, fucking into my mouth. I let him, let myself be used, and it made me feel powerful, starved and worshipped all at once.

“Goddamn, baby. That mouth is perfect.”

I looked up at him and smiled through my eyes—because it was truly impossible to actually smile with his cock in my mouth.

I was proud of myself for not backing down. For being confident.

“I’m about to come, darling. You gotta let me know if you want my cum in your mouth. Or if you want it somewhere else.” He gripped my hair tighter, and I looked at him again.

Without taking him out of my mouth, I silently let him understand that I wanted him to come in my mouth. I continued to suck his cock, and a slow grin tugged at the corners of his lips.

“You gonna swallow it, too?” he challenged.

That, I wasn’t so sure about.

The idea of his cum puddling in my mouth didn't disgust me. Ruby often talked about how she hated the taste and consistency of cum. But I couldn't judge that without having tried it first.

I gave him a small nod.

"Good girl," he praised. His voice was tight and hoarse, and I didn't stop.

I closed my eyes and took him deeper, felt his cock pulse and twitch as he came.

His grunts made me clench my thighs, and my pussy reacted to the sounds he made. His cum filled my mouth, and bit by bit, I swallowed it all.

"Goddamn beautiful," he murmured as he calmed down. His eyelids were lowered and his breath was shallow. And he looked so damn hot. "Come here."

I let his cock plop out of my mouth and moved up to straddle his lap again. He cupped the back of my head and pulled me to him, kissing me intensely, and tasting himself on my tongue. It didn't bother him, which made him as a man even more attractive.

"That felt incredible," he murmured between kisses, making me smile.

I wanted him inside me, but he told me he needed a moment before he could get hard again. I didn't push, but I helped quicken the process by rubbing my pussy against his length until he was ready.

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We were on the couch, naked, legs tangled, and his arms tightly around me.

He kept kissing my forehead while I kept my eyes closed, enjoying the closeness. The calm. The storm outside.

It was perfect.

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His breathing had slowed, steady against the crown of my head. I stayed curled into him, my cheek pressed to his chest, listening to the rhythm of his heart. One of his hands was splayed across my back, the other tracing lazy, absentminded circles on my hip. Neither of us spoke for a while. We didn't need to.

Outside, the rain picked up, tapping harder against the windows, and thunder rumbled somewhere in the distance. But inside, everything was still. Warm. Safe.

I shifted slightly to get more comfortable, and he adjusted with me, pulling a blanket from the back of the couch and draping it over us.

"You good?" he murmured, his voice soft and sleepy now.

"Yeah," I whispered, tightening my arm around his middle. "Really good."

His lips brushed against my temple. "You sure?"

I nodded, feeling the rise and fall of his chest beneath my cheek. "I could stay like this forever."

He chuckled lightly, the sound rumbling through his chest. "You can. I'm not moving."

We lay there for a long time, bodies warm beneath the blanket, letting the storm play its soundtrack in the background. It was the kind of quiet I hadn't known I needed. No words. No hiding. Just the weight of him holding me together.

Eventually, his hand found mine beneath the blanket, and he laced our fingers.

And for the first time in a long time, I let myself feel completely still. Completely his.

## Chapter 9

### IVY

My week had been going great until Eleya walked straight into the studio and up to me. She was walking too quickly for it to be a coincidence. Her eyes locked on mine with purpose, and I knew before she even said a word: this wasn't going to be a casual run-in.

She walked toward me with too much confidence for someone who usually kept her head down around campus. That shaky little laugh and sweet-as-sugar expression she used with Will? Gone. Now she looked smug.

"Figured you'd be here," she said, crossing her arms, and looking around the studio before her eyes met mine again. "No Will?"

I bit the inside of my cheek and tightened the grip around the brush I had just dipped into yellow paint. "It's Thursday. He's in class."

"Right." She pursed her lips, looking at the almost empty canvas behind me. "Pretty. What's that going to be?"

I didn't feel like talking to her about my paintings. Not when she looked at me in that condescending way. "What do you need, Eleya?"

"I wanted to talk to you about something," she said, looking way too damn amused. "Something important."



I said nothing. Just waited. My stomach was already beginning to twist.

She smiled tightly. “I don’t want to sugarcoat it. I saw you with Professor Novak.”

The words hung in the air between us, heavier than they should’ve been. I stared at her, trying to decide if it was better to deny it or stay silent.

“You know, last Friday, by the vending machines out there,” she added, her voice calm now, almost polite. “You were...close. Very close.”

Still, I said nothing. My fingers curled around the brush even more until my nails dug into my palms.

“I couldn’t really see your faces because Will was standing with his back toward me, but then...you kissed. Like, actually kissed.” She looked disgusted, as if she never dreamed of kissing him.

What a hypocrite.

“Eleya.”

“Don’t worry,” she said, interrupting me with a stupid grin. “I’m pretty sure you won’t be kicked out. He will, though. Probably.”

I blinked. “You went to the Dean? You snitched?”

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“I had to,” she said, all face concern now. “It’s unethical. He’s your professor, Ivy. There are rules about these things.”

“You actually told the Dean.” My voice came out lower than I expected. Not shaky. Just quiet.

She nodded. “Of course. You don’t have to thank me.”

A cold wave of dread washed over me. My skin went hot, then cold again.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” I said finally, forcing the words out.

Eleya shrugged, like she couldn’t believe I was upset. “You’re not the only student who admires him. The rest of us have to follow the rules.”

There it was.

Jealousy.

God.

What. A.Bitch.

My heart was pounding. “This isn’t about rules. This is about you being jealous.”

She uncrossed her arms and tilted her head to the side. “Call it whatever you want. But someone needed to say something. You crossed a line.”

I stared at her for a second, trying to decide if I should scream or cry. I did neither.

Instead, I asked her to leave.

Nicely.

But if I hadn't the strength to keep calm, I would've attacked her. Thankfully, I wasn't a violent person.

"I kinda want to feel sorry for you," she told me as she turned around to leave. She stopped by the door and looked at me over her shoulder. "But I won't. Because you took what I wanted. And now neither of us can have him."

Tears finally rolled down my cheek once she was out of eyesight, and I found myself catching my breath. My throat felt tight, my heart almost exploding in my chest.

I was shaking all over as I reached into my book bag to take out my phone and send Will a text.

I need to see you.

I hit send.

Did he already get called to the Dean's office? Maybe he was still in class, teaching.

Maybe Eleya was bluffing. Maybe she didn't even tell the Dean.

Either way, I needed to talk to Will.

I needed him to hold me and help me calm down.

Moments later, my phone vibrated with his reply.

Please come to the Dean's office.

My heart sank, and everything around me crumbled.

Shit...

I didn't even clean my brushes. I left them sitting in the water jar and walked out of the studio with my legs shaking beneath me. The walk across campus and to the admin wing of the college felt longer than usual, and while it wasn't like that, it felt like everyone passing by was judging me.

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I was sweating, and I felt guilty for feeling what I felt for Will.

My fingers trembled as I pushed open the door to the hallway leading to the Dean's office. The assistant at the desk glanced up and smiled at me. She didn't look like she knew what was going on.

"How can I help you?" she asked, leaning forward with her elbows on the desk.

"I uh...Professor Novak called me here."

She looked down at the small note in front of her, then nodded. "Ah, yes. Ivy Hill."

"That's me."

"All right, Ivy, please enter," she said, her smile consistent as she gestured to the door behind her.

"Thanks." I knocked once before entering.

Will was sitting across from Mr. Hartley, his spine straight but tense, his expression unreadable. His eyes shot to mine the second I stepped in, and something in his jaw relaxed slightly.

"Ivy," Mr. Hartley said. He was in his late fifties, always polite, always sharp-eyed. "Take a seat."

I did. Right next to Will. He gave me a tight smile, but neither of us said anything.

“I want to be clear that this is a professional conversation,” Hartley began, interlocking his fingers on the desk. “And no disciplinary action is being taken at this time.”

I sat still, staring at him with glassy eyes. We all knew why we were here, and it felt strange. At least, to me it did.

He looked at us both. “A student came forward with concerns about your relationship. Namely, that there may be inappropriate contact between a faculty member and a student. Ivy, I’m not asking you to confirm or deny anything. But I do want to be very clear about what the college’s position is.”

My heart pounded.

I just swallowed, unable to say anything.

Mr. Hartley turned to Will. “Mr. Novak, technically, you are not employed as a full-time professor. You’re an adjunct art instructor. You were contracted through the college’s artist-in-residence program, which, legally, places you under a different classification.”

Will raised his brows. “Meaning?”

“Meaning, the rules are...less rigid,” the Dean said carefully. “We don’t have a formal faculty-student relationship policy that governs guest instructors or contracted artists the same way it does tenured staff. That said, the spirit of the code of conduct still matters.”

So they couldn’t fire him.

But they weren’t thrilled about us, either.

“The optics are the issue,” the Dean added. “This isn’t about legality. It’s about how things look to the rest of the campus. If the rumor spreads, it could damage both your reputations. Ivy, yours especially, if other students feel uncomfortable or claim favoritism.”

I felt Will tense beside me.

“We can’t, and won’t, terminate Mr. Novak’s contract over an assumption, nor will we penalize you, Ivy. But we expect discretion. If there is anything more than a professional relationship here, we’re asking that it not play out on campus. Understood?”

I nodded slowly. “Yes, sir.”

Will matched my nod. “Understood.”

Mr. Hartley sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “I trust both of you to be smart about this. I’d rather not have another meeting like this one.”

“Of course not, Mr. Hartley.”

We stood to leave, and as we turned toward the door, Mr. Hartley added, “And for what it’s worth, Ivy...you’re a very talented student. Make sure nothing, and no one, derails that.”

I smiled tightly. “Thanks.”

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We stepped out into the hallway and kept walking until we were around the corner, out of sight, behind a set of tall bookshelves near the back of the building.

Then I stopped, turned to Will, and finally let out the breath I'd been holding.

"That could've gone worse," I said quietly with a nervous laugh.

He nodded, watching me closely. "But it could still get worse."

I leaned into his chest, feeling his arms wrap tightly around me. I needed to be close to him.

"I don't care," I murmured. "They can't take you away from me."

"Not unless we give them a reason," he whispered into my hair, cupping the back of my head with one hand. "So we don't. Not anymore. Not here."

Turning my head to look up at him, I whispered, "But at your place?"

His smile was small but it said so much. "Yeah, at my place. And you'll be graduating next summer," he reminded me, making it sound like a silent promise.

Everything between us had to be quieter. Hidden better.

But it didn't mean it was over.

If anything, it made me want him even more.



## WILL

Normally, the smell of fresh paint and turpentine in the studio grounded me. But it was different today. It was noisy, and more students than usual filled the space.

I walked in with a sketchbook tucked under one arm and a box of new supplies for the class under the other. The students were already spread out, brushes moving, canvases quietly filling with color. There was a strange tension in the room, but the moment I saw Ivy sitting quietly in front of her painting, my nerves eased a little.

She was perched on her stool, hunched a little, brush held just above the canvas but not moving. I wanted a painting of her like that in my house.

Her stillness wasn't concentration. It was tension.

I followed her gaze before she even turned her head, and that's when I saw Eleyna.

She walked in with her head high, her ponytail swishing behind her like some kind of statement. She went straight to her usual seat, smiling at her friends before her eyes locked on mine.

I looked away, hating the way she grinned, feeling way too damn proud. I wasn't looking at her because I wanted to. I was looking because I wanted to make sure she wouldn't bother Ivy.

I turned away, putting my things away before clearing my throat and turning my attention to the students. "All right. Since there's so many of you here today, I want you to be patient with me. I will take my time to look at your work, and answer questions if you have any. That said...enjoy painting."

Some muttered "thank you" or gave me a nod, others turned away without a word,

way too focused on what they're working on.

My gaze flickered over to Ivy for a moment, and the tiny smile she gave me made me relax a little. She was okay, and she was telling me not to worry. I gave her a nod, then headed to the first student who had a question.

While I took my time with each student, I kept getting closer to Eleyna. And the closer I got, the more I understood what she was saying. I didn't hear everything. Just a few bits and pieces of her conversation with her friend.

When the words alone, studio, so wrongfell, I knew she was talking about Ivy and me. I didn't react. Didn't want to put fuel to the fire, but when I heard her call Ivy an embarrassment and a slut, I've had enough.

I looked over at Ivy to make sure she didn't hear any of that, but she dropped her brush into her water cup, her hand trembling.

My jaw tensed, and I took the few steps toward Eleyna. I kept my expression blank when I told her, "Come with me."

Her brows lifted. "Oh? Why?"

"I need a word. Outside."

She hesitated, looked around, trying to decide whether to make a scene. She must've decided against it, because she followed me through the door leading into the hallway.

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I let the door shut behind us before I turned to face her.

“You need to stop talking about Ivy.” My voice was quiet, even.

Eleya straightened her back, eyes narrowing slightly. “I didn’t say anything that wasn’t true.”

I stepped closer, not menacing, but enough to make her back straighten even more. “You came to me for help more than once this semester. You asked for critiques, feedback, extra time, attention. I gave it. You want to know what I didn’t give you? Mixed signals. I never once led you on, Eleya. So don’t act like I did.”

She flinched.

“If you’re hurt, fine. Be hurt,” I continued, voice low. “But if you keep spreading rumors, if you keep making Ivy feel unsafe in my studio, I’ll take it up with the department and make sure you’re removed from my course.”

Her eyes widened. “You can’t—”

“I can,” I cut in. “Because unlike most of your professors, I’m not tenured. I’m contracted. And I choose who’s in my section. If I believe you’re creating a hostile environment, you’re out.”

She stared at me, mouth parted slightly, like she didn’t know whether to argue or cry.

“And one more thing,” I said, stepping even closer. “Whatever you think you

saw...stay out of my private life. And leave Ivy the hell alone.”

I didn’t wait for her response. I turned, opened the studio door, and stepped back inside.

Laughter quieted when I entered. Conversations paused, but only for a moment. It all went back to normal, and I went straight to Ivy, standing next to her so both our backs were facing the rest of the students.

She didn’t look at me right away.

“I’m so sorry,” I murmured. I gently touched her thigh. In this position, nobody could see. “I handled it.”

She finally glanced up at me, her eyes glassy but fierce. “I hate her.”

“I know,” I said gently, rubbing my thumb over her thigh. “But she won’t bother you again.”

She nodded slowly and looked at her painting.

I gave her thigh a quick squeeze before moving back to my space, and I kept looking over at her, just to make sure that she was okay.

In here, on campus, and anywhere else, I was going to make sure she stayed safe.

## Chapter 10

### IVY

It was spring break, and Will asked me to stay with him for a week. Of course, I said

yes. I had no other plans, and I longed to be close to him 24/7.

We managed to stay away from each other on campus, but there were still a few stolen moments. A glance when no one was looking. His hand brushing mine in the supply closet. A low “You’re driving me insane” murmured against my ear when I passed him in the hallway wearing something he claimed shouldn’t be allowed in a college building.

But now, with no classes, no lingering eyes, no Eleya hovering like a ghost in every room, I was free to exist in his world. Completely.

The second I stepped into his house that Saturday morning, it felt different. He greeted me with a slow kiss, hands on my hips, and for the first time in weeks, we didn’t pull away.

He didn’t say much. Just took my bag, set it by the door, and led me to the kitchen. The windows were open, letting in a breeze that smelled like pine and the promise of rain. Music played low in the background. He handed me a mug of coffee, and we leaned against the counter in a kind of peaceful silence that didn’t need to be filled.

“I want this week to be ours,” he said eventually. “No stress. No rules. Just...us.”

I nodded, feeling that lump in my throat I always got when he said things like that.

And that’s exactly what it became.

The days were slow and easy. We painted together in the back room, sometimes quietly, sometimes side by side with our knees bumping, sometimes not saying anything for hours except a muttered curse when a brush fell or a color dried too fast.

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We cooked dinner every night, took turns picking movies, played board games.

And sometimes, we fucked. On his couch, his bed, the shower.

One night, three days in, I woke to find him sketching me. The lamp beside the bed was on, casting soft light across his face and the open sketchbook on his lap. I didn't say anything, just watched him for a moment, memorizing the way his brow furrowed in focus. When he noticed I was awake, he smiled, set the pencil down, and crawled back into bed like nothing about what he'd just done was out of the ordinary.

We didn't talk about the outside world.

Not once.

Not about Eleya. Not the people who would have opinions, or the fact that this time next week, we'd have to pretend we were nothing again.

Because here, I wasn't just a student.

And he wasn't my professor.

We were just Ivy and Will.

But on Thursday, something shifted.

Will had been acting a little off since morning. Distracted, even though he tried not to show it. He kissed me like usual, touched me like usual, but there was a tension in his

shoulders he hadn't carried all week.

When I asked what was up, he just said, "Later."

I didn't press. I trusted him. But I couldn't help watching him a little more closely as the day wore on. He spent most of the afternoon in his home office, shutting the door for phone calls he wouldn't explain, and when I passed by, I caught pieces of his voice, calm but clipped. Purposeful.

Dinner was already prepped when I wandered into the kitchen around six, confused when he told me not to help.

"Go sit on the porch," he said, sliding two glasses across the counter toward me. "Sun's setting. I'll bring everything out in a few."

I furrowed my brows. "What's going on?"

He just smirked. "Nothing bad. Promise."

I did as he said, partly because I was curious, and partly because I was too comfortable in his hoodie to argue. The sky was streaked in lavender and pink, and the forest just beyond the house was bathed in gold.

Ten minutes later, he came out with two plates of pasta, a bottle of wine, and a piece of paper tucked under his arm.

We ate first. He wouldn't tell me what it was. Not even when I narrowed my eyes and asked four different times.

Finally, after we finished, he took a deep breath and pulled out the folded sheet of paper, setting it in front of me on the table.

“What’s this?”

“Just read it,” he said, barely containing the grin threatening to break across his face.

I unfolded it.

And then I froze.

It was an email. From the director of the city’s modern art museum.

Your student’s submission, “Rain in Blue”, was exceptional. We’d be proud to display it as part of our spring emerging artists installation.

My eyes scanned the lines again. And again.

“I didn’t submit it,” I whispered.

“I did,” Will said softly. “A month ago. It just sits there for nobody to see. It needs to be seen, Ivy.”



My throat closed. “Will...”

“They’ve already confirmed the placement,” he added. “It’s going up next weekend. Your name, your work. It’s official.”

I didn’t say anything for a moment. I couldn’t. My hand flew to my mouth and I just sat there.

Stunned.

Overwhelmed.

He reached for me across the table, his voice softer now. “You deserve to be seen, Ivy. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to get your hopes up. But when I heard back today, I couldn’t wait.”

I stood, rounded the table in two quick steps, and fell into his arms.

“You’re insane,” I whispered, hugging him tight. “You did this for me?”

“Of course I did,” he murmured into my hair. “You’re the most talented person I’ve ever met. I’d do anything to make sure people see that.”

For the first time in weeks, I felt more than wanted.

I felt recognized.

And it was because of him.

“I love you, Will,” I whispered into the crook of his neck. My heart was pounding, and I was overcome with joy.

His arms tightened around me. “I love you too, darling. And I’m so fucking proud of you. Always remember that.”

I would.

And I would love him forever.

Because when a man like Will gave you everything, you gave him your soul and never once asked for it back.