



Advantage Love (Sexy as Sin)

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Category: Sport

Description: Can a fake romance lead to a very real forever?

One meltdown on the court and now my career is in trouble. Enter Luke Andrew. The one night stand that should have remained in my past. But he needs something from me now too. His plan? A PR stunt that will secure my comeback and give him his promotion. The catch? We have to fake-date in front of the cameras.

The more we pretend, the harder it gets to remember that this is fake. How could I have known this is more than just a match for my career, it's a match for my heart.

This is a steamy, fake dating, enemies to lovers tennis romance.

Total Pages (Source): 20

Chapter 1: Avery

The tennis ball whizzes past my ear at 120 miles per hour, and I don't even flinch. I'm used to it by now. What I'm not used to is losing. Not like this. Not when I'm better than this.

"Forty-love," the chair umpire announces, his voice echoing across the stadium.

I bounce the spare ball against the court, trying to steady my racing pulse. The Australian sun beats down, and sweat trickles down my spine, making my designer tennis dress cling uncomfortably. One more point and this match is over. One more point and I'll have crashed out of yet another Grand Slam in the first round.

"Miss Jenkins, time violation warning."

My fingers clench around the ball. I've been here before, too many times in the past year. The pressure, the whispers, the disappointed looks from my coach. I toss the ball up for my serve, but it's all wrong. The timing, the angle, everything, it all leads to a double fault.

"Game, set, match—Rodriguez."

The crowd's applause taunts me. Now, I should walk to the net, shake hands, be gracious in defeat. That's what professionals do. That's what my sponsors expect.

The good girl. Fuck that.

"This is bullshit!" I hurl my racquet across the court. It skids against the blue hardcourt surface, leaving an ugly mark. "That was clearly out in the second set, and you know it!"

The umpire's face remains impassive. "Miss Jenkins—"

"Don't 'Miss Jenkins' me!" My voice carries across the suddenly silent stadium. "This whole tournament is rigged. The line judges, the calls, everything! You've had it out for me since the first point!"

The crowd starts murmuring, phones raised high to capture my meltdown. Some are booing now, others laughing. The umpire gives me a code violation warning, but I'm past caring.

"Avery." My coach's voice cuts through my haze of anger. "That's enough."

No. It's not enough. I've spent the last two years struggling to maintain my ranking, of watching younger players zoom past me in the standings, of reading articles questioning if I've lost my edge. It all comes pouring out. I grab my water bottle and hurl it at the umpire's chair, missing by inches.

"You want to see a meltdown? I'll show you a meltdown!"

Security starts moving in as I upend my tennis bag, sending racquets and gear scattering across the court. The crowd's reaction is a mix of gasps and jeers. Someone shouts, "Go home, drama queen!"

I flip them off.

The tournament director appears courtside, her face a mask of controlled fury. I know what's coming. Fines, suspension, maybe worse, but watching my career implode

feels almost liberating.

I storm off the court, ignoring the mandatory press conference. Let them fine me. Let them write their articles. I'm done playing nice.

Back in the locker room, reality crashes in hard. My phone is exploding with notifications:

Tennis Bad Girl Strikes Again! Avery Jenkins' Latest Meltdown

Nike "Reconsidering Partnership" with Troubled Star

From Rising Star to Falling Star: The Avery Jenkins Story

#TennisTantrum trending worldwide

My agent's text is short: Emergency meeting tomorrow. This is bad, Avery. This is my last meeting with you. You need to find a new agent.

I slide down against the lockers, still in my sweat soaked tennis dress. My hands shake as I scroll through socials. The video clips are everywhere of me throwing the racquet, screaming at the umpire, flipping off the crowd.

My mom calls, but I let it go to voicemail. Then my dad. Then my sister. They all know what this means. At twenty-six, I'm watching everything I've worked for since I was four years old crumble in real time, one repost at a time.

A notification pops up from Wilson, my racquet sponsor. They're "suspending our partnership pending review." Translation: They're dropping me as soon as legal gives them the green light.

I open Instagram, masochistically reading the comments:

"What a disgrace to the sport!"

"Someone needs anger management"

"Remember when she used to actually win matches?"

The worst part? They're not wrong. I haven't made it past the third round of a major in eighteen months. My ranking has dropped from number eight to forty-three.

My coach texts: Press conference in 10. Damage control.

I text back: Not happening.

Avery, you NEED to face this.

I can't. Not yet. Not when I can barely face myself in the locker room mirror. The woman staring back at me looks desperate, and nothing like the confident player who won the French Open three years ago.

Another text buzzes through, this one from an unknown number: Need an agent who can handle the storm? Call me.

I delete it without responding. I've got bigger problems right now than shopping for new representation. Like figuring out how to rebuild a career, or if it's even worth trying.

The locker room door opens, and a tournament official pokes her head in. "Miss Jenkins? The press is waiting."

I grab my bag, already planning my escape through the back exit. "Tell them I said to go to hell."

It's not my smartest move, but then again, I haven't made a lot of those lately. As I slip out into the Melbourne night, my phone keeps buzzing with notifications, each one another reminder that in tennis, like in life, love means nothing.

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Chapter 2: Luke

"Jenkins Loses More Than Match: Nike Suspends Partnership"

I lean back in my leather chair, studying the headlines splashed across my monitors. Video clips of Avery's meltdown play on repeat. Most agents would see career suicide. I see opportunity.

"Mitchell." Sandra Peters, my boss, raps on my office door. "Partnership announcements next week. Ramirez just signed that teenage phenom from Spain." She gives me that look I've grown to hate. "What've you got?"

What I've got is a folder of solid but unspectacular clients. Good players. Reliable earners. Nothing that'll make the board sit up and take notice when they're choosing new partners. I was once a tennis star myself, but injuries had sidelined me early, but I had good instincts. I can spot a sports star, and now I had learnt how to handle them.

"Working on something big," I tell her with more confidence than I feel.

She arches an eyebrow. "You better be. We're not looking for safe bets in the partnership track."

After she leaves, I pull up another video of Avery's explosion. This time, I'm not watching the meltdown. I'm watching her move, the fire that made her a champion before everything went sideways.

My mind drifts to Miami, one year ago. A chance meeting at a charity gala. Both of

us riding the high of our own personal victories. Hers was winning, mine was signing a huge client. My career as an agent was sky rocking.

She had something about her even then. Something that made me want to stay near her, and it wasn't just the way her black dress hugged every curve, or her perfume that mixed with the ocean air. It might have been her attitude and smart mouth though. She told me I was staring. I told her she telegraphs her moves on court. Her answer was swift.

"And what about now?" Her eyes had challenged me, dared me. "What am I telegraphing now?"

Christ. I shift in my chair, my body hardening at the memory. That night had been explosive. The way she'd pushed me against her hotel room wall, strong hands demanding more. Funny how she thought she was in control. That didn't last though. Soon she moaned my name when I'd pinned her wrists above her head, my mouth lapping every inch of her athlete's body. We'd competed even then, each fighting for control until we were both sweat-soaked and gasping.

The next morning, she'd been gone. A text: "Let's keep this professional." Then radio silence.

Professional. Right. Like I haven't gotten hard every time I've watched her play since then, remembering how those powerful thighs had felt wrapped around me.

My phone buzzes with another headline: "Wilson Drops Jenkins Following Australian Open Incident"

I pull up her stats. Former world number eight. French Open champion. Twenty-six years old, prime time for a comeback. The talent's still there, just buried under pressure and expectations. She needs the right motivation, the right management, the

right... handling. And I need a client that'll put me on top.

A plan starts to form. Tennis loves a redemption arc. The bad girl finding her way back. Add in a public romance with a former tennis star, turned agent? The media will eat it up. It'll keep her relevant while she rebuilds her game at least.

My cock twitches again, remembering how she tasted, how she felt. Mixing business with pleasure is a rookie mistake, but then again, playing it safe has never been my strength.

I open my phone, scroll to draft a message, then stop. No. This needs to be face to face. I want to see her expression when I lay out my proposition. I want to watch those green eyes flash with that familiar fire anger or arousal. I didn't care which, as they look the same on her.

"Julie," I call to my assistant. "Book me on the next flight to Melbourne."

"Tell me you're not going to do what I think you are?"

"Trust me." I start packing my briefcase, already imagining Avery's reaction. She'll fight it, of course. That's half the fun. "This is exactly what I need to make partner."

I pull up the video one more time, freezing on a frame of Avery, all attitude and barely controlled power. My body responds again, and I welcome it. By the time I'm done, she'll be back on top of the rankings, and the headlines, and if I play this right, back on top of me.

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Chapter 3: Avery

There's something depressing about eating ice cream straight from the carton in a hotel room while watching your career implode. I dig my spoon deeper into the chocolate chunk, trying to ignore the footage playing on repeat.

"In her latest meltdown, former French Open champion Avery Jenkins showed once again why sponsors are distancing themselves..."

I click through channels, but it's everywhere. Tennis Channel. Sports Center. Even the local news. Each replay makes me cringe. The racquet throw looks worse than I remember, and did I really flip off that entire section of the crowd?

My phone buzzes again. Probably another reporter. Or my agent, ex-agent now, with more bad news. I've been avoiding calls all day, hiding out. The championship suite I'd booked at the Hilton seems like a bad joke now.

A knock at the door makes me jump, sending ice cream dripping onto my oversized t-shirt.

"Miss Jenkins?" A male voice. Familiar. "Your agent, or should I say, ex-agent, said you were in here."

I frown. I know that voice. That deep, slightly raspy timbre that had whispered filthy promises against my skin one hot Miami night.

"Go away, Luke."

"I can't do that." Another knock. "We need to talk business."

"I'm not decent." It's true. Between the stained shirt, ratty shorts, and day-old mascara tracks, I'm about as far from decent as possible.

"I've seen worse."

You've seen better , I think, remembering how his eyes had devoured me in that black dress.

No. Not going there.

"Five minutes," he says. "That's all I'm asking."

I consider my options. Hide in here until my savings run out, then slink home to teach tennis to bored housewives? Or hear what Luke Mitchell, rising star agent and former whatever he was, has to say?

"Fine." I open the door but block the entrance. "Talk."

He looks exactly like I remember, damn him. Perfectly tailored suit that emphasizes broad shoulders. That subtle five o'clock shadow he always had by evening. Eyes that see too much.

His gaze sweeps over me, taking in my disheveled state. One eyebrow lifts. "Love the outfit."

"Four minutes now."

He holds up his hands in surrender, but I catch the ghost of a smirk. "Can I come in? Unless you want to discuss your future in the hallway?"

I step aside, suddenly aware of every flaw in the cramped room. The unmade bed. The empty ice cream carton. The tennis bag I'd thrown against the wall earlier.

Luke closes the door and leans against it. "You're trending on socials."

"Thanks for the update. Is that all?"

"Number one in Australia. Number three worldwide." He loosens his tie, a gesture that shouldn't be distracting but is. "The video's got ten million views."

"Fantastic. I'll add it to my resume while I'm applying for jobs at the local tennis club."

"Or," he pushes off from the door, "you could let me help you turn this around."

I laugh, but it comes out bitter. "Right. Because you're such a charitable guy."

"I never claimed to be." He moves closer, and I catch a hint of his cologne, expensive, subtle, maddeningly familiar. "I'm a businessman. I see an opportunity, I take it."

"And I'm your opportunity?"

His eyes darken slightly. "You could be. If you're smart about this."

"About what, exactly?"

"A partnership." He pulls out his phone, starts scrolling. "Your ranking's slipping. Sponsors are bailing. You need someone who can rebuild your image, and get you back in the game."

"And you need?"

"A breakthrough client." No pretense, at least. "Someone who'll get attention, make headlines for the right reasons this time."

I cross my arms. "So you want to be my agent? Thanks, but I think I'd rather teach tennis to toddlers."

"Not just your agent." He meets my eyes. "Your boyfriend."

The word hangs in the air between us. I wait for the punchline.

"You're joking."

"Think about it." He starts pacing, energy radiating off him. "The bad girl of tennis, tamed by her former rival and now agent. It's a story the media can't resist, they'll eat it up."

"You want us to fake date?" The idea is absurd. Insane. Completely....possible?

"Two months." He stops in front of me. "That's all I'm asking. Long enough to change the narrative, get sponsors interested again. You focus on your game; I'll handle the PR."

"And what do you get out of this? Besides commission?"

"Partnership track at the agency. I land this, prove I can handle high-profile clients." He shrugs. "Everyone wins."

I turn away, needing distance from his intensity and from the memories his proximity stirs up. "And what happens when people realize it's fake?"

"They won't." His voice drops lower. "Because we'll make it convincing."

Heat crawls up my neck. "Like Miami?"

The air changes, and I hear him step closer but don't turn around.

"Miami was real." His voice rough now. "This would be business."

"Right." I face him, chin lifted. "Just business."

His eyes drop to my mouth for a fraction of a second. "Exactly."

"And there'd be rules?"

"Of course." He takes another step closer. I hold my ground. "Professional boundaries. Clear expectations. Everything in writing."

"No touching?"

The corner of his mouth lifts. "In public, enough to be convincing. In private, we can do whatever you need."

Whatever I need. Holy moly.

"In private, nothing." I need to make this clear, even as my body remembers exactly how his touches feel. "This is a business arrangement."

"Agreed." But his eyes say something different. "Do we have a deal?"

I should say no, kick him out and figure this out on my own. Instead, I find myself saying.

"Two months," I say finally. "That's it. After that, we go our separate ways."

"Perfect." He pulls out a business card, sets it on the TV stand. "Come by my hotel tomorrow. We'll draw up the contracts."

"Fine."

He moves to the door, then pauses. "Wear something professional. For the cameras."

"I know how to dress myself."

"Yeah." His eyes drag over me one last time, lingering on my bare legs. "You do."

The door closes behind him, but his presence lingers. I grab the ice cream carton, now completely melted.

Two months. I can handle two months of fake dating Luke Mitchell. I've handled worse.

As I head to the shower, I can't shake the feeling that I'm about to play the riskiest game of my career. This time, love definitely means something.

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Chapter 4: Avery

"Remember," Luke murmurs against my ear, his breath sending shivers down my spine, "you're remorseful but not defeated. Humble but still confident."

We're backstage at the Melbourne press center, minutes away from my public apology. The navy pencil dress he'd approved feels too tight and too warm. Or maybe that's just his proximity.

"I know how to handle the press," I whisper back, though we both know that's a lie. If I did, we wouldn't be here.

His hand finds the small of my back, steady and warm through the thin fabric. "Just follow my lead."

The touch is for show. We'd discussed acceptable public contact during this morning's contract signing. Hand-holding. Casual touches. A chaste kiss now and again. Nothing too intimate, but my body doesn't seem to have gotten the memo.

"Ready?" His thumb traces a small circle against my back.

I nod, not trusting my voice. He guides me toward the conference room, his hand never leaving my back. The familiar click of cameras greets us, along with the surprised murmurs at seeing Luke Mitchell at my side.

He pulls out my chair, the perfect gentleman. As I sit, his fingers brush my shoulder, another calculated move, I'm sure. Everything about Luke is calculated.

"Good afternoon," I start, voice steadier than I feel. "I want to address my behavior at the Australian Open."

Luke sits close enough that our thighs almost touch under the table. I feel his presence, making it hard to focus on my prepared statement. When I falter slightly, his hand finds mine under the table, squeezing gently.

The gesture should be comforting. Professional. Instead, it sends heat racing through my body, remembering other things those hands can do.

"I let my frustrations get the better of me," I continue, forcing myself to focus. "My actions were unprofessional and disrespectful to the sport I love."

His thumb strokes my knuckles as I speak. Up and down. Slow. Rhythmic. Maddening.

The questions start flying as soon as I finish my statement.

"Will you be appealing the fine?"

"Have you spoken to your former sponsors?"

"What's your plan moving forward?"

Luke leans forward, all cool confidence. "Miss Jenkins is focused on getting back to what she does best - playing world-class tennis. We're in talks with several interested sponsors who understand that one moment doesn't define a career."

"And what's your role in this, Mr. Mitchell?"

His hand tightens on mine. "I'm representing Miss Jenkins moving forward. We

believe in her potential for a strong comeback."

"Is that all you're representing?" Someone calls out. "You two seem close."

This is it. The moment we planned. But I'm not prepared for Luke to turn to me, his eyes dark with something that looks too real to be acting. I'm definitely not ready for how his free hand comes up to cup my cheek, thumb brushing my bottom lip.

"Should we tell them?" he asks, voice pitched low enough that the microphones barely catch it.

I manage a small nod, pulse racing. We'd rehearsed this. A quick, tasteful kiss. Something to get the cameras clicking.

His mouth meets mine, and every carefully laid plan goes up in flames.

His lips are soft but demanding, coaxing mine apart with practiced skill. I gasp, and he takes advantage, deepening the kiss just enough to make it clear this isn't just for show. His tongue teases mine, a brief hot slide that sends electricity shooting through my body.

My free hand finds his chest, meaning to push him away. Instead, my fingers curl into his expensive suit jacket, pulling him closer. He groans, low in his throat, a sound I remember from Miami, a sound that makes heat pool low in my belly.

The cameras are going crazy, but I barely notice. All I can focus on is the taste of him, the feel of his hand sliding into my hair, the way his teeth graze my bottom lip.

He pulls back first, but not far. Our breath mingles as we stare at each other, both slightly dazed. His pupils are dilated, lips slightly swollen. I probably look worse.

"I guess that answers that question," he says with a smirk, turning back to the press, but his voice is rougher than usual.

The room erupts with questions:

"How long has this been going on?"

"Is this why you've taken her on as a client?"

"Miss Jenkins, is this just for the publicity?"

Luke handles them smoothly, spinning our story while I try to remember how to breathe. His hand stays linked with mine, but now it feels like a brand, every point of contact burning.

"We reconnected recently," he's said.

I should be paying attention, but all I can think about is that kiss, and how it was supposed to be pretend but felt anything but.

"I think that's enough questions for today," Luke announces finally. He stands, pulling me up with him. "Miss Jenkins needs to focus on her training."

The reporters keep shouting questions as he guides me out, his hand back on my lower back. This time, the touch feels possessive. Hungry.

In the privacy of the hallway, I round on him. "What was that?"

"That," he says, straightening his tie with his free hand, "was making it convincing."

"That wasn't what we rehearsed."

His eyes drop to my mouth again. "No, it wasn't."

We stare at each other, the air crackling between us. I'm acutely aware of how close we're standing, and how easy it would be to grab his tie and pull him down for another kiss.

"Your lipstick's smudged," he says, breaking my thoughts.

I swipe at my mouth. "Whose fault is that?"

He catches my wrist, thumb pressing against my racing pulse. "It will be worth it for the headlines we'll get."

Right. Headlines. This is all for show. All business. So why does his touch feel like something more?

"I should go," I manage. "Training, like you said."

He releases my wrist slowly, fingers dragging across my skin. "Dinner tonight. For the cameras."

"Fine." I step back, needing distance. "But next time, stick to the script."

His laugh follows me down the hallway. "Now where's the fun in that?"

As I head to the locker room to change, my phone buzzes with notifications. The kiss is already trending. Luke's plan is working perfectly.

So why do I feel like I'm the one who just lost control of the game?

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Chapter 5: Luke

"The press conference video has over two million views already," Sandra's voice comes through my car's speaker. "Every sports blog is talking about tennis's new power couple."

"That was the plan." I check my watch. Twenty minutes until I pick up Avery for dinner. The kiss from this afternoon is still burning in my memory, how she'd melted against me, the soft sound she'd made when I'd deepened it. Fuck it was perfect.

"The board is impressed," Sandra continues, snapping my focus back. "Pull this off, get her back in the top twenty, sign her to a major sponsor, and that corner office is yours."

My pulse quickens. Partnership. The thing I've been working toward since leaving the pro circuit. "I might need more time."

"Two months. Show us consistent progress with Jenkins, and the promotion's yours." She pauses. "Just don't let the relationship angle compromise your judgment. We've all seen the kiss footage."

"It's strictly business," I lie, thinking of how Avery's body had pressed against mine, how perfectly she'd fit.

"Keep it that way." Sandra hangs up.

I pull up to the luxury rental house I've arranged overlooking the bay. Perfect for the

"living together for appearances" story we're spinning. The realtor had been thrilled to lease to a celebrity couple, especially after I doubled the security deposit.

Couple. The word shouldn't affect me. This is a business arrangement, nothing more, but then I remember Avery's taste, her scent, the way her fingers had curled into my jacket.

My phone buzzes with a text from Avery: Running late. Meet at restaurant instead?

No. I'm picking you up. That's what couples do.

This isn't real, remember?

I smirk. Tell that to your tongue this afternoon.

There's a long pause before she responds: Fuck you, Mitchell.

Maybe later. Wear something nice.

I can practically feel her frustration through the phone. Good. A frustrated Avery is hot Avery, and tonight needs to be convincing.

The restaurant I've chosen is pure romance with it's oceanfront views, private booth, soft lighting. The media I tipped off are already stationed outside when we arrive.

Avery's wearing a red dress, cut low enough to make my mouth water but classy enough for the eventual photos. Her dark hair falls in loose waves, and all I can think about is how it had felt wrapped around my fingers during the press conference.

"You're staring," she murmurs as I help her from the car.

"That's the point." I let my hand linger on her lower back, guiding her through the cameras. "Give them something to talk about."

She plays her part perfectly, leaning into me, laughing at something I whisper in her ear. By the time we reach our booth, my body is humming with awareness. I tell her about the rental.

"You didn't have to rent a house," she says once we're seated. "My hotel was fine."

"Your hotel was depressing." I order a bottle of wine without consulting the list. "Besides, couples live together."

"We're not a couple."

"No?" I lean forward, dropping my voice. "That kiss felt pretty real to me."

Color floods her cheeks. "That was for show."

"Show me again, then."

Her eyes darken.

"The photographers can see us through the window," I remind her. "Make it convincing."

She hesitates, then slides closer in the curved booth. My heart rate kicks up as she brings her lips to mine. The kiss is softer than this afternoon, but no less potent. I let her control it, enjoying how she teases, how her hand comes up to rest against my chest.

When she pulls back, we're both breathing harder.

"Convinced?" she asks, voice husky.

"Getting there." I tuck a strand of hair behind her ear, noting how she shivers. "We should practice more. For authenticity."

"You're enjoying this too much."

"You're not enjoying it enough." I trace her bottom lip with my thumb. "Relax, Jenkins. Think of it as another kind of training."

Her phone chimes. Her coach, confirming tomorrow's practice time. Reality intrudes, reminding me why we're really here. Two months to get her back on track. Two months to prove myself to the board.

Two months to pretend I'm not already falling for her again.

"Speaking of training," I say, forcing my mind back to business, "I've set up meetings with some sponsors for next week. They're interested in renegotiating."

"Because of the publicity?"

"Because you're still Avery Jenkins. One meltdown doesn't erase your Grand Slam title." I catch her hand when she tries to pull away. "You just need to remind them why they signed you in the first place."

"And dating you helps with that how?"

"Everyone loves a redemption story. Especially one with a romance angle." I stroke my thumb across her knuckles, watching her pupils dilate. "Trust me."

"I don't."

"Lie better, Jenkins." I lift her hand to my lips, pressing a kiss to her palm. "You trusted me plenty in Miami."

Her breath catches. "That was different."

"Was it?" I let my teeth graze her wrist, feeling her pulse jump. "Or are you just scared it might happen again?"

Before she can answer, the waiter arrives with our wine. We shift apart, but the tension.

My phone buzzes with a n email from Sandra: Board wants weekly progress reports. Don't screw this up.

I look at Avery, studying our wine list with forced concentration, her lips still slightly swollen from our kiss. Two months to secure my promotion. Two months to resurrect her career.

Two months to pretend I'm not already addicted to the taste of her.

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Chapter 6: Avery

The smell of coffee and bacon pulls me from sleep. For a moment, I forget where I am. This isn't my depressing motel room. The sheets are too soft, the morning light too perfect as it streams through floor-to-ceiling windows.

Right. The rental house. Our staged little love nest for the media.

I pad downstairs in sleep shorts and an oversized tennis shirt, following the sounds of domestic activity. Luke stands at the professional grade stove, already dressed in workout gear that shows off every muscle. He doesn't look up as I enter, focused on whatever he's cooking.

"There's coffee," he says, spatula moving with practiced efficiency. "And we need to talk strategy."

"Before breakfast? That's cruel."

His lips quirk. "Wilson called this morning. They're reconsidering their position about pulling their sponsorship."

That gets my attention. "Seriously?"

"Apparently, our little press conference made quite an impression. The bad girl finding love, finding her way back." He slides a perfect omelet onto a plate, adding bacon and fresh fruit.

"Finding her way into your bed, you mean." But I accept the plate he offers, impressed despite myself. "I didn't know you could cook."

"There's a lot you don't know about me." He leans against the counter, arms crossed, watching me eat. "Like how I hate it when people don't take their careers seriously."

I pause mid-bite. "Excuse me?"

"You're talented, Jenkins. But talent isn't enough. You need discipline, focus, commitment."

"I am committed."

"Really?" His eyes pin me in place. "Because from where I'm standing, you've been sabotaging yourself. The outbursts and the tantrums. It's like you're trying to prove everyone right about you."

"You don't know what you're talking about." I push away from the breakfast bar, suddenly not hungry. "You're my fake boyfriend, not my coach."

"I'm the guy trying to save your career." His voice is intense. "Whether you like it or not."

"By controlling every aspect of my life? Thanks, but I've had enough men telling me what to do."

He moves then, until he's right in front of me, towering over me.

"Someone needs to challenge you," he says as he cups my chin in his hand to tilt my face to his. "Push you past your comfort zone. Make you remember why you fell in love with the game in the first place."

My heart pounds against my ribs. "And you think that's you?"

"I think." His hand comes up, fingers ghosting along my jaw. "You need someone who isn't afraid of your attitude. Someone who knows how to channel it into your game."

"Everything's a game to you, isn't it?"

"Life's a game, Jenkins." His thumb traces my bottom lip. "The question is: are you ready to start playing to win?"

Something inside me snaps. I grab his wrist, yanking his hand away. "I've been playing to win my whole life. Don't pretend you know what I need."

Instead of pulling back, he steps closer, backing me against the counter. "I know exactly what you need. Structure. Discipline. Someone who won't let you hide behind your tantrums."

"I'm not hiding."

"No?" His hands bracket the counter on either side of me, caging me in. "Prove it."

My breath catches as he leans down, his mouth inches from mine. "What are you doing?"

"Testing your commitment." His voice is rough velvet. "Show me how badly you want this comeback."

"By letting you dominate me? Not happening."

His laugh is low, dangerous. "Sweetheart, if I was trying to dominate you, you

wouldn't be talking right now."

Heat floods my body. "You can't shut me up."

"I can think of several ways." His eyes drop to my mouth. "But we're keeping things professional, remember?"

"Professional?" I arch against him slightly, satisfaction coursing through me when his breath hitches. "Is that what this is?"

His hands tighten on the counter. I lean up, letting my lips brush his ear. "I don't think it is anymore."

He moves fast, lifting me onto the counter in one smooth motion. My legs part instinctively as he steps between them, hands gripping my thighs.

"Last chance to back down," he warns.

I curl my fingers into his shirt, pulling him closer. "I never back down."

For a moment, we're frozen there. Our breath mingling, hearts racing, bodies humming with potential energy. Then Luke smiles, slow and wicked.

"Good to know." He steps back abruptly, leaving me cold. "Practice in thirty minutes. Don't be late."

WTF! "You're seriously walking away right now?"

He grabs his coffee, heading for the door. "Consider it motivation. Channel that frustration into your training."

"You're an ass, Mitchell."

"And you're going to thank me when you're holding your next trophy." He pauses in the doorway. "By the way, Wilson wants to meet tomorrow. Be ready."

"Is that an order?"

His grin is pure sin. "Unless you need more forceful motivation?"

I grab an apple from the fruit bowl and throw it at his head. He catches it easily.

"That's my girl." He takes a bite, winks, and disappears upstairs.

I slip off the counter on shaky legs, torn between fury and arousal. This is going to be the longest two months of my life.

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Chapter 7: Luke

The hot water pounds against my shoulders as I try to clear my head. This morning's interaction with Avery plays on repeat.

"Keep it professional," I mutter, adjusting the temperature colder. Professional. Right. Like I haven't been thinking about Miami for the past year. Like I haven't memorized every detail.

The sponsorship deals are lining up. The press is eating up our story. Everything's going according to plan. Except for the way my body responds to her presence. The way I can't stop thinking about her.

I shut off the water, grabbing a towel. This is business. A strategic play to advance both our careers. Nothing more, but when I step into my bedroom and find Avery in the doorway, all strategies fly out the window.

She's dressed in fitted workout gear; hair pulled back in a messy ponytail. It's her eyes that stop me cold. They have a hunger that matches my own. Her practice today must have not worked out the frustration from this morning.

"Jenkins." My voice comes out rougher than intended. "Something you need?"

She doesn't answer immediately, gaze trailing over my chest, following a water droplet as it runs down my torso.

"We should talk about this," she says finally.

"About what?"

"This." She gestures between us. "Whatever's happening here."

I take a step closer, noting how her breath catches. "Nothing's happening here. We're keeping things professional, remember?"

"Is that what you want?"

The question hangs in the air, heavy with possibility. I study her face. The flush in her cheeks, the slight parting of her lips, the challenge in her eyes.

"What I want," I say carefully, "isn't relevant. This is about your comeback. Your career."

"What if I want more?"

My control slips. "Avery."

"Tell me you don't feel it too." She moves closer, fearless as always. "This pull between us. It's not like we haven't had sex with each other before."

"It's complicated."

"It's simple." Another step. "We want each other. Since Miami we always have."

The distance between us shrinks to nothing. I can smell her scent and its turning me on.

"If we cross this line," I warn, "there's no going back."

Her hand comes up, hovering just above my chest but not quite touching. "Good, I don't want to go back."

Everything in me screams to pull her closer, but I force myself to step back.

"We can't," I say, though it physically pains me. "Your career has to come first. If it all falls apart it could get messy. For both of us."

"It's already messy." Her voice catches. "It has been since Miami."

"Which is exactly why we need to be smart about this." I run a hand through my wet hair, needing the distraction. "Two months, Jenkins. Give me two months to get your career back on track. After that." I trail off.

"After that?"

I meet her eyes, letting her see everything I'm holding back. "After that, all bets are off. My mouth is on you, my cock buried deep in you."

She shivers, and it takes everything in me not to close the distance between us.

"Two months is a long time," she says softly.

"I know." I allow myself to trace her cheek with my knuckles, just once. I let my thumb brush her pulse point, feeling it race. "I'm going to remind you why Miami was just the warm-up, but not tonight. Soon."

Her eyes darken further.

She turns and leaves. Fuck I want her, but is it worth my career if I let my feelings dictate my life? I dress quickly, trying to focus on the day ahead. Its only six more

weeks.

Chapter 8: Avery

The ball machine fires another serve, and I return it with practiced precision, exactly where Luke called for it. Sweat trickles down my spine despite the early morning hour, my muscles already burning from the intensity of this session.

"Again," Luke calls from the sideline. "This time, down the line."

I catch glimpses of the Wilson and Nike reps watching from the stands between shots, talking to my coach. They arrived twenty minutes into my warm-up. But it's Luke who commands my attention, making sure they see the best of me.

"Faster on the return," he instructs.

"I know how to play tennis," I snap, even as I adjust my stance.

The next serve comes in hot. I channel my frustration into the return, sending the ball screaming down the line. Perfect placement. Perfect power.

"Better." Luke's approval shouldn't affect me, but warmth blooms in my chest anyway. "Now serve."

I move to the baseline aware of our audience. This is what I'm known for. My serve was clocked at 128 mph last season. Lately, it's been inconsistent. Unpredictable. Like me.

"Focus, Jenkins." Luke tells me. "Show them why you're worth the investment."

I block everything out except the ball and the court. My toss is perfect, my motion fluid. The serve rockets over the net, hitting the corner with an explosive crack.

"That's my girl," Luke murmurs.

Heat that has nothing to do with exertion as warmth floods my body. I serve again, and again, each one better than the last, until my coach calls for a break.

"Impressive, Miss Jenkins," the Wilson rep says as I approach. "We're particularly interested in your dynamic with Mr. Mitchell."

"Our dynamic?" I accept the water bottle Luke hands me, our fingers brushing.

"The public is fascinated by your relationship," she explains. "It's marketing gold. We're thinking of building a campaign around it. How love can make the difference."

I almost choke on my water.

Luke's hand settles on my lower back. "We would be open to looking at that."

The rep's eyes track the gesture. "Exactly. The bad girl of tennis, tamed by love? The story writes itself."

"I'm not some fairytale princess needing rescuing," I start, but Luke squeezes my hip in warning.

"What Avery means," he smoothly interjects, "is that our relationship is about partnership, not taming."

"Even better." The rep makes a note on her tablet. "We'll want joint appearances, of course. Practice sessions like this, but with media present. Perhaps some lifestyle

photos at home?"

"Within reason," Luke says, reading my discomfort. "Avery's focus needs to be on training."

"Of course." The Wilson rep turns to the Nike rep. "Your thoughts?"

"We're in," he says immediately. "But we want exclusivity on the relationship angle. Joint sponsorships only."

They discuss terms while I try not to focus on Luke's thumb drawing small circles against my back. It's meant to be comforting, I know, but it's driving me crazy.

"We'll have our team review the contracts." Luke announces finally.

"One more thing," The Wilson rep calls as we turn to leave. "The kiss at the press conference? That kind of authentic emotion is exactly what we're looking for. Keep it up."

Luke's hand tightens on my hip. "Trust me," he says, voice rough. "That won't be a problem."

"Contracts will be ready tomorrow," the rep says as they leave. "You two are going to be amazing for our brand."

When they're gone, Luke turns to me with that wicked smile. "Told you I could sell it."

I watch him walk away, all confident swagger. Only five more weeks of this and it's done.

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Chapter 9: Avery

"One month down," I murmur to my reflection, adjusting the designer tennis dress Wilson sent over for today's campaign shoot. The fabric hugs every curve, the hem hitting mid-thigh, more fashion than function. But that's the point, isn't it? To look good. To play well and to date Luke. Well. Fake date Luke.

The numbers don't lie. My ranking has climbed two spots. Three new sponsors have signed on and even my serve percentage is up. Luke's plan is working perfectly.

Luke.

My body heats just thinking about him, about this past month of dirty words and professional touches that feel anything but professional. Living together has become an exquisite form of torture as I hear him move around his room at night, passing him in the hallway fresh from the shower, pretending I don't notice how his eyes follow me.

"Focus," I tell myself. "It's just another photoshoot."

Then I walk into the studio and see Luke waiting and I know this is anything but normal. He's wearing snug jeans and a tight white Henley, the fabric emphasizing every muscle. His eyes roam over me and I smile as I see them darken as they take in my outfit.

"You're late," he tells me as he moves to my side.

"But it's worth it, isn't it?" I strike a pose, enjoying how his gaze lingers.

Before he can respond, the photographer swoops in. She is a stylish woman in her forties who introduces herself as Marina.

"The chemistry between you two is incredible," she gushes, positioning us on the set. "We want to capture that spark, the tension, the passion, the story of you."

"We know the story," Luke says dryly. His hand finds my waist, turning me to face him. "Trust me."

The first few shots are standard tennis poses, side by side, holding tennis balls. Yawn. This is pretty boring. Then it ramps up as Marina wants more intimate shots.

"Luke, stand behind her," she directs. "Like you're teaching her form."

His body aligns with mine, one hand on my hip, the other sliding down my arm to adjust my grip on the racquet. His breath fans against my neck, and memories of Miami flood back and how those hands had felt elsewhere, how his mouth felt there too.

"Perfect!" Marina calls. "Now look at each other like you're about to kiss."

I turn in his arms, racquet forgotten. His eyes are stormy as they meet mine, full of barely contained heat.

"Selling it for the cameras?" I ask.

His thumb traces my bottom lip. "Does this feel fake to you?"

The camera clicks rapidly as we stare at each other. Luke's free hand splays across

my lower back, pulling me closer.

"Beautiful!" Marina circles us. "Now, Avery, put your hands on his chest. Luke, tangle your fingers in her hair."

We follow her instructions, but it stops feeling like a performance. My hands slide up his chest, feeling his heart race beneath my palms. His fingers thread through my hair, tugging gently.

"Remember our deal," I breathe, even as I arch into him.

"One more month." His voice is strained. "No sex until it's done, but we never said we couldn't play."

Heat pools in my belly. "Play?"

Instead of answering, he dips me backward, one strong arm supporting my weight. The move is pure dance floor romance, but there's nothing romantic about the way his body presses against mine., as I feel his arousal hard against my hip.

"Trust me," he murmurs, and then his mouth is on my neck, just below my ear. The camera keeps clicking as he trails kisses down my throat, each one sending electricity through my body.

"Luke." It comes out somewhere between warning and plea.

He pulls back enough to meet my eyes, and the naked want there steals my breath. "I'll stop for now, but when we are alone, I'm doing this again. Naked."

Yes!!!!

"Incredible!" Marina's voice breaks the spell. "That's exactly what we needed."

Luke straightens us slowly, but keeps me close. "Did you hear me Avery." He asks as he kisses the shell of my ear, his hand playing with the hem of my dress. "You. Spread out naked for me."

My legs feel shaky. I'm a mess of frustrated energy.

"The Wilson execs are going to love these," Marina says as she comes over to us, showing us some preview shots on her laptop. Luke steps back slightly, but keeps me at the front of him, hiding how aroused he is also.

I look at the photos and realize she's right. We look amazing together. More than amazing. We look real.

"Send the proofs to my office," Luke says, all business now. "We'll need approval before anything goes public."

As the crew packs up, his hand finds mine. "Home?" His thumb strokes my pulse point.

I nod, hoping we could finally be together.

"I'll drop you off first. I have an errand to run and I'll be back. We can have dinner after."

Bugger. There's goes that plan.

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Chapter 10: Avery

Three hours later and Luke is still not home. He is frustrating. I end up making a sandwich for dinner, stripping off and climb into bed.

He can have dinner by himself. I don't know how I can want him and hate him all at once. No matter how hard I tried to ignore him, the man has consumed my every thought.

With him just down the hall. Every night, and it drives me crazy. I must have finally fallen asleep as it was dark when I woke up. I tip toe to Luke's room and see the light on under his door. He's obviously home then.

Fucker. Yep. I'm back to hating him.

I go back to bed, staring at the ceiling, frustrated knowing he was close enough to touch. Imagining what he was doing. Wondering if he was thinking about me.

My hand slid across the sheets, brushing against my stomach, thinking of the night in Miami. I roll onto my side, squeezing my thighs together. This was ridiculous. I couldn't let him get into my head.

I was done fighting it.

"Bugger it," I muttered, reaching for the drawer in my nightstand. My fingers closed around the familiar cool metal, and a flicker of anticipation sparked low in my belly.

This wasn't about him, I told myself. This was about me. About control. About releasing all the tension that had been building up since the day he walked back into my life.

The toy hummed to life in my hand, and I bit my lip, sinking back into the pillows. My free hand slid up to my breasts, teasing the sensitive skin there, while the vibrations buzzed against my inner thigh, teasing, tormenting.

My hips shifted instinctively, a low moan slipping past my lips as I finally pressed the toy where I needed it most, imagining him there, his mouth, his fingers. The sensation was electric, chasing away every coherent thought until there was only this.

Only him.

My mind conjured his image. Of Luke leaning against the doorframe, his shirt unbuttoned just enough to hint at the hard planes of his chest. The way his gaze would darken as he watched me, heat radiating from him in waves.

I moved the toy faster, chasing the edge, my breath coming in ragged gasps.

"God, Luke," I whimpered, arching off the bed.

A sudden sound broke through the haze. The creak of my bedroom door.

My eyes flew open, but before I could react, I saw him.

Luke stood in the doorway, his hand braced against the frame, his expression unreadable. His gaze was fixed on me, dark and intense, and I realized with a jolt that I hadn't been quiet.

Not even close.

Heat flooded my face, but my body betrayed me, refusing to stop, the toy still buzzing against my skin.

“Don’t stop,” he commanded, his voice low and rough.

My breath caught. I should have been mortified, but the way he looked at me sent a fresh wave of heat pooling low in my belly.

“Luke,” I whispered, but it came out as a plea.

He stepped inside, closing the door behind him. The sound of the latch clicking was loud in the silence, and my heart hammered in my chest.

“You called out to me,” he said, his voice a growl as he stalked toward the bed.

“I didn’t mean—”

“Yes, you did.” He cut me off, his eyes locking onto mine. “Did you imagine my mouth on you? My tongue licking you?”

He stopped at the edge of the bed, towering over me. My toy slipped from my hand, forgotten as his fingers brushed against my ankle, trailing up my leg.

“Are we going to play now?” I managed, though my voice was weak, trembling.

“No,” he murmured, his lips curling into a wicked smile. “I want to watch.”

His eyes raked over me, taking in every inch, and I felt exposed in the best possible way. The heat between us flared as his hand lingered on my thigh.

“Finish,” he commanded. “I want to see you fall apart.”

My body shuddered under the weight of his gaze. This was a game I wasn't sure I could win, but damn if I didn't want to play.

I swallowed hard; my gaze locked on his. His thumb brushed against my knee, just the lightest touch, but it sent a shiver coursing up my spine.

"Go on," he coaxed, his voice lower now. "Let me see you."

My fingers trembled as I reached for the toy again. He didn't move, didn't flinch, just stood there watching me like I was the most fascinating thing he'd ever seen.

"Luke." My voice was barely a whisper.

"Fuck, Avery," he said, his eyes darkening further, "say my name when you come. Let me hear you scream it."

It wasn't just a command. It was possession.

I took a shaky breath, letting my hand drift between my legs once more. The toy buzzed back to life, the vibrations teasing against my sensitive skin. My hips bucked instinctively, and a soft moan escaped me.

His jaw clenched, and I caught the slight flare of his nostrils.

"Good girl," he murmured, his voice smooth and intoxicating.

Heat shot through me, my body arching as I followed his lead. My free hand gripped the sheets, desperate for something to ground me as the pleasure built higher and higher.

He stepped closer, his hand brushing against my ankle again before sliding up my

calf, his touch firm but unhurried. The rough callouses on his fingers sent sparks skittering across my skin, and I couldn't hold back the gasp that followed.

"You like this," he said, his tone filled with smug certainty. "Knowing I'm watching you."

I couldn't deny it, even if I wanted to.

"Yes," I breathed, the word barely audible but loud enough to make his lips curl into a satisfied smirk.

His hand traveled higher, his fingers trailing over my thigh with a deliberate slowness that made my toes curl. His eyes never left mine, pinning me in place as if daring me to look away.

"You're beautiful like this," he said.

My breathing became faster, my body trembling as I edged closer to release. Every muscle tightened, Luke's focus narrowing to the sensation building within me.

"Let go, Avery," he demanded. "Now."

That was all it took. His words sent me tumbling over the edge, my body convulsing as wave after wave of pleasure crashed over me. His name tore from my lips, raw and unrestrained, as I shuddered under his gaze.

I felt his hand slide to my hip, steadying me as I came down. When I opened my eyes, his expression had shifted. The hunger there was unmistakable, and I was aware of what happened.

"I—" My voice cracked, and I swallowed, suddenly aware of how vulnerable I was.

“Don’t.” He cut me off, his thumb brushing against my hipbone. “Don’t apologize. Don’t overthink. Just feel.”

His words had meaning, and I realized this moment wasn’t just about physical release. It was about surrender, about trust, about the unspoken tension that had simmered between us since the day we reconnected.

He leaned in then, his forehead nearly brushing mine. There was no career, no fake relationship, no PR strategy. There was only us.

“You drive me fucking wild Avery,” he murmured, his breath warm against my skin. “I want to taste you, to fuck you and to love you.”

“Likewise,” I admitted, my voice barely audible.

His lips twitched as he stood, pulling back.

“Three weeks,” he said simply, his tone soft but laced with intention.

And then, without another word, he turned and walked out, leaving the door slightly ajar behind him.

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Chapter 11: Luke

The door to Avery's bedroom clicked shut behind me, but the scene I'd just left burned into my mind like a brand.

Avery Blake, sprawled on her bed, flushed and breathless, completely undone.

The sound of her moans still echoed in my ears. She didn't just push me to the edge—she shoved me clean off it.

My hands clenched at my sides as I stalked down the hall. I needed air, space, and something to keep me from turning around and finishing what she had just started. I couldn't stop the flood of images that filled my head. Her parted lips, the way her back arched, the scream of my name as she fell apart under her own touch.

Fuck me.

I shoved open the door to my room, the force rattling the frame, and leaned against the wall, dragging a hand down my face. My chest heaved with the effort to rein myself in, to remind myself why this was a bad idea.

For the next three weeks she was still my client. My responsibility. The entire reason I was on the verge of solidifying my place as one of the top agents in the business. But fuck if she didn't make me want to throw all of that away.

I closed my eyes, and let my imagination take over, filling in the gaps of what I wanted to do.

I pictured her on her knees before me, those bright green eyes wide as she looked up at me. My fingers tangling in her dark hair, guiding her, controlling her. The thought of her lips parting for me, of her willingly submitting to my every command, made my body tighten painfully.

I'd take my time with her. Make her beg for it. Make her realize there was no one else who could give her what she needed.

Her hands would rest on my thighs, soft and tentative at first, but I'd coax her into confidence, into boldness. She wasn't the type to hold back, not really, not when I'd felt her passion that one unforgettable night in Miami.

I imagined the way her lips would feel, the heat of her breath, the exquisite friction that would drive me insane. I'd murmur instructions, telling her exactly what to do, how to please me. And she'd follow them. Not because she had to, but because she wanted to. Because she wanted me too.

The thought of her surrendering to me made my blood roar in my veins.

I cursed under my breath, pacing the length of my room like a caged animal. This was madness, pure and simple.

But the thing about madness? It was seductive.

I sank into the edge of my bed, scrubbing a hand through my hair. This wasn't just lust. It was more than that. It was something raw and consuming that went beyond the physical. She didn't just push my buttons; she ripped the whole damn control panel out.

And I wanted her to keep doing it.

I leaned back, my hands braced on the mattress, and let my mind drift further into forbidden territory.

I imagined pulling her into my room, her back pressing against the wall as I pinned her there, my hands framing her face. She'd try to fight me, but I'd break her resolve with a single kiss, deep and commanding, leaving her breathless and wanting.

I'd whisper filthy promises against her skin, my lips trailing down her neck, her collarbone, the curve of her shoulder. I'd feel her body tremble under my touch, her nails digging into my back as she surrendered completely.

The idea of her submission wasn't about power. It was about trust. It was about her giving me every part of herself, knowing I'd never let her fall.

And when she begged for more, I'd give it to her.

My hand clenched into a fist, and I forced myself to stop. This wasn't helping. If anything, it was making things worse.

I stood abruptly, moving to the window. The cool glass against my palm grounded me, a sharp contrast to the heat still coursing through my body.

I needed to focus. To remember why I was here. Avery's career depended on me keeping my shit together. Her comeback wasn't just about her. It was about everything I'd worked for, everything I wanted to prove.

Damn it though, she made me want to throw all the rules out the window.

I closed my eyes, exhaling slowly.

Five weeks in, and I was already teetering on the edge. Another three weeks of this,

and I wasn't sure I'd survive. One thing was certain: when this was over, when we'd both gotten what we wanted from this arrangement, I wasn't letting her walk away again.

No. Avery Blake was mine.

She just didn't know it yet.

Chapter 12: Avery

After last night, Luke had avoided me all day, but tonight was date night, and he couldn't avoid me any longer. If I had my way, tonight would end with him, inside me.

His hand settled on my lower back as he guided me through the crowd and into the restaurant, the heat of his palm searing through the thin fabric of my dress. I hadn't missed the way his fingers lingered, the subtle pressure as though he couldn't help himself.

Good.

We were seated near the back, away from prying eyes but close enough for the media to get their shots through the windows. Luke thanked the hostess with his signature charm, pulling out my chair before taking his own.

I waited until the waiter poured the wine and disappeared before making my move.

"So," I said, swirling the deep red liquid in my glass, "did you enjoy the show last night?"

Luke's hand froze halfway to his glass. His eyes met mine across the table. "Fuck Avery. Give me a break. I don't want to have my erect dick on every newspaper."

I leaned in, lowering my voice to something just shy of a purr. "No. I'd rather have it in me."

His jaw tightened. “Avery.”

“Relax. I’m just having fun” I said, dragging my finger along the rim of my glass. “I’m just curious though. Did you like what you saw?”

The muscle in his jaw ticked, and I knew I had him.

His gaze dropped to my lips, lingering before snapping back up to meet my eyes. “Yes,” he growled out.

I leaned closer, resting my chin on my hand, my voice soft and teasing. “I was thinking about you, you know. While I had my fingers inside me.”

His breath caught, so slight that anyone else might have missed it. But I didn’t.

“I imagined it was you,” I continued, my words slow and deliberate. “Your hands. Your mouth. The way you’d take your time, teasing me until I was begging you for more.”

Luke’s fingers curled around the edge of the table, his knuckles whitening. “Avery.”

“You told me not to stop,” I said, my tone light, conversational, as if we were discussing the weather. “And I didn’t. I came so hard, Luke. But it wasn’t enough. I want more.”

He leaned forward, his voice a rough growl. “We had a deal. Play only until it is over.”

“I think we should renegotiate,” I shot back, emboldened by the heat simmering in his gaze. “We can still play, but it would be good to play a game for two.”

His eyes darkened further, his control slipping by the second. I bit back a smile, relishing the way his focus narrowed entirely on me.

“Like tonight,” I said, my voice barely above a whisper, “I’m not wearing anything under this dress. Now, if I had a partner for me to play with, he would be able to find that out for himself.”

That did it. Luke stood abruptly, the chair scraping against the floor with a sharp screech.

Before I could say another word, he grabbed my hand and pulled me to my feet, his grip firm. The other diners turned to look, but I barely noticed.

Luke’s expression was a mix of frustration and something darker, something that made my pulse race.

“We’re leaving,” he said, leaving no room for argument.

“Where are we going?” I asked, though I already knew the answer, as I tried to smile at finally winning.

He didn’t respond. He didn’t need to. As he led me out of the restaurant, the cameras outside clicked furiously, capturing the moment. But for once, I didn’t care.

Because it was going to be worth it.

Chapter 13: Luke

The second we stepped out of the restaurant; my patience snapped. I could still hear her voice in my head, low and teasing, describing how she wasn't wearing anything under her dress tonight.

Damn it, I was done pretending.

The cameras flashed as I pulled her toward the car, the media yelling questions I couldn't be bothered to hear. All I could think about was getting her alone.

The valet scrambled to bring the car around, his wide eyes darting between me and Avery. I must've looked like a man possessed because he didn't waste a second tossing me the keys.

"Get in," I growled, yanking open the passenger door.

Avery slid inside, her green eyes bright as she smiled up at me.

She wasn't scared or embarrassed—no, she looked thrilled. Like she knew exactly what she was doing to me and loved every second of it.

By the time I rounded the car and got behind the wheel, my blood was roaring, and my hands were tight on the steering wheel.

When I glanced at her and saw the way she was looking at me, her lips parted, her chest rising and falling a little too quickly, her thighs pressing together, I knew my

restraint wasn't going to last.

Not tonight.

I screeched out toward home, but the second we hit a red light, I shifted in my seat to face her.

"Pull your dress up," I commanded, edged with the heat that had been building for weeks.

Her brows lifted, and a sly smile curved her lips. "What if someone sees?"

"They won't." I told her. "And even if they do, I don't care."

Her cheeks flushed as she bit her lip. Then, with slow, deliberate movements, she gathered the fabric of her dress and pulled it up her thighs, inch by inch.

Fuck.

The sight of her bare skin, soft, smooth, so close, made my self control shatter. I reached out, dragging her legs apart and running my hand up her inner thigh. She gasped, her body jerking slightly, but she didn't stop me.

"You weren't lying," I murmured, my fingers brushing against the slick heat between her thighs.

She was soaked, and the realization sent a dark thrill through me. I slid one finger through her folds, teasing, before pushing it inside her.

"Luke," she moaned, her head falling back against the seat.

“Look at me,” I growled.

Her eyes fluttered open, her gaze locking onto mine. I kept my hand moving, slow and steady, while my thumb circled that sensitive spot that made her hips buck against me.

“You want this,” I said, my voice rough and unrelenting. “Say it.”

“Yes,” she gasped, her voice trembling with need.

“What do you want, Avery?”

“You,” she whispered, her cheeks flushing even deeper. “I want you.”

Damn right she did.

The light turned green, but I didn’t move. Instead, I pulled my hand back, ignoring her soft sound of protest, and gripped the back of her neck, pulling her toward me.

“I’ve been waiting for this,” I growled against her lips. “Waiting to touch you. Taste you. Take you.”

She didn’t reply. She didn’t need to. Her mouth crashed into mine, her kiss as demanding as the woman herself. Her hands tangled in my hair, pulling me closer, and for a moment, I forgot where we were.

A horn blared behind us, snapping me back to reality.

“Not here,” I muttered against her lips, pulling away just enough to turn my attention back to the road.

Her breath came in soft pants, her lips swollen and glossy, and it took every ounce of willpower I had not to pull over and finish this right now.

I pressed down on the accelerator, the car surging forward as I headed for somewhere, anywhere, we could be alone.

Home.

The second I threw the car into park, I was on her, dragging her into my lap as her dress rode up her hips. Her knees pressed into the seat on either side of me, her warmth settling against my thighs as her arms wrapped around my neck.

“Luke,” she begged as she ground against me.

I slid my hands down her back, over the curve of her hips, and gripped her ass, pulling her closer. “You’ve been driving me insane,” I growled.

I kissed her hard, my hands roaming over her body, exploring every inch of her soft, smooth skin. My mouth found her neck, sucking and biting just hard enough to leave a mark, while my hands pushed her dress higher.

Her moans filled the car, soft and breathless, as I kissed my way down her chest, pulling the fabric of her dress aside to reveal more of her.

“You’re perfect,” I murmured against her skin, my voice thick with need. “Every inch of you.”

Her body arched into me as I took her nipple into my mouth, sucking and flicking my tongue over the sensitive peak.

“Harder,” she gasped, her hips grinding against me.

I pulled back, my breathing ragged, and looked up at her. “I want you to remember this,” I said. “I want you to remember how it feels to be mine.”

Her lips parting as if to speak, but no words came out. Fuck. I need to see all of her.

“Out,” I growled, my voice edged with the kind of authority that left no room for argument.

Avery barely hesitated as she opened her door and stepped onto the driveway. I thanked every God know to me that the house was hidden from prying eyes.

Her dress was still hiked up from her teasing, her thighs bare and begging for my touch. I met her on the passenger side, slamming the door shut behind her before backing her against it.

“You think this is a game?” I growled. “Does this feel like I'm playing?”

Her lips curled into a smug smile.. “Maybe,” she said, tilting her chin up. “But I'm playing too.”

I grabbed her waist and lifted her onto the hood of the car, my hands sliding up her thighs to push the dress higher. The fabric bunched at her hips, exposing her to the cool night air, and to me.

She parted her thighs wider, her cheeks flushed, her breaths shallow. “Time to stop playing.”

That was all the permission I needed.

I leant over her, my hands gripping her thighs and spreading them open further. She gasped as I pressed a kiss to the sensitive skin above her knee, then another, trailing

higher and higher until my mouth hovered over her core.

Her hips jerked forward, and I smirked, watching her squirm under my touch.

“Luke, please,” she whispered, her voice trembling with need.

“Please, what?” I teased, running a single finger through her slick folds, just enough to make her whimper. “Say it, Avery.”

Her eyes locked onto mine, wild and desperate. “I need your mouth. Now.”

I didn’t make her ask twice.

I leaned in, my tongue sweeping over her in one long, deliberate stroke. She cried out, her hands flying to my hair as her thighs tensed around me. I gripped her hips, holding her in place as I devoured her, my tongue circling and flicking her sensitive clit until she was gasping my name.

Her hips began to move, grinding against my mouth as her moans grew louder, more frantic. I slid two fingers inside her, thrusting deep and curling them just right, and she nearly came off the hood of the car.

“Fuck, Luke!” she gasped, her nails digging into my scalp.

“That’s it,” I growled against her, the vibrations making her shudder. “Ride my hand. Show me how much you want it.”

She didn’t hold back, her hips rolling against my fingers as I thrust them harder, deeper. The slick sounds of her arousal filled the night air, mingling with her breathless moans and the low growls rumbling in my chest.

Her body tensed, her back arching as she clutched at me, and I knew she was close.

“Come for me, Avery,” I commanded, my fingers pumping into her while my tongue worked her clit. “Let go.”

She shattered with a cry, her entire body shaking as waves of pleasure crashed over her. I didn’t stop, coaxing her through every second of her orgasm until she was trembling and breathless, her head falling back against the windshield.

I stood, wiping my mouth with the back of my hand as I towered over her, my chest heaving. Her skin was flushed, her eyes half-lidded, and she looked like everything I’d ever wanted.

But I wasn’t done with her. Not even close.

“You think we’re done?” I asked.

Her gaze flicked to mine, still hazy with pleasure but filled with that fiery defiance I craved. “Fuck I hope not.”

“Good.” I grabbed her hand, pulling her off the car and spinning her toward me. “Because I’m not stopping until I hear you screaming my name again.”

She bit her lip, her eyes dark with anticipation. “Then what are you waiting for?”

My mouth crashed into hers, claiming her in a kiss that left no doubt about what was coming next.

Chapter 14: Avery

The second we stumbled through the door, Luke's hands were on me, pulling me close, his lips crashing into mine. My back hit the wall, as his hands gripped my thighs, lifting me slightly, and I wrapped my legs around his waist, feeling the hard press of him against me.

"You've been driving me insane," he growled, his breath hot against my neck as his lips and teeth trailed down to my collarbone. "Every word, every look, every damn thing you do."

I pushed at his chest, just enough to make him step back, and slid out of his grasp. His brows furrowed, confusion flashing in his dark eyes, but I didn't give him a chance to speak.

Slowly, deliberately, I sank to my knees in front of him, my hands trailing down his chest, over the hard ridges of his abs, until they found the waistband of his pants.

"Fuck Avery," he said, his voice rough.

"Shh," I whispered, looking up at him through my lashes. "Let me."

His chest heaved, his jaw tight as he watched me unbuckle his belt, pulling it free with a slow, deliberate motion. His eyes followed my every move, dark and burning with need.

When I unzipped his pants and freed him, he was hard, thick, and perfect. I wrapped

my hand around him, stroking him slowly, watching the way his body tensed, the way his breath deepened.

“Fuck, that feels good, Avery,” he rasped, his head falling back for a brief moment before his gaze returned to mine.

I leaned in, pressing a soft kiss to the tip, then another, trailing my tongue along his length, tasting the salty heat of him. His hands fisted at his sides, his control hanging by a thread, and it sent a thrill through me.

I took him into my mouth, inch by inch, hollowing my cheeks as I slid down, my tongue teasing along the underside. He groaned, a low, guttural sound that made me clench with need.

His hand tangled in my hair, not pulling but holding, guiding, as I moved. I picked up my pace, my hands and mouth working in tandem, and his control finally snapped.

“Fuck,” he growled, his hips jerking forward as I took him deeper. “You look so good with your lips on my cock.”

I hummed around him, the vibrations pulling another groan from his lips. I wanted to drive him wild, to push him to the edge and watch him fall apart for me.

But Luke Carter wasn't the type to let anyone have the upper hand for long.

He pulled me off him suddenly, his grip on my hair firm but gentle as he brought me to my feet. His eyes burned into mine, his chest heaving as he reached down and grabbed the backs of my thighs.

“You're not finishing me like that,” he growled, lifting me effortlessly.

I gasped as he pressed me against the wall, his body pinning me there as his hands slid under my thighs to hold me in place.

“Luke,” I whispered, my breath catching as he positioned himself between my legs.

“You want me, Avery?” he asked, his voice rough and low, his lips brushing against my ear.

“Yes,” I gasped, my nails digging into his shoulders. “God, yes.”

He didn’t wait.

With one hard thrust, he was inside me, stretching me, filling me completely. I cried out, my head falling back against the wall as he started to move. The angle had me seeing stars, every thrust hitting just right, driving me higher and higher until I was on the brink of losing control.

“Fuck, you’re perfect,” he growled, his mouth on my neck, his hands gripping my thighs so tightly I knew I’d feel it tomorrow.

I clung to him, my body arching into his, meeting him thrust for thrust.

“Say my name,” he commanded, his voice rough and demanding.

“Luke,” I gasped, the word breaking on a moan.

“Again,” he growled, his pace quickening, his control slipping.

“Luke!” I cried, my body trembling as pleasure built to a breaking point.

When I shattered, it was with his name on my lips, my nails digging into his

shoulders as wave after wave of pleasure crashed over me.

He followed moments later, his hips slamming into me one last time as he groaned, his body tensing and shuddering against mine.

I was still catching my breath when Luke shifted, his hands firm on my thighs as he pulled me away from the wall. My legs were like jelly, barely capable of holding me up, but it didn't matter, as he wasn't about to let me fall. He scooped me into his arms, as he walked down the hallway, and kicked open the door to my bedroom and strode inside. Gently, he laid me down on the bed, his hands lingering on my hips as he straightened.

I watched as he shrugged off his shirt, the muscles in his chest and arms rippling with every movement. His pants followed, leaving him gloriously bare, and my breath caught at the sight of him.

He knelt on the bed, his hands bracketing my ankles as he slowly slid them up my legs, spreading them apart as he went.

"I don't know to be pleased or angry at myself that couldn't wait another few weeks to claim you." He said as I stretched out in front of him.

"This means we can spend the next few weeks like this instead of pretending," I said as I watched his hands continue their journey, tracing every curve, every dip, until I was trembling beneath him again. He leaned down, pressing soft kisses to the inside of my thighs, his breath warm against my skin.

"I've wanted you like this since the moment I saw you again," he murmured, his lips brushing against my hip bone.

I saw him grow hard again. Fuck I love the stamina of athletes, even ex-athletes like

Luke. There is something about the raw need to take what's yours. My hands tangling in the sheets as he lightly bit my breast as his fingers toyed with my clit.

When he finally moved over me, positioning himself between my legs again, I thought I might come apart before he even touched me. He held my gaze as he slowly entered me, inch by torturous inch, stretching me, filling me completely. I gasped, my back arching, and he stilled, his hands gripping my hips to hold me steady.

This was more intense than before. This was different. Almost as if he needs my body to recognize only him.

"Look at me," he commanded. I obeyed, my eyes locking onto his as he began to move, slow and deliberate, every thrust measured and controlled.

"Fuck, Avery," he groaned, his forehead resting against mine. "You feel so good. So perfect."

He kept the pace slow, driving me to the brink over and over, only to pull me back, teasing me with his control.

"Please," I gasped, my nails digging into his back.

"Please, what?" he asked, his voice dark and teasing.

"Don't stop," I begged, my voice trembling with need. "Please, Luke, don't stop."

His pace quickened just slightly, his thrusts deeper, harder, and I cried out, my body arching into him as he hit that perfect spot again and again.

"That's it," he murmured, his lips brushing against my ear. "Let go for me, baby. Scream for me."

I was already falling apart, every nerve in my body alight with pleasure. His name fell from my lips in a chant, as the tension built higher and higher until it snapped. I screamed, my body shaking as wave after wave of pleasure crashed over me. He didn't stop, his movements steady and relentless, prolonging my release until I was nothing but a trembling, moaning mess beneath him.

"Fuck," he groaned, his rhythm faltering as his own release overtook him. He buried himself deep, his body shuddering as he came, his grip on my hips tightening.

He collapsed against me, his weight warm and solid, his breath hot against my neck. For a moment, we just lay there, tangled together.

When he finally lifted his head, his eyes were soft, filled with something that made my chest tighten.

"That was better than I remembered," he said.

"For me too," I whispered, my fingers brushing against his cheek.

In that moment, I knew I was his.

Completely.

Chapter 15: Avery

The next morning Luke and I headed to my first tournament game since my meltdown.

I felt good. For the first time in what felt like forever, I wasn't dreading stepping onto the court. My game had improved, my focus was sharp, and I still had the dull delicious ache between my legs from last night.

This was supposed to be fake. A mutually beneficial deal that would put both of us back on top. But after last night and after the way he touched me, the way he looked at me, it didn't feel fake anymore.

I shook my head, forcing the thoughts away. I couldn't let myself get caught up in this. I needed to focus on my game, on winning. That was the only thing that mattered.

Or at least, that was what I kept telling myself.

Luke's phone buzzed, breaking the silence. He glanced down, his brows furrowing briefly before he answered it, the sound throwing into the car speaker.

"Carter," he said, his tone brisk and professional.

"How's it going with taming her?"

Taming her.

The words hit me like a slap, sharp and stinging.

I froze, my fingers tightening around the strap of my gym bag.

Luke's jaw tightened, his grip on the steering wheel flexing. "It's going fine," he said, his voice clipped. "Better than expected." He reached across to take my hand but I shook him off.

Better than expected.

I stared out the window, my stomach twisting into knots. I wanted to say something, to ask what the hell that was supposed to mean, but the words wouldn't come.

"Good," the voice continued. "Keep it up. Once she's back on top, the agency will look golden. This whole thing will pay off in spades if you play it right."

"Yeah," Luke said, his tone unreadable as he flicked a glance to me.

I barely heard the rest of the conversation. My mind was racing, the voice in my head growing louder with every second.

He's just using you.

Luke ended the call and tossed his phone back into the cupholder. The silence that followed was deafening.

I could feel his gaze flicking toward me, could sense the tension in the air, but I didn't look at him. I couldn't.

"You okay?" he asked finally.

“Fine,” I said quickly, my voice sharper than I intended.

He didn’t push, and for that, I was grateful.

I forced myself to focus on the game ahead, on anything but the ache in my chest. This was a business arrangement. That was all it had ever been.

I just needed to get my head back in the game. I needed to win. To prove to everyone, and to myself, that I didn’t need him.

And once I did, he could leave.

The rest of the drive was quiet. When we finally pulled up to the stadium, I unbuckled my seatbelt and reached for the door without looking at him.

“Avery,” he said.

I paused, my hand on the door handle, but I didn’t turn around.

“You’re going to kill it today,” he said.

“Thanks,” I said, forcing a small smile before stepping out of the car. It was like last night had never happened. Now he was just a stranger to me again.

As I walked away, I told myself to forget about him. To focus on the court, on the game, on the only thing that mattered.

But the ache in my chest told me it wasn’t going to be that easy.

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Chapter 16: Luke

The second the call ended, I regretted answering it.

“Taming her.” Those two words echoed in my head. I gripped the steering wheel harder, my knuckles white as I tried to keep my emotions in check.

That idiot. My boss didn’t know shit about Avery.

Now, because of that stupid call, she was freezing me out. I glanced at her. She was hurt.

And the worst part? I couldn’t blame her. I wasn’t supposed to fall for her.

This whole thing had started as a business deal, but somewhere along the way, it stopped feeling fake. For me at least. I didn’t want to let her slip through my fingers again like she did after Miami.

She wasn’t just another client. She wasn’t just a means to an end.

She was Avery. And now I had to fix this.

First, I am going to watch her dominate on the court, before, hopefully, I do the same to her tonight.

The sun was relentless, beating down on the stadium, but Avery was focused.

She was poetry in motion. The sharp crack of the ball against her racket echoed across the court, and the crowd responded with cheers, their energy electric.

This was her domain, her battlefield, and today she owned it.

I leaned forward in my seat; elbows braced on my knees as I watched her deliver another flawless serve. Her opponent scrambled to return it, barely keeping pace as Avery advanced on the net.

“Come on,” I murmured under my breath, gripping the edge of my seat.

Her opponent faltered, sending the ball just wide of the line. The umpire called it out, and the crowd erupted into applause. Avery didn’t smile or react. She simply turned and strode back to the baseline.

This was the Avery the world saw, but I knew the truth. The way she’d been in my arms, her body soft and warm, her gasps and moans echoing in my ears. She’d been vulnerable, open, so utterly herself—and now, watching her here, she was a completely different person.

Another rally began, the exchange fast and brutal. Avery’s movements were precise, her footwork flawless as she sent her opponent chasing down shots. The poor girl looked exhausted, her frustration evident in every rushed swing of her racket. Avery, on the other hand, was calm, her expression neutral.

The final game of the match was over in minutes, Avery’s dominance absolute.

She stood at the net, shaking hands with her opponent and the umpire before turning to acknowledge the crowd. The applause was deafening, a mix of cheers and whistles,

and I saw more than a few people holding up signs with her name on them.

She gave a small wave, her smile polite but restrained, before heading toward the bench to grab her bag. I leaned back in my seat, watching as she slung her bag over her shoulder and walked off the court, her head held high.

She was back.

The Avery Blake the world had fallen in love with, the media darling who'd been written off after her meltdown, was back on top where she belonged.

And damn it, I was proud of her. Still, the knot of tension in my chest refused to loosen. I wasn't supposed to fall for her, but watching her now, I knew it was already too late.

She was it for me.

Now I just had to convince her to believe it too.

The fundraiser tonight was my chance. Tonight, I was going to tell her. No holding back, no carefully crafted words. She needed to know how I felt, and I wasn't leaving that party until I made her listen.

I was straightening my tie in the mirror, trying to push back the nerves that had no business being there, when I heard the click of her heels.

When I turned around, I froze.

Avery stood in the doorway, her dress a shimmering cascade of midnight blue that

hugged every curve and fell to the floor. The neckline was low, just enough to tease, while the slit up the side revealed a tantalizing glimpse of her toned leg with every step she took.

Her hair was swept to one side, soft waves cascading over her shoulder, and her lips painted a deep, dangerous red, curved into the faintest of smiles.

“Wow,” I said.

She arched a brow, her smile turning wry. “You clean up pretty well yourself.”

Her voice was light, but there was something guarded in her expression, a flicker of something she was trying to hide.

It was my fault. I knew that. And I was going to make it right.

The car ride to the fundraiser was tense. Avery was distant, her gaze fixed on the window, her hands clasped in her lap. By the time we arrived, my frustration had reached a boiling point, but the cameras were waiting, and I couldn’t afford to let them see anything but the perfect image we’d created.

So, I played my part.

I opened her door, offered her my hand, and held her close as we walked into the venue. The cameras flashed and congratulated her on her win today as she stopped and we posed together. I gathered her in tighter to me. She didn’t pull away, but she didn’t lean into me either, her body stiff and unyielding.

It drove me insane.

As the night wore on, I found every excuse to touch her.

At first, she stiffened, her body language screaming resistance. But as the night went on, she started to relax, or maybe she just gave up fighting it.

Either way, I wasn't stopping.

By the time we reached the dinner portion of the evening, I could feel the tension between us building to a breaking point.

She sat beside me at the long, elaborately set table, but when I let my hand drift under the table to rest on her thigh.

"Luke," she hissed, her voice low as she turned her head slightly toward me, keeping her smile in place for the people across from us.

"Yes, Avery?" I murmured, leaning in just enough for my breath to brush her ear.

Her fingers curled into a fist on her lap, her nails digging into her palm. "Don't. Touch. Me."

I let my thumb brush against her bare skin in defiance. "Why not?"

Her head turned toward me, her green eyes flashing with warning. "Because we're in public," she whispered sharply. "Or is this all part of taming me?"

"Dominate you? Yes. Tame? Fuck no." I countered.

Her lips parted, a retort clearly on the tip of her tongue, but I didn't give her the chance.

Before she could speak, I leaned in, capturing her mouth in a kiss that was anything but subtle.

Her gasp was muffled against my lips, her hands flying up to grip my jacket in surprise. I didn't pull back or soften the kiss. I kissed her the way I'd wanted to all night—with possession.

The world around us faded. I didn't care who was watching, and I didn't care what headlines might come from this. All I cared about was her and the taste of her lips, the way her body melted against mine despite her protests. I wanted her to know she meant something to me.

When I finally pulled back, her cheeks were flushed, her breathing uneven, and her green eyes wide with a mixture of anger and lust.

I cupped her jaw, forcing her to meet my gaze. “You told me not to touch you,” I said. “So I kissed you instead.”

Her lips pressed into a thin line, her expression torn between frustration and desire. “You can't just do that.”

“I can,” I said simply, leaning closer until our foreheads almost touched. “And I will. Because I know you want it as much as I do.”

She opened her mouth to argue, but the words didn't come. Instead, her fingers tightened in my jacket, her gaze flicking to my lips before snapping back to my eyes.

“That's what I thought,” I murmured, my thumb brushing against her cheek before I pulled back slightly.

My hand found its way back to her thigh under the table, and this time, she didn't push it away. By the time we left the ballroom, the tension between us was palpable.

As I guided her through the crowd, my hand resting possessively on her lower back, I

leaned down to murmur in her ear.

“We’re not done, Avery,” I said. “Not even close. We need to talk about what happened last night and again today.”

She didn’t respond, but the way her body shivered against mine told me everything I needed to know.

Chapter 17: Avery

The drive home from the fundraiser was a blur. My head was spinning, my emotions ricocheting between anger, confusion, and something dangerously close to hope.

Luke had kissed me— really kissed me. Not for the cameras, not for show, but because he wanted to. And damn it, I wanted him too.

My reputation was restored. His promotion was practically in the bag. We didn't need this anymore. Not the fake dating. Not the fake living together. I couldn't play the game anymore after last night. I felt wrung out after the game, the kiss and the amazing sex from last night. What did it all mean? Now that I was advancing in the ranks again, will Luke leave? Was I just a willing (okay, very willing) body last night? Was it because we obviously had an attraction for each other? That was proven in Miami. Was it a repeat of that?

I didn't need this anymore.

At least, that's what I told myself as I stormed into the house, Luke hot on my heels.

"Avery, stop," he said, as I headed for the stairs.

I spun around, my chest heaving. "No, Luke. You stop. I can't do this anymore."

He froze, his brows furrowing as he stared at me. "What are you talking about?"

"This," I said, gesturing between us. "The fake dating, the public appearances, all of

it. My reputation's fine now. You've proven yourself to your boss. It's over."

"It's not over," he said, his tone firm.

"Yes, it is," I shot back, my voice rising. "We agreed to two months, but I'm done. It's is enough. We've both gotten what we wanted, so let's just—"

"No," he interrupted.

I blinked, startled by the force of his response.

"You agreed to two months," he said, stepping closer, his dark eyes locking onto mine. "And I'm holding you to that. I have one week left. I intend to collect on it."

I opened my mouth to argue, but the look on his face stopped me.

"It's not fake for me, Avery," he said, as he stepped closer. "And after last night, I don't know how you can think we are still faking it."

My breath caught, my heart skipping a beat as his words sank in.

"What?" I whispered; my voice barely audible.

"This stopped being fake for me a long time ago," he said, stepping closer until there was barely any space between us. "You're all I think about. All I want. And I'm not letting you walk away from this without knowing how I feel."

I stared at him, my mind racing. "Luke, I—"

"How can you think what we have between us is fake?" he said as he his hands slid up my thighs as his gaze burned into mine. "Don't say anything," he murmured. "Just

let me show you.”

He knelt before me as his hands moved to the hem of my dress, pushing it up with slow, deliberate movements until the fabric bunched around my hips. I stood frozen, my breath shallow, my heart pounding as he leaned in, pressing a kiss to the sensitive skin just above my knee.

“Let me taste you,” he said, his hands gripping my thighs as his lips trailed higher.

I couldn’t speak, couldn’t think, as he kissed his way up my inner thigh, his breath warm against my skin. When his mouth finally found me, I gasped, my hands flying to his shoulders for support.

He didn’t rush. He took his time, his tongue teasing and tasting, his hands holding me steady as my knees threatened to give out.

“Fuck,” I gasped, my head falling back as he circled my clit with maddening precision.

“You taste like heaven,” he murmured against me, the vibration of his voice sending shivers up my spine.

I was trembling, my hands clutching at his shoulders, my body arching into his mouth. When he slid his tongue inside me, I cried out, my hips jerking as a fresh wave of pleasure tore through me.

“That’s it,” he growled, his hands gripping my hips tighter. “You are mine Avery, now give me what I need.”

He didn’t stop, his tongue thrusting deep, his lips and fingers driving me higher and higher until I was on the brink of losing control. He growled against me, the sound

raw and possessive, and the vibration sent me over the edge.

I shattered, my body shaking as pleasure crashed over me in waves, as I called his name out again and again as it echoed in the quiet room.

Luke looked up at me. “I’m not letting you go, Avery,” he said. “Not now. Not ever.”

Thank God for that.

Chapter 18: Luke

I stayed on my knees for a moment longer, watching Avery recover. Her legs trembled, her chest rose and fell with quick, shallow breaths, and her lips parted as if she wanted to say something but couldn't find the words.

She was perfection. Messy, undone, and completely mine.

When I stood, her green eyes lifted to meet mine, wide and searching. There was no hiding from her now. She'd seen it, felt it. Every bit of the fire I'd been holding back for months was there.

"No more games," I said. "No more pretending. You're mine, Avery. Fuck the promotion. Fuck the deal. None of it matters without you."

I slid my hands up her sides, the fabric of her dress bunching in my fists as I pushed it higher.

Her lips parted as I dragged the silky material over her head, leaving her bare before me. My eyes raked over her, taking in every inch of her soft, flawless skin, every curve.

"You're so damn beautiful," I murmured, my hands trailing down her sides to her hips.

I stepped back, my fingers working quickly to unbutton my shirt. Her eyes followed every movement, darkening as I shrugged it off and reached for the buckle of my

belt. When I pushed my pants and boxers down, standing completely bare before her, I saw the way her throat worked as she swallowed, her cheeks flushing deeper.

“Eyes on me, Avery,” I commanded.

Her gaze snapped to mine, her lips parting slightly as I stepped closer, closing the distance between us. I took her hand, threading my fingers through hers as I tugged her gently toward the dining table.

She followed without protest, her breaths quickening as I guided her to the edge.

“Sit,” I said, my voice leaving no room for argument.

She obeyed, her hands gripping the edge of the table as I stepped between her legs, spreading her thighs to make room for me.

“You’re mine,” I said again, my hands trailing up her thighs, gripping her hips firmly. “Do you understand that?”

Her breath hitched, her eyes searching mine. “Yes,” she whispered.

“Say it,” I demanded, my voice a low growl.

“I’m yours,” she said. “And you belong to me now too.”

A surge of possessive heat roared through me, and I leaned down, capturing her mouth in a hard, demanding kiss. Without breaking the kiss, I lifted her, laying her back against the cool surface of the table. My hands slid over her body, brushing over her breasts, her stomach, until I reached her hips again.

She moaned into my mouth, her hands gripping my shoulders as I settled between her

legs, the hard length of me pressing against her heat.

“You feel this?” I growled against her lips, rocking my hips against her. “This is all for you, Avery. Only you.”

Her head fell back, a soft cry escaping her as I thrust forward, sliding inside her in one slow, relentless movement. I didn’t give her time to adjust. I couldn’t.

My hips moved, driving into her with hard, deep thrusts that made her cry out, her nails digging into my back as she clung to me. The sound of our bodies colliding, the way her moans filled the room.

“Luke,” she gasped, her voice breaking on a moan.

“Say it again,” I demanded, my thrusts quickening, harder now, pushing her closer to the edge.

“Luke,” she cried, her body arching beneath me, her head tipping back as she gave herself over to the pleasure.

I leaned down, capturing her lips in another kiss as I drove into her, my hand tangling in her hair, holding her close. Her nails scraped down my back, her moans vibrating against my mouth as she tightened around me, her body trembling with the force of her release.

“Fuck, Avery,” I groaned, my pace faltering as she shattered around me, dragging me over the edge with her.

I buried myself deep, my body shuddering as pleasure ripped through me, leaving me breathless and utterly spent.

For a moment, neither of us moved. When I finally pulled back, her eyes met mine, and what I saw there stole the words from my mouth.

It wasn't just desire. It was trust.

And it made me realize one thing for certain: I wasn't just claiming her tonight.

She'd already claimed me.

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Chapter 19: Luke

The quiet hung between us. I didn't move, afraid to break whatever spell had wrapped itself around us in those moments. She wasn't pushing me away, she wasn't shutting down, and she wasn't retreating behind the walls she so carefully kept in place.

Instead, she stayed exactly where she was. With her arms loose around my neck, her legs still hooked over my hips, her forehead resting against mine.

"Luke," she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Yeah?" I murmured, my lips grazing her temple.

She hesitated, her lashes fluttering against her cheeks as she took a deep breath. "What happens now?"

I pulled back just enough to look at her, my hand moving to cup her cheek. "We stop pretending," I said simply.

Her brows furrowed, her lips parting slightly as she searched my face. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, I'm done with the games," I said. "I'm done with the fake dates and the contracts and the deadlines. I'm done pretending this isn't real for me."

She smiled and I knew she felt the same way.

“I’m yours, Avery,” I said, my thumb brushing against her cheek. “Completely. And I don’t care about the deal or the promotion or anything else. All I care about is you.”

“I don’t know how to do this,” she said. “I always mess up anything that is good.”

“I won’t let you. This is new for me too, so we’ll figure it out,” I said, pressing a kiss to her forehead. “Together.”

She nodded slowly. “I want this,” she said. “I want you.”

I lifted her from the table, her legs still wrapped around my waist, and carried her toward the stairs. Her fingers traced lazy patterns on my shoulders, her lips brushing against my neck as I climbed, the warmth of her sending a shiver through me.

When we reached the bedroom, I laid her down on the bed, my body covering hers as I braced myself on my forearms. Her hands slid into my hair, her eyes searching mine, and I saw everything I’d ever wanted reflected back at me.

This was just the beginning for us.

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Six months ago, my life was in shambles. I was barely holding my career together, the media had turned on me, and I was convinced I'd never claw my way back to the top.

Now, everything was different.

Winning wasn't just a goal anymore; it was my reality. Tournament after tournament, I stepped onto the court and reminded everyone why they'd fallen in love with my game in the first place. The crowd loved me, the media couldn't get enough, and the sponsors I'd lost came crawling back with bigger offers than before.

But none of that compared to what I'd gained off the court.

I glanced at Luke, who was sitting across from me on the plush private jet he'd insisted we take to Vegas. He was casually scrolling through his phone, one hand holding a tumbler of whiskey, the other resting on the armrest like he owned the world.

And in a way, he did.

He'd walked away from the agency not long after the fundraiser, refusing to play by their rules anymore. He wanted control, independence, and he got it. His new firm wasn't just thriving. It was dominating. Clients flocked to him, drawn by his reputation, his results, and that infuriating charm that made him impossible to resist.

I couldn't blame them. After all, I'd fallen for it too.

“Stop staring, Mrs. Carter,” he said without looking up, a small smirk tugging at the corners of his mouth.

I rolled my eyes, fighting the smile threatening to break free. “I’m not Mrs. Carter yet.”

“Give it a couple of hours,” he said, finally meeting my gaze. “I like the way it sounds.”

I’d never imagined myself getting married, much less in Vegas, but with Luke, everything felt right.

The chapel he’d chosen was understated by Vegas standards, with no Elvis impersonator, no neon lights, just a simple, intimate space with soft lighting and white roses lining the aisle.

“Are you nervous?” I asked, slipping my arm through his as we stood just outside the entrance.

“About marrying you?” he asked. “Not even a little.” He added, “The only thing that makes me nervous is how much I want to get this right.”

I reached up to cup his jaw, letting my thumb brush against the stubble there.

“You already have,” I said.

The ceremony was perfect.

The officiant’s words faded into the background as I looked up at Luke, his hand warm and steady in mine. When it was time to exchange vows, I thought my chest might burst from the weight of everything I felt for him.

“I take you, Avery,” he said, his deep voice steady and sure, “to be my wife, my partner, my everything. From this day forward, you’re mine, and I’m yours. Always.”

The simplicity of his words was what broke me. Tears welled in my eyes as I repeated the vow, my voice trembling but full of conviction.

When the officiant pronounced us husband and wife, Luke didn’t hesitate. His hands cupped my face, and he kissed me with a passion that left me breathless, his lips firm and demanding as the small crowd of onlookers erupted into applause.

Later that night, back at the penthouse suite he’d booked, I stood by the window, looking out over the glittering Vegas skyline.

Luke came up behind me, his hands sliding around my waist as he pulled me close. His lips brushed against the curve of my neck, sending a shiver down my spine.

“You’re mine now officially,” he murmured, his voice low and possessive.

“And you are mine,” I agreed, leaning back against him.

He spun me around, his dark eyes burning with something primal as he lifted me into his arms and carried me to the bed.

“Mrs. Carter,” he said. “My wife.”

I tugged him closer, my body pressing against his as I whispered, “Say it again.”

“You’re mine, Mrs. Carter,” he growled, lifting me effortlessly and carrying me to the bed. “And I’m going to spend the rest of my life making sure you never forget it.”

As we tangled together in the silk sheets, the only thing I could think was that this—he—was the best fake decision I’d ever made.