



Blind Date with a #MOUNTAINMAN (Love Canyon Blind Date with a #BOOKBOYFRIEND)

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Category: Romance

Description: When I went to California to visit my grandma, the last thing I expected was to be set up on a blind date.

Nan loved her new book club with her friends and I couldn't tell her no. She raised me as her own and I lived for her smile.

When I met the sassy, moody, curvy woman, instantly I knew- Iris was mine.

But in less than a week I was headed back home to Appleridge, the family business waiting for me. I couldn't ask her to come with me even if she was desperate for a change. We barely knew each other.

Until my heart convinced me otherwise, it now only beating for her.

Total Pages (Source): 7

CHAPTER ONE

Jace

“Oh, look at my handsome boy!” Nan clapped her hands excitedly as she watched me walk up the pathway to her front door. “Aren’t you just a sight for sore eyes?”

“Sweet boy, let me have a good look at you.” She took a step back and looked me up and down before beckoning me inside. “Looking a little thin. You’re eating enough, right? Not working too much?”

I closed the door behind me and set my bags down.

It was my first time visiting her in new senior community apartment in Love Canyon, California where she moved a couple of years after my grandfather passed.

She lived in Appleridge her whole life and wanted to explore.

With her two friends in tow, she packed up and moved out here, leaving the family business to me.

As sad as I was, who was I to stop her? Nan deserved to relax on the sunny west coast after raising her own children and then me when my parents died unexpectedly. She deserved the world. I’d make sure she always had it.

“Eating enough? Mostly. Working too much? Never.” I grinned and took a look around her place. “Give me the grand tour, I’m ready.”

Nan waved her hand at me and fluttered off into the next room. I followed behind and entered her kitchen. I should've known we'd stop here first. She wanted to feed me. "Sit down first. You need to eat something."

I placed a hand on her shoulder. "I'm fine, Nan. I grabbed something earlier. Come, sit, and tell me how life is in Cali."

"You sit. I'll put on the kettle."

I shook my head and chuckled to myself as I took a seat. Nan never stopped. "How about you sit, and I put on the kettle?"

"Nonsense. You're already sitting, see?" Nan tipped her chin towards me before placing the kettle on the stove and turning on the burner.

I gave up on the losing battle. "Whatcha been up to?"

"Oh, you know, the usual lunches with the girls, my daily walk, and I've picked up a new hobby- paint by number kits.

The girls and I get together and paint, have a glass of wine, and gossip.

" Her eyes sparkled as she retrieved two mugs from the cabinet and placed them on the table.

She dropped a tea bag in each and brought over the sugar.

"Well, aren't you just a busy lady?" I smiled, happy to see her so happy. "I love this for you, Nan. I love seeing you so happy."

"Thank you, my sweet boy. Now enough about me. What's new in Appleridge?" The

kettle whistled and Nan flicked off the stove before filling our mugs with steaming hot water. After she placed the kettle down, she took a seat across from me.

“Same old crap, different day. There has been a lot of new developments in the area. A logging crew came in and cleared a lot of land in both Appleridge and Apple Falls. Looks like a lot of new houses and commercial building plans are underway. I just hope they don’t clear too much land on the mountain.

I like our cabin being tucked away from others.

I don’t want neighbors.” I smirked and Nan laughed as she dunked her tea bag up and down in the water.

“It is very peaceful. But I suppose small towns need to grow, eventually.”

“Nah. I like when things stay the way they are. Why fix something that isn’t broken?” I echoed one of Grandpa’s many statements he said on repeat.

Nan smiled wistfully. “If only everyone else saw things the same way. Everything good with the business? No troubles?”

“Nope. Runs like a well-oiled machine, just the way you and Pops left it.”

“Perfect. Have any pretty ladies stolen my sweet boy’s heart yet?”

“Ha. Not quite. I’d actually have to date one for that to happen.”

“Oh!” Nan’s mouth dropped open and she snapped her fingers. “That reminds me! I wanted to see if you’d like to go on a blind date.”

I nearly choked on my sip of tea. “A blind date?”

“Yes. I joined a book club and met more nice people from the community. One woman I’ve become close with, and she’s worried about her granddaughter finding love. Anyway, I thought, why not set up something for when you’re here? She’s smart, successful, very career driven and?—”

“Nan, sorry to interrupt, but why would you set me up with a girl here? You know I can’t move here with the family business and all.”

“Oh sweetie, it’s no big deal. I’m not saying fall in love with her.

I just owe my friend a little favor is all.

Do a little wining and dining and she’ll get some practice, as will you, with dating.

Besides, I’ll be at book club on Friday night anyway, so that’s the perfect time to take her out.

” Nan sipped her tea, her soft brown eyes pleading with me.

“You little sneak! You know I can’t say no to you.” I chuckled. “But now you’ll owe me one.”

Nan laughed, her eyes shining. “Sweet boy, you know I would give you the world. Always. Now, let me show you around and where you’ll be sleeping. Then I want to show you off to all my friends.”

“Show off little ol’ me? Nah.” I teased. “I’m the one showing you off.”

“See, I knew I kept you around for a reason.” Nan winked. “Always good for a confidence boost.”

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CHAPTER TWO

Iris

“Remind me why I agreed to this again?” I huffed into the phone as I hurried down the busy city block, doing my best to avoid the stream of bodies in every direction.

“Because you could use a little lovin’ in your life.” My best friend, Emily, responded, a hint of amusement in her tone.

“One blind date isn’t going to lead to some lovin’.” I retorted.

“No time to be cynical. Get your ass to that restaurant and enjoy a nice meal with a handsome man.”

“We don’t know he’s handsome. Can we trust my grandma and her friends?”

I’m not so sure.” I should’ve told my grandma Mimi no.

This wasn’t the way I spent my nights. Usually, I worked until almost seven at night, went straight home, changed into my pjs, poured a glass of wine, cooked myself some dinner, and sat on the couch, binging the latest true crime documentary on Netflix.

Sometimes I ordered takeout, but I didn’t mind cooking most nights.

Yeah, my life consisted around my job. I didn’t have time for love, nor did I want to

even look for it.

I barely had time for a life. Sometimes I wanted a change, to let all the stress and chaos of my high-profile marketing executive job go, but I loved the money.

I was good at my job, and I enjoyed doing it.

Yet the thought of a slower life and settling down and having a family appealed to me.

Until it became time to take the leap. Then I stalled faster than a kid at bedtime.

“I’m pretty confident in Mimi’s taste of men.” Emily declared as I rounded the corner, the restaurant coming into view.

“I’ll take your word for it. I’m here. Wish me luck. I’ll text you if I need an out.”

“And I won’t answer.”

“Emily!”

“Relax, I’m kidding. I’m on standby. Keep me posted. But no texts over something stupid like the shape of his ears.”

I snorted and rolled my eyes even though she couldn’t see me.

“Don’t roll your eyes at me.” Emily quipped.

“I’m not.” I snickered. “Bye, love you.”

“Love you and remember to have fun!”

I ended the call, shoved my phone in my purse, and took a deep breath. Let's get this over with.

I found a seat at the bar, dropped my purse in the one next to me, and ordered a glass of wine. We agreed to meet here in the restaurant over text message earlier today. My grandma helped herself to handing out my phone number, so I was surprised to see an unknown phone number texting me.

I quickly pull out my phone and do a quick Google search of the number. I doubted it would tell me much, but the area code wasn't from around here which piqued my curiosity.

Google said it was a Vermont area code. That was strange. Did this guy not live in Cali?

What is Mimi up to?

Clicking on one of the links, I tried to find out any information I could but no name or anything. Maybe I could search it on Facebook. As I navigated to the app I wanted, I saw out of the corner of my eye someone sit down next to me.

Of course, they had to sit on the stool right next to mine, the very one I was saving.

I turned my head to let them know when my eyes connected with the most handsome man, I'd ever laid eyes on.

My breath caught in my throat when his gaze met mine, his dark brown eyes reflecting deep pools of mystery. Mystery I suddenly had to know.

I opened my mouth to tell him the seat was taken, but no words formed, my brain suddenly blank.

The man smiled, a pearly white shining smile, and my heart damn near skipped a beat. A warmth radiated off him and I wanted to wrap myself around it and never let go. “Iris, is it?”

Shit, he knows my name.

He said my name.

He’s not...he can’t be...

“Yes, that’s me. And you are?” I arched my eyebrow, pretending like I didn’t know this sexy as fuck man was my blind date, Jace.

He chuckled, his eyes drawing me in more. “Jace, your blind date. Nice to meet you. I’d offer you a handshake but that seems a little weird, so how about a hug?” Jace opened his arms, his very beefy arms might I add, and there was no way I wasn’t accepting this man’s hug, awkward or not.

If only Emily could see me now...

His arms enveloped me in a way no other hug had before. Like I was safe, secure, and protected, his calming presence working its way through me. His scent infiltrated my nose, sending desire coursing through my veins in ways I never expected, my panties now drenched, my legs clamped shut.

I didn’t let go until he backed away, wanting the feeling to stay forever, a high I’d never be able to duplicate.

Who the fuck am I right now? A damn horny toad?

“Mmm, that felt nice.” Jace smiled and dropped his arms back at his sides.

I cleared my throat, a burn rushing to my cheeks. I said nothing and instead buried my face in the menu. Men didn't have an effect on me like Jace did and I felt lost and out of control. I needed to reel it back in and get this date over with.

When I didn't say anything, Jace filled the silence, his voice calming.

"Any idea what you might order? I'm feeling like a good burger, or maybe a steak.

Nothing beats my Nan's cooking though, that's for sure.

Last night, she made my favorite dish of beef stew in a bread bowl with melted cheese on top. It was amazing."

I've barely said five words to this man, and he talked like we were old friends. Was he always so kind? Didn't it become tiring?

"What's your favorite meal?" Jace asked.

I shrugged. "Don't really have one. Food is more of a necessity to me.

" Internally, I cringed at the way I sounded.

But I couldn't help the irritation in my voice.

He was too damn chipper for me. And my stubborn ass did have a favorite meal.

It was chicken parmesan and only my Mimi could make it just the way I liked it.

"Gotcha." Jace went back to browsing the menu.

A few minutes of silence stretched between us, and the air was stifling. I killed the

mood. Ugh, why aren't I home right now?

Jace closed the menu and flagged the bartender down. "Would you like a refill?" He nodded at my near empty glass.

"Sure, thanks."

More silence fell between us, and I wiggled in my seat, the awkwardness filling like a balloon stretched to its max capacity.

Jace ordered a glass of wine for each of us, which intrigued me. He liked wine? A strong merlot, to be exact. One of my favorites.

"You enjoy wine?" I asked, unable to hold back my curiosity.

"That I do. Never was a fan of beer or hard liquor. But a nice, sweet red wine, I'll take any day. You?"

"Yeah, same here."

"Not much of a talker, hmm?" Jace grinned.

I sighed. "Look, it's been a long day. I promised my grandmother I'd go on this date because she kept nagging at me, telling me I need to settle down soon, when really, I want to be home, in my pjs, on my couch, watching TV."

"Well, why don't we do that, then?"

"What?" I asked, baffled.

"Get this dinner to go, head back to your place, and veg out on the couch. I promise

not to hog the remote.”

“But I don’t even know you.”

“Your grandma, Mimi, is it? She’s a good friend of my Nan’s, and I happened to meet her last night when the ladies got together. I’m sure if we call either one of them, they’ll vouch for me.”

I shook my head in complete disbelief. But I found myself saying yes anyway. “As long as we grab a bottle of wine on the way there.”

CHAPTER THREE

Jace

Despite the cold exterior radiating off Iris, for some reason, I enjoyed her company. In the short twenty minutes since we've met, there was something about her that set off a spark inside me.

But I pushed it down and ignored it. This was nothing more than a fun evening together.

A favor for my Nan. Besides, Iris would get some much-needed dating practice, not that I was any better at this whole dating thing, while I had fun trying to break down her walls. Kindness was such a killer after all.

"What do you do for work?" I asked Iris as we climbed into the taxi she hailed for us. I wasn't much of a city boy, hell I wasn't one at all, but she made it look so easy, flagging down the first taxi that took notice.

"I work as a marketing executive for a big company downtown. Long hours, but I love it and the money." Iris shifted in her seat, our bag of dinner in between us along with the bottle of wine we picked up.

"Money is great. I know all about working long hours. When you run your own business, sometimes it seems like you never get a day off."

"You run your own business?" Iris raised an eyebrow in question.

I laughed. “Do I not look like a business type guy or something?”

She shrugged, a small hint of a smile playing on her lips. “Not really. I mean...okay, fine, I’m judging. Based on appearance alone, no. But most of the businessmen around the city wear suits. I take it you’re not from around here, are you?”

“How could you tell? The New England accent? Or the flannel shirt?”

Iris giggled and the sound was sweet music to my ears.

So, the grumpy girl does laugh. I loved it.

“Definitely the flannel. But I love the accent.” Her eyes lit up and the unexpected happiness on her face filled me with a joy I couldn’t explain.

She looked away quickly, her cheeks turning pink, and my heart rate doubled.

Is she actually flirting with me?

“Wasn’t too shabby for a blind date, huh?” When she turned her head back towards me, I winked, causing her cheeks to flush more. I fucking loved it.

“What business do you run?” Iris asked, skipping right over my flirty question. Dammit.

“The family one my grandfather handed down to me. We make applesauce in a little mountain town in Vermont called Appleridge. Sounds silly, but there’s a very precise process to making applesauce. Just the right amount of sugar and cook time equals perfection. Plus, you must pick the best apples.”

Iris watched me with amusement, and I knew exactly how I looked. Like an idiot who

loved applesauce too much.

“Don’t look at me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like you would a person who makes applesauce for a living.”

Iris laughed, the sound even better than her giggles and I wanted to make her laugh all the time. “What brings you all the way out here? And on a blind date no less?”

“I’m here visiting my grandma. Nan moved out here a year after my grandpa passed, the small town too full of painful memories.

She also wanted to see the world, having never left Vermont before.

The blind date thing is sort of a favor.

Apparently, your grandma, Mimi, told Nan, you needed help in the dating department. ”

“I’m going to hurt her.” Iris muttered under her breath. “I don’t need help. I just don’t have time. My job is my life. And that’s how I like it.”

The taxi pulled over in front of a large, high rise apartment building. I offered to pay, holding out a couple of twenties but Iris insisted, pushing my money away. “You paid for dinner. I got the cab.”

“Thank you.” I watched as she slid out of the cab, reaching behind her to grab the bag of takeout and bottle of wine. Her full figure of curves made my damn mouth water and suddenly all I could think about was getting her naked. Her perfect ass pointed to

the sky as I railed her from behind.

“You coming?” Iris peaked her head back inside the taxi.

Shit.

“Yes, sorry. Got a little distracted there.” I winked and climbed out of the taxi, closing the door behind me, the driver barely waiting for the door to be closed before he sped away.

“By the food?” Iris held up the bag. “It does smell yummy.”

“Something like that. More curious about what your pajamas might look like.” I took the bag and wine from her.

“Get ready for the best moo moo you ever saw.” Iris snickered.

“Ah, ha. So, she does have a sense of humor. Glad to see it.”

“Home brings out the best of me.” Iris led me into the lobby and over to a set of elevators. A few minutes later, we walked through her front door, her fifth-floor apartment spacious with a lemony clean scent.

Being in someone’s space showed a lot about a person and I greedily drank all of it in, wanting to get to know this mysterious woman.

“I don’t do tours, so feel free to look around. The kitchen is just through here and the bathroom is down the hall. I’m going to change if you don’t mind?”

“Bring on the pjs! Wish I had mine.” I moved towards the kitchen. “I’ll get our dinner plated.”

“Perfect. Everything you need is in the cabinets. I might have a pair of sweatpants you could wear? I sometimes buy my pjs oversized.”

I chuckled. “Nah, I’m good. Thank you. Might just take this flannel off.”

“Okay, I’ll be right back.”

While Iris went to change, I headed to the kitchen, set down the bags, and opened up all the cabinets until I found the wine glasses and dishes. I located utensils, a couple of serving spoons, and popped the cork on the wine, filling our glasses.

A quick swirl, sniff, and taste told me the wine was perfect.

Iris appeared in the doorway. One look her way and I froze. Not only did she not have a moo moo on but she looked sexy as hell.

A silk button down pink pajama top with the matching pink shorts left little to the imagination, her nipples clearly on full display along with long, silky legs.

The bottom of the shorts barely covered her ample ass cheeks and fuck, I wanted to press my face between her ass cheeks and taste her sweet taste.

Her blonde hair was thrown into a messy bun on top of her head, curly tendrils falling around her face, and fuzzy cheetah slippers adorned her feet.

I swallowed hard. “I thought...”

“My best moo moo was dirty.” Iris’s eyes flashed, the sexual tension between us growing at rapid speed. “Hope this is okay.”

I nodded as I began to unbutton my flannel, revealing a tight black undershirt. Two

could play at this little game. “It is a bit too hot in here for flannel, wouldn’t you say?”

Iris’s gaze dropped down my chest and I loved the way she drank me in, savoring every sip, her eyes traveling along my arms both covered in full ink sleeves. Her mouth fell open and her tongue darted out, the very tip of it touching her lip.

Then as if someone had dumped a bucket of ice-cold water on to her, she straightened her back and walked over to the spread of food and wine. “Let’s eat in the living room. The couch is calling my name.” Her words emotionless, her face a mask of seriousness. The cold wall back in its place.

We had a moment there. It was there. It was palatable.

And I wanted it back even though I knew I shouldn’t of.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Iris

Emily: What is happening? I NEED TO KNOW

Emily: Don't ignore me

Emily: IRIS! At least tell me you're okay

Iris: I'm okay. I'm home. In my happy spot.

Emily: Already? But it's only been an hour. Tell me it wasn't horrible.

Iris: It wasn't horrible. In fact, the date isn't over yet. He's here with me.

Emily: ...

Emily:

Emily: Hello, who are you and what have you done with my friend Iris?

Emily: Iris, you better answer me

Emily: HELLO?! Do I need to call Mimi?

Iris: Relax, we're just having dinner and watching a movie. I'll text you later, okay?

Emily: No. No, it's not okay. Who are you and what have you done with my best friend?!

Iris: You told me to have a good time. So that's what I'm doing.

Emily: Okay, seriously, the jig is up.

Iris: It's true. Kinda helps that he's hot af.

Emily: OMG.

I tucked my phone away and looked over at Jace, sitting on the opposite end of my couch, respectful of my space.

Honestly, I was just as confused as Emily was.

The hot as fuck applesauce mountain man was doing funny things to my insides. Weird things. But things that felt...good. Instead of my usual fight against it, I've backed down.

But I had to be careful. Jace didn't live around here. He was going back to Vermont, his home. My life and career were here. But that didn't mean we couldn't have a bit of fun, right?

As long as you don't fall for him.

Shut up, brain. There's no falling in love around here. Ick.

Mimi knew what she was doing, didn't she? But why pair me with someone I couldn't be with?

“How was your meal?” Jace asked, pulling me from my overabundance of thoughts.

I finished off the last of my wine and set my plate down. “Pretty good. You?”

“Good. Hit the spot. Want a refill on wine?”

I nodded. “I’d love one.”

Jace returned a moment later with the bottle of wine and filled our glasses almost to the top. “Might as well finish it off, right?”

I smiled, the warmth of the wine buzzing through me. Certainly nothing to do with him. “I can’t believe we have the same taste in wine.”

Jace sat closer to me on the couch and sipped his drink. “I think it’s cool. Nan doesn’t drink and Pops, my grandpa, drank beer. Joked I had girly taste.”

“Ha, I bet your friends didn’t let you live that one down.”

Jace smirked. “Nope. They prefer beer. But hey, we like what we like, right?”

“Right. Have you ever gone to a vineyard?” My tongue loosened as I drank more.

“No. I’d love to though. Aren’t there some around here?”

“Yeah. A little more north. But I’ve never been, either. Always wanted to, never found the time.”

“What if we make the time?”

I set my wine glass down. “Uh, I’m not so sure. I have to work and how long are you

here until, anyway?”

“I leave in six days.”

“See, not much time.”

“There’s plenty of time if you want to make it happen.”

“Who’s watching your business while you’re away?”

“A couple of guys I trust who work for me. They’ve run the show a few times. We all need a break sometimes.”

“Yeah, well, not all of us can get one so easily.” I said, my words sounding harsher than I intended. I looked away from him and down at my lap, my shoulders sagging.

“Okay, no biggie.” Jace’s voice softened. “Just an idea I had.”

We sat in silence for a few minutes, the reality show on the TV forgotten about.

It was official- I was a fun sucker. Through and through. My cold exterior dampened any warmth he gave off.

I sighed heavily, as if the weight of the world sat on my shoulders.

You have plenty of vacation time...use some! Go to a vineyard with this hot man!

I shook my head in a futile attempt to clear my thoughts. I couldn’t get caught up in whatever this was. It wasn’t real life. This was the wine talking and I wasn’t about to let it convince me of something unrealistic.

“I think I’m going to call it a night.” I muttered and stood up from the couch. No need to drag this out any longer. Just cut ties and be done with it.

“Oh, okay. I take it you have work tomorrow?”

“Yeah.” I forced the word out. What are you doing? Why would you let him go?

“Listen, Iris, I’m sorry if I offended you in any way.

That wasn’t my intention.” Jace stood up next to me, his eyes full of sincerity.

“I thought it could be a fun little adventure. But I totally understand if you have to work. So, yeah, it was nice meeting you and thanks for the nice meal.” He went to grab our plates and without thinking, I placed my hand on his arm.

“Wait.”

Jace froze in place and when our eyes connected, his were full to the brim with kindness and compassion.

Who is this man?

I dropped my hand. “You know what? Maybe a trip to a vineyard would be nice. I haven’t taken any vacation time in so long. I could use a few days off.” I blurted the words out quickly before I had a chance to change my mind.

“Really?” Jace’s entire face beamed bright. “I mean, that’s cool. If you want to...” His voice trailed off but the grin stretched across his face didn’t waver one bit.

I lightly pushed him on the shoulder, a playful gesture, like two friends teasing, but Jace seized the moment and wrapped his strong hand around my wrist, pulling me

towards him.

He pressed his muscular body against mine and my breath hitched in my throat, dizzy from the feel of him. My fingers ached to touch him, explore his skin, and see what was beneath his t-shirt.

Tingles ran down my spine and when his hands fell to my waist and his fingers dug into my skin, I was ready to explode. “What are you doing?”

“I’ve thought about kissing you all night.” Jace whispered, his lips moving closer towards mine. “May I?”

Swoon, holy fucking swoon.

Did this man just ask me permission?

I nodded, all reasonable thought processes evaporating into thin air.

Jace wasted no time.

His mouth landed on mine and our lips fused together, as if we were made for each other, easily gliding into a kiss, the connection between us uncanny.

When he broke the kiss, both of us panting and out of breath, he smiled. “As long as we don’t fall in love with each other, we’re good. But a little fun never hurt.” He winked and my panties flooded with heat.

I scoffed jokingly. “Love? Not possible.” Cynicism at its finest.

“Stranger things have happened. Can you take tomorrow off or is that too soon?”

“I can take tomorrow off.”

“Perfect. Then I’ll be here bright and early. In my Nan’s car. It’s a Buick so no laughing.” He kissed me once more and after helping me pick up the dishes, we said goodnight.

When I climbed into bed later, I couldn’t stop smiling at the thought of spending the day with Jace. At a vineyard no less.

As I typed an email to my boss, requesting the rest of the week off, a thrill ran through me. Like I was skipping school or something, the high from kissing Jace and now requesting time off at work was completely new to me.

But I loved it.

Every delicious second.

This new side of me emerging from the shadows was about to have some much-needed fun.

I’d ignored her for too long. It was time to come out and play.

CHAPTER FIVE

Iris

Our trip to the vineyard turned into another, and soon we were hanging out whatever chance we got.

My days were free without work and Jace didn't hesitate to find us things to do.

Over the next few days, we spent a lot of time together.

From visiting two different vineyards, to joining our grandma's book club meeting, and having dinner with each of them, I'd never had so much fun before.

Jace was unlike anyone I'd ever met before.

He was so kind and caring, his love for his Nan shining bright, along with his passion for his business.

He talked about the process of applesauce making for almost an hour one evening over dinner and how he loved finding new ways to improve and expand the product.

On the outside, his brawny tough look could give someone the wrong impression. But his ooey gooey insides could melt the coldest of hearts. Like mine. Defrosting more and more as the minutes passed.

All of my coldness had been replaced by Jace's warmth, and I found myself laughing

and carefree, in one of the best moods of my life.

Jace took my hand in his as we exited Emily's apartment building together.

She invited us over for dinner and cooked us a feast of roasted chicken, potatoes, and mixed veggies.

Emily had begged to meet him before he headed back home, and I finally gave in.

She also insisted this happy, chipper version of myself couldn't possibly be real.

Hell, I didn't think it was real.

But he was leaving in just a few, short days.

Something I kept pretending wasn't happening.

I didn't want him to leave. I liked who I was when he was around.

"Emily is a trip. Were you really that grumpy before I came along?"

I grimaced, a small laugh escaping my throat. "No, Emily loves to overexaggerate."

"Well, I kind of remember the first time we met...maybe she's not overexaggerating as much as you think." Jace smirked.

"Yeah, yeah." I muttered and Jace laughed.

"Doesn't matter to me. I think you're a peach."

"A peach, huh?"

“Yep. I mean, I have spent most of my vacation with you. But I wouldn’t change a thing.” Jace smiled as we strolled down the street on the way back to my place.

I wanted to ask him to spend the night, to spend the last of his days in bed with me, but the words wouldn’t form and the few that did lodged themselves in my chest. I cleared my throat and attempted again. “I don’t want you to leave, Jace.” I whispered.

He stopped in place and turned to face me. His eyes searched mine and the depth of his feelings sent my heart into chaotic leaps. “I don’t want to, either.”

His words filled me with courage. It was as if the world around us melted away, leaving only us two. “Spend the night with me.” I whispered, putting myself out there in a way I never had before.

When he didn’t say anything, panic flooded my veins. I’m an idiot. I never should’ve said anything. What am I thinking?

But then he wrapped his arms around me and hugged me close. “I thought you’d never ask.”

When we arrived back at my apartment, I poured us each a glass of wine and settled down on the couch next Jace. But the last thing I was able to do was pay attention to the TV. Not with Jace’s heat beside me, an all-consuming fire I couldn’t ignore any longer.

“Penny for your thoughts?” His deep voice rumbled, and I squeezed my legs together. I couldn’t reveal my dirty thoughts, the way I imagined his mouth would feel between my legs, or the image of him tossing me around the bedroom, bending my body like a pretzel.

“Or maybe I can show you what I think you might be thinking about...” Jace said and

before I could even contemplate his words, he'd taken my wine glass and set it down on the table.

He pulled me into his lap and didn't once try to hide his full erection straining at the seams of his jeans.

"It kinda seems like we have the same idea."

His adorable face and calming demeanor put me at ease, along with the fact that he felt exactly the same.

Piece by piece, we undressed each other, our eyes never breaking contact and when I took him in in all his full naked glory, I gasped, his body like something straight out of a magazine. My hands deftly explored every inch of his hot skin, his own fingers grazing over my skin.

Suddenly, without warning, Jace got to his feet and took me with him, lifting my naked body into his arms. He carried me to my bedroom and laid me down in the middle of my bed, not bothering with the light switch.

With only just mouth and tongue, he worked his way from my toes to my head, climbing on top of me, as he pressed his hard, dripping cock into my thigh. My hands immediately found his throbbing dick, stroking and teasing and rubbing his precum all over the head, desperate for a taste.

With a loud groan, Jace swept me into a mind-altering kiss, his hands now caressing my breasts, his fingers squeezing my hard nipples.

Leaving me wanting more, he broke the kiss and moved downwards again, stopping to leave a trace kiss on each breast before settling between my legs. His tongue went right to the sweet spot of my clit, and I cried out loud when he latched on, sucking

hard on the sensitive little nub.

My hands pulled at his hair, and I thrust my hips, grinding my wet pussy all over his face, soaking his beard with my juices.

Jace didn't stop, his licking and sucking becoming more intense until he slid a finger inside and I was done for.

My orgasm crashed through me hard like a powerful tsunami, my legs shaking as I fell apart beneath him.

Jace lifted his head and smiled, his face and beard glistening. "That's right, you sexy woman you. Cum all over my face." Then he dove back in and didn't stop until I came again and again.

And again.

All night long.

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CHAPTER SIX

Jace

I should've held back. Should've protected both our hearts.

But once I got my first taste, there was no going back.

Iris is mine.

Every sexy inch of her.

We just had to ignore the fact that we lived on opposite ends of the country, with thousands of miles between us.

“Well, butter my buns and call me a biscuit, my sweet boy looks like he's in love.

” Nan said to me one morning before I left to see Iris.

I laughed it off and told her I was just having fun.

She didn't mind. She loved seeing me happy and bonus points, her friend was so happy she couldn't stop baking Nan her favorite treat of chocolate fudge.

But for the rest of the day, I couldn't get Nan's words out of my head.

My sweet boy looks like he's in love...

There was no way. I barely knew Iris. We had fun together. Nothing more, nothing less.

But the thought stuck around all day, nagging at me. And after a fun day together and dinner with her hilarious friend Emily, I didn't want the night to end.

So, when she asked me to spend it with her, there was no way in hell I was saying no.

And now after spending the night having sex in every position possible, I was afraid my Nan was right.

I was falling hopelessly in love with Iris. A woman from an entirely different world than mine. Yet when our two worlds combined, it was life altering.

Our blind date turned into something I never saw coming. Yet I was headed back home. The one place she wasn't. How could I ever let her go? How could I ever break her heart? Or mine?

Or maybe her heart wouldn't break. Maybe she'd cut ties and be done, back to her old ways. Always working and never experiencing or enjoying life to the fullest.

When I woke up in the morning on the day I was leaving, with Iris in my arms, sadness yanked at my every string and I pulled her closer to me, burying my face in her hair and whispering I love you.

We had spent the past two days in bed together, besides the little window of time where we had dinner with both Nan and Mimi.

After morning sex in both the bed and the shower, we enjoyed one last breakfast together before it was time to say our goodbyes. I still had to stop in at Nan's, pack up the rest of my things, and say my goodbyes to her.

I stood in the doorway of Iris's apartment and took her in my arms. I breathed her in deep, hoping to commit her scent to memory, something to bring me comfort in the long nights ahead.

Iris took a step back and looked up at me while placing her hands on my chest. "Maybe you can come visit sometime." Her voice cracked and she blinked away the tears glistening in her eyes.

"I'd love to. And maybe you can come visit me and see how sexy I am when making applesauce." I attempted a smile but there was no light behind it, my usual warmth turning colder.

Iris chuckled. "Looking sexy while making applesauce? Now this I have to see."

"Yes, you do." I lifted her off her feet and spun her around in a circle before setting her down gently and kissing her with everything I had, pouring my feelings out as an unspoken language only the two of us understood.

And when I'd filled up every empty hole inside me with her, holes formed by the thoughts of never seeing her again, I hugged her one last time and whispered a goodbye. Soon, the holes would be empty again and I'd miss her and wonder if she missed me.

After a moment's pause, I walked out the door and didn't look back. If I had, I might never leave.

My goodbyes to Nan weren't much better, my throat thick with emotion. This wasn't my home, and my actual home needed me. My business needed me. Yet every part of me yearned to stay.

"Come back soon, sweet boy. Time is precious. And I'm pretty sure a special

someone would be very happy to see you.” Nan hugged me tight, her short petite frame swallowed by my much larger one.

“I wasn’t supposed to fall in love, Nan.”

“Oh, my sweet, sweet, handsome boy. When it’s the right one, it’ll always work out. You’ll see.” Nan touched the side of my cheek, and we said goodbye.

The cab ride to the airport was uncomfortable and hot and I was thankful when I finally arrived and climbed out of the stifling car. Inside, I made my way through check in and security, before finding a seat in front of a coffee shop, my flight still a couple of hours out from boarding.

I tried checking my emails, scrolling through social media, and reading over my business emails, but I couldn’t focus. All I could think about was Iris.

Her smile.

Her laugh.

Her curves.

I wanted her as mine. As my wife. The mother of my children.

My own thoughts scared the shit out of me and my pulse raced. How had I become so smitten for a woman I met only a week ago?

Life is crazy...

I stood up and walked around, aimlessly wandering, hoping for some sort of distraction. Once I got on the plane, I’d feel better. Headed home, back to my life and

business, back to my regular routine.

“Jace!”

I heard my name, a frantic voice screaming it from somewhere. I looked around but saw no one I recognized. Probably another Jace or something.

“Jace! Please! Wait! Jace!” The vaguely familiar voice yelled again. There was so much commotion around me, I could barely hear, never mind make out who it was.

“Jace!” The voice got closer.

My heart rate tripled, pounding in my chest.

It couldn't be...

“Jace, please, wait! I love you!”

Iris's voice was crystal clear now.

I love you.

I love you.

I love you.

I spun on my heel and found Iris standing there, chest heaving as heavily as mine, tears streaming down her cheeks. She shrugged her shoulders and offered a half smile. “I couldn't let you go without telling you.”

My entire mood lifted at the sight of her standing before me. I blinked a couple of

times, but it was real.

She was here.

Chasing me down in an airport.

Telling me she loved me.

“What are we going to do now?”

Iris shrugged again.

“Kiss her, you idiot!” Someone said from beside me. Without bothering to look, I stalked over to her, took her in my arms, bent her backwards, and kissed the living shit out of her.

Cheers erupted around us.

“I love you so much, Jace.” Iris whispered. “I don’t know how or where we go from here. But I couldn’t let you go. The thought of never seeing you again...” She blinked and swallowed hard. “It tore me apart inside.”

“Come with me. To Appleridge.”

“What?” She huffed, her eyes wild.

“Come with me. You can help me with the business or not work at all. Whatever you want. I make plenty to support us both. You said it yourself that you don’t like your job. Why not give us a chance?”

“But Jace it’s not that simple. There’s Mimi and Emily...”

“There’s a lot to figure out, I know. But when it’s right, it’ll always work out.” I echoed Nan’s words from earlier.

Iris searched my eyes, studied my face, and when a huge ear to ear smile stretched across her face, my heart lifted, full of hope.

“Okay, yes, fine, let’s do it.” Iris jumped into my arms, and I spun her around while everyone cheered.

“I love you.” I said.

“And I love you.”

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Iris

One year later

“I can’t wait to visit you next week!” Emily cheered into the phone, her excitement contagious.

“I know! I’ve missed you so much.”

“You sure about that? With the big diamond on your finger and your amazing, endless sex life, have you even had time to miss me?” Emily teased and I laughed in return.

“Of course. We’re not having sex every second of every day.”

“Pretty close to it!” Jace said, coming up from behind me and kissing my neck. The small act sent shivers down my spine, just like when we first met. The spark was alive and well. I doubted it would ever fade out.

“See! Alright you two lovebirds, I’ll let you go. Get all that sex stuff out of the way now before I’m there. I don’t want to hear sounds coming from your bedroom.” Emily roared with laughter before she ended the phone call with our usual round of I love yous.

I turned and slid my arms around my handsome fiancée’s neck and pushed myself up on my tip toes to grab a kiss.

He delivered like he always did, lifting me up onto the kitchen counter of his cabin.

Or as he would say, our cabin. Jace said it was all mine now as much as it was his.

He even let me redecorate a few rooms, including upgrading the master suite bathroom and a bigger bed for the two of us to share.

It all happened so quickly. I went back to Vermont with him, not caring about the details. But a couple of weeks later when my vacation time was up, I had to get serious and decide.

Without a hint of hesitation, my decision was made, the answer loud and clear from the beginning. I loved Jace and I wanted to stay with him.

The two of us flew back to Cali together, packed up all my crap, and rented a car that we took turns driving back.

Mimi cried, but more so tears of happiness, and Nan was there to see us off.

My job didn't take my resignation very well, but I wished them well and tried not to let any guilt get to me.

I had to do what made me happy and that was being with Jace.

The days long road trip back to Vermont tested our patience a few times, both of us weary and exhausted from traveling, but our love prevailed. If anything, it grew stronger.

A few months later, Jace got down on one knee.

Fast forward several months and I now worked with Jace in the family business, we had a wedding date set even though we were sort of considering eloping, and a

positive pregnancy test.

That no one knew about yet except me.

Jace ran a hand along my stomach, and I froze in place. Could he read my thoughts, tell by the expression on my face that I was pregnant with his child? I wanted to wait and surprise him with the news, my mind still reeling at the double lines.

A baby.

A baby.

Was it too soon? Did we not have enough time along together yet?

“What’s wrong, Peach?” Jace asked gently. Peach ended up sticking around as a pet nickname and I’d be lying if I said I didn’t like it.

“Nothing, why?” I trailed light kisses along his jaw line, his favorite tender spot.

His shoulders visibly shivered, and I loved the reaction he gave, still after all this time, the passion and desire as intense as the day we met. “You’re a little tense. Everything okay?”

“Yeah. Probably my time of the month of something.” I brushed it off and kissed his lips softly, hoping to divert his attention to something else. Like bending me over and railing me against this counter right now.

Damn, pregnancy hormones were already taking over.

Ha, who am I kidding. My future husband was hot as hell.

“You sure you want to fool around, then?” Jace asked, his voice full of sincere

concern.

“With you, I’m always down.”

He captured my mouth in a mind-bending kiss, and I let myself fall into it, surrendering to his power. Our kisses grew hot and heavy quickly and soon Jace lifted me off the counter, flipped me around, and hiked up my skirt. His fingers yanked at my panties, his impatience growing by the second.

I bent forward, pressing my cheek to the cool tile counter, while lifting onto my toes, and thrusting my ass in the air.

I heard his fly unzip and seconds later, his hard thick cock was lined up at my entrance.

He pushed inside and filled me to the brim.

My pussy ached and yearned for the stretch, the perfect fit of our bodies together.

And then he fucked me hard, until we both fell apart, a heap of tangled limbs on the kitchen floor.

A couple of days later, I told him I was pregnant, wrapping the test stick up from him to open like a gift.

A month later, we eloped to Las Vegas, only Nan, Mimi, and Emily in attendance.

And eight months later, I gave birth to our first child, a son, we named after Jace’s grandfather, Anthony.

THE END

I hope you enjoyed Jace and Iris's story!