



Collin (Forever #4)

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Category: Romance, Young Adult

Description: The Forever Trilogy hasn't ended yet...now it's time for Connor & Ellery's son to tell his story...

I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Collin Black, and I'm the future CEO of Black Enterprises. At twenty-two years old, I'm living the American dream, or at least my version of it. I'm rich, fit, sexy, and no matter where I go, women are always throwing themselves at me. I love to party, and when I do, it can sometimes lead to trouble.

Women. What can I say? One woman broke my heart which led me to close myself off so it could never happen again. I've become one of New York's most eligible bachelors and bad boy. I leave a trail of broken hearts wherever I go.

Until her.

This is my journey of going through the ups and downs of life as I climb the corporate ladder, heal a broken heart, and discover that there's more life than what I thought.

She. Changed. Everything.

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Chapter 1

I looked at the time on my phone while I was stuck in the famous New York City traffic. My mom was going to kill me if I was late for dinner again. I was expected to be at home for dinner two nights a week. The two nights that Julia and Jake came over, we'd all have dinner as a family. I should've left Black Enterprises earlier, but I had an unexpected visitor and she was smoking hot. One thing led to another, we had sex, and now I was going to be late. I parked the Range Rover and took the elevator up to the penthouse. As I walked through the elevator doors, I headed straight to the kitchen, where I heard everyone talking. Thank God, they hadn't started eating yet.

"There you are," my mom said as she walked over and kissed me on the cheek.

Something was going on. Everyone was way too happy. Julia smiled as I kissed her on the cheek and I shook Jake's hand.

"What's up? I'm sensing there's a celebration or something."

Julia looked at me and grabbed my hand. "I'm pregnant. You're going to be an uncle." She smiled.

"What?! Congratulations!" I exclaimed as I pulled her into an embrace.

"Thank you, little brother."

I reached over and gave Jake a light hug. "Congratulations, bro. Wow. I thought you guys were going to wait a couple of years?"

“Yeah. So did we. But it happened, and we couldn’t be happier.” Jake smiled.

I turned to my dad, who was grinning from ear to ear. “Well, looks like you’re going to be a grandpa.” I smiled as I hooked my arm around him.

“Yeah, and I think one grandchild is enough for now. You reek like perfume and I’m assuming she was the reason you’re late.”

“I was working, Dad. I got the contracts ready for tomorrow’s meeting.”

“Really, because when I left the office three hours ago, you were almost finished.” He sighed.

I walked away because I didn’t need his shit. He didn’t understand what I was going through and I was in no mood for a Connor Black lecture. My mom and Julia called us to the table and we all sat down and enjoyed a family dinner. I was happy for Julia and Jake; they were going to make amazing parents. She was glowing, Jake was all smiles, my parents were ecstatic, and I was happy that now there was something other than me on which Connor and Ellery could focus.

I hadn’t been the model son since Hailey left. I wanted it to work, but she said that with her being in Italy, and me in New York, it wouldn’t. She left to study fashion when she was accepted by one of the top schools of design and was interning with a well-known, up-and-coming designer. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for her and the thing that hurt me the most was that she wasn’t even willing to try and have a long distance relationship. She left without even so much as a sorry. My twenty-second birthday was the next week and we had been seeing each other for almost six years. How do you just throw the past six years of your life away? I thought we had something, and I thought that I meant something to her. The more I thought about it, the angrier I became. Well, those days were gone now. I’d never let another woman do that to me. Since she left, I’d partied too much, drunk too much, had sex with

every woman that looked my way, and I'd been labeled New York's Most Eligible Playboy. Much like my dad, women fell all over me. My mom called it the Black Curse. I'd decided that many women were better than just one. No relationships, no strings, no frills, nothing. Just good sex and a sweet goodbye. When one woman left, another stepped into her place.

"Are you okay, Collin?" my mom asked.

I looked at her as she stared at me with her blue eyes. "Yes, I'm fine. Why?"

"You seem distant. Your sister asked you a question and you didn't answer her."

The truth was that I was lost in my thoughts about Hailey that I didn't hear her. "I'm sorry, Julia. What did you say?"

She looked at me with pursed lips. "We'll talk later, after dinner."

"Okay." I smiled as I finished eating.

As I pulled my phone from my pocket, I went upstairs to my room and sat down on my bed. Julia knocked lightly on the door and asked if she could come in.

"Hey." I smiled as I held out my hand to her.

She took it and sat down next to me. "I'm worried about you, Collin."

"Don't be, sis. I'm all right." I smiled.

"It's been a couple of months since Hailey left. Have you talked to her?"

"No. She made it clear that it would probably be best if we didn't because it would

make things harder. What the fuck ever. I'm over her, and I'm moving on."

Julia put her arm around me. "I don't think you're over her and there's no way you can be. It hasn't been long enough, and I know damn well that when you've been in a relationship as long as the two of you were, it's just not that easy to get over."

"Yeah, well, you're wrong. I've wasted the last six years of my life on a bullshit relationship. I won't ever do that again. I'm exploring, going out, and having fun. I'm doing what I should've been doing the past six years instead of being tied down to one girl."

"I know you don't mean that, Collin."

The truth was maybe I did mean it. I was still angry at her for leaving our relationship behind. I looked at my watch and saw it was time to hit the bar with Aiden. I gave Julia a kiss on the cheek and got up from the bed.

"Listen, I have to go now. I'm meeting Aiden in about thirty minutes. Congratulations again. You and Jake are going to make really great parents."

"Thanks, Collin, and stay out of trouble," she said as she pointed at me.

"That I can't promise." I winked as I walked out the door.

I walked into the bathroom and brushed my teeth before walking out of the penthouse. I dabbed on some more cologne and, as I walked downstairs, my mom stopped me.

"Collin, where are you going?" she asked.

"Out with Aiden."

“Do you think you can stay home at least one night? We hardly see you anymore.”
She pouted.

“Mom, come on. I’m almost twenty-two. The last thing I want to do is hang with my parents when I can go out with my friends. Plus, Dad sees me every day, all day long at the office.”

“Yeah, well I don’t, and I miss my son.”

“I love you, Mom,” I said as I kissed her on the cheek and stepped onto the elevator.

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I felt bad. I loved my mom so much, and I hated when she made me feel guilty, but fun was to be had and that was exactly what I was going to do; no matter what she said.

I took a cab to Club S because I knew that I'd be drinking and wouldn't be able to drive. My dad was in the process of hiring a new driver. Denny had retired; my dad forced him into it because he had some health issues and it was becoming too much for him. My dad seemed to be taking his time with hiring the new driver, and I believed that it was because he couldn't see anyone else driving him or us around besides Denny.

Aiden was standing outside Club S, waiting for me, when the cab pulled up to the curb. I got out, we high-fived, and walked inside. The music was blaring and the floor was thumping. It was more crowded than usual tonight and the girls were gorgeous. I was getting hard just looking at them. I walked up to the bar and ordered my usual scotch, and Aiden ordered his whiskey. This club had become our usual hangout over the past couple of months. The girls were smoking hot and they sure knew how to have a good time. I think if my parents knew that I hung out there, they'd be pissed. We sat at the table and kicked back our drinks. This pretty girl kept eyeing me from the bar. When I gave her a wink and a smile, she strutted over to our table and sat down next to me.

"You're really cute." She smiled.

"Thanks, babe. You're pretty cute yourself."

"Can I buy you a drink?" she asked.

“No. But I can buy you one.”

I raised my hand and signaled for Amber, our waitress, to bring us a couple of shots each. As soon as she set them in front of us, we brought our shot glasses together and then slammed them as fast as we could. After we slammed both shots, she grabbed my hand and led me to the dance floor. As I grabbed her waist, she moved her hot ass up and down my body, causing me to become instantly hard. Her dress was really short, which allowed my hands easy access to cup her bare ass. She welcomed it and threw her head back when I squeezed it. When the song changed, I led her back to the bar for some more shots, and when we approached the table, Aiden already had some hot girl sitting on his lap. The four of us drank more than we should've and, before I knew it, we were outside the club and I had my girl's back pressed up against the side of the building.

“Let's go back to your place.” She smiled as she nipped my bottom lip.

I turned around and hailed us a cab that took the both of us back to the penthouse.

“We have to be really quiet. My parents are sleeping,” I whispered as I carefully shut the front door.

She laughed as I picked her up and tried to carry her up the stairs. Needless to say, I stumbled and we both fell. We started to laugh, and I put my hand over her mouth as we got up and went to my bedroom, closing the door softly behind us.

“Collin, get down here, NOW!” my dad yelled up the stairs.

I rolled my eyes and went down to his office. “What?”

“You know what, Collin.”

I sighed as I crossed my arms. I knew what this was about. It was about the hot brunette I brought home last night. “Dad, calm down. She’s a nice girl.” I smiled.

“Really? What the hell is her name?”

Shit, he put me on the spot. If I remembered correctly, I didn’t catch her name, but if I told my dad that, he’d flip, so I gave her a name. “Her name is Darcy.”

“Bullshit! Her name is Renee. Ask me how I know, Collin. Go ahead and ask me,” he yelled.

“How do you know her name is Renee, Dad?”

“Because she introduced herself to me this morning when I was walking down the hall and she came out of your room, naked! Your mom is in the kitchen, ready to kill you. You’ve been out of control since Hailey left and this stops today. Do you understand me? Now get your ass in the kitchen and apologize to your mom, and maybe, just maybe, when I walk back in there, you’ll be alive.”

My head was already killing me from last night’s alcohol binge and my dad’s yelling made it worse. Now, I had to go and face my mom. The last thing I wanted to do was disappoint her, but lately, that was all I seemed to do. I walked out of the office and straight into the kitchen, where my mom was sitting at the table.

“Sit down, now!” she said with anger in her eyes.

“Mom, I’m—”

“Don’t. Don’t you dare say a word until I’m finished saying what I have to say.”

She pointed her finger at me. Something I didn’t ever remember her doing. She was

pissed and she kind of scared me.

“I know you’re hurting, Collin. I know how hard it’s been on you since Hailey left, but you are way out of control. You go out every night. You come in during the wee hours of the morning, and you reek of alcohol. I don’t appreciate naked girls coming out of your bedroom in the morning. It’s rude, disrespectful, and I won’t have it in my house. What the hell were you thinking?”

As I looked into her angry, but sad eyes, I hated myself for making her so mad. “Mom, I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking, and it’ll never happen again.”

“You’re right; it won’t happen again. Connor, get in here,” she yelled from the kitchen.

My dad walked in and looked at me. “Still alive, I see.”

I rolled my eyes and my head felt like it was going to explode. My mom got up from her chair and started getting the stuff out for the hangover cocktail she always made. God, I hated that shit.

“Connor, don’t you have something to tell Collin?” she said.

My dad looked at me as he sat down in the chair. “I’ve decided that you’re attending the meeting at the office this morning and then, after that, I have some things I need you to take care of.”

“No way, Dad. Today’s my day off.”

There was no way I wanted to sit in that meeting with a hangover. I didn’t get much sleep last night, and all I wanted to do was go back to bed.

“I’ve changed your day off and today isn’t it,” he said as he got up from the chair.

My mom walked over to me and handed me a glass with the cocktail in it. “Here, my darling son, drink up because you’re going to need to feel a hundred percent before you go into the office.” She smiled.

My dad sipped his coffee and, as he walked out of the kitchen, he turned around, looked at me, and then looked at his watch. “You have about fifteen minutes to get ready. I’ll be waiting by the elevator. You better not be a minute late.”

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Chapter 2

“Good morning, Collin,” Valerie said as I walked to my dad’s office.

“Good morning, Valerie. How many more days until retirement?”

“Ten more days and then I’ll be on my way to Arizona.” She smiled.

“Good for you.” I winked.

I opened the door. Sitting across from my dad’s desk was a very sexy woman dressed in all black. When she turned around and looked at me, all I could picture was her bent over the desk and me taking her from behind.

“Collin, I’m in an interview.”

“Sorry, Dad, but I need you to review these when you’re finished.”

I sat down in the chair next to her and held out my hand. “Hello, I’m Collin Black, and you are?”

She smiled at me as she lightly shook my hand. “Hello, I’m Briana.”

“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Briana,” I said as I kissed her hand.

My dad rolled his eyes and got up from his desk. “Okay, Collin, thank you for dropping these off. Now go back to your office and do some work.”

I gave Briana a wink as I left and shut the door. She was hot and I could tell by the way she looked at me that she wanted me. Valerie shook her head at me as I walked by her desk.

“What?” I asked.

“The apple sure doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

I strutted down the hall as I made my way to Julia’s office. When I opened the door, she wasn’t in there. I heard noises coming from her bathroom. As I walked over to the door, I knocked softly.

“Julia, are you okay?”

I heard the toilet flush and she came walking out, wiping her mouth with a tissue. “Morning sickness.” She sighed.

“Oh. That sucks.”

I sat down across from her desk as she opened her drawer and took out a mint. “What are you doing here? Isn’t today your day off?”

“It was supposed to be, but Dad changed it after last night’s events.”

“What happened now?” she asked.

“I brought a girl home and she came out of my room this morning and ran into Dad in the hallway. Did I mention she was naked?”

“Collin! What the hell?”

“I know. Spare me the talk because I already got it from both Mom and Dad, and I’m in no mood. I’m hung over and I’m tired. I don’t understand why I have to be punished for having a good time.”

“Maybe because your good times always end up disastrous.” She smiled. “I would’ve loved to have been a fly on the wall this morning.”

“Meh, whatever. I’m over it. I just want to get this day over with. Anyway, do you have the new plans for the gym?”

“Yeah, I have them right here,” she said as she handed me the drawings.

I rolled them up, walked over to her, and gave her a kiss on the head. “I hope you feel better, sis.”

“Thanks, Collin.” She smiled.

I tucked the designs under my arm as I left her office. I tried to do a 180 when I saw my dad walking towards me.

“Stop right there, son.”

I took in a deep breath as I slowly turned around. “Yes, Dad.”

“You can go home now.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes. After you drop off these plans at the Chicago office.” He smiled. “The plane is waiting for you.”

“Haha. You’re funny, Dad.” I laughed.

“Sorry, son, but this is no joke.”

“You can overnight them. They’ll get there by tomorrow morning,” I said.

“I could. But I want them there today.” He smirked.

I shook my head as I grabbed the file from him and walked away in a huff.

I was upstairs, packing a light bag when my mom knocked on the door.

“Come in, Mom.”

“So, your dad’s sending you to Chicago.”

“Yep. He sure is.” I sighed. “He knows I’m not feeling well today and he doesn’t care.”

“You know that’s not true, Collin. Do you want me to go with you?” she asked.

“No. I’m a big boy, Mom. I can go to Chicago by myself.”

She put her hand on my cheek. “You’ll always be my little boy, no matter how old you are.” She smiled.

I wrapped my arms around her and hugged her tightly. “I know I will. I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too. Text me when you land and don’t argue with me about it.”

I sighed and then I flashed her a smile. "I'll do better than text you. I'll call you."

Just as I was about to leave, my phone rang. I pulled it from my pocket and saw it was my dad calling.

"Hello," I answered unwillingly.

"Change of plans, Collin. You'll be flying commercial because something's wrong with the plane and the mechanic needs to look at it."

"Are you kidding me?"

"Do I sound like I'm kidding, son?"

I stood there, shaking my head in disbelief over this whole thing. "Your flight leaves in two hours. I suggest you get to the airport quickly. Your ticket is already waiting for you."

I could hear him loving every minute of this. He was going to make me pay one way or another for bringing that girl home. "Fine, I'm leaving now. By the way, when are you hiring the new driver?"

"I don't know. I'll talk to you later," he said as he hung up.

I grabbed my bag and headed downstairs. "Now I'm flying commercial because something's wrong with the plane," I said to my mom as I headed towards the elevator.

"You'll be fine, sweetheart. Have a good flight," she said as she kissed my cheek.

I rolled my eyes and took the elevator down to the parking garage. I climbed in my

Range Rover and drove to the airport. As I valet parked, I grabbed my bag from the back seat and ran to the ticket counter. My flight was leaving soon and I still had to get to my gate.

“Can I help you?” the girl behind the counter asked with a wide smile.

“I’m Collin Black, and there’s a ticket waiting for me for a flight to Chicago.”

“I’ll need to see some I.D., Mr. Black.”

She was hot and she was licking her plump lips. I stood there and stared at her mouth, imagining it wrapped around my cock. She keyed some information into the computer and handed me my ticket with a folded piece of paper. I opened it up and it was her phone number. I looked at her and smiled.

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“Maybe you can give me a call when you come back to New York,” she said innocently.

“I think I will.” I nodded as I stared at her and started to walk away.

I checked my ticket and what the fuck! I’m flying economy class! Are you fucking kidding me?

As I headed to my gate, I pulled my phone from my pocket and noticed there was a text message from my dad.

“I forgot to tell you that first class and business class were all booked up. Enjoy your flight in economy, son.”

I wasn’t even going to respond because he did it on purpose. Jesus, he was really making me pay. I arrived at my gate and walked up to the counter. I flashed my smile and asked the girl if there was any way to upgrade to first class. She looked at her computer and shook her head.

“No, I’m sorry, but first class is full and so is business class. You made it just in time. We’re starting to board.”

I rolled my eyes and sighed as I picked up my bag from the floor and stood in the long line with the rest of the people waiting to board the plane. I was getting so drunk tonight. I wondered if Ellie was going to be around. I found my seat and squeezed in. At least it was a window seat. This was total bullshit that I had to fly like this. Maybe I’d get lucky and some hot chick would be in the seat next to me. WRONG. It was

some snot nose kid who sounded like he was going to hack up a lung.

“Hey, can you cover your mouth when you cough?”

He looked at me with knitted eyebrows. “Can you mind your own business, fucktard?”

“Where’s your mom, kid?” I asked with irritation.

“I don’t know. Some seat way in the back.”

He put his headphones in and blasted the music on his iPod. It was so loud, I could hear the rap over the roaring engines of the plane. I shook my head and looked out the window. When it was safe to use our phones, I pulled mine from my pocket and scrolled through my pictures. There was one I didn’t delete of Hailey. It was my favorite picture of her and I just couldn’t get rid of it.

“Who’s that? Your girlfriend?” the kid asked.

I glared over at him. “Why don’t you mind your own business?”

“Prick,” he said as he looked at his iPod.

I turned my phone to camera status and held it up. “Hey, kid, smile.”

As soon as the kid turned his head, I snapped his picture.

“What the hell, dude,” he said and then started coughing.

“Just a memory of my flight.” I smiled.

“Fucker,” he mumbled.

I sent his picture to Julia with a text message.

“Dad made me fly commercial and this is who I’m stuck with.”

“OMG! That’s hilarious. Be nice to the kid. Remember, you’re going to be an uncle. I’m surprised that kid is in first class.”

“He’s not. I’m in economy because first and business class were sold out. Fuck this.”

“LOL at dad.”

“Haha. I’m glad you find it funny.”

“Sorry. Have a safe flight. Love you.”

“Love you too, sis.”

I looked over at the kid, who was coughing. “Are you sick or something?” I asked with sincerity.

He turned his head and looked at me. “Yeah, I have cystic fibrosis.”

I knew what that was because I had to do a power point presentation on it in health class in college. “Dude, I’m sorry.”

“I don’t want your pity,” he said.

“My name is Collin and I don’t give pity.” I smiled as I held out my hand.

He twisted his face and looked at my hand. He slowly brought his hand to mine. "I'm Jacob Kline."

"Nice to meet you, Jacob Kline."

"Yeah," he said sadly.

Now I felt sorry for this kid. I understood his rough and tough exterior. It was to hide the sadness he was feeling inside.

"So, why are you going to Chicago?"

"To see another specialist," he replied.

"How old are you?"

"Twelve."

I turned my head and looked out the window. I felt bad for this kid and I couldn't believe his mom wasn't sitting by him. What the hell kind of parent is she?

"I can switch seats with your mom if you want her to sit here," I said.

"Nah. You're cool." He smiled.

For the duration of the flight, Jacob and I talked about a lot of things. I told him about Hailey and he told me all about his disease. He said he didn't have any friends because the other kids were scared of what he had. When the plane landed, I sat in my seat until Jacob's mom came over to get him.

"Hey, Mom. This is Collin. He's my new friend." He smiled.

“Nice to meet you, Collin. I’m Diana.” She smiled.

She was an older woman and she looked tired. As we walked off the plane together, I reached in my pocket and pulled out a twenty-dollar-bill and handed it to Jacob.

“Here, go buy yourself a souvenir from Chicago.” I winked.

“Wow! Thanks!” he exclaimed.

“That’s very nice of you, Collin, but Jacob can’t accept that.”

“Sure he can. Please, just let him have it.”

“Thank you. You’re a very kind man.”

Jacob and I high-fived, and I waved goodbye to him and Diana. As I got into my car that I arranged to have pick me up, I noticed Jacob and Diana standing around. Jacob had told me on the plane that he and his mom had no money because she had just lost her job and she was spending what little savings she had on this trip for him. I told the driver to hold on and I got out of the car. I walked over to Diana and asked her to please let me give them a ride to their hotel. She resisted at first, but after Jacob’s pleading, she agreed.

“Where are you staying?” I asked.

She looked down before answering me. “I was just going to have the cab driver take us to a motel that was the cheapest. This trip happened so fast and at the last minute, I didn’t have a chance to really find something.”

There was no way Jacob could stay in a dirty motel. Not with his condition. I had an idea.

“Listen, before you shoot me down, let me explain. You shouldn’t be staying in a not-so-clean place with Jacob’s condition. I’ll bring you with me to the hotel I’m staying at, and I’ll pay for your room for as many days as you’re going to be in Chicago.”

Diana put her hand up and immediately got defensive. “No, absolutely not. No. I won’t allow it. It’s very kind of you, but you’re a stranger and you don’t know us and we don’t know you. Plus, I could never allow it.”

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Jacob had his head lying on her shoulder and he looked tired. “Diana, listen. Jacob told me that you lost your job and you’re using what little you have for this trip to see the specialist. I’m going to introduce myself and then you’ll know me.”

I held out my hand. “Hi, Diana, I’m Collin Black and I work for Black Enterprises in New York City. I’m here in Chicago to deliver some plans to our Chicago office. My parents are crazy lovers, my sister and her husband are expecting their first child, and my girlfriend of six years left me to study fashion in Italy. Please let me help you out because I really like Jacob and he’s my friend.”

She cocked her head and stared at me. “You’re the son of Connor Black?” she asked.

“Yes, I am. Do you know my father?”

“No, not personally, but I know who he is. He holds charity events every year for children with autism.”

“Yes, he does. See, now you know my family and you know we like to help people. So please, Diana, let me help you and Jacob.”

“Your parents would be very proud of you.” She smiled. “Thank you, Collin. I promise to pay you back.”

I pulled out my phone and sent a text message to Ellie.

“Hey, babe. I’m in town. Let’s do some clubbing tonight.”

“It’s about time, Mr. Black. I was wondering when I’d see you again.”

“Tonight, babe. How’s seven o’clock?”

“Great. I’ll be downtown anyway, so I’ll meet you at your hotel.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

Ellie was a sexy girl and I couldn’t wait to get her into bed again. My phone rang and it was my mom calling. Shit, I forgot to call her when I landed.

“Hey, Mom.”

“Are you alive? You said you’d call when you landed.”

“I’m sorry, Mom. I got distracted,” I said.

“Seriously, Collin?”

“Seriously, Mom. I promise to explain when I get home. Now I have to go. I just arrived at the hotel.”

The driver took our bags from the trunk and handed them to us. Diana and Jacob stood in front of the Trump Hotel and wouldn’t stop staring at it.

“Come on. You’ll love this place.” I smiled.

They followed me inside and up to the desk.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Black. I have your suite ready,” the hotel clerk said.

“Thank you. I also need to book an additional room for my guests.”

“Sure, Mr. Black. How many nights will your guests be staying with us?”

I looked over at Diana. “Just two nights,” she said.

“Are you sure? You’re welcome to stay longer,” I spoke.

“I’m sure. After we see the specialist tomorrow, we’re flying back the next morning. I can’t afford to stay in Chicago any longer than necessary.”

“Two nights,” I said to the clerk.

Diana and Jacob walked over to the glass elevator and stared into it. I leaned over to the clerk and I whispered, “I want you to tell them that the mini-bar in the room is free and so is room service. Just bill everything to my room.”

“Will do, Mr. Black.”

I called Diana over and the clerk handed her the key. She explained to her how all room service and the mini bar were free to guests.

“Are you sure that’s free?” she asked her.

“It’s a perk of staying at the Trump.” I winked.

The bellhop walked over and took their bags. Diana hugged me and, with a tear in her eye, she thanked me for all my help.

“You be brave tomorrow,” I said to Jacob as we high-fived.

“It’ll be a piece of cake.” He smiled.

They walked onto the elevator and waved as it took them up to their floor. I pulled my phone from my pocket and called my dad.

“Hello,” he answered.

“Hey, Dad. I need you to send the plane to Chicago the day after tomorrow to pick me up.”

“Collin, I bought you a round-trip ticket.”

“I know, but something happened.”

“What do you mean ‘something happened’?” he asked. “Are you telling me that you can’t even fly to Chicago without getting into some kind of trouble?”

“I didn’t get into any trouble, Dad. I met someone.”

“Jesus Christ, Collin, I’ve heard enough.”

“No, Dad, you have to let me explain. I met a kid. A sick kid.”

“What?” he asked calmly.

I explained to him about Jacob, and I told him about Diana and how she lost her job.

“What you did for them was very nice, son. I’m proud of you,” my dad said.

“Thanks, Dad. I have to go. I need to get these plans over to the office and then I’m off to meet some friends.”

“Stay out of trouble.”

“I will. Bye, Dad.”

Chapter 3

I walked through the doors of Black Enterprises and, as always, I was warmly greeted by all the ladies. I took the elevator up to Mac’s office.

“Well, if it isn’t Mr. McHottie.” She smiled as I walked through the door.

“You do know that your flattery will get you some of this,” I said as I grabbed my crotch.

“Would you like me to tell your father that you’re sexually harassing me?” She smiled as she kissed me on the cheek.

“The sad part is, he’d believe you.” I pouted. “Here’s the plans,” I said as I handed them to her.

Mac – Mackenzie – was the head manager at the Chicago office. She oversaw the entire office and made sure it ran smoothly. She was an older woman and had been working for my dad since he first built the Chicago building and she’d known me since I was a baby. She was hot for her age and we liked to joke around; too bad she wasn’t into guys.

“So what did you do?” she asked.

I sat down in the chair across from her desk and folded my arms. “What do you mean?”

“Your dad wouldn’t make you fly the all the way to Chicago unless you did something to piss him off.”

“I went out, got drunk, and brought a girl home. I don’t think it would’ve been a big deal if she hadn’t walked out of my room naked and right into my dad.”

Mac sat at her desk and shook her head. “Collin Black. Get your head out of your ass! What’s the matter with you? You just can’t bring home a random girl with your parents down the hall. The least you could’ve done was get a hotel room. It’s not like you can’t afford it.”

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I chuckled. “Yeah, yeah, yeah. I screwed up. It won’t happen again. I really pissed my mom off and that’s the last thing I wanted to do.”

“Lesson learned. I understand the pain you’re going through over Hailey. Trust me, I’ve been there. But, screwing every woman that looks your way isn’t the answer to healing your broken heart.”

I rolled my eyes and sighed. “I know and I don’t want to talk about Hailey. She’s my past and that’s where she’s staying.”

“All right, but I want you to remember that everything happens for a reason. It’s hard to see it now, but you will someday.” She winked.

I got up from my seat and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “It’s a shame you don’t dig guys. You’re missing out on this.” I winked as I grabbed my crotch.

“Get the hell out of here before I call your daddy.” She smiled.

“You wouldn’t.” I pointed before opening the door.

“Probably not.” She smiled.

I walked out of Mac’s office and down the hall to the elevators. I heard my phone beep and, when I pulled it from my pocket, I saw there was a message from Ellie.

“Hey, hot stuff. I’m in the lobby at your hotel. Where the hell are you?”

“On my way, babe. Got held up at the office. Tell the hotel to let you in my room. I’ll be there in fifteen.”

As soon as I arrived at the hotel, I opened the door and didn’t see Ellie. I walked into the bedroom of the suite and shook my head as I smiled and began to unbutton my shirt.

“It’s about time, hot stuff. I was getting lonely in this big bed by myself.” She smiled as she lay there totally naked.

“No worries. I’m here now and I can promise you that you won’t be lonely anymore,” I said with a smile as I grabbed the bottle of Jack, took down my pants, and climbed on the bed.

The ringing sound of my phone was making my head hurt more than it already was. I rolled out from under Ellie’s arm and grabbed my phone from my pants pocket.

“Hello,” I whispered.

“Are you up?” my dad yelled into the phone.

“I am now.”

“I need you to head to the office and pick up the plans sometime today. Mackenzie is going to have the changes made and then we’ll be set to move ahead.”

“Okay,” I said.

“Late night last night, Collin?”

“Yes, Dad. Can I call you back later?”

“Yeah, son. Call me back when you’re not so hung over.”

“Bye, Dad.”

I set my phone back on the nightstand. I looked over at Ellie as she lay there sound asleep. We went out last night, drank too much, and had sex all night long. I missed Hailey and there was no denying it. Every time I would go to sleep with a girl, I thought about her. That was why I never slept with a girl unless I was drunk. If I was drunk, I didn’t have to think about her. If I was sober, I felt like I was cheating on her, even though she left me. I couldn’t help but think about Jacob and Diana. His appointment with the specialist was today and I thought maybe it would be cool to hang out after. Ellie started to stir when I got up and pulled on my sweatpants. I walked over to the window in the living area and opened the curtains. I looked out as the sun brightened the sky. After a few moments, I walked back into the bedroom and grabbed my phone. I pulled up Hailey’s name and began sending her a text message.

“Hey, how have you—” I started to type. Looking at my half-typed message, I threw my phone down on the couch and ran my hands through my hair.

“What’s wrong, hot stuff?” Ellie said as she wrapped her arms around my waist.

“I just have a lot on my mind. I have some things I need to do, so I’m going to take a shower and head out. You can order room service if you want.”

“Nah, I’ll just grab my stuff and go. I had fun last night. How about we do it again tonight?”

I turned around and looked at her with a small smile. “I wish I could, but I can’t. I have something else to do tonight and my plane will be here early tomorrow. But, thank you for last night.”

“Any time you’re in town, hot stuff!” She smiled as she kissed me on the cheek and walked back to the bedroom.

I stepped in the shower and, when I got out, Ellie was already gone. After getting dressed, I went to Diana’s room to see if they left for the specialist yet. There was no answer when I knocked so I walked down to the front desk and left a message for her and Jacob. I had the hotel bring a car around and, when I was on my way to Black Enterprises, Julia called me.

“Hello,” I answered.

“How’s your head?”

“Fine; why do you ask?”

“I talked to Dad a few minutes ago and he said you had a late night again and you sounded like shit. I think he’s really worried about you.”

I rolled my eyes and sighed. “There’s no need to worry about me. I’m fine. So what if I like to have fun. Maybe he should try it some time.”

“I’m thinking that Dad sees himself in you when he was younger. You heard the rumors.”

“Too bad. I’m not him, and I’ll be fine.”

“Promise me,” she said.

“I promise. Now I have to go because I’m at the office.”

I pressed end and shook my head as I stepped out of the car. As I was walking into

the building, Mac was coming out. She looped her arm around mine and turned me around.

“Did you have breakfast yet?” she asked.

“No, why?”

“Good. You’re coming with me, then. I’m starving and we can go over the designs. I spoke with your dad last night.”

We pulled into the restaurant, ordered breakfast, and, as soon as we started going over the plans, my phone rang. I pulled it from my pocket and it was Diana.

“Hello,” I answered.

“Collin, it’s Diana. The desk gave me your message.”

“Hi, Diana. I was wondering if maybe you and Jacob would like to hang out this afternoon. I thought maybe we could go to the Field Museum. I think Jacob would love it. I know I did when I was his age. Actually, I still do.”

“That’s very nice of you, Collin, but we don’t want to impose on you. I know you’re a very busy man.”

“Actually, I’m not that busy and I want to. Jacob will love it. I’ll be back to the hotel in a couple of hours. Okay?”

“Thank you, Collin. We’ll be here.”

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I hung up and Mac was giving me a strange look.

“Now you’re seeing someone who has a kid?” she asked.

“Nah, I met them on the plane. Jacob is a sick kid and they flew here to see a specialist. Diana just lost her job and spent the last of her savings on this trip for him. I feel bad for the kid, so I think a trip to the museum would be good for him.”

“My...my, look at Collin Black acting like a responsible adult.” She winked.

“Okay...okay. Can we get back to going over these plans?”

Chapter 4

“WOW!” Mom, look!” Jacob pointed as he ran to Sue, the largest and most famous T. Rex on display.

I let them run ahead as I stayed back and smiled at how excited he was to be here. I knew he would be. My mom and dad used to bring me and Julia here all the time when we were kids. I brought Hailey here once, but she didn’t like it; she said it wasn’t her thing and I was kind of hurt by it because this museum was one of my favorites. I walked over to where Jacob and Diana were standing, and Jacob looked at me with a huge smile on his face. I pulled out my phone and took a picture of Sue, the T. Rex, and sent it to Julia.

“Sue is going to eat you up, Julia!”

“Lol, what are you doing at the museum?”

I used to say that to her every time we’d come here and she’d get scared and hold onto my dad for dear life. My mom used to tell me not to tease her, but I couldn’t help it. It was the one thing she wasn’t so sure of at the museum, so I used it to my advantage. I asked Jacob and Diana to stand in front of the T. Rex so I could get a picture of them. After I took it, I sent it to Julia.

“I brought Jacob and Diana here.”

“Dad told me about them. That was really nice of you.”

“We’ll talk about it when I get back to New York.”

As we entered the Dinosaur Hall and Jacob ran ahead to see the woolly mammoth, I asked Diana about the appointment with the specialist.

“How did the appointment go?”

“Same as always. There’s nothing really new they can do for him. The doctor gave me a script for a new antibiotic for when Jacob gets another lung infection and he’s going to discuss other optional treatments with his regular doctor in New York.”

“I’m sorry, Diana. I wish there was something I could do.”

“You’re sweet, Collin, thank you. But, Jacob and I will be fine. I’ve been a single parent now for about five years, ever since his dad died in a car accident.”

God, I didn’t know if I could hear any more. Diana reminded me of my mom. She was strong and she seemed like a fighter. Jacob looked back at us and took both our hands as he led us over to another dinosaur display. After we left Dinosaur Hall, we

stopped and grabbed some sandwiches at the Field Bistro. I could tell Jacob was getting tired and he started to cough.

“Maybe after a couple more displays, we should get going,” Diana said to Jacob as she ran her hand through his hair.

“Mom, no, and stop with the hair.”

“Maybe your mom’s right, bro. You’re looking kind of tired,” I said.

He began coughing. “Okay, maybe I am ready to leave now.” He coughed some more.

Diana took hold of his hand and we walked out of the museum. My car was waiting for us at the curb. When we got back to the hotel, Diana thanked me and said that she was going to take Jacob up to the room and let him rest while she took a shower. I told her to order room service for the night and meet me at the restaurant in the hotel for breakfast in the morning. Jacob and I high-fived and Diana smiled.

As I took the elevator up, I pulled my phone from my pocket and decided to send a text message to Ellie.

“Hey, sexy. I need you tonight. How about we get drunk and have wild sex?”

“Sounds good, hot stuff. Let’s meet at Stingray’s around eight.”

“Make sure you wear something sexy for me.”

“I always do,” she replied.

As soon as I stepped into the room, I took off my clothes and got in the shower. I had

a few hours before I had to meet Ellie, so after I showered, I took a nap. I dreamt of Hailey. We were at the beach in the Hamptons, playing volleyball and eating burgers. When I awoke, I was sweating. Fuck, I thought to myself as I sat on the edge of the bed with my face in my hands. I got up and got dressed. This was nothing that a lot of alcohol and a hot sexy woman couldn't fix. As I was fixing my hair in the mirror, Ellie sent me a naked picture of herself. I smiled as I looked at her perfectly round tits. I couldn't wait to get those babies in my mouth. I was getting hard and I felt the need to jack off to her picture. But then I decided that I could wait until later when I could have her all to myself. I sent her a text message back.

"I can't wait to fuck you deep and hard."

"Looking forward to it. I have some toys for us to play with."

Oh God. When I read that, my cock, which had just started to go limp, shot straight up again. As I smiled and set my phone down, there was a knock on the door. I walked over and opened it.

"Dad!"

"Hello, son. Going somewhere?" he asked as he made his way into the room.

"Umm, actually, yes."

"Great, I'll join you," he said as he set his bag on the bed.

"What are you doing here?"

"Seeing what you're up to."

"You flew all the way to Chicago to see what I was up to?"

“Yep,” he replied as he nodded his head.

“Dad, come on.”

He sighed as he sat down in the chair. “Listen, your mom was worried about you. So, to please her, I told her I’d fly out here and check up on you.”

“If she was so worried, then why didn’t she come herself?” I asked.

“Because she had plans with Peyton that she couldn’t cancel. Think of it this way; we’ll have some father-son bonding time.” He smiled.

I grabbed my phone and sent Ellie a text message.

“Sorry, babe. I have to cancel our plans. My dad just showed up.”

“Bring your sexy daddy with you. It’ll be fun.”

“Very funny. We’ll hook up the next time I’m back in Chicago.”

“Okay, hot stuff, but I’ll miss you tonight. I was really looking forward to trying out those toys.”

“Next time, babe.”

I sighed and set my phone down.

“Let me guess. You just canceled your plans with either Sarah, Tru, Bella, Ellie, or Riley.”

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I cocked my head and knitted my eyebrows.

“Well, which lovely girl was it, son?” he asked.

“Ellie.”

He smiled. Not his warm, loving smile. His “I know her type” smile.

“You didn’t have to cancel on my account, Collin.”

“Yes, Dad, I did. I’m starving. Can we go to dinner?”

He chuckled as he got up and walked out of the room. We went to Joe’s Seafood, one of our favorite restaurants that we usually ate at when we were in Chicago. As we sat down, my dad and I both ordered a scotch while looking over the menu. He leaned back in his chair and shot me that look. The look of him trying to figure me out and I was in no mood for a lecture. I smiled at him as the waitress brought our drinks and took our dinner order. I pulled out my phone and sent a text message to Julia.

“Did you know that Dad is here in Chicago and we’re having dinner right now instead of me clubbing it up with Ellie?”

“LOL. I’m glad he’s there. That way, I know you’ll stay out of trouble.”

“Thanks, sis. I appreciate your support.”

“Enjoy your father/son bonding time, little brother.”

I sighed as I put my phone away and looked at my dad.

Chapter 5

I opened my eyes and couldn't believe how bad my neck was killing me. My dad took my bed and told me that I could sleep on the pullout, since he was the one paying for the room. I went to go to the bathroom and he was in the shower. Shit. I grabbed my phone from the table to check my messages. There was a text message from my mom.

"I hope you had a fun night with your dad. I wish I could've come with him, but with Peyton, I couldn't cancel. I know he felt bad for making you go there to drop off the plans and he was worried about you. I'll see you later, sweetheart. I love you."

I stood there and stared at the message. So, he was the one that was worried, not my mom. He lied to me, but I knew there was no way he'd admit it. He walked out of the bathroom and looked at me.

"Did you sleep well, son?" he asked.

I gave him a smile because I knew how much he loved me and Julia. "Yeah, Dad. I slept great."

"Good. How about some breakfast?"

"I'm meeting Diana and Jacob downstairs for breakfast. Please join us. Also, I cancelled their flight home and had the desk refund their ticket. They'll be traveling home with us on our plane, if that's okay? It's sort of what I already had planned."

"Of course it's okay, and I can't wait to meet both of them."

He went in the bedroom to get dressed and I stepped into the shower. When we went downstairs to the restaurant, Diana and Jacob were already sitting down. When they saw us walking towards the table, Diana stood up and shook my father's hand.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Black." She smiled.

"The pleasure is all mine, Diana. This must be Jacob," he said as he placed his hand on Jacob's head.

We sat down and ordered breakfast. Diana was in a panic and said that her flight was cancelled and they were on standby for another flight out of Chicago.

"No need to be on standby. You'll fly home on my private plane." My dad smiled.

"Mr. Black, I couldn't. Collin has already done so much for Jacob and me. Really, we can wait."

"Nonsense. You're flying home with us on my plane."

I looked over at Diana. "You can't argue with him. He wins every time. Except when my mom is involved, then she wins."

"Collin—"

"Don't even try to deny it, Dad," I interrupted and he chuckled.

The four of us had a great breakfast and when I glanced at my watch, I noticed it was time to check out. As the bellhop went to our rooms and collected our bags, my dad had his car waiting for us at the curb.

The four of us stepped onto the plane and Jacob was in awe over it.

“WOW! This is so cool!” he exclaimed, then began to cough.

My dad looked at me and then at Jacob. “Pick any seat you want to sit in and, as soon as we’re up in the air, Collin will show you where the video games are.”

“You have video games on your plane? How awesome! Mom, did you hear that?”

“I sure did, sweetie.” She smiled.

We all took our seats and, as soon as we were up in the air, my dad and Diana unbuckled their seatbelts and sat down at the round table, while I showed Jacob the video games.

“Where did you used to work, Diana?” my dad asked.

“Rogers Media Corp. I was the administrative secretary to Glenn Williams, the Vice President.”

After setting up the video game system for Jacob, I walked over and joined them at the table. My dad leaned back in his chair and brought his hand up to his chin.

“I had heard they were going under a while back,” he said.

“Yeah, it happened so fast. One day, I went to work and they let everyone go except a few people.”

Jacob began coughing as he played his game and my dad kept looking at him. “What part of New York are you from?” he asked her.

“Brooklyn,” she said. “My husband and I moved there right after we were married.”

“I’m sorry to hear about your husband. Collin told me he passed away.”

“Thank you, Mr. Black,” she said as she looked down.

“My secretary, Valerie, is retiring and I’m currently interviewing for her position. So far, I haven’t been impressed with anyone until now. How would you like to come work at Black Enterprises as my secretary? You’ll get fully paid health benefits and a very good salary. I can guarantee you’ll be making double of what you did at Rogers Media Corp.”

“Mr. Black, are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m very sure. Come by the office tomorrow morning around nine and I’ll have Valerie show you around.” He smiled.

“Oh my goodness, Mr. Black, I can’t even begin to thank you enough!” she said as she stood up and hugged my dad. “You have no idea how much this means.”

I looked at my dad as Diana walked over to tell Jacob. “Thanks, Dad. You’re pretty awesome.” I smiled.

“No, son, thank you. You’re the one who found her and helped her. If you wouldn’t have, I still wouldn’t have a secretary.” He winked.

As soon as the elevator doors opened, I threw my bags on the floor. My mom came from the direction of the kitchen with her arms out to me.

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“Welcome home, Collin. How was your trip?” she asked as she hugged me.

“It was fine, Mom. It’s good to be back home.”

She walked over to my dad and gave him a passionate kiss; a long kiss that wouldn’t stop.

“Ugh, will you two knock it off already or take it upstairs.”

“Trust me, son; we are right now.” My dad winked.

I rolled my eyes and grabbed my bags and went to my room. I heard my mom giggling behind me. I threw my bag on the bed and pulled out my phone, noticing a text message from Aiden.

“Hey, bro, are you back in town yet? We have some serious partying to do tonight at Tina Brian’s house. Everyone is going to be there.”

“Hey, I just got back. What time is the party?”

“Eight o’clock.”

“I’ll meet you there.”

Score. That party was exactly what I needed. Tina was a good friend. We occasionally hooked up and enjoyed each other’s company. She wasn’t my type, though. Don’t get me wrong, she was a very nice and sexy girl, but there wasn’t that

spark there that Hailey and I had. A spark that I never thought would go away. I sat down on my bed and pulled out a picture of me and Hailey that I hid in my nightstand. Memories of our greatest times together flooded my mind and hurt me like hell. I picked up my phone and pulled up her name. Fuck it! I sent her a text message.

“Hi, how are you?”

“Hey, Collin. I’m good. How are you?”

I wished I could tell her that I was good too, but I couldn’t lie to her.

“Not good, Hailey. I miss you like hell.”

“Don’t start with that again. You need to move on, Collin.”

Move on? Was she fucking serious?

“Have you moved on, Hailey?”

“Yes, I have. I’m sorry if it hurts you, but I’ve met someone.”

My stomach felt sick when I read that and my heart began to ache something fierce.

“Good for you. I won’t ever bother you again.”

“I’m sorry, but I believe that we weren’t meant to be.”

How could she be such a heartless bitch? It was like one morning she woke up a completely different person. I didn’t even know who she was anymore. She was not the girl I fell in love with all those years ago. I didn’t respond to her last message. If

she believed we weren't meant to be and she found someone else, then so be it. I wouldn't lie and say that I wasn't completely devastated, because I was – all over again. Her words hurt me more than I ever imagined they would. If she wanted me to move on, then that was what I would do, but I could promise you that I would never allow myself to hurt like that again.

I put my hand on the doorknob and, as I turned it and opened the door, I was startled when I saw Julia standing there.

“Welcome back.” She smiled as she hugged me.

“Jesus, Julia, you scared me.”

“Sorry, but you're the one who opened the door. I was just getting ready to knock. Where are Mom and Dad?”

“Where do you think?” I said as I walked out of my room, shut the door, and looked down the hall.

“Oh,” she said as she followed me down the stairs.

I went into the kitchen and Julia sat down at the table. “How are you feeling?” I asked.

“I'm feeling okay. How are you?”

“I'm great, Julia!” I smiled.

“Yeah, okay. That's not going to work on me.”

I rolled my eyes as I poured some juice for us in a glass and sat down across from

her. I slid the glass across the table. "Juice?" I asked.

"Thank you. Now tell me what's going on."

"Nothing is going on, Julia. Why do you keep insisting something is?"

She put her elbows on the table as she slid the glass of juice back to me. "Because, I know you and I know the look on your face when something happens. You can't fool me."

I sighed. "Fine. I sent a text to Hailey and she told me to move on and that she's met someone."

"Aw, Collin, I'm sorry."

"Sorry about what?" my dad asked as he strolled into the kitchen with a big smile on his face.

I looked at Julia and discreetly shook my head. "Oh, nothing, Dad. I was just telling him that I was sorry about Jacob's illness."

"Ah, yes. It's a terrible thing. It's good to see you, princess." He smiled as he kissed her head. "Are you two almost ready to go to dinner?"

I looked at him in confusion. "Dinner? I have plans tonight, Dad," I said.

"Tell that to your mother, son."

"Tell me what?" my mom asked as she walked into the kitchen.

"Collin has something he'd like to tell you." My dad smiled as he raised his eyebrow

at me.

“What’s wrong?”

Damn it. I could never say no when it came to her. “Nothing’s wrong, Mom. I was just telling Dad that I can’t wait for all of us to go and have a nice dinner. It’s been a while.”

“Oh good. I was afraid you had already had plans for tonight.” She smiled.

“Well, I do, but not until later. Is Jake coming with us?” I asked Julia.

“No, he had to go help his dad with something at the dealership.”

I looked at my watch. “Great, let’s go. I’m starving.” I smiled, trying to hurry them up so I could go the party after. I didn’t want to be too late.

“Are you in some sort of a hurry, son?” my dad smirked.

“Uh, no. I’m just really hungry.” I smiled as we walked onto the elevator.

Chapter 6

I kissed Julia and my mom goodbye before leaving the restaurant. Since my dad brought the Range Rover, I had to take a cab to Tina’s house.

“It’s about time, man.” Aiden smiled as we high-fived.

“Sorry. I had to have dinner with my family. You know how my parents are about family dinners.”

“Yeah, I sure do. Come on; let’s get our drink on and party!” he screeched.

We walked inside and straight to the kitchen, where Tina and a few of our friends were gathered around the table doing lemon drops.

“Collin, get your sweet ass over here and do some shots with us!” Tina exclaimed.

I needed to forget about Hailey once and for all. Okay, I probably wouldn’t forget about her for good, but at least for tonight, I would after I got rip-roaring drunk. I picked up a lemon drop and held it up.

“Fuck relationships!” I said as I threw the shot down the back of my throat.

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“Yeah, and here’s to fucking a lot of different women!” Aiden smiled as he picked up another shot.

As I stood at the table drinking one shot after another, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around and Yasmin stood there and started at me.

“Why haven’t you called me or answered any of my text messages?” she asked with an attitude.

“Why would I call you?” I replied.

She grabbed my wrist and led me out to the backyard to a spot where it was quiet. “What do you mean, Collin? After we had sex, you said it was the best you ever had and that you really liked me.”

Shit. I was totally wasted that night. I sighed as I looked into her green eyes. “Yasmin, sex with you was great, and I think you’re a really sweet girl, but it was only about the sex. You knew that.”

“No, I didn’t know that!” she yelled. “I don’t do one-night stands, you bastard! You told me how beautiful I was and I thought I meant something to you,” she said as tears started to stream down her face.

I didn’t need to stand here and listen to her whine. I needed a beer, and as I began to walk away, she grabbed my arm. “Fuck you, Collin Black! You’re nothing but a cold-hearted, emotionless bastard, and I hope you get what you deserve. I really thought you were different from the other guys.”

I stared at her as she cried. Yeah, I felt bad, but I couldn't do anything about it. "I'm sorry, Yasmin, but you thought wrong," I said as I shook my head and walked away. I went back inside the house as I left her sobbing outside. I grabbed a beer from the cooler and downed it as fast as I could.

"Whoa, bro, slow down," my friend Brett said. "It can't be that bad."

"You have no idea," I said as I finished the bottle and grabbed another one.

I looked at my watch and saw that it was one in the morning. Shit. I had to be at the office by seven for a meeting. The party was still going strong and Aiden was up in one of the bedrooms with some chick. I found Brett and asked him if he could call me a cab so I could get home. He laughed and led me to his car.

"Forget the cab, Collin. I can drive you home. I'm the designated driver for tonight."

"Thanks, man. I owe you."

I had Brett drop me off in the parking garage so I could take the elevator right up to the penthouse. I stood there and felt sick to my stomach as the elevator went up. Ugh. I didn't know if I was going to make it. I drank way too much. As the doors opened, I tried to make it up to my room, but stumbled up the stairs and fell. I didn't care. I just needed to lie down and that was exactly what I did. I passed out at the top of the stairs and slept in the hallway.

I felt jabs in my side and when I carefully opened my eyes, I saw my dad staring down at me.

"What the hell, Collin!" he yelled.

I put my hand on my forehead and closed my eyes. "Dad, stop."

“Get your sorry ass up right now! You reek of alcohol and you need to be at the office in an hour. Go get in the shower and clean yourself up. I don’t have time to deal with you right now. This isn’t over,” he said as he stepped over me and walked downstairs.

I lay there, my head pounding and vibrating like a train racing down the tracks. I didn’t want to get up and go to the office. I wanted the comfort of my bed for the rest of the day. Suddenly, I felt someone grab my arm.

“Come on, Collin. Get up,” my mom said as she helped me. She took me into the bathroom and set me down on the toilet. She started the shower and lifted my shirt over my head.

“Okay, Mom, stop. I can get undressed myself.”

“Be careful, and your cocktail will be waiting for you when you get out and come downstairs. You better hurry up because your dad is pissed off.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” I said.

“Sometimes I look at you and I don’t even know who you are anymore,” she said with disappointment as she left the bathroom and shut the door.

I carefully got up and stepped into the shower, letting the hot water stream down my body. I washed up and then got dressed. I walked downstairs and to the kitchen where my dad was sitting at the table and my mom was standing by the counter, holding that shit cocktail I’d come to drink on a regular basis.

“Drink it now!” she said in a stern voice.

“Mom—”

“Don’t you ‘Mom’ me, young man. You go sit down at the table and don’t say one word. Do you understand me?”

I nodded my head and sat down. My dad just glared at me from the opposite side. “We’re going to talk about this later and you’re not going to like it.”

“Dad—”

“Don’t ‘Dad’ me. Finish your drink and get your ass down to the parking garage. We have a meeting to get to,” he said as he shook his head and got up from his chair.

After I managed to choke down the cocktail, I put on my shoes and kissed my mom goodbye.

“I’m sorry, Mom.”

“You’re always sorry, Collin, and sorry just isn’t cutting it anymore.”

I stepped into the elevator and looked down as the doors shut.

Once again, I held my composure in the meeting. Julia kept staring at me from across the table and all I could see was disappointment from her too. It seemed like I couldn’t make anyone happy anymore. Once the meeting was over, my dad told me to follow him to his office. He told me to have a seat and then looked at his watch.

“Diana will be here soon, so I’m going to make this quick. I think you are one of the smartest people I know, and you have an excellent business sense. You need to get your damn head out of your ass and stop acting like a spoiled rich kid, because make no mistake about it, I will fire you from this company and completely cut you off. Do you understand me?”

I nodded my head as I got up from the chair and started to walk away. I put my hands in my pockets and stopped before I reached the door. “Hailey told me yesterday that I need to move on and that she’s seeing someone else. Just imagine what it would be like if Mom said that to you.” I slowly opened the door and went to my office. I sat down at my desk, turned my chair around, and stared out the window at the busy city. My head was still pounding, so I opened my desk drawer and took out the bottle of ibuprofen. As I was about to pop some in my mouth, Julia walked in.

“Hey.” She smiled.

“Hey. If you came to lecture me again, don’t bother. Dad just threatened to fire me and cut me off.”

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“He’d never do that to you, Collin,” Julia said as she sat down.

“A long time ago, I would have thought the same thing. But now, I’m not so sure anymore,” I said as I looked down.

“I think you need to get some help and talk to someone about Hailey. Go see a shrink.”

I chuckled. “Yeah, right. I’m not going to see a shrink. I’ll be fine.”

“You’re fine when you’re drinking. Don’t you see, Collin, alcohol is a band aid, and without it, you won’t stop thinking about her.”

“You don’t understand, Julia. No one understands what it’s like to walk in my shoes right now. Maybe I’m crazy. Who the fuck knows.”

“She was your first love and first loves are hard to get over. But you can’t drink your troubles away. Mom and Dad always taught us to deal with our problems head on and find a solution. Alcohol is not the solution.”

“You talk like I’m an alcoholic. I’m not an alcoholic, Julia.”

“I didn’t say you were. I’m just worried about you heading down the wrong path.”

I sighed as I got up from my chair and grabbed a bottle of water from the mini fridge. “Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine. I promise you.”

“Did you forget your birthday is in a couple of days?” she said.

“No, I haven’t forgotten and Mom and Dad haven’t mentioned it either.”

She smiled as she got up from the chair. “That’s because they’re throwing you a surprise party. Don’t you dare tell them that you know. Jake and I are taking you out to dinner and then back to the penthouse. The only reason I’m telling you is because you’ll go off and make plans and you’ll ruin it for Mom and Dad. So I’m giving you notice right now.”

I walked over and hugged her. “Thank you for letting me know. I would’ve made plans.”

“I know you would’ve.” She smiled.

I placed my hand on her stomach and felt the small bump she had. “How’s my niece or nephew?”

“Fine, and I need to go shop for maternity clothes. I can’t squeeze into my regular clothes anymore.”

“I’m sure Mom is really excited to take you.”

“She is. We’re going tomorrow,” she said as she opened the door. “I love you, little brother.”

“I love you, big sister.” I smiled.

Chapter 7

Connor

I sat at my desk, thinking about Collin and what the hell I was going to do with him. I picked up my phone from the desk and called Denny.

“Hi, Connor.”

“Hi, Denny. How are you, friend?”

“You know me; I’m doing okay.”

“Enjoying retirement?” I asked.

“Somewhat.”

“I was wondering if I can stop by later? I need to talk to you about Collin.”

“Sure. I’ll be here all day.”

“Great. I’ll see you soon.”

I could always count on Denny to give me the right advice. After all, he always put his two cents in when it came to Ellery.

I met with Diana and she accepted the position I offered her as my secretary. Valerie spent the day with her and showed her the ropes. I finished up some paperwork and stopped by Collin’s office to see what he was doing and to let him know that I was leaving the building for the day. When I walked in his office, he was standing and staring out the window with his hands in his pocket. He reminded me so much of me at his age.

“Son,” I said as I walked in.

“Hey, Dad.”

“I have somewhere I need to be, so I’m leaving for the day.”

“Okay. I’ll either catch a cab or get a ride home with Julia. You know, you really need to hire someone to replace Denny,” he said.

“I know I do. I’ll see you later at home.”

I walked out of the building and climbed into the Range Rover and headed to Denny’s house. When I arrived, he was sitting in the backyard. I walked back and gave him a hug. I hadn’t seen him in about a month and I really missed him.

“Sit down and talk to me about Connor Jr.,” he said.

I sighed as I sat down and took the scotch he already had waiting for me. “Why are you calling my son that?”

“Because the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. I told you that your past would come back to bite you in the ass one day.” He smiled.

I rolled my eyes. “His heart is broken and he’s partying too much. God knows how many women he’s had sex with already.”

“Like I said, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” He chuckled. “The boy has your genes, Connor. Put yourself in his shoes because you’ve been there. You’ve walked in his shoes already. Your heart was broken because you thought you were responsible for Amanda’s death. His heart is broken because the love of his life, or so he thinks she is, left him and left the country. His defenses are up now, just like yours were. He’s killing the pain with booze and sex, just like you did. The difference is, you can help him now. Your father wasn’t there for you and I tried to be the best I

could. But, you've been there and you can talk sense into him."

"I tried. He won't listen to me."

"Yeah, I know the feeling." He smiled as he held his glass up to mine. "I think you need to come clean with your son and tell him about the list of rules you had in place for your women."

I looked at him in horror. "There is no way in hell I'd share that with my son."

"Step outside your perfect box, Connor. Collin is hurting something awful. He's doing the same thing you did. You need to make him see that it's wrong, and if he continues walking that line, he'll regret it. You were a miserable bastard until the day you met Ellery. You need to tell him about Ashlyn and what she did to you and your family. You never know, he could run across a psycho bitch like that himself if he keeps up his ways."

I threw back my drink. "I've already thought about that. The difference is I was more responsible at his age where work was concerned. I threatened to fire him and cut him off today if he didn't straighten up."

"Was that really a wise move? Just be there for him, Connor. What does Ellery say about all this?"

"Of course she's upset and she's worried about him."

"He's a Black, and he comes from an outstanding and loving family. He'll be okay. But he will need your guidance."

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“Thanks, old man. I knew I could count on you.” I smiled. “You are coming to his birthday party, right?”

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world. Maybe I’ll even have a few words with him.” He winked.

I got up from my chair, gave him a light hug goodbye, and drove home.

I was in the kitchen having coffee when Collin came downstairs.

“Good morning, Collin,” Ellery said as she kissed his cheek.

“Good morning, Mom. Dad,” he said as he looked at me.

“You’re going to need to go upstairs and change your clothes,” I said.

“Why?”

“Because you and I are going to play golf today.”

He looked at me strangely. “Huh?”

“We’re not going to the office. We’re going to skip work today and spend some father/son time together.”

“Oh,” he said in shock. “Okay. Does Julia know?” he asked.

“Does Julia know what?” she said when she walked into the kitchen.

“Hello, princess.” I smiled as she walked over and kissed me.

“Dad and I aren’t going to the office today. We’re going to play golf instead.”

“Good for you!” She smiled. “Mom and I are going maternity clothes shopping.”

“It looks like the Black family is playing hooky today.” Ellery laughed.

I got up from my chair and wrapped my arms around her. Even after all these years, her scent still drove me crazy. I brought my lips closer to her ear as I whispered, “We can play hooky together later. All night, if you want.”

“Mhmm,” she moaned. “I can’t wait.”

“Hello! Children in the room!” Julia yelled.

Ellery and I laughed and kissed each other goodbye for the day. Collin and I climbed into the Range Rover and headed to breakfast before tearing up the golf course.

“I love the omelets here,” Collin said as he took a bite.

“This was always your favorite place to eat breakfast.” I smiled.

Collin looked at me as he took a sip of his coffee. “Okay, Dad. Confess. Yesterday, you were about ready to fire me and cut me off and today, you’re taking me to breakfast and golfing. What’s up? Are you going to lecture me?”

Chapter 8

I sat there and listened to my father spill about his past. His women, his stalker, and the reason he was the way he was. I was blown away when he told me about his rules. It was hard for me to hear. I could see why I reminded him of himself. He saw almost the same behaviors in me that he once had. I felt sorry for him. I felt sorry that I had pushed him far enough that he had to relive his past. I told him that I was okay and not to worry. He could tell I wasn't and said that he'd worry, no matter what.

"One day, son, you're going to meet the love of your life."

"I already did, Dad."

"I'm sorry to break this to you, but no, you haven't. Hailey wasn't the love of your life and you'll finally understand when you meet that special person."

It didn't matter what he said. Hailey was the love of my life and nobody could tell me otherwise. They weren't inside my heart and they weren't inside my head. Nobody had any clue as to how much I loved that girl and still did. After breakfast, we golfed for most of the day. It was great to spend the day with my dad. But no matter how much time I spent with someone else, Hailey was always still front and center in my mind.

"I need to talk to you about your birthday," my dad said.

"What about it?"

"Your mom and I have to attend a charity function that we can't get out of. So we're going to take you out the day after."

I smiled to myself because if I hadn't already known, I'd actually believe him.

"That's okay, Dad."

“Julia and Jake are taking you to dinner, so don’t make any plans.”

“Okay,” I said.

He gave me a strange look and continued to golf. We finished up our game and then headed home where we took my mom, Julia, and Jake to dinner. After dinner, I came home and spent the rest of the evening with my mom and dad. That made my mom smile and it felt good to make her happy.

“Happy birthday, my darling baby boy,” my mom said as she walked into my room and kissed my cheek.

“Thanks, Mom.” I smiled.

“I made you all your favorite breakfast foods. So get dressed and come downstairs.”

I reached over and grabbed my phone from the nightstand with the hope that Hailey had at least wished me a happy birthday. Disappointment washed over me as I scrolled through all my text messages and not one of them was from her. I climbed out of bed, showered, and dressed before heading down to eat the wonderful breakfast my mom prepared for me. I put on my fake smile as I entered the kitchen.

“Mom, it smells great in here.”

“Thank you. Sit down and I’ll bring you your plate.”

“Happy birthday, son.” My dad smiled.

“Thanks, Dad.”

My mom set down a plate of eggs and French toast and then took her seat next to me.

“I feel so bad that we won’t be able to take you out tonight.” She pouted.

“Don’t be, Mom. We can do it another night. It’s not that big a deal. I’m a big boy now.” I winked.

“Well, at least you’ll be with Julia and Jake tonight.”

Yeah, I thought to myself. As much as I loved my family, the only person I wanted to spend my birthday with wasn’t here.

I spent the rest of the day at the office, catching up on work that I’d been slacking on over the past few weeks. I decided that maybe it was time for me to throw myself into my work because this was going to be my company one day and I wanted to be just as successful as my dad, plus I wanted to make him proud of me.

“Happy birthday, bro.” Jake smiled as we shook hands.

“Thanks,” I said as I sat down at the table.

The three of us had a great dinner and I couldn’t wait to get home and really start drinking at my party. If there was a night that I needed to get drunk, tonight was it. The whole day had passed and not one word from Hailey. Once again, she had managed to break my heart and I let her. When dinner was over, I climbed in Julia’s and Jake’s Range Rover and they took me back to the penthouse.

“Now remember to act surprised,” she warned me.

The elevator doors opened and, suddenly, the lights went on and everyone yelled “Surprise.” A wide grin graced my face as I took a step back and pretended to be in shock.

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“OMG! I can’t believe you did this.” I smiled at my mom and dad.

“Are you surprised, sweetheart?” my mom asked with a big smile.

“Surprised isn’t the word for it, Mom. Wow. Thank you both so much.”

After my mom and dad hugged me and my mom gave me twenty-two birthday kisses, Peyton walked up to me and held out her arms.

“Happy birthday, Collin,” she said as she kissed both my cheeks.

“Thank you, Peyton. Where’s Henry?”

“He’s on his way. He got held up with a patient. I don’t think I need to ask how you’re doing.”

I took in a deep breath. “I’m hanging in there.”

“I’m sorry for Hailey’s behavior, but I want you to know that my feelings for you will never change. I love you very much and nothing my daughter does will change that.”

“I love you too, Peyton. Thank you.” I smiled. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m in need of a scotch.”

I walked away and to the bar where the bartender poured me a scotch. As I took a sip, I heard a voice behind me.

“I hope you’re having a happy birthday, Collin.”

“Uncle Denny, it’s good to see you. How are you?”

“I’m okay, son. But let’s not talk about me. The question of the evening is how are you doing?”

I couldn’t help but smile because I felt a lecture coming on. I remembered growing up and listening to him lecture my dad all the time. He had a certain tone in his voice that he used right before the lecture. He wasn’t looking well and I knew my dad was overly worried about him.

“I’m doing okay.”

“Come with me and let’s go sit down,” he said as he put his arm around me and led me to the couch where no one was sitting. “Your dad is worried about you and, frankly, so am I.”

“It’s okay, Uncle Denny. I’m fine. There’s no need to worry.”

“Really? Because you’re boozing it up and having sex with women all over the state.”

“Uncle Denny, keep it down,” I said as I looked around.

He chuckled loudly. “You sure are your father’s son. One day, my boy. One day, she’ll sweep you off your feet. And trust me, it won’t be Hailey. She was never ‘the one’ anyway and someday, you’ll finally realize that. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to go talk to your mom.”

He got up and left me sitting there, speechless. I could guarantee I had the same look

on my face that my dad always did.

“Come on, Collin. It’s time to blow out your birthday candles.” My mom smiled she led me into the kitchen.

Everyone gathered around, sang “Happy Birthday,” and clapped as I blew out twenty-two glowing candles.

“Did you make a wish, son?” my dad asked.

“Yeah, I did.” I smiled.

I was celebrating my birthday on the outside, but on the inside, I was a broken man with a void so deep that any emotion or feeling would get lost and never be found. After I cut the first piece of cake, I handed the knife to my mom and walked over to the bar to fill up on scotch for the night. I just needed to feel numb this last time. Tomorrow would be different. But for tonight, I needed to forget.

Chapter 9

Three Months Later...

After my birthday and some serious thought, I decided to tone it down a bit. When I say that, I meant that I was more careful about what I was doing. I didn’t get as drunk on weeknights anymore because I was solely focused on Black Enterprises and my job. But I sure as hell made up for it on the weekends. I partied starting at six o’clock Friday night until eight p.m. Sunday. I went to clubs, friends’ parties, and had a lot of sex. I hated to admit that I also broke some hearts. These women knew it was for one night only, so it wasn’t my fault or problem if they couldn’t understand that. As far as my parents were concerned, I was starting to turn my life around and becoming a more responsible adult. But I couldn’t fool Julia. She knew me all too well and there

were some nights I spent down in her and Jake's apartment because I didn't want my parents to see how drunk I was. Overall, I was having fun. I was finally starting to get over Hailey because the more women I slept with and then left afterwards was working for me. I had the best of both worlds, an amazing job and many women at my side any time I snapped my fingers. I didn't need to be tied down in a relationship. My heart was healing and, for the first time since Hailey left, I felt good. My new motto in life: No tied-down relationships make for a happy man.

"Good morning, Diana. Is he in there?"

"Yes, he is, Collin." She smiled.

"I sent a text to Jacob last night and he didn't text me back. Is he okay?"

"He's fine. He had a friend over last night and they were playing video games. He probably just forgot."

"Good. I'm glad the little guy is making new friends."

"Thanks. It's really helped since I was able to put him in that private school. Thanks to you and your father."

"Don't mention it." I winked.

I opened the door and saw my dad turned around in his chair, staring out the window.

"Hey, Dad. Is everything okay?"

He turned around and looked at me. "Yeah, son. Everything's fine. I was just thinking about Denny."

“So does that mean you’ve hired a new driver?”

“Yes, son, I have. You know him.”

“I do?” I asked in confusion.

“Yep. I’ve hired Ralph from the transportation department.”

I couldn’t help but burst into laughter. “You mean Ralphie?”

My dad gave me a stern look. “Yes, and don’t call him that. He’s a very good employee and has been for many years. I think he’ll do fine.”

I rolled my eyes. “If you say so. He’s no Denny, that’s for sure.”

“There will never be another Denny,” my dad said as he turned back around and stared out the window.

“Good morning, Daddy. Good morning, little brother,” Julia said as she walked into the office.

“Good morning, princess.”

“Morning, sis. Wow. You look bigger than yesterday!”

She lightly jabbed me in the shoulder. “Jake and I are going for the ultrasound today and want to know if you and Mom want to come with us?”

My dad’s eyes, which were just filled with sadness a few moments ago, lit up when Julia asked him.

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“I would love to go with you, princess. Have you talked to your mom?”

“Yes, and she screamed. She wanted me to ask you myself. My appointment is for three o’clock. You and Mom can meet us at the doctor’s office.”

“Excellent. I’ll have Ralph swing by the penthouse to pick up your mom.”

I started laughing again and Julia couldn’t help but laugh as well.

“You two kids are terrible people. I hope you know that,” my dad said.

I got up from my chair and kissed Julia’s cheek. “I’m out of here. I have a meeting to attend and some files to go over before I start my weekend. You better call me and tell me if I’m getting a niece or nephew.” I pointed at her as I walked out of the office.

As I was finishing up the last of the paperwork that needed to be reviewed, my phone rang. It was Julia.

“Well?” I answered.

“You are going to have a nephew!” Julia said with excitement.

“Ah, that’s great news, Julia. Congratulations. Mom and Dad must be thrilled.”

“They are. Dad got all teary-eyed and Mom burst into tears.”

“I bet they did. That’s awesome. I can’t wait to meet him.”

“We’re going to dinner now. Do you want to meet us?” she asked.

“Nah. I’ve got plans for tonight. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Okay. Stay out of trouble.”

“I can’t promise that.” I chuckled.

I shut down my computer, grabbed my briefcase, and headed out of the building to start my weekend. I was heading to the beach house and Aiden and I were going to check out a new club that had just opened up close by. I didn’t have to worry about my parents showing up this weekend because they were heading to Chicago tomorrow.

As I pulled into the driveway, Aiden was sitting in his car, waiting for me.

“It’s about time, man,” he said as he got out and high-fived me.

“Sorry, I had to finish up some work at the office before I headed out and then I got stuck in a shitload of traffic.”

I inserted the key into the lock and opened the door. I took my bags straight up to my room while Aiden planted himself on the couch and waited for me.

“Dude, I have to shower first. Order us a pizza. I’m starving,” I yelled down the stairs.

After I showered and put on some clothes, I walked downstairs. “Did you order it?”

“Yeah. It should be here in a few minutes,” Aiden replied.

A few moments later, there was a knock on the door. I grabbed my wallet and was caught off guard by a beautiful girl when I opened the door. A big smile splayed across her face when she looked at me.

“Here’s your pizza. That’ll be twenty dollars, please,” she said shyly.

I pulled out thirty and handed it to her. “Here, keep the extra ten for your tip.” I winked.

She bit down on her bottom lip as she thanked me. She began to walk away and then stopped and turned around. “I normally don’t do things like this, but would you like to go out later?”

Damn! I hadn’t been here an hour yet and already I had a date! “Sure. My friend Aiden and I are going to that new club that just opened up over on Northpoint. We’ll be there around nine if you want to meet us there.”

“Sounds like fun. I’ll ask my friends if they want to go. Can I have your number and I’ll text you when we get there?”

“Sure, hand me your phone.” I smiled.

I punched my number under her contacts and hit save. “By the way, what’s your name?” I asked.

“Alexis. And you are?”

“Collin.”

“See you later, Collin.” She smiled as she walked her fine body back to her car.

I shut the door and took the pizza in the kitchen. “Smooth. Very smooth, bro. I didn’t see her. Was she hot?”

“Fuck, yeah, she was hot!”

“You better be careful, man. Tina told me the other day that a few of her friends said that you’re a douchebag.”

“Why the fuck would they say that?” I asked as I grabbed the paper plates and set them on the table.

“Two of her friends you slept with are upset with you because you never called them back.” He chuckled.

“And? They shouldn’t be surprised. They know me and how I am.”

“Just saying, bro.” He smiled. “Love them and leave them. The Collin Black way.”

“Leave them, yes. Love them, no,” I said.

After we ate our pizza, we sat on the couch, watched some of the hockey game, drank a few beers, and then headed to the club.

“Hey, I thought we’d never find you in here. This place is packed,” Alexis said.

“Hey. Thanks for coming.” I smiled as I lightly hugged her.

She looked smoking hot in her short, tight, white skirt, black tank top, and black high heels. I introduced her to Aiden and she introduced me to two of her friends. We

hung out, drank a lot, and danced. Alexis could move. I wondered how she would look dancing on a pole. I was getting hard just thinking about it. Her firm legs wrapped tightly around the pole as she slid around it.

“Come with me,” I said as I grabbed her hand and led her to the back of the club.

There was a long hallway where the restrooms were and, at the end, there was a door on the left with a sign that said “storage.” I turned the knob and, surprisingly, the door opened. I led her inside and shut the door. There was a dim light that hung overhead.

“What are we doing in here?” she asked with a smile.

“I wanted to get you alone. I’ve been watching your hot body all night.”

She wrapped her arms around my neck and kissed me. My hands traveled to her enormous breasts, and, as I squeezed them firmly, her hand made its way down the front of my pants.

“Ah,” I moaned as I broke our kiss and my tongue traveled down her neck.

I lifted her shirt over her head and unclasped her bra, feeling her bare tits in my hands.

“OMG. I’m going to come already,” she said.

“Seriously?” I asked.

“Yes,” she moaned as I kneaded her tits.

I took one hand and cupped her pussy from underneath her skirt.

“No! Don’t touch me down there. I only want you to touch my tits.”

I moved my hand back up to her breasts as she stroked my hard cock up and down firmly. I really needed to fuck her and she wasn’t going to allow me yet. I took down my pants as she continued stroking me. My lips wrapped themselves around her hardened nipple and, as I lightly sucked them, she let out a loud moan and tightened her body. She came. I couldn’t believe she came like that. I looked up at her and she smiled at me.

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“Okay, I’m going to suck you off now. Then we can be finished.”

I stood there and stared at her in disbelief. “Umm, don’t you want to fuck?”

“I’ve never had a penis in me before. I’m not ready for that yet. But I’ll suck your cock until you come. That’s what I always do to guys and they don’t mind.”

This girl was weird and I was losing my hard-on faster than the speed of light. “You know what? Just forget it. I’ve lost the mood.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. I’m positive,” I said with a frown.

I needed to get out of there quickly. I pulled up my pants, buttoned them, opened the door, and quickly walked down the hallway back to the bar. Alexis followed quickly behind me. When I reached the bar, Aiden held up his hand to high-five me. I shot him a look as I sat down at the bar.

“Bro, what’s wrong? Didn’t you score?”

“I don’t want to talk about it. That chick is weird. I need a drink.”

I held up my hand to get the bartender’s attention and then ordered a double scotch. Aiden was eyeing some girl over in the corner and finally got up the nerve to go talk to her. As I downed my scotch, I heard Alexis from behind.

“We’re going to go, Collin. We’re hitting another club. One we’re more familiar with. Do you want to come?”

“No, I’m good right here. Have fun.” I smiled and secretly wished that she’d get the hell away from me.

“Okay, thanks again for....well, you know.” She smiled.

I gave her a fake smile back and she and her friends disappeared. I rolled my eyes as I ordered another scotch. A while later, Aiden came up to me and told me that he was taking the girl he’d met home and that he could drop me off at the beach house first. I told him that I wasn’t ready to leave and that I’d catch a cab home. I wasn’t anywhere near drunk enough to leave.

Chapter 10

Amelia

It was a beautiful night for a walk on the beach. I needed to think and clear my head, and walking along the water always helped. It was dark out, but the way the moonlight glistened over the ocean water was magical. I looked around at some of the boxes stacked in the kitchen and my eyes filled with tears. It was an exhausting day and I needed to relax. If that was even possible anymore. I walked out the patio door and hit the warm sand. The light breeze that swept across my face felt calming, and as I took in a deep breath of the salt water air, I began to relax. The water swept across my feet as I held up my dress so the bottom didn’t get wet. The water was my life at one time, and now, it was just a distant memory that filled my heart with sadness and despair.

As I walked, I couldn’t stop looking up at the stars in the sky. Orion shined brightly. My star gazing came to an end when I tripped over something and fell to the ground.

After I realized what I'd done, I looked at the man I'd tripped over. He was lying face down in the sand.

"Excuse me. Are you okay? I didn't see you. It was completely my fault."

He didn't answer me, so I poked him. "Hey, are you okay?"

He didn't move and I started to panic. I inched my way closer to him and rolled him on his back. His face glowed in the moonlight and I couldn't help but stare at him. I leaned closer and put my ear to his mouth to make sure he was breathing. His breath reeked of alcohol and that was when I knew he was passed out. I got up, brushed the sand off my dress, and started walking away. Could I just leave him there like that? I pondered with the thought of trying to wake him up and asking him where he lived. Oh well, if he drank that much that he passed out in the sand, then that was where he belonged. I began walking back in the direction I came and stopped when I heard him moan. I turned around and stared at him lying there, in the sand, drunk and helpless. I walked back over to him and shook him by the shoulders.

"Okay, you need to wake up now!"

He opened his eyes and looked at me. "Who are you?" he slurred.

"Someone who tripped over you. You're lucky I didn't break anything."

"God, my fucking head. The beach is spinning."

"Well, that's what you get for drinking so much. Are you from around here?" I asked.

He turned his head and then pointed up to the house that wasn't too far from where we were at.

“That’s your house? Are you sure?”

He nodded his head as he tried to sit up, but then fell back down. “Come on; let’s get you home,” I said as I tried to pick him up. “Okay, you’re going to have to help me. Get on your knees and I’ll grab your arms to help you up.”

He did what I asked and I carefully helped him up. He stumbled and almost knocked both of us over. But I held on tight. I put my arm around his waist and his arm around my neck.

“Just take slow small steps.”

“Why are you doing this?” he asked.

“To be honest, I don’t know. I couldn’t just leave you all night on the sand.”

He kept stumbling and complaining that he felt sick. I told him that he better not throw up or I’d drop him and he could spend the night outside. When we made it up to the patio, I opened the door and helped him inside.

“I’m going to go now. You’ll be safe here in your house.”

He turned away from me and gave me a small wave before he tripped up the steps and lay there. I rolled my eyes as I walked over to him and helped him climb up the stairs one by one. When we reached the top of the stairs, I asked him which room was his. He pointed straight ahead. I helped him to his bedroom and made sure he lay down on the bed. He yawned, and when I went to walk away, he grabbed hold of my hand. I turned around and looked at him.

“You’re beautiful.”

I lightly smiled as I put my hand on top of his. “I bet you say that to all the girls.”

I walked out of the room and felt the hand he grabbed. It felt like he was still holding it. I could still feel his soft fingers wrapped around my hand. Before leaving, I stopped in the family room and looked at the numerous pictures that were displayed all over the room. His mom was beautiful and his dad was extremely handsome. Now I could see where he got his good looks from. His sister was beautiful as well. Looking at what a beautiful family they were tore my heart to pieces. Tears began to swell in my eyes as I headed back to my house as fast as I could.

Chapter 11

“Fuck,” I moaned as I rolled over and tried to open my eyes. I lay there on top of the comforter, fully dressed, wondering how the hell I got here. As I moved my hand across the bed, I felt something. Sand. How the hell did sand get in here? Shit, I hated when I drank so much that I couldn’t remember. I dragged myself out the bed and down the stairs to make a cup of coffee. I looked at the clock and it was noon. I popped a k-cup in the Keurig, grabbed a mug from the cupboard, and hit the brew button. I kept shaking my head because I kept smelling the scent of roses. I looked around the kitchen, trying to figure out where it was coming from, but there weren’t any roses to be found. I grabbed hold of my shirt and held it up to my nose. Sure enough, it was on me. What the hell happened last night? I took my cup, went upstairs, and took a shower. When I was finished, I picked up my shirt from the floor and sniffed it one more time before throwing it in my bag. The smell was nice. It was the scent that a woman would wear. Maybe some kind of perfume or lotion. Who was I with? I sighed as I made another cup of coffee and took it outside and down to the beach, where I stood and watched the waves crash against the shore. I took my phone from my pocket and looked at the date. Today was Hailey’s birthday. I wasn’t going to let it bother me and I wasn’t going to send her a text message either. She’d moved on, I’d moved on, and after everything that happened, we couldn’t be friends. As I stared at my phone, I heard a voice.

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“Glad to see that you won’t be tripping anyone today.” She smiled as she jogged by.

She kept going and I didn’t understand what she meant. “Excuse me? What did you say?”

She stopped and then turned around. “I said, I’m glad to see that you won’t be tripping anyone today.”

I shook my head. “Sorry, but you must have the wrong person.”

She laughed and began walking towards me. She was beautiful, especially when she smiled.

“Nope. You’re the right person,” she said as she walked up to me.

“I don’t understand. I’m sorry.”

The wind blew lightly and the faint scent of roses swept across me. The same scent that was on my shirt from last night.

“You were passed out drunk on the beach last night and I was taking a walk and I tripped over you. So, I’m happy to see that you’re awake and standing here so nobody will trip over you again.”

I knitted my eyebrows and cocked my head. This girl. This girl that smelled like roses intrigued me.

“I’m sorry. Are you all right?” I asked.

“I’m fine. Are you all right?”

I kicked the sand with my foot as I looked down in embarrassment. “Yeah, I’m okay.”

“You must have one wicked hangover. You were passed out cold. I was surprised I even managed to get you in the house and up the stairs.”

“You brought me to my bed?” I asked in confusion.

“I did. I didn’t think you should spend the night on the beach. Anyway, I have to go. I’m glad you’re up and feeling better.” She smiled as she turned and started jogging away.

“Wait!” I exclaimed. “Do you live around here?”

“Corner house, on the left.”

“Do you have a name? Or should I just call you the girl who tripped over me?” I smiled.

“My name is Amelia.” She laughed lightly.

“I’m Collin.” I smiled.

“Nice to meet you, Collin, aka, the guy who tripped me on the beach.”

I chuckled as she jogged down the beach. Wow, I thought to myself. What a great girl.

My phone began to buzz in my hand. I looked at it and there was a text message from Aiden.

“Bro, I met the most fantastic girl. Going out with her tonight, if you want to tag along.”

“Nah, have fun. I think I’m going to stay in tonight.”

I walked back up to the beach house and I couldn’t stop thinking about Amelia. Her smile and her scent stayed with me and I thought about her for the rest of the day. I needed to pick up a few things from the store, so I hopped into the Range Rover and drove to the local market.

My phone buzzed with a text message from Aiden.

“Are you sure you don’t want to come out with us tonight?”

“Yeah, I’m sure,” I texted back.

I wasn’t paying attention and ran into the cart that was in front of me.

“Oh my God, I’m sorry,” I said as I looked up and saw Amelia staring at me.

“First you trip me on the beach and now you practically run me over with your cart in the grocery store,” she said.

“I am so sorry.” I began to laugh. “I was texting my friend and I didn’t see you.”

“Of course you didn’t see me. You had your eyes focused on your phone and not what’s straight ahead of you. If you’re going to text while pushing the cart, at least stop and text.”

She liked to go on little rants. She made me smile and no one had done that in a very long time.

“I’m glad I ran into you, literally.” I chuckled. “I want to thank you for thinking enough of me to not let me spend the night on the beach. Don’t get me wrong, I’m all for spending the night on the beach, under the stars. Just not passed out drunk. I was hoping that you’d have dinner with me.”

She looked at me and her eyes diverted down. “I’m sorry. I can’t.”

“Why?” I asked in confusion.

“Because I just can’t,” she said as she began pushing her cart down the aisle.

I grabbed my cart and caught up with her. “Oh, I see; your husband or boyfriend wouldn’t approve.”

“I don’t have a husband or boyfriend.”

Whew, I thought to myself. She’s single. That’s good. “Then why can’t you?”

She stopped her basket and turned and looked at me. “Look, Collin, you seem like a really nice guy, but I’m not interested.”

Okay, she’s not interested. That’s impossible. “Okay, so you’re not interested. I’m not interested either. All I want to do is thank you for helping me into the house last night and to apologize to you for hitting you with my cart.” I smiled. “I don’t understand why women think that when a guy asks them to dinner, they automatically think we’re interested.”

“Because, men usually are,” she said with a twisted face.

“Well, not me. I think you’re a nice girl and all I want to do is thank you. What’s the big deal with that? Am I trying to have sex with you? No way. Do I want a relationship with you? No way. Would I like to show my gratitude as a new friend? Yes way.”

She stood there and stared at me while she chewed on her bottom lip. She was trying to figure me out.

“Okay, fine. I’ll have dinner with you.”

“Okay. Thank you. How about I cook for you at my house? I’m really not up for going out tonight.”

“Sounds good to me because I’m not up for going out either. Maybe I can help you cook.”

“No. I’ll cook for you. Remember, it’s my thank you.”

“Fine.” She smiled. “How about I bring dessert?”

“I would like that.” I smiled back. “Do you eat meat?”

“Yes, I eat meat.”

“Good, because I’m going to cook us some steaks. Do you have any food allergies?”

“No.” She laughed.

“Don’t laugh. At the rate I’m going with you, I would probably cook something that you’re allergic to and I’d send you into anaphylactic shock.”

“Don’t worry. I’m not allergic to anything.”

“Okay then. I’ll finish up shopping and see you at my place around seven?”

“I’ll see you then, Collin.”

We smiled at each other as our carts went the opposite way. I smiled all the way through the store.

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I made sure I had everything, right down to a couple bottles of wine. I set the table for two and threw the steaks in the pan. As I put the final touches on the salad, the doorbell rang. I looked at the clock and it was seven already. As I walked to the door, my heart began to race.

“Hey,” I said almost without breathing.

“Hi,” she said. She held a covered plate and a bag in her hands.

“What’s all this?” I said as I grabbed the bag.

“Dessert. I brought brownie sundaes. I hope you like chocolate.”

“I love chocolate. Come on in.”

She walked into the kitchen and set the plate of brownies on the counter. I put the gallon of ice cream in the freezer and the caramel sauce on the counter.

“It smells delicious in here,” Amelia said.

“Thank you. I’m making us pan-seared tenderloin steak with a sauce, steamed broccoli, baked potato, and a Caesar salad. But first, we’re going to start with marinated shrimp scampi.”

“Wow.” She smiled. “Where did you learn to cook like this?”

“My nanny, Mason.”

“You had a nanny?”

“Yep, and he was the best. He was an amazing cook and taught me and my sister everything he knew. Now, do you like red wine or white wine? Because I have Pinot or Merlot.”

“Pinot is fine.”

She looked so beautiful. She wore a cute white sundress that made her tan glisten and she wore her long, blonde hair straight. She stood about five foot nine with a petite frame. I found myself staring at her more than I should have. I poured the wine into our glasses and told her to step out onto the patio.

“I thought we could eat out here, since it’s a beautiful night.”

“It is a beautiful night.” She smiled.

She sat down with her wine and I brought out the shrimp scampi.

“That looks great.”

“Thank you. Wait until you taste it.” I winked.

I stared at her blue eyes as I took a sip of my wine. I was feeling overwhelmed by her; a feeling I hadn’t had in a very long time. Actually, I wasn’t really sure I’d ever felt like that. She took a bite of the shrimp and smiled.

“Wow, Collin. This is amazing!”

“Thank you,” I said as I nodded my head.

I got up from my seat and walked into the house to get the rest of our dinner. I was nervous that she wasn't going to like it and then think I was a total idiot. Maybe I should've just taken her out to dinner.

Chapter 12

"I'll say it again. Wow! This food is amazing. You have to be a chef. You're a chef, right?"

I chuckled. "No, I'm not a chef, but I do like to cook."

"A man after my own heart." She smiled as she put her hand over her heart.

I held up my glass and motioned for Amelia to do the same. "Thank you, Amelia, for being so kind to me last night, and also, please accept my apology for running you over with my cart today."

She laughed as we brought our glasses together. "Thank you for this wonderful dinner and I accept your apology for tripping me and running into me."

I winked at her and we continued to eat our dinner. There was an aura about her that made me happy when I was with her. After we finished with our meal, we both went into the kitchen and made brownie sundaes. I was startled when I heard the front door open. I looked up and gasped when I saw my mom and dad walking into the kitchen.

"Oh, excuse us, son. We didn't know you were having company tonight." My dad smiled.

"Mom, Dad, what are you doing here? I thought you were in Chicago?" I asked through gritted teeth.

“We decided to go next weekend instead,” my mom said. “Hello, I’m Ellery Black, Collin’s mom.” She smiled as she held out her hand to Amelia.

“Hi, I’m Amelia.” She smiled back as she shook my mom’s hand.

“I’m Connor, Collin’s dad.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Black.”

“Son, I’m sorry if we interrupted something,” he said.

“You couldn’t have called first,” I said.

“To be honest, we thought you’d be out for the night. You actually surprised us.”

I turned to Amelia. “I’m sorry. I had no idea that they’d be coming here.”

“It’s perfectly fine. I would give anything to have my parents walk in right now.”

I picked up on a sadness in her voice when she said that. I didn’t want to ask her any questions about it since my parents were here and she’d probably tell me that it was none of my business.

“Let’s grab a blanket and have our sundaes down on the beach,” I said.

“Okay.” Amelia smiled.

“Collin, we’re really sorry. We can leave. Right, Connor?” my mom said.

“Don’t worry about it, Mom. We’re going down to the beach.”

My dad handed me the blanket, and Amelia and I grabbed our sundaes and took them down to the beach. As I spread the blanket on the sand, she handed me my sundae and we sat down, facing the ocean. The water was calm and the light breeze was soothing.

“You never told me your last name,” I said as I looked over and gave Amelia a small smile.

“Well, I was going to until I heard your last name. You’re going to laugh at me.”

“Why? Is it Black?” I asked jokingly.

She set down her sundae and stuck out her hand. “It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Collin Black. I’m Amelia Jean Gray.”

I tilted my head and smiled as I shook her hand. “Nice to meet you, Miss Gray.”

I shook my head as we both laughed. “I told you that you were going to laugh.”

“Okay, now that I got your last name, tell me something else about you.”

“There’s nothing else to tell. My name is Amelia, and I think that’s all you need to know. When people start telling things about each other, a bond forms, and that’s something I’m not interested in.”

“So you’re not even interested in being friends?” I asked.

“Friends? I don’t have any friends. I gave up on any friendships I had a long time ago.”

Something was going on with this girl. She was broken and she had the same sadness

about her that I once had, or maybe still had.

“You just did it,” I said.

“Did what?” she asked as she looked at me.

“Told me something about yourself and didn’t realize it.”

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“Well, then, maybe I need to stop talking.”

“That’s fine. You can do whatever you want, but I’m going to tell you about me.”

She let out a light laugh and gave me a strange look. “And what makes you think that I want to know anything about you?”

“It doesn’t matter if you do or don’t. I’m going to tell you anyway.” I smiled. “I live in New York City and I work for my dad at Black Enterprises. He’s grooming me to take over his company when he retires. I have a sister whom I adore and she’s going to have a baby; a boy, in fact. I graduated from Columbia with a degree in business and I have a lot of friends. Friends who I count on for support when things aren’t going right in my life. I party too much; something that I’m changing, and at those parties, I tend to drink too much. But you already knew that when you tripped over me last night.” I smiled.

“Why are you telling me all this? And for the record, you tripped me.”

“No. You should’ve been paying attention to where you were walking.”

“I was looking up at the stars because I love them and they soothe me. You shouldn’t have drank so much that you passed out on the beach.”

“Touché, Amelia. Touché.” I smiled.

She looked away, but with a smile. I was responsible for her smile and I felt good about that. I bumped my shoulder against hers and she bumped me back. “Fine, Mr.

Black. Come to my house tomorrow morning at nine o'clock and bring me coffee and breakfast. We can sit and talk some more. I'm leaving the day after tomorrow," she said as she got up and began walking towards her house.

"Where are you leaving to?" I yelled.

"Home," she yelled back.

"And where's home?"

"New York."

I watched her walk up the beach. I didn't want her to leave, but I'd have to settle for seeing her tomorrow morning. I got up, picked up the blanket and the sundae cups, and headed back up to the house. Now I'd have to explain to my parents who she was and how I met her. If I lied about it, they'll eventually find out, so I better just tell them the truth.

"Back already?" my dad asked as I walked in the kitchen.

"Yeah, Amelia had to get home."

"Does she live around here?" my mom asked.

"Down the street. Corner house."

"Hmm. Nobody's been living in that house for the last two years. The people who owned it bought it, moved some stuff in, and then they hadn't been back. Are you sure that's where she lives?"

"That's what she said, Dad."

“Do you want to tell us how the two of you met and when?” My mom smiled.

And there it was. I knew it wouldn’t take long. “Do you really want to know the truth, Mom?”

“Of course I want the truth, Collin.”

“You’re not going to like it.”

“Spill it. Now!” she said.

“Fine, but you can’t get mad at me,” I said as I raised my hands. “Aiden and I went to a new club last night. I drank too much, passed out on the beach, and Amelia found me and brought me in the house and up to bed. Okay, she didn’t find me; she tripped over me and then, today, at the grocery store, I hit her, by accident, with my cart. So I invited her to dinner as a thank you and an apology.”

My mom looked at my dad and smiled. “I already love her.”

“There’s something about that story that sounds familiar.” My dad smiled.

“Do you like her?” my mom asked.

“I think she’s a nice girl. She isn’t interested in relationships or friendships.”

“Hmm, sounds familiar,” my dad said as he raised his eyebrow at my mom.

She smiled at him and that was enough for him to lean over and kiss her. A kiss that turned into a make-out session.

“I’m going to bed. I’ll see you in the morning,” I said as I rolled my eyes and went up

to my room.

The next morning, I was up bright and early. I didn't get much sleep because I couldn't stop thinking about Amelia all night. Damn it. What the hell is going on? I walked downstairs and saw my dad sitting outside on the patio, drinking coffee.

"Morning, Dad. You're up early."

"Good morning, son. I'm always up early. Your mom is still sleeping. I think I wore her out last night." He smiled.

"Dad, seriously. I really think you say this stuff on purpose," I said as I sat down.

He chuckled before taking a sip of his coffee. "You really like Amelia, don't you?"

"I don't really know her."

"It doesn't matter. I could tell the moment we walked in last night that you were different, and then when you came back from the beach, you seemed really happy. I haven't seen that look from you in a very long time."

I stared straight ahead as I contemplated whether or not to tell him how I was feeling.

"There's something about her, Dad. Something that affects me in a really good way."

He looked over at me and smiled. "I know that feeling. You do whatever it takes to get her if you really like her. If you need my help, just ask."

"Thanks, Dad. But I don't think stalking her will accomplish much." I smiled.

"Hey, it worked for me." He winked.

I got up from the chair and put my hand on his shoulder. “I have to go and grab breakfast and coffee for her. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Have fun, son.”

Chapter 13

I drove up the driveway and threw the Range Rover in park. I grabbed the large brown bag and the two coffees I bought at the café about a mile away. Before I even made it to the porch, Amelia opened the door. God, she looked amazing and my heart started to beat a little faster.

“You’re on time.” She smiled.

“I’m always on time.” I smiled back as I handed her the brown bag.

When I walked into her house, I was shocked by all the boxes that sat around; sealed and marked. There was no furniture downstairs except for the kitchen table.

“Sorry, it’s like an obstacle course in here. Don’t mind the mess.”

“Nah, it’s okay.”

I wanted to ask her what was going on, but I was afraid she’d tell me off. I set our coffees down on the table and sat in the chair while she opened the bag. She looked at me and smiled.

“You got a lot of stuff in this bag.”

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“You failed to mention what kind of breakfast foods you liked, so I had to guess. I wanted to make sure there was a variety. There has to be something in there that you’ll eat.”

She took out the bagels and the muffins first. Then she pulled out the Styrofoam containers that had the quiche slices in them.

“I like everything in here. You did good, Black.” She opened a drawer and pulled out paper plates and plastic silverware. “I only have paper and plastic. I hope that’s okay.”

“It’s fine. So, I take it you’re moving,” I said.

“I can’t imagine what gave you that idea.” She winked.

Oh man, she was getting me hard and this needed to stop. “You said last night that you would give anything to have your parents walk in. Are your parents no longer around?”

“What gives you the right to ask that? I barely know you and you have no right!” she snapped.

I put my hand up. “Whoa, Amelia. I’m sorry. You told me to come over and we could sit and talk. Listen, you obviously changed your mind, so I’m just going to go and you can go about your business. I’m sorry that I was just trying to get to know you a little better,” I said as I got up from my chair and walked to the front door.

“Wait. Collin, I’m sorry. You don’t understand. Please stay,” she said as she walked up behind me.

I took in a deep breath. There was a desperation in her voice when she asked me to stay. I turned around and looked into her sad blue eyes. I desperately wanted to grab her and hold her tight.

“Ugh,” she said as she clasped her head. “My parents owned this house. They were killed two years ago in a boating accident.”

“Amelia,” I whispered as I walked closer to her.

She put her hands up and stopped me. “Don’t. I don’t want your pity,” she said as she walked back to the table and sat down.

“I’m really sorry. I had no idea. I’m sorry,” I said as I shook my head.

“Sit down and finish your coffee and breakfast. I’m sorry for being so rude. I don’t like to talk about it and I’ve closed myself off since the accident. I gave up my friends and I pretty much stay secluded in my apartment, except when I go to classes.”

I sat back down and grabbed a bagel. “Classes?”

“I attend NYU and I live in an apartment on campus. I’m going into my last year and it’s been really hard for me to focus.”

My phone buzzed in my pocket. “Excuse me,” I said as I pulled it out and saw a text message from Julia.

“Why didn’t you tell me about this lovely girl you met?”

“I haven’t had a chance yet. We just met. Let me guess, Dad told you.”

“Yes, and he said you seemed to really like her. I’m so happy for you.”

“Don’t get too excited yet. I’ll talk to you later. I’m with her now.”

“Oh, sorry. I can’t wait to hear all about her. Love you.”

“Love you too, sis.”

“Sorry, that was my sister, Julia.”

“No, it’s okay. Never apologize for taking a moment to talk with your family.”

As I took a bite of the bagel that I was holding in my hand, I contemplated what to say to her next. “Listen, Amelia, I’m going to be totally honest with you. I don’t know what to say because I don’t want to upset you.”

She looked at me and gently put her hand on my arm. “I’m sorry that I make you feel that way.”

Her touch sent chills throughout my body. It was the way her soft fingers touched my skin. I found myself staring at her lips. I pictured myself kissing her and I wondered what it would be like. The one rule I always followed was the no kissing rule. The women I slept with never touched my lips. To me, kissing was special and passionate and it wasn’t to be shared with just anyone. I’d watched my mom and dad kiss a million times growing up and it was always full of passion. It symbolized their love for one another. Hailey was the only girl I’d ever kissed, and ever since we broke up, my lips hadn’t touched another woman’s. But as I sat there and stared at Amelia, I felt this overwhelming urge to kiss her. I wanted to feel how soft her lips felt against mine.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

I snapped out of my daydream and smiled. “Yeah, I’m fine.”

“You were just staring at me. Why?”

Shit. She noticed and I had to come up with something fast. “I’m just trying to figure you out.”

“Maybe I don’t want to be figured out.”

“I think you do,” I said.

“You’re very forward, Mr. Black.”

“And you’re very closed off, Miss Gray.”

“I have to be.”

“Why?”

“I gave up on life after the accident. Everyone and everything that I ever loved was taken from me. Not only my parents, but my sister and my boyfriend.”

I looked down because I didn’t want her to see the hurt that I felt for her in my eyes.

“What’s the point of moving on when you’re alone and you have nobody to share anything with? Like I said, I gave up all my friends. Or should I say, they gave up on me. They could only take so much of my constant crying and refusal to leave my apartment before they left me. I don’t blame them, though. I’m not a good person to be around.”

I couldn't stand it anymore. I needed to touch her, and I needed to comfort her. I reached across the table and grabbed her hand. Her eyes widened as she looked at me, but she didn't pull back.

"You are a good person, and I won't sit here and let you wallow in self-pity. Come on, I'm taking you somewhere."

"Collin, no."

"Yes, Amelia," I said as I pulled her from the table. "You said you're leaving tomorrow. We have all day today and you're going to have fun with me, whether you like it or not."

"No, I'm not. You're being bossy and I don't like it!"

"Yes, you are, and you're being stubborn and I don't like it!" I replied.

She stood there for a moment and stared at me. "I have too much to do," she said in a low voice.

"I promise to help you with everything once we get back." I smiled.

"Fine. Let me go get my purse and then we can leave."

"Hey, Amelia. You might want to change into more casual clothes. A dress isn't appropriate for what I'm planning."

“Oh, okay. I’ll be right back.”

As she was upstairs changing, I looked around the first floor. It seemed that she had everything packed and ready to go. I walked over to a desk that sat in the corner of the living room. It was an antique and my mom would love it. I picked up a picture of her and a guy. I assumed it was her boyfriend. They looked really happy, like Hailey and I once did. Such a tragedy and such loss for someone so young. I had a feeling that she would tell me more in time. I set the picture down and walked back to the foyer.

“I’m ready.” She smiled.

“You look great.”

“Thank you,” she said shyly.

Chapter 14

I drove us to Deep Hollow Ranch to go horseback riding. My mom and dad took me and Julia there when we were kids. I hadn’t been there in a few years because Hailey didn’t like horseback riding. I wanted to share this with Amelia and I hoped that she would enjoy it.

“A ranch?” she asked as we pulled up the dirt road.

“I hope you like horses.”

“I love horses, but I’ve never been on one.”

I looked over at her when she said that. “You’ve never been horseback riding?”

“No. I spent my life in and on the water.”

“Well, today’s your lucky day because you’re going horseback riding.”

“Can I ask you one favor?” she asked.

“Sure. What is it?”

“Would it be okay if I rode with you instead of my own horse? I’m a little nervous.”

“Of course. I was going to suggest that.”

She smiled as she opened the door and got out. I watched her as she took in a deep breath of fresh air. I looked straight ahead as Murray walked towards us.

“Well, well, well. Collin Black. I haven’t seen you in years, buddy,” he said as we lightly hugged.

“Murray. Good to see you, friend. This is Amelia.” I smiled.

“Nice to meet you, Amelia,” he said.

“You riding the horses today?”

“We sure are. But only one horse. Amelia’s never been horseback riding, so she’s going to ride with me first.”

“Follow me to the stable. I’ll set you up with Majestic. She’ll be perfect for you.”

We followed him to the stable and he took Majestic from her stall. Murray saddled her up and I climbed on first. Amelia looked a little nervous as she stared at the horse.

“Come here, sweetheart,” Murray said. “Make friends with her first if it’ll make you feel better. Talk to her and pet her. You’ll feel more comfortable.”

Amelia walked to the front of Majestic and started petting her. She ran her hand down her mane and said hi to her. I looked down at her and smiled as she looked up at me.

“Are you ready?” I asked.

“Yeah. I think so.”

She put her foot in the stirrup as I helped her onto the horse. She sat behind me and I told her to hold on. The minute she wrapped her arms around me, a feeling overtook me that I’d never felt before. I couldn’t describe it.

We rode along the shoreline of the white sanded beach. It was breathtaking and I missed this. I was happy to be able to share this with Amelia.

“Collin, this is beautiful,” she said.

“Isn’t it? I’ve really missed this.”

“Why did you stop coming here?” she asked.

“My ex-girlfriend hated horseback riding and she would never come.”

“She really missed out.”

The smile never left my face as the light wind swept across us as we rode down the beach. I took it slow and easy with Majestic because I didn't want to frighten Amelia. After about an hour, I thought Amelia would like to take over.

"How about we switch spots and you take over?" I said as I stopped the horse.

"Really?" she asked with excitement.

I got off the horse and told Amelia to scoot up. She had a smile on her face that I'd never forget. Her blue eyes were full of light and happiness. It was the first time since we met that I saw her like this. I climbed back on behind her and told her to grab hold of the reins. I told her what to do and then I placed my hands on her hips. She looked back at me and smiled as Majestic started walking.

"Oh my God." She laughed. "This is amazing. I love horseback riding. Thank you, Collin. Thank you for this."

"I'm happy you're enjoying it and you're welcome."

We rode for about another hour. I grabbed the reins and I told her to hold on.

"Let's go, Majestic!" I yelled.

The horse began to gallop and I yelled, "Woohoo!" Amelia held onto my arms tightly.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"I'm great. This is great." She smiled as she turned her head and looked at me.

We rode back to the ranch. As I climbed off, I grabbed Amelia's hand and helped her

down.

“Well, what did you think?” Murray asked as he walked up to us.

“I loved it!” Amelia replied.

“Good. That’s what I like to hear.”

I shook Murray’s hand and he told me not to be a stranger. He also told me to send my mom and dad over to the ranch for a visit. We walked back to the car and the clouds started to roll in.

“It looks like it’s going to rain,” I said. “Let’s get to the restaurant before it starts.”

“Restaurant?” she said.

“Don’t tell me you’re not hungry.”

“Actually, I am.” She smiled.

“Good. Me too. I’m taking you to my favorite place.”

We were seated at a quiet little corner table at Nick and Toni’s. As Amelia looked over the menu, she asked me what was good.

“They have the best chicken here with the best roasted garlic potatoes I’ve ever eaten.”

She laughed. “I love chicken, so I think that’s what I’ll have.”

The waitress brought us each a glass of wine and took our order. I looked at Amelia

as I held my glass up to her.

“Here’s to an amazing and fun day.”

“Amazing is right.” She smiled as she brought her glass up to mine.

“Can I have your phone number?” I blurted out.

She looked at me while she bit down on her bottom lip. “Are you going to call me sometime?”

“I was planning on it, but only if you want me to.”

She didn’t say anything for a moment and she just looked at me from across the table.

“Yeah, I would like you to.”

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Hearing her say that made me the happiest person in the world. I took out my phone and programmed her number as she rattled it off to me. I pushed dial and her phone rang. She pulled it from her small purse and looked at me with a smile.

“Hello,” she answered.

“Hi. Now you have my number in case you ever want to call me.”

“Thank you,” she whispered.

Our food was brought to the table and we both hung up our phones. Amelia enjoyed the chicken and the white chocolate panna cotta that I ordered us for dessert. We finished, and the minute we stepped outside, it started to pour. We ran to the car and I stood there, feeling my pockets for my keys. They weren't in there.

“Collin, we're getting soaked,” she laughed.

“I left my keys on the table.”

I ran around to the other side of the Range Rover, grabbed her hand, and told her to stand under the overhang while I ran inside. The hostess was kind enough to have my keys waiting for me the second I walked in. I walked back out and smiled at Amelia as I took her hand.

“Are you ready to try this again?”

“I sure am.”

We ran to the Range Rover and the rain was coming down harder than before. I quickly opened the door for her and she climbed in. I got in on my side, shut the door, and we both started laughing at each other. We were soaked. My hair was dripping and my jeans were sticking to me. I didn't have a towel in the car, but I grabbed a sweatshirt from the back seat and handed it to her.

"Here, dry yourself with this."

"I don't want to ruin your sweatshirt," she said.

"Don't worry about it. It's only water."

"Here," she said as she took the sweatshirt from my hand and wiped my face with it and then set it down.

Her bare hand touched the side of my face as she looked into my eyes. I softly smiled as I placed my hand on hers and leaned in closer, our lips almost touching. My damn phone rang. I sighed as I apologized to her and pulled it from my pocket. It was Hailey. Why the fuck was she calling me? I hit ignore and looked at Amelia.

"Everything okay?" she asked.

"Yeah. Wrong number," I said as I started the Range Rover and pulled out of Nick and Toni's.

I couldn't stop thinking about Hailey's phone call as I drove Amelia back to her place.

"Thank you, Collin, for a wonderful day. I appreciate it."

"I'm just going to run home and change out of these wet clothes and then I'm coming

back to help you like I promised.”

“Really?” she asked.

“Yes. Did you think I was lying?”

“No. But you just seemed really distracted after your phone rang.”

“Nah. Everything’s good and I’ll be back real soon.” I smiled.

“Okay. I’ll see you in a while.”

I watched her run to the door as the rain continued to fall. I pulled out of her driveway and drove down the street to my house.

“You’re soaked!” my mom said as I walked in.

“I know. That’s why I’m home to change clothes.”

“Well, hurry up and go change. I don’t want you catching a cold,” my mom said.

“Then come back down. I want to hear all about Amelia.”

“Sorry, Mom. I don’t have time. I’m helping her with her things. I’ll tell you both about it later. Dad, are you and Mom going back to the city tonight?”

“Yes, and you better be as well. You have to be in the office in the morning.”

“I will be. Don’t worry,” I said as I ran up the stairs and changed out of my wet clothes.

Once I was dry, I ran back down the stairs and told my mom and dad what Murray

from the ranch had said. They both smiled and said they might head up there later. I kissed my mom on the cheek and drove back to Amelia's house. When I opened the door, she was walking down the stairs, carrying a large box.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" I asked as I took the box from her.

"It was the only one left upstairs, so I figured I'd just bring it down."

I set the box on the floor in the hallway against all the others. "What are you doing with all these boxes?"

"The realtor is calling Goodwill to come and take them."

"There's nothing in any of them that you want?" I asked.

"No. I went through everything before I packed it all up. I really need this house to sell. I'm running out of money quickly. When my parents died, there wasn't a will or trust or anything, so all of this, and all of their accounts went into probate. By time my father's debt was paid off, this house was all that was left. Apparently, my parents were in some financial trouble. Anyway, this house is going up for sale tomorrow morning and now I just have to wait for someone to buy it," she said.

"Real estate can be tricky. If you get an offer, have either me or my dad look it over. I don't want you getting screwed," I said.

"Thanks. But I won't get screwed. I have a very good agent."

I walked over and clasped her shoulders. "Just be smart."

She looked at me and cocked her head, narrowing her eyebrows. "Are you saying that I'm not smart?"

Oh shit. “No, that’s not what I meant. I think you’re very smart, but there are a lot of people out in the world that like to take advantage of others. Now, tell me what needs to be done still.”

“Umm. Nothing,” she said as she turned away from me.

“What do you mean ‘nothing’? You said earlier that you had way too much to do and that’s why you didn’t want to go out.”

“Yeah, well, I was just saying that because I was trying to get out of going out with you.”

“Oh,” I said as I frowned.

“I’m sorry, Collin. But I’m glad I chose to go because I had a really good time.”

My frown turned into a smile when Amelia said she’d had a good time. I looked out the window and noticed the rain had stopped and the sun was shining.

“Hey, would you like to go and grab some coffee? We can walk to the Starbucks that’s around the corner. The rain stopped and the sun is out.”

“Sure,” she said as she put on her shoes and we walked out the door.

Chapter 15

We took our coffees from the counter and sat down at a table in the corner. The past couple of days had been the happiest I’d had in a long time. I really liked Amelia and I wished we had more time to spend.

Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 6:04 am

“You never told me what you’re studying at NYU,” I said.

“I’m studying to be a nurse. I start my clinicals one week from tomorrow at Mount Sinai Hospital.”

“That’s great, Amelia. Nursing is a good field to get into.”

“My dad always said that I’d make a great nurse. I remember when I was a little girl, I’d ask him if he could pretend that he broke his arm or cut himself just so I could bandage him up. I’ve always been interested in taking care of and helping people.”

She was starting to open up to me and I really enjoyed it. The softness in her voice was sweet and she had a gentle way about her. The feelings that I had fought for so long were starting to emerge and that only meant one thing: heartache. I couldn’t stop thinking about the kiss we almost shared in the car earlier in the day. I kept replaying that moment in my head and if Hailey wouldn’t have called, it would’ve happened. Damn her.

“So you go back to New York tomorrow?” I asked.

“Yeah. I start classes the day after tomorrow. How about you?”

“Yep. I have to be at the office tomorrow morning.”

Suddenly, something hit me. “I didn’t see your car. How did you get here?”

“I took the bus,” she said.

“You can drive with me back to the city tomorrow morning.” I smiled.

“Really?”

“Yeah, really. There’s no need for you to waste your money on bus fare.”

“Thank you, Collin. I owe you one.” She smiled gently at me.

We finished our coffee and took a walk back to her house. I didn’t want to go, but I also didn’t want to overstay my welcome. “Well, I guess I better get back to my house. I’ll pick you up tomorrow morning around seven.”

“Sounds good. I’ll be ready.” She smiled.

I turned around and walked out the door. “Enjoy the rest of your evening.”

“Thanks. You too,” she said.

I climbed into the Range Rover and drove back to my house. My mom and dad weren’t home, so I assumed they probably headed to the ranch to visit Murray. I pulled out my phone and noticed there was a text message from Hailey.

“Hey. I tried to call you, but you didn’t answer. I was just wondering how you’re doing.”

Why all of a sudden did she care? Every time I had called her, she blew me off or told me to move on. I set my phone down on the counter without responding to her. The last thing I needed was her stirring things up inside me. I was moving on with my life. A life without her in it and that was exactly how I wanted it. I lay down on my bed and scrolled through my pictures. When Amelia and I went horseback riding, I took a picture of us on Majestic. I smiled when I saw her smile. She had a pretty

smile. It sort of reminded me of my mom's. I decided to call Julia.

"Hello," she answered.

"Hey, sis. How are you?"

"I'm good, Collin. The question is how are you?"

"I think I'm in trouble," I said.

"What now? What did you do?"

"I went and met a girl and I think I'm seriously falling for her."

I heard her laugh. "How is that being in trouble? I think it's great."

"No, you don't understand. I don't want to go through that again, Julia."

"Listen to me, Collin. It's time for you to move on and apparently, you have. This girl obviously has something special if you like her. Just go with it. If it was meant to be, it will be. Love will find its way to you. It can't be helped and it can't be stopped. Now stop being a baby and let things happen naturally."

I rolled my eyes at her last comment. "I have to go. I think I hear Mom and Dad."

"I'll see you at the office tomorrow, little brother."

"Bye, Julia."

The truth was that I didn't want to think about Amelia anymore. I closed my eyes and decided to take a nap.

I awoke to the sound of my phone beeping. I looked at the clock and realized that I'd been asleep for over two hours. I picked up my phone and there was a text message from Amelia.

"Hi, it's Amelia. I'm going to take a walk on the beach and thought maybe if you weren't doing anything, you'd like to join me. I'll walk past your house. If you want to join me, be on the beach. Just not where I can trip over you. Don't reply back."

I couldn't help but chuckle at her message. I wondered why she didn't want me to reply back. I thought that was strange. I got up, fixed my hair, and went down to the beach. I couldn't believe she actually asked me to join her on her walk. It didn't matter. I was happy that she did. I sat in the sand and watched the waves lap against the shore as I waited for Amelia. I turned my head and smiled when I saw her in the distance. My heart picked up its pace and, for some reason, nerves started to set in. As she walked closer to me, I got up and met her. She had a beautiful smile on her face.

"I wasn't sure if you got my text," she said.

"You told me not to reply."

She laughed lightly and we both walked along the shoreline. "Thanks for joining me."

"Thanks for asking." I smiled.

As we were walking, she looked down at the sand. I so badly wanted to hold her hand, but I didn't want to cross any lines. The sun had already set and darkness was starting to settle upon the water. She talked to me a little bit about NYU and I told her about my experiences at Columbia.

“I have an idea. Why don’t we go back to my house and build a bonfire. We can roast marshmallows.”

“Can we make s’mores?” she asked with a grin.

“You bet. I’ll have to see if we have the stuff, but I’m pretty sure we do.”

“If not, we can run to the store and buy them,” she said.

We walked back to the house and into the kitchen to look for the chocolate bars, graham crackers, and marshmallows. We didn’t have any graham crackers. Shit.

“Hold on,” I said as I pulled out my phone.

“Are you on your way home to the beach house or the city?” I texted my mom.

“The beach house. We’ll be home in about five minutes. Why?”

“Could you and Dad stop at the store and pick up a box of graham crackers? Amelia and I want to make s’mores, but we don’t have any crackers.”

“Of course we will, sweetheart. How fun!”

Oh God. I sure hoped she didn’t think she was joining us.

“Thanks, Mom.”

“Problem solved. My parents are on their way home and they’re stopping at the store to pick up the graham crackers.”

“Your parents seem really amazing.” Amelia smiled.

“They are. You’ll really like them. While we’re waiting, let’s go get that bonfire started.”

We walked back down to the beach where my dad had put in a fire pit years ago. Memories of Hailey and me sitting by the bonfire began to flood my mind. The only difference was, this time, I didn’t care and it didn’t bother me. Once I got the fire going, I ran into the house and got the skewers and the marshmallows. I handed Amelia one and we both put them over the fire.

“I haven’t done this in years.” She smiled as she looked at me.

“It’s fun and it’s nice to share it with someone.”

I decided that I was going to ask about the picture I saw of her and her boyfriend. I needed to know her story and I hoped that I wasn’t crossing the line.

“When I was at your house earlier, I saw a picture on the table of you and a guy. Was that your boyfriend?”

“I don’t talk about him,” she said as she looked away.

“Our situations are different with the ones we lost, but my girlfriend of six years left me to study fashion in Italy.”

“Totally different situations, Collin. You can’t even compare the two,” she said as she went to get up.

I took hold of her wrist. “Don’t leave. I just asked a question. A simple yes or no would have been fine.”

She sat back down and stared at me before speaking. “Yes, he was my boyfriend.”

“I’m sorry about the accident, Amelia.”

“Me too,” she said.

We sat there in silence for a few minutes until I heard my mom and dad walking towards us.

“Here you go, son. One box of graham crackers. Hello, Amelia. It’s good to see you again.” My dad smiled.

“Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Black. It’s good to see you too.”

“Please, call us Connor and Ellery,” my mom spoke.

“Would you like to join us?” Amelia asked.

Oh my God, I couldn’t believe she just invited my parents to sit down. I looked at them and gave them the look.

“As much as we’d love to, Amelia, Ellery and I are heading back to the city now.”

“You’re leaving?” I asked.

“Yes. We thought it was best to head back tonight. Don’t forget to lock up when you leave in the morning. I can expect you in the office around eight?” he asked.

“No. I’ll be late. I’ve offered to drive Amelia back to NYU so she doesn’t have to take the bus. We’re leaving at seven.”

“Ah, okay then. I’ll see you when you get there. Come straight to my office because we have to go over the proposal for the new building for Tricho Enterprises.”

“I know, Dad, and I’ll be there.”

“So you attend NYU?” my mom asked with a smile as she sat down.

My dad lightly grabbed her arm and helped her up. “Come on, baby; leave them alone. You can talk to Amelia another time. I really want to get on the road.”

“Oh. Fine, Connor,” she said with irritation. “It was nice to see you again, Amelia. You’ll have to have dinner with us at the penthouse sometime.”

“Thank you, Ellery, and it was good to see you too.”

My dad winked at me as he and Mom turned around and headed back to the house. I could tell I upset Amelia by asking about her boyfriend. That wasn’t my intention. I just wished she’d open up to me. I decided to tell her about Hailey. I didn’t know if it was such a good idea, but I was willing to take the chance. I put two marshmallows on my skewer and held it over the fire.

“My ex-girlfriend, Hailey, and I had known each other since we were babies. My mom and her mom are best friends. We started dating each other when we were

around sixteen and things became pretty serious. We both graduated from Columbia and she was offered an internship in Italy to study fashion. I was cool with that because I believed that our love was strong enough to withstand the long-distance relationship. She didn't. She came to me one day before she left and told me that we weren't meant to be and that long distance relationships don't work. She said she was sorry, but it was time for her to move on and focus on her studies. She left two days earlier than planned and without as much as a goodbye."

"That's really shitty of her to do that to you," she said.

"Yeah, it was really shitty. Wasn't it?" I asked.

"You must've been devastated."

"I was. I resorted to partying almost every night. I drank way too much alcohol and I—"

I stopped what I was about to say because I didn't want Amelia thinking poorly of me.

"You slept with a lot of women, right?" she asked.

I looked down in shame and I lightly nodded my head. She put her hand on mine. I was shocked, but I welcomed it.

"Everybody handles their broken heart in their own way. It sounds like you tried to forget it, and I just shut everyone out of my life because I didn't want to talk about it."

"Sometimes we have to talk about the things that hurt us most in order to find some sense of peace."

She tilted her head and smiled at me. “I don’t like that you said that, but I know you’re right.”

I smiled as I handed her two graham crackers and some chocolate. “Your marshmallows are done.”

She made her s’more and she bit down into it. Some chocolate got on her cheek. I leaned over and took my thumb and wiped it away. She instantly brought her hand up to mine.

“Sorry. You had some chocolate there.”

“Thank you,” she whispered.

I removed my hand and told her that I’d be right back. I went into the house, grabbed a few napkins, a couple of glasses, and a bottle of wine. When I went back down to the beach, Amelia had gotten up and was leaving.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“I’m sorry, Collin. I have to go. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Amelia, wait!” I exclaimed as I set down the glasses and wine.

She kept walking and I caught with her. I stood in front of her and lightly took hold of her arms.

“What did I do? What did I say? Please don’t go yet.”

“You didn’t say or do anything, Collin. I just can’t do this with you. I’m sorry,” she said as she pushed me aside and continued walking.

“Damn it, Amelia! I deserve an explanation!”

She stopped walking and stood there for a second. Suddenly, she turned around. “You want an explanation? Fine, I’ll give you an explanation. I’ve known you now for two days. Only two days and I already feel guilty for spending time with you and having fun. I feel guilty because I should have been the one who died in that accident. Not my parents, not my sister, and certainly not Billy,” she yelled. “I don’t deserve to have fun or be happy!”

My heart broke listening to her yell that across the beach. I slowly walked towards her, not knowing what she’d do. But she didn’t do anything but stand there. I approached her with caution and looked into her sad blue eyes and placed my hands gently on each side of her face.

“You deserve to be happy. Don’t ever think you don’t. I don’t know what happened, but I do know that the accident wasn’t your fault. We can’t control fate, Amelia. You survived for a reason. Don’t ever forget that,” I said as I pulled her into a warm embrace.

“They shouldn’t have died, Collin. They just shouldn’t have,” she began to cry.

I held her tightly as I felt sorry for her. I could feel her pain and ache as she cried into my chest. As she began to stop crying, she looked up at me.

“I’m so sorry for that,” she said.

“Don’t apologize. Never apologize for the way you feel,” I said.

We stood there and stared into each other's eyes. I wanted to fucking kiss her so bad, but not under these circumstances. I pulled away. It was the only thing I could do or else I would have kissed her and potentially could've ruined what little we had at the moment.

"Can we go back to making s'mores?"

"Can we order a pizza?" she said with a half-smile.

I chuckled as I placed my forehead on hers. "Yeah. Pizza sounds like a great idea."

I put my arm around her and she laid her head on my shoulder as we walked up to the house. I pulled out the pizza menu and, after we both decided on what we wanted, I placed the order and we waited for it to be delivered.

Chapter 16

The alarm went off and I jumped into the shower. I couldn't stop thinking about Amelia and last night. We enjoyed our pizza and had a great conversation about music. It turned out that we shared the same taste. Once I showered, I got dressed, grabbed my bag, locked up the house, and headed to Amelia's. When I pulled in her driveway, she was standing on the porch with her bags.

"Good morning." I smiled.

"Good morning. Look at you looking all handsome in a business suit."

I smiled as I grabbed her bags and set them with mine in the back seat. I opened the door for her and she climbed in.

"Ready to head back to the city?" I asked.

“Not really. I would like to stay here forever. I love it here.”

“Me too.” I said as I touched her hand.

She turned and looked at me with a smile. I could get used to seeing that smile every morning.

“I think we need some Starbucks before we head back. What do you think?”

“I think you just read my mind, Mr. Black.”

I pulled into the drive thru and ordered us coffee and two muffins. All the way to the city, we sang some of my favorite songs and had a lengthy conversation about politics. That was a subject we must never talk about again.

“My apartment is at 75 Third Ave. in the Third Avenue North building.”

“You’re not too far from Black Enterprises.”

We reached her building and I got out and grabbed her bags.

“It’s okay, Collin. I can get them. Thank you for me driving back. I appreciate it,” she said as she kissed me on the cheek.

“You’re welcome and it was my pleasure.”

“I’ll see you around,” she spoke.

“Don’t be a stranger,” I said as I got into the Range Rover and clasped the steering wheel.

I felt sick to my stomach as I watched her walk into the building. What if this was the end for us? What if the Hamptons was just a dream and, now that we were back to reality, the dream was gone. I pulled out into traffic and drove to the office. I took the elevator up to my dad's office, but stopped to say hi to Diana first.

"How was your weekend?" she asked.

"It was amazing! How's Jacob?"

"He's had a little setback. But he'll be okay."

"Tell him I'm coming over to play some Xbox tonight."

"He'll like that very much." She smiled. "Your dad is waiting for you."

I sighed. "I know."

I opened the door and, when I walked in, he was on the phone. He motioned for me to sit down. I walked over to the coffee pot and poured a cup of coffee before taking a seat in the chair.

"How was your ride back?" he asked as he hung up from his call.

"It was great. How was yours?"

"Don't try and change the subject, son. I can tell you're smitten with this girl."

"Smitten? Really, Dad? Did you just say 'smitten'?"

"Collin, you know what I mean," he sighed.

“I do like Amelia. She’s a great girl, but she’s very complicated and that bothers me.”

My dad leaned back in his chair. “Complicated how?”

“Her parents, sister, and boyfriend were all killed in a boating accident two years ago. She confided in me last night that she should’ve have been the one killed, not them. She’s really closed herself off to the world and I can tell she’s scared.”

“So are you,” he said. “Hailey left a bad mark on you and that’s why your behavior has been less than acceptable. But, as someone who understands, I can see where you’re coming from. If you truly like her and want to be with her, make it happen. I did, and believe me, son, I was more fucked up than you. I’ve learned to let go of fear and let things happen the way they’re supposed to.”

“Thanks, Dad, for your wisdom. Now, let’s go over that proposal. I have a lot of work to do today.”

He smiled at me as he pulled out the file from his drawer and we spent the next hour going over business.

“Spill, little brother,” Julia said as she walked in my office.

“Wow, you look bigger than the last time I saw you.” I smiled.

“I’m not here to talk about how fat I’m getting. I’m here to talk about your little romantic weekend.”

“Want to see a picture of her?”

“Shut up! You have a picture already?”

I unlocked my phone and scrolled to the picture of us on Majestic.

“That’s her. That’s Amelia.” I said as I handed Julia my phone.

“She’s so pretty, Collin. Are you horseback riding?”

“Yes. It was her first time and she was a little nervous, so I told her to ride with me.”

“Aw, you’re so sweet.” She smiled as she put her hands on her heart.

“Stop it, Julia. We’re friends.”

“Did you have sex?”

“NO! I would never.”

She rolled her eyes at me. “Really, Collin? You have sex with any woman that looks at you.”

“Not her. She’s different. I haven’t even kissed her yet.”

Julia’s eyes widened. “Wow. You must really like this girl a lot.”

“I do. More than I want to admit. I completely forgot to tell you, Hailey called me and then sent me a text message.”

“Why? What did she want?”

“Who the hell knows?” I said as I got up from my desk. “She wanted to know how I was. As if she even cares.”

Julia got up from the chair and clasped my shoulders. “Listen, follow your heart. Don’t look back at the past.”

I smiled at her as she walked out of my office. I couldn’t stop thinking about Amelia and the worst part was, I think I missed her. Oh boy, what the hell was I going to do? I walked back to my dad’s office and stepped inside.

“What can I do for you, son?” he asked.

“I need you to buy a house.”

He looked up at me from his paperwork and just stared. “You need me to do what?”

“Dad, listen. The beach house was Amelia’s parents’ and she needs it to sell because she’s almost out of money. I’m afraid that it’s going to take too long to sell. Could you just buy it and then put it back on the market?”

My dad gave me the look that he used to when I was child. I used to call it the “explanation” look. He had the same facial expression right before he would begin to explain things to me.

“Collin, my son, listen. I know you want to help this girl out. I don’t blame you. But there comes a point when you have to realize that you can’t save everybody. I just

can't go and buy her house because she needs the money."

"Why not? You have a shitload of it."

"That's not the point, son. Okay, I'll make you a deal. If the house doesn't sell in three months, I'll buy it."

"Three months is too long, Dad."

"And what happens if things don't work out and you're not with her in three months?"

"Fine. Three months," I said.

A couple of days passed and I didn't hear anything from Amelia. I didn't call her or text her because I was afraid that she'd reject me now that we were back in New York. The fact that she didn't call or text me gave me a real insecure feeling. I dropped by Jacob's house and we played some Xbox. He was coughing more than usual. Diana said that the doctor had changed his medication and it wasn't working.

"So, you gotta girl yet?" Jacob asked.

"There may be someone I'm interested in."

"Like in serious or just a casual fling?"

I couldn't help but laugh when he said that. "I don't know yet. I just met her, but she's not the casual fling type."

"Cool. Have you gone out yet?"

“Just a couple of times in the Hamptons. I haven’t talked to her since we got back to the city.”

“Oh. Well, I hope things work out.”

“Thanks, bro.”

“No problem. My mom likes some guy. I met him. I don’t like him.”

“Why don’t you like him?”

“Cause I don’t.”

“But if he makes your mom happy, that’s all that matters.”

“I don’t care. I don’t want him around.”

I could hear the anger in Jacob’s voice when he talked about it. I suspected he didn’t like the guy because he wasn’t his dad. When we finished our game, he looked at me.

“I think you should call her and ask her out.”

“I think you don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Seriously, dude. Call her. She might surprise you,” he said as he began to cough.

“I’m sorry. How old are you again?”

“Just do it. Are you a scaredy cat?”

“No!”

“Oh, that’s right, you’re a chicken,” he said as he walked around the room making chicken noises and flapping his arms.

“You little shit. You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Then call her. Right now.”

“Fine, I will!” I said as I pulled my phone from my pocket.

I dialed her number and Jacob sat on the bed.

“Hi, Collin,” she answered.

God, it was so good to hear her voice. “Hi, Amelia. How are you?”

“I’m okay. How are you?”

“I’m okay. Hey, would you like to go out to dinner tomorrow night?”

“Sure. I’d love to. But I can’t be out too late, I have a lot of studying to do.”

“No problem. I’ll make sure you’re home early. How about I pick you up around six?”

“Six sounds great. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Bye, Amelia.”

I looked at Jacob as he sat on the bed, holding his thumb up in the air. “Thanks, bro.”

“No problem.” He smiled.

After I left Jacob's house, I went straight home. My mom was in the living room, working on one of her paintings, and my dad was sitting on the couch with his laptop when I walked in.

"Hi, Collin. Did you and Jacob have fun?" my mom asked.

I walked over to her and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "Yeah, we had fun."

"How's he doing?" my dad asked.

"He wasn't all that great tonight. Diana said the doctor changed his meds."

"Damn, I wish there was something more we could do for him," my dad said.

"On another note, I called Amelia and we're having dinner tomorrow night."

"Oh good, you can bring her to family dinner." My mom smiled.

"Um. I forgot that was tomorrow night. Mom—"

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“You won’t be missing family dinner tomorrow night, Collin. I expect you and Amelia to be here,” she said as she got up and left the room.

I turned and looked at my dad, who was sitting there with a big smile on his face. “You have to listen to your mother. Don’t disappoint her, son,” he said as he looked at his laptop screen.

I rolled my eyes and went up to my room. I pulled my phone from my pocket and sent Amelia a text message.

“We have to have dinner at my house tomorrow night. I forgot it’s family dinner night and my mom is making me be here. She told me she wants you to come. I’m sorry and I would completely understand if you changed your mind.”

“No need to apologize. I think family dinner is great. I’m looking forward to it.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Really.”

“I’m still picking you up.”

“Okay. I’ll be ready and waiting.”

Chapter 17

The limo pulled up to the curb of the Third Avenue Building North. I sent Amelia a

text message to let her know I had arrived. I looked at Ralph as he just sat there.

“Ralph, you need to get out and open the door for Amelia.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Mr. Black,” he said as he jumped out of the limo.

I rolled my eyes and sighed. I think my dad made a mistake when he hired Ralphie. As I looked out the window, I could see Amelia walking down the stairs. Ralphie opened the limo door and she climbed inside and sat down next to me. She looked beautiful in her black and pink floral sundress. The way she wore her hair was different from what I was used to seeing. Instead of wearing it straight, she had soft waves going through it. Shit. I was starting to get hard just looking at her, not to mention that she smelled like roses again.

“You look great.” I smiled.

“Thanks. So do you.”

We talked a bit about her classes as Ralph drove us back to the penthouse. We took the elevator up and I could tell she was impressed. As soon as the doors opened and we stepped into the foyer, Julia came sprinting from the kitchen.

“Hi, I’m Julia, Collin’s sister. You must be Amelia.”

“Yes, I am. It’s nice to meet you. Congratulations on your baby.”

Julia smiled and put her hands on her stomach. “Thank you. Did Collin tell you it’s a boy?”

“Yes, he did. That’s so exciting.”

Julia hooked her arm around Amelia's and led her to the kitchen. As I followed behind, I couldn't help but take in the amazing aroma that filled the penthouse. When I approached the kitchen, I walked up to my mom and kissed her on the cheek.

"It smells great in here, Mom."

"Thanks, sweetie." She smiled.

I turned around and found that my dad, Jake, and Julia were all talking to Amelia. Just as I was going over to join the discussion, I heard Denny approaching the kitchen.

"Smells excellent in here, Ellery!" he said rather loudly.

I walked over to him and gave him a light hug. "I didn't know you were going to be here tonight."

"I was feeling a little better, so I decided to come over and hassle your old man." He smiled.

"I heard that, Denny." My dad smiled as they shook hands.

I walked over and asked Amelia to come and meet Denny. "Denny, this is my friend, Amelia."

Denny looked her up and down and then smiled. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Amelia," he said as he lightly kissed her hand.

"Thank you, Denny. It's a pleasure to meet you as well. I've heard a lot about you."

"Don't listen to them. They don't know what they're talking about."

Amelia and I both laughed at the same time. My mom announced that it was time for dinner and she wanted everyone seated in the dining room. Denny took my arm and pulled me aside.

“She’s stunning, son. She reminds me of your mother all those years ago. She’s a keeper and I have no doubt that she’s the one.”

“I think it’s way too early for that, Uncle Denny.” I chuckled.

“Funny, your father said the same thing.” He winked.

I patted him on the back and we all took our seats at the table. After we finished with dinner, we ate the tasty fruit flans my mom had bought from the bakery, and then Amelia and I got up and sat down on the couch.

“I hope you’re having a good time?”

“I am. Your family is wonderful. You’re very lucky to have them in your life. Never once take them for granted,” she said with sadness.

“I’m sorry, Amelia. This must be hard for you.”

She turned towards me and placed her hand on mine. “It is a little bit because it makes me miss my own family. But, it feels good to be a part of something, even if it is only for a couple of hours. “I’m curious to see your bedroom,” she said.

I looked at her in confusion. “Really?”

“Did you know that you can tell a lot about a person by the way their bedroom is decorated?”

“No. I didn’t know that. But you’re more than welcome to analyze it if you want.” I smiled.

She smiled back as we got up from the couch and I led her up to my bedroom. She opened the door and, when we stepped inside, she looked all around. She walked over to my bed and ran her hand across it. Then she walked over to the windows, looked out them, turned to my dresser, and then looked at the pictures hanging on my wall.

“You are driven and you enjoy the thrill of a chase. You know what you want, and you know how to get it. This room also tells me that you’re sensual and sexy. You love sex and you seek it out whenever you can.”

“Now that is not true,” I interrupted. “Sex just happens to find me.” I smiled.

She shot me a small smile and shook her head. “Your greatest strength is also your greatest weakness: Your craving for physical pleasure.”

“Okay, who have you been talking to?”

She looked at me and bit her bottom lip, then she looked down at the floor. I began to walk towards her slowly. “There’s no way you could have guessed all that just by looking at my bedroom.” I smiled as I approached her and started to tickle her. I wouldn’t stop until she confessed. She fell back on the bed and I fell on top of her, still tickling her until she gave up.

“Okay, okay.” She laughed. “I googled you and I asked around campus.”

“Why did you do that?” I smiled as I continued to tickle her. I stopped tickling her and stared into her blue eyes. “Why didn’t you just ask me?” I whispered.

“Because then you’d know I was interested,” she whispered back.

We both shared a moment, and I wanted nothing more than to brush my lips against hers. I could tell by the look in her eyes that she wanted me too. I ran the back of my hand across her cheek as I inched my lips closer to hers. Before I knew it, her soft lips were touching mine. I kissed her softly and then looked at her to make sure she was okay with it. She smiled at me and that was my cue to keep going. I brought my lips to hers once again and, this time, I felt them part, inviting my tongue into her mouth. Our lips moved together in sync and I could feel her smiling from underneath. I broke the kiss before it went any further and stared into her eyes.

“I think we should stop. You need to go and study.”

“Good idea,” she whispered.

I got up, took hold of her hand, and helped her from the bed. “Can I see you again?” I asked.

“I would like that very much.”

I leaned in and kissed her softly again. “Let’s go. I’ll drive you home.”

“Not Ralphie?” she asked.

“No. Not Ralphie. Just me and you,” I said.

We walked downstairs and Amelia said goodbye to my parents and Julia and Jake.

We hopped into the Range Rover and I drove her back to her apartment.

“Would you like to come up?” she asked.

“As much as I want to, I don’t want to interfere with your studying. So go and get some studying done and promise me you’ll go out with me tomorrow night.”

“I promise that I’ll go out with you tomorrow night.” She smiled as she tilted her head.

“And I promise my parents won’t be there.” I laughed.

“Good night, Mr. Black,” Amelia said as she reached up and brushed her lips against mine.

“Good night, Miss Gray,” I responded as our lips locked one last time for the night.

As I walked up the stairs to my room, my mom came from her bedroom and stopped me.

“I thought I heard you come in.” She smiled. “Thank you for bringing Amelia to dinner tonight. She’s a lovely girl, Collin.”

“Yeah, she is. Isn’t she?”

She followed me to my room as I set my phone and wallet on my dresser. “Can I tell you something?” she asked.

“Sure, Mom. What is it?” I replied as I pulled off my shirt.

“You’re reminding me a lot of your dad in his younger years.”

“For God’s sake, Ellery, you’re making me sound like I’m an old geezer.” My dad smiled as he stood in the doorway.

I looked at my dad and laughed. “You’re not a geezer yet, Dad.”

“Connor, I love you, but I’m trying to have a conversation with our son. Go back to bed and I’ll be in there shortly.”

“I’ll be waiting anxiously, Elle.” He winked.

I rolled my eyes and threw a pillow at him. “Dad, stop!”

He chuckled as he threw the pillow back at me and headed to his room.

“Mom, is there a point to this conversation?” I asked.

“Yes, there is. You have the same qualities as your father and the same amazing heart. Any woman would be a fool not to have you in her life. It takes a very special person to stand by someone through the thick and thin of things. I just want you to remember that I’m here for you when you need to talk. Your father and I have been through so much during our years together and if he wasn’t the man he is, he never would have forgiven me and stuck by me the way he has. Even broken people can be fixed and there’s no need to be frightened about trying to heal them.”

I looked at her in confusion. Where the hell was this coming from? Could she see that I had some fears about Amelia? That I felt she was too closed off and burdened with the death of her family and boyfriend that it would cause problems in a relationship? She was my mom and nobody knew me better than she did.

“Thanks, Mom.” I smiled as I kissed her on the cheek. “Dad’s waiting for you. Please do me a favor and keep it down.”

She laughed as she hugged me. “I’m sorry that we do this to you. Goodnight, baby.”

“Goodnight, Mom.”

I climbed into bed and as soon as I set my phone on my nightstand, it buzzed with a text message from Julia.

“I really like Amelia. I think the two of you are super cute together and I don’t want you to do anything to fuck it up.”

“I really like her too. She’s different, Julia. I feel things I never have before.”

“I know you do, little brother. I can see it in you.”

“I’m a little scared.”

“Do I need to come up there and smack you?”

I laughed.

“I wouldn’t advise that. Mom and Dad are getting it on down the hall. I really need to move out!”

“Haha. Better you than me! Put your earplugs in. Night.”

I smiled as I set down my phone and pulled the sheet on top of me. As I placed my hands behind my head, I couldn’t stop thinking about Amelia. I couldn’t wait to see her tomorrow. She was starting to consume my every thought and I prayed to God that I consumed hers.

Chapter 18

Before I picked up Amelia at her apartment, I stopped and picked up Chinese carryout and a bottle of wine for us. She thought we were going to eat it in her apartment, but I had another plan. It was a beautiful evening and it needed to be spent enjoying it. I walked up to her door and knocked. She opened it with a big smile on her face and invited me in.

“Hi.” I smiled as I placed my hands on her hips and lightly kissed her.

“Hi.”

I looked around the small place she called home and was quite impressed at how cozy it seemed. “You never mentioned a roommate. Do you not have one?” I asked.

“I used to have one when I lived in another building. But after the accident, I moved here and I just wanted to be alone. So, to answer your question, no, I don’t have a roommate.”

“Well, your apartment is nice. I like it.” I smiled.

“Thank you. It’s okay. Did you bring the food?”

“I did. But I left it in the car. I decided that we’re going to eat it somewhere else.”

“Sounds like you have a plan.” She smiled.

“I do. So if you’ll come with me, I’ll show you,” I said as I stuck out my arm.

It took us less than five minutes to get to Central Park. I parked the Range Rover and looked over at Amelia as she smiled at me.

“Central Park?”

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“Yep. Central Park. This is one of my favorite places to be.”

We got out of the Range Rover and I grabbed the basket from the back seat. I handed Amelia the blanket and I grabbed her hand as we walked through Central Park.

“So tell me why Central Park is one of your favorite places.”

“It’s my mom’s favorite place to escape, and it’s a place where Julia and I spent a lot of time. When we were kids, my mom would bring us here while she painted one of her pictures. Our nanny, Mason, used to bring us here to play and our family would have big picnics in the park. It sort of became like a second home to us.”

“That’s really special, Collin.” She smiled.

“I’m sorry. I think I kind of got a little sappy.”

Amelia playfully smacked me on the arm. “You did not. Did you bring any paper plates?”

“For what?” I asked.

“For the Chinese food.”

A playful grin spread across my face. “We don’t need plates. We’ll eat out of the cartons.”

“That’s barbaric.”

“No, it’s not.” I laughed. “It’s fun and we can share.”

I grabbed a piece of sweet and sour chicken with my chopsticks and brought it up to her mouth. “Be careful; it’s hot.”

She carefully blew on it first before putting it in her mouth. God, she was so sexy and my mind was picturing very inappropriate things. We talked and laughed and Amelia told me how nervous she was to start her clinicals. After we finished eating, we put the cartons back in the basket and I poured us another glass of wine. By this time, darkness had settled in and the stars were shining brightly above us. She lay back on the blanket and patted the ground for me to do the same. We stretched out and looked up at the sky.

“Do you see the man in the moon?” she asked.

“Yeah, I see him. He looks happy tonight.”

“I’m happy tonight,” she said as she turned her head and looked at me.

“Me too.” I smiled as I reached over and took her hand, interlacing our fingers together.

We lay there in silence for a moment, and then Amelia started to point out some of the constellations. We laughed as I pointed to what I thought was the Little Dipper, but I was wrong. Then, suddenly, her voice became quiet.

“My father’s life was sailing. It was his passion. He began teaching me how to sail when I was just three years old. My older sister, Alana, never really got into it, but I did. My favorite part of the boat was the sail. I was so fascinated by how that piece of material, powered by the wind, made the boat sail. Like this is your place of peace, mine was the open water. My family would sail for days on end. One time, my dad

took an entire month off work and we took the boat out and sailed on the open water. A whole month,” she said as she looked at me. “I loved it. My mom and sister said it was way too long and they were anxious to get home. I could have stayed on that boat forever.”

I tightened my fingers around hers and watched her as she slowly closed her eyes. “My family and I raced in the boat races in California. It was the one thing my dad looked forward to every year. Two years ago was the first time Billy went with us. They were calling for storms that day, but according to the radar, the storms wouldn’t be in our area until the races were over. We set sail and my dad had a plan. He was determined to win that race. I stood by his side the whole time. I was his second in command and his execution was always flawless. We were going strong and everyone was having a good time. We were blowing by the other boats and suddenly, out of nowhere, clouds darkened the sky and the waves picked up. My dad yelled at me to go sit down and hold on tight. My mom started to panic and he yelled at her to stop and to hold on as tight as she could. I’ll never forget looking at him and seeing the fear in his eyes. All I could hear were the screams of the other people on the other boats. The winds were high and the waves hit the boat, throwing a rush of water from the bow over all of us. My dad was losing control and the boat was tipping. I’d never been so scared in my life. Billy shouted my name and begged me to come to him. But I couldn’t. My dad made a sharp turn towards an island in the distance and other boats went the opposite way. I kept telling him to turn around because there were no beaches near the islands. When I looked through the binoculars, all I saw were rugged, rocky shores. I knew if we hit those rocks, there was no turning back.”

I lay there and watched as tears fell down her face. “Amelia, you don’t have to say another word.”

She didn’t listen. She kept on telling me about that horrific day that changed her life forever.

“I pulled on my dad’s arm and begged him to try to turn around. He jerked his arm and his elbow hit me in the face, knocking me down. Billy yelled and I tried to get up, but I couldn’t. Billy stood up and he let go of the edge of the boat. That was when another wave crashed over the boat and knocked him off and into the water. I screamed and tried to crawl across the deck. I remember the rain being so heavy that it hurt my eyes. My mom and sister were holding each other, screaming and crying as I tried to get to the edge of the boat to try to look for Billy.”

Amelia brought her hand to her face and wiped away the tears. I reached over and wiped a single one that she’d missed.

“As the boat got closer to the island, it was headed straight for a large rock. The last words I heard my dad say were, ‘I love you.’ The boat crashed into the rock, flipping it over and throwing us all into the water. I’ll never forget trying to swim to the surface and being tangled in the seaweed that almost killed me.”

I ran my finger along the scar that extended down her arm. I noticed it on the beach the day after she had helped me, but I never wanted to ask about it and she never volunteered to tell me. I suspected now it was from the accident.

“The scar on my arm is from slicing it on a rock when the boat crashed and I was thrown into the water. I finally managed to make my way out from under the boat and to the top of the water. I began screaming for my family, but they weren’t anywhere to be seen. I dove back under, but I couldn’t see anything. The water was cloudy and the seaweed was thick. Suddenly, I heard a helicopter up above. I swam to the surface and began screaming and waving my arms. Blood was gushing from my cut and the water was turning red around me. The next thing I remembered was waking up in a hospital bed and my aunt was sitting beside me, crying.”

She turned her head and looked at me as another tear fell from the corner of her eye. “You’re the first person that I ever told about the accident in detail.”

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I wiped her tear and then put my arm around her, pulling her into me. “Words can’t even describe how sorry I am.”

“Before the accident, I had planned to race myself the following year. But now, I’m scared to death of the water and I can only look at it from a distance.”

My grip around her tightened. She looked up at me with such sadness in her eyes that it took everything I had not to cry with her. My lips softly brushed against hers, a soft-spoken kiss that instantly turned passionate. My desire for her became stronger and, before I knew it, my hands were all over her, feeling every curve her body had to offer. She broke our kiss and pulled away.

“I’m sorry, Collin. I can’t.”

“No, I’m sorry, Amelia. I crossed the line.”

We both sat up and she looked at me. “It’s okay. There’s no need to apologize. Things just got a little hot and heavy and I’m not ready for that. To be honest, I don’t know if I’ll ever be,” she said as she turned away from me. “In fact, please just take me home. I never should’ve done this.”

I was stunned by her words. “Done what, Amelia?”

“Please just take me home. I want to go home.” She began to cry.

“Why? So you can sit there all alone and shut out the world like you’ve done for the past two years?”

“That’s none of your business!” she snapped.

“It is my business because I really like you and I don’t want to see you hurt anymore.”

She got up from the ground and slowly walked away. “You don’t get to tell me when I can stop hurting.”

“Fine. If that’s what you want, then fine.” I got up, grabbed the blanket and the basket, and headed to the Range Rover. Amelia followed behind. I threw everything in the back and we drove in silence. When we reached her building, she got out of the vehicle, slammed the door, and went inside.

I pulled away from the curb with a tight grip on the steering wheel. As I turned the corner, I pulled over. She had opened up to me and this was just the beginning. Her tragedy was reborn when she told me about it, which sent her into fear again. I kept playing my mom’s words over and over again. “Even broken people can be fixed.” Amelia wasn’t the only one who was broken. I was too, but in a different way. We needed each other. I got out of the Range Rover and walked to her building. Someone was coming out the door, so I held it for them and walked right up to the second floor. I knocked hesitantly, not knowing what was in store for me for the rest of the night.

Chapter 19

The door flew open and she sighed. “Somehow, I knew you’d come up here.”

“Damn right!” I said. “I don’t want to argue and I don’t want to leave tonight being angry. I don’t want to do anything except be with you. I’m happy holding you in my arms, because right now, I think that’s where you belong.”

People were opening up their doors and looking out into the hallway. Amelia grabbed me by the shirt and pulled me into her apartment. “Get in here. You’re making a scene.”

I took her hands in mine. She tried to pull away, but my grip on them tightened. “Look at me, Amelia,” I said. “I’m sorry for earlier. I don’t want to hurt you and I don’t want you to be scared of me.”

“I’m not scared of you, Collin. It’s just—”

“Just what?”

She took in a deep breath and looked into my eyes. “I’m just scared of life.”

I pulled her into me and held her. “Me too, Amelia. Me too. But I think we’re more scared of the unexpected.”

“I live every day in fear that something bad is going to happen because I’ve experienced how your life can change in a split second.” She pulled back and left my arms. “Since you’re here, can I offer you something?”

“No, I’m good. Amelia,” I said as I ran my hands through my hair. “Have you ever talked to a doctor about how you feel?”

“No. I haven’t talked to anybody. Like I told you earlier, you’re the first person I’ve told in detail about the accident.”

“Why did you tell me?”

She looked at me and then diverted her eyes to the ceiling. “I don’t know, Collin. It just felt right.”

“Exactly, Amelia. It felt right. Just like it feels right being with you.”

Just as I said that, my phone starting ringing. I pulled it from my pocket and saw that it was Hailey. I hit ignore and put it back in my pocket. I sat down on the couch and asked her to sit with me. I held out my arms and she sat on my lap.

“If we’re going to spend time together, then we have to take things slow,” she said as she laid her head on my chest. “I really do like you, Collin. Even though you tripped me and then ran me over with your cart.”

I laughed. “For the last time, I didn’t run you over.”

She looked up at me with a smile and I softly kissed her lips. There was no place else I wanted to be. I was content holding her in my arms. But, I was bothered by the fact that Hailey kept calling me.

“I’m surprised you came home last night,” my dad said as he strolled into the kitchen and poured some coffee.

“Where else would I go?”

He gave me a perplexed look as he sipped the coffee from his cup. “I thought you’d be staying at Amelia’s, since you went out last night.”

“Nah. We talked and we’re taking things slow. Very slow.”

“That’s good, son. That’s the way things should happen. It’s not good to rush into anything. Take your time and get to know each other.”

“She’s really messed up, Dad. I mean, in a bad way.”

“What do you mean?” he asked as he set down his cup.

“She told me about the boating accident last night and it nearly killed me. What she experienced was horrific. I seriously don’t know if I could ever recover from something like that.”

“It sounds to me like she hasn’t, and if it’s as bad as you say it was, and you really like her, then maybe you can help her. Poor girl probably never had any support after the accident.”

I sat there, lightly shaking my head, debating whether or not to tell him that Hailey had been calling me. “Hailey called me last night while I was with Amelia and it wasn’t the first time.”

He looked up from his phone and raised one eyebrow at me. “What do you mean, it wasn’t the first time? What does she want?”

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“I don’t know. The last time we talked, she...well, you know what she said.”

“Do you still have feelings for her?”

“You want the truth? No. I don’t. In fact, when I’m with Amelia, I feel things that I never felt before.”

“Ah, I know that feeling.” He smiled.

“I know you do, Dad. Mom is your soul mate and the one and only and when you met her, she completely changed your life...blah blah blah.”

“Collin!” my mom exclaimed as she entered the kitchen.

“Sorry, Mom. Dad, I’m sorry, but I’ve heard it a million times and I love you both very much, but—”

“But what, son?” my dad asked quietly.

“I don’t know,” I said as I got up from the chair. “I’m going to drive myself into the office today.”

“Why? Ralph is downstairs,” he said.

“Yeah, no thanks, Dad. I’ll just drive myself. Love you, Mom,” I said as I kissed her on the cheek.

The more I thought about Hailey calling me, the more curious I became. I climbed into the Range Rover and hit her number on my phone. If I was going to be with Amelia, this thing with Hailey was going to have to be put to rest.

“Hey, Collin. I’ve been trying to call you.”

“Yeah, I saw. What do you want, Hailey?”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong. Why do you keep calling me?”

“I just wanted to see what you’ve been up to. I thought maybe we could Skype one night.”

I didn’t know where the hell all this was coming from, but she sounded different.

“I’m sorry, Hailey, but don’t you have a boyfriend? I don’t think he’d appreciate you skyping with your ex.”

“Things didn’t work out between us.”

That was quick, I thought to myself.

“Sorry to hear that.”

“Anyway, I’m going to be flying back to New York in a couple of weeks and I may be staying there permanently.”

Shit. What the hell happened in Italy that’s making her want to come back to New York? I didn’t want to know.

“That’s nice. I’m sure your mom and dad will be very happy to see you.”

“What about you?” she asked.

“What? Hailey, are you there? Hello?” Click.

There was no way I was answering that question, so I did what I had to in order to cut her off. As I walked up to my office, I sent Amelia a text message. She was the one I needed to be thinking about, not Hailey.

“Good morning, beautiful. I know you start your clinicals today, but I was hoping I could pick you up from the hospital and we could grab some dinner together.”

“Good morning. I would really like that. I get off at seven.”

“Great! I’ll pick you up in front. Have a good day.”

“Thanks, Collin. Have a good day yourself.”

Just reading her words made me smile. Everything about her made me smile. Even when I thought about her, I smiled. I worked my ass off all day and held an important meeting that even impressed my dad. I stayed at the office until it was time to pick up Amelia so I could get some much needed work done.

Chapter 20

I pulled up to the hospital entrance just as Amelia was walking out the doors. She climbed in and smiled at me.

“Hi.”

“Hi.” I smiled back. “How was your first day of clinicals?”

“It was interesting and harder than I thought it would be.”

I reached over, grabbed her hand, and brought it up to my lips. “You’re going to make an amazing nurse. Don’t ever forget that.”

She giggled, leaned over, and put her head on my shoulder.

“Are you okay?” I asked as I pulled away from the hospital.

“I’m fine. I’m just happy today is over with and I get to see you.”

I smiled as my lips touched her forehead. I was just as happy to see her. We both were in the mood for pizza, so we drove to Pizzapopolous. When we walked in, I saw Julia and Jake sitting at a table. Julia looked up and smiled.

“Hey!” she said as she got up from her chair.

“Hey, sis. It looks like we wanted the same thing for dinner. Hi, Jake.”

“Hey, Collin, Amelia. It’s good to see you.” He smiled.

“Sit down and join us,” Julia said.

I looked at Amelia and she smiled. “Okay, we will,” I said as I pulled out the chair for Amelia.

We had a great dinner with Julia and Jake. They left before we did because Julia was tired and feeling uncomfortable. I got up from my seat and kissed her goodbye.

“I’ll see both of you at the office tomorrow.” I smiled.

I sat back down and grabbed Amelia’s hand. “That was nice, having dinner with my sister and brother-in-law.”

“Yeah, it was. I really like them. In fact, I really like your whole family. Everyone is so nice.”

“They’re okay.” I smiled. “Have you heard anything about the house yet?” I asked.

“No,” she said as she looked down at the table. “The realtor called me today and said that three people looked at it, but said it was out of their price range.”

“Out of their price range? It’s the fucking Hamptons. What do they expect?”

“I don’t know. I wish I could keep it. Even though we only lived in it a very short time, it was a place that was special to my parents.”

“What about your house here in New York that you grew up in?” I asked.

She looked at me in confusion. “We didn’t have a house in New York. I grew up in Palisades Park, New Jersey. I thought I told you that.” She laughed.

“No. But I guess it never came up because we always talked about the Hamptons and NYU. I just assumed you grew up in New York.”

As we sat and talked, my phone buzzed. I pulled it from my pocket. There was a text message from my mom.

“Hi, sweetheart. The whole family is going to the beach house this weekend to celebrate Jake’s birthday. So, don’t make plans and bring Amelia. We’d love to have

her.”

I looked up at Amelia and smiled. “My mom said that the whole family is going to the beach house this weekend and she wants you to come. We’re celebrating Jake’s birthday. What do you say?”

She hesitated for a moment and then said okay. “It’ll be fun.” She smiled.

“You bet it will be! It’s always fun when I’m around.” I winked.

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I sent a message back to my mom.

“Sounds great, and Amelia is looking forward to coming.”

“Perfect.”

We finished our dinner and I drove Amelia home. I walked her up to her apartment, put my hands on her hips, and softly kissed her goodbye. “I had a nice time tonight,” I said.

“Me too.” She smiled.

I pulled her into me and embraced her. Her scent was driving me insane and I started to get a hard-on. She broke our embrace and looked at me.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I can’t help it when I’m with you.”

Amelia laughed. “It’s okay. I understand, Collin. You don’t need to apologize.”

“I better go. You have studying to do and I need to leave.”

“Thanks for dinner. Next time, it’s on me.” She smiled.

I leaned over and lightly touched her lips with mine. “Never. I will always pay.” I winked as I walked out.

I heard her giggling behind me as she shut the door. I smiled all the way back to the

Range Rover.

Over the next few days, Amelia and I saw each other after she finished her clinicals. I would pick her up and we'd grab carryout from somewhere and take it back to her place. I would bring my laptop and do some work while she sat and did her homework. I even helped her study for a big quiz she had coming up. She wanted to make sure she finished all her studying before we left for the beach house. I could tell that she was getting closer to me and letting me in more. We talked about our childhoods and how we grew up. We shared family stories and she even talked a little bit about Billy.

We were both sitting on the couch. I had my laptop on my lap and she was sitting next to me with her nose in her textbook. When she closed it, she looked at me and smiled.

"Well, that's it. I'm all finished. Now I'll have a clear mind for the weekend."

"That's great," I said as I set my laptop to the side and pulled her into me. I softly kissed the top of her head. "I'm so happy that you're coming with us."

"Me too. Is anyone else coming besides your family?"

"I think just Peyton and Henry."

"Aren't they the parents of your ex-girlfriend?"

"Yeah."

"You don't think it will be uncomfortable having your girlfriend there while they're there."

Instantly, I smiled. We had never talked about girlfriend/boyfriend status before. “Nah, it’ll be fine. Peyton and Henry are really cool.”

My phone buzzed on the table. Amelia sat up and reached over to grab it. There was a text message from Jacob.

“Guess what. Your dad invited me and my mom to the beach house. How cool is that, dude?”

I laughed as I replied, “That’s awesome, buddy. I can’t wait to see you.”

“It’s going to be so cool. I can’t wait.”

“Are you coming up tomorrow or Saturday?”

“My mom said we can’t leave until Saturday because I have a doctor’s appointment tomorrow after she gets off work.”

“That’s okay. You see your doctor first. That’s more important. See ya Saturday, little buddy.”

“That was Jacob. My dad invited him and Diana to the beach house.”

“Cool. I can’t wait to finally meet them.” She smiled.

I stared into her eyes and placed my hand on her cheek. “So, you’re my girlfriend?” I asked with a smile.

She bit down on her bottom lip before answering me. “So, you’re my boyfriend?”

I chuckled as I kissed her. “I am.”

“Then I’m your girlfriend.” She smiled as she wrapped her arms around my neck.

“So it’s official.”

“It’s official,” she said.

I wanted nothing more than to make love to her at that moment, but I knew she wasn’t ready yet and I was more than willing to wait until she was.

“Since we’re leaving in the morning and you don’t have classes or clinicals, why don’t you spend the night at the penthouse and we can leave together.”

“Really? Your mom and dad wouldn’t mind?”

“Not at all.”

“Maybe you better ask first.”

I raised my eyebrow at her. “Seriously? You want me to ask?”

“Yes. They’re your parents and it’s their penthouse. So, out of respect, it would be best to ask them.”

“You’re right,” I said as I sent a text message to my mom.

“Can Amelia spend the night in the guest room since we’re leaving in the morning?”

“Great idea. She’s more than welcome to spend the night here.”

I looked at her and showed her my phone. “See, I told you they wouldn’t care.”

She smiled at me and got up to pack her bag for the weekend. “Can I help you with anything?” I asked.

“No, it will only take me a minute. Oh, can you grab my charger out of the desk drawer?”

I got up from the couch and, when I opened the drawer, there was a picture of her, her dad, and her sister in front of T-Rex Sue. I pulled it out and, as I was looking at it, she walked up behind me.

“That’s Sue,” she said over my shoulder.

“I know,” I said as I pulled out my phone and brought up the picture that I took at the Field Museum.

“Hey, you have a picture of Sue too!” She smiled.

“That’s one of my most favorite museums,” I said.

“Mine too. My dad took us there about four years ago for the first time and I loved it.”

“I’ll take you back there and we can get a picture of us in front of her.” I smiled.

“I would love that,” she said as she kissed my lips.

She was becoming more and more perfect to me and she was fitting perfectly into my world. I loved sharing the museum with Diana and Jacob, but to share it with someone I was falling in love with would be even more amazing. I pushed a few strands of hair behind her ear and placed my finger under her chin.

“You’re perfect.”

“No, I’m not. Nobody’s perfect.”

“Well, as true as that may be, you’re perfect to me.” I smiled.

Our lips met once again and, this time, it was more than a small kiss. It was comforting and passionate. I inched her backwards until she was leaning against the wall. I placed my hand above her head while our lips moved together in sync. I kept my other hand firmly planted on her hip so it didn’t wander where it wanted to go. My tongue left her mouth and, as it softly explored her neck, she let out a moan that sent me over the edge.

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“We have to stop,” I said with bated breath.

“I know,” she whispered.

I sighed as I moved away from her and she looked at me. “I’m sorry,” she said.

“Don’t apologize. You have nothing to be sorry for. I’ll wait for you for as long as it takes.”

“It’s not that I don’t want to have sex with you, Collin. I do. But I just feel like it’s not the right time.”

I slightly smiled at her and placed my hands on each side of her face. “We’ll both know when the right time comes and it will be amazing.”

“I have no doubt that it will be amazing. Just being with you makes me feel like that.”

I placed my forehead on hers and we kissed one last time before heading to the penthouse.

We stepped off the elevator and my mom came walking down the stairs with a smile.

“Hi, Amelia. Welcome to our penthouse.”

“Thanks, Ellery.”

“Mom. She’s been here before.”

“I know that, Collin. But she’s never stayed the night,” she said as she shot me a look and grabbed Amelia’s bag from me. “I’ll show her where the guest room is and you go talk to your dad. He’s in the living room.”

Amelia looked at me and smiled as she followed my mom upstairs. I walked into the living room. My dad was sitting on the couch with his laptop.

“Hi, son. How was your evening?”

“It was good, Dad.”

“How are things going with you and Amelia?”

“Things are good. I really like her.” I smiled.

“I think you should know that Hailey flew back to New York today.”

“The last time I talked to her, she told me she was. We sort of got disconnected when she asked if I was happy that she was coming back.”

“Ah.” He smiled. “I’ve pulled that a few times myself. It’s so unfortunate when that happens.”

“Right? I learned from the best.” I smiled at him.

Just as he was about to say something else about Hailey, my mom and Amelia walked into the room.

“What are you two talking about?” my mom asked.

“Just going over a few business things,” my dad replied.

I got up and led Amelia to the kitchen. “Are you hungry? Can I get you anything?”

“I’m fine, Collin.” She smiled as she wrapped her arms around me. “Your mom is amazing. She told me that if I ever needed to talk about anything, to come to her. She’s such a warm and caring person.”

“Yeah, she is. She had a really rough childhood and both her parents died when she was young. She’s been through a lot, so she understands,” I said as I tucked her hair behind her ear and softly kissed her lips.

“It’s getting late and we need to be up early in the morning. Maybe we should head upstairs,” she said.

I led her upstairs and kissed her goodnight. I walked across the hall and back to my room. I got undressed, put on my black pajama bottoms, and headed to the bathroom to brush my teeth. The door was closed, so I knocked.

“Amelia, are you in there?”

“Yeah, I was going to brush my teeth,” she said as she opened the door.

“Me too. May I join you?” I smiled.

“It’s your bathroom, silly.” She laughed. “Come on in.”

I grabbed my toothbrush and stood in front of the sink next to her. I could see her eyeing me up and down as I was trying to avoid looking at how sexy she looked in her little shorts and tank top. I could feel myself starting to get hard. Oh God, not now. Once I was finished brushing, I rinsed off my toothbrush and put it away. I turned and looked at her as she brushed her beautiful blonde hair.

“Okay, goodnight,” I said as I tried to get out of there as fast as I could.

“Wait,” she said.

I turned around and looked at her. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m thinking that maybe you should give me one more kiss goodnight.”

I stared at her with a small smile as I placed my hands on her hips. “Your wish is my command,” I said as I leaned in closer and kissed her.

She brought up her hands to my bare chest and softly stroked it as our lips enjoyed each other. It was torture as far as I was concerned because I wanted to be inside her so badly. I broke our soft kiss and we stared into each other’s eyes as I lifted her up and sat her on the counter. She took my hand and placed it underneath her tank top, up to her bare breast. I softly caressed her breast as I took her erect nipple between my fingers. She let out a soft moan and I immediately removed my hand.

“You’re killing me, Amelia.”

“I’m sorry. I just—”

“I know,” I said as I took her face in my hands and kissed her lips. “Not here. Not in my bathroom, and certainly not in my house with my parents down the hall. Wrap your legs around me.” I smiled.

She did as I asked and I lifted her from the counter and carried to her bed. I laid her down and kissed her forehead. “Get some sleep,” I said. As I got up from the bed, she grabbed my hand. I turned around and looked at her.

“When I’m with you, I forget about everything bad that’s happened in my life.”

“Me too.” I smiled.

“Good night, Collin.”

“Good night, Amelia.”

I walked back to my room and climbed into bed. I couldn't stop thinking about her and how, if I wouldn't have stopped it, we could've had sex for the first time in my bathroom, with my parents down the hall. I couldn't let that happen. With Amelia, things were different as far as sex was concerned. She wasn't going to be a fly-by-night, wham-bam, thank-you-ma'am type of fuck. I was going to make sure that it would be magical and something she'd never forget. She deserved that and much more. I closed my eyes with the image of me making love to her in my mind and suddenly, I was awoken by her softly calling my name.

“Collin, are you awake?”

I opened my eyes and all I saw was her silhouette standing next to my bed. “What's wrong?”

“I had a nightmare about the accident,” she whispered.

“Come here,” I said as I patted the other side of the bed and rolled over.

She climbed under the covers and into my arms. Her face was wet with tears and she was shaking. “Shh. You're okay. I'm here,” I said as I kissed her head. I lay there with her, sheltering her from the nightmare that brought her into my arms.

Chapter 21

I awoke and I was alone. I got up, walked to Amelia's room, and lightly tapped on the door. When I didn't get a response, I opened it. She wasn't in there. I walked downstairs and found her in the kitchen with my mom, making breakfast.

"Good morning, Collin," my mom said as she walked over and kissed my cheek.

"Morning, Mom."

Amelia smiled at me as I walked over and softly kissed her on the lips. "Good morning."

"Good morning." She smiled back at me.

"Where's Dad?"

"He'll be down in a minute. He was getting dressed, which is something you should already be doing, mister," my mom said as she pointed at me with a spatula.

"I'm going to take a quick shower right now. I'll be back in fifteen."

"Make it ten and hurry up. Breakfast is almost ready."

I dashed back up the stairs and hit the shower. As I was coming out of the bathroom, my dad was walking down the hall.

“Morning, son,” he said.

“Morning, Dad. You better hurry up and get down there for breakfast before Mom yells.”

“I already got an earful when you were in the shower. Maybe if someone would’ve just gotten out of bed instead of—”

I covered my ears. “La la la.”

He chuckled and walked downstairs. I followed behind a few minutes later and sat at the table for the pancake and fruit breakfast my mom and Amelia made for us before heading to the beach house.

Amelia and I climbed into my Range Rover while my mom and dad got into theirs. My dad suggested that we all drive together, but I liked to drive myself. You never know if and when you need to leave early. Amelia reached over and took hold of my hand. I looked over at her and smiled.

“I haven’t had the chance to thank you for letting me sleep in your bed last night. I’m really sorry about that.”

“There’s no need to apologize and you’re welcome. Believe me when I say it was my pleasure. Do you always have nightmares about the accident?”

“Sometimes I do.”

I brought her hand up to my mouth and pressed it against my lips. “I’ll do everything I can to prevent you from having them.”

We arrived at the beach house and I pulled up beside my dad. I grabbed my and

Amelia's bags and headed upstairs to my room.

"Julia and Jake will be staying across the hall in her room and you can stay in the guest room next to mine. It used to be my mom and dad's room until my dad added an addition with bedrooms to the back of the house. It got to be really annoying when they would constantly have sex and I could hear them."

"Your mom and dad are so cool and so in love." She laughed.

"Yeah, well, sometimes they have a problem keeping their hands off each other, especially in front of people."

"I think it's great."

I took her bags to the room next door and set them on the bed. "Jake and Julia should be here soon."

We walked downstairs. My mom and dad were in the kitchen, kissing. I rolled my eyes.

"See, told you. Excuse me, parents. We have company and she's not yet accustomed to your open sexual behavior, so could you please tone it down and not embarrass your son in front of his girlfriend?"

They both stood there and looked at me. "Didn't you warn Amelia about us?" my mom asked.

"Yes, I did. But still."

"It's okay. I think it's wonderful." Amelia smiled.

“See, son. She doesn’t mind.” My dad chuckled.

“Why did you tell them that?”

She giggled as I grabbed her hand and led her down to the beach. I ran into the water until it was up to my knees, and when I turned around, I saw Amelia standing at the shoreline.

“Come here,” I said as I held out my hand.

“No. I’m fine right here.”

“Amelia. What’s wrong?”

She stared straight ahead at the water and then it hit me. The accident. The things she experienced in the water. She was scared. She was too scared to go in the water. I walked back up to the shore and wrapped my arms around her.

“It’s okay. We can go another time.”

“I don’t go in the water anymore, Collin. Not since the accident and that’s how it’s going to stay.”

Just as I was about to say something, I heard Julia yell my name.

“Collin, Amelia!” She waved from the house.

“Come on; let’s go see Julia and Jake.” I smiled as I took her hand.

We ran up to the house and I shook Jake’s hand and hugged my sister. “Whoa,” I said as I placed my hand on her belly. “It’s getting impossible to hug you anymore.”

Julia laughed as she playfully hit me on my arm. She took Amelia inside and I stayed outside with Jake. A few moments later, my dad came walking out with a couple of beers. He handed one to me and then one to Jake.

“Thanks, Dad.” I smiled as I sat down at the table.

“I saw you and Amelia down by the water,” he said.

“She won’t go in. The shoreline is as far as she’ll go. She said doesn’t go in the water anymore and that’s how it’s going to stay.”

My dad looked at me and sighed. “Well, I can understand that, considering what happened to her, but is it going to pose a problem when we go out on the boat this evening?”

“I don’t know, Dad. I’ll have to ask her.”

“I feel really bad for her,” Jake said as he set down his beer.

“Me too, bro.”

The women came outside and Amelia sat down on my lap. She smiled as I kissed her cheek. I held my beer up to her lips and asked her if she wanted a sip. She nodded her head and I slightly tipped the bottle. She looked damn sexy drinking beer from a bottle. I was nervous to ask her about going on the boat. If she wouldn’t go in the water, I was certain that she wouldn’t go on a boat.

Julia, Jake, my mom, and my dad all went into town to do some shopping. They asked us to come along, but I just wanted to stay back and relax with Amelia. Plus, it gave me the chance to talk to her about going on the boat. We walked hand in hand down to the beach and sat in the sand.

“My family is going out on the boat tonight.”

“Oh,” she said as she looked down.

“You don’t want to go?” I asked.

“No. I can’t get on another boat.”

I noticed that she started to shake. “Amelia, relax. You don’t have to go.”

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“I’ll just stay back at the house and wait for you.”

“I’m not going if you don’t.”

“This is your family. You have to.”

“They’ll understand,” I said.

She stood up and started to walk away. “Where are you going? Come back here.”

“Maybe this was a mistake coming here this weekend.”

I quickly got up and walked over to her. “Why would you say that?”

“Because you and your family like to do the things I can’t and it’s not fair to you.”

“You mean the things you won’t. Not ‘can’t.’”

She turned away from me and didn’t say a word.

“Amelia, look at me.”

“It’s not up for discussion anymore, Collin. This is who I am, and nothing, especially you, is going to change that. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to lie down for a little bit.”

She walked back to the house and left me standing on the beach. She was upset and I

could see the terror in her eyes when I mentioned the boat. I put my hands in my pockets and walked back to the house. I grabbed a beer from the fridge and sat outside. I wanted to go comfort her, but I could tell she wanted to be alone and I was going to respect that. Her fears were understandable, but she couldn't stop living life because of the accident and I needed to make her see that. Maybe I was crossing the line, but I cared about her more than I ever cared about anyone in my life and I wasn't about to sit back and watch her stop living.

A while later, as I was sitting outside, Julia came and sat down next to me. "Where's Amelia?" she asked.

"She's lying down."

"Are you okay? Did something happen between the two of you?"

I sighed and looked down at my beer bottle. "She's too afraid to go in the water and she won't go on the boat. I don't know what to do about it."

Julia placed her hand on mine. "You're going to support her decisions. She's obviously traumatized by what happened and she should be. I know I would be after experiencing something like that. You haven't walked in her shoes, little brother, so it's hard to understand."

"You're wrong, Julia. I do understand. I want to help her."

"You understand as an outsider. You weren't there. You didn't see what she did and you certainly didn't go through what she did. I get that you want to help her, but pushing her to do something she's not ready for is only going to push her away from you."

I couldn't say anything. I got up from my chair and kissed Julia on the cheek.

“Thanks for the talk. I’m going to go check on her.”

I quietly opened the door and poked my head in. She turned around and looked at me. I walked in the room and climbed in next to her, wrapping my arms around her and pulling her into me.

“I’m sorry, Amelia,” I said as I kissed her head.

“Don’t be. I’m the one with the issues.”

“We all have issues, baby. Some more than others, but in the end, everyone has issues. But issues can be worked on.”

“Can we please not talk about this now?” she asked.

My phone started buzzing. When I reached in my pocket and pulled it out, I noticed a text message from Aiden.

“Bro, I’m in the Hamptons. You here?”

“Yeah. I’m at the beach house with Amelia and my family.”

“Awesome. Let’s hit the club tonight.”

Maybe that wasn’t such a bad idea, since Amelia wouldn’t go on the boat. I asked her if she wanted to go and she said yes.

“We’ll meet you there around eight.”

“Cool. I’m bringing Sonya. I can’t wait for you to meet her.”

Chapter 22

Amelia and I walked out from our rooms at the same time. I stopped dead in my tracks when I saw her. She looked so sexy, I had to put my hand in my pocket.

“Wow, you look amazing.” I smiled as I looked her up and down.

Her short black skirt complemented her long legs and her silvery spaghetti-strap top clung to her hourglass shape. She wore the sides of her hair pinned up with curls cascading down her shoulders.

“Thanks,” she said as she walked to me and ran her hand down my silk shirt. “So do you.”

I smiled as I kissed her and we headed downstairs. My family had already taken the boat out, so I grabbed my keys, locked up, and then we drove to the club.

“Dude!” Aiden smiled as he walked up to us right outside the club.

“Hey, bro,” I said as we high-fived. “This is Amelia. Amelia, this is my best friend, Aiden.”

He took her hand and lightly kissed it. “It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“Thank you. It’s nice to meet you,” she replied.

“Where’s Sonya?” I asked.

“We got into an argument and she left. No big deal. There’s plenty of ass in there to look at.”

I shot him a look. "Aiden, not in front of my girl."

Amelia laughed and told me it was okay. She hooked her arm in mine and Aiden's and we walked into the club. Aiden turned and mouthed to me, "OH..MY..GOD..YOU..LUCKY..DOG."

We grabbed a table in the corner and Aiden went to the bar and got us a few drinks. He set down Amelia's glass of wine and handed me my scotch.

"Dude, remember the last time we were here with that pizza delivery girl and you got her off and then she said she was a virgin and not ready for sex? That was classic!" He laughed.

I closed my eyes at the idiocy of my so-called friend. Amelia looked at me and raised her eyebrow.

"That was the night I met you." I smiled as I took her hand and kissed it.

"Sorry, Amelia. My bad," Aiden said.

He always had a habit of saying the wrong things at the wrong time. Now I was embarrassed and I could tell Amelia was less than pleased. A waitress came over to our table and asked if we needed anything. Amelia held up her glass of wine and ordered another. I ordered another scotch and Dumbass ordered us two rounds of lemon shots. After we downed them, I looked at Amelia.

"Would you like to dance?" I smiled as I held out my hand.

She smiled, put her hand in mine, and we went to the dance floor. She downed her glass of wine pretty fast after the shots and I could tell she was feeling it. She was all over the dance floor. I grasped her hips with my hands and brought her close to me.

She began moving her body up and down mine, causing some excitement. I took in a deep breath as I bit my bottom lip to distract me from my hard-on. She turned to me and wrapped her arms around my neck.

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“I think you may have had a little too much to drink.” I smiled as I kissed her forehead.

“Not nearly enough, as far as I’m concerned. Come on; let’s go do some more shots!” she exclaimed.

We went back to the table. Aiden was talking to some chick. She was a redhead, which was totally not his type and she was hanging all over him.

“Bro and Amelia, I would like you to meet, Amberlyn. Amberlyn, this is my best bud, Collin and his girl, Amelia.”

We said hi and Amelia turned to Aiden. “More shots?” she asked.

“Hell, yeah, little lady!” he yelled as the two of them high-fived.

“You two go ahead. I’m not having any. I have to drive back to the beach house.”

“Collin, seriously? You never let that stop you before.”

I kicked Aiden under the table. “I said, not for me.”

Aiden held up his hand and signaled for the waitress to bring the shots over. I ordered a bottle of beer and sat and watched the three of them get wasted.

“Come on. Let’s get you into bed,” I said as I picked up Amelia from the passenger’s seat.

She wrapped her arms around me and looked at me with a smile. “You are so fucking hot. I can imagine how hot you are in bed.”

“Thank you. Let’s not talk about this now. You need to sleep this off.”

Her lips smashed into mine as I was carrying her up the stairs and she started laughing.

“Shh, everyone is sleeping.”

When I sat her on the bed, she grabbed hold of my shirt, fell back, and pulled me on top of her.

“I need you to fuck me right now,” she said as she kissed me.

“Amelia, stop.”

“No, I mean it. I want you. I need to feel you inside me.”

“You’re drunk and I won’t sleep with you while you’re drunk. Not our first time anyway.” I got up off of her and pulled back the sheets. As I took off her shoes, she told me that she was going to be sick. I helped her up and into the bathroom. She leaned over the toilet and started vomiting. I kneeled down next to her and softly rubbed her back. Once she was finished, she leaned up against the wall while I wet a wash cloth. I lifted her chin with my finger and wiped the mascara stains around her eyes and then wiped her mouth. I smiled as I kissed the tip of her nose before helping her up.

“Sorry,” she said as I laid her down in bed.

“You’re kind of cute when you’re drunk,” I said as I pulled the covers up and kissed

her forehead. "I'll see you in the morning, baby."

She closed her eyes and, as I walked out of her room, I heard noises in the kitchen. I walked downstairs and saw my dad getting a bottle of water from the fridge.

"Hey, son. Did you just get in?"

"I've been home a while. I was upstairs with Amelia. She had way too much to drink and she got sick."

He laughed. "Been there, done that. I'll tell your mom to have the cocktail ready for her in the morning."

"Better her than me." I smiled. "Night, Dad."

"Night, son."

I climbed into bed and heard a light knock on the door. "Collin," I heard Julia whisper. "Are you awake?"

"Yeah, come on in."

"I was just on my way downstairs for something to eat and I thought I heard you. Did you just get in?"

"Doesn't anyone in this house ever sleep?" I laughed.

She walked over and sat down on the edge of the bed. "It's so hard to sleep these days and so uncomfortable. I can't help it if your nephew is hungry."

"You mean, you're hungry." I winked at her.

“So, I’m curious. Have you and Amelia had—”

“No, Julia, we haven’t,” I interrupted.

She smiled and patted my arm. “I’m proud of you. You aren’t rushing into anything. Good boy.”

“You know it’s killing me, right?”

“I know, but you’ll be happy you waited,” she said as she got up from the bed.

“Yeah. I know I’ll be and so will she.”

“Night, little brother.”

“Night, big sister.”

The next morning, I got out of bed, checked on Amelia, and went downstairs for breakfast. The kitchen smelled of bacon and eggs, two of Jake’s favorite breakfast foods.

“Happy birthday, man.” I smiled as we fist pumped.

“Thanks, Collin. Where’s Amelia?”

“She’s still asleep,” I replied as I poured a glass of orange juice.

My mom said, “I’m making her cocktail right now. Your dad told me about last night.”

My dad walked in the kitchen with his arm around Amelia. “Ellery, someone needs

that drink now,” he said.

“It’s coming right up, babe.”

I looked at Amelia and tried so hard not to laugh, but I couldn’t help it. I walked over to her and wrapped my arms around her.

“You look like a hot mess.”

She smacked me on the chest. “Thanks.”

“Here you go, sweetie. Drink up.”

I took the glass from my mom and handed it to Amelia. She sniffed it and then looked at me.

“What is this?”

“It’s my mom’s famous hangover cocktail. I’m not going to lie to you and tell you it tastes amazing because, truthfully, it sucks. But I promise you that you will feel better quickly.”

My dad took his coffee and sat down at the table. “I’m officially welcoming you to the family, Amelia. When you get to drink one of those, you’re in.” He winked.

“It’s okay, Amelia. It’s not that bad,” Julia said.

“Are you kidding me? That tastes like shit,” Jake said.

Amelia sat down at the table and started to sip it. I pursed my lips together and could feel her agony. “You have to chug it. Pretend it’s a shot or something. You can’t sip

it. You have to chug it. Trust me.”

She looked at me with fear in her eyes and then threw back the drink. She drank it all and, as she set the glass on the table, she made the cutest face of disgust.

“I know, baby. I know it’s awful, but it really does work,” I said.

“Remember one thing, Amelia,” my dad said. “As long as you’re hung over in front of Ellery, you will always have to drink that.”

“Connor, that’s not true,” my mom said.

“Really, Elle?”

“Yeah, Mom, really?” Jake, Julia, and I said at the same time.

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Amelia started to laugh and ate some dry toast. The rest of us enjoyed a great breakfast before we had to get ready for Jake's party.

I heard a knock at the door and I knew it was Jacob and Diana. I jumped up from my chair and answered it.

"Hey, little man!" I smiled.

"Hey, Collin."

I kissed Diana on the cheek as Amelia came walking into the foyer.

"Diana, Jacob, I would like you to meet my girlfriend, Amelia. Amelia; Jacob and Diana."

"It's so nice to finally meet the two of you. Collin talks about you all the time."

"The pleasure is mine, Amelia." Diana smiled. "You've got yourself a great catch here. Collin is an angel."

"I don't think I'd go that far, Diana." My dad laughed as he walked in.

It was good to see Jacob again. It had been a while. "How are you feeling?" I asked as I messed up his hair.

"Knock it off, dude, and I'm feeling fine."

“Fine enough to maybe do some surfing?”

“SURFING? Are you serious?” he said.

“Sure am. That’s if it’s okay with your mom.”

“Mom, please. Please can I go? Please,” he begged.

Diana looked at me with uncertainty. “I don’t know.”

“Diana, please trust me on this.” I smiled. “He’s in good hands and Jake will be out there with us.”

“Okay, but be very careful,” she said.

“YES!” Jacob exclaimed.

“Let’s go get our bathing suits on and we’ll head down to the beach.” Amelia looked at me and smiled. “Come with us? Please?”

“No. I’ll be more than happy to watch you from the sand.”

I sighed and kissed her on her forehead. While Jacob and I went upstairs and changed into our bathing suits, Amelia grabbed a blanket, a few towels, and headed down to the beach.

“Come on, bro! Let’s get the surfboards from the garage.”

“Be careful out there, Collin. You know how I worry,” my mom said.

“Yep. Don’t worry, Mom. We’ll be fine,” I said as we raced through the kitchen.

I took the surfboards from the wall in the garage and Jacob and I took them down to the beach. When we got there, Jake was already in the water and Julia was sitting on the blanket, talking to Amelia.

“The waves are looking good today,” I yelled out to Jake.

“They’re awesome, dude. Hurry up and get out here.”

I knelt down in front of Jacob and put my hand on his shoulder. “Listen to me, buddy. I want you to breathe in the ocean air, really take it in. Okay?”

“Yeah, sure, Collin.”

“Okay, let’s hit the water.”

I gave Jacob a few tips and, before too long, he was up on the surfboard. He fell a few times, but so did Jake and I. Overall, he wasn’t bad. He took it slow and listened to everything I said. He was happy to be out in the water. Julia called for Jake and told him they had to get back up to the house and get changed for the party. Jacob and I stayed in the water a little longer.

“Come on, buddy. We need to get back to shore. Jake’s party is going to be starting soon.”

We paddled our way back land and, as soon as we emerged from the water, Amelia ran over, handed Jacob a towel, and took the surfboard from him. She walked over to me and kissed my cold lips.

“You looked great out there.” She smiled.

“Thanks, baby. Jacob did pretty well and I think he had a good time.”

The three of us sat down on the blanket and dried off for a few minutes before heading up to the house. “You feeling okay, bro?” I asked.

“I feel great. Better than I ever have.” He smiled.

I placed my hand on his head. “That’s great, buddy.”

Amelia took my hand and held it tight. She looked at me before leaning over to give me a kiss. “You’re the most amazing person I’ve ever met.”

“Stop it.” I smiled. “I think you’re the most amazing person I’ve ever met.”

Diana walked towards Jacob and he got up and ran to her. “Mom, it was so much fun. I can’t wait to do it again and guess what?”

“What, sweetie?” She smiled.

“I feel great. I don’t feel like I normally do.”

“That’s wonderful, Jacob. Now let’s go get you out of this wet bathing suit and into some dry clothes. We’ll see you up at the house, Collin.”

Amelia turned and brushed her lips against mine. “How did you know?”

“Know what?” I asked.

“That the salt water would help open up Jacob’s airways.”

“I’ve been doing a little research here and there. No big deal.”

“It is a big deal. A very big deal,” she whispered as she once again kissed me and we

both fell back into the sand.

Chapter 23

The guests had started to arrive and the party was under way. My mom had a huge spread of food catered and enough alcohol to quench the thirst of an army. Family and friends were in attendance and, finally, my grandparents arrived. I introduced them to Amelia after my grandmother lectured me about how they don't see me much. Denny wasn't able to make it because he wasn't feeling well again, which had my dad really concerned. As Amelia and I filled our plates with food, I heard a voice behind me.

"Hi, Collin."

I froze for a moment because of her voice. I took in a deep breath and turned around.

"Hailey. What are you doing here?"

"When my parents told me they were coming, I just sort of tagged along. I need to talk to you."

I looked over at Amelia as she glared at Hailey. "Hailey, this is my girlfriend, Amelia."

"Girlfriend? I didn't know you were seeing anyone," she said.

"There are a lot of things you don't know, Hailey. Now if you'll excuse me, we're going to go eat."

I took Amelia's hand and led her outside to the table where Jacob and Diana were sitting. I noticed my mom and dad staring at us from the corner of the room.

“That’s nice. You didn’t tell me that your ex-girlfriend was going to be here,” Amelia said with a slight attitude.

“That’s because I didn’t know she was coming.”

“I thought she was in Italy,” she said.

“Your ex-girlfriend is here? Not cool, Collin,” Jacob chimed in.

I shot him a look and he smiled. I could tell how upset Amelia was by the look in her eyes.

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“Did you know she was back?”

“I just found out a couple of days ago. Who cares anyway? I surely don’t,” I said.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Amelia asked.

“What did you want me to say? Hey, by the way, my ex is back in town.”

“Yeah, something like that. Maybe I wouldn’t have been caught off guard.”

“I don’t want to talk about this anymore. Let’s just eat,” I sighed.

Now I was angry. I was angry at Hailey for showing up at my family’s party. Who the hell did she think she was after all this time? Not only did she piss me off, but she upset Amelia, and I was afraid that her being here was going to cause an argument. As I looked across the patio, I saw her talking to Julia. Peyton walked over to me and gave me a hug from behind.

“I’m so sorry, Collin. I told her not to come, but she wouldn’t listen,” she whispered in my ear.

“It’s okay, Peyton. Don’t worry about it.”

She gave me a squeeze and walked over to where my mom and dad were. I looked at Hailey and noticed she had a different look about her. Not physically, but emotionally. She looked unsure and sad. After everyone ate, we sang “Happy Birthday” to Jake and had cake. I tried to get Amelia to have some, but she wouldn’t.

The happiness she displayed earlier was gone and now she was in a somber state.

“Hey, do you think we can have that talk now?” Hailey asked as she walked up to me.

I looked over at Amelia. “Go ahead. Go talk and get it over with so we can go on with our evening,” she said.

“Amelia, do you want to go inside and play some X-box?” Jacob asked.

“Sure, Jacob. I’d love to.”

Before Amelia walked away, she gave me a kiss and told me that she’d be waiting for me. I didn’t want to talk to Hailey, but I didn’t have a choice.

“Let’s make this quick, Hailey. What do you want to talk about?”

“Can we at least go somewhere quiet? Like down to the beach?”

I rolled my eyes and sighed. “Fine.”

We walked down to the beach and Hailey sat down in the sand. I sat down next to her and asked her what she needed to talk about.

“I’m pregnant,” she said as she looked down.

My heart stopped for a split second and I didn’t know what to say. “Wow. Do your parents know?”

“No, not yet. I don’t know how to tell them.”

“What about the father? Does he know?”

“Yeah, he knows and he wasn’t happy. When I refused to get an abortion, he broke up with me.”

“Nice guy,” I said.

She reached over and placed her hand on mine. I immediately pulled my hand away from her. “Listen, Hailey. I’m sorry for what you’re going through, but I have a girlfriend who I care for very deeply and she’s the priority in my life.”

“I’m sorry, Collin. I’m so sorry for hurting you.” She began to cry.

I stood up and, when I started to walk away, I stopped and turned to her. “Sorry isn’t going to cut it this time, Hailey. You made your choice the minute you got on that plane.”

I turned around and walked back to the house. I grabbed a beer from the fridge and told Amelia to meet me up in my room when she and Jacob finished their game. I went upstairs and sat on my bed with my back up against the headboard. As I took a drink of my beer, Amelia walked in and climbed on the bed next to me.

“How’d it go?” she asked nervously.

“She’s pregnant.”

“The baby’s not—”

“God, no!” I interrupted. “Supposedly, the guy she was with wasn’t happy about the baby and he wanted her to get an abortion. When she refused, he kicked her out.”

“That’s terrible. How could someone be so cruel?”

“I don’t know, but it’s not my problem,” I said as I threw back my beer.

She put her arm across my chest and snuggled close to me. I put my arm around her and gripped her shoulder firmly. Everything felt right with her. I was happy and no one was going to ruin that for me.

I woke up holding Amelia in my arms. We both fell asleep last night after we talked about Hailey. I carefully moved my arm and quietly rolled out of bed so I didn’t wake her. I stood there and stared at her as I pulled the sheet over her. I was falling in love with this girl and I wanted to tell her so badly, but I was scared. I walked downstairs and made a pot of coffee. As soon as the coffee was done brewing, Julia walked in.

“Morning, Collin.”

“Morning, Julia. You look bigger than you did yesterday.” I smiled as I poured her a cup of coffee.

“Thanks, and I feel it too. Did Hailey tell you?”

“Yeah, she told me.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” she asked.

“There’s nothing to talk about. It has nothing to do with me.”

“It doesn’t bother you at all that she’s pregnant?”

“Why the hell would it? She dumped me and told me to move on. So I did. I don’t have feelings for her at all. I’m happy with Amelia. She’s the girl I want. Hailey will

have to deal with this baby on her own. It's not my fault she got knocked up."

"Whoa. Tell me how you really feel." She laughed.

"I just did and I don't want to talk about it anymore. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to bring my girlfriend some coffee."

I made Amelia's coffee exactly how she liked it: one part cream and one part sugar. I walked back up to the bedroom and, when I opened the door, she was lying there, staring at me. I smiled as I set the cups down on the nightstand.

"Morning, beautiful." I smiled as I leaned over and kissed her.

"Morning, handsome. I can't believe we both fell asleep last night."

"I brought you some coffee."

She sat up and I handed her the cup. "Thank you." She smiled.

I climbed back on the bed and she leaned her head on my shoulder. "I don't want to go back to the city. I love it here."

"I know. I do too. But, you have school tomorrow and clinicals, and I have work. We don't have to go back until later, so we'll do whatever you want to do today. It's your choice," I said as I kissed her head.

"I want to go horseback riding."

"Seriously?" I asked.

"Yes. That day we went was amazing and I would love to do it again."

“Then horseback riding it is.”

“Great. If you don’t mind, I’m going to take a quick shower,” she said.

“Go ahead. I’ll meet you downstairs.”

She kissed my lips and then got up from the bed. I grabbed her hand and pulled her back. She laughed as she fell on the bed. I leaned into her and kissed her again. This time, it was deep and passionate and I didn’t want to let her go. I broke our kiss and she smiled at me.

“I just felt the need to do that.” I smiled.

“Feel free to do that anytime.”

“I will. I promise. Now go get in the shower.”

She got up and I lightly smacked her perfect ass. She giggled as she left the room.

When I went back downstairs, my mom and dad were sitting at the table with their heads down. I looked around the kitchen. My mom had started to take out the ingredients for her hangover cocktail. Oh my God; this was perfect.

“GOOD MORNING, PARENTS!” I yelled.

“Oh my God, Collin. Shut up!” my mom said as she put up her hand.

“Son, be respectful.”

“What’s wrong? Did you drink too much last night?” I whispered in my mom’s ear.

“Are you hung over?” I whispered in my dad’s ear.

Julia walked into the kitchen and I brought my finger to my lips, motioning for her to be quiet.

“Let me help you out, dear parents, and make you something to help ease your pain.”

Julia silently laughed as she helped me put the ingredients in the blender. I turned it on full speed and both my mom and dad jumped.

“Jesus Christ, Collin!” my dad exclaimed.

“Sorry, Dad.” I laughed.

I poured the drink in two glasses and handed them to my parents. They just sat there and stared at me.

“Well, what are you waiting for? Go ahead and drink it.” I smiled.

Julia sat down at the table next to them. “I sure hope your grandson never sees you like this. What would he think?” She smiled.

“Let’s do this, Connor,” my mom said as she held up her glass.

They both drank it as Amelia walked into the kitchen. She had the look of fear in her eyes when she saw the blender. “You know I don’t need one of those.”

“I know, baby. It’s for them.” I chuckled as I pointed to my parents.

“Whew,” she said.

My parents, Julia and Jake, and Diana and Jacob all left early to head back to the city. My dad wanted to get back and check on Denny. I told them that Amelia and I wouldn’t be heading back until later this evening because we were going to spend the day horseback riding and then relaxing on the beach. Amelia had an amazing smile on her face the entire time we were horseback riding.

“I love this so much,” she said as we rode along the shore.

“It’s relaxing. Isn’t it?”

“It sure is.”

I extended my hand out to her and she took it. We rode our horses next to each other and held hands the rest of the ride. Words couldn’t describe what I felt. When we finished with the horses, we drove back to the beach house and got in our bathing suits. I had to bit my bottom lip when I saw Amelia in her string bikini. Fuck, I was getting hard just looking at her. We went down to the beach and lay down on the blanket. I reached over and grabbed her hand while we both relaxed in the sun. I had an idea.

“Hey,” I said as I turned my head and looked at her.

“What?” she asked.

“Stand up.”

“Why?”

“You’ll see.” God, I was scared to do what I was going to do, but I felt it had to be

done.

We both stood up. I bent down, placed my arm under her legs, and picked her up. “What are you doing?” she laughed.

“Do you trust me?” I asked seriously.

She became quiet and looked at me. The smile had left her face and it was almost as if she knew what I was going to do.

“Do you trust me?” I asked again.

“Don’t, Collin. Please,” she said as her eyes began to tear.

“I’ll ask you one more time. Do you trust me?”

“Yes, I do trust you. But—”

“No buts, Amelia,” I said as I began walking towards the water.

Her grip tightened around my neck. “Don’t, Collin. Please, I’m begging you. If you care at all about me, you won’t do this. PLEASE!” she yelled.

“I do care about you and that’s why I’m doing this,” I said as I walked into the water.

I could feel her heart racing faster than the speed of light and the tears started to pour from her eyes. “Please take me back.”

I reached the point with her where the water was above my waist. She was crying and I felt like a fucking monster. But I knew in the end that this was what she needed to live her life again.

“You loved the water. You told me it was your life and you can’t let one accident destroy it.”

“You bastard. I fucking hate you for doing this to me,” she cried as I put her down in the water.

Her eyes were closed tight and she was shaking. Not because the water was cold, but because of fear.

“I’ve got you and I won’t let you go. I promise. Please, baby, relax.”

I was holding her as tight as she was holding onto me. “I hate you,” she said with her eyes still closed.

“No, you don’t. Feel it, Amelia. Feel the water, the waves; everything you once loved about it. I know you’re scared, but open your eyes. It’s beautiful out here, baby, and I want to share it with you.”

“Fuck you!” she screamed.

My heart broke for her, but this was the only way to get her back into the water, a place where she used to feel safe and at peace. She needed to understand that it could still be that way.

“You can hate me all you want. But you need to do this. I’m doing this because I love you, Amelia, and I want you to get better.”

I said it. I told her that I loved her and I meant it. She became still as she had her arms wrapped tightly around my neck. She took her hand and placed it in the water, moving it slowly back and forth. I let out a deep breath because she had finally calmed down.

“It’s great, isn’t it?” I said.

She lifted her head from my shoulder and looked at me as the tears still streamed down her face. I gently wiped them away as I smiled at her and then kissed her softly on the lips.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” she whispered.

“It’s not so bad, is it?” I asked as my eyes began to water.

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She brought her hand up to my face and softly ran it down my cheek. “You said you loved me.”

“I do love you.”

“We haven’t made love yet.”

“I don’t need to make love to you to know that I’m in love with you, Amelia.”

“You’re sure? You’re not trying to convince yourself because Hailey’s back, are you?”

“Of course not. I was falling in love with you after our first date. Hailey has nothing to do with this.”

“That’s good then, because I love you too.” She smiled as she hugged me.

I closed my eyes and smiled because she loved me like I loved her. I broke our embrace and kissed her as the waves danced around us.

“Are you ready to go back to the shore?” I asked.

“No, not yet.” She smiled. “I want to be here with you in the water.”

“So you’re okay?”

“I feel safe with you,” she said as she splashed water at me.

“Oh, so that’s how you want to play?” I chuckled as I splashed her in the face.

She let out a playful scream and splashed me back. Then she really surprised me when she started to swim away from me.

“Get back here!” I said as I swam after her. God, she was fast.

She slowed down and I was able to catch up to her. I grabbed her from behind and we both went under the water. When we both came back up, she laughed. I was loving this side of her; this side that she had hidden away from everyone for the past two years.

Her laughter stopped and she placed her hands on each side of my face. “Thank you. Thank you for everything.”

Chapter 24

We went back to the beach house to change out of our bathing suits because we needed to get back to the city. I went to my room to change and Amelia went to hers. As I grabbed a pair of shorts from the drawer, I heard Amelia call my name from her room. When I opened the door, she was standing in the middle of the room, holding a sheet around her. I tilted my head and smiled as did she. She never looked sexier than she did at that moment. Her blonde hair was still wet and it was starting to dry in waves. The silhouette of her perfectly shaped body was visible under the sheet that clung to her. I walked over to her and stroked her face.

“Are you sure?”

“I’ve never been so sure of anything in my life. I’m a little nervous because I’ve only ever had sex with Billy.”

“You don’t need to be nervous with me, baby. I will be everything you need.”

Our lips locked passionately as my hand cupped the nape of her neck. This was it. The moment I’d been waiting for since the first day I laid eyes on her. I was going to explore every inch of her body, not only with my hands, but with my tongue as well. Making love to her was going to be slow and gentle because that was what she deserved. She was going to get my full attention to her needs and I was going to make sure that it was something she would never forget.

She let go of the sheet and let it drop to the floor. I broke our kiss and stared at her beautiful naked body. She was more perfect than I had thought and I didn’t think that was possible. Her blue eyes stared into mine as she took my hand and placed it on her breast. I was so hard and my cock was throbbing for her. I walked her back to the bed, where she lay flat on her back with her legs hanging over the bed. I smiled as I took down my shorts and my lips covered her supple breast. She moaned as my teeth lightly tugged on her hard nipple and then my tongue licked it to soothe the sting. My hand gripped her other breast, kneading it and getting her more excited, before it traveled down her torso and stopped when my fingers touched her clit. She moaned and threw her head back as my fingers rubbed her in tiny circles. I lifted my mouth from her breast and looked at her.

“I’m going to make sure you are completely satisfied and I’m going to take my time. I can promise you this won’t be rushed. You deserve every bit of pleasure I have to offer.”

“I love you,” she whispered.

“I love you too,” I said as my lips explored her other breast.

I moved my fingers down and felt the wetness that emerged from her. I let out a moan as I plunged my finger inside her and felt how tight she was.

“I want to make you come like this,” I said.

“Please do.” She smiled.

I inserted another finger inside her and, as I moved them in and out, her hips moved up and down with the same motion. Her moans became louder, arousing me more. I planted my thumb firmly on her clit and rubbed it until she couldn't take anymore and I sent her body to orgasm. She tightened her legs and her body shook as she threw back her head and her voice reached a high-pitched shout. I immediately went down on her and tasted every bit of pleasure that poured from her. She ran her fingers through my hair and then held my head.

“Oh my God,” she kept saying over and over.

I stood up and took down my underwear. She smiled as she looked at my full package and licked her lips as she sat up on the bed. She wrapped her lips around my cock and began sucking. She caught me off guard, but I wasn't going to complain. I fisted her hair as I stood there and watched her move her head up and down. Her mouth felt incredible wrapped around me and I could only imagine what her pussy felt like when it was wrapped tightly around me. I stopped her because I needed to be inside her. I reached over to grab a condom and she grabbed my hand.

“No, I'm on the pill. I have been for years.”

She lay back down on the bed and I hovered over her, pushing my cock between her legs. “If at any time it hurts you, I will stop. Just say the word.”

“Collin, I love how gentle you're being, but for the love of God, just fuck me already.” She smiled.

I chuckled as I kissed her lips and then stared into her beautiful eyes while I pushed

myself inside her. I wanted to take it slow so I didn't hurt her. I wanted to ease my way in, but she had another plan. She placed her hands firmly on my ass and pushed me down so I would be deep inside her. As soon as she did that, I let out a loud moan.

“Amelia, you feel incredible.”

“So do you.”

I thrust in and out of her slowly at first, but then I picked up the pace when she wrapped her legs around my waist and I fell deeper inside her. My lips met hers and our tongues danced together as I was on the verge of an orgasm.

“I'm going to come, Amelia. Can you come with me?”

“YES!” she screamed as her body tightened. I felt her coming and one last deep thrust was all it took before I spilled myself inside her.

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Our hearts were racing and our breathing was shallow. I collapsed on top of her and held her tight. I never wanted to let go. Once our breathing returned to normal and our heart rates slowed, I sat up and pushed her hair behind her ear.

“You’re amazing.” I smiled.

She softly stroked my face with her finger. “That was the best sex I’ve ever had in my life. I didn’t know I could feel certain things.”

“I aim to please.” I smiled.

“You are fantastic in bed, Mr. Black. I have no words for what I felt. You sent me to places I’ve never been.”

I leaned in and kissed her one last time before we had to get dressed and head back to the city.

Over the next month, Amelia and I spent as much time together as we could. Actually, we saw each other every single day. I spent the night most nights, but it was difficult with her bed being so small. She wouldn’t spend the night at the penthouse because of my parents. The whole respect issue kept coming up. I really needed to get my own place. It was family dinner night, so I picked up Amelia and we went to the penthouse. As we were having dinner, her phone rang. She excused herself and picked it up from the counter. She answered it and suddenly became excited.

“What’s going on?” I asked as she hung up the phone.

“My parents’ house in the Hamptons sold. The buyer paid cash and I’m meeting the realtor tomorrow to collect the money.”

I got up from my chair and hugged her. “That’s great news, baby. I’m so happy for you.”

“Thanks. It couldn’t have come at a better time. Now I can pay off my student loans and still have enough money to live on until I start getting paid for being a nurse.”

Everyone congratulated her and we sat down to finish our dinner. As the women were cleaning up, I walked over to the bar and poured myself a scotch. My dad and Jake walked in shortly after.

“Would you like me to pour you one?” I asked.

“No thanks, Collin,” Jake replied.

“Sure. Do you have a second to talk?” my dad asked.

“What’s up, Dad?”

“I know you’ve been itching to get a place of your own and, if you think it’s cool, I would like to buy you the apartment that’s for sale on the same floor as Julia and Jake.”

I swear my heart stopped. “Dad, are you serious?” I asked as I handed him his scotch.

“Your mom and I talked and we think it would be good for you to have a place of your own. You’ve exceeded my expectations at Black Enterprises and you’re doing extremely well. I’m really proud of you, son.”

“Dad, I don’t know what to say. Thank you,” I said as I hugged him.

“You’re welcome and now, with you gone, that means your mom and I can fuck all over this place as many times as we want without the worry of anyone coming home.”

I hurried and covered my ears. “DAD!”

He chuckled as he raised his eyebrow and gave me a smile. My mom, Julia, and Amelia walked in the room and my mom looked at me and smiled. I walked over and pulled her into a warm embrace.

“Thank you, Mom. I love you.”

“I love you too, my sweet boy.”

“What’s going on?” Amelia asked.

I turned to her and placed my hands on her hips. “I’m getting a place of my own.”

“That’s wonderful! Where?”

“One floor down. By Julia and Jake.”

She smiled as she pressed her lips against mine. “That’s so cool.”

“I better get you home. It’s getting late.” I winked.

“You’re right. It is getting late.” She smiled.

“Getting late? It’s only eight thirty,” my dad said.

I shot him a look and he then knew exactly what I meant. “Oh, you’re right; it is getting late. You better get going. I’ll contact the realtor tomorrow and we’ll go look at the apartment downstairs.”

“Thanks again, Dad.”

Amelia and I said goodbye to everyone and I told my mom that I’d be back home tonight. She was happy about that because she wanted to make me breakfast in the morning.

We climbed into my Range Rover and I drove Amelia back to her apartment. As soon as we reached her door, she unlocked it, turned around, grabbed me by my shirt, and pulled me inside, smashing her lips against mine with force. My hands instantly gravitated to the bottom of her shirt as she broke our kiss and lifted up her arms.

“God, I need to fuck you up against the wall,” I said as I looked around. “Shit, baby, there’s no open wall space.” I laughed.

“I promise you amazing wall sex the minute you move into your new place.” She smiled as she nipped my bottom lip and unbuttoned my pants.

“I’m holding you to that promise.” I unhooked her bra and threw it on the floor. She pulled down my pants and took hold of my hard cock in her hand, stroking it up and down, sending me into oblivion.

“Not just wall sex either,” she said between kisses. “Kitchen sex, counter sex, bathroom sex, floor sex. Just fucking sex all over the place.”

That was it. I needed to be inside her immediately after all that sex talk. I ripped her panties from her and pushed her back on the bed. As I plunged two fingers inside her to make sure she was ready, she moaned.

“I want you to take me from behind,” she said as she pushed my fingers out of her and rolled over.

“Fuck, baby. I’m dying here.”

“Then get moving, Mr. Black. I want you now!”

I pushed inside her and we both gasped. I moved in and out at a rapid pace, bringing both of us to orgasm at the same time. I pushed and pumped every last drop inside her and then collapsed on top of her, softly kissing her neck with the smallest kisses and holding her breasts in my hands.

“You’re amazing, baby. Just fucking amazing. I love you,” I whispered.

“I love you too, Collin.”

I rolled off of her and onto the other side of her small bed. As much as I loved being with her at her place, it was way too small for two people. We both lay there and I wrapped my arm around her. She placed her hand on me and began to stroke my chest.

“That is so nice of your dad to buy you your own place. I’m so happy for you.”

“He has his motives.” I laughed.

“What do you mean?”

“As much as my mom and dad love having me at home, it’s cramping their sex life because I’m always catching them starting to do things in places other than their bedroom and I yell at them. Plus, my dad thinks I’m old enough and responsible to be on my own. Not to mention the fact that I’m always complaining about how small

your place is.” I smiled.

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“Yeah, it kind of sucks here, doesn’t it?”

“Nah. Anywhere with you is perfect. Except when I can’t fuck you against the wall.”

She giggled. I moved my arm and leaned over, licking her breast before sucking her now hardened nipple. “Okay, baby. I should go. You have to be up early and so do I.”

“I want you to stay,” she pouted.

“I want to stay, but I told my mom I’d be home tonight. Soon, we won’t have to say goodbye like this. You can spend the night at my place and I’ll drive you to school and to your clinicals in the morning.”

“I can’t wait.” She smiled as she kissed me goodbye.

Chapter 25

Amelia and I stayed up and talked on the phone until two in the morning. The next morning, before getting out of bed, I grabbed my phone from my nightstand and saw a text message from Hailey.

“Hi, Collin. I was wondering if we could talk. I told my parents last night and they are really upset and I need to talk to someone.”

I sighed. I didn’t know if it was such a good idea. The fact that she hurt me really bad wasn’t even a factor anymore. I was over it and everything happens for a reason. We did grow up together and had known each other since birth. So I guessed listening to

her would be okay.

“I guess. I’ll text you later when I’m available.”

“Thanks. I appreciate it.”

I took a shower, got dressed, ran down the stairs, and followed the amazing scent of French toast and coffee.

“Good morning, Mom.” I smiled as I walked over and kissed her.

“Good morning, Dad,” I said as I poured a cup of coffee.

“You’re in a great mood today, son,” he said.

“That’s because things are good.”

I sat down at the table and my mom set down a plate of French toast in front of me.

“Have you spoken to Hailey?” my mom asked.

“Not really. Why?”

“Peyton and Henry are really worried about her. All she’s been doing lately is staying locked in her room. Did something happen in Italy?”

“Yeah, she got knocked up,” I blurted out as I took a bite of my French toast.

“WHAT!” my mom exclaimed.

“I’m surprised Aunt Peyton didn’t call you. She told them last night.”

“That’s a shame,” my dad said as he took a sip of his coffee.

“Peyton did call me last night, but I didn’t answer because your father and I were in the middle of—”

“STOP! Can’t you just say that you were busy? Do you always have to be so detailed?”

I looked at my dad as he sat there laughing. “It’s not funny, Dad. How would the both of you like it if I brought Amelia here and had wild sex and were so loud, you could hear us in any room of the house?”

“Collin, that’s not cool,” my mom said.

“EXACTLY! Now you get how I feel. I don’t like the thought of my parents having sex. That’s just...just...”

“Okay, son. We get it. We’ll try to be more careful with what we say,” my dad said.

“You’ve been saying that for years,” I said as I rolled my eyes.

“Well, I’m going to call Peyton. Now I feel horrible.” My mom kissed me on the head and walked upstairs.

My dad got up from his seat and put his plate in the dishwasher. “Ralph is driving me to the office today. Are you joining me or are you driving yourself?”

“I’m driving myself.”

“Okay. I’ll see you at the office,” my dad said.

“Have fun with Ralphie.” I laughed.

My dad stopped and turned around. “He is a bit strange.”

I laughed as I got up from my chair and grabbed my keys from the kitchen counter.

As I pulled into the parking garage of Black Enterprises, my phone rang. I pulled it from my pocket and it was my girl calling.

“Good morning, baby.”

“Good morning. How was your breakfast?”

“It was great! I wish you were there.”

“My clinicals were cancelled for today, so my friend Gina and I are going to the library for the day to study for our exams that are coming up. Plus, I have a research paper that’s due tomorrow.”

“Okay, babe. Have a good day and I’ll see you later. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

As soon as I got to my office, my secretary, Blythe stopped me. “Mr. Black, your father wants to see you in his office.”

“I just saw him thirty minutes ago.”

She shrugged and went back to typing on her computer. I stepped into my office, set my briefcase down, grabbed a cup of coffee, and headed across the hall to his office.

“Morning, Diana. How are you?”

“Good morning, Collin. I’m good. After you meet with your father, can I talk to you for a minute?”

“Sure. Let me go see what the old man wants.” I winked.

I opened the door. He had just hung up the phone. “Come in and have a seat.”

“What’s up?”

“Congratulations, son. We just landed the Firman deal.” He smiled.

“What the fuck! Are you serious?”

“Yes, I’m dead serious.”

“How did that happen? I basically told Mr. Firman to fuck off after all the shit he tried to pull with the deal.”

“I guess he liked you and your ‘I don’t give a shit if you don’t go with us’ attitude.”

I sat there as my dad smiled at me. I knew how proud he was and it made me happy. Black Enterprises was going to be my company one day and I was going to make sure it stayed strong and successful, just like my dad did when he took it over from my grandfather.

“You’re getting a huge bonus, son. I’m taking you to lunch later and we’re going to celebrate.” He smiled.

“Thanks, Dad.” I smiled as I shook his hand.

I walked out of his office and stopped at Diana's desk. "I heard the good news. Congratulations."

"Thanks. What did you want to talk about? Is Jacob okay?"

"He had his doctor appointment yesterday and I told him how much better Jacob was doing after you took him surfing. Unfortunately, it didn't last once we got back to the city. The doctor told me that the ocean water would definitely help Jacob because of the high content of saline in it. You knew that, didn't you?"

I pursed my lips and gave a small smile. "I was hoping it would work. I had been doing some research and I came across several articles that stated it's the natural way of helping patients with cystic fibrosis. I hate to tell you this, Diana, but I think you need to move to the ocean."

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“Yeah, right, Collin. There’s no way I can afford that. Plus, I’d have to pack up and move somewhere where it’s warm all year long.”

“California,” I said with seriousness.

“Don’t be silly. Go back to your office. I have work to finish for your father before he fires me.” She winked.

I placed my hand on her shoulder and smiled at her before I walked away. As I walked down the hall, she called my name. I turned around and looked at her.

“Thank you.” She smiled.

I nodded my head, put my hands in my pockets, and went back to my office.

“Here’s to your sometimes lousy attitude.” My dad smiled as he held up his scotch.

I brought my glass to his. “Thanks, Dad. I appreciate it.”

“I called your mom to come and join us, but she’s with Peyton. I wonder how that’s going.”

“Oh shit. I forgot about Hailey.”

“What are you talking about, son?”

“Hailey sent me a text message this morning, asking if she could talk to me because

Peyton and Henry were really upset about her being pregnant and I told her I would.”

“Are you going to tell Amelia?”

“I didn’t plan on it. Why? It’s only a quick talk.”

“Son, if I’ve learned anything at all in life, it’s NEVER keep anything from the woman you love. Even if it’s the smallest insignificant thing. You really need to trust me on that one.”

His phone rang and, as he answered it, I pulled out mine and sent a text message to Amelia.

“I love you, baby.”

“I love you too. I hope your day is going good.”

“It’s the best day ever. Well, except when I first laid eyes on you. I’ll tell you all about it later.”

“Lol. I can’t wait.”

My dad hung up from his call and smiled. “The realtor is on her way to the apartment now. I told her we’d meet her there in fifteen minutes.”

“Great; let’s go,” I said as I reached in my pocket and pulled out my keys.

We drove to the building and, when we stepped off the elevator, my heart started racing when I saw the realtor. Shit. I thought to myself. She turned and looked at us as she unlocked the door across from Julia’s and Jake’s apartment.

“Hello there, Mr. Black. What a small world.”

“Yes, it is,” I said as my dad and I stepped inside the apartment.

“You know my son?” my dad asked.

Shit.

“Yes, I do. We just closed the deal on the house in the Hamptons.” She smiled.

My dad grabbed the back of my neck. “Is that so?” he said as he looked at me.

I wiggled out of his grip and smiled at Macy, the realtor. “Let’s see this great apartment, shall we?”

She showed us around and I fell in love with it. I could see myself making this my home. A home for me and Amelia someday.

“What do you think, son?” my dad asked.

“I love it, Dad. Plus, you and mom are right upstairs, so if you ever need me, I can be up in a flash. I love the fact that it’s so close to family. Julia and Jake are right across the hall. I need to be close to my family.” I tried to sugarcoat it so he wouldn’t yell at me about the beach house once we were alone.

My dad looked at me and rolled his eyes. “We’ll take it. I can write you a check right now so my son can have the keys. I’m sure he’s dying to move in.”

“Brilliant. Let me run downstairs and grab the paperwork from my car and we can settle this today.”

As soon as she walked out of the apartment, my dad walked up and smacked me on the back of the head.

“What the hell did you do?”

“Ouch, Dad. Stop with the hands. Okay, I bought Amelia’s parents’ house in the Hamptons.”

“What did I tell you when you asked me to buy it?”

“I know. But please listen to me. That house means everything to her and she was sad when it sold, but she needed the money so bad. I want to make it our home someday. Like you did for Mom.”

My dad sighed and walked over to the window. “She’s the one for you. Isn’t she?”

“Yes, Dad, she is. She’s my entire world now. I thought I was in love with Hailey when we were together, but I wasn’t. Yeah, I loved her; don’t get me wrong. But I didn’t know what actual love was until I met Amelia. I feel things for her that I never felt for Hailey. I have new emotions, new feelings; things I can’t explain. I want to protect her and shield her from all the bad in the world. I want to help her get better and I want to spend my life with her. Dad, I can actually envision a future with her and kids. I know it seems weird to you and you’re thinking it’s too soon, but she’s the love of my life and I’ll do anything to make her happy. And if buying the house where she had one last good memory of her family before they were torn away from her makes her happy, then damn right I’m going to do it.”

The realtor walked back into the apartment with all the necessary paperwork and my dad signed it and wrote a check. She handed over the keys to me and smiled all the way out the door.

“It’s not weird,” my dad said.

“What?” I asked in confusion.

“I don’t think what you said or think is weird because I would have done the same thing for your mom. I’ve dedicated my entire life to making her happy, whatever the cost may be. I know that feeling and I get it, son. I’m proud of you. You bought your first property.” He smiled as he put his arm around me. “Now we can work on the payment plan for this place.”

“What? I thought you were buying this for me, like you did for Julia.”

“But the difference is Julia didn’t already buy a house.” He smiled.

“Dad, come on.”

He chuckled as he hooked his arm around my neck and we took the elevator up to the penthouse.

Chapter 26

“Ellery, where are you?” my dad yelled through the penthouse.

“I’m right here, Connor,” she said as she came down the stairs.

“Ask your son what he did.”

“You mean besides closing a huge deal for Black Enterprises?” She smiled as she walked over and kissed my cheek. “Congratulations, sweetheart.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“Yes, Ellery, besides that.”

“What did you do, Collin?”

I took in a deep breath before I answered her. “I bought Amelia’s parents’ beach house in the Hamptons.”

“Oh. Is that what you wanted me to know so badly, Connor?”

“Dad was mad,” I said.

“That house meant a lot to Amelia. We talked about it not too long ago when I asked her how things were going. She told me that she was really sad that she had to sell it because she wanted it to be a place where she could go and feel close to her family every summer. You are so much like your father, Collin. I see more and more of him in you every day.” She smiled as she brought her hand up to my face. “Good for you! Are you going to tell her?”

“No, not yet. I want to wait until I see how things go with us. Plus, I don’t want her to be mad at me for doing it.”

“She’ll think you are the most incredible and giving person on the face of this earth.” She smiled.

“Thanks again, Mom. Excuse me. I need to get something to drink,” I said as I walked to the kitchen. I heard my mom raise her voice at my dad and I stood out of sight and listened to their conversation.

“As for you, Mister. How the hell could you be mad at your son for doing exactly what you would have done? You should be very proud of him, Connor. You are an amazing father and you taught your son well.”

“I am proud of him, Elle. He’s an incredible man. I just wish—”

“You wish he would have asked your opinion first, right? You weren’t mad at him for buying that house. You were hurt because your son made a responsible adult purchase on his own. Connor, you’re scared that Collin doesn’t need you any more, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, something like that,” he said.

I hadn’t stopped to think about my dad’s feelings. He was afraid of letting me go like he was with Julia. Damn, I wished I would have talked to him about it first. I didn’t realize he would feel not needed. As soon as they were finished talking, I walked out to the foyer.

“Hey, Dad. I’m sorry about not talking to you before buying the house. I know that I probably should have consulted you first, but I really wanted to do something on my own. I’m sorry.”

“Come here, son,” he said as he hugged me. “Don’t be sorry. You’re an adult and you can do whatever you want. Just know that I’m always here for you, no matter what, and I always will be.”

“Thanks, Dad.” I smiled.

“Now go on and get out of here. Your mom and I have some things to do.” He winked.

I shook my head and rolled my eyes. “Have fun.”

“Oh, I fully intend to,” he said as he walked up the stairs.

I made Amelia close her eyes as I put the key in the lock. I opened the door and took her hand and led her inside.

“Okay, you can open your eyes.”

“Oh my God! This is amazing,” she said as she looked around the apartment.

“I’m happy you like it.” I smiled.

She walked through the living room and into the kitchen. I thought she was going to have a heart attack when she saw the dining area and the five large windows that made up one wall.

“Oh, the romantic dinners we can have here.” She smiled.

I walked over to her and wrapped my arms around her waist. “You’re going to be spending a lot of time here.”

“I hope so,” she said as she leaned her head back and I kissed her lips.

“Look around. What do you see?” I asked.

She escaped from my arms and walked through the apartment, looking up and down and all around. “Hmm...I see nothing but a lot of wall space.”

I smiled. “That’s right. Do you know what that means?” I asked as I unbuttoned my pants.

She turned around and looked at me as she bit down on her bottom lip with a wide smile across her face. “Lots and lots of wall sex!” she said as she lifted off her shirt.

“That’s right. Lots of wall sex, and I think we should start now.” I smiled as I threw my shirt on the floor and took down my pants.

She stood in the middle of the empty room, stepping out of her jeans while unhooking her bra and slowly inching backwards until she was up against the wall.

“Fuck,” I said as I walked towards her.

I was already as hard as a rock and I hadn’t even touched her yet. I took down my underwear as soon as I reached her. I stepped out of them and kicked them to the side as I firmly planted my hands against the wall on each side of her head. I teased her with my lips, kissing her slowly and softly. She wasted no time stroking me up and down slowly, driving me insane. My hand traveled down to her wet pussy and I cupped it before slipping my fingers inside.

“Ah, baby, you’re so wet already.”

“Mhmm. Only for you,” she whispered.

“I need to taste you first,” I moaned as I knelt down and planted my mouth against her, tasting her pleasure.

She grabbed my hair and began thrusting her hips back and forth. “Oh God, I’m going to come already!” she yelled.

“Do it, baby. I want to hear you and I want to feel you,” I said as my tongue flicked in and out of her rapidly.

Her body tightened and swelled against my mouth, releasing the orgasm that I brought her to. “Oh God. Oh God,” she kept yelling.

“Are you ready, baby?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said with bated breath.

I placed my cock inside her and pushed into her with force. She wrapped her legs around me, which caused me to go deeper inside her.

“AH!” I moaned from the pleasure I felt.

I held her up by her perfect ass and pounded in and out of her. Her tits were shaking all over the place as she begged me to suck them. I slowed down and took her in my mouth, biting and licking her hard nipples like she commanded.

“Faster, Collin. Faster. I’m going to come again!” she yelled.

I held her up with one hand this time as I pressed my other hand against the wall. I thrust in and out of her as fast as I could, building up for my release. Her moans grew with each thrust and, just as her legs tightened around me, I could feel her come pouring onto me as I released myself deep inside her. Our hearts were racing and we were both out of breath. Once I pushed every last milky drop inside of her, I buried my face into her neck. She brought up her hand to my head and softly stroked my hair.

“I love you, Collin.”

“I love you too, Amelia. More than you’ll ever know.” I lifted my head and softly kissed her on the lips. “Let’s go furniture shopping, shall we?” I smiled.

“I would love to.” She smiled back.

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We were at the furniture store when my phone rang. I pulled it out of my pocket. It was Hailey calling. I sighed as Amelia looked at me.

“Why is she calling you?”

“Probably because I blew her off today.”

“What? What the hell are you talking about?”

“She sent me a text this morning and asked me if we could talk because she told her parents about the baby and they were really upset.”

“So she has to talk to you about it?” Amelia asked with a little bit of an attitude.

“Baby, listen. Don’t you worry about Hailey. You know I love you. I’m just trying to be nice, I guess. Which I’m not sure if I should be.

“She’s going to get the wrong impression, Collin.”

“Well, if she does, I’ll set her straight. No big deal. Now come on; help me pick out a bed.” I winked.

I bought all the furniture I needed. It was fun shopping with Amelia. She and I had the same taste in furniture. We picked up Thai food on the way back to my apartment and we set a blanket on the floor as we ate with chopsticks out of the carton, talking and laughing about life.

“Go ahead and call Hailey back. Meet with her tomorrow and let her talk. I’m okay with it,” Amelia said.

“Are you sure? Because I don’t have to if it’s going to upset you.”

“It won’t upset me. Just do it.”

I grabbed my phone and dialed Hailey’s number. She answered on the second ring and we arranged to meet at Starbucks tomorrow morning around ten. I looked at Amelia and smiled. “Can you stay here for a second? I have to run across the hall.”

“Sure.” She giggled.

I got up and stepped across the hall to Julia’s apartment. I softly knocked and Jake answered the door.

“Hey, neighbor. What’s up?”

“Do you have a couple extra blankets I can borrow for a couple nights? I don’t want to go upstairs and be interrogated by the parents.”

“HAHA!” Jake laughed. “Sure, we have extra blankets. Come on in.”

Julia came walking from the bedroom and smiled when she saw me. Oh my God, did she look huge in her nightgown. But I didn’t dare say anything.

“What are you doing here, handsome?” she asked as she kissed my cheek.

“Your little brother is spending the night at his new pad and he asked to borrow a couple of blankets. I’m thinking he may be having a sleepover.” Jake smiled.

“Oh, really? Is that true?” Julia asked.

“Yes. Amelia is spending the night,” I said as I took the blankets from Jake.

“Have fun!” Julia said as I opened the door.

I turned around and smiled at her. “To quote Dad, I fully intend to.”

Julia covered her ears. “Stop that! And you better wash those blankets before you give them back!”

I laughed as I shut the door, walked over to my place, laid down the blankets in the bedroom, and made sweet love to my girl again.

Chapter 27

I looked at my watch. It was ten fifteen. I sat there with my cup of coffee and looked out the window to see if I could see Hailey walking down the street. I pulled out my phone and sent her a text message.

“Hey, where are you? I have to get back to work.”

I sat and waited for another ten minutes and there was no Hailey and no reply text message. I sighed as I got up from the table and my phone began to ring. I thought it was strange that Amelia was calling me during her clinicals.

“Hey, baby. Is something wrong?”

“Collin, I’m doing clinicals in the Labor and Delivery unit and Hailey is here. I saw her, and her mom asked me to call you.”

“Is she okay?”

“She lost the baby. I really think you should come to the hospital.”

“Thanks, baby. I’m on my way. I love you.”

“I love you too. See you soon.”

Oh, man. I couldn’t believe she lost the baby. I drove to the hospital and went up to the Labor and Delivery unit. The nurse at the desk told me which room Hailey was in and, when I went there, Peyton and Henry were in the room with her.

“Hi, Collin. You’re so sweet for coming,” Peyton said as she hugged me.

“Hi, Collin. Thanks, man,” Henry said as he walked over and shook my hand.

They both left the room and I walked over to the side of Hailey’s bed and sat down in the chair. She wouldn’t look at me. She just stared at the blank wall.

“Hey, Hailey.”

“Hey,” she whispered as she wiped a tear that fell from her eye.

“I’m sorry about the baby.”

“I’m not. Why are you here?” she asked as she turned and looked at me.

“Your mom asked me to come.”

“That’s just fucking great. I’m asking you to leave.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want you here. You’re the last person I want to see.”

“Really, Hailey? Because yesterday, you wanted to talk,” I said.

“That was then, this is now, and now I don’t want to see you. I needed you when I came back and you turned your back on me.”

I was getting angrier by the minute. I couldn’t yell at her because she had just lost the baby and she was emotional. I got up from the chair and placed my hand on hers.

“I hope you feel better, Hailey.” I walked out of the room and saw Amelia down the hall. I walked over to her and grabbed her hand.

“I know you’re busy, so I’ll see you later. Okay?”

“Okay. Are you all right?” she asked.

“I’m perfectly fine, baby,” I said as I kissed her forehead and went to the office.

A couple of weeks had passed and Amelia and I spent them going out with friends and organizing all the things my mom bought me for my apartment. I sent Ralph to pick up Amelia from the hospital because I was making dinner for her. I heard the door open and, instantly, I smiled. I wiped my hands on the kitchen towel and walked to the foyer.

“Hi, baby,” I said as I kissed her. “Did you have a nice ride home with Ralphie?”

She smiled and then let out a giggle. “Be nice. It smells wonderful in here.”

“Thank you. How was your day?” I asked.

“It was good. How was yours?”

“It’s better now that you’re here.” I smiled as I gripped her hips and kissed her.

There was a knock at the door and Amelia looked at me. “Are you expecting someone?”

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“No,” I said as I walked over to the door and opened it. To my surprise, Hailey was standing on the other side.

“Hey, do you have a minute to talk?”

“Actually, I don’t. I’m in the middle of—”

“It’s okay, sweetheart. You two talk. I’ll go over and see Julia. Hi, Hailey,” Amelia said as she walked across the hall.

I shut the door and sighed. “What do you want, Hailey?”

“I want to apologize for what I said at the hospital. It was rude and I was out of line.”

I stood there, nodding my head. “Okay. Apology accepted. Now if you’ll excuse me,” I said as I walked towards the kitchen.

“I still love you, Collin, and I want you to give us another chance!” she shouted.

I stopped dead in my tracks. “What? I have a girlfriend.”

“So what. Break up with her. I know you still love me.”

I couldn’t believe I was standing there, listening to what she was saying. She didn’t have a clue what she did to me. I turned around and glared at her.

“I hate to break the news to you, Hailey, but I don’t love you. To be honest, I never

really did.”

“How the fuck can you say that after six years of being in a relationship?”

“I was young. Neither one of us knew what love really was, and I’m pretty sure you still don’t.”

“Oh, and you do?” she asked.

“Yeah, I do know because the girl I’m madly in love with is across the hall right now. Hailey, if you truly loved me, you wouldn’t have done what you did. You couldn’t have so easily walked away. But you did and you broke my heart. You told me numerous times that we weren’t meant to be and that I needed to move on. So I did. Now you come back to New York and you think we can pick up where we left off? Did you honestly think that I would be waiting for you after what you did?”

“I’m sorry. I made a mistake. Please forgive me,” she cried.

By this time, the tears were flowing from her uncontrollably and I felt bad. But there was nothing I could do for her.

“The only mistake you made was thinking that you could have me back. You’ll find someone, Hailey.”

“I already have found someone, Collin. You. I want you back in my life. I want to hold you and kiss you and make love to you,” she cried.

“I’m sorry.”

She walked up to me and smashed her mouth against mine. I pushed her away and looked at her tear-filled eyes.

“Now tell me that you didn’t feel something,” she said.

I stood there as I was about to break her heart one last time. “No, Hailey. I felt nothing. It’s been over between us for a long time. Now, please leave so I can finish cooking dinner.”

She ran to the door of my apartment and flung it open before running down the hallway, crying her eyes out. I stood there with my head down, feeling bad for hurting her, even though I shouldn’t have felt that way. Amelia walked into the apartment and wrapped her arms around me.

“She’ll be okay, Collin.”

“I know she will be,” I said as I kissed her head. “Come on; let’s eat.”

A couple of days later, we got word from the nurse my dad had hired that Denny had passed away from a massive heart attack. I’ve never seen my dad take anything so hard in his life. When he received the call, I was there in his office, and watched as a tear fell from his eye. My mom wasn’t handling it very well either and, as much as Julia and I loved Denny, we felt like we needed to be strong for our parents. We all suffered a huge loss, but it was my parents that were hit the hardest. We were all meeting at the penthouse because Denny’s lawyer, which was also my father’s, was coming over to read a few things that Denny had left. He was instructed to read the letters one day after his death.

Before heading up to the penthouse, I showered. As I stepped out, I wrapped a towel around my waist and sat at the end of the bed. Amelia was in the room, changing her clothes.

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” she asked.

I finally broke down and let go. I kept my head lowered as I shook it back and forth and the tears started to pour from my eyes.

“Collin,” she said as she sat down next to me and hugged me. “I’m so sorry you have to go through this.”

I wrapped my arm around hers and gripped it tightly as I buried my head into her shoulder and cried. She gently rubbed my back and told me that everything was going to be all right. I was thankful that she was there because I needed her more now than ever. Once I composed myself, I got dressed and we headed up to the penthouse. Julia and Jake were walking out of their apartment when we were and Julia’s eyes were red and swollen. I kissed her and put my arm around her.

When we stepped off the elevator, we gathered in the dining room and sat down at the table.

“Thank you all for being here tonight and I’m so sorry for your loss. The letter that I have in my hand is from Denny, which he wrote approximately a month ago. Are you ready for me to read it?

“Go ahead,” my dad said as he looked down.

The lawyer cleared his throat and unfolded the white piece of paper. His glasses sat far down on the bridge of his nose as he looked at the paper and began to read from it.

“Hello family. If you’re sitting around the dining room table listening to this, then that means one thing: I’ve finally kicked the bucket. Connor, make sure your scotch is a double as you’re listening to me because you always needed a double during my lectures. Now, I want you all to listen very carefully to what I’m about to say. This is my funeral and I’m the host. I want you all to dry the tears because there will be no crying at my funeral. So, I’m going to give you all a moment to compose yourselves

so we can get on with this.”

We all just sat there and looked at each other. The lawyer told us to take five minutes to talk and to get anything we needed before moving on. My dad got up, walked into the living room, and straight over to the bar. I followed behind him.

“Your mom wants a glass of red wine. Could you please get her a glass and I’ll pour you a scotch.”

“Sure, Dad. Make it a double,” I said with a small smile.

I walked to the kitchen and poured a glass of wine for my mom and Amelia. I grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge for Julia and walked back to the dining room.

“Here you go, Mom,” I said as I set down the glass in front of her.

“Thank you, sweetheart,” she replied.

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I sat down and handed Amelia her wine and Julia her water. The lawyer entered the room and took his seat, where he continued to read from the white paper.

“Now that everyone has gotten what they needed, we can move on. Connor, I’m assuming you’re cussing me out about now and went and got your double scotch. But anyway, here are my wishes. Once you have my body cremated, I want you to spread my ashes across the Pacific Ocean. Thank you, Connor and Ellery, for taking care of me all these years. Words can never express how much I love you both. Julia and Collin, watching you grow up was the best part of my life and watching Connor struggle trying to be the perfect father was the highlight. Connor, you did well and I hope that I had a hand in helping you make the right decisions in your life. Jake, you and Julia are going to make wonderful parents and any child of yours is going to be blessed and incredibly lucky. Ellery, you were always a daughter to me and we’ve been through a lot together over the years. In fact, you and Connor exhausted me more times than I want to remember with all of your stubbornness. But it was a part of my life that I would never change. If he gets out of line, slap him around a few times and tell him it’s from me.”

We all let out a soft laugh and my dad smiled.

“Collin, a true chip off the old block. You are definitely your father’s son and I couldn’t be more proud of you, just like I was of him. Watching you grow into a man has been a great journey for me and I’m proud to have considered you my grandson. Julia, you’re a beautiful young woman and I wish I could have stayed around to see that baby boy of yours, but the gods have called me home. You’re just like your mom and watching you grow up and defy your dad the way you did was priceless. I am proud to have considered you my granddaughter. Connor, I have a separate letter for

you to read alone because I don't need you getting all sappy on me. You can call me a fool, but these are my wishes. Black Family, you have given me more out of life than I can ever thank you for. I love you all very much, so don't go getting used to the idea that I'm gone. I'll always be around, watching over all of you. Did you hear that, Connor? You aren't getting rid of me just yet. Now go get another drink, eat, and celebrate, Black Family. Peace to you all. Love, Denny."

The lawyer reached in his briefcase and handed my dad a sealed envelope. My dad took it and put it in his suit pocket. We all got up from the table and hugged one another. I watched as my mom hugged my dad tightly. I put my arm around Amelia as we walked into the kitchen and Julia and I started to set out the food. My mom and dad walked in and hugged us one last time before we sat down to eat and talk about life with Denny.

Chapter 28

A week later, as I was sitting in my office, Julia walked in and handed me a file to sign off on. She sat down and she looked really uncomfortable.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"Yeah. I'm okay. I'm just ready to get this child out of me."

"I bet." I laughed.

I looked over the papers and signed them. As I handed the folder to Julia, she stood up and then doubled over, holding her stomach. I jumped up from my chair and ran over to her.

"Julia, what's wrong?" I asked as I lightly took hold of her arm.

“Oh, just a cramp. I’m okay.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I think so,” she said as she stood up.

I let go of her arm and, as she began to walk out of my office, she doubled over again.

“Collin, I think I’m in labor,” she said as she sat down on the floor of my office.

“What?! You can’t be. You’re not due for another month.”

“Tell that to your nephew.”

I started to panic. This couldn’t be happening right now. “I’ll call Jake.”

“He’s across town in a meeting.”

“Shit, Julia. I’ll call Dad.”

I picked up my phone from the desk and dialed my dad. No answer. I called my mom. No answer. Julia let out another yell and I ran over to her.

“No one is answering. What do I do?”

“Take me to the hospital!” she yelled. “Don’t panic. Because if you do, then I will.”

“Right. Okay, let’s go. I’ll get you there,” I said as I helped her up.

I held on to her as we waited for the elevator. She had another contraction and everyone gathered around to see what was going on because she wasn’t exactly quiet

about it.

“Everyone get back to work. I’m taking Julia to the hospital. She’s in labor.”

The elevator doors opened and we stepped inside. Once we got to the parking garage, I helped her into the Range Rover. I got in and, as I was pulling out, my dad called.

“Dad!”

“Son, what’s wrong?”

“Julia is in labor. We’re on our way to the hospital. You need to get a hold of Jake. Julia said he’s in a meeting across town.”

“Oh God. Okay. Your mom and I will get Jake and we’ll meet you there. You tell Julia not to have that baby until we get there.”

“Dad said not to have the baby until they get there,” I said as I looked at her.

“Oh, okay. I’ll try my best!” she said with irritation.

Amelia wasn’t doing clinicals today and I knew she was in class, but I sent her a text anyway as soon as I stopped at a red light.

“On my way to the hospital with Julia. She’s in labor.”

“Oh my God! I’ll meet you there as soon as my class ends. How exciting!”

“OH GOD IT HURTS!” Julia screamed.

I reached over and grabbed her hand. “It’ll be okay, Julia.”

“NO IT WON’T BE OKAY!” she yelled at me.

I drove as fast as I could in New York midday traffic. To be honest, I was surprised we didn’t get into an accident. I was swerving in and out of traffic and running basically every red light. Julia was in a lot of pain and my main focus was getting her to the hospital before her water broke in my Range Rover. My phone rang and it was Jake.

“Jake!” I answered.

“Collin, Julia isn’t answering her phone.”

“I think she left it at the office. Here; talk to her.”

Julia seemed to calm down a little when she heard Jake’s voice. Then, suddenly she screamed.

“YOU BETTER GET YOUR ASS TO THE HOSPITAL IN TIME, JAKE JENSEN!”

She threw the phone at me and I picked it up from my lap. “Dude, she’s in a lot of pain. She really doesn’t mean to be mean.”

“YES I DO!” she yelled.

We finally arrived at the hospital and I grabbed a wheelchair and helped her into it. I wheeled her into the Emergency Room and the nurse immediately took us up to the Labor and Delivery Unit. She handed me paperwork to fill out and called me Mr. Jensen.

“Oh, I’m not her husband. I’m her brother. Her husband, Jake, is on his way.”

The nurse apologized and made me leave the room while Julia changed into the hospital gown. As soon as it was safe, I walked back in and walked over to Julia. I grabbed her hand, kissed it, and sat down in the chair next to her.

“It’s too early, Collin. I’m scared. What if something’s wrong with him?”

“Nah, nothing’s wrong with him. He’s just an impatient little guy and he wants to come out and see the world.” I smiled.

The nurse hooked Julia up to the fetal monitor and said that everything sounded great. She had a few more contractions that nearly broke my hand. The doctor came in and I left the room so he could examine her. When I walked back in, Julia had a big smile on her face.

“I can have an epidural. The doctor is ordering it now.”

“That’s great, Julia. You’ll be pain free soon,” I said as I dialed my dad. He didn’t answer.

A few moments later, the anesthesiologist walked in with the epidural for Julia. Another contraction had come and, as I was holding her and helping her through it, she dug her nails so far into my arm that I started to bleed. I just bit down on my lip and didn't make a sound. Once her contraction was over, the anesthesiologist gave her the epidural. I had to look away because the needle was making me sick. God, it was a good thing she didn't see that. She lay back down and began to be comfortable. After the anesthesiologist left the room, my mom, dad, and Jake came busting through the door. All three of them ran to her side. Jake wouldn't stop kissing her and my mom instantly ran to the bathroom and wet a washcloth for her. My dad looked at me and smiled. He walked over put his arm around me and led me out into the hallway.

"Thank you, son, for taking care of your sister."

"Of course, Dad. She's lucky I was there."

He looked at my arm and saw the nail marks and the tiny bit of blood that emerged from them.

"Are you okay? It looks like she got you pretty good."

"I'm fine." I smiled. "She just scared me a bit. God, all that yelling and shit. It was like she was possessed."

"Yep. I remember your mother in labor with both of you. Trying times, son. Trying times."

We walked back into the room and my mom hugged me. "Thank God you were there."

"Thanks a million, bro. I owe you big time," Jake said as he hugged me.

I pulled him over to the side and showed him my arm. “Yeah, you do.” I smiled.

“Ouch. Sorry, man.”

I kissed Julia on the head and told her I was going to see if Amelia was here yet. She smiled at me, and before I walked out the door, she called my name.

“Hey, Collin.”

I stopped and turned around. “Yeah.”

“I love you.” She smiled.

“I love you too, sis.”

I met Amelia in the lobby and we stopped at the coffee bar before heading back up to see Julia.

“What happened to your arm?” she asked.

“Julia.” I laughed.

I sent a text message to my dad, asking if he, my mom, or Jake wanted anything. He texted me back saying that he and my mom were on their way down. I bought Amelia and me some coffee and we sat down, waiting for my parents.

“I can’t believe I’m going to be an uncle soon.”

“I know. I didn’t think she’d go into labor this soon.”

“The doctor said that the baby is fine and seems to be ready to make his appearance

into the world.” I smiled. “Do you want kids?” I asked out of the clear blue.

She laid her head on my shoulder. “Yeah. I love kids.”

“How many do you want?”

“Why?” she asked as she lifted her head and looked at me. “Are you worried that I’m going to say five or six.”

“No. But you really don’t want that many, do you?” I asked with nervousness.

She laughed as my parents walked up to us and she never did answer my question. As much as I loved and wanted children, I thought two was perfect.

“I can’t believe I’m going to be a grandma!” my mom said with excitement as she hugged Amelia.

“Do I dare ask what you were doing in the middle of the afternoon and why you weren’t at the office?” I said to my dad.

He looked at me and smiled. “Do you really want to know the answer to that?”

I rolled my eyes because I already knew. I looked at him and my mom and shook my head.

“What?” she asked. “Your father came home because he left some papers on his desk that he needed.”

“Okay. No details, please. I already got my answer.”

All of our phones beeped at the same time and, when we looked at them, there was a

text message from Jake.

“IT’S TIME!”

My mom and dad jumped up from their chairs and ran to the elevators. I took Amelia’s hand and we waited in the waiting room while my mom and dad stayed with Julia. She told them that she wanted both of them in the room to witness the birth of their first grandchild.

“You never answered my question,” I said as I kissed Amelia’s hand.

“What question?” She smiled.

“The one about how many kids you want.”

“So now you’re nervous?” She laughed.

“No, not at all,” I lied.

“Relax, Mr. Black. I think two children are perfect. But if a third happened unexpectedly, that would be okay too.”

I smiled as I leaned over and kissed her cheek. She was on the same page as I was regarding kids and I couldn’t be happier.

“I hope I’ve made you happy with my answer.” She smiled as she gently squeezed my hand. “I love you.”

“You have and I love you just as much.”

We waited patiently and, after about an hour, my dad came out of Julia’s room with

the biggest smile on his face that I'd ever seen.

“He has arrived.”

I stood up and hugged my dad. He was so happy. We followed him into the room and I stopped in the doorway and stared at my big sister holding her brand new baby. I couldn't help the tears that filled my eyes as she looked at me.

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“Come on in and meet your nephew, Brayden Connor Jensen.”

I looked at my dad and he had tears in his eyes. I walked over to Julia and she handed me the baby. I was a nervous wreck to hold him because he was small. For as big as Julia was, I expected him to be bigger. But I didn’t dare say anything.

“Brayden, I want you to meet your Uncle Collin. He’s going to be the best uncle in the world and spoil you rotten.”

“That’s right, little dude. You are so loved already,” I said as I rubbed his tiny hand.

Julia reached her hand over and touched my arm. “Thank you for taking care of me until Jake got here. I’m sorry about your arm.”

“Don’t sweat it, sis, and you’re welcome.” I winked.

Chapter 29

I opened my eyes and took in the scent of roses that I loved so much on Amelia. She was wrapped up in my arms and snuggled tightly against my chest. I felt weighted down by the fact that I never told her about the beach house. Now that winter was settling in, the house was closed up until I decided to open it up next summer. She stirred in my arms and let out a big yawn as she opened her beautiful blue eyes.

“Good morning, baby.” I smiled as I kissed her head.

“Good morning.”

“You still look tired.”

“Well, considering we had three rigorous workouts last night, I’d say I am.” She smiled.

“Ah, what amazing workouts those were too.”

She kissed my chest and got out of bed. She looked sexy as hell in her silk black nightie that I bought for her.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to make us some coffee. Stay right there and don’t move.” She pointed.

“Yes, ma’am!” I saluted.

I smiled as I put my hands behind my head and thought about last night. My phone rang; my dad was calling.

“Morning, Dad.”

“Good morning, son. I wanted to let you know that Diana called in today because Jacob is in the hospital. Why don’t you take the morning off and go visit him?”

“Thanks, Dad. I will.”

“I’ll see you this afternoon.” Click.

Amelia walked back in the room and handed me a cup of coffee. “Did I hear you talking to someone?”

“Yeah. That was my dad. Jacob is back in the hospital.”

“Oh no. That’s terrible.”

“When I drop you off at the hospital, I’m going to stay and visit.”

“Good idea, sweetie,” she said as she leaned over and kissed me. “Jacob will be thrilled to see you.”

We both took a shower and got ready to leave. I pulled into the parking lot, parked the Range Rover, and walked with Amelia into the hospital.

“Bye, baby. Have a good day,” I said as I kissed her.

“Bye, sweetheart. Let me know how Jacob’s doing.”

“I will.”

She went right and I went left. I took the elevator up to the pediatric floor and one of the nurses showed me to Jacob’s room. When I walked in, he was lying in the bed, hooked up to a breathing mask, and Diana was sitting next to him.

“Hey, bro.” I smiled from the doorway.

“Hi, Collin. What are you doing here?” Diana asked.

“My dad called me and told me that Jacob was here and I wanted to check in and make sure he’s doing okay,” I said as I walked over to him and placed my hand on his arm.

He gave me a thumbs up.

“That is very sweet of you and I know Jacob is thrilled you’re here.”

He gave another thumbs up. He couldn’t talk because he was in the middle of getting a treatment. I felt bad for him and it really hurt me to see him lying there like that. It was something he’d dealt with his whole life, but it was new to me and I didn’t know if I’d ever get used to it.

“Hey, buddy. As soon as you get out of here, I’m going to come over and spend the day with you. We can do whatever you want.”

I told Diana to go and take a break and get some breakfast. She’d been by his side the entire night and I could see that she was exhausted. She took me up on my offer, knowing that I’d be there with Jacob. Sitting on the table next to his bed was the book *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. I picked it up and looked at it.

“Was your mom reading this to you?” I asked.

He nodded his head. I opened to the page that was saved with a bookmark and looked it over.

“Would you like me to read it to you?”

He nodded again. I smiled and began reading where Diana had left off.

I’d spent half the day with Jacob. It was time for me to get to the office because I had a meeting to attend. I kissed Diana on the cheek as she said goodbye to me, and I ran my hand through Jacob’s hair.

“You better call me when you get out of here. Got it?” I pointed at him.

He nodded.

As I stepped into the board room, my dad was already sitting down, going over the notes for the meeting.

“How’s Jacob doing?” he asked as he looked up at me.

“I don’t know, Dad. It was terrible seeing him like that. We need to talk after the meeting.”

“Okay, son.”

Once the meeting was over, I followed my dad into his office. I walked over to the refrigerator and grabbed a bottle of water.

“Sit down. What did you want to talk about?” he asked.

“I think you should rent the house in California to Diana.”

“What?” he asked with surprise.

“I’ve been thinking about this ever since I took Jacob surfing at the beach house. He was so much better there. You even mentioned it to me, remember?”

“Yes. I remember.”

“They have water-related programs for children with cystic fibrosis and I think the quality of life would be so much better for both him and Diana.”

He looked at me and cocked his head. “Collin, you want me to move my secretary?”

“Yeah. I know she’s good here, but she can be just as good in California. I know Reese just quit the art gallery to stay home and raise her baby. You can give that job

to Diana. She's a smart woman and I know she can do it. It's close to the house and Jacob can meet other kids in the programs there that are like him. I just think California would be a better place for them."

"Son, I know you want to help them, but you just can't tell someone they have to move across the country."

"Why? Jacob is everything to her and she'd do whatever she could to make him better. Plus, Mason is close by since they moved back there and he could kind of act as a big brother to him. I'm sure he'd love that."

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“I don’t know, Collin. That’s a huge move.”

“We can help them, Dad. I wouldn’t be suggesting this if I didn’t feel it was right. Also, I want our company to start hosting charity events for cystic fibrosis. After all these years, you never branched out from the autism charities.”

He leaned back in his chair with his hands behind his head. “Now that is a great idea. I’ll have Barb get started on that.”

“Thanks, Dad.” I smiled.

“I’ll give some serious thought to your proposal and get back with you in a couple of days.”

“Okay,” I said as I got up from my chair.

“By the way, have you told Amelia yet about the house you purchased?” he asked.

“No.”

“Son.”

“I know, Dad. I will, don’t worry.”

I told him not to worry when it was constantly a worry on my mind. As I walked out of the building into the freezing cold, my phone rang.

“Hi, Mom.”

“Hi, sweetheart. I’m having family dinner tonight and I expect you and Amelia to be here. I know it’s last minute, but I just decided it. Julia, Jake, and the baby will be here. So if you have plans, cancel them, and I’ll see you around six.”

I didn’t have plans, but even if I did, I would have no choice but to cancel them because what my mom says goes.

“We’ll be there, Mom. I love you.”

“I love you too, my sweet boy.”

As I was walking down the street to Starbucks, I passed the flower shop. I stopped and decided to buy Amelia some roses. It was no special occasion. I just wanted to let her know in another way that I loved her. While I was looking at the beautiful assortment of roses, my phone buzzed with a text message from Amelia.

“Hey, babe. Clinicals ended early and I need to stop by the campus library and pick up a book. I’m going to catch a cab with Cheri and then I’ll take one to your place.”

“No, Amelia. You and Cheri stay at the hospital. I’ll send Ralph over to pick you both up and then take you where you need to go.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive. I’ll see you later. I love you.”

“Thank you, babe. I love you too.”

I immediately called Ralph and had him pick up the girls. I told the sales clerk that I

wanted two dozen red roses. As she was getting them together, I heard a voice behind me.

“Fancy seeing you in here.”

I turned around. “Hi, Hailey.”

“Buying flowers for your girlfriend?” she asked.

“Yeah. I am. Why are you here?”

“No reason. I just saw you standing here when I was walking by and thought I’d drop in and say hi.”

The clerk handed me the roses with a smile and I gave her my credit card. “Well, we’ve said hi and now it’s time to say goodbye.”

“I’m leaving for Paris in a couple of days.”

“Good for you. You always liked Paris.”

“Yeah. Maybe I’ll meet some hot French dude who will sweep me off my feet with his incredible French accent.”

“I hope you do, Hailey. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to get going. Good luck.”

I began to walk away and stopped when I heard her next words.

“Tell me one more thing. Does she make you happier than I ever did?”

“Yes. She does,” I said as I closed my eyes and lowered my head.

“Then I’m happy you’re happy. See ya around sometime, Collin,” she said as she placed her hand on my back and then walked away.

My phone started to ring and, when I pulled it from my pocket, I noticed it was my dad calling.

“Hello,” I said.

“Where are you?” he asked.

“Down the street at the flower shop.”

“Good. Do me a favor and pick up some roses for your mom and then you can drive me home since you sent Ralph on an errand.”

Oh shit. I forgot he didn’t drive to the office himself. “Okay, Dad. What color roses for Mom?”

“Be creative and get a mix of colors. I’ll meet you in the parking garage.”

I hung up and walked back up to the counter. The clerk smiled at me.

“Sorry, but I need two dozen roses in a variety of colors.”

“Sure thing, Mr. Black. This wouldn’t happen to be for your mom, would it?”

“Yes.” I smiled.

She made up a bouquet of colorful roses and handed them to me. I left the store still thinking about the question Hailey asked me and the sadness in her voice when I answered her. My phone rang. It was my dad again.

“Hello,” I answered.

“Pick up some pink roses for your sister.”

I rolled my eyes and sighed. “Okay, Dad.”

I walked back into the flower shop and the woman smiled at me again.

“I need two dozen pink roses, please.”

“Sister?” She smiled.

“Yep.”

“Your dad always bought her pink roses. I’ll be right back.”

She handed me the roses and, before I left the store, I dialed my dad.

“Hello, son.”

“Before I leave the flower shop, is there anyone else you want flowers for?”

“No. Just your mom and Julia. I’m assuming you went there to buy Amelia flowers, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Then you’re all set. Hurry up and get back here.”

“I’m on my way,” I said as I hung up.

I stepped into the apartment and Amelia came from the direction of the kitchen. The corners of her mouth curved up when she saw the roses I was holding.

“Are those for me?” She smiled.

“No. Some girl at the office gave them to me.”

The look on her face was priceless. She stood there and narrowed her eyes at me.

“What girl?”

“I don’t know. She’s new. Anyway, she told me she loved me and then gave me these. Aren’t they pretty?”

“She told you that she loved you?”

“Yeah. Isn’t that weird? I was totally flattered and she was really hot. But I guess if you want the flowers, you can have them.” I smiled.

“NO THANKS!” she said in a huff and walked away.

Okay, maybe I took that a little too far. Now I needed to make things right. “Of course these are for you, baby. I was just teasing.”

“Go away, Collin. In fact, I’m just going to stay at my place tonight.”

Oh shit. What the fuck had I done?

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“Amelia, I was teasing. Please, baby. We have dinner with my parents tonight. They’re expecting us.”

“Then you can tell your parents about the girl at the office!” she spat.

She was looking around the apartment for her shoes. “Amelia, please. These are for you. I’m sorry I teased you.”

“Nope. I don’t think you were teasing and I just really need to be alone right now, Collin.”

“Really? How are you getting back to your place?”

“A cab like every other New Yorker,” she said as she opened the door.

I walked up behind her and slammed it shut. “Please don’t do this.”

She turned around and looked at me. “Are you hurting?”

“Yes. Really bad right now.”

She smiled. “Good. That’ll teach you to fuck with me, Mr. Black.” She laughed and ducked under my arm.

“AMELIA!” I exclaimed as I started chasing her around the apartment.

She laughed as she ran through the kitchen. “You should’ve seen the look on your

face.”

“You wait until I catch you. You’re going to be punished.”

“Only if it involves you holding my wrists above my head and a wall.”

I stopped dead center in the middle of the apartment. She stopped and turned around.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yeah. Really.” She smiled.

“Now or after we get back from my parents’ house?” I asked.

She twisted her face and looked around. “Both.”

“Deal!” I said as I unbuttoned my pants.

Chapter 30

“Jesus Christ, you’re hot,” I said breathlessly as I pulled out of her.

“See what happens when you get me all wound up?” She smiled.

I let go of her wrists and gently kissed each one. “I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

“Yeah, you did. But it hurt so good, babe.” She winked.

I kissed the tip of her nose and looked at the clock that hung on the wall.

“SHIT! It’s six fifteen. My mom is going to kill me,” I said as I ran and grabbed my

pants.

I picked up Amelia's clothes off the floor and threw them at her. "Hurry up and get dressed. We were supposed to be there fifteen minutes ago. The one thing my mom hates is when people are late."

"Collin. Calm down." She laughed.

"Oh no. This is no laughing matter." I said as my phone rang. I picked it up from the table and it was my mom. "See. I told you," I said as I showed her the phone.

"Crap," Amelia said as she ran and grabbed her shoes.

We ran out the door and up the stairs to the penthouse. There was no time to wait for an elevator. I opened the door and as soon as we walked in, my mom came scurrying from the kitchen.

"Why didn't you answer when I called you?" she asked as she pointed at me and then hugged Amelia.

"We were almost here."

"You're late!"

"I know. I'm sorry."

"Go sit down. Dinner is almost ready."

We walked into the dining room and my dad smirked at me. I walked over to Julia and gave her a kiss on her cheek. I bent down and took the little hand of my nephew.

“Hey, Brayden.” I smiled.

As soon as dinner was finished, I took Brayden from Julia and walked into the living room. My dad was already sitting down with his after dinner scotch in hand.

“Your shirt is buttoned wrong. Is that the reason you were late? Amelia must have really liked those roses.” He winked.

A wide grin spread across my face. “She loved them and that is the reason I was late. I lost track of time.”

“Good for you.” He smiled as he held up his glass.

Brayden started crying and I tried to rock him back and forth. It wasn’t working.

“Dad. Help me. Why’s he crying?”

He chuckled. “Maybe he’s hungry. Here, let me take him for a moment.” He got up and took him from my arms. Holding Brayden made my dad happy. He just hadn’t been quite the same since Denny passed away. My mom and I had a conversation about it and she said that all my dad needed was time. I walked over to the fireplace where Denny’s ashes sat in an urn.

“Dad, when are you spreading his ashes?”

“I was thinking we could all go next month. Brayden will be a little over two months old and Amelia will be on semester break from school, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Then it’s set. We’ll go right after Christmas and spend a couple of weeks there. It

will give me time to arrange things.”

“What things, Dad?”

“Things for Jacob and Diana.”

“Really?”

“I gave it some more thought after you left and I think you’re right. It would be the best thing for them. But only if Diana wants to go.”

“Bring her and Jacob to California with us. That way, she can spend a couple of weeks there and get the feel for everything.”

“I already planned on it, son.”

I walked over and gave him a light hug, being extra careful not to squish Brayden. “I know I don’t say it enough, but I love you, Dad.”

“I love you too, Collin.”

“What’s going on in here?” Julia asked.

“Just having a father/son chat,” my dad replied.

Amelia and my mom walked in the room and my mom took Brayden from my dad.

“I have an announcement to make,” my dad said as everyone quieted down. “I’ve decided that we’re going to fly to California for a couple of weeks, as a family, and spread Denny’s ashes right after Christmas. That way, we can spend the holiday in New York and then spend New Year’s in California.”

“What about the company, Dad?” Julia asked.

“No worries, princess. The company will be fine without us for a couple of weeks.”

Amelia looked at me and smiled. I couldn't have been happier to take her to California with me. The only thing that worried me were the horrific memories of what had happened there.

Amelia and I walked hand in hand down the streets of New York, looking at all the Christmas lights and decorations that lit up the city. She was in an exceptionally good mood because her classes had ended and she completed her first round of clinicals. I wanted this Christmas to be special for her and one she'd never forget. She told me that she had spent the past two Christmases alone. My heart broke when I heard that because no one should spend the holidays alone. We stopped at Starbucks before meeting my family over at FAO Schwarz. Julia and Jake wanted to take Brayden to see Santa Claus and do some shopping. She wanted it to be a family affair and then my dad wanted all of us to go see the tree at Rockefeller Center.

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“This coffee tastes exceptionally good right now,” Amelia said.

“Why’s that?”

“Because I’m freezing and it feels good to have something hot.”

“I can warm you up and inject you with some hot liquids if you’d like.” I smiled.

“I’m going to take you up on that offer when we get back to your place.”

“Move in with me,” I blurted out.

“What?” She laughed.

“I’m serious, Amelia. I want you to move in with me.”

“I already practically live there,” she said.

I grabbed her hand from across the table. “It’s not the same. I want all your stuff there. Your clothes, your makeup, all your girly things. I want it all to invade my bathroom and closet space. I want you in my bed twenty-four-seven and I want to know that there isn’t any other place for you to go. I want my home to be your home, our home.”

“Oh my God, that’s so sweet,” some girl sitting at the table next to us said. Amelia looked at her and laughed. “Why don’t you ever say things like that to me?” the girl said as she reached across the table and smacked the guy she was with.

He looked over at me. “Dude, thanks a lot.”

I chuckled as I squeezed Amelia’s hand. Her beautiful blue eyes, which put me in a trance every time I looked into them, stared at me.

“Yes. I will move in with you and the only reason why is because you give amazing sex!” She winked.

The girl at the table next to us reached over and once again smacked her boyfriend.

I stood up with the biggest smile on my face and wrapped my arms around Amelia. “I love you so much, baby. Thank you.”

“I love you too.”

I hooked my arm around her and we walked out of Starbucks. All the way down to FAO Schwarz, I kept kissing her cheek and pulling her into me. We stepped inside and I saw Julia and Jake by the stuffed animals.

“Hey, sis,” I yelled.

She smiled as she held up her arm and waved us over. I bent down and gave Brayden a kiss as he lay asleep in his stroller. “He’s such a good boy,” I said to Julia and Jake.

“I’m happy you think that. I’ll be calling you tonight when he’s up screaming his head off at three in the morning.”

“Ah, no thanks.” I chuckled.

My mom and dad walked up behind us and my mom kissed my cheek and then looked at me strangely.

“You have that look.”

“What look?” I asked.

“The same look your father gets when he’s really happy about something. What’s going on?” She smiled.

I looked at my dad and he rolled his eyes. “Well, I do have some news that I’m really excited about.”

“Please tell me Amelia’s not pregnant,” my dad said with seriousness.

“NO, Dad! I’ve asked Amelia to officially move in with me and she said yes!”

I watched as my dad let out a sigh of relief. “Congratulations, son. Congratulations, Amelia.”

“That’s wonderful,” Jake and Julia said.

My mom stood there and stared at me with tears in her eyes. “Mom. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. I’m happy for the both of you. It’s just my little boy is a man now and you’ve moved out and—”

“Aw, Mom,” I said as I hugged her.

“Come on, Ellery. Let’s take our grandson to see Santa,” my dad said as he put his arm around her.

As Julia pushed the stroller and we followed behind, I saw the Big Piano. “Julia, look!”

She stopped and smiled when she saw it. “Remember when we used to play that as kids?” she said.

“Come on; let’s do it.”

“Okay!” she exclaimed.

The two of us stepped on the piano. “Do you remember what we used to play?” I asked.

“I sure do,” she said as she stepped on a note.

My mom stood in front of us and took a video with her phone. My dad stood next to her with a wide smile across his face. When we finished our song, Julia and I pulled Jake and Amelia in with us and we goofed around, playing all kinds of tunes.

“Excuse me, children, but there’s a baby here who wants to see Santa and the line is getting longer by the minute,” my mom said.

We laughed and stepped off the piano. When Julia set Brayden in Santa’s arms, he screamed and I couldn’t help but laugh. As soon as they took his picture, I called Amelia and my family up and we all had our picture taken together with Santa.

“Merry Christmas, baby.” I smiled as I rolled on top of her and kissed her lips.

“Mhmm... Merry Christmas.”

I rolled off of her and reached under the bed where I stored one of her Christmas gifts.

“I would like you to open this now.” I smiled as I handed her the small velvet box.

“Collin.”

“Just open it.”

She slowly tipped the lid up and stared at the ring that sat inside.

“It’s a promise ring. I hope you like it.”

Tears filled her eyes as she took it out of the box. “I absolutely love it.”

“Read the inscription.”

“I promise forever with you,” she read.

A tear fell down her cheek. I took the ring from her and held her left hand. “Would you wear it on your left hand?”

“Yes. There’s no other finger that I’d want to wear it on,” she cried.

I placed the ring on the finger of her left hand and brought it up to my lips as I softly kissed it. “This ring is my promise to you. A promise of a future together and a promise of me being with only you. This ring also is my promise to marry you some day because I can’t see spending my life without you. With this ring, I promise you forever and always and my forever love.”

I held on to her hand as she cried and wrapped her arm around me, pulling me down on top of her. “You have changed my entire life, Collin. I was in a really bad place and, somehow, you were the only one that brought me back from it. I promise you that I’ll never take off this ring. You have my love forever.”

I smiled as my mouth crashed into hers and we made love for the next hour. Of

course, we were late getting upstairs to celebrate Christmas with my family, but when we walked in and my mom saw Amelia wearing the ring, she smiled and kissed me.

Chapter 31

We were on the plane headed to California and Jacob was in his glory with the new X-box games I had bought him for Christmas. He and Jake played on the plane while Julia and I had a conversation.

“I’m worried about Amelia and California,” I said.

“Have you talked to her about it?”

“No, and she hasn’t mentioned it either.”

“Don’t worry about it, Collin. You’ll be there with her and for her if she starts to freak out.”

“She hasn’t been on a boat yet and I’m a little scared about how she’s going to react when we get ready to spread Denny’s ashes.”

“She’s a lot stronger now than she was when you first met her. I’ve seen an incredible change in her. Give her some credit; she’ll be just fine. And if not, you’ll know how to help her.”

I looked across the plane at my parents fussing over Brayden. “Look at them,” I said. “They are so happy to have Brayden around.”

“I know.” Julia laughed. “Mom said she’s babysitting full-time when I go back to work. I can’t wait to see Mason and Landon again.”

“I know they’re excited to us. I talked to Mason about Jacob and he said if things work out with them moving to Cali, then he’ll be more than happy to visit with him.”

Amelia walked over and sat down with us. “You should see Jake and Jacob playing that game. They’re crazy good at it.” She laughed.

I put my arm around her and kissed her head. “I love you, baby,” I said as worry consumed me the closer we got to California.

Mason and Landon had a car waiting for us at the airport. As soon as we stepped off the plane, Mason yelled, “Oh my God, give me that baby!”

Julia handed Brayden over to him and the rest of us didn’t exist. “What about me, Uncle Mason? I was your baby, remember?” I said.

“Pfft, Collin. You’re a man now. I’ll shower you and the princess when I’m done with this little prince.”

Meanwhile, Landon hugged us all and I introduced him to Amelia, Diana, and Jacob. We all got into the limo and drove to the house. The housekeeper, Louise, a short woman with short black hair, took care of the house when no one was staying there. I’d known her since I was little. We usually traveled to California three to four times a year to check on the art gallery and to visit friends. It was mostly when Julia and I were on break from school. The last time I was here was right before Hailey and I broke up.

“My babies,” Louise said as we walked up the driveway.

“Hi, Louise.” I smiled as I hugged her.

“Who’s this? This isn’t Hailey?”

“No, Louise. Hailey and I haven’t been together in almost a year. This is Amelia and she’s the love of my life.”

Louise held out her arms to Amelia. “If you make him happy, then welcome to the family.”

“Thank you.” Amelia smiled.

We went inside the house and I started to take our bags up to our room.

“Ahem,” Julia said.

“What?” I asked as I stopped on the stairs.

“Are you two sharing a room?” She smiled. “Because I do believe that when Jake and I went to Aspen with the family for Thanksgiving, Daddy wouldn’t allow us to share a room because we weren’t married.”

“Really, Julia? Because I remember that you were only eighteen years old. Wait a minute. I seem to remember Jake sneaking into your room every night after Mom and Dad went to bed. So you did share a room.” I winked.

“JULIA ROSE!” my dad said rather loudly.

“I’m going to kill you, Collin!” she yelled as she chased me up the stairs.

I heard my mom laugh. “That’s not funny, Ellery.”

Julia tried to tackle me on the bed and then I heard Brayden crying. “Your baby is crying. Shouldn’t you go and see what’s wrong?” I smiled.

“I’ll get you back, little brother. When you least expect it.” She smiled as she walked out of the room.

I sat down on the bed, trying to catch my breath, and Amelia lay down on her back next to me. “You and Julia have such an awesome relationship. It reminds me of the relationship I had with my sister. God, do I miss her.”

“I know you do, baby,” I said as I leaned over and kissed her. “Come on; let’s go downstairs and see what’s going on.” I grabbed her hand and helped her up from the bed.

She went into the kitchen with the other women and I stepped outside in the back. I looked straight ahead at the water and watched a boat go by. We were set to spread Denny’s ashes in a few days and I had an idea that would possibly help Amelia feel more comfortable on the boat. I’d put my plan in motion tomorrow. Tonight, I just wanted to spend every minute I could with my girl and my family.

“Where are we going?” Amelia asked with a smile.

“You’ll see,” I said as I drove down the road.

I feared the reaction I was going to get when we arrived at our destination. I didn’t know what she’d do. I pulled into the parking lot and she looked at me.

“Why are we here at the marina?”

“I want to show you something,” I replied.

“The only thing here is boats.”

I looked at her and, when she looked at me, I saw the fear in her eyes. Not only did I see fear, I swore I saw a touch of hate. I parked the car and, when I opened the door to get out, Amelia said, “I’m not getting out of this car.”

“Amelia, please, baby.”

“NO!” she spat as she folded her arms.

“Fine. Then you can sit in the car. But I’m going.”

I got out and shut the door behind me. I began walking towards the dock of the marina, hoping she’d change her mind. She didn’t. I sat down on one of the docks that was close to the parking lot. Maybe this was a mistake. Or maybe not. Even if it was her decision never to get on a boat again, decisions are made to be changed. I sat there for two hours and thought about Amelia and how maybe I was the one being unfair. What it came down to was that I needed to respect her choice. It was her choice not to get on a boat. I couldn’t force her to do something that she was so against. Even though taking her in the water worked the first time, this was different. I took in a deep breath and began to get up, when I heard a voice behind me.

“What did you want to show me?”

I stood up and stared at her before I took hold of her hand. “It’s over this way,” I said.

I led her to the sailboat that I had rented for the day and she stood on dock and stared at it. “You told me how much you once loved boats and how you felt at peace on the open water. I want to give that back to you, Amelia. I don’t want you to fear anything anymore.”

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She didn't say a word, but her hand tightened around mine. We stepped up onto the boat and she immediately went and sat down, gripping the side of the boat as tightly as she could. I stood there and watched as her legs began to shake.

What the fuck did I do? What was I thinking?

"I'm so sorry, baby," I said as I kneeled down in front of her and placed my hands on her knees. "I didn't mean for this to be so hard on you. Let's go. I'm taking you back to the house," I said as I held out my hand.

She shook her head. "I made the decision to come out here and I will stay. I spent the last two hours thinking, and I'm not turning back now. I can't. I have to do this. You're right. I can't live my life in fear anymore. You've taught me to enjoy life again. You've given me hope and security and love. The least I can do is try."

"Oh, babe," I said as I wrapped my arms around her and held her tight. "You're an amazing woman, but I don't want you to make yourself sick over this."

"Do you know how to sail?" she asked with a whisper.

"Me? Of course I know how to sail. I'm the master at sailing."

"Then undock this boat and let's go. You need to do it now before I change my mind."

"Okay!" I said as I kissed her on the lips and got ready to set sail.

I was having a hard time getting the boat to the appropriate speed.

“Collin, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong, baby. Just relax.”

“The wind is coming from the other side. You have to change the direction of the boat,” she said.

“I’m trying, babe. Just hold on.”

“Oh my God,” she huffed as she got up from her seat. “I thought you said you knew how to sail?”

“I do.”

“Move,” she said as I stepped out of the way and she took over.

Mission accomplished. I smiled to myself.

I stood behind her and wrapped my arms around her as she sailed the boat out into the open ocean. The light wind swept across our faces and the ocean air was as refreshing as ever.

“It’s beautiful out here,” she said.

“It sure is, baby. Are you okay?”

“Not really. But, I can do this.”

“Just remember how it used to feel before the accident.”

“I’m trying to. But it’s hard, you know?”

“I know. But you’re doing great. Tiny steps, baby. Tiny steps.”

She turned her head around and looked at me with a small smile. I leaned down and kissed her soft lips, and we continued to sail for the next couple of hours. I never once let go of her. Whether I was holding onto her waist or just holding her hand, I wanted her to feel safe.

We docked the boat and, as soon as we stepped off, Amelia grabbed me and wrapped her arms around me as tightly as she could.

“What’s wrong, baby?”

“Thank you. That’s all,” she said.

I closed my eyes as I kissed the top of her head. “I didn’t do anything. You were the one who made the choice.”

“A choice I never would have made if you didn’t give me that little push.”

I broke our embrace and kissed her lips. “I love you, and I just want you to be at peace with your life.”

“I am because of you.” She smiled.

Chapter 32

“Is everyone ready?” my dad asked.

“We are.” Julia smiled as she held Brayden.

Today was the day that we were going to spread Denny's ashes across the Pacific. I held on tightly to Amelia's hand as we stepped onto the yacht.

"Are you okay?" I asked her.

"She's fine." My dad smiled as he put his arm around her.

"I'm fine." She smiled at both me and my dad.

It was the perfect day. The sky was bright blue and the sun was shining brightly. Up on deck was a spread of cheese, crackers, an assortment of fruit, and bottles of wine and champagne.

"Okay; everyone listen up," my dad announced. "I want to thank everyone for being here today. This is exactly what Denny wanted and, even though I wasn't very pleased at first, I'm happy to do this. It has brought us all together and Denny was a huge part of this family. So I want everyone to eat, drink, and enjoy the ride. As soon as we get out far enough, we'll spread his ashes over the water, as he wished."

My mom walked over and sat down next me as I watched Amelia stand next to Jacob. The two of them leaned against the rails and looked at the ocean water.

"How did you do it?"

"Do what?" I asked.

"Get Amelia to overcome her fear of boats?"

"I took her to the marina and prayed that she'd sail with me. It took a couple of hours for her to come around, but she finally did, and I helped her through it."

“She’s a wonderful girl, and I’m so happy you found her.” She smiled.

“She found me, remember?”

“Just like I found your father. I guess your bad behaviors had their rewards. You sure are your father’s son and I couldn’t be more proud of you. He told me about the cystic fibrosis charity you want the company to start running. I think it’s a wonderful idea and what you’ve already done for Diana and Jacob is really heartwarming. You’re an amazing man, Collin, and you’re my sweet boy.” She smiled as she brought her hand up to my cheek with tears in her eyes.

“Mom, stop.”

“I can’t help it. You and Julia have made me and your father so proud.”

I put my arm around her and kissed her cheek. “That’s because we have the best mom and dad in the world.”

My dad announced that it was time to scatter the ashes and for everyone to gather around. He first made sure we all had drinks in our hands. Amelia walked over to me and put her arm around my waist. We all stood and watched as my dad took the lid off the urn and let Denny’s ashes go.

“Goodbye, my friend. May you be at peace and have an eternity filled with happiness.”

“To Denny,” I said as I held up my glass.

“To Denny,” everyone followed.

Once the ashes were scattered and my dad dried his tears, he walked up to me and

Julia and wrapped his arms around both of us. “I love you two very much.”

“We love you too, Dad,” Julia and I both said at the same time.

He patted us on our backs and smiled. “Now, I’m going to go rescue my grandson from Mason.”

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I stroked her hair as she lay in my arms, sound asleep. I watched her chest slowly move up and down with each breath. The fact that I still hadn't told her about the beach house was haunting me. I couldn't wait until the summer to tell her. I had to tell her as soon as we got back to New York. She opened her eyes and then closed them again as the corners of her mouth curved up. Her hand, which lay on my chest, moved down my torso and down the front of my underwear. She lightly took hold of my erection and opened one eye while she smiled at me.

"You're so hard." She smiled.

"I always am when I'm with you."

"Well, let's put that hard-on to good use, shall we?" she asked as she climbed out from under my arms and got on top of me.

"You're my kind of girl." I smiled as I took her breast in my mouth.

"And you're my kind of guy," she said as she slowly placed my cock inside her.

I thrust my hips as my teeth tugged on her erect nipple. She sat up, taking my entire length inside her as she let out a soft moan. Her hips moved back and forth as she rode me slowly. I threw my head back at the intense pleasure she was giving me. She was dripping wet and I could feel it running down my balls.

"Baby, you feel so good."

"So do you," she whispered as she continued to move.

I reached up and grasped her breasts with my hands and kneaded them, paying special attention to her hard nipples, which my fingers liked to play with. Her hips started to move faster and I could feel her swelling around me.

“Do it, baby. Come all over me.”

“Collin. Collin. Oh my God,” she whispered as her body tightened and she released herself, forcing me to spill inside her.

“Ah,” I moaned and I thrust my hips up and stayed buried deep inside her.

She collapsed on top of me and buried her face into my neck. “Good morning.”

“And what a good morning it is.” I smiled as I kissed her head.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. “Breakfast is ready, you two,” my dad said.

“Okay, Dad. We’ll be down in a minute.”

Amelia rolled off of me and started laughing. “What if he would have walked in and saw me lying on top of you?”

“Then we would’ve given him a show.” I winked.

“Collin, that’s not funny.”

“Yeah, it is. Did I ever tell you about the time he walked in on Julia having sex for the first time?”

“Oh my God! Are you serious?”

“Dead serious. Ask her about it some time. I thought he was going to murder her. Come on; we better get dressed and get downstairs before someone comes up here and breaks down the door.”

Louise made us an amazing breakfast, as always. I took my plate and joined my mom, dad, and Amelia outside on the patio. I looked down towards the beach and saw Jacob in the water with Mason.

“Son, I want you to join me today when I talk to Diana. We’re also going to take her to the art gallery. There’s a house down the beach for sale. It’s smaller. They don’t need this big of a house for the two of them. I have the house on hold, and if Diana decides she wants to move here, then I’ll rent it out to her.”

“Okay, Dad. Just let me know when you’re ready.”

“I spoke with her last night down on the beach and she told me how beautiful it was here and that she really liked it. So, we’ll see. I called Joel at the art gallery and told him our plan. He said he’s excited to meet Diana and he’ll help in any way he can. Your mother and I had dinner last night with Ian and Rory and they said that they’d also keep an eye on her and Jacob if she decided to move here.”

“Great. It sounds like you have everything covered.”

My mom and dad both got up from their seats. “As soon as you’re finished eating, we’ll talk with her. Amelia can spend the day with your mom and Julia. They’re going shopping.”

“Oh, I love to shop.” She smiled.

“They have the cutest little shops here. I can’t wait to show you them and you don’t have to worry about bringing any money because our shopping trip is on Connor

today. Isn't it, sweetheart?" She smiled as she ran her hand down his cheek.

"Yes, I guess it is. Feel free to buy whatever you like," my dad said.

They walked into the house and I leaned over and smiled at Amelia. "Make sure you buy a lot and if you see anything you think I'd like, buy it."

"Collin, stop that." She giggled.

"No, I'm serious, and trust me, my mom will make you buy something."

We finished our breakfast and took our plates inside. I gave Louise a kiss on the cheek and thanked her for the great meal. Amelia went upstairs to change into a sundress to go shopping in, and I decided to go down to the beach to see Jacob and Mason. When I walked down, I saw a young girl talking to Jacob. I walked over to Mason, who was standing a few feet away from them.

"Hey, Mason. Who's that?"

"I'm not sure. We were getting out of the water and she just came walking up."

"That's cute. She's a cute kid."

A few moments later, the girl left and Jacob walked over to where Mason and I were standing.

"Hey, bro. Who was that?" I asked.

"Her name is Lexi and she lives in a house way down the beach."

"Was she hitting on you?" I smiled.

“Knock it off, Collin.” He smiled back. “She has cystic fibrosis too,” he said as we started walking towards the house.

“Really? How did that come up?”

“She started coughing a little and it sounded like mine, so I told her that I cough like that sometimes, and she told me.”

I could tell that Jacob was happy because he finally met someone that was like him. As we walked in the house, the women were getting ready to leave to go shopping and my dad had arranged for Jake and Mason to spend the day with Jacob. I gave Amelia a hug and kiss goodbye.

“Remember, my dad’s buying. Shop. Shop. Shop.”

She giggled and playfully smacked me on the chest. “I’ll do my best. I love you.”

“I love you too, baby.”

“What did you want to talk about, Connor?” Diana asked as we went and sat outside.

“Collin, why don’t you start?” my dad said.

“You two have me very nervous,” Diana spoke.

I reached over and grabbed her hand. “Don’t be nervous, Diana. I just don’t know how to say this.”

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“Are you firing me?” she asked with a look of fear in her eyes.

“Oh my God, no!” I said. I cleared my throat and took in a deep breath. “I think you and Jacob need to move to California.”

She laughed. “Yeah, right. I can’t move,” she said as she looked at my dad.

“You saw how much better Jacob was at the beach house in the Hamptons and you see the difference in him since we got here to California. I think this would be the best place for him.”

“That’s nice of you to think that, Collin, and believe me, I would love to move here for Jacob, but it’s not possible.”

“What if my dad and I made it possible?”

“What? What are you talking about?” she asked in confusion.

My dad took over. “Diana, I have a house that’s just down the beach that I am renting out and I want to rent it to you. I think it would make an incredible home for you and Jacob.”

“But, Connor, what about my job?”

My dad looked away because he didn’t want to lose her as his secretary. “I have another job here for you. You’d be making a little more money and you’d still have all the same health benefits. But instead of working in an office setting, you’d be

working at my art gallery. It's only a twenty-minute drive from here."

Tears started to fill her eyes. "I...I...I can't. You've done way too much for me already and there's no way I could accept anything else."

"They have programs here, Diana. Programs that work with kids and cystic fibrosis. It's way better here than in New York. Jacob loves the water. He loves the beach; you've seen how happy it makes him, and today, he met a little girl who also has cystic fibrosis. Her name is Lexi and she lives in a house somewhere along the beach," I said.

The tears that filled her eyes began to stream down her face. My dad looked at me and shook his head. He placed his hand on her arm. "No tears, Diana. If you want to move here, we'll make it happen for you and Jacob. But the decision is completely yours. Would you like to go look at the house? Then, after, we'll take you to the art gallery."

She nodded her head and my dad handed her a tissue. "Great; let's go see the house." I smiled.

We spent the rest of the afternoon looking at the house and then at the art gallery. My dad introduced Diana to Joel and they hit it off right away. I nudged my dad and he told me to knock it off. Diana seemed to love the house and the art gallery. I was almost positive she was going to move here.

"Take some time and think about it," my dad said to her. "Talk to Jacob and see what he wants."

"Thank you so much, Connor and Collin. I don't know what I ever did to deserve the two of you in my life. You are the most incredibly giving people I've ever met."

“Aw, stop.” I smiled.

We drove back to the house and Diana told Jacob that just the two of them were going out for pizza because she had something she needed to talk to him about.

Chapter 33

We flew back to New York, back to the snow and cold. I wanted to stay longer in California, but there was business to be done and everyone had to get back to work or school. Amelia still had another week left before her classes and clinicals started up again. Diana had a long talk with Jacob and they both decided that they were going to move to California. On one hand, I was really happy because Jacob would be doing better, but on the other hand, I was sad because I was going to miss them both terribly.

“What’s wrong?” Amelia said as she sat down next to me on the couch.

“Nothing much. I was just thinking about how weird it’s going to be not to see Jacob all the time.”

“I know. But you said yourself it’s in his best interest to move to California. Plus, think of how happy he’ll be and how much better he’ll feel.”

“Come here,” I said as I pulled her on to my lap. “Have I told you today that I love you?”

“No. I don’t think you have. You better tell me.” She smiled.

“I love you, Miss Gray, and tomorrow, we’re going somewhere. Just me and you.”

“I love you, Mr. Black. Where are we going?”

“You’ll find out tomorrow, baby. Now, enough talk. Kiss me.”

She gave me her amazing smile and brushed her lips against mine. As our kiss became passionate and I practically had her shirt off, there was a knock at the door.

“Collin, it’s Julia. I tried to call you, but you didn’t answer your phone.”

I looked at Amelia and she laughed. I got up, adjusted myself, and opened the door.

“Hey, Julia. What’s up?”

“Can you watch Brayden for a while? Jake and I need to run some errands and we’d get done quicker if Brayden wasn’t with us.”

I looked at her as she held him in her arms. I knew my sister and I knew her well.

“You and Jake want to have sex with no baby in the house.”

She looked down at Brayden. “No. Why would you say something like that?”

“I know when you lie, Julia.”

“Okay, fine,” she said sternly as she walked into my apartment. “Jake and I want some time alone because every time we start to make love, our sweet son starts to scream. I can’t have an orgasm with my son screaming! I need to make love to my husband without any interruptions. Is that so much to ask?”

“Julia, TMI!” I said. I took my nephew from her arms and kissed her on the cheek. “Go and spend some time with your husband. In fact, have sex a few times and don’t worry about Brayden. Where are Mom and Dad?”

“They went out to dinner with Peyton and Henry. Thank you, Collin. I owe you.”

“No, you don’t. You know I’m always here for you.”

She set the diaper bag on the table, kissed Brayden goodbye, and headed back to her apartment. I stood in the middle of the room and looked at Amelia, who was smiling on the couch.

“What?”

“You are so sexy, holding him. I know you’re going to be an amazing dad someday.”

I walked over to the couch and sat down. “And you’re going to make an amazing mom.”

I leaned in to kiss her and Brayden started to cry. We both laughed and now I sort of saw what Julia was talking about.

“Are you going to tell me where we’re going?” Amelia asked.

“You’ll see when we get there.” I smiled as I tapped her on the nose.

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We climbed into the Range Rover and headed towards the Hamptons. Worry consumed me because I didn't know how Amelia was going to react when I told her that I was the one who bought the house. A part of me said that she'd be thrilled, while the other part said she was going to be pissed.

"Are we going to The Hamptons?" she asked.

I couldn't lie to her. "Yes," I replied.

"Why? It's the middle of winter."

"I know, but there's something there I want you to see."

We pulled onto the street of the beach house and I pulled into the driveway.

"Why are we here?"

"Follow me, baby," I said as I took her hand and unlocked the front door.

"Why do you have a key to my old house?"

"This is my house now. Our house. I'm the one who bought it."

"What? Why would you do that? Do you know how long ago that was and you've been keeping it from me?" she said in a raised voice.

"Yes, and I'm sorry. I wanted it to be the right time to tell you."

“This is the right time?”

“I don’t know. But what I do know is that I couldn’t keep it from you anymore.”

She looked at me with daggers and shook her head. “I can’t believe you. Why would you buy this?”

“Because I know how much it means to you. You said yourself that you didn’t want to sell it.”

“But I didn’t want you to buy it. Fuck, Collin. That really pisses me off! And then the fact that you kept it from me all these months.”

She was mad. I didn’t think I’d ever seen her this angry before. “Amelia, I’m sorry.”

“How could you keep something like that from me? If you could so easily hide that, then it makes me wonder what else you haven’t told me.”

“That’s not fair. I’ve never kept anything from you except this,” I said as I raised my voice.

“I want to leave right now.”

“We just got here.”

She opened the door and got in the Range Rover. I sighed and shook my head as I locked the front door and climbed in next to her. I reached over and grabbed her hand. She pulled away.

“Baby, please. I’m so sorry.”

“This wasn’t just a small purchase. This was huge and it’s just not something a boyfriend does.”

“He does if he has money,” I said.

“So you think that because you have money, you can just do whatever the hell you want? I’m so mad at you, Collin. Please, just don’t say another word to me and take me home. I just want to go home.”

I started the car and tore out of the driveway. There was complete silence the entire ride home. When we entered the apartment, Amelia went to the bedroom and took her bag from the closet.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m going to stay with Cheri for a couple of days at her apartment. I just can’t stay here right now.”

“Amelia, please. Don’t do this. I didn’t do anything wrong. For fuck’s sake, I did this for you!” I screamed.

“I need to think. I need time alone. God, Collin. I can’t believe you did that,” she said as she walked out the door.

I paced back and forth throughout the apartment, trying to make rhyme or reason out of all of this. I went to my cabinet and grabbed a bottle of whiskey. I took a glass from the cupboard and sat down on the couch. I looked at the glass before I poured some whiskey and set it down on the table. Fuck the glass. I drank it straight from the bottle. I drank almost the whole bottle and I was trashed off my ass. I got up from the couch and fell onto the floor. The room was spinning and, when I closed my eyes, it was worse. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door and I heard my dad call my

name.

“Collin. What the hell is going on? Are you okay?”

The door was unlocked, and when I didn’t answer him, he walked in and saw me lying on the floor. “Son, what happened? Where’s Amelia?”

“She left.”

“Oh God, you reek of whiskey.”

He pulled out his phone and I heard him talking to Jake.

“Jake, I need you to come across the hall and help me get Collin up to the penthouse. He’s drunk.”

“Dad, I’m not going to the penthouse,” I slurred as I tried to get up, but managed to fall over.

“Yes, you are. I don’t want you alone when you’re like this. What happened?”

Jake walked in and came over to me. “Go around to the other side and I’ll grab this arm,” my dad said.

“Hey, buddy, you okay?” Jake asked.

“She packed a bag and left.”

“Amelia did?”

“Yeah, we got into a fight,” I slurred as they picked me up and helped me up to the

penthouse.

When we walked through the door, my dad called for my mom.

“Shit, Dad.”

“Quiet, son.”

“Oh my God. What happened?” she asked as she hurried to me.

“Your son and his girlfriend must have gotten into an argument because she packed a bag and left and he drank a whole bottle of whiskey.”

“Not the whole thing,” I slurred.

“Oh, Collin. Get him upstairs to his room,” my mom said.

My dad and Jake set me down on my bed. My mom followed behind and lifted my shirt over my head.

“On your side, mister,” she said.

I closed my eyes and all I could see was Amelia’s face, along with the pain and hurt that splayed across it when she found out I was the one who bought the house. I needed to sleep to forget.

Chapter 34

I woke up, and when I looked at the clock, it was five thirty a.m. My head was pounding, so I decided to take a shower. After standing under the stream of hot water for almost twenty minutes, I stepped out and pulled on a pair of sweat pants I found

in my drawer. I went downstairs, started the coffee, and gathered the ingredients for the cocktail. My parents were still asleep, so I tried to be as quiet as possible. I ran up the stairs to find my phone. It was lying on the floor in my pants pocket. I pulled it out, and before I looked at it, I prayed that there was a text message or call from Amelia. There wasn't. I went back to the kitchen and finished making my cocktail. A few moments later, my parents walked in.

“Here, let me finish that for you. Go sit down, sweetheart.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“How are you feeling?” my dad asked as he poured some coffee.

“Not real good,” I replied.

“Want to talk about what happened between you and Amelia?”

My mom set the cocktail down in front of me and I chugged it down to get it over with. “I took her to the Hamptons yesterday, to the house. I told her that I bought it and she got pissed. She got really pissed and I don’t understand why,” I said as I put my head down on the table.

“Maybe it’s because you kept something from her that you shouldn’t have,” my mom said.

“I told you, son, that you should’ve told her about the house,” my dad chimed in.

“I remember someone doing the exact same thing. Not once, not twice, but at least three times, Connor.”

“I know, Elle, and you know I regret each and every one of those times.”

“Okay, okay. I fucked up. What else is new? What am I supposed to do?”

My mom walked over and kissed me on the head. “Alcohol doesn’t solve your problems. It only creates more. So the first thing you’re going to do is lay off the booze. The second thing, find a way to make things right. You’re your father’s son. You can do it.”

She walked out of the kitchen and my dad sat across the table and looked at me.

“Give her time. She needs to think. You need to think. Don’t call. Don’t text. Just give her time. When she’s ready, she’ll come around.”

“Easier said than done, Dad. I miss her like crazy already.”

“I know, son. Trust me. Maybe send her a small text and tell her that you love her and that’s it. It’s the little things, you know? She’ll forgive you. She loves you and love conquers all.”

“Thanks, Dad. I’m going to go into the office now. Do you want to drive with me?”

“No, Ralph is driving me in. I have a meeting across town this afternoon.”

“Okay. I’ll see you later.”

I sat in my office, trying to concentrate on the work that needed to be done. I threw my pen across the desk and pulled out my phone.

“I love you.”

No response. I sighed and decided to go to the gym. I always kept a bag in my office for those spur-of-the-moment workouts. I walked into the gym and went straight to our private locker room to change into my swimming trunks. I grabbed a towel and headed to the pool. When I opened the door and walked in, I was shocked to see Julia, my mom, and Brayden in the water.

“Collin, what are you doing here?” my mom asked.

“I needed to work out.”

“Does your father know you’re not at the office?”

“Mom, cut me some slack. It’s fine.”

I jumped in and swam over to Julia and Brayden. I took him from her arms and held him in the water.

“First swimming lesson?” I asked her.

“Yeah. Never too young to learn. How are you? Mom told me what happened.”

“I’m a mess, as usual. Nothing new there, right?”

“Don’t say things like that. Amelia loves you and she’ll come around.”

“I just don’t understand why she’s so upset. I thought I was doing the right thing.”

“Maybe she’s pissed off because you kept it from her and didn’t talk to her about it first.”

“I wanted it to be a surprise. She deserves surprises in her life.”

Brayden started to fuss and I handed him back to Julia.

“She’s not Hailey, Collin. I know what you’re thinking and I know you’re scared. This is your first fight, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, it is,” I said as I looked down.

“First fights are always the hardest. Don’t worry; she’ll be back in your arms before you know it.”

“Thanks, Julia. I’m going to do some laps now. I don’t want to be gone too long

because Dad will get pissed.”

“I think Brayden is starting to prune. I better get him out of the water.” She laughed.

“Where’s Mom?” I asked her as she got out of the pool.

“I have no idea. That’s strange, that she just left like that.”

Ellery

I hated seeing my son in pain again. It was bad enough what he went through after Hailey left him, and I didn’t want to see him like that again. I quietly got out of the pool while Collin and Julia were talking and went to the locker room to call Amelia.

“Hello,” she answered.

“Hi, Amelia. It’s Ellery. Would you like to have a late lunch with me? Say around two thirty?”

“Hi, Ellery. Sure. I would like that very much.”

“Great. Let’s meet at Aureole’s. I’ll call and make reservations for us.”

“I’ll see you then, Ellery.”

“Bye, Amelia.”

I went back to the pool and saw Julia and Brayden watching Collin do laps around the pool.

“Are you finished swimming, Julia?” I asked.

“Yeah, Brayden was turning into a prune. Where did you go?”

“I had to make a phone call.” I smiled.

“Please tell me you didn’t call Amelia.”

“I did, and we’re meeting for lunch at two thirty. Don’t you mention this to your brother or your dad.”

“I won’t. Good luck. But I don’t think you should get involved.”

“Well, I don’t want my son hurting and I would do the same for you.” I smiled.

“Let’s go get this little guy back in his clothes. Bye, Collin. I love you.”

“Bye, Mom, Julia. I love you too.”

Amelia and I arrived at the restaurant at the same time.

“Hi, sweetheart,” I said as I hugged her.

“Hi, Ellery.”

We walked in the restaurant and were promptly seated. I looked at Amelia and could see the sadness in her eyes.

“How are you?” I asked.

“Collin told you what happened?” she replied.

“He did. After Connor and Jake found him completely inebriated and on the floor of his apartment. They brought him up to the penthouse to sleep it off.”

She looked down as she played with her spoon. “He shouldn’t have drunk like that.”

“No, he shouldn’t have, but he didn’t want to hurt anymore. I understand you being mad at him for not telling you about the house. I really do. Sometimes, people think they’re doing the right thing when they’re not. He should’ve talked to you about it first. Unfortunately, he gets that from his dad. Well, and maybe me too.”

“What do you mean?”

“When I first met Connor, I kept a huge secret from him and, when he found out, he left me. Actually, he left me in Michigan, alone in a hotel room, and made me fly back to New York by myself.”

“Wow. Seriously?”

“Yes. But I hurt him on such a deep level that I didn’t think I’d ever see him again. What I did was unforgiveable. But Connor loved me so much that he forgave me eventually. My point is that people make mistakes.”

“I know that, Ellery, but he can’t think he can just buy my parents’ house because I needed the money. I felt like such a charity case, and then, for him not to tell me. That right there proves he knew what he was doing wasn’t right.”

“Ah, I know the feeling. But you’re not a charity case. He wanted you to have that house to hold on to the memory of your family. He wanted to give you a piece of them. Don’t you think he would have just given you some money? He knew you needed it, but he didn’t offer to give you any while the house was up for sale, did he?”

Amelia shook her head. “No, he didn’t.”

“If you haven’t figured it out yet, my son is a very giving person. He’s the spitting image of his father.”

“I noticed that.” She smiled.

I took hold of her hand from across the table. “Running away doesn’t solve anything. Trust me. I’m not defending him, but I think you need to hear him out and he needs to hear you out. He loves you, Amelia. I’ve never seen him so happy.”

“Thank you, Ellery.”

“You’re welcome, sweetie. You know I’ll always be here for you.”

Chapter 35

The day seemed to drag on forever. I stared out the window of my office and thought about Amelia. She never responded to my text message from earlier. I really fucked things up and I missed her like crazy. My heart was hurting, and every time I thought about her, it broke just a little more. Since she was constantly on my mind, there wasn’t going to be a heart left in me at all. I needed to get out of New York for a couple of days, so I called the airlines, booked a flight to Chicago, and went home and packed a bag for the weekend. I didn’t want to ask my dad to use the plane. It was less complicated just to book a commercial flight.

I boarded the plane and took my seat in coach. I didn’t care because first class and business class were booked up and I just wanted to get on this plane out of New York. A few moments later, an older woman took the seat next to me.

“Hello. My, you are a handsome young man.” She smiled.

“Hi, and thank you.” I smiled back and then turned my attention to the window. As I was watching some of the other planes take off, I heard a familiar voice.

“Damn it. Why can’t I get this to fit up here?”

I turned my head and saw Amelia trying to stuff her bag in the overhead compartment.

“What the—” I said.

She looked at me and shock overtook her face. “What are you doing here?” she asked with an attitude.

“Flying to Chicago. What about you?”

“Same.”

I couldn’t fucking believe this. Amelia took her seat next to the lady who sat next to me and looked the opposite way. I stared out the window as the plane took off from the runway and into the sky. As soon as I could use my phone, I pulled it from my pocket and sent Amelia a text message.

“Why are you going to Chicago?”

I saw her look at her phone and then type a message back.

“Why are you?”

“Don’t answer a question with a question.”

“I can do what I want.”

“Answer my question.”

“No.”

“Damn it, Amelia,” I said as I looked over at her.

“Don’t swear at me,” she growled.

The poor lady who was sitting between us looked at us in confusion. “Would you like to switch seats?” she asked Amelia.

“No.”

Amelia looked over at me. “Why are you in coach anyway? Shouldn’t you be on your dad’s plane or at least in first class?”

“First class was booked and I didn’t ask to use the plane. I just wanted to get out of New York as soon as possible.”

The lady next to me got up and went to the restroom. Amelia sat there, looking straight ahead while I looked out the window. When the lady came back, she stood in the middle of the aisle.

“Excuse me, young lady, but you need to move over because I’m having bathroom issues and it would be more convenient for me to sit on the end seat instead of having to climb over you.”

Amelia looked at her and narrowed her eyes. She sighed and sat in the seat next to me.

“Thank you, my dear,” the lady said.

“I can’t believe you’re on this plane,” Amelia said through gritted teeth.

“I can’t believe you are.”

“Isn’t it funny how fate works?” The old lady smiled.

Amelia put her earphones in and I laid my head against the window and closed my eyes. Suddenly, the plane dropped and began shaking. Amelia grabbed my arm.

“Put on your seatbelt,” I said to her.

“I don’t want to let go,” she said with fear in her eyes.

I reached over and buckled her seatbelt and then mine. The captain came on and apologized that we were experiencing some turbulence and would be for a little while longer. It was a bit unsettling, but with the amount of flying that I did, I was used to it. I wanted to bring her on my lap and hold her tight and tell her that everything was going to be okay. I looked over at the lady sitting next to Amelia and asked her if she was okay. She smiled and nodded her head. The turbulence had settled and Amelia let go of my arm. She put her earphones back in and acted like nothing happened.

“No. You don’t get to do that,” I said as I took her earphones out of her ears.

“What the hell are you doing?” she snapped.

“You don’t get to hold on to me for dear life because you’re scared and then ignore me. You know what? Forget I said anything. I’m sorry. You go on with your business and I’ll go on with mine.”

“Oh no, mister. You started this and we’re going to talk about it.”

“I don’t want to talk to you anymore. Go back to listening to your music,” I snapped. “And for the record, I did nothing wrong but love you. Maybe more than I should have.”

“You made me feel like a charity case.”

“How did I do that?” I asked.

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“By buying my parents’ house because I needed the money. You couldn’t just let someone else buy it?”

“I bought that house for us to have someday. I wanted you to hold on to something of them. Even though they didn’t have the house very long, it meant something to them, which means it meant something to you, and I couldn’t let that go. So, I’m sorry if you felt like a charity case because that wasn’t my intention. My intention was to keep a part of your family alive for you and the money was a bonus. Now, I’m done talking about this with you because you obviously can’t understand where I’m coming from,” I said as I turned and faced the window.

“He bought you a house and you’re mad at him?” the lady asked.

“It’s complicated,” Amelia said.

“I see nothing complicated about a man who loves a woman enough to buy something that meant the world to her.”

Go lady... go lady...go lady, I kept chanting to myself.

The plane landed and Amelia and I grabbed our bags and exited the plane. We walked side by side through the airport.

“Where are you staying?” I asked.

“Holiday Inn Express,” she replied.

“Oh. Why?”

She laughed lightly. “Because it was cheap. Where are you staying: The Trump?”

“Yeah.”

“Of course you are.” She smiled.

“I would like it if you came with me.”

It was a longshot asking her, but I took it anyway. I didn’t want her in this city alone. It wasn’t safe.

“I’ve never been to The Trump before.”

“There’s a first time for everything, and I would love for your first time to be with me.” I smiled.

She looked at me as tears formed in her eyes. “I’m sorry, Collin.”

“Sorry?” I asked nervously.

“I’m sorry for acting like such a bitch. I’m sorry for saying some awful things to you.”

“I’m sorry for not telling you about the house when I bought it.”

We reached the outside of the airport and my driver was standing outside the limo.

“Good evening, Mr. Black. It’s good to see you again.”

“Good evening, Tom. Thanks for picking me up.”

“My pleasure, sir.”

We climbed in the back of the limo and Tom shut the door.

“Where to, Mr. Black?”

I looked over at Amelia and she smiled at me. “We’re going to The Trump, Tom.”

I smiled as I took my hand and lightly caressed her cheek before my lips fell upon hers.

After having the most mind-blowing makeup sex, Amelia and I lay back in the tub and turned on the jets. There was nothing like the feeling of her soft, wet skin pressed against mine. I wrapped my arms around her as her back pressed into my chest and her perfect small ass fit nicely between my legs. She softly ran her finger up and down my arm as I held her against me.

“Don’t you find it strange that we both decided to come to Chicago and we were on the same flight?” she asked.

“Yeah. But like the old lady said: fate.”

“I had lunch with your mom today.”

“You did? Why?”

“Because she called and asked me to. We had a nice little chat about you and how much you are like your dad.”

“Oh God. She keeps saying that.”

“Your dad is an amazing man and you should be proud to be like him. Anyway, I wanted to get away for a couple days and get myself together before I called you and begged you to take me back.”

“Amelia,” I whispered as I kissed her neck. “You won’t ever have to beg me.”

“Your mom told me about your drinking binge last night.”

“Of course she did,” I said as I nipped her neck.

Amelia giggled. “Why did you come to Chicago?”

“I was sitting in my office, looking out the window, and thinking about you, when I thought of our little chat about the Field Museum and T-Rex Sue. That’s when I decided, at the last minute, to hop on a plane and come to Chicago.”

“So you were going to go to the Field Museum without me?”

“Yeah. I guess I was.”

“You beast! How dare you? You promised me we could go together.”

“Amelia, are you going to tell me that you weren’t going to go there yourself?”

“I would never!” she exclaimed.

“Liar.” I smiled as I splashed her with water.

She turned her body around so she was facing me and wrapped her legs around my

waist. “I love you so much. I was so stupid for getting mad at you about the house.”

“It’s okay, baby, and I love you too.” I smiled as I pushed a strand of her hair behind her ear.

“No, it’s not okay. You’re the most loving and generous man I’ve ever met, and you love me. How could I be mad at you for that? A part of me feels guilty about the house because my mom and dad should be the ones enjoying it, not me.”

“Amelia, you need to stop with that. You survived. You need to accept that and try to live the rest of your life as fully as possible. With me in it, of course.” I winked.

She placed her hands on each side of my face and rubbed her nose against mine. “I missed you last night and I don’t ever want to sleep apart again.”

“I missed you too and, trust me, we won’t. We need to make a promise to each other right now that we’ll never ever go to bed angry. If we get into an argument or a fight, then we need to work it out first. Deal?” I asked.

“Deal.” She smiled as she kissed my lips.

Chapter 36

Amelia and I had the best time in Chicago. We visited the Field Museum, and we had someone take a beautiful picture of us in front of T-Rex Sue. I took her to my mom and dad’s art gallery, showed her Black Enterprises, and introduced her to Mac.

“Mac, what are you doing here? It’s Saturday.”

“Hey, Collin. I was just about to ask you the same thing. Why the hell are you in Chicago?”

“Mac, this is my girlfriend, Amelia. Amelia, this is Mackenzie. She runs this office for us.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Amelia.” She smiled. “I was just catching up on some work. I’m going on vacation next week.”

“Ah, nice. Are you going with anyone I know?” I asked.

“Yeah. Carla and I are going to the Bahamas.”

I looked at her with a twisted face. “Carla, as in Carla from design?”

“The one and only.” Mac smiled.

“I didn’t know she was—”

“Yeah, well, she hasn’t really told anyone yet. So, let’s keep our little vacation under wraps.”

“Ah. Okay. My lips are sealed.”

“Anyway, it was great seeing you, sweetheart,” she said as she kissed my cheek.

“And it was great to meet you, Amelia. You’ve changed my boy here. I can tell already.”

“Have a great trip,” I said as we headed down the hall.

“She seems really nice,” Amelia said.

“She is. She’s one of the best in the company.”

We went to dinner that night and, as soon as we got back to the hotel, I ordered a bottle of champagne and we drank and had sex all night long.

My dad sent the plane to Chicago for us and we went back to New York. Amelia’s break was over and she went back to her classes and clinicals the next day. As soon as we got home, my mom and dad came down to see us.

“I’m really happy the two of you worked things out,” my dad said.

“Me too, Dad. Me too.”

“How weird was it that you were both going to Chicago at the same time and on the same flight? The universe works in mysterious ways. I’ve learned that over the years. By the way, I’m starting to interview people tomorrow for Diana’s position and I want you to sit in on them.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re a great judge of character and I want your opinion.”

“Thanks, Dad. I’ll be there early tomorrow right after I drop Amelia off at the hospital.”

“Ellery, are you ready to go home? I believe you have a promise to keep.” He smiled.

She looked at him and bit down on her bottom lip. “You’re right, sexy. I do. I hope you can handle me.”

“That’s it! Out. You two can take your little sex talk out of my apartment. I don’t want to hear about you two handling each other.”

My parents both laughed and kissed me and Amelia good bye. I rolled my eyes and shook my head.

“I absolutely love your parents.” She smiled as she put her arm around me.

“As crazy as they can be, I do too.”

My mom and dad threw a going-away party for Diana at the Waldorf Astoria. The entire company was invited and I think just about everyone showed. They were all a

bunch of suck-ups to my dad, so it didn't surprise me. We mixed and mingled and I could tell Diana was a little upset.

"What's wrong?" I asked as I walked up to her.

"It's nothing. I'm just going to miss you all. It's a little scary starting somewhere new."

I put my arm around her and gave her a light squeeze. "I know, but think of how much better you and Jacob will be. And it's not like you won't know anyone there. You have Mason and Landon."

"I know and I've been talking to Joel almost every day, either on the phone or Skype."

I looked at her strangely. "Really?"

"Yeah. He's a great and interesting guy. We have a lot in common." She smiled.

"Really?" I asked again.

"Why do you look so shocked?"

"I don't know. He is a great guy and his wife passed away a couple of years ago."

"We've talked about her and my husband."

I got the feeling that she and Joel might have started something or would start something when she got to California.

The next afternoon, I picked Amelia up from her classes and we headed to the airport

to say goodbye to Diana and Jacob. I'd been dreading this day since she agreed to move to California. My mom and dad were already there and so were Julia and Jake. I walked up to Jacob and knelt down in front of him as I placed my hands on his shoulders.

"Hey, buddy. I want you listen to me. Okay?"

"Yeah, sure, Collin. What's up?"

"I want you to have the best life in California. Really take in that ocean air. I'll be coming out to visit you quite a bit and to check up on you. This is a new start for you and your mom and you're going to need to be there to help her out. Mason will be around a lot and I just know you're going to do great," I said as my eyes instantly filled with tears.

"I'm going to miss you, Collin."

I pulled him into an embrace. "I'm going to miss you too. We'll keep in touch almost every day through phone calls and text, and whenever you want, we can Skype."

"Okay," he said as a tear fell from his eye.

I gave him one last squeeze and then patted him on the head. "Go on. Get out of here and go meet some hot California girls." I smiled.

He smiled and held up his fist. I bumped mine against his and stood up and said goodbye to Diana with a hug and a kiss.

"Stay in touch and enjoy California. Amelia and I will be out soon to visit."

"Thank you, Collin. I will never forget what you've done for us. This isn't goodbye.

I'll see you later." She smiled.

They walked to the plane and, before Jacob got on, he stopped and waved at me. Amelia put her arm around my waist and laid her head on my shoulder as we both waved goodbye.

Chapter 37

Two Months Later

"Baby, are you ready? The plane is waiting for us."

"I'm coming. I'm sorry. I had trouble deciding what to bring," she said.

I had to go to Vegas for a business meeting and we decided to make a long weekend of it. Amelia had never been to Vegas and she was really excited to go.

"Have you ever gambled?" I asked her as we sat on the plane.

"No. But I can't wait to." She smiled.

"If you have any addictions, gambling could become a problem. So you better be careful."

"Hmm. I do have one addiction: you." She growled as she kissed me.

She had me hard and we were going to be landing in about ten minutes. "You're a very bad girl, Miss Gray, and as soon as we get to the hotel, I'm afraid I'll have to punish you."

"Only if you promise to punish me hard." She smiled.

“Jesus, Amelia. You’re killing me,” I said as I kissed the side of her head and buckled my seatbelt.

She giggled.

We arrived at The Bellagio Hotel and I had to get ready for my business meeting. As I was in the bathroom, Amelia threw herself onto the king-sized bed.

“I thought you were going to punish me?”

“I am. After my meeting. I promise you I won’t be gone long. The meeting should only take an hour. I’ve booked a massage and facial for you down at the spa.”

Source Creation Date: June 27, 2025, 6:05 am

“That was sweet. Thank you,” she said as she walked up behind me.

“You’re welcome, baby. My meeting is here in the hotel. If you get done with your spa appointment before my meeting is over, come back up to the room and, when I get back, we’ll go and do some gambling.”

“Sounds good, babe,” she said as she kissed my back.

I put on my suit coat and I walked Amelia down to the spa.

“This is where we part ways. I’ll see you soon. Enjoy the spa, baby.”

“I will. Enjoy your meeting.”

“That I won’t.” I smiled as I kissed her and headed to the board room.

My meeting ran a little longer than I planned, but I signed the deal for the company and my dad was going to be extremely happy. I walked over to the spa to see if Amelia was done and saw her walking out the door.

“Perfect timing. How was your massage?” I asked as I gave her a kiss.

“Exhilarating, relaxing, amazing.” She smiled.

I chuckled. “Maybe before we leave Vegas, we can get a couple’s massage.”

“I’d like that,” she said as she laid her head on my shoulder and looped her arm

around mine.

We spent our first night at the black jack table and I taught Amelia how to play. She was either very lucky or she was bullshitting me about not knowing how to play. She cleaned up and she cleaned up well. I was more in love with her than ever, and playing against her and watching how excited she got when she won was an amazing feeling. I reached over and stroked her blonde hair and asked her if she was ready to go back to the room.

“Are you ready, baby? I think we have some celebrating to do.” I winked.

“Yeah, I’m ready.” She smiled.

I took her hand and we entered the elevator. Once we hit the tenth floor, I pushed the stop button.

“What are you doing?”

I turned to her and placed my hands on her thighs. My fingers slid their way up to the edge of her panties and pushed them to the side. I slipped my fingers inside her, feeling how excited she already was.

“I’m giving you a little something before we go to the room. Judging by how wet you are, I think you want it.”

I pushed her against the elevator wall and she brought her knee up. “Collin, you’re so bad.”

“Tell me how much you want me to make you come right now,” I whispered as my tongue stroked her neck.

“I want you to,” she said breathlessly.

“You want me to what?”

“I want you to make me come now and then multiple times in the room.”

I took down the strap of her dress, exposing her bare breast as my fingers moved in and out of her at a rapid pace. She tried to contain her moans, but let loose once my mouth surrounded her breast. My thumb rested on her clit as she swelled against my fingers. I knew that a few short strokes on her clit would have her coming in no time.

“Come, baby. Show me how good I make you feel.”

“Don’t stop. Please don’t stop,” she begged.

I moved my fingers in circles and hit her g-spot. She let out a howl and her body tightened against me.

“Oh my God!” she said with bated breath as her orgasm came to full force.

I smiled as I looked at her and pulled up the strap to her dress. I then kissed her on the lips and pushed the button to go up to our room. The elevator door opened and there was a group of people standing in front of it.

“Are you two okay?” a gentleman asked. “The elevator was stuck.”

“Yeah. We’re great.” I smiled as I took Amelia’s hand and we went to our room.

Needless to say, we were up all night and barely slept.

I rolled over and opened my eyes when I heard my phone buzz. I picked it up from

the nightstand and saw a text message from my dad.

“Morning, son. Congratulations on closing the deal. We’ll celebrate when you get back to New York. I hope you and Amelia are having a great time.”

“Thanks, Dad. We’re having a blast. Amelia loves Vegas and she cleaned up last night at the black jack table. See you in a couple of days.”

I rolled over and looked at how peacefully Amelia was sleeping. I got out of bed, put on some clothes, and went downstairs to the reception desk. When I came back to the room, Amelia rolled over and looked at me as I stood in the doorway with red roses.

“Morning, baby.” I smiled.

“Where did you go?”

“Down to the flower shop to get you these,” I said as I handed her the roses.

She brought them up to her nose and smelled them. “They’re beautiful. Thank you,” she said as she reached up and kissed me.

“You’re welcome. Our breakfast will be here soon. I ordered you your favorite.”

“Chocolate chip pancakes?” She smiled.

“Yep. Chocolate chip pancakes,” I said as I kissed her nose.

While she was in the shower, room service was delivered and set up at the table for us.

“Amelia, breakfast is here,” I said as I walked in the bathroom.

“I’ll be there in a sec. Don’t start without me.”

I sat down at the table and waited for Amelia to join me. A few moments later, she came out in her silk robe and sat down across from me.

“I’m starving,” she said.

“Me too.”

She lifted off the silver lid from her plate and stared at her pancakes. She put her hand over her mouth and looked up at me with tears in her eyes.

I got up from my seat and took the five-carat diamond ring that sat on the stack of pancakes. I got down on one knee and took her hand.

“Amelia, I want to spend the rest of my life with you. You have given me the best gift in life; true love. I fell in love with you from the moment I saw you walking past the beach house that morning after you saved me. My world was crumbling down before I met you, and then you came along and changed my life. There is nothing that I wouldn’t do for you or give you. I want to build a future with you. I want you to be the mother of my children and I want to do nothing but grow old with you. I love you so much that sometimes it hurts. I can’t stand to be away from you and, when I see you at the end of the day, my whole world lights up again.”

I placed my finger on her promise ring. “I gave you this ring as a promise of my love and a promise to marry you. Now, I’m fulfilling that promise by giving you this ring and asking you to be my wife forever and always. Let’s get married, baby. Let’s do it here in Vegas. I don’t want to wait a year to plan the perfect wedding. I want you now as my wife, Mrs. Amelia Black. What do you say, baby? Will you marry me today?”

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The tears fell from her eyes as she stared into mine. “Of course I’ll marry you. Yes. Yes, I will marry you today!” she said with excitement.

I removed her promise ring from her left hand and placed it on her right. I slid the diamond ring on her finger and kissed it. We both stood up and I swung her around, holding her tight and kissing her nonstop.

“You have made me the happiest man alive!” I said.

“And you’ve made me the happiest girl in the world. I love you so much, Collin Black, and I can’t wait to marry you.”

“I love you too, Amelia. I have everything all arranged already.”

She looked at me when I put her down and smiled. “What if I would have said no?”

“Well, that’s the chance I took. But somehow, I knew you’d say yes.”

“What am I going to wear? I need a ring for you! Flowers? My hair, makeup! Oh my God, I’m starting to panic.”

I laughed. “Amelia. Calm down. I’ve arranged all that. There’s a jewelry shop in the lobby; we can go pick out my ring. I have two women catering to you today. They will be helping you pick a dress and they’ll be doing your hair and makeup.”

She took in a deep breath. “Okay. You’re truly amazing. Did you know that?”

“I’ve been told a few times.” I smiled.

We sat down at the table and ate our breakfast. “Collin, I’m scared.”

“Why are you scared?”

“Your parents are going to be so upset. Not to mention Julia.”

“When we get back to New York, I’ll let my mom plan a reception for all of our family and friends. She’ll love it. Listen, Amelia, I don’t want to wait. Once we get back to New York, you have your classes, your clinicals, and you’ll be graduating in a few months. There won’t be any time to plan a wedding.”

“You’re right and I don’t want to wait either,” she said as she got up, sat down on my lap, and wrapped her arms around my neck. “I can’t wait to be your wife, Mr. Black,” she said as her lips brushed against mine.

Amelia and I were married at the Chapel of the Flowers. It was a beautiful ceremony and I paid top dollar to make sure everything was perfect. I wore a black tuxedo and she wore a white, tea-length dress with beads that glistened when she walked down the aisle. She wore her beautiful blonde hair up in cascading curls and carried a bouquet of pink and white roses. She was the most beautiful bride in the world and I was captivated by her every single day. The ceremony was perfect and a few tears were shed by both of us. I vowed to love her, cherish her, and devote my life to her forever. We shared our first kiss as husband and wife and walked up the aisle hand in hand. We exited the chapel and stood in front of the long, white limo that was waiting for us.

“I love you so much, Mrs. Black.”

I love you, Mr. Black.

We kissed one more time and climbed into the limo. We celebrated with a beautiful dinner, dancing, and a lot of lovemaking as husband and wife. She was my eternity and my savior. There was no place or no one else I wanted to be with. She took my breath away every single minute of the day and she made me happy. My life was now complete with her by my side as my wife and I was going to build an incredible family and future with her. We lay wrapped up in each other's arms after a fulfilled night of sex and champagne. My eyes flew open as the sun shined brightly through the crack in the curtains. We were flying back to New York today and panic started to settle in as one thought came to my mind: SHIT. How am I going to tell my parents that we got married in Vegas?

The End