



Crash with Me (Seasons of Sizzle #3)

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Category: Romance

Description: I came for the paycheck. He came uninvited. Now we're fake dating at a wedding that's about to go off the rails.

I'm just at this wedding to pour drinks, pocket tips, and avoid eye contact with clingy groomsmen.

What I don't expect is for a brooding, bearded stranger to crash the rehearsal dinner, and claim I'm his date for the wedding weekend.

Seth is tall, intense, and seemingly unbothered by the fact that he wasn't invited to his own father's wedding—to a bride who just so happens to be his ex-girlfriend.

One fake date turns into a weekend of steamy glances, "accidental" touches, and sharing the only bed left at the inn. All of it leaves me aching for more.

It's all pretend... until it isn't.

Because Seth isn't just the kind of guy who gets under your skin.

He's the kind who makes you want things you never even dreamed of wanting.

But when his father crosses a line. When truths come out. We'll both have to decide: is this pretend or the real thing in disguise?

Crash With Me is a steamy, not-so-slow-burn fake dating romance with wedding shenanigans, off-limits tension, and a guaranteed happily ever after. For fans of funny family drama, forced proximity, broody bearded heroes, and smart-mouthed heroines who don't back down.

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ONE

HEIDI

“What’s a pretty lady like you doing back there?”

I grit my teeth and force a smile, cringing inwardly. Years of bartending have given me ample experience dealing with overly friendly patrons. Including overly friendly fifty-somethings with bottle-dyed hair and shit-eating grins.

“Oh, you know.” I reach for the bottle of Jack and give it a three-count pour over ice. “Just doing my job.”

“I could give you a job.”

My eyes narrow, but I keep my tone neutral but not encouraging. “Oh?”

“I have an idea or two.”

Leaning forward on the bar, he strokes his mustache. The diamond in his pinky ring catches the light and flashes. My eyebrows shoot up.

A pinky ring. I swear, I’ve never seen a real life man with a pinky ring. It doesn’t fit the lumberjack/fisherman aesthetic that Alaskan men usually have. Not that I’m judging Mr. Smooth here for his pinky ring.

I’m judging him because he’s being a jackass.

“Thanks.” I give another tight-lipped, false smile. “But I like the job I have now just fine.”

He scoffs. “You’re happy being a bartender?”

“I am.”

There’s no point telling him and his condescending tone that I love a job that offers plenty of flexibility. Plus it gives my semi-extroverted self a chance to interact with people.

This weekend should be straight forward. The bride and groom paid for an open bar for this rehearsal dinner and the reception tomorrow night. But most people are ordering hard stuff on the rocks or glasses of something bubbly.

Still, people are tipping well on top of the flat fee I’m being paid by the couple up front.

Anyway, the point is, I enjoy my job. It’s fun. It keeps me flush with cash. And it gives me plenty of time and bandwidth to focus on my other passions. Like taking scenic photos and writing poetry while hiking through the bush when the semi-introverted side of me needs to decompress.

Dealing with old farts who think they’re smooth might not be my favorite part of the job, but it’s an occupational hazard I can manage.

Especially because I’ll totally talk shit about him with my friends later.

Mr. Smooth sighs mournfully and leans a little bit further over the bar. “You know, a pretty girl like you could do better.”

My jaw ticks. Okay, enough is enough. There's a line between being polite to get a tip and protecting my peace, and my dignity. "I bet you'd love to tell me how."

"I wouldn't mind showing you."

"Oh, barf, Jim." A perky brunette in a fuchsia cocktail dress steps up to the bar at his side and wrinkles her nose. "Lines like that might have worked when you were younger. But now that you're old, it just makes you look like a creep."

He scowls. "I'm not old, Stacey."

"You're my dad's best friend." She gives a deliberate blink. "You're old enough to be my father and hers."

"Some women like older men."

Stacey flashes a friendly smile at me. "Do you prefer old men?"

I grin back. "Not usually."

"See, there you have it." She hands Jim his drink. "Now take this and go back to your duties of being my dad's best man instead of harassing the poor bartender."

Frowning more fiercely, he snaps up his drink and leaves with a huff. Once he's out of earshot, we both burst into laughter. The more she laughs, the more I laugh, and vice-versa.

My sides are hurting and I'm gasping for breath by the time we stop.

Stacey accepts a cocktail napkin to carefully wipe the tears from her eyes. "Thank you. And sorry about Jim."

“Oh, it’s no problem.”

“You probably deal with guys like him all the time.”

“All the time,” I agree, taking her glass and topping it off with fresh chilled Prosecco. She’s been nursing the same glass most of the night while flitting around to welcome guests and whisper with the wait staff. “Your dad is the groom.”

“Yeah, he is.” She releases a heavy breath. “This is his fifth wedding. His fifth marriage.”

We turn our gazes to her dad—the groom—and his much-younger bride-to-be. The buxom blonde is clinging to his arm and beaming up at him like he’s the man who invented the smart phone.

Stacey sighs again. “He swears this one will stick.”

I make a sympathetic sound. “Well, he’s lucky to have your support.”

“I’m not supporting their marriage or relationship.” Something flashes in her eyes. “But he’s my dad. And, well... He hasn’t been the same since my mom died.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.” A lump lodges in my throat. “That had to be hard.”

I hand her a fresh cocktail napkin as fresh tears fill her eyes.

“Thank you.” She carefully blots her eyes again to avoid smudging her make-up. “It happened a long time ago, but...”

“But time doesn’t mean you don’t miss her, or the life you all had before, any less.”

“That’s right.” Her bottom lip quivers but she catches it. With a shake of her head—and a short humorless laugh—she takes a breath and straightens her shoulders. “Anyway, thank you for that. And thank you for understanding. You’re really good at that.”

“I’m just doing my job. Pouring drinks”—I hold up the bottle—“and playing part-time therapist.”

She giggles again. This time, it reaches her eyes and sounds genuine. “I bet you hear all kinds of thing—from all kinds of people—in your line of work.”

“I do. It’s part of the fun.”

“It’s good you can find enjoyment in that.” She looks over my shoulder and winces. “Oh, crap. It looks like our favorite groomsman is trying to work his charms on the wedding coordinator. I’d better go rescue her.”

“Here.” I hand her a shot of a pre-mixed pink cocktail I’d made at the bride’s request. “To take the edge off.”

“Thanks.” She throws it back, flinching only a little. “Wish me luck.”

“Good luck,” I call after her as she gently pushes her way through the crowd. “You’re doing God’s work.”

“Hey, can you do me a favor?” a deep voice asks.

I turn toward the voice. My heart hitches as my gaze lands on a tall, broad-shouldered man in a fitted suit. His beard is trimmed, and his dark brown hair is messy. As if he’s been running his fingers through it.

He tugs at his tie, as if it's strangling him. He might not look comfortable in what he's wearing, but he looks good—too good—wearing it.

He looks so good, I seem to have lost the power of breathing, let alone speaking. I just nod my head dumbly as I find it impossible to break my gaze away from his dark, serious eyes.

“Okay, thanks.” He takes a deep breath. “This is going to sound weird, and there isn't time to explain it. But... will you please go along with everything I say in the next few minutes.”

I nod again, still incapable of using my words.

Have I ever seen eyes so full of power and mystery? Also, I wonder what cologne he's wearing. It's kind of woodsy, with a hint of something rich and intoxicating. A musk that's maybe uniquely him, but should be bottled up and sold to men everywhere who want to smell both rugged and powerful.

There's something about this man. Something I can't quite put my finger on. It has me hooked—captivated—as if I'm under a spell. It's something that has every cell in my body tingling.

Whatever it is, I have the distinct impression I would go along with anything he has to say. Even if he hadn't asked me to do precisely that.

“Dad,” Mr. Rugged says in a terse tone as the groom and bride approach the bar. His eyes narrow a fraction. “Kelly.”

Dad? I shake my head, partially coming out of my lusty haze. If the groom is his father, that would make him Stacey's brother.

“Seth,” the groom—I think his name is Walter—says. “Didn’t think we’d see you here.”

“Did you think I’d miss one of your weddings?”

Annoyance flickers in Walter’s eyes. “I thought you might prefer to skip.”

“We didn’t want you to be... uncomfortable,” Kelly, the bride, says.

“Is that why my invitation went missing in the mail?”

“We would have invited you. And you’re totally welcome. It’s just... we just thought you might feel... lonely,” she says. Her full bottom lip sticks out, giving her a little pout. “You know, since you aren’t seeing someone. We didn’t want you to have to spend the weekend alone.”

“As it happens, I didn’t come alone.”

Walter frowns. “You didn’t?”

Seth raises his chin. “I have a date.”

“You do?” Now it’s Kelly’s turn to frown. “Who?”

Seth slides his hand across the bar. “I’d like you both to meet my date—and girlfriend.”

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TWO

SETH

My heart is pounding in my ears as I take the bartender's hand in mine. I hope my palms aren't sweaty. I feel like they must be sweaty right now.

I meet the bartender's gaping, green-eyed gaze. Please, I think as hard as I can. As if fixating on that word as I stare into her eyes will somehow make her hear it. Please just go along with this.

If you do... Well, I don't know what I'll do.

But she'll have my never-ending appreciation for helping me get through this nightmare of a weekend with my dignity intact.

Kelly sucks in a breath. "Your girlfriend. Since when have you had a girlfriend?"

"Three months," the bartender blurts out, her voice slightly husky and music to my ears.

Come to think of it, this is the first time I've heard her speak. She didn't utter a single word in the thirty or so seconds we had together before the happy couple descended upon us.

"Three months?" Kelly's eyes narrow. "You've been dating for three months, and we haven't heard about it?"

“Oh, you know how it is.” The bartender steps around the bar reaching my side, gazing up at me adoringly with the most beautiful pair of sage green eyes I’ve ever seen.

“We’ve been in that blissful new relationship bubble.

So caught up in each other, so happy, you don’t have time to even talk about it. ”

My dad, who has been silent since I dropped the bomb, watches us with his hawk-like stare. “Aren’t you going to introduce us?”

“Of course.” I blink, panic slicing through me.

Fuck. In the rush of asking for her help and in the shock of having her agree to it without having to drop to my knees and beg, I didn’t get a chance to ask her anything else. Like, ‘By the way, I’m Seth, your new fake boyfriend. What’s your name?’

Before I can panic, the bartender once again comes to my rescue. “My name is Heidi. We met earlier.”

Heidi. Some of the tension eases from my shoulder. Her name is Heidi. Well, at least I know one thing about her now.

“Right.” My dad’s eyes narrow. “You’re the bartender. How... convenient that you’re my son’s girlfriend.”

Shit.

This was a stupid idea. It’ll never work. I don’t know what possessed me to do it. I don’t even know why I came.

But when I found out my dad was marrying her , I had to come. And when I saw them walking toward me, smug looks of satisfaction on their faces, I couldn't face them without some armor.

Beautiful armor with long, reddish brown hair pulled back from her creamy face. A black shirt and black slacks clinging to her shapely figure, showing off her full chest and thick thighs.

Fuck me, she's stunning. I knew Heidi was beautiful when I saw her from across the room, when I walked through the door. But up close, she's a God-damned work of art.

And, for some reason, this incredible woman has agreed to help me out. That thought strengthens my resolve.

"That's actually how I found out you were getting married." I give them stern looks.

"Really?"

"That's right." Heidi nods, gripping onto my arm and running her hand up and down my bicep, sending a hot bolt of lust straight through me. "I told him I was working a wedding this weekend while we were in bed this morning."

If only I'd woken up in the same bed with her this morning. I can almost feel how her curvy body would feel cuddled up next to mine. Her smooth bare skin pressed against my body.

Her fingers tracing light trails over my chest, tickling the dark hairs smattered across it. My cock twitches.

I shift on my feet, suddenly uncomfortable. "When she mentioned the names of the

bride and groom, I put two and two together.”

“We weren’t trying to hide anything from you,” Kelly says. “We just knew this might be hard for you given how we used to date.”

Heidi’s hand tightens on my arm. I cover her hand, silently letting her know I’ve got this.

With her standing next to me, I feel invincible. Or, at least, damn close to it.

“Yes, well.” I clear my throat. “I can see why you might think that. But I promise. There are no hard feelings.”

“Good,” Kelly all but purrs, resting her cheek against my dad’s arm. “Because we didn’t mean to fall in love.”

“That’s right, son .” There’s a hint of heat in the way he says. That. “It just happened.”

“The heart wants what it wants.”

“More like the dick wants what it wants,” I mumble under my breath.

Heidi snorts, but masks it with a cough. I dart a sidelong glance at her. While her lips might be pressed together in a line, her eyes are sparkling.

“What was that?” Dad asks, leaning his ear toward me.

“That’s why I’m here,” I say more loudly. “I wanted to show that there were no hard feelings. That I want you two to be happy.”

“That’s very mature of you,” Heidi says.

“Yeah, well.” I clear my throat. “I hope you have room for two more.”

“Of course. I’ll just tell the planner.” Heidi gives my dad a nudge. “Come on, honey bear. Let’s talk to her right now.”

Dad gives me a long, hard look. Like he suspects all of this is a lie. Like he’s trying to suss out whether or not I plan to unleash a trailer of goats to run rampant through the wedding.

I hold his gaze, not giving anything away. After they’ve turned and walked away, I release a breath and turn to Heidi.

“Thanks for that.”

“It was no problem.” She tilts her head to the side and lowers her voice. “So you decided to crash your dad’s wedding but didn’t think to bring a date?”

“I don’t know what came over me.” I shake my head, and keep my own words for her ears alone. “My sister let it slip during lunch last week. I spent the past few days pretending it didn’t bother me.”

“It’s understandable you’d be upset that your dad is marrying your ex.”

“That’s really not what’s bothering me.” I shake my head. “Okay, I won’t lie. It did bother me at first. No one wants their girlfriend to leave them for their father.”

“I wouldn’t think so.”

“But what really pisses me off is that they didn’t give me a choice. I was the injured

party.”

“So you decided to crash the wedding.”

I nod. “I told myself I would be fine. That I could be a bigger person. But as soon as I got in here.” As soon as I saw my ex and dad giving me those smug-ass smirks...

“You needed back-up.”

“Exactly.” I take a deep breath. “Is there any way I could talk you into being my date for the weekend? I can pay you.”

“That isn’t necessary.” Heidi shakes her head. “If you can just cover the cost of my replacement for the reception, we can call it good.”

“Are you sure? You’re doing me a huge favor here.”

“It’s my pleasure.”

I eye her suspiciously. “Is it because you think I’m a sad sack and you feel sorry for me?”

I hope she doesn’t. Normally, I wouldn’t care. Normally, I wouldn’t give two shits about what another person thinks of me. Especially someone I met ten minutes ago.

But not her. I can’t explain why. I don’t want Heidi to feel anything remotely like pity when she thinks of me.

“That’s not it. Well”—she grimaces a little—“I’ll admit, I do feel bad for you. For the situation. But I want to help because, well... because...”

“Because?” I prompt, waiting for her answer as if my life depends on it.

“Because,” she gives a short laugh, “I’m so tired of seeing the nice guys lose and the jerks coming out on top. It’s time someone puts them in their place.”

“So you’re doing it for revenge?”

“Isn’t that what this all is about?”

I incline my head in agreement. “I suppose it is. It’s also about saving face.”

“It’s the principle.”

“Exactly.” I study her, keenly aware of the warmth spreading through my body and growing with every second I spend in her company.

I want her. Badly. That much is clear. I shouldn’t. If this is going to work, I need to keep a clear head. I need to think with my brain and not my dick.

And... I get the impression she wants me too.

That complicates things. Then again, maybe it’s a good thing. Maybe, if the sexual tension between us is palpable, no one will suspect that we aren’t really together.

Maybe it’s okay. As long as I don’t cross any lines that fuck this up and blow our cover.

After I help Heidi close up the bar, we leave the party room and stop at the front desk.

The clerk looks up bored from her magazine. “Can I help you?”

“I’d like to book a room, please.”

“We’re all booked.” She turns her attention back to an article about two co-stars who are supposedly having an affair.

“Oh no,” Heidi whispers.

My heart sinks. “Are you positive there isn’t anything? A broom closet? A couch in the lounge?”

“We’re all booked.” She flips the page. “There are no more rooms in the inn and all that jazz.”

Well, shit. “I guess I can fly home and come back in the morning.”

“That would take forever and you’d hardly get any rest,” Heidi says. “You’ll just have to stay in my room.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive.” She loops her arm through mine. “Besides, it’ll really help sell the fact that we’re here on a date.”

“True.” My shoulders once again relax. I didn’t realize how tense I’d been these past few days. “You’re saving my life, once again here.”

“I’m happy to do it.” She chews on her bottom lip. “There’s just one thing.”

“Whatever it is, I’m sure it’s no problem.”

“I hope not, but, well...” She shrugs. “There’s only one bed in my room.”

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THREE

HEIDI

Masking a yawn, I gratefully accept the cup of coffee Seth hands to me. Our fingers brush, setting a flutter through me.

“Thank you.” I work my jaw, and bring the liquid gold to my lips. “I’m exhausted.”

“That’s my fault.” He gives a sheepish look. “I kept you up half the night.”

That he did. After we both crawled into our respective sides of the bed, after a short argument where he said he’d be fine sleeping on the floor, we found that neither of us could sleep.

I could lie and say it was the excitement of the intrigue keeping me awake.

In actuality, my body was so keenly aware of his presence—his size, his strength, his delicious smell—I was too tightly coiled to keep my eyes closed.

Every time I closed them, I’d imagine how he’d looked when I caught a glimpse of him bare-chested while he changed out of his suit and into a white shirt and gym shorts.

When I realized Seth couldn’t sleep either...

I wish I could say we stayed up half the night worshipping one another’s bodies. But,

instead, we went round after round of rapid fire questions and answers...

“Where did you go to high school?” I ask, curled up on my side, cradling my head on my hands.

“My dad flew us down to Anchorage every morning.” He settles into his own pillow, his arm tucked under his head. “Until I got my pilot’s license.”

“You have a pilot’s license?”

“Of course. When you grow up in the bush, it’s more useful than having a driver’s license.”

“Did you have a driver’s license?”

The look he gives could melt stone. It easily pulverizes my heart.

“What did you like to do in high school?” he asks.

“I’m sure you’ll find this hard to believe, but I was a total nerdy artsy girl.”

Again, his heated stare turns my insides into pools of desire.

“I worked at the hardware store in town after school every day to save money for a camera,” I say. “I kept track of every dollar, every penny, and turned down countless trips to the mall with my friends.”

“Did you save enough?”

I nod. “But it didn’t matter. On my sixteenth birthday, my parents surprised me with my dream camera. I used my savings to get extra lenses and photo editing software.”

“Do you still like photography?”

“I love it.” I scoot a little closer, my body drawn to his. “I take it with me almost everywhere I go. I capture pictures around town. I sometimes do portraits. But, mostly, I love still-life.”

“What’s your favorite thing to photograph?”

“Nature, of course. I try to get out for hikes a couple of times a week. There’s something about being out in nature. Just my camera and me. The trees.”

He nods. “The birds.”

“Water flowing through the streams.” I sigh. “I don’t know if I’m any good, but I love framing a scene and capturing it.”

“I’m sure your work is great.”

“How do you know that?”

“You’re too passionate about it to be anything short of spectacular.”

My heart skips a beat, the butterflies in my belly flap their wings.

“I’d love to see it sometime.”

My eyebrows shoot up. “You would?”

“Definitely. May I?”

Nodding, I turn away from him only long enough to reach for my phone, charging on

the nightstand.

I pull it between us and pull up my digital portfolio. We both lean in to watch it load on the screen. Our heads are so close together, they're nearly touching.

I hold the phone as Seth swipes through each picture. He pauses and studies each one, as if there's going to be a test over it later. Every so often he makes a noise. A little hum that comes deep in his chest.

When we reach the last one, he turns his dark stare to me. "Just as I suspected. They're spectacular. You're spectacular."

I want to kiss him. I want to throw myself at him and wrap my body around his, showing him with my body how happy his words have made me.

I settle on a softly breathed "Thank you" and return my phone to the nightstand.

"I'm sure you'll find this hard to believe," he says, when I'm back in my position, curled up on my side facing him. "But I also love hiking."

"I suppose it's kind of a prerequisite when you live here."

"It's why I could never leave. Have you ever thought about living anywhere else?"

I shake my head. "I did a year of college in Portland. But..."

"You missed it too much." He nods. "I felt the same thing when I was away at school."

"Where did you go?"

“University of Minnesota.” When my eyebrows shoot up in surprise, he gives a rich, husky chuckle that rumbles from his chest into mine. “I had a hockey scholarship.”

“Seriously? Do you still play?”

“Only for fun in a league. Work usually keeps me busy.”

“What do you do?”

“I own a store. An online shop that sells outdoor gear. Mostly things for fishing, hiking.”

“The basic mountain man supplies,” I tease. “That must keep you busy.”

“It keeps me out of trouble.” His gaze briefly lowers to my lips. “Most of the time.”

My belly flutters.

“So, bartending. Do you enjoy it?”

“I get to meet interesting people.” I give him a meaningful look. “And it’s never dull.”

“I guess not. What do you like about it most?”

“The creativity of it. You wouldn’t think it, but being a bartender—being a mixologist—is a kind of magic of its own.”

“Oh yeah?”

I nod. “I bartend at a restaurant, and I have carte blanche to experiment with the

seasonal drink menu.”

“What’s your favorite drink you’ve made?”

“Last summer, I made a spicy blackberry margarita that went viral.”

His eyebrows shoot up. “No shit?”

“Well, as viral as a drink made in Alaska can go. But tourists in the area flocked to order it so they could snap pictures and videos to post on their socials.”

He gives a low whistle.

“It was so popular, our liquor distributor was a little panicked he wouldn’t be able to source enough tequila for me to keep making them.”

Seth chuckles, and the crinkle around his smiling eyes makes my heart skip.

I take a shaky breath. “Don’t worry. I made his life easier over the fall with a pumpkin old fashioned.”

“Maybe there’s a way to combine your passions.”

I cock my head thoughtfully. “What do you mean?”

“Maybe you could do a book of recipes and photos of the drinks out in nature. You could call it something like On the Rocks and Off the Grid .”

I suck in a breath. “That’s brilliant. You’re brilliant.”

His cheeks flush. It’s so dang cute.

We keep going. Sharing secret after secret.

Naturally, it's all in the interest of our agreement. Purely to help us sell the fact that we're a couple.

It has nothing to do with the fact that I find myself inexplicably drawn to this man. Or the fact that I want to know everything about him.

From the way he takes his coffee in the morning—black and strong enough to knock out an elephant—to the way he led his high school hockey team to the state championships.

I want to know everything. I want to know it all.

Four hours of late night pillow talk isn't enough. I could talk to him all day, every day, for a hundred years and never become bored.

What's more, he seems to want to know everything about me. As we lay curled up on our sides, our gazes never wavering from one another, we forge a bond.

It's only for the weekend.

I keep telling myself that over and over. But no matter how many times I turn that phrase over in my head, my heart doesn't seem to care.

I'm not sure when we finally doze off. It's hard to tell the time of day—or night—this time of year, even with the blinds closed over the windows.

Neither of us said anything when we woke up this morning close together, our hands linked on the pillows between our heads.

Instead, he'd smiled at me. Almost shyly. And what little part of my heart he hadn't already stolen was completely his.

Now, dressed for brunch with the rest of the wedding guests and armed with a cup of coffee, I give him a serious look, catching his eye in the mirror.

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine." He shrugs his shoulders, as if there's something tickling the back of his neck.

"It's okay if you aren't. No one would blame you for feeling uncomfortable about all this. Come on." I give him a little nudge. "This thing only works if we're honest with each other."

"You're right." He scratches the back of his head and lets his arm fall to the side. "This whole thing is awkward as hell. I don't want it to be. I don't want people to think I'm sulking."

"You want people to think you're okay."

"Because I am okay. Mostly." He lifts a shoulder. "Yeah, what they did sucked. But it's not like Kelly and I were ever going to get married. It's not like we were in love."

"Still, it hurt."

"It hurt my ego. Not my heart."

We stare at each other's reflections, and I see it in his eyes. He isn't wounded. Not really. But he has a point to prove. He's a man with pride. It's my job to help him get through this weekend with it still intact.

“Well, okay then.” I nod at him. “Let’s do this then.”

He nods back at me. “Let’s do this.”

The brunch isn’t as uncomfortable as having your legs in stirrups while a gynecologist puts forceps in you for a pap smear.

But it isn’t easy either.

Walter and Kelly are all over each other. They take turns feeding each other bites off of their plates, which seems more than a little unnecessary. It’s a brunch buffet, for crying out loud. They can get up and grab something more from the spread at any time.

“It’s like they’re trying to prove something,” Stacey grumbles.

I glance up at her. She took the seat across the table from Seth and I. While it’s clear she isn’t really buying our claims of being in a three-month-long relationship, she isn’t trying to blow our cover either.

Mostly.

She asked a few probing questions—how we met, how often we see each other, and so on. Luckily, Seth and I spent part of our overnight conversation coming up with answers to these exact questions.

Seth looks up from his plate, where he’s kept his attention for most of the meal. “What was that?”

“I said they’re acting like they have to prove they’re really in love so no one will think this is a terrible idea or that they’re terrible people for getting together in the

first place behind your back.” Stacey straightens her shoulders. “At least that’s one theory.”

“You’re probably right.” I cast a sidelong glance at Seth and lower my voice. “Are you still doing okay?”

“I’m fine.” He faces me and offers a light smile. “I just hate the way people keep looking and staring. Like I’m the lion at the zoo.”

I glance around and catch more than a few people looking away suddenly. “It does seem like they’re waiting for you to do something.”

“I don’t know what they expect from me.”

“You should just kiss already and get it over with.”

Seth and I turn in unison to gape at her. She shrugs. “What? I’m just saying, if you give the people what they want, maybe they’ll leave you alone.”

“And the people want us to kiss?” Seth says.

“Probably.”

With a shaky laugh, I lift a shoulder. “Well, I guess we should give the people what they want so we can all get on with our lives.”

“It’s okay.” He leans toward me, whispering in my ear. “We don’t have to do anything you don’t want.”

His warm breath on my skin sends a shiver down my spine.

“No, it’s okay.” I pull back a little, so our lips are a breath apart. “I want you to kiss me.”

“You do?”

I nod. And then, before I can second-guess whether or not this is a good idea, I do the very thing I’ve wanted to do since I first saw him.

I close my eyes and press my lips to his.

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FOUR

SETH

Her smooth lips brush against mine, and my whole body comes alive.

It's like I've been a tightly wound spring. The moment we touch—finally—I come apart.

The kiss starts off light. A gentle brush. But once we've breached the invisible wall keeping this arrangement of ours professional, there's no holding back. A flood of desire rushes through me. Sliding my hand to cradle the back of her head, I angle my head and urge her lips apart.

With a gasp, she relents. Our tongues lightly touch, and the want inside of me rages into a need. A need as essential as taking my next breath or having a drink of water.

Kissing Heidi feels necessary. And I don't want to stop.

But as much as I want to lose myself in the moment—to lose myself in her—the gasps around us remind me we aren't alone. With a final nibble, sucking her bottom lip, I pull back and rest my forehead against hers.

We're both gasping for breath. My thumb strokes the smooth skin behind her ear as we take deep gulps of air and let our heartrates return to normal.

“Well, then.” Stacey clears her throat. “I guess you showed them.”

I pull back slightly and search Heidi's gaze for any sign of discomfort. She just gives me a smile. It's almost shy and so damn sweet. It's more than a little surprising, but endearing, coming from a woman who has been so damn confident from the moment we met.

"You okay?" I ask.

"Mmm hmm." She rubs her lips together, as if she's savoring my taste. "For the record, we can do that again any time you want."

I chuckle. "I may take you up on that offer."

"Please do." She looks as if she wants to say more, but she pulls back and gives a polite smile as Kelly and Dad move toward us.

"That's enough, you lovebirds," Kelly says. "We have more planned this morning."

Stacey narrows her eyes. "You have more planned?"

"Of course, we do. It is a party."

"I thought it was bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the wedding," Stacey says. "And you want to spend more time together."

"It's bad luck to be superstitious," Dad says. "Besides, we want this whole weekend to be a party."

"And what would a party be without some games?" Kelly asks.

I groan inwardly. "Games?"

“That’s right.” She bats her eyes. “And I can tell the two of you are going to give us a run for our money with what I have planned.”

“This is a terrible idea.”

Heidi rolls her eyes at me. “It’s going to be fine.”

“We’re just asking for trouble.” I shake my head. “We’re going to give ourselves away.”

“You’re worrying about nothing.”

I lean my head toward hers and lower my voice. “We just met last night. Don’t you think that’s going to be pretty obvious when we’re going up against a handful of well-established couples in The Newlywed Game?”

She scoffs. “You’d be surprised how many ‘well-established couple’s’ know next to nothing about each other.”

“They probably know more than we do.”

“Maybe they do. Maybe they don’t. Either way, don’t you think it’ll be more suspicious if we back out?”

My shoulders slump. Damn it all, she’s probably right. If we back out now, it’ll only draw attention. Kelly and my dad will want to know why. And considering the way I’ve crashed their wedding weekend, I doubt either of them will let it go until they’ve questioned us to death.

We might as well answer a bunch of random questions instead of being faced with real ones.

I take a deep breath. “Okay. We can do this. But maybe we should have a signal or something.”

Her eyes widen. “You want us to cheat?”

“I didn’t say cheat. Just... you know... Maybe we can give each other a hint or two.”

She clucks her tongue. “And here I was thinking you were an honest kind of guy.”

“I am honest.”

“Says the man who just proposed we play dirty.” Her lips quirk up. “It’s a good thing I’m a play-to-win kind of gal. Just follow my lead.”

We move toward the two rows of chairs lined up at the front of the hotel’s party room. Stacey, who has been drafted into playing the MC, hands each of us a white board and marker.

“Who gave you the questions?” I ask.

“Who do you think?” She rolls her eyes. “But don’t worry. I plan to go off script. Just to keep things fair.”

I smirk. “That’s my baby sister.”

“I try. Now.” She gives a nudge. “Go on and take your seat, Bro. I guess you’re supposed to sit opposite your woman.”

Following my sister’s orders, I take the only remaining seat, to my dad’s right. He gives a grunt in greeting as I make myself comfortable. Or, as comfortable as I can be with my dad still eyeing me suspiciously.

Settling across from me, Heidi catches my gaze and winks. I immediately relax.

“It’s a funny thing,” my dad says.

“What’s that?”

“I keep trying to wrap my head around why you’d show up to my wedding with a woman you’ve never introduced to the family.”

I clench my jaw.

“Can you blame the boy?” his buddy Jim asks from his other side. “You’re marrying the last girlfriend he introduced to you.”

Dad’s glare grows more fierce, and I choke on a laugh.

Luckily, Stacey calls us all to attention before the two old guys can come to blows. “Okay, friends, family, and people who aren’t quite sure where you fall, but somehow ended up attending the wedding.”

There’s a rumble of laughter.

“We’re playing the Newlywed Game—or, rather, the Soon-to-be-Newlywed Game in honor of my dad and his”—she clenches her teeth in a tight smile—“bride. In this first round, we’ll ask this side”—she gestures toward Heidi—“questions about”—she points in my direction—“this side. You’ll have thirty seconds to write down your answers. ”

Narrowly resisting the urge to sigh—yet again—I uncap my marker and hold it poised to write.

“What”—Stacey says with dramatic flair—“is their favorite meal?”

I perk up at that. Flashing a grin across the aisle, I quickly scribble down my answer. I beam when it’s our turn to flash our boards as Heidi and I both hold up signs that say, “Smoked ribs with baked beans and corn on the cob.”

I shake my head as I wipe the board. I can’t believe she just asked one of the questions Heidi and I randomly discussed last night.

“What is their favorite TV show?”

We once again answer the same with his and her responses of Friday Night Lights . Stacey continues the line of questioning. Heidi and I ace every question in the first and second rounds.

By the time she’s made it through the list of questions provided by Kelly, only she and my dad and Heidi and I are still standing with perfect scores.

“Okay, we’re down to two couples.” Stacey arches an eyebrow. “It’s time for the final, rapid-fire question round. And to make sure no one cheats...” She looks down at the notes and gives a chuckle. “It looks like you’ll be playing this round blind-folded.”

“What?” My pulse quickens. “That’s not possible.”

“Why do you say that, son?” Dad asks. “Afraid you won’t know the answers

I dart a nervous glance at Heidi, who just gives me an encouraging grin. It’s not like we ended up needing to cheat. Somehow, every question had an answer we both knew.

But I'd taken comfort in looking up to find her encouraging gaze.

"I mean... How are we supposed to answer with our eyes closed?"

"You'll be sitting next to each other," Kelly says. You'll point at the person who best fits."

I frown, but I catch that neither my dad nor Kelly seems particularly happy about this turn of events. I perk up at that. This must be where Stacey decided to go rogue.

Well, good then. Heidi and I have already more than proved we know each other well. Or, at least, better than most of the other guests in attendance. Win or lose, we can walk out of this game with our cover intact.

As we sit down next to each other and one of the bridesmaids places blindfolds over our eyes, Heidi reaches over to take my hand. She gives it a short squeeze.

It's a clear signal. As if to say, "I'm still with you." It's the kind of support and acceptance I never knew I wanted.

"If it's anything about a short temper or kind of wild," she whispers, "pick me."

"And if it's not?"

"Choose yourself."

She releases my hand and we face forward. With our eyes covered, I'm even more aware of everything around us. I can practically feel people staring, and I can definitely hear their whispers.

But, I'm also even more in tune with Heidi. I can feel the warmth flowing from her

body into mine. And I'm keenly aware of her scent. It's the vanilla body wash she uses paired with a sweet, citrusy spray she misted on herself before we left the room.

It's the same smell I woke up with clinging to my skin this morning. I can feel myself growing thick and hard at the memory of her body pressed intimately against mine.

"Ready, contestants?" Stacey calls out. "Let's go. Who is most likely to plan a romantic night in?"

I hesitate a moment and point at myself.

"Who is most likely to start an argument?"

Though I doubt this answer, I follow her earlier instructions and point at Heidi.

"Who is most likely to be late to a date?"

I point at her again.

"Who is most likely to cry during a movie?"

With a chuckle, I gesture to myself.

"Who said 'I love you' first?"

Swallowing past a sudden lump in my throat, I press my thumb against my chest again.

"And, who is most likely to break the other's heart?"

My own heart hitches. I don't have to guess the right answer on this one. I point at

Heidi without a second thought.

Of course, it's her. When it comes to us, she holds all the cards. And she doesn't even know it.

"I think we have a clear winner here, folks. Contestants, you can remove your blindfolds."

Tugging it from my face, I blink at the sudden brightness. I turn to Heidi who is doing the same. Our gazes meet, and she grins.

"How do you think it went?" I ask.

"I guess we're about to find out."

"Thank you all so much for playing," Stacey says. "And now, please put your hands together for our winners: Seth and Heidi."

My jaw falls open and Heidi gasps, throwing her arms around me. Mine instinctively come up to wrap around hers.

I bury my face in her long, auburn hair, breathing in the sweet smell of vanilla and grapefruit.

I'm vaguely aware of my dad and Kelly bickering about who said 'I love you' first, but I don't give them another thought. I'm too damn surprised, and too happy holding the woman in my arms to care.

"You think you're happy now"—Stacey wiggles her eyebrows—"wait till you find out what you've won."

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FIVE

HEIDI

For the second time today, a stranger removes a blindfold. This time, it's to reveal, well, paradise.

“Oh my God,” I breathe. “It's... beautiful.”

Seth squints beside me. “Where the hell are we?”

“Not hell. Heaven.” I slide my arm through his and rest my cheek against his bicep. “This, my friend, is a magical space called the day spa.”

“Day spa?” He frowns. “Don't tell me they're going to slather us in mud and make us drink cucumbers.”

“My kingdom for a mud wrap and cucumber water.” I hold up the certificate the bridesmaid handed us before leaving. “But unfortunately, no, that is not our journey today.”

“Then what are we doing?”

“Today, we're getting naked.”

His eyes widen and his gaze drops briefly—if I'm not mistaken—to my chest. “We're doing what?”

I narrowly stifle the urge to laugh. It's not easy. The poor guy looks like he doesn't know whether to blush or start stripping.

"We're getting a massage." I hand him the certificate. "A couple's massage."

"Oh." He stares down at the paper. "And you have to get naked for that?"

"It's up to you," a masseuse says as she strides into the room carrying a small stack of towels. "But most of our guests prefer to remove their clothing to avoid the risk of staining from the oils and lotions we use."

Seth nods slowly. "And we get naked... together?"

"Did you want individual massages?" She frowns. "Unfortunately, we don't have any openings for those today. And your certificate is for a couple's massage."

"A couple's massage is fine," I assure her. "He's just a little nervous. It's his first time at a spa."

"Oh, yes." She nods in understanding. "We promise we'll be gentle with you. Now, I'll leave you two to get more comfortable. And my colleague and I will be back in about ten minutes."

I start to thank you, but Seth rests a hand on the small of my back, sending a tingle up and down my spine.

"Excuse me, miss," he says, his voice low and gruff. "Do you by any chance have cucumber water?"

"We do. Would you like a glass?"

“Could you please get one for the lady?”

“Of course.”

My heart skips a beat. “You listened.”

“I’ll always listen to you.” He gives my back a final rub. “So... how does this work exactly?”

“Well.” I swallow hard, my throat thicker than it was before. “It’s like I said before. We get naked. As long as you’re comfortable. With that.”

“I’m comfortable. With that.” His dark eyes become almost pitch black. “Are you? Comfortable. With that?”

I nod, clenching my thighs together to savor the warmth building between them the longer I’m the subject of his blazing hot stare.

Heart thundering, and breath coming in short gasps, I fumble for the towels our masseuse left behind.

“Here.” I thrust one at him.

“Thanks.” He takes it. His work-calloused fingers brush against mine, sending a fresh, delicious shiver through me.

Oh dear. If I’m like this now—half nerves, half anticipation—how am I going to be once we’re both, indeed, bare as the day we were born?

“Right.” Filling my lungs and straightening my shoulders, I step behind a screen. “I’ll just get changed here.”

“Changed?” He arches an eyebrow. “I thought the point was to get naked.”

“You know what I mean.”

My cheeks feel as if they’re on fire. How did this happen? When did we go from me being the one who is in control and teasing to him having the upper hand and better grip? And... Why do I kind of like it?

“Well then.” He inclines his head slightly. “I guess I’ll see you once we’re both... comfortable.”

“Yeah. Right. See you then.” Spinning on my heel, I nearly bump into a potted rubber ficus on my way around the screen.

More thumbs than fingers, I remove my clothes, carelessly tossing them into a pile on a stool. I don’t have the patience—or control—to fold them neatly now. Not when I can hear the sound of a belt unbuckling. The lowering of a zipper. The rustle of denim falling to the ground.

I clench my eyes tight, trying not to imagine the scene unfolding on the other side of the screen. It doesn’t work. It’s impossible. Eyes open or closed, I can’t seem to think about anything but the way the muscles on his shoulders and neck tighten as he moves.

Or the dark hair that smatters across Seth’s strong chest.

With a trail that leads down his six-pack abs.

To a part of him I haven’t seen.

But, oh, I can imagine how good it looks as well.

And I can practically sense how good it would feel inside of me.

More tightly coiled than I've ever been in my life, I wrap the towel around me and groan.

"Is everything okay back there?" Seth calls out.

"Yes. No." I sigh. "It's the towel."

"What's wrong with it?"

"It..." God. I'm normally so confident in the body I have. I've spent years working to love myself and this life I have.

And I hate—absolutely hate—that right now I feel anything less than happy in my own skin.

"The towel," I start again, "won't wrap around me completely." My shoulders slump. "I don't think it was made for girls like me."

"What do you mean girls like you?"

I scowl at the screen. "You know what I mean. Plus size."

"Oh."

I cringe, hating this, and hating even more that the backs of my eyes are burning.

"Well," Seth says, "I can turn around and give you a chance to settle on your bed first if that makes you more comfortable."

“That... would be nice.”

Taking another breath, I hold the towel as tightly around me as I can. The edges just come together but leaving a gap exposing part of one breast and my belly. I step around the corner.

I gasp.

“What?” Seth turns from the wall. His lips part, and heat flashes in his eyes. But he shakes his head. “What’s wrong?”

“The massage beds.”

“Is something wrong with them?” He frowns and follows my stare. He sucks in a breath. “There’s...”

“There’s only one,” I finish.

“Is that... normal?”

“I’ve never seen a couple’s massage with only one bed.” I give a breathy laugh. “Trust a random resort in Alaska to be the first.”

“Is that... okay?”

“It doesn’t seem like we have another choice.”

“Well.” He swallows hard. “Then I guess we’d better get on it.”

So we do. It’s not quite comfortable, but also not completely awkward, for both of us to settle on the bed.

Still feeling some kind of way about the whole towel situation, I place my face in the headrest, determined to put it behind me.

“Heidi,” Seth whispers. “Can I say something?”

“You can say anything.”

“You have nothing to feel shy about.” At his words, I turn to face him and those dark, expressive eyes of his. “You’re gorgeous. Everything about you... gorgeous.”

“Everything about me is bigger than the rest of the world seems to think it should be.”

“Then the rest of the world is stupid.” His teeth scrape across his bottom lip. “I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you since we met.”

“We’ve basically been together every second since we met.” I give a wry grin. “But... It’s the same for me.”

“You’ve been thinking about me?” His grins at my nod. “Have you been thinking about how good it would be to kiss again?”

“Yeah.” The single word comes out breathy.

“Me too.” His head moves closer, and I lean forward too. Narrowing the distance between us. “I wonder what it would be like to kiss without any clothes on.”

I don’t speak but move toward him, my eyelids fluttering closed. His breath tickles my lips.

A loud moan rings through the air. My eyes open.

Seth's dark brows knit together. "What the fuck was that?"

There's another moan. This one is followed by an unmistakable. "Oh my God. Yes. YES. YEEEEESSSSSSSSSSSS."

His eyes widen. “Are they... fucking?”

A giggle bubbles out of me. “Probably not.”

“Then what the hell are they doing over there?”

“They’re getting a massage.”

“And that makes them... come?”

I laugh again. “For some people, it’s a release on that level.”

“Fucking hell.” He lifts a hand to scratch the back of his head. “Do you make noises like that when you’re getting a massage?”

“On their level? No.”

He visibly relaxes.

“But I’ve been known to make a few sounds of my own.”

He winces. “Fucking hell,” he says again. “I’m never going to survive.”

“Why’s that?”

“If you must know...”

“I think I must.”

“I’m already hard as a rock.” He clenches his jaw. “And I think I might explode if I hear you making noises like that.”

My jaw falls open. “Seriously?”

“Deathly seriously.” He reaches for my hand. “May I?”

I nod dumbly, my lips parting in anticipation. My breath catches as he turns on his side and brings my hand toward him.

My fingers brush over his cock. I gasp, even as I marvel at the smooth skin, and the rock hard steel that stands strong below inch after inch.

He’s a big boy. A thick boy. I nibble on my bottom lip as I wrap my fingers around him.

He lets out a moan of his own as I stroke him. Up and down. Pumping his already hard shaft. Letting every catch of his breath, every groan, guide me.

Turning on my own side so I can get a better grip, I slide my other hand across his chest. Tracing circles in the smattering of hair. Scraping my nails around his nipples.

Watching the pleasure play across his face. Watching his dark eyes watching me, going hazy the more I move. I’ve never felt more powerful.

Being the reason this strong, hulking man comes apart makes me feel like a queen.

“Fuck, Heidi.” His lips are parted. His breath comes in gasps. “I won’t last long.”

“Then don’t.” I give him a gentle squeeze, and he hisses. “Let go.”

“But... I should... You should get to... First.” He sucks in another breath. “I should make you come first.”

“You can owe me one.” I pump my fists a little faster. Sliding my thumb along the bulging vein of his perfect cock. “Besides. I want you to enjoy your first massage. We can’t let this guy and his needs get in the way.”

“Heidi... I... I...” I give him one more squeeze, and he shouts, “Fuck!”

Warm liquid shoots out from his cock, covering my fingers, covering my belly with the force of his release.

My own breath comes in gasps. My body is alive, electric even.

“That was...” Seth gives a shaky laugh.

He cradles the back of my head and pulls me closer, capturing my lips in a kiss. This one isn’t like the other. It isn’t searching or exploring.

It’s searing.

Branding.

Claiming, as if he’s declaring that I’m his with that one kiss.

We’re both panting when we pull apart.

“That was incredible. You’re incredible” He searches my eyes. “I want to do that for you.”

“And you can but—” The knock at our door interrupts me. I give a nod toward it.
“We’re out of town.”

“I’ll tell them to go away.”

“No you won’t. I want a massage. I want you to get a massage.”

“Well, fine then.” He gives me another firm kiss as he wipes his seed from my skin with his towel. “But I’m going to make you come so hard later, you won’t see straight.”

From Seth, I know those aren’t empty words. They’re a promise.

A promise I can’t wait for him to deliver.

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SIX

SETH

Feeling loose after the massage—and after the most explosive handjob of my life—I tighten my hold on Heidi’s hand as we leave the day spa.

“Someone is eager to get out of there.” She giggles and practically skips to keep up with my long strides. “Where are we going?”

“Somewhere.”

She laughs again, a sound that’s quickly become one of my favorites in the world. It’s up there with wind blowing through the trees, while a creek bubbles, and birds chirp on one of my hikes.

There’s only one sound I think I’ll love more.

It’s the sound of her crying out my name as I make her come.

A sound I intend to hear as soon as fucking possible.

A door opens off the hotel lobby, and a sanitation worker leaves, pushing a cart with them.

“That’ll do,” I mutter.

“What?”

I don't answer Heidi's question. Instead, I throw open the door, pull her inside and slam it shut.

Her lips open in surprise. Before she can ask what exactly we're doing in here, I kiss her.

Hard.

My tongue sweeps into her mouth finding hers. I capture her gasp and savor the feel of her fingers gripping my shoulders. Digging in so hard, I wouldn't be surprised to find bruises there later.

I hope I do. I want a visual reminder of this moment. Of what I'm about to do.

Gripping her hips, I push Heidi back against the door. Propping her up with my body pressed against hers. My cock, once again painfully hard, cradled against her soft curves.

I'd like to feel her hand around me again.

I'd love to be in her mouth or in her hot pussy.

But my wants can wait. Her needs, her desires, are all that matters now. I can't wait to explore them.

Taking a nip at her bottom lip, I trail wet, hot kisses along the line of her jaw and down her neck.

I pause as I find her pulse, her heart racing. I suck slightly on her skin there, savoring

the feel of her pulse beating against my tongue. Delighting in the way she gasps and arches against me. Urging me on. Silently begging for more.

I have every intention of delivering.

“Seth.” My name comes out in a whispered breath. It’s both a question and an answer.

“Hold on, sweetheart.” I give another nip at her neck. “I’m going to make you feel good.”

“You already do.”

I chuckle, low in my throat as I stroke the curves of her hips.

Pulling back slightly, I nuzzle the sweet spot behind her ear. “Can I kiss you?”

She massages my shoulder. “Isn’t that what you’ve been doing?”

“Yes, but, I’d like to kiss you somewhere else.”

She sucks in a breath. “You do?”

“So. Fucking. Much.” I lower my head to press my lips to the swell of her breasts above the V of her sundress’s neckline.

“Well...” She takes a shuddering breath as I push the dress aside and kiss her through the lace of her bra. “I suppose it would only be polite to let you have your way.”

“Oh.” I slide my tongue under the lace and she hisses. “I don’t plan on doing anything polite.”

With that. I drop to my knees and bunch the skirt of her dress up. I stroke the smooth, creamy skin of her thighs. I kiss one leg above her knee. Then the other, higher up on her thigh.

Then, with one jerk, I tug her panties down her hips and let them fall to the ground. The sweet, musky scent of her desire fills my lungs and my soul.

With a growl, I lower my head to see if she tastes as good as she smells.

“Oh.” She gasps as I slide my tongue across her seam. One hand slides into my hair as I find her clit and swirl my tongue around it in long, languid circles.

“Oh my God.”

I vaguely hear the sound of her head thudding back against the door as I apply pressure, then ease up, and add more, and lighten. Teasing and tempting.

Making her every bit as wild as she made me before.

It's not enough.

Sliding one hand up her belly under the dress, I find her chest. I tug the bra down until I find her breast. I massage it, sliding my thumb over the hardened peak. She lets out a mew, like a satisfied kitten.

At the same time, I squeeze her hip with my other. Pulling her more squarely against me so I can devour her with more ferocity. I use my tongue. My lips. And even my nose to entice as much of her as possible.

Based on the noises she's making, the battle I'm waging on her desire is working. Only, in this battle, we'll both be the victors.

She tugs on my hair, pulling it so it's almost painful. It's the best feeling as her breaths grow shorter and higher pitched.

"Seth," she cries out, music to my ears. "Oh, I'm so close. I'm... so... close."

I press my tongue more squarely against her clit, suckling on it as I gently pinch her nipple between my finger and thumb.

"Oh. SETH!" she cries out, she presses against me as her body quivers and the power of the orgasm consumes her.

She collapses back against the door, her breath coming in gasps. I pull my head back and rest my cheek against her thigh. Rubbing my lips together to memorize her taste.

"I was right," I murmur, pressing one more kiss to the curls covering her sweet pussy.

"Right about what?"

"That's the best sound in the world." I tug up her panties.

"What is?"

I kiss her through the satin and look up at her looking down at me with hazy green eyes. "The sound of my name on your lips while you're coming. It's the best sound in the world."

"What crawled up your butt and died?"

I scowl at my sister as I finish tying a bundle of roses and some sort of netting to a chair. "Nothing."

“Yeah right.” She snorts. “You forget that I’ve known you my whole life. And I can tell when you’re in a piss poor mood.”

“I’m fine.”

“No you aren’t.”

There’s no point in arguing. Like Stacey, I’ve known her most of my life. And I can’t remember a time in my life when she let me win an argument.

Besides, she’s not wrong. I am in a “piss poor mood,” as she put it. I’d just brought Heidi back to our room and was about to strip her naked when she showed up at the door. Begging me to come help her with a last-minute wedding emergency.

“I hardly think sticking flowers on chairs counts as a wedding emergency,” I grumble. “Why do they even need more flowers? They’re getting married in a fucking garden.”

“What was that?”

I shake my head. “Are we done here?”

“Almost.” She hands me another bundle of flowers and points to another chair at the end of the next row. “You seem eager to get back to your room. Are you so worried about primping for the wedding.”

“Shut up.” But there’s no heat in my words.

“Or, maybe you’re eager to get back to your ‘girlfriend.’”

I glance back up at her and catch her smirk.

“I know, you know.” Her grin spreads. “I know you two only met last night.”

Well shit. Of course, she does. “You aren’t going to say anything?”

“Absolutely not. I think it was a good idea to let Dad, Kelly, and the rest of the world know you’re unbothered.” Her lips twitch. “Besides, I’m rooting for you kids.”

I arch an eyebrow, which prompts a laugh. “I have eyes. I have ears. I can see and hear that somehow, in just one day, the two of you have established a relationship that is already stronger than any other you’ve ever had. Plus, I like Heidi.”

“I like her, too.”

“I’m glad to hear it. And I’m sure I’ll enjoy attending your wedding to Heidi better than this one.”

I roll my eyes, but I don’t tell her to shut up. Crazy as it sounds, hearing the word wedding and Heidi in the same sentence doesn’t fill me with panic or annoyance. It feels... right.

I’m not saying I’m going out to buy a ring after this wedding. But I do think, sooner rather than later, Heidi and I should have a talk about making this arrangement of ours a real thing.

Finally finished with the decor, I say my goodbyes to Stacey. I promise to find her before the wedding so we can sit together. There’s strength in numbers.

Eager to get back to Heidi to have a serious talk—and maybe a make-out session—I don’t notice a door open. A hand reaches out and tugs me inside.

I come face to face with Kelly. Her hair is already curled, teased, and pinned up, and

her makeup is done.

But she's only wearing a white slip and she's eyeing me with a predatory look.

"Seth," she purrs. "I've been waiting for you."

My brow furrows. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe it was seeing you for the first time in so long. Maybe it was watching you work to make my wedding a fantasy." She sighs. "It got me thinking... maybe I didn't give us enough of a chance."

I blink. "You're joking."

"I'm serious. So..." She bats her eyes, giving my arm another squeeze. "What do you say? Want to ditch this and find somewhere we can be together. Alone?"

I burst into laughter.

Pulling back as if I've struck her, Kelly's bottom lip quivers and big, fat tears roll out of her eyes.

Despite the ridiculousness of her question coming an hour before her wedding to my dad, the man she left me for, I stop laughing.

"Hey, there's no need to cry."

"No. There is." She swipes at her face, smudging mascara. "I know you don't want me. Heck, I'm not even sure I want you."

"Then what exactly is going on here?"

“I don’t know.” She sniffles. “I guess I was just feeling a little... sensitive and jealous.”

“Jealous?” I frown. “About Heidi and me?”

“No.” Her tear-stained gaze lifts to mine. “About Heidi and your father. I saw them disappear into her hotel room a few minutes ago.”

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SEVEN

HEIDI

Walter walks past me and into the room before I can finish a greeting.

I frown at his back. “Are you here to see Seth? Because he is out in the garden helping Stacey with the decorations.”

“That’s fine.” He waves me off and begins pacing the floor back and forth. “I didn’t come here to talk to him. I came here to see you.”

“You wanted to see me.” I shake my head. “Why would you?—”

“Do you find me attractive?”

If possible, my eyes would pop right out of my head and my tongue would roll out of my mouth. Like I’m a freaking cartoon character.

“I’m sorry. Did you just ask...”

“Do you find me attractive?” he repeats. “It’s a simple yes or no.”

“And it’s simply inappropriate.”

“That’s not an answer.”

“It’s the only one you’re going to get.”

He stares at me. And, it’s a little creepy. His eyes are just like Seth’s. Dark. Intense. Only there’s something I haven’t seen in his son’s. Something that keeps me from reaching out and slapping him.

There’s a haunted sadness.

“I know you aren’t really here to proposition me. I know you don’t hate your son that much.”

Now it’s his turn to gape. “Of course I don’t hate Seth. Why the hell would you think that?”

“Is it really such a jump to think there might be a little animosity between a father and son when one steals the other’s girlfriend and asks her to marry him.”

He huffs. “It wasn’t like that.”

“If that’s what you say, I’ll choose to believe you.” I hold up my hands in concession. “Then what’s really going on here?”

His shoulders slump and he drops to the bed. “I don’t know if I should be doing this?”

“Sitting in my room or... getting married?”

“The wedding. Marriage.” He takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. “I didn’t mean to hurt Seth when Kelly and I got together. I swear. But when we met, I felt something inside of me. A spark of joy I haven’t felt since... well. It’s a feeling I’ve been chasing since the kids’ mom died.”

My heart aches. Despite what he's done to Seth, despite the fact that he was seemingly coming on to me a few minutes ago, I feel sorry for the guy.

If what I've heard is even half true, the man was crazy in love with his first wife. And when she died, she took a big piece of his heart with her.

I don't blame him for trying to chase that same high. I do blame him for seeking it out in his son's girlfriend.

"So what changed?" I ask him.

"I just... I see the way Seth looks at you. I see the way you look at him." He shakes his head. "It's not like that with Kelly."

"Oh, Walter."

"And then the game." He scratches the back of his head and drops his hand to the side. The same way his son does when he's working something out. "The only reason we made it to the final round is because Kelly wrote the damn questions and gave me the answers."

"That doesn't mean?—"

"What if this is a bad idea?" he asks. "What if I sacrificed the relationship I had with my son to be with a woman who will only leave me like the others? Because I don't have enough to give her."

God. This poor guy is killing me. There are times being a bartender feels like being a therapist. But I'm not equipped for this.

"I don't have a crystal ball," I say, swallowing hard. "I can't tell you what the future

holds. Only you can decide what is and isn't right."

"Do you think I've ruined things with Seth forever?"

"I can't answer that either." I give him a sympathetic look. "But your son is a good man. He isn't vindictive. He has a big heart. If you give it time, and you give it your all, I think you might be able to build a new relationship."

"I'd really like that." He sighs again and stands. "Thanks for listening to me."

"I hope it helped."

"It did, and?—"

The door swings open. A wild-eyed Seth stands on the other side. His chest is rising up and down, as if he just ran across the hotel. His hands are balled into fists at his side.

His dark gaze darts between his father and me. "Is everything okay here?"

"Yeah," Walter says. "It is." He starts out the door but pauses at the threshold. He cuffs Seth's shoulder. "You have a damn fine woman here."

Seth blinks in surprise, but turns back to me. His eyes are full of warmth and something else. Something captivating and breathtaking. "I know."

"Don't let her get away."

"I won't." He closes the door behind his dad and turns to me. "Seriously, is everything okay?"

“Yeah, it’s fine. He only made a little pass at me?—”

“That son-of-a?—”

“But his heart wasn’t in it.” I raise my hand to cup his cheek. “He’s a groom with cold feet. A man having second thoughts.” I stroke his light beard. “He’s a father who regrets his relationship with his son.”

“You must have had some conversation.”

“We did. And we can talk about it later. But”— I reach for his hand—“we have a wedding to attend.”

Linking my fingers with his, I turn toward the door and take a step. Seth tugs me to stop.

I turn and arch a curious brow at him. “Shouldn’t we get down there so we can find our seats?”

“We have plenty of time.” He tugs me close and slides his free hand behind my head. “I need to tell you something.”

My heart thuds. “I’m listening.”

“I know we just met. I know this was only supposed to be for the weekend.” He shakes his head. “But, Heidi. The way I feel about you... the way you make me feel...”

I reach up to clasp his arm. “I know. I feel the same.”

“Oh thank God.” He releases a breath and rests his forehead against mine. “I’m so

glad it isn't just me."

"It definitely isn't just you." I lift my chin and brush my lips against his.

He kisses me back. It's slow and deep. Sealing our spoken and unspoken feelings with a promise for more.

I'm not sure who starts undressing who first. But as we remove our layers and our lips and hands explore each other's bodies, we make our way to the bed.

This time, when we lie down, we don't climb into separate sides. We tumble in together. Wrapped around each other. Stroking and enticing. Giving the endless sparks that have snapped between us a source at last.

Seth lowers his mouth to my already tight nipple and slides his tongue over it. I gasp, digging my fingers into the back of his head. He takes me into his mouth. Sucking. Using just the slightest hint of teeth.

It sends a fresh jolt of desire through my belly and straight between my thighs.

"I don't think I'll ever get enough of you," he says, releasing my nipple to explore the other. "We could do this forever, and it would never be enough."

A single tear slides down my cheek as I stare down at the man who has become so dear to me in so little time.

When we finally become one, when he thrusts into me, filling me to the hilt, he does more than claim my body.

He captures my heart.

I move with him. My fingers trace the muscles of his back. His lips suckle the pulse on my neck.

And when I don't think I can hold back a second longer, a wave of pleasure bursts inside of me. Flowing through every inch of my body as I fall apart.

Shouting my name, Seth buries himself in me one more time, finding his own release.

We lay there together, connected, for several minutes. Both of us basking in the afterglow of our passion. His face buried in the crook of my neck. My cheek pressed against his thick head of hair.

When at last he lifts his head, I see all of the love in the world shining in them.

"That was..."

I nod and cup his cheek. "It was."

Chuckling, he kisses my neck. "You always seem to know what I'm thinking."

"Well, not always. And definitely not everything." I rub my cheek against his hair. "But it's kind of nice."

"It's very nice." He raises his head. "Heidi, I?—"

A loud commotion sounds outside. We both bolt up and scramble to the window, not bothering to cover ourselves as we pull the curtains aside.

Down in the garden, Walter and Kelly are facing off. Hands on their hips. Faces red.

Seth pushes open the window in time to hear Kelly ask, "What do you mean you

think we should postpone?”

“What do you mean you had Seth in your room?”

“Well, you were in his girlfriend’s.”

“That was different.”

“I don't see how.”

“That’s the problem with you. You never?—”

Shaking his head, Seth closes the window and I let the drape fall back into place.

We share a look, and burst into laughter. We’re both still grinning as we fall back into bed together.

Whatever is going on out there is none of our business.

Everything that really matters in life is right here.

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SETH

“Will you stop pacing?” Stacey cries out. “You’re making me nervous.”

I freeze mid-step. “I’m making you nervous.”

“Yes, with all the back and forth and sighing.” She shakes her head. “You’re going to walk a hole into the carpet.”

“I don’t think that’s possible.” But all the same, I sneak a glance at the ground.

It’s fine. I’m fine. Everything is fine.

“I don’t know why you’re so nervous.” Her eyes narrow. “Please tell me you aren’t having second thoughts.”

“Of course not.” I glare at her. “I’ve wanted to marry Heidi almost from the moment I met her.”

“Okay.” She presses a hand to her chest. “You were scaring me for a moment.” Her hand falls to the side. “So, what’s the problem?”

“I’m just... nervous.”

“About the wedding?”

I give a short nod. “You know I don’t like being the center of attention. I don’t like

people staring at me.”

“If it makes you feel better, most people will be looking at the bride and not you. Well, not unless you do something stupid, like saying the wrong person’s name during your vows.”

I stop mid-pace again to gape. “Oh, great. Now I have to worry about that too.”

“Or, maybe you might lock your knees and pass out.”

“That’s enough, Stacey.” My dad steps into my room, a tie in his hand. “Leave your poor brother alone.”

“I’m just keeping him on his toes.”

“I know, but that’s going to be Heidi’s job now.”

All three of us smile at that. Who would have guessed that the woman who was hired to bartend my dad’s ultimately ill-fated wedding would have ended up being the one who brought us all together?

I’ve stopped trying to figure out how she did it. My future wife has a way about her.

She befriended Stacey.

She helped my dad realize he needed a therapist, not another wife.

As for me, well, she’s made every day of my life better simply by being in it.

Nudging Stacey aside, my dad places the tie around my neck and begins to form the knot. That’s another thing Heidi did. She helped my dad and I mend our issues.

While our relationship isn't the same as it was before, which would have been impossible, we've built a new one.

"I can't wait to get this over with," I say as my dad finishes.

"I can appreciate that." He straightens the tie and steps back. "But as long as you say the right name and keep your knees from locking, you have nothing but a lifetime of happiness to look forward to."

I chuckle at that. "Okay. I'm ready."

And a few minutes later, when I see Heidi walking down the aisle toward me, I know I am.

I'm ready for whatever life has in store for me. Until death do we part, and after if possible.

Thank you for reading. For more steamy shorts, check out the rest of the Seasons of Sizzle series.