



Daddy to Go

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Description: The gorgeous doctor's got sensual lips, sculpted abs, and yeah whoops! He gave me a baby the forbidden way. Ryder Rivington rode into town, and the female population gasped. This doctor was H-O-T. In our small village, it's not often you see a physician with tattoos swirling up his sculpted arms, not to mention those penetrating blue eyes and cocky, knowing grin. But even more, Dr. Rivington's got magic in his hands ... so magical in fact, that he gave me a baby! It was my first exam. It was supposed to be about blinding florescent lights and the cold, hard touch of a metal speculum. I was frightened, and absolutely petrified about what was going to happen. But instead, Dr. Rivington made the experience sensual, warm and hazy ... and now, all I want is more babies with the handsome physician!

Total Pages (Source): 63

1

Abby

“You really need to stop panicking,” my best friend Mary scolded as she sat on the phone with me for the tenth straight minute of panic. “This is something that women get done all the time. I mean, there’s probably some ridiculous statistic out there that says every minute five thousand women get poked and prodded by a gynecologist.”

I looked down at my hands, clutched securely to the steering wheel. I was white knuckling. White knuckling seemed to come with the territory whenever a doctor’s appointment loomed into view.

“I know, I know,” I said with a sigh. “It’s just that I’ve never had anything intherebefore. This is my first gyn appointment.”

“Which is ridiculous,” Mary snapped. “You’re twenty. I got my first one at sixteen. Besides, it’s not all about the badump-badump. You have to have those ta-tas checked too, woman!”

“But I heard it’s going to hurt,” I whined. “I saw the pictures. They take this long metal tool and stick it up ... well, you know where.”

Immediately my thighs clenched together, and my fingers began to ache from being so tightly wrapped around the steering wheel. I could barely keep the phone stuck between my cheek and shoulder but there was no way I was prying my frigid hands from the crumbling leather of my Toyota Camry’s wheel.

“It is uncomfortable, I told you that,” Mary said with exhaustion. “But like I said, you should be more concerned with making sure you have your breasts examined. That is no laughing matter. Your family has that –” She snapped her fingers. “What’s it called? The Angelina Jolie cancer gene. At least they most likely do, and you’ve been too afraid to get that test done too.”

“Yeah, I know,” I whispered, looking over at the small picture of my deceased grandmother that hung from the rearview mirror. “I guess you’re right.”

“I am, and you’ll realize that it’s not that terrible,” she said comfortingly. “Now put your big girl panties on, get your ass out there, and go to the appointment. Call me later to tell me how right I am.”

I chuckled, loosening the grip on the column. “Okay. Thanks, hun.”

“Yeah, yeah,” she laughed. “Thank me when you’re done.”

Mary hung up the phone and I finally released the faux leather wheel, dropping my phone onto the seat beside me. I tapped my foot on the floorboard and looked up in the rearview mirror. There was a blob of chocolate from the milkshake I nervously woofed down on the way over, stuck to the corner of my mouth. I wiped it away and sighed, pulling my sweater down tightly.

Of course, it wouldn’t stay that way because my boobs are too huge for the damn thing. Nonetheless, the thick material made me feel more secure, like it was armor against prying eyes. So be it. It was a false security, but worth the scratchy, hot wool.

I took the keys out of the ignition and took in a long deep breath. “You can do this, Abby. One foot in front of the other and before you know it, you’ll be done.”

I gave myself a solid head nod and flung the car door open, glad that I parked in an

outside space so I wouldn't have to squeeze my swinging hips sideways to get down the row. The parking lot was full of vehicles but no one was out walking around. Well, except for a very pregnant woman with her husband frantically scampering beside her, holding her purse while patting her hand.

Well, I was probably off better than the pregnant lady. She looked hugely uncomfortable, as if there was a giant watermelon in her tummy. At least at that moment I didn't have to schlep around another human being inside of me while waddling like a duck.

Carefully I stepped up onto the sidewalk and meandered as slow as I could go without looking suspicious. Walking along the pathway I glanced down at the red blooming flowers and the groomed and mulched shrubbery. I couldn't help but wonder if it was perfectly done to create a false sense of comfort before getting probed with a cold metal tool.

Just then the door flew open and a woman came out on her phone with an annoyed expression on her face.

"Yeah, I just got done. No biggie, just had to check the lady bits. Yeah, I'm on my way back to the office."

I stepped to the side to let her pass but she didn't even notice I was there. If she could be so nonchalant about it, I should have nothing to worry about, right? I wish it was that easy to convince myself of that fact. I grabbed the door before it shut and walked in, looking to my right at the sliding glass wall with a receptionist in scrubs sitting behind the counter.

Meanwhile, to my left was the waiting room where four or five women sat. They were accompanied by a couple of guys awkwardly sitting there with their eyes glued to a silent TV. The place was actually not as scary as I thought. There were colorful

paintings on the walls, a pleasant low music playing overhead, and the seats looked comfortable. It was definitely not the institutional green walls and fluorescent lighting I had been expecting.

Twisting my lips, I walked up to the window and smiled, waiting for the receptionist to push it open.

“How can I help you?” she asked in a kind tone.

It took me a second to get my voice. “Yes, I have an appointment to see Dr. McNamara.”

The secretary looked at me funny, almost puzzled. I immediately reached into my purse and pulled out an appointment card, handing it over to her. “I made the appointment two months ago.”

She took the card and tapped on the computer for a moment. “I see. They should have called you because Dr. McNamara actually went on vacation. I apologize, she must have scheduled her vacation after you made this appointment, and we forgot to give you a ring.”

“Darn,” I said, secretly delighted. Yay, I’d get to reschedule! Thank goodness!

“Well, hold on,” the secretary said, typing again on the computer.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:54 am

I bit the inside of my cheek and clutched my bag in front of me, wobbling back and forth, my eyes darting around. They went back to the woman behind the counter and for the first time I actually noticed what she looked like. She was tall, slim, and beautiful, with long silky blonde hair. I tugged on my sweater a bit, now feeling huge and bulky.

“It’s really okay,” I offered. “I can just reschedule for a later date.”

The secretary narrowed her eyes at the computer screen for a moment.

“Actually, you don’t need to do that at all. I have a spot open with Dr. Rivington instead. It’s only ten minutes from now. And trust me, he is awesome at what he does, puts you right at ease, and can have you in and out of here in a jiffy.”

My hands instantly white knuckled again, this time on the straps of my purse. I wanted to say no, especially when she had described the doctor as a “he.” I wanted to be seen by a woman. I had never had any man look at my parts before, much less seen me fully nude. My first pap smear was not really where I wanted to start.

But there I stood, staring at the beautiful blonde lady with the perfect white toothed smile. It was intimidating. So, instead of turning her down, I found myself slowly nodding my head, unsure of how my face actually looked in that moment.

It didn’t really matter. I was going to have to get the appointment done at some point or another. I could put it off but in reality, there was no good reason to wait. It was hard for me to get time off work, and I really couldn’t afford to take another day for another appointment. So I let my head continue to nod as the woman chirped and

pulled my file.

“Did you fill out the new patient forms?” she asked.

I continued to nod, pulling them from my bag and handing them through the window. I also gave her my insurance and my license and stood in disbelief as she ran them through the copier and handed them back over to me. I went from barely wanting to come in to having an appointment with a male doctor. Oh god. It was going to be awful.

But the receptionist didn't know.

“Alrighty,” she said cheerfully. “Meet me at the door over there and we'll get your vitals and take you on back. It was just lucky we had a cancellation.”

I forced a smile, one that I knew did not actually look genuine. Turning, I walked toward the door. With each step I felt like I was making my way down Death Row. My knuckles were still white while one hand clutched my bag and the other my paperwork, now crumpled. Just as I stepped up, there was a click and the door opened, the same lady holding it as I walked through.

“Come on right over here to my office and I'll get your stats,” she said walking in front of me.

We went into a small room with a couple of pictures on the wall, a height measure, and a scale. She grabbed one of the blood pressure machines from outside the room and wheeled it in, wrapping the cuff around my arm. Then, she stuck a thermometer in my mouth and stood there, waiting for the machine to show its readings.

“Your temp's slightly up because it looks like you are a little nervous,” she soothed. “But everything's normal. No need to be nervous, I promise you. The doctor is very

gentle and always makes sure to cover all questions from his patients.”

I nodded as she took the cuff off and held her hand to the scale. I stepped up but closed my eyes, not wanting to see the final number. I haven’t owned a scale in years, and didn’t plan on ruining my entire day with those stats. She could probably tell I wasn’t fond of it, as she didn’t repeat my weight out loud to me.

“Okay, I have all your information on the sheets,” she cheerfully said walking to the office door. “Let’s head back to your exam room and get you all set up.”

I followed her back, clutching my purse to my chest, glancing at the nurse’s station. There were four young nurses, all stick figures, typing, writing notes on files, and taking care of their normal workload. No one looked up at me but I couldn’t help but feel like everyone was staring. It was all in my head, as it usually was, but it didn’t help the nerves that were coursing through me as I made my way back to the exam room.

Ugh. Now we were at the place where it would all go down. The place where I would be checked, poked and prodded from head to toe. Suddenly I was glad that I had taken so much time to meticulously manicure my lady bits the night before. Three hours had seemed excessive but now I was thinking maybe four would have been better, given that I was about to be seen by a guy.

“Right in here,” the nurse said, smiling as she allowed me to walk past her.

Inside the exam room was a pleather exam table covered by a long sheet of white paper and stirrups folded back at the ends. I sat my purse down on the chair hesitantly and turned around, tapping my hands on my sides. The nurse reached into the cabinet and pulled out a hospital gown and thin white sheet.

“Please be sure to take everything off, even your panties and bra. Put on the gown,

and this sheet is to cover up with if you feel cold,” she instructed, handing me the items. “Just have a seat on the table and the doctor will be in shortly!”

I nodded nervously, turning in a circle to watch as she left, closing the door behind her. I set the gown down on the table and began to undress, feeling slightly uncomfortable taking my clothes off in a strange room when anyone could walk in. Nonetheless, I did it, knowing there was no turning back at this point.

Folding my clothes, I sat them on the chair neatly and pulled the gown on. It was pink and made of crinkly paper with two small ties that barely held it shut. Thinking ahead, I tied them in simple bows, not wanting the awkwardness of having the doctor fidget with knots. There were no mirrors in the room but looking down at myself I could tell that it was bad.

After all, the thing barely covered me and definitely did nothing to flatter my curves and DD breasts. They were almost bursting from the thin paper covering. They were so huge that I didn’t even want to think about forty-year-old me with boobs down to my waist. Maybe I would consider plastic surgery at that point.

Plus, there was nothing in the world that could disguise my sassy hips and I was just going to have to deal with that. I am who I am and I could cry about it in a strange cold room, or get my ass up on the table and move on with my day. I was just hoping that this doctor wasn’t ninety years old with coke bottle glasses, white hair, and a judgmental stare like my regular physician.

Carefully I stepped onto the metal stool and turned, smoothing the gown underneath me as I sat. The paper crackled noisily and my eyes fell on the cold steel of the stirrups on the sides. Immediately I felt like a farm animal in for an exam. I bit my lip and put my hands in my lap, reading over the picture of the reproductive system on the back of the room door.

You can do this Abby. It'll be over before you know it. Just hang tight.

But who was this Dr. Rivington? A knock sounded and my heart pitter-pattered with nervousness.

“Come,” I managed in a semi-normal voice.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:54 am

A low growl rang out on the other side, and the door swung open, revealing a huge, gorgeous man with laser-blue eyes and swirling tattoos beneath the cuffs of his lab coat. Oh god, this was my doctor? My temperature soared as my pulse raced. How would I survive the exam now?

2

Ryder

“Of course, Mrs. Albertson, we’ll get your tests right over and have them back within a couple of days,” I said, reassuring the eighty-year old-woman for the fifth time. “You have a good day and I’ll see you soon.”

Walking out of the room I hit the button on the sanitizer and rubbed it into my hands. I walked up to the nurse’s station and flipped open Mrs. Albertson’s chart, making a couple of notes inside.

“Tests for Mrs. Albertson?” one of the nurses asked, surprised.

I chuckled. “Just some cholesterol tests she requested. The woman eats like a rabbit, works out like a jock, and takes her vitamins like some of us drink whiskey. I’m sure everything is fine but she has them done once a year so if you could draw some blood for me and have it sent out, that would be great.”

The nurse, Shelley, smiled with a hint of flirtation. She was always flirting but I made it a point to never date someone I worked with, even if I only worked with them for a few days. Not that she was my type. She was skinny and pretty, sure, but also tiny

and frail.

Besides, it's not like I have the type of lifestyle conducive to relationships. I've been traveling around as a substitute doctor for nearly five years. As soon as I found out that this career was possible, I had my bags packed and was on the road with my trusty sportscar. I love it; I'm not tied down, nor do I have to work if I don't want to.

And it's great, to be honest. I'm at the top of my game professionally and have the luxury of knowing my entire schedule months in advance.

This visit to Farmington, Maryland just so happened to be a last minute booking on my schedule. I was working a gig in Chicago when my old friend from med school, Colleen McNamara, called and asked me to fill in while she was on vacation. She had a sub already, but he bailed because his kid got chicken pox at the last minute. As a result, she was panicky and nervous, calling me in desperation. Of course, I said yes. I was happy to do it. But once I got to Farmington, suddenly I remembered how tiny and suffocating little cities can be.

But it's just for a short while. My next move will come soon. Colleen will return from vacation, and then I'll be free to go wherever I choose.

Besides, it's not so bad here. Mrs. Albertson was older, but the rest of the patients were mostly middle-aged women with the typical middle-aged problems: varicose veins, hot flashes, and saggy boobs. It was the same story every time with a little flirting, a wide spread of the legs, and then me unobtrusively trying to back out of the room as they asked a million questions.

Something about being middle-aged makes women desperate. It's like they were searching for the fountain of youth. They asked me about vitamins, elixirs to help them stay young, and every other fad diet and pill on the market. I had the same answer for them every single time: exercise, eating well, and minimizing stress were

the key. These are the best ways to maintain youth, beauty and vigor, but my advice fell on deaf ears. I would put my whole life savings on the fact that if I came in a year from now, they would ask all the same questions over again.

“Ms. Henshaw left her number for you,” one of the nurses said with a grin as she set it down on the desk. “How many does that make today?”

I chuckled and closed the file, taking the number, balling it up, and tossing it in the waste basket. “That would be number two.”

“And how many patients have you seen today?” she asked.

“Eight so far,” I replied.

She nodded her head with a sly grin. “And out of eight, how many did a little wiggle of the hips, cooed, made coquettish comments, or innuendos?”

I cleared my throat, glancing up at her. “Seven. Fortunately, Mrs. Albertson managed to control herself.”

The nurse giggled and shook her head, picking up a file and setting it in front of me. “I don’t know how you do it.”

I shrugged. “You know what? These women, they just want the attention. For whatever reason, it’s lacking in their life and I’m successful and not too bad on the eyes. So if I can smile and be nice, why not? I’m not hurting anyone.”

She put her hands up with a smile. “Oh, I’m not doubting that. Dr. McNamara raved about you and your professionalism. I’m just saying, you’re handsome and successful. Don’t you want to share that with someone?”

It's the million dollar question. I frowned at the thought, taking the next patient file from her.

"I'm not looking, to be honest. Part of why I travel is because I want to see the world. Having ties would just inhibit that right now. I grew up in small town Minnesota, and when I say small town, I mean the place had maybe two hundred and fifty people max. This is my chance to see the world, so getting into a relationship with someone in Farmington...well, it's not really on my to do list."

"I don't blame you," she laughed. "I was born and bred here. Married my husband here, and we'll probably grow old here. I'm fine with it, but I know how it feels to want to spread your wings. Take advantage of it, because not everyone has that chance."

Glancing down at her moderately sized diamond ring, I smiled, pretending to look at the next file. My words were true, but in fact freedom wasn't the only reason I like to travel. In reality, I was awkward, skinny, and really shy during my teen years. I spent half of my life with a weak chin and scrawny frame. Once I got to medical school, though, everything changed. I started working out and eating right. I started making sure that I took care of myself and it showed. My new haircut, trendy clothes, and toned physique caught the attention of the ladies, and soon they were moaning my name in bed.

As a result, it's kind of like I had a delayed manhood. I wasn't necessarily proud of the fact that I slept with different women every city that I went, but it is what it is. It made me happy, comfortable, and stress free. And I wasn't a douche about it either. I made sure that every woman I slept with knew I was leaving the next day or very shortly after that. I never led a woman on, and that was important to me. There's no reason to be an asshole, so long as expectations are upfront and clear.

Lately though, my lifestyle had been getting a little stagnant. I had been traveling so

much and there had been so many women coming in and out of my bed, that it was all starting to blur together. I had an appetite, one that made me want to go out on the prowl. But after so many women, I was almost ashamed of the fact that I was struggling to keep them separate in my mind. I couldn't remember some of their names. Others, I'm not sure I even knew their names to begin with.

On top of that, my last stop in Florida last month had been a bit of a head turner. I went to see my sister Pam and her family. She's not like me in many ways. She settled down right out of college, marrying a man, Tom, she met as a freshman. Pam's got two kids, my niece and nephew, a perfect little home, a picket fence, and a dog named Rover. She's got the storybook tale with a perfect marriage and a happily ever after.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:54 am

It was so perfect, in fact, that sitting there in the warm Florida sunshine playing with my nephew, I could almost imagine myself settling down soon. How soon? Obviously not that soon. I was still stoked to have a full schedule and to get back on the road asap. But I could definitely tell the temporary lifestyle was getting a little tiresome.

“Hello? Dr. Rivington? You look dazed,” the nurse said, snapping her fingers before my eyes.

I shook my head. “Oh yeah, sorry. Mind went somewhere else.”

She raised an eyebrow and laughed, tapping the file in front of me. “Your next patient. Twenty. Her name is Abby McAllister. Non-smoker, doesn’t drink, no history of drugs.”

Sounds boring as hell.

“Right,” I said out loud. “Great. I have a break after that right?”

The nurse looked down at the schedule and nodded. “Yep, and actually your last appointment canceled, so you’re done for the day.”

I gave her a thumbs up and slid the file open as I walked toward the room at the other end of the hallway. I looked over the patient’s vitals, noting that she seemed pretty healthy. Blood pressure normal. Pulse normal. Weight a little high, but still fine. No alcohol, no cigarettes, and no drugs.

She sounded like a complete bore, which in my profession is usually a positive thing. I've seen too many problems resulting from addiction and various psychoses.

Most likely, this appointment was going to be a general exam with a discussion about anorexia, birth control, STD testing, or one of the many other plights that troubled young girls. At least she was twenty and I didn't have to deal with an overprotective mother hovering over my shoulder while I swabbed her cervix.

Like I always did, I leaned my shoulder against the door, tapped twice with my knuckle and walked in while still looking down at the file. When the door clicked shut behind me, I strode over to where the gloves were, still not looking up.

"Hi Abby, I'm Dr. Rivington, here filling in for Dr. McNamara."

I glanced over at the patient, rushing through the introductions a bit. But then I did a double take. The girl sitting there on the table was gorgeous, with an angelic face with big brown eyes that her long black eyelashes batted down over. Her long brown curly hair cascaded over her shoulders and...holy shit, that body.

Even through that hideous pink paper gown I could see her lush ripeness. There was nothing anorexic about Abby McAllister, and her curves seemed to go on for days. My attraction to her was immediate. It was so immediate, in fact, that I had to turn away as I pulled on my gloves to hide my growing erection.

Clearing my throat, I continued talking in a professional tone. "What brings you in today? How can I help you?"

As I turned around, she looked up at me with wide innocent eyes, entrancing me to the point where I had to put one hand on the counter. She nodded as she shook her head shyly.

“Well, it’s my first time at the gynecologist’s office.”

Her voice was so low it was almost a whisper. I grabbed a stool and scooted over next to her, laying the back of the table down.

“That’s alright, Abby. It’s my first time too.”

She looked at me wildly for a moment and then giggled. That laugh was intoxicating.

“What? How can this be your first time, Dr. Rivington? You didn’t just graduate from med school, did you?” I kept a professional manner, but I could feel the blue in my eyes blazing as I stared deeply at her.

“It’s my first time with you,” I clarified. “And there’s no reason to be nervous. You can call me Ryder, if you like. Are you here for a regular check-up?”

She nodded shyly. I pressed forward.

“Is there anything else I should know before we start?”

She was lying down at this point, her hands on her stomach, her head turned toward me. She shook her head and then stopped, her brow furrowing slightly. “Actually, yes. I’m a virgin. So please be gentle, okay doctor?”

I almost choked on my own tongue in that moment. Beautiful, shy, sexy as hell, and a virgin to boot. And god, that voice asking me to be gentle. I don’t think I’d ever wanted anyone as much as I wanted that girl right then and there.

Reaching up, I put my hand on her shoulder in what I hoped was a comforting manner.

“No reason to rush into it. Why don’t you tell me about yourself as we begin?”

Her eyes shifted down and then back up to mine. “Okay. I work at a call center, and I’m saving up to go to a local community college. I graduated from high school last year.”

I nodded. “And what do you do in your free time?”

Page 5

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:54 am

She smiled nervously. “Pretty much read. I love to read, everything I can get my hands on. I probably could have paid for college twice over if I didn’t buy so many books.”

I laughed. “I like that. That means you’re intelligent, Abby. Intelligent and beautiful, quite the mix.”

Her eyes shifted again and I immediately realized what I had said. “I’m sorry, that kind of slipped out.”

“Intelligent or beautiful?” she teased, breaking a bit out of her nervous shell.

With a grin I shook my finger at her. “I like that. Sense of humor too. I appreciate it, especially since you’re not the only woman who gets nervous when it comes to her annual exam.”

Abby’s eyes flashed slightly, and I could tell she was already attracted to me. Why not? I have an incredible bod, wavy black hair and eyes so blue that they sometimes turn black. Yet I also wanted her to relax, and to let me examine her without being too nervous. Of course, I needed to relax too. It wouldn’t really be good for me to give a breast exam if I was poking her in the side with my hard cock.

“Women probably get nervous because you’re so handsome,” Abby said shyly, immediately looking away when she realized her gaffe.

I don’t know what crossed my mind in that moment, but I’m not sure I even had control over my own hands. Before I realized it, my fingers were grazing her chin,

turning her head back toward me. My cheekbones had a harsh flush on them, and my voice was deep and thick.

“Don’t look away when you say something like that. It makes me think you’re just saying it to make me feel better.”

Her eyes grew bright again and she slowly smiled. “I think you know that already.”

A half smile pulled at my lips. “Believe it or not, I wasn’t always a confident man. I used to be shy and a loner. Pretty geeky.”

“Oh yeah?” she asked. “And what changed it?”

I took in a deep breath, my eyes moving down her body and back up to her face again. “Becoming a doctor and starting a wellness program where I took care of myself. But more on that later because it’s time we get your exam started. How about we begin with the breast exam? Do you check yourself on a regular basis?”

She licked her lips and nodded, turning her head back to stare up as I moved my fingers from her chin. I stood up, nonchalantly edging my cock to the side and pushed my sleeves up, gently pulling the strings on the front of her gown. As they came loose, I brushed the paper to the sides, staring down at her huge, firm, round tits.

At that point, I tried to stop myself from being overzealous, but there went my hands again, immediately cupping her right breast. My eyes shifted up to her and sank deeply into the chocolate brown of her gaze. Her nipples immediately went hard as my gloved hand passed over it just light enough to tell me she was aroused. Oh shit. What do I do now? This exam has already gone off the rails, and yet we just started.

Abby

I was so wet, I was terrified I was going to slip right off the table and into a mound on the floor. I'd been nervous but when Dr. Rivington walked into the room, everything changed. The way he looked at me with his piercing blue eyes. The way his muscles tensed, pressing against his light blue t-shirt beneath his white jacket. The way his jet black hair stayed perfectly in place but looked soft and shimmering as his ultra-white smile reminded me of a wet dream.

Then there was his personality. As soon as his hand touched me, I felt sparks shoot through my whole body and my thighs began to quiver enough that I pulled them tight together. The way he spoke to me, the connection between us, made me anxious, nervous, and calm all at the same time. Talk about a mixture of emotions while wearing nothing but a crinkly pink gown.

Then came the moment when he untied my gown. All I could do at that point was fixate on his handsome face. The way he bit the inside of his lip as he folded back each side. Just one touch of his hand on my skin set me on fire. It took everything I had not to arch my back into the air and to beg for more.

“You like it, don't you Abby?”

I could do nothing but nod silently, my body giving him its own answer. His palm slid slowly over my nipple and it hardened, but as his eyes seized mine, any feeling of shyness washed away. The fact that locking eyes during an exam wasn't really how it was supposed to go didn't even cross my mind. All I could think of was how I wanted more. How I couldn't pull my eyes away from his as he pressed down, cupping my breast with one hand while caressing it with the other.

My mouth opened slightly and a heated breath pumped my chest up and down. He squeezed again, this time harder and pulled his fingers up to my nipple, rubbing it

between his forefinger and thumb. A small whimper came from me and he released me before slowly taking both of his gloves off.

“Is this okay?” he rasped. “You’re just so beautiful and I want to feel you skin-to-skin.”

I nodded, unable to get the words out of my mouth. Of course, it was okay. In fact, it was amazing to be with Dr. Rivington like this. The warmth of his hands, the pressure he put on my breasts, every whisper and hum made me go insane. It sent unbelievable electricity through my entire body.

Dr. Rivington took things to the next level then. Slowly he lowered his head down to my breasts and ran his lips over my skin. The soft tender pressure made my lower back arch upward. Suddenly, as his own control wavered, he dove down onto my tits, squeezing them hard while rubbing his face across my firm mounds.

“Shit baby,” he rasped. “You feel so good. Huge and bouncy.”

A slow moan rose from my throat and my hand moved up his shoulder, rubbing against the stiff fabric of his jacket sleeve. I could feel his pulsating muscles beneath, hardening with every touch. Keeping his face lowered, a nipple in his mouth, he pulled his jacket off, dropping it to the floor around his feet.

Immediately I wanted him. I needed him to examine me even more, if that’s possible. As if he could hear my inner thoughts his hand slid down to the tie at my waist and slowly pulled it loose. He moved quickly to the end of the bench and gripped my hips, digging his fingers into my thick flesh.

With a quick tug, I slid down the table, my legs immediately opening wide for him. The air was cold in the room but his heat quickly filtered over to me, flowing over my body like a wave. I lifted my head for a moment, but he pushed me back down, his

blue eyes fierce. He licked his lips and knelt down on the step, running his fingers up my thighs.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:54 am

“We should get to the exam,” he said in a deep sexual tone that sent chills rippling over my skin.

I lay back and looked up at the ceiling, my heartbeat racing. I was white knuckling the table, but this time not out of anxiety, but anticipation. My hips screamed to lift up toward his face and my knees shook slightly. He pulled the stirrups out and gently took each foot, placing them into the holds. I should have felt exposed. Any other situation and I would have.

But the anticipation...

He opened me up wide and ran a warm finger down through my lips. He took a circle around my clit which instantly stiffened, twitching in delight at the unexpected touch. I could feel my pussy pulsating, vibrating as if it had its very own heartbeat.

“Oh Dr. Rivington,” I moaned. His blue eyes flicked up and he let out a hoarse chuckle before moving down, the sensation against my skin both erotic and nerve wracking at the same time. I wanted him to both slow down and speed up simultaneously, it felt so good.

“Oh yeah,” he whispered. “I see it right there. Right inside your vaginal orifice, sweetheart. That’s your sweet hymen.”

I never in my entire life thought someone could sound sexy and arousing when they said the words vaginal orifice. But there I was, wishing with all my might that his other orifice would plant right onto it. It didn’t take long to get my wish. He slowly lowered his face, his eyes hungry as his lips touched me.

“Oh god!”

Suddenly his soft tongue swiped against me, touching a place that even my fingers had never ventured. As he tasted me, I felt a race of charged energy blast from between my legs and surge into my belly. It felt exciting, arousing, and taboo at once as I moaned beneath his touch.

My pussy walls pulsed and juice dripped out but never hit the crumpled paper below me. Instead, Ryder’s tongue flicked down, catching every last drop and licking upward to my clit where he gently sucked it in, groaning in satisfaction. My mouth opened and I gasped, covering my mouth to stay quiet. But moans muffled by my sweaty palms escaped my lips and my eyes rolled back in my head.

When I looked back down at him, he’d lifted his head just a bit, a smirk on his lips. He gazed at me for a moment before lowering himself down again, this time swishing his tongue as it zigzagged through my mound, caressing my clit before gently pushing into my sweet pink channel.

“Oh god, Doctor!” I cried out, my tits shaking as I pulsed and pounded. “Please, more!”

And the doctor didn’t stop there. As he mouthed my creaming cunt, he slowly reached down before undoing his belt and unzipping his pants. The perfectly ironed grey dress pants fell to his ankles and I could see the outline of a huge bulging cock, constricted by the fabric of his boxer briefs. Oh my god, it was enormous! Unbidden, I creamed wetly, growing moist at the thought of his massive cock in my waiting sweetness.

He licked his lips, looking at me as he ran his palm up and down his shaft, groaning softly.

“You want this?” he asked me, his voice soft and rough at once.

I bit my bottom lip and nodded wildly. “Yes please.”

He shivered at the sound of my voice, making me feel powerful and strong. Making me feel like a wanted woman for the first time in my life. Stepping out of his pants he grabbed a tube of lube and walked up next to me. I took the tube from him and squirted some of the pre-warmed jelly-like substance in my hand. Turning toward him, I reached down and wrapped my hand around his shaft.

It was rock solid, hard with a velvety covering, and I could feel the blood coursing through the veins that ran up and down the pole. He groaned as I gripped tighter, marveling at how a bead of pre-cum appeared at the tip. He kept his eyes shut and helped move his briefs down even more, pulling on them a leg at a time until they hit his knees and fell to his ankles.

“There you go, baby girl. Help yourself.”

His cock flipped forward, standing straight out, long, thick, and strong. Spreading his legs, he cupped his balls and slowly opened his blue eyes, staring down at me with desire. With my hand full of lube, I gripped him and carefully slid my hand up and then down that enormous shaft. My hand flipped over the head and he shuddered, biting his lip as I stroked him up and down, over and over again.

In his palm his balls rolled back and forth and he tugged lightly on them. When I finally released, he wasted no time, moving back to the end of the table and grabbing me above my hips. Obliging, I scooted to the end, lifting my feet from the stirrups and placing them on the crooks of his arms.

Reaching down between us he gripped his hard shaft and ran the tip up through my pussy, slipping through the folds and circling my clit. The sensation was incredible.

“Yes, just like that,” I gasped. “Put it in.”

He chuckled and as he moved back down, he leaned forward, gently kissing my lips. My mouth opened and simultaneously, he very carefully, and very slowly pushed into me. There was a pinch of pain and then the pleasure was overwhelming.

“Oh god, you’re big,” I moaned deliriously. “I don’t know if I can take it.”

He chuckled hoarsely, that big body tense.

“You can do it,” he rasped. “I’m already through your hymen sweetheart, so you’re doing amazing.”

His breath caught in his throat as his body convulsed, his cock all the way inside of me, lingering for just a moment before his hips began to pump. My hands flew up, my fingers digging through the soft cotton of his t-shirt, gripping down into the muscled back below. I whimpered, wanting to scream out, and he could sense it. Ryder ducked low, kissing me deeply, allowing my moans to echo out into his throat instead of into the room.

He grunted as he pushed deep and slowly pulled back, rolling his hips and pausing with his eyes tightly shut. His cock pulsed for a minute and he breathed heavily.

“God, you’re so fucking wet, sweetheart.”

Page 7

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:54 am

I leaned up, sucking his lip into mine, my eyes staring directly into his. Suddenly my shyness took a back seat.

“Then don’t hold back,” I said coyly. “Use my body to give yourself pleasure.”

He chuckled and kissed me again, his hands gripping my ass as his hips moved even faster. I was pretty much screaming in ecstasy into his mouth and with every grunt I grew more and more aroused. I could feel the energy swirling up into my stomach, teetering on the edge of explosion. Meanwhile, Ryder became a man driven by a deeper purpose.

As he slammed his body into mine, I swirled to the highest heights and then burst, feeling an explosion erupt in my core, spreading quickly through every iota of my body.

“Oh god!” was my ecstatic cry as a wave of wetness engulfed his cock. “Fuck!”

He chuckled hoarsely, still pumping like a madman.

“That’s it, sweetheart, give me your cream. After you release, Daddy will give you his cream as well.”

With that, I could feel Ryder’s body tense as well as he thrust hard once, twice, three more times before gripping my curvy body close to him, his muscles tensing and relaxing over and over again. I could hear a low growl escape his throat, and then his cock pulsed against my swollen pussy walls.

“Fuck baby,” he gasped. “You feel so fucking good.”

I moaned in return, my juices flowing out like a river, drenching his cock as his seed exploded inside of me, virile and hot. The warmth rushed through my belly and my pussy spasmed violently, trying to pull that spunk deep inside.

As we came to, all I could feel was his body hunched over mine, his cock twitching as his hot breath gushed over my skin. My eyes were blurry as oxygen slowly released from my lungs and silence fell across the cold exam room. The feeling of his heart beating against my skin was comforting, and the excitement of the moment still lingered quietly in the background.

But oh my god, what did we do? I was here for my first lady exam and got something else in return. Yet I didn’t regret it at all. Dr. Rivington is hot, muscular and so compelling, and all I craved was more.

4

Abby

My hands shook slightly as I stumbled into my apartment, dropping the keys on the small dish next to the door. My cat, Mr. Bugles, stuck his head around the kitchen door and mewed at me, turning his head to the side.

Yeah, Mr. Bugles, I thought. I am not the same person that left this apartment terrified of a speculum just hours before. I have become a girl that is no longer a twenty-year-old virgin. Instead, I’m the girl that just had some sort of wild fantasy play out in real life.

That wasn’t me! That wasn’t my life! The most exciting thing that happened in my day was usually ice cream going on sale, buy one get one free, at the local market.

It definitely wasn't having hot wild sex on the table in my doctor's office with Dr. McSteamy. It all felt like some sort of dream as I randomly dropped things along the hallway while making my way to the shower.

I didn't even flip on the light when I walked in. I just turned the shower handles and undressed, dropping my clothes to the ground and only momentarily testing the water before climbing in. The steam billowed up and around me as my cool body collided with the hot pulses of water. I closed my eyes for a moment, letting my thoughts slow as the scalding stream hit my forehead and rivulets ran down my face.

It was like the water itself was cleansing me of...of...well, I really don't know what it would be cleansing me of. Did I do anything wrong? I opened my eyes and turned around, letting the water drop down my hair, pulling the curls momentarily smooth as water trickled down my lower back and ass. I stared at the other side of the stall, not really seeing it. My mind was running circles around the last few absolutely incredible, NC-17 hours.

Replaying the appointment in my head, I tried to pinpoint the exact moment things went off the rails. After all, I had gone in, terrified for my first gynecological exam ever and ended up in a passionate release with my doctor instead.

Who does that? How in the hell did that even happen? As far as I knew, a scenario like that only happened in porn or a man's fantasy. In other words, in his head. Maybe a woman's too, but definitely not mine. While I'd been dreading the horrible travesty of a pap-smear, my mind never wandered to the possibility of an exam using the doctor's anatomy instead of a speculum.

I chuckled to myself for a moment. If every appointment ends like that, there would be a lot fewer women missing appointments.

Shaking my head ruefully, I grabbed the shampoo and squirted a blob on the top of

my head. Not really funny, I know, but I had to make light of the situation somehow. How else was I going to reconcile myself to it? The thing was, no matter how awkward and odd it seemed in retrospect, that didn't negate the fact that I loved every second of what happened. Every stroke of Ryder's hand across my skin. Every thrust of his hips as he slammed his cock deep inside of me. There wasn't a single thing I disliked about the actual act of it.

After all, Dr. Rivington looked like a hero from a damn romance novel. Dark hair, blue eyes, tall with broad shoulders, powerful muscular arms, long strong legs...he had it all from top to bottom. Not to mention a smile created solely to make a woman weak in the knees before she melted into a puddle on the floor.

Plus, whenever he looked at me, basically every part of my body started to act some sort of crazy. I could feel myself swelling and warming up inside. My thighs were clenching but not in the way they did in the car. They were throbbing, pulsating, wanting so desperately to be spread apart and opened wide for his pleasure. Little did I know, but he wanted the same thing, and we went crazy together. It was insane.

The whole drive back to my place was a big blur. There were butterflies rushing through my chest, a smile creeping up and disappearing again, and my speed often slowed to way below the speed limit. Multiple people honked at me during that twenty-minute drive back to my place, but I merely smiled and waved them off.

And here I was, standing in the shower, reliving it over and over again, still in a state of shock. Nonetheless, it was important to get clean. Quickly, I grabbed my loofah from its spot before accidentally dropping it. I squatted to pick it up and quickly stood up straight again, my eyes wide as something glopped out of my pussy. I reached down and rubbed the mixture through my fingers, suddenly realizing exactly what it was.

Ryder came right here, inside of me, and now his seed was overflowing. Dr.

Rivington had come bareback in me and it felt so damn good, even though my mind was screaming out that I was big trouble. I should have been freaking out over the fact that a man had just used my fertile and ripe body. Yet I couldn't help but savor the moment just a little longer.

Having his come inside of me felt so good. I reached down, stroking the rivulet of cream with my finger. Closing my eyes, I brought it up to my lips, letting out a deep sigh as I remembered the feeling of him releasing hard inside of me. It was so creamy, so white, and so perfect, just like him. I opened my lips just slightly and tasted his brand, rolling my eyes back at the salty, sweet flavor.

I moaned aloud, rubbing it over my breasts and turning, letting the water pound hard against my body. It struck me in all the right places, bringing that feverish want and need right back up to the surface. One of my hands slowly slid down between my thighs and my fingers rubbed over my swollen lips. They were tender and sensitive and I could already feel myself moistening.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:54 am

Flashes of Ryder's abs, his shoulders, and his bulging cock appeared in my mind. The way he bit his lip and growled as he came, his hands gripping my flesh and bearing down as if he couldn't get himself deep enough inside of me. I began to gently rub circles around my pussy, putting pressure as hot streams of water splattered against my clit. The loofah fell from my hands as my fingers twisted a hard nipple.

I could feel his cum seeping out of me and mixing with the water as I rubbed it through my folds, groaning in delight at the real life dirtiness. Yet, this wasn't someone else's life, it was mine. I licked my lips thinking about the way his dick shimmered with my juices as he pulled out of me, cum dripping from the head of his cock....cum dripping from the...cum dripping...oh!

My hands quickened and my eyes opened up wide. My body shook helplessly as I reached down, grabbing the bar inside the tub to steady myself. Orgasm made me scream, the sound echoing in the small chamber. But it was real.

Because this was virile sperm from a virile man, and oh my God, but we didn't use any sort of protection at all. I should have made Ryder use a condom because we were at a gynecologist's office for crying out loud. I'm sure there were plenty of them in the damn place. Why didn't I think?

I shook my head at my own stupidity and stepped back beneath the hot water, trying to calm down. Of course, using protection didn't occur to me. After all, I was there for a doctor's appointment, and not hot times. Until Ryder was balls deep in me, I didn't actually think anything like that was going to happen.

But it did and even though I should be worried, all I really want is to feel it all over

again.

5

Abby

With the scent of floral gardens mixing with my newly found womanhood, I climbed out of the shower. My knees shook a bit as I carefully stepped onto the bathmat, making sure not to fall. The last thing I wanted was to end up in the hospital with a broken hip. There had been enough showmanship on my part for the day. Yet it's funny how the power of a man's hands can change everything.

But then anxiety followed. What had I done? And unprotected too! It was at the moment that I started to understand peoples' obsession with Valium, not that I had ever experienced that kind of bliss before. The closest I had ever gotten to drugs was an unfortunate burst of laughing gas at the dentist. Let's just say, the doctor never stuck his finger in my mouth again.

Back in my room, going through my pajama drawer, I felt different. It was like seeing my life through a new pair of eyes. I was still me but somehow, I was different. The usual floral nightgown that billowed loosely around my curves seemed like it was too young. Maybe I was so hot and bothered it just didn't match the dirty thoughts in my mind.

Either way, I grabbed a tank top from the drawer and pulled on my one pair of satin panties. If I was going to feel sexy for the first time in my life I might as well hold onto it before the romance wore off. Quickly I braided my soaked hair down my back, not in the mood to take an hour drying my locks.

Climbing into bed was a relief to my senses. While the rush of events had been invigorating, my mind was tired of thinking. Sleep offered a bit of relief and I

dropped off in minutes.

* * *

The morning was sobright and sun-filled that I almost forgot where I was for a moment. Sleepy eyed, I raised myself up on my elbows and looked out my bedroom window. The sky was crystal clear and there was literally a blue jay chirping on the sill. Holy shit, did I really just sleep through the evening and into the night? It was morning now? I must have slept at least twelve hours straight.

Wow, Dr. Rivington really did you a good one,the voice in my head spoke. Do you feel like Cinderella now that you're back to real life?I laughed at my own thoughts. I definitely didn't want to be a slave to any evil stepsisters, but I'd take Cinderella's waistline, that was for sure. And maybe the singing mice too because they were really cute.

I rubbed my feet against my soft sheets, feeling the expensive Egyptian Cotton my mother bought me for my birthday rubbing against my smooth legs. It felt good to sleep, and to wake feeling a little bit more desirable than the day before.

That's when it hit me again, the realization of what I had done. The nerve crushing, boulder in the belly, knot in the throat kind of epiphany that I wasn't as plain and boring as I had once thought before. Maybe, just maybe, I could be a sexy vixen too; a curvy one, but a vixen nonetheless.

Just as the thought went through my head, my feet caught on my blanket and I stumbled face first into the floor. There was a thud but I didn't fight it. I turned my head to the side, resting my cheek on the soft carpet. I had a habit of tripping even when I wasn't walking. I've tripped multiple times in the past. This time though, I didn't beat myself up so bad. In fact, a slight giggle erupted from my throat and I grunted as I pushed my body up onto my knees.

My phone buzzed on the nightstand by my head. I grabbed it off and looked at the message. It was from my friend Mary.

“Look, hooker, you have twenty minutes to get to the coffee shop on the corner before I come pry you out of your bed with my own version of a speculum.”

I snorted and looked at the time. Shit. I had been so exhausted I forgot to set an alarm. I texted her back and threw the phone on the bed as I awkwardly climbed to my feet. Grabbing a pair of yoga pants and a sweatshirt, I threw them on and slipped on a pair of flipflops. My hair wasn't nearly as wild as I thought it would be. Sleep must have found me hard, and there was nothing a fabric headband couldn't fix.

Out the door I flew, heading down the stairs with a kick in my step I hadn't had since I, well, since never actually. When I got to the coffee shop, Mary was standing at the door tapping her foot.

“Some people have lives, okay?”

“Yeah, sorry about that,” I chuckled. “Forgot to set my alarm.”

Mary scrunched her nose, looking me up and down. “You? Perfect Abby forgot to set her alarm? Alright, spill it, what's wrong with you?”

I chuckled as I walked to the counter. “Nothing is wrong with me. I was just exhausted.”

“Oh sure,” Mary replied, grabbing her wallet. “Because gyno exams are really exhausting.”

I could feel my cheeks turning red as I faced away ordering my coffee. “Medium dark roast, soymilk, and four sugars. Oh, and I'll take a strawberry rhubarb muffin.”

Mary pushed her way over next to me. “And a large black coffee. I got this.”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:54 am

“Thanks,” I replied cheerfully.

I could feel Mary’s confused stare on me all the way from the counter to the table. When we were seated and set up, she continued to stare at me. I took a deep breath and let my eyes line up with hers.

“Mary, you’re staring.”

My friend blinked dramatically. “You didn’t set an alarm, you came out in yoga pants which I can’t even get you to wear during yoga, and you didn’t fight me on paying. What happened to you? Are you actually Abby or did some sort of extraterrestrial take over?” She leaned closer and whispered. “Because if that’s the case, your secret is safe with me. I always knew you were out there.”

I rolled my eyes and sipped my coffee. “Can’t I just feel good?”

“No,” Mary growled. “Don’t bullshit me, woman. Spill it before I torture you.”

Her normal tactic was embarrassment. Something usually along the lines of Mary raising her voice and squealing at the top of her lungs. Then she followed up with something ridiculous, turning everyone’s heads. Feeling more alive or not, I laughed.

“Okay, stop,” I whispered. “Something happened at the appointment. My doctor wasn’t in and I had a substitute. This male doctor named Ryder.”

She snorted, looking down at her coffee. “This sounds like some lame beginning to a porno. He gave you the once over and then dug deep, right?”

As she laughed to herself, I went quiet, just staring over at her. My silence caught her attention and she glanced up with a grin. As soon as she saw the look on my face her grin dropped and her mouth hung open. She sat there frozen in place for several moments, reading every twitch of my lip and flare of my nostrils.

She closed her mouth and pulled herself together. Carefully she set her coffee down and cleared her throat. “Did you just imply that you went to get your hoo-ha checked out and instead, you got laid?”

My lip curled. “You don’t have to say it so crudely. But I guess in essence, yeah.”

Mary stared again, her face straight. “I’m sorry, I think you just shocked me so bad, I’m having an out of body experience. So, let me just recap. You went into the doctor, saw a fill-in, who came in and bent you over the exam table?”

“Something like that,” I replied.

“No, not something like that,” she said in a hushed voice, eyes wide. “You tell me every detail of this so I can decide whether I need to high five you or call the cops. Was he old?”

I gasped. “Oh my God! NO! And he didn’t coerce me either. There was just this heat in the air between the two of us when he walked in and we both lost control as soon as he put his hands on me. I mean, looking back at it, the whole thing is kind of unbelievable.”

“Uh, yeah,” she snorted. “I can’t. I don’t even know what to say to you besides, nice work girlie. Get you some young hunky doctor.”

I smiled for a moment, my cheeks burning again. I glanced down at my coffee, the smile fading and a sigh replacing it. “I just don’t know what to do now. We didn’t

exchange information. We were kind of in a hurry after that and I left in a complete daze. I feel like it would be weird to call him at work.”

Mary shrugged her shoulders. She never gave a shit about doing the “right” or “normal” thing. She did whatever she wanted, and I always admired that about her. “I would personally make another appointment with him and clear up the loose ends. If it was a one-time deal, cool, if not cool. But one thing I can tell you from experience, leaving it up in the air will drive you crazy. Call his office and make an appointment.”

I wrinkled my nose. “You think?”

“I wouldn’t say it if I didn’t think it,” she replied, stealing a bite of my muffin.

Thinking about seeing Ryder again made me feel buzzy and warm. I grabbed my phone from my purse and dialed the doctor’s office. The receptionist picked up and I played it off like I didn’t remember Dr. Rivington’s name, just in case she overheard us last time.

“I can fit you in tomorrow morning at nine fifteen,” she replied.

I smiled. “Great. Perfect. Thanks.”

When I hung up Mary gave me a sly grin and nodded. “I’m proud of you. Who knew all it would take was a good hot man? I would have gotten you laid like, at puberty had I known that. You might have become a completely different girl.”

I shook my head, tossing my phone back in my purse. “No, I would have ended up like all of our friends.”

Mary looked confused. “Drunk, and stuck in a marriage they regret even though they

drive the newest BMW SUV with three kids in the back?”

“No, the ones like us. You know, from the wrong side of the tracks,” I replied.

She nodded her head.

“Ohhhh, yeah. Pregnant and angry. Got it. You know, with your luck I would probably have to agree. Good call.”

Page 10

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:54 am

We spent the rest of breakfast and coffee teasing each other back and forth playfully as Mary tried to get more details out of me. But I wasn't giving in. It had been so perfect with Ryder that I was afraid if I thought about things too much, I'd worry it to death. Yet, the anxiety persisted. How likely was it I would get knocked up on the first time? That kind of thing only happened in shitty after school specials, right?

"Earth to the wild sex goddess." Mary's voice echoed into my thoughts.

I sat up, shaking my head. "Sorry, my mind was somewhere else."

She snickered. "I'm sure it was. Was it long, hard, and warm?"

I sighed. "It isn't always about just that."

Suddenly, Mary's face went serious.

"Listen, it's all great but I just want you to be realistic. These things rarely turn into fairy tales. If the doctor did that with you, well, I'm just saying, take it one step at a time. Don't start imagining your little doctor children and doctor dog just yet. He may have been sexy and cute but he could be a complete jerk. I hope not, but just be careful."

She was right, and I already knew it, but for some reason the words cut through me like a knife. There were no dreams of grandeur, but I guess I had some hopes of becoming a couple. Who knows what Ryder thought?

"I will be careful. And I am. No thoughts of white weddings," I lied.

She gave me a look. “Better not be. Cause I’ll Red Wedding this guy if he hurts you. I’ll come in with my sword in one hand, and my whip in another, and he’ll be wishing he lostGame of Thronesafter that.”

We both burst into laughter, but my heart thumped a little bit faster. What did Ryder want from our encounter? There was only one way to find out.

6

Ryder

My head had its own heartbeat. I saw fourteen patients in nine hours. I ate a ham and cheese sandwich from the worst deli in the world, one that likely had rotted meat in it. I was a sucker for a family owned business, even if they were terrible.

I washed my hands off at the nurse’s station sink and flapped them over the bowl, grabbing a couple of paper towels and drying off to my elbows. I glanced up at my reflection in the mirror that hung over it, seeing the stress lines in my forehead. Maybe the constant travel was starting to age me, and make me tired.

Turning, I leaned against the sink, giving a fake smile and wave at Mrs. Mercer, the 73-years young lady who had given me a full lecture on the use of tinctures during her exam. I figured if she survived at-home medicine for seventy something years, who was I to tell her any different? That and I really didn’t want to know the full history of her wacky ways.

“She gave you the rundown, didn’t she?” one of the nurses, Alex, asked with a chuckle. “Which topic was it? Fermented greens? No, wait. You don’t look like the fermented greens type.”

I frowned. “Thank God.”

She laughed, shaking her head. “Must have been the tinctures.”

“Ding, ding,” I chimed. “Brilliant. Don’t know why I wasted my life going to medical school.”

Alex shrugged. “Guess you had to learn the hard way. When are you opening up your tincture shop?”

I grabbed my keys off the desk. “After I learn how to ferment vegetables.”

“Smart,” she nodded as she broke out into laughter. “See you in the morning Doc.”

I tapped my hand down the counter. “You know of any chill spots I can get a drink?”

Alex pulled her sweatshirt jacket on over her scrubs. “Uh, yeah. There’s a little bar called Torrent Jacks right down the street. My husband grabs beers there sometimes. Pretty cool place on a Thursday.”

Giving her the thumbs up, I walked down the hall and out the back door. My car was parked right up to the curb in the back lot and I was relieved to not have to smell old lady perfume and the scent of antiseptic. I clicked the keys, unlocking my Mercedes SL36 Roadster. It was a present I got for myself. After all, I don’t own a house and travel all the time. I can only shop so much, so the car seemed like the perfect gift.

Unfortunately, out there beyond the cities and traffic, in small town life, I felt a little ridiculous driving a car that cost more than most residents’ homes. It made me really question whether I felt the need to have the car or not. I felt uncomfortable, like I was showboating or something.

But too late now. I found some street parking and glanced up at a small flickering neon sign across the street. It was Torrent Jacks, and close enough to stumble back

drunk to the hotel if I had one too many. I waved at a slowing car and jogged across the street, grabbing the door and holding it as two middle aged women giggled and hurried through. Normally, I'd have an automatic smile on my face, but for some reason they just weren't coming today. I wasn't upset, just plagued with thoughts.

The bar was pretty busy but there was an open seat to the left. The bartender walked over as I sat down. "Hey, man. What can I get for you?"

"I'll have a Dewar's on the rocks," I replied. "Thanks."

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:54 am

I pulled out my phone and flipped through my social media accounts, not actually taking anything in. To be honest, my mind was on the day before. That hot encounter I had with Abby. It ended kind of rushed, and I felt kind of bad about it. It was probably the single hottest encounter I had ever had and I got automatically hard, just remembering it.

I glanced up, feeling someone step up beside me. It was a tall blonde with huge tits, a round firm ass, and ice blue eyes. She smiled at me but it didn't seem to register like it normally would have. My smile back was completely robotic, something I had acquired from seeing so many patients day in and day out. Immediately I went back to staring at my phone.

The clink of the ice in my glass as the bartender set it down in front of me caught my attention quicker than the girl. He leaned forward.

“You seem to have quite the fan club in here. The ladies can't take their eyes off of you, my friend.”

Glancing around, I realized I was getting the same attention I always did when I walked in a bar, wearing my scrubs. I was being followed by the hungry eyes of dozens of women. Up until the bartender pointed it out, though, I had been completely oblivious.

I chuckled and gave another half-smile. “Yeah, kind of comes with the territory sometimes. They love the baggy scrubs,” I joked.

He stood back up, wiping his hands on his towel, and shaking his head. “To be you,

man. You could walk out of here with any girl you wanted.”

He was probably right but my head was swimming with visions of Abby, and nothing else. If I could have seen myself from the outside it would have been painful to watch. But I wasn't in the mood that night. I didn't want to take another girl back to my hotel for a wild romp only to feel awkward in the morning.

With that realization, I sat back, grabbing my drink and taking a gulp. I breathed heavily in through my nose and rubbed my hands up my slightly bristled cheeks. What are you doing, man? I questioned myself. Are you happy? Is this the life you want?

But the attention from various ladies was crazy. Their eyes were like hot lasers burning into the back of my head. And my ass. The bartender meandered back over. “You alright? You look pretty down.”

I glanced up, surprised by his voice. “Oh, yeah man. My head is somewhere else.”

“Somewhere else? Or with someone else?” he asked.

I leaned my head back and groaned.

“Buddy, I don't even know anymore. You think you have your life just how you want it and then one moment in time makes you question it all. Or it makes you confused as hell.”

The bartender, around my age, smirked. “Well, you just gotta keep going dude. In my opinion, if you don't roll with what life gives you, you'll end up regretting it.”

I nodded and finished my drink and pulled out a twenty, tossing it on the bar.

“Thanks man, I'm going to go ponder some more in my hotel room. Have a good

night.”

The bartender nodded.

“You too, doc. Whatever it is, whoever it is, just relax. You’ll know.”

I gave a half smile and turned, walking through the increasing crowd and out the door. Leave it to me to find the Buddha of bartenders in some small ass town in the middle of nowhere Maryland. I needed to book more big city practices. No one there paid attention to you, which would be nice for a change.

I got to the hotel and took the lift up to the top floor, where my penthouse suite waited. It wasn’t the biggest I had ever stayed in, but it was pretty nice. It was decorated in smooth lines of crisp white with splashes of color throughout. I didn’t always get the penthouse because it depended on the practice and what they set up for me. Since this one was a personal favor, I got treated to the luxury stuff. It was okay. I’m used to hotels now, having lived in them on a near constant basis. Tonight though, there was something cold and distant about the place.

It wasn’t the hotel though; it was my mental viewpoint on life, and I knew it. I wasn’t comfortable in my own head in that moment, but I needed some time to clear my head before bed. I needed to get some rest before seeing patients again. Last night had been filled with hot dreams and a curvy, beautiful girl, and I was distracted at work as a result.

My phone buzzed in my pocket and I pulled it up, seeing a video call from my best friend, Jack. We went through medical school together, and have been buddies since then. Jack was a traveling doctor too. When I first told him about the lifestyle, he just about died. He couldn’t wait to get out on the open road and be free from the politics of hospital life.

“What up, what up?” he greeted, his smiling face large on the small screen. “Dr. Swagger here checking in from beautiful sunny Florida.”

“Nice,” I replied, hearing the ocean in the background. “I am currently in my penthouse suite in Maryland.”

“Fancy, I like it,” he grinned. “Getting some serious action with that gig? I bet the nurses are loving you.”

I shook my head. “You know my rule: never shit where you eat.”

Jack snorted.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m starting to have a list of practices to avoid because of these crazy nurses. But I will do what I do. Free as a bird.”

Shaking my head with a smile, I walked over to the large floor to ceiling windows that lined the living area of the penthouse. There was a set of sliding doors that led to a patio, and a private infinity pool with surrounding chairs. It was a good view, and for a second, I got lost.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“Earth to Dr. Rivington,” Jack laughed. “You seem like you’re on another planet. What’s up?”

I shook the daze from my head. “Nothing man, just a ton of patients. That’s all really.”

Jack raised an eyebrow. “Yeah, ok. I call bullshit. I have personally seen you work natural disasters with no breaks for days and not look out of it. There’s something else.”

My eyes glanced back at the screen of my phone and I sat down in a chair to my left. “I guess I can’t lie. Something happened yesterday. Something beyond even my hustle skills.”

I launched into the story. I told him every detail from the moment I entered the room with Abby, to the way her hips curved, and to the moment she wandered from the room dazed. He stayed quiet for a minute, just listening.

“Did you just have a stroke?” I asked jokingly.

Jack swung his head back and forth making a humming noise with his loose lips. “Dude. Not only did you break your own rules, but now you’re obsessing over a chick. A chick you met online. You did the deed once. You know what you’re doing right?”

I furrowed my brow. “No. What?”

“You’re sabotaging yourself,” he said. “You just got back from visiting your sister, and you’re having family fever. Dude, it will pass. Don’t go messing up your head over some girl. Mad props to you though, that is fucking ballsy. Even I would think twice before doing something like that.”

“It wasn’t on purpose,” I groaned. “It was like I had no control over myself. She’s gorgeous, and I had to have her.”

Jack’s eyes moved off screen as he nodded to someone. When he looked back, I could tell there was some girl calling for him. “Here’s the deal. You have the life you always dreamed of. You better think long and hard before you go messing that up. But listen, I’m gonna jet. Got a hottie and her best friend getting in the hot tub. Gotta go try to get my threesome on. Don’t make any crazy decisions without consulting me first though. I don’t trust this phase you’re going through.”

The girls were calling for him and I laughed. “Get out of here man. I’m going to go to bed. I’ve got a lot of patients tomorrow, and I won’t go run off and get married, promise.”

Jack put his fist up and I did the same, symbolizing our normal fist bump. The connection cut and I laughed to myself. One thing that always pulled me back to Earth was having Jack on speed dial. He was a dose of reality, that’s for sure.

I connected my phone to its charger and grabbed a shower to wash the day’s dirt and grime off of me. I dried off really good and climbed into bed naked. I loved the way the cool expensive sheets felt on me, and there weren’t very many times I went to bed clothed anyway. Sleeping naked had become a habit.

I laid on my stomach, bunching a pillow under my head. Jack’s right, I told myself. I am living the damn dream. I can’t let myself be derailed. This girl is amazing but I’ve got lots of other fish to fry. Single and free. Remember the motto.

My mind convinced itself pretty quickly, and yet I drifted off to sleep with dreams of a special curvy girl in my head.

* * *

“Doctor, so glad you came in a little early,” Alex chirped, walking beside me into the office. “So, as of yesterday we had back to back patients scheduled. Problem is, something happened to the system and our appointments were all erased. We’ll be pulling files manually as patients arrive today and stacking the ready ones at the nurses’ station with their room number on them. We are going to be grabbing and going today.”

I shook my head with a laugh, feeling much better than the night before. “Gotta make things exciting or we would get bored, right? And if you say full schedule, that means I have an overbooked one.”

Alex grinned knowingly. “You are already catching up. Your nine am never showed and the 9:15 is already on the counter.”

I tossed my keys on the desk and stretched my arms up, yawning. “Sounds good to me.”

The folder had a sticky note over the name, but I wasn’t concerned. I’d meet my patient soon enough, and strode down the hall, feeling lighthearted with a spring to my step. Little did I know, but a surprise awaited me behind the door of Exam Room 6; someone I thought I might never see again was waiting with an innocent smile and a full heart.

Trying to come up for a metaphor to describe my morning was difficult. My stomach had nerves like when I was a kid, excited but at the same time dreading the first day of school. My stomach was grumbling the entire car ride to the office, so I hit the drive through for a few donuts and a coffee. The caffeine was a bad idea because my nerves were already through the roof.

There I sat, in the parking lot of the doctor's office again, with donut sprinkled over myself. Great. I'd gotten dressed with especial care for today's appointment, but now with crumbs everywhere, what was the point? Clearly, I was nervous. My hands clung to the steering wheel, and my knuckles were turning ghost white again.

"You can do this, Abby. Get out of the car. You can do this," I whispered to myself.

Closing my eyes for a moment, I let visions of Ryder filter through my conscious thoughts. While in the past, that would have only made me more nervous, it was having the opposite effect now. With every pass of his radiant smile in my head, courage bloomed in my chest. Before I knew it, my hands were releasing their death grip, my shoulders were relaxing, and my tongue removed itself from the roof of my mouth.

I took a long deep breath and slowly let it out until my lungs were empty. The sounds of birds chirping outside made me smile a bit and the warm sunshine lifted my spirits. I opened up the door and set my black stiletto out onto the asphalt. I hadn't worn those shoes since Missy Grave's shotgun wedding a year before, but I remembered how confident they made me now.

My wide legged black dress pants draped down to the tops of my shoes, and my shirt followed the lines of my waist and hips. Even with my aversion to mirrors, I was pretty happy with how I looked. I pulled my rarely used black purse over my shoulder and locked the door of my car, taking a deep breath.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

The first time I walked up that sidewalk I had done it with clenched thighs and nightmares of wild speculums and crazy bright lights shining into my uterus. This time I walked with visions of Ryder, my thighs squeezing against him as my body quaked in his hands.

“Good morning, Abby,” the receptionist chirped as I walked in and up to the window. “See? I remembered your face. You’re the nine fifteen this morning, right?”

I nodded with a smile. “Yes, ma’am. With Dr. Rivington.”

“Very good,” she replied. “And actually, if you want to meet me at the other door, I can go ahead and take you back to the room. Our first appointment cancelled.”

“Oh sure, no problem,” I replied.

The same nurse I had last time walked behind us, following right in, gloves snapping on. The receptionist left and the nurse smiled at me happily. “Hello again! I hope everything is okay. What brings you back in so soon?”

Shit. I hadn’t even thought of some fake reason I wanted to see the doctor again. Whatever look was on my face had the nurse feeling sorry for me in two seconds flat.

She walked over and put her hand on mine. “I don’t know if you remember, but my name is Alex. Trust me, we have seen, heard, and witnessed it all. I can promise you that no matter what you have to tell us, we will never look down on you. Just take a deep breath and get dressed in your gown, and I’ll be back.”

Finally, I found my voice. “Wait. I came with some questions for the doctor. Last time was my first time and I was so stressed about things that I forgot to ask about some additional tests he suggested. And, I know I could have just called and talked to you guys, but I figured it was worth paying for the appointment to be able to talk to Dr. Rivington directly about it. Breast cancer has been a thing in my family. A big thing.”

Alex smiled kindly. “Well, don’t worry. You can have a seat on the exam table and the doctor will be in shortly. He shouldn’t be running late.”

I nodded my head, feeling the warmth growing in my cheeks. The excitement was actually kind of a terrible feeling in some respects, but exhilarating on some levels too. In fact, the excitement was surging right down between my thighs making me almost pop up out of my chair. I walked across the room and stared at the different posters and announcements pinned to the wall.

My eyes shifted over the information but none of it actually sunk in. I knew that at any moment Ryder was going to come in, and I had to keep my wits about me. I had to be confident, ask what I wanted to know, but not be standoffish. Hell, at that moment I didn’t even know what I came there to ask in the first place. I just didn’t want to leave things where they were. It would drive me crazy.

It was only about ten minutes before a knock on the door sounded, but it felt like a lifetime. As the door opened with a creak, I whirled around, watching Ryder stroll in, looking down at the file. As his eyes hit my info, he jerked to a stop, immediately putting his hand on the door and pushing it closed.

Those amazing eyes flickered up at me and my voice caught in my throat. It wasn’t as embarrassing as it could have been, seeing that he seemed to be utterly affected too. The physician’s eyes rolled over me and heat immediately ignited. If he had made a move, I would have bent over ready to serve, no questions asked.

But he didn't.

"Abby," he said in a professional voice. "You came back."

I started to melt but quickly remembered my goal.

"I did. I hope you don't mind. I guess it's a little strange to be here again so soon, but I didn't have another way contact you."

He lifted a hand.

"No, it's fine. It's good. I'm glad that you came."

I sat down in the chair and he pulled another one around, facing me. He tossed my file on the counter and leaned forward, his clean rugged scent delicious. Had I been standing my legs might just have gone out from under my body.

Trying to block the thoughts of his pulsing muscles out of my head, I crossed my legs and tried to look assertive.

"I won't lie. The last time we met, I did something that was completely out of character and I haven't been able to get it off my mind."

He smirked a bit, and it made my heart flutter. His eyes shifted back up to mine. "It's been on my mind too. A lot, actually."

Hearing that sent mixed emotions to my brain. I didn't know whether to take that as a good thing, or to prepare myself for the "but." I kept trying to remember to keep my guard up and not jump to conclusions but he was so handsome and so sweet that it was nearly impossible. I wanted every barrier to break at that moment.

But before I could say anything, he spoke up again. His face made my stomach drop and I forced myself to keep calm.

“Abby, I don’t know what kind of emotions you’re having about what happened, but I do know that I owe you an apology. Not for the amazing sex, or for wanting you that badly, but for not being a professional. I feel as if I took advantage of your vulnerability and as your doctor, I’m supposed to shield that.”

I found my head shaking back and forth before my thoughts were completely organized.

“No. Don’t apologize. Please. You asked if I wanted you, and I told you that I did. I gave my consent. And no matter how fragile I may have seemed in that moment, I can promise you, I’m fine. I tend to be a bit snarky and sarcastic sometimes. But I definitely was not taken advantage of.”

I smiled, leaning forward, putting my hand on his knee. “It’s quite possible I owe you an apology. After all, I may have taken advantage of you and used my superpower sexiness to blind you from using your best judgment.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

He grinned right back.

“With great power comes great responsibility.”

I laughed, covering my mouth as the sound echoed through the room.

“You’re quick. I like it. Look, we both did something that was probably against all the rules, and in all reality, it shouldn’t have happened here. We should have been less like two horny teenagers and more like adults. But we weren’t. We both wanted each other and there was a pull that was intense, at least on my side.”

He nodded but didn’t say anything. From the way he was looking at me though, I could tell the attraction was intense. I pursed my lips and kept my eyes locked on his, slowly sliding a hand up his thigh. Oh my god, was I really doing this? What kind of wanton hussy had I become?

But to my surprise, Ryder reached out as well. I thought he was going to move my hand, but instead, he put his on my leg in return.

We both leaned forward, our lips just inches away from each other. We both had begun breathing heavily, and I could feel his warmth on my face. He lingered there in front of me for a moment, moving his mouth just slightly back and forth so his lips brushed mine. The end of his tongue slipped out and I closed my eyes, letting out a small whimper as the wetness spread across my lips.

“You want it, don’t you?” he asked in a low voice.

I could do nothing but mewl again, giving him my assent. With a low growl, a large hand came up and cupped the back of my neck as he pulled me into him. He parted my full lips with his tongue and kissed me deeply and passionately. My thighs started to tremble but this time I let them. I was yearning for the touch of his hands on me so badly. My pussy pulsed at the thought of his fingers pressing against it. The heat in the room could have started a fire, it was that overwhelming.

But then Ryder stood from his chair, grabbing me under the arms and bringing me to my feet. I gripped the front of his coat, getting my balance as he pulled me even closer, his hands sliding down my sides and over my curves toward my ass. As they crested over the hump, they froze and he pulled away, out of breath.

I swallowed heavily. God don't stop. Don't have a crisis of conscience now! But Ryder had already pulled away. He paced back and forth for a moment and then stopped, his hand cutting through the air.

"I'm sorry, Abby. Shit, I keep apologizing, but I'm not sorry at all. I can't seem to control myself with you. In fact, I was two seconds away from bending you over the counter."

My pussy throbbed and I stared at him as he sighed again. Closing his eyes, he pinched the bridge of his nose as a small growl rose from his throat. Before I could say anything though, he started to pace again.

I rolled my shoulders, feeling arousal running through my frame. Every dirty thought coursed through my mind at that moment. I wanted him. I wanted him to watch me pleasure myself. To help me pleasure myself. I wanted to drop to my knees and take that big dick in my mouth. I wanted him to rock me so hard I would need a wheelchair to get back to my car. But I had to control it. I had to.

"If you do this with all your patients, then I don't know what to think," I joked.

He laughed harshly before turning to stare at me.

“I have never, ever, done anything with any of my patients until you. And I mean that. It has always been a rule of mine. I do not want my career to turn into an episode of Grey’s Anatomy.”

“Yeah, I could see how that might sidetrack you from actually doing your job,” I replied, leaning over and picking up my purse. “It’s okay. I’m not offended, and besides, I did actually come here for more than that. I guess I just wanted to know where we stood in your head. If you wanted to see me again, or if you didn’t. If you wanted me to book a months’ worth of appointments with you just for us to be together.”

I expected a laugh from that but instead I found Ryder staring at me. His expression was hard to read, the dark blue of his eyes intense and stormy. I braced myself for bad news. I just wanted the truth, no bullshit, give it to me straight. Good or bad, I would deal with whatever this handsome man had in mind.

8

Ryder

My eyes were glued to the curvy girl. In any other circumstance, I would have carefully explained my entire stance on dating, relationships, and my chosen lifestyle. But standing there with my cock throbbing and my heart pounding, I made the selfish choice. I didn’t want her to leave. I wasn’t quite ready to say goodbye. I wanted more time with her, with her sweet smile and sassy ways.

Looking down at my watch, I realized I needed to get a move on it. “Look, I have to go back to work. But I want to take you out tonight.”

Abby raised an eyebrow. “Oh yeah? Like on a date? We make love first, and then date second. I like how you think.”

I shrugged with a laugh. “Who doesn’t like their dessert before their dinner?”

She pursed her lips, looking to the side. “Alright. I will accept your date invitation. Where are you taking me?”

My face dropped, realizing I had no idea what there was to do in this town. I knew for a fact she wasn’t yet old enough to drink so bars were out. It was probably for the better. Alcohol would cut the date portion very short and the dessert portion would be an all-nighter. Not that I minded an all-nighter.

I walked toward the door thinking about it.

“How about this? You plan where to go. Pick something normal and fun in Farmington so that I can see what you guys do out here. Then call up the receptionist and tell her you have a message for Dr. Rivington, and I’ll tell her to expect a call. Let me know where and when, and I’ll meet you there.”

“Okay,” Abby replied already thinking. “You want to see what we do in Farmington. Check. So, I’ll bring the drugs, you bring a toothless hooker, and then we’ll go bowling.”

Page 15

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I burst into laughter. It was a nice surprise that she had such a good sense of humor. She was strong yet fragile, confident yet not enough to be conceited in any way. It was amazing.

“I’m assuming toothless hookers are easy to find here?”

She nodded with a knowing face. “Oh sure. That’s like pretty much seventy percent of the community.”

“Noted,” I said seriously.

She smiled at me and nodded toward the door.

“Go. Do your job. Save lives. Kiss babies. Plant a tree.”

Laughing again, I hurried back over and kissed her on the cheek.

“I don’t know what they teach you out here, but we should have a conversation tonight about what doctors are supposed to be.”

Jokingly she nodded.

“You mean your lawn guy shouldn’t also be the mayor, and your father’s proctologist too? Who would have known?”

I left the room with a smile on my face, waving a last goodbye. The day was long and there were a lot of people to be seen, and yet I couldn’t wait. The hours passed in a

blur.

Around three the receptionist came up to me, handing me a piece of paper. She looked slightly perplexed. “There was a call for you. The woman said to just call her Toothless. You’re to meet at Vincent’s Pizzeria at seven, and she said that you can ask anybody in Farmington and we’ll direct you to Vincent’s.”

I took the paper, pressing my lips together trying to hold in the chuckles. Abby’s sense of humor was sensational.

“Is it true? Everyone knows where Vincent’s is?”

The receptionist laughed and swatted me in the arm.

“You’re so funny. Good job today, we’re almost at the finish line.”

She walked off and I looked around, perplexed. She didn’t actually tell me where it was. In fact, her response was slightly odd. Alex walked up and slapped a file into my hand. “Isabella Rogers, twenty-six, six months pregnant. She’s here with her husband, Everett, and he looks nervous.”

She went to walk off but I reached out, tapping her arm.

“Do you know where Vincent’s is?”

Alex blinked at me for a moment and then giggled.

“Of course, I do. Silly question.”

She shook her head and walked off leaving me there, yet again, unsure of what had just happened. And no more the wiser on where Vincent’s Pizzeria was. Didn’t

matter because I would ask the hotel. I was pretty sure they wouldn't call me silly. At least I hoped not.

I sighed and headed in to deal with Ms. Rogers and her husband. When I finally finished for the day, I wasted no time zooming out. I only had an hour to get home, get changed, and find this infamous Vincent's before I was late for my date. The last thing I wanted was to make Abby think I was standing her up.

As I reached the penthouse floor, the elevator opened into the hall. A bell boy was coming back the other direction. I stopped him for a moment.

"Hey, you wouldn't happen to know where Vincent's is?"

He looked at me for a second and then laughed, slapping me on the shoulder. "You're already fitting in. Of course, I do. Silly question."

I stood there flummoxed as he walked off. I was starting to think that I was being punked. Letting it go, I hurried into the penthouse and took a quick shower, letting the steam fill up the marble space.

Jumping out of the shower I threw on a pair of jeans and a blue button down. Using the hairdryer in the bathroom I tousled my hair back and forth and then spritzed on some cologne. Standing in front of the mirror I smiled at myself. Hopefully Abby would find me as hot in real life as she did at the doctor's office. I had been in situations before where a girl was all about me in scrubs but as a normal guy, I wasn't nearly as impressive.

I blamed the television dramas for that one. Making every doctor a handsome god who worked miracles every day was just crazy. In reality, it's a whole lot of messy body fluids, embarrassed girls, and birth control talk. Even when I did work at a hospital, there weren't many lifesaving moments, or at least not dramatic ones where

I had to perform surgery in an old warehouse during a hurricane with a chisel and handheld saw.

Leaving the penthouse, I headed down to the front desk.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“Sir, you’re just in time,” a hotel employee said. “I think management told you we were pre-booked going forward? It means we’ll have to move you into one of our extended stay residences. I think you’ll like it.”

I raised my eyebrows at the young man.

“But will I like it more than the penthouse?”

The man looked down at his hands but then smiled.

“Some people like it more, actually. Our extended stay residences are free-standing buildings with a much homier touch.”

I laughed.

“Just kidding. Yeah, it’s fine. Are you guys going to move my stuff for me?”

The young man nodded.

“Yes, we’ll come up for your luggage, and get everything done for you in a jiffy. You won’t even notice. Here’s the key to your new place.”

I looked at the golden key in my hand. It was fine. I’m used to moving around and hadn’t even unpacked my bags.

“Thanks. Can you point me to the concierge, by the way?”

“Sure,” the hotel employee smiled. “Right over there.”

I thanked him again and made my way over to a middle-aged man standing behind a wooden podium.

“Hi, I have a question.”

The concierge smiled, putting his hands behind his back. “Yes, Dr. Rivington?”

“Do you know where Vincent’s Pizzeria is?” I asked, holding my breath.

The concierge did not look amused.

“Do I have to say it sir?”

I blinked several times.

“You aren’t going to tell me?”

He sighed and put on a fake smile.

“Of course, I do. Silly question.”

I rubbed my face groaning.

“I don’t know what it is with people in this town. But I literally have plans to meet someone in ten minutes at Vincent’s Pizzeria. I am not from here. I don’t know where to go.”

The concierge’s face dropped.

“Come with me to the desk.”

I followed him over hoping to God he had Vincent’s hiding under the counter because my irritation level was rising. He pulled a brochure from behind the counter and slid it across to me. There was a guy on the front smiling next to a little girl shrugging dramatically. Both of them were laughing. The concierge waited until I looked up.

“I see where the confusion has set in, sir. Vincent’s has been here since 1967. They were the first family owned business to have a commercial on our local broadcasting channels. The commercial was simple. Several video seconds of delicious-looking pizzas and then Mr. Vincent and his daughter Annabelle. He would say, ‘Do you know where Vincent’s is?’ And his daughter would giggle and in the most frightful voice squeal out, ‘Of course I do. Silly question.’”

I let my shoulders relax a moment. “And the dialogue became famous and now the town all knows it.”

The concierge nodded. “Precisely, sir. But you have a meeting so let’s get you there. I’ll have a car come around. It’s only six blocks but it will be quicker to drive.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“Thank you,” I replied, pushing the brochure back at him.

That had to be the dumbest line I’d ever heard. But then again, whole towns are literally built off the backs of someone or some show that was famous. That was how they made their income. Tourists.

The car was already out front when I walked outside. I hopped in and the driver took off. The concierge took the liberty of telling him my destination so I didn’t have to deal with the Vincent’s debacle anymore.

When we got there, Vincent’s looked like a shiny diner. There was a lot of chrome on the outside with neon signs and a huge sculpture of an Italian man tossing a pizza out front. There were kids running around and families laughing, enjoying their pizza.

Any other time in my life I would have bolted in the other direction, but when a horde of kids parted, there she was. Abby stood, her hands in front of her, that thick dark hair in waves down around her shoulders. She was wearing a Baltimore Orioles t-shirt, a pair of jeans rolled up at the cuffs, and a pair of black sandals. Her toes were painted a dainty color pink that until that moment I hadn’t realized matched her fingernails.

Abby turned toward me, her cheeks rosy red, her eyes shimmering, and her lips plump and glossy. Her eyes connected with mine and I felt something jolt in my chest. As soon as she saw me her face lit up, a welcome I wasn’t used to getting. Sure, I get a lot of attention, but not for the right reasons. Mostly because I was a rich doctor with a nice car and good genes. Not because women were genuinely happy to see me.

But Abby's smile was infectious and I immediately grinned back. As I walked forward, I almost took out three kids who darted in front of me. Across the way, Abby giggled, watching me stride toward her, maneuvering through the outdoor tables with large striped umbrellas.

Our body language was magnetic. Both of us reached for the other, feeling that solid connection between us. I pulled her in for a hug and breathed in her scent. She smelled absolutely amazing, delicious and sweet with her own female fragrance.

"You're late," she pouted playfully.

"Yes, well, no one would tell me where Vincent's was," I grumped.

She furrowed her brow. "What? Why not?"

I let out a deep dramatic sigh. "What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say, 'Do you know where Vincent's is?'"

She stared at me for a moment and then clapped her hand over her mouth laughing. Her eyes clenched shut and her nose wrinkled as she laughed silently at first, before bursting into fits. I stuck my bottom lip out and crossed my arms.

Abby patted the air, trying to breathe through the tears that formed in the corner of her eyes.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. Oh man. I have to be honest, that was not on purpose. But now that it's happened, it's probably the best unintended consequence of inviting you to my world. I can still hear that little girl's voice in my head."

I let up on my fake frown and grinned.

“I haven’t seen it at all and I too hear that little girl’s voice in my head.”

Abby glanced over at the restaurant.

“Well, brace yourself. You’re about to learn all of that in a crash course. They replay that ad inside over and over.”

I reached out and opened the glass doors on the building, bowing in jest.

“I can’t wait. I’ve always wanted to be surrounded by creepy little girls while eating my pizza.”

She patted me on the chest as she walked through.

“Loosen up a bit. It’s beautiful out, and you’re with me. Vincent’s has amazing pizza. Did I mention, you’re with me?”

I walked in behind her, keeping my pseudo-sarcastic tone. “Nope. Don’t think you did.”

Abby giggled as we walked up to the hostess. I held up two fingers. “Two please.”

The hostess couldn’t have been more than fifteen years old. She looked me up and down like a steak and then tittered as she gathered the menus and walked us to our seats. She sat one menu down at my seat and handed Abby’s to her.

“Chrissy will be over in a minute to take your order.”

I smiled at my gorgeous date. We both opened our menus but I couldn’t take my eyes off of her. She was absolutely beautiful, with her flushed cheeks and curly hair. Suddenly, I knew this was more than a fling; this was something real.

Abby

Page 18

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

The whole Vincent's thing couldn't have worked out better. I seriously had no idea that it would happen. I figured enough people knew Ryder was new in town that they would realize he wasn't just walking around repeating the commercial over and over again. I had to admit though, the scenario was hilarious to me. I was still trying to control myself enough to not laugh at him.

I cleared my throat and put the menu down. "I want to ask you a question."

He smirked. "Okay. Shoot."

I furled my brow, trying to look as serious as I could. "I have a very important question for you. Now, this question is usually reserved for later on. The kind of question a girl asks herself before she accepts a ring. Are you sure you're ready for it?"

He shrugged a little, trying to look casual, but then pushed his shoulders forward. "Right. Got it. But you think it's important to know now."

I tilted my head back and forth. "It's more essential to the happiness of our dinner than anything else. So here it is. Are you ready?"

He nodded faster, chuckling a little. I breathed deeply in and closed my eyes as I let the air back out of my lungs. "What are your feelings about pineapple on top of a pizza?"

I could see him visibly let out a deep breath. He thought about it for a second and then shrugged.

“I’ll just throw caution to the wind here and tell the truth. I believe that pineapple on pizza is the best invention ever created. And while I do like ham, I prefer either bacon, or having the savory part be something like mushrooms and green peppers.”

My face was perfectly still for several intense seconds and I finally gave in. With a huge smile I nodded my head. “You just might be okay after all. Is there anything you don’t eat?”

He pursed his lips, his eyes shifting around the restaurant. “Pepperoni. I don’t eat pepperoni.”

With a giggle I nodded. “Alright, no pepperoni on our pizza then. I mean it is the most widely chosen pizza topping. But for you I will make an exception,” I said with a queenly air.

He chuckled. “Thank you.”

When the waitress came back, I ordered my favorite pizza, a large deep dish with extra cheese, pineapple, mushrooms, onions, peppers, and Canadian bacon. The waitress, a girl I knew from grade school, eyed Ryder and then winked at me before walking away. Luckily when I looked over at him, he didn’t seem to have noticed it at all.

He tapped the table like drum and then pointed at me. “Okay Abby. Tell me about yourself. What do you do for a living? What are your hobbies?”

I smiled, putting my elbows on the table and pressing my palms together. “Well, I grew up here in Farmington. I currently rent the apartment that is located above my mother’s garage. That’s right, I pay rent to her.”

There was no judgment in his eyes. “That’s cool. You get your own place but you

help pay bills for your mom. I don't blame you for that. Are you still in college?"

Ugh, the college question. I sucked it up and held my pride.

"No. I've been working for a call center in town for almost two years now, ever since I graduated high school. Part of the money I make goes into an account to pay for things because we don't have much. My mom is a single mom and she works as a secretary for a construction firm two towns over. With me and my little sister, my mom can't afford to put me through more school."

Again, there was no judgment in his look at all. At that moment, the waitress came and dropped off a pizza stand and our drinks. When she was gone, I awkwardly took a sip of my diet soda and continued. If I was serious about getting to know Ryder, I had to open up to him as well, so I took a deep breath.

"Then there's my poor sad daddy story. He was around for three years of my life, and two days after my sister Melody was born, he disappeared. Bon voyage. Never to be seen again. From an early age I knew my mom was going to rely on me for stuff, but I swear I don't have daddy issues."

Ryder snorted and then looked at me mortified.

"I'm sorry, my snort wasn't directed at you. Sorry. That was more directed at me because maybe I have parental issues. Me and my sis, Pam, we're pretty much orphans. My mother was a surgeon, and my father was a tinkering scientist. He worked for a big university during the day and at night in his lab at home. One day they went to run some errands with me and Pam at home, and never came back. A car accident took their lives. We were teenagers so we went and stayed with friends and family until going off to college."

Instantly my heart went out to him. There was a big difference in someone not being

there because they left versus, they died. I know that everyone has baggage, but I really didn't predict this coming from Ryder. I expected him to have some rich parents in a big mansion in some hills somewhere. Not two dead parents.

"Where is your sister?" I asked.

"Florida," he said, his tone showing he was glad to change the subject. "Yeah, my sis lives out there with her husband and their two kids. My niece and nephew. They have the best marriage and are always happy. It feels good knowing that she's taken care of."

"I'm sure," I said in a slight shock. "I'm sorry you lost your parents. I can't even imagine what that must be like. I should never have said anything about mine."

Ryder shook his head, reaching over and cupping his hand over mine. "Everyone weathers their own storms. So we both have sad stories. It's not a competition, and it shouldn't be."

His words made sense, but it still didn't take away that ball of anxiousness from my chest. Luckily, before any kind of awkward silence could set in, the waitress was back with the pizza. I could see Ryder's eyes go wide. The thing was huge. I served him a piece and waited for him to try it. His expression was ecstatic.

Laughing I took a bite of mine. "I told you, I am genius. When it comes to food, at least."

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“Genius, beautiful, funny. You got it going on,” he replied.

My cheeks felt hot and I giggled as I looked down. I changed the subject quickly, never having really been paid compliments except by my bestie and my mother. When it came to men, I was more than a little underqualified to hold it together.

Still, I didn’t want there to be awkward silence. “My mom, when I was about twelve, and my sister was nine, would bring us here once a month to eat pizza. My sister was always oblivious to how hard my mom worked, but my mom wanted to make it nice for my sister. I made sure everyone was smiling the whole time because I wanted things to be special.”

He smiled at me. “Your mom sounds like she loves her daughters. My mom was a really sweet woman too. She was one of those people that was always smiling, even when it was hard. She hugged everyone. My dad was tough but so was his father, and his father. It was all he knew.”

“Do you miss them?” I asked, instantly realizing it was a stupid question.

He shrugged, wiping his mouth. “I do sometimes, when everything is fine and dandy. But most of the time, that part of my life really just seems like a dream sequence. Like some movie I watched when I was younger or something. I think I blocked out the pain as a teenager and then I became numb to it. My sister is a little older than me, and it still takes a toll on her.”

While my father wasn’t dead, and my mother was still with me, I could sort of relate. I grew up with a desire to have a father figure around because my own abandoned

me. And since Mom was so busy with work, I never saw her. That wasn't the right thing to say though. I could feel it. So, instead, we sat there comfortably for a bit, eating, listening to the music playing, and laughing at the kids running wild around the place.

After a couple of slices, he sat back in his chair. "So, where to next?"

"Well," I said with a grin. "If you give this place just fifteen more minutes, it turns into a nightclub. The bar goes up, pizza goes down, and people start to dance, laugh, and get crazy. Two birds with one stone."

He looked around the room, amazed. I could understand how it was hard to imagine. Vincent's was bright and loud with wild children hopped up on soda and carbs. They looked like little beasts. But I've been here after hours many times since I turned eighteen, and it definitely became a different place. It became fun. At least I hoped it would be. I didn't want to bomb out on our first date.

Ryder popped a piece of pizza crust in his mouth and nodded. "I can see it. We're going to get wild at Vincent's."

I burst out laughing. "That sounds like some silly television sitcom. I will not be diminished to a sitcom star."

"Would you rather it be a soap opera?" he asked.

I giggled harder and harder as he began to talk in an uppity high-pitched voice, slinging a fake shawl over his shoulder.

"These are moments of our lives," he said dramatically. "Vincent's Pizza Parlor was more than a place to chow, it held Victoria's heart and her darkest secret. The baby she had with the dishwasher, Juan Alvarez."

Putting my hand to my chest I gasped. “How could she?”

We both laughed wildly, watching as the kids began to pile out of the place. The parents wanted to get back before things got wild. Personally, I liked quiet nights at home, but since this was literally my first date with Ryder, I didn’t want to spend it at home playing board games.

The lights began to dim and the waitress came over, boxing up the rest of the pizza.

“You want me to hold it in back for you, Abby?”

I smiled, already reaching for the leftovers and the bill. Ryder had anticipated it though, his card already out of his pocket.

“I got this. I’m taking you out, remember?”

I wrinkled my nose but then smiled.

“Thank you,” I said, blushing. “I appreciate it.”

Suddenly, the volume of the music went up, and the television switched off. Ryder looked all around him as adults surged towards the bar, getting their dollar beers and whiskey shooters before dancing across the floor to their friends. He clapped his hands together loudly, making me jump. Half of his mouth curled upward and he put out his hand.

With a raised eyebrow, I carefully reached for it. “What are we doing?”

He pulled me to my feet, leaning in just inches from my face. My entire body came to a halt, and I didn’t know if he was going to kiss me or run off without me. He laughed a little, seeing the look of confusion on my face.

“Don’t worry little lamb, I’ve gotten you all taken care of.”

With that, Ryder grabbed my wrist and swirled me around the floor. We danced to the music. I let loose, rocking my head from side to side, jumping up and down, busting moves like a madwoman. We laughed the entire time. He was carefree, something that was missing before, but that I didn’t realize until that moment. Ryder swirled me around, dipping me down while staring into my eyes.

When the song ended, he lifted me back up, the music melting into something slow and almost sensual. My arms were over his shoulders and his hands trailed down my sides and across my lower back. Suddenly, all of my manic energy dissipated, and I stared right back at him. I melted again, this time letting him take the lead. Our warm cheeks were pressed gently against each other’s and that was the one silence that I didn’t mind in the least. Our bodies were giving each other telltale signs.

I couldn’t help but swirl my hips against him, feeling his cock grow larger inside of his pants. He pressed his forehead against mine and our mouths were just inches apart. I could feel that rush returning, that eye opening, heart thumping adrenaline that turned to simmering heat in my belly with every wave of passion that washed off of Ryder and onto me.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

Just as he leaned forward to kiss me, the music changed, and the lights went up just a tiny bit. We both stepped back, looking to see if anyone was paying any attention out there. We weren't necessarily doing anything wrong, but in a town like Farmington, tongues will wag. With Ryder's career, he didn't need that. But it was going to be a really long night if we had to act like kids with a chaperone.

He took me by the wrist and pulled me to the side. "Why don't we get out of here? This is fun, but I want to be with you. Just us."

My eyes shimmered. "Where do you want to go?"

He looked at his watch.

"Well, I was staying at the hotel, but they were pre-booked starting tonight, so they apparently moved me over to a service apartment that visiting doctors stay in when they come here for conferences. They were going to move my stuff over there for me, so I haven't actually been yet. It shouldn't be too bad though. Do you want to give it a try?" He carefully trailed his finger down my arm. "And Abby, we haven't had real time alone yet. It would be nice, don't you think?"

I smiled sweetly.

"Sounds good, Doc. Let's go." Inside, my heart thumped. More alone time with this man? Sign me up!

Abby

I held back a grin as Ryder slipped his hand into mine, walking down the street toward his new apartment. The night was gorgeous and his place was only four blocks away so a stroll was in order. I figured it was probably a good idea to get in some exercise anyway. After all, I just devoured an entire pizza, or at least a huge portion of one. Yet, Ryder didn't seem disgusted and swung my hand forward and back playfully.

"So, are you and your sister really close?"

I shook my head. "Not really. My sister has been kind of standoffish with me since she hit high school. I'm not sure why. I think maybe we are just two completely different people. She's in her senior year of high school too, so that could play a part in it."

Ryder laughed.

"My sister and I used to fight, but then one day, we realized we only had each other in this world," he explained. "But not everyone has a bond with their sibling. Ours was out of necessity at first. Then, as time went by, we genuinely began to care more about each other."

I smiled at him.

"That's nice. I hope one day me and my sister get along better but it's up to her. I'm here if she needs me, and she knows that."

Ryder was quiet for a second, looking all around.

"It sure is really quiet in this town. I feel like I'm in some zombie movie or something."

“Ha,” I burst. “If I didn’t grow up here, I would feel the same way. But I get it. It’s so quiet, with no crowds. It’s just a sleepy little place. I went to Chicago once with my aunt when I was younger and I didn’t know how to handle so many people. I didn’t sleep the entire time I was there because it was so loud! I think I was just made to be a small town girl.”

“That’s not a bad thing,” he replied, squeezing my hand. “That means you care about the small and simple things just as much as the big ones. That’s hard to find in a woman.”

I put my hand up. “Here I am!”

We laughed as we walked up to the front of an old brownstone converted into apartments. There were some flyers scattered on the stoop, and I stood to the side as he opened up the mahogany front door. The place was older but well maintained and in a really nice part of town. We were quiet in the shared hallway, holding back laughter when we saw his neighbor’s doormat. It was pink and fuzzy, and decorated to the hilt with cats.

“I have a cat,” I said as he fiddled with the lock.

Glancing up at me he smiled.

“Oh yeah? I’m never home long enough to have any pets.”

“I don’t know, I think pets are essential to sanity,” I explained. “Mr. Bugle, he always knows how I feel.”

He got the door open and stood to the side to let me through. “Mr. Bugle, huh. That’s a funny name.”

I stepped in the entryway of the apartment and stood to the side, my hands in front of me.

“I found him in a junk yard, sleeping in the side part of a tuba.”

Ryder paused, closing the door and throwing the keys in the bowl next to it. “So is that why he’s named Bugle?”

Page 21

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I smirked. “Because calling him Mr. Tuba sounds weird. If I found him in an egg sandwich wrapper, would I call him Mr. Egg Sandwich?”

Ryder chuckled, shrugging. “Mr. Egg. I like that. Very sophisticated.”

I giggled, turning and looking at the living room of his new place. It was very sparse. It was freshly painted in a grey color, with obviously expensive furniture, but nothing to make it feel like home. There was a huge flat screen mounted on the wall, a rug under the grey and silver perfectly rectangular couch, two armchairs in vibrant blues next to the fireplace, and that was about it.

Ryder looked around as well.

“Well, they told me this was homier than the penthouse, but clearly not.”

We took a quick tour of the rest of the place. The kitchen was stocked with everything he would need, including a fridge full of food, but again, there was nothing personal or warm about it. The bedrooms were the same. There were huge king-sized beds in each room with plush bedding and swags of drapery, but nothing cozy or comfortable.

Walking back out to the living room he put his hands out with a smile.

“Here we are.”

My hand trailed down the back of the couch.

“Why is the place so formal?”

He was pulling the long thick blue drapes closed on the front windows.

“Most places I stay are pretty corporate, from the hotels to the service apartments. Everyone from visiting doctors to interviewees from out of town is hosted here.”

My eyes shifted around with a nod.

“Gotcha. I don’t know, I’ve stayed in hotels before but there’s nothing like going home to your knick-knacks, warm fuzzy blankets, and a broken-in couch. It’s just nice.”

His eyes skimmed over me, bringing a rush of heat to my chest. Suddenly I felt nervous, but he smiled.

“I’m a traveling doctor,” he shrugged. “That part of it I got used to a while ago. I don’t own a place of my own and everything I have, I travel with. I don’t have my own practice so I am not obligated to stay in one place.”

I crossed my arms and leaned against the sofa with my hip. “So how do you get gigs?”

He shrugged.

“I work with a staffing agency, and I also have a good reputation,” he replied. “I put myself out there, and people call and book me. It’s usually for vacation coverage, funerals, weddings, and things like that, but sometimes it’s for a special consult. I have made myself marketable over the years by attending just about every updated training session available as I travel. Plus, I’ve seen a lot of things from traveling so much.”

I smiled. “Yes, there probably isn’t much variety in a place like Farmington.”

Ryder chuckled, walking over next to me. His eyes sat on my neck as he brushed his finger through my hair.

“Most young doctors want action. They don’t want to deal with chicken pox, routine exams, and sniffles. They want adventure.”

“What about your action and adventure?” I asked, my voice slightly lowered as my eyes latched onto his.

Ryder put his finger under my chin and lifted it, giving me a very gentle kiss. My heart felt like it was going to explode right out of my chest.

“I travel all over the country, sometimes even consulting overseas. That’s my adventure. I was born and raised in small town Minnesota. Most of the people there will never leave, and their children will never leave, and so on. This was a way for me to break free and see the world. Get that travel bug out of my system.”

He rested a hand gently on his arm.

“I have to say, I’m kind of jealous of that. I’ve lived right here my whole life. Other than one trip to Chicago, and my eighth grade field trip to Washington DC, going to the next town to pick up something for my mom is the extent of my travel. I’ve always wanted to see the world though.”

He tapped his finger to my nose and turned, looking around the room. I followed him into the kitchen. It was like he was sniffing something out, but I had no idea what it could be. Finally, he flipped open the end cabinet to find shelves of liquor.

“Aha,” he laughed. “I knew it would be here somewhere. Would you like

something?”

I shrugged. “Sure, you pick. I don’t have very much experience with alcohol.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

He pulled down a bottle and two glasses and started pouring.

“Do you have plans to go to college? I know you said you were saving for it. That’s always a really great way to see the world, and to open up your perspective a little. Sometimes it’s hard to take the first leap because we get so comfortable with our surroundings. College kind of pushes you to do it.”

Without realizing it, a small sad smile crept onto my face.

“I wouldloveto go to college. I had great grades in school but didn’t get any scholarships and couldn’t afford to rack up thousands of dollars in student loans. With my mom being a single mom and working so hard just to put food on the table, there was no way she could help me with that. So I’m saving up, and when I have enough, I’ll enroll. But I’ll probably just start at the local college in the next town over and then transfer to the University of Maryland or something. So much for seeing the world.”

Ryder handed me a glass of what I assumed was bourbon from the color. I took a sip and had to strain to keep my face from cringing. He chuckled, though, seeing my stiff lips.

“It’s a little strong, I know. It’s not my favorite but it’s here.”

Ryder led me back out to the living room and we sat on the couch. He turned towards me, watching my every move. Normally, I would find that uncomfortable, but the interest in his eyes and the way he opened his body to me was titillating. He took a sip of his drink and sat it on the coffee table.

“What do you want to go to school for?”

I took a deep breath and laughed.

“Well, that’s the million-dollar question. I definitely think for some sort of art. I’ve always loved the fine arts. I paint, sculpt, draw, and do some graphic arts too. I’ve always loved it.”

He grinned.

“That’s awesome, you’ll have to show me some of your stuff.” Ryder looked thoughtfully into the amber of his glass. “As far as the college stuff, I know how that is. After my parents died, there wasn’t a steady flow of income for me and my sister. They left us some money, but they hadn’t planned on dying so young. I got scholarships mostly, did some cool summer internships, and worked part-time all through school to cover the rest of tuition. I was so busy with jobs and school sometimes I just wanted to retreat to a desert island to get some peace.”

I giggled.

“Why didn’t you? That sounds amazing.”

He laughed.

“Because we both know life doesn’t quite work that way. And, I wanted to be a doctor. Despite my showing of unprofessional behavior the other day, I actually take my work really seriously.”

My cheeks heated up just thinking about it. He could see the red tint to my face and scooted close to me. His eyes roved over my body and he took my cheeks in his hands. “There is no reason to be shy about it. It was the hottest thing that has ever

happened to me.”

I could barely get my words out. “Me too. But don’t you ever think about staying in one place? Forging relationships?”

He smiled, his eyes on my lips. “Maybe. If I found the right girl.”

Air stuck in my chest, and my mouth fell open slightly. The way his voice lowered immediately jump started my arousal. He smelled so good and I had never even thought someone could make me feel so wanted just from the way he looked at me. Ryder leaned in and barely touched his lips against mine. His hands fell down to my shoulders, and then skimmed my arms. Shivers ran down my spine and my chest began to heave.

As he rubbed his lips to mine, moving over to my cheek and down to my neck, he spoke in segments. “I just wanted to...”

He kissed my skin, and my eyes rolled back. Continuing, he moved up to my ear. “... have you all to myself, no interruptions.”

Finally, I moved toward him, gripping the strong muscles under his shirt. Our mouths collided and his tongue swooped in, circling through my hot cavern. I gasped against Ryder, digging my fingers into his shirt, wanting to feel his hot skin so badly. He ravaged my mouth for a moment, his right hand slipping down to my thigh. As I spread a bit, he cupped my warm wet mound.

I let out a deep moan as his fingers pulsed against me, rubbing through my jeans. Then, suddenly, they stopped. He pulled back and smiled at me mischievously. Standing, he put out his hand and began unbuttoning his shirt with the other.

“Come on,” he growled. “Let’s go somewhere where I can devour you all at once. I

want to see your whole body.”

My teeth chattered slightly and my pussy throbbed. There was no thinking about it. I grabbed his hand and followed him out of the living room, flipping off the light as we headed down the hall. We walked into the bedroom and I stopped, standing in the center of the room as he closed the door and slipped his shoes off.

He strode toward me like a lion after its prey, his shirt now open. I reached up and pushed it back over his shoulders and let it drop to the ground. Biting my lip, I ran my fingers over his flesh, feeling the electricity connecting between us. My eyes darkened and, in that moment, there was no more Ms. Shy and Demure. I wanted him, and I wanted him to know that I wanted him.

The old Abby had disappeared and this new one was ready to come out and play.

11

Ryder

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

Her skin was like silk, her body almost vibrating in the dim bedroom light. As she ran her fingers down my chest, I lifted the bottom of her shirt and growled as I pulled it up and over her head. Her hair cascaded down her back and her huge breasts sat perched in her purple and black lacey bra. Leaning forward I pressed my face in their billowing glory.

“You’re so gorgeous,” I breathed into her soft flesh. “Absolutely beautiful.”

She whined a little and tossed her hair, pressing herself closer to me. Good. Carefully, I unsnapped the back of her bra and let her tits free. They bounced out, ripe and perky, even better than I remembered. I ran my tongue down her sweet supple skin and around her nipple. Abby gasped, her fingers digging into the back of my neck as I pulled it into my mouth, swirling my tongue around it. God, she was so sweet and so hot.

Her hands pulled at my shoulders, lifting my mouth to hers. She smiled as I kissed her, reaching her hands down to my belt and pulling it undone. Her lips parted mischievously and I watched as she lowered herself down onto her knees, her eyes shifting up to me as she unbuttoned my jeans.

“Do you want this, Ryder?” she cooed playfully.

Hell, yes. The need for my cock to rest perfectly on those pouty lips was almost unbearable. As she dropped my pants to the ground, her other hand ran up my boxer-brief sheathed cock. I groaned as she slipped my boxers to the ground and got in position, flinging her hair back over her shoulder while shifting forward on her knees. She gave me just a hint of a smirk as she stroked my dick, up and down, twisting her

hand slowly to the tip and back again.

“God, sweetheart, do it. Put my dong between those pouty lips.”

With another sly smile, she leaned forward and opened her mouth, pulling my cock deep into her throat. Slowly Abby raised up, keeping her hand tight as it trailed up behind her lips. Down she went again. Her suction was so strong and sensuous that I reached out for something to hold onto, but there was nothing. My hand came back down, gently landing on the back of her head.

She gripped my balls and rolled them back and forth in the palm of her hand while she sucked harder and harder. Holy fuck, where did she learn this technique? With a bit of pressure from my palm she started to move faster. Her head bobbed up and down on my raging cock, spit dripping from the base and rolling down my sack. When air hit the wetness I shivered, electricity blowing through my whole body. My thighs were stiff and my heels dug in hard to the rug beneath us.

“God,” I groaned out as she tugged gently on my balls. “Fuck.”

She tilted back just a bit and put her hands on her thighs. Using just her tongue, she guided my dick back into her warm moist mouth. Without warning she picked up speed again, bobbing in and out, over and over. A deep moan echoed from my chest and I feared I would never make it inside of her. She felt so amazing in fact, that I had to stop her. This night was meant to go on for a while and I didn’t want to blow prematurely.

I reached down and pulled Abby back up to her feet, cupping the back of her head with my hand and kissing her deeply. My other hand yanked at the clasp on her jeans until it came loose. Slowly, I pulled the zipper down and tugged them, getting the denim down to her knees where they fell to the floor in a pile.

Holding her mouth to mine I stepped forward, pushing her back toward the bed. When the mattress caught her legs, I helped to gently lower her down, never releasing my lips from hers. I climbed on the bed next to her, and tasted the sweet sensation of her lips. Fuck! This woman was absolutely delicious. I ran one hand up her thigh, finding her soft satin panties soaked. That was definitely a good sign.

“You’re a horny little girl, aren’t you?” I murmured against her lips. “You want it so bad, and Daddy’s going to give it to you.”

She mewled beneath my lips as I kissed her, and I rubbed my fingers against her mound. Abby moaned into my mouth, echoes going down my throat. Her lips came undone beneath me and she let out a high pitched, breathless cry. The sound of her ecstasy drove me wild.

But then, the girl took me by surprise. She reached between my legs and grabbed my cock as her back arched and her hips gyrated. Getting my fingers into her panties, I slipped them into her hole, feeling her plush wetness.

“Fuck baby, you’re drenched,” I rasped in a hoarse voice. “You ready for what comes next?”

I wanted more. No need to play games. I moved to the end of the bed and grabbed the top of her panties, sliding them down and off her thick thighs. Dropping them to the ground, I bent forward. I was hungry to taste that juiciness between her legs. I pushed her knees to each side and licked my lips as I stared down at her perfect pussy. Her folds were so tight and tiny, the hole between peeping out just a bit.

Dropping to my knees, I gripped her waist and pulled her closer to me before diving right in.

“Aaaah!” she squealed as juices covered my face. “Fuck!”

My tongue was immediately out, sliding up through her crease. She was sugar, spice, and the hot taste of aroused woman. She gripped the bedsheets and screamed out as I swirled my tongue around her clit and then pulled it into my mouth. I sucked and released, repeating the process multiple times. Meanwhile, Abby's juices flowed so heavily that they pooled on the comforter beneath her. She tasted so sweet and succulent, I couldn't help but groan as I pushed my lips into her, slurping and licking at that beautiful pussy.

"Ryder," she panted, her hips bucking a bit. "Give me more."

I was happy to oblige. I pulled back and pushed two fingers inside of her, stopping for a second and then pulling back. She gasped and rolled her head back and forth at the intense penetration. I loved watching her responsiveness and began to finger her slowly, twisting my hand back and forth as they slid through the wetness.

"Fuck," she whispered, her body arching.

I licked my lips. "Yeah? You like that?"

"Mhmm yes," she moaned. "Faster."

Immediately I moved faster, pushing her knees back for deeper access. Keeping my fingers in her, I climbed up next to her again, this time maneuvering myself so that my cock brushed lightly at her cheek. She knew what this meant. She grabbed it tight and pulled up, sucking it right into her mouth. Oh fuuuuck. My body jolted and I groaned, watching my fingers going in and out of Abby as she bobbed her head. I leaned down and tongued her a bit. This was the dirtiest sixty-nine ever.

Her breathing picked up and her moans started getting closer together. I moved even faster, finger fucking the hell out of her. Her hips opened wider and she started to scream out with ecstasy. I wanted her to cum, but I also wanted her pussy to squeeze

my cock in orgasm.

That's what Abby wanted too because suddenly, she opened her eyes and parted those delicious lips.

“Fuck me, Ryder. Fuck me now. I need you inside of me.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

Who could argue with that? I quickly maneuvered myself around until I was between her thighs once more. Holding my cock in hand, I slid the head up and down, through her juices and then put the bulb just slightly into her. She gasped and twisted her hips, her body begging for more.

“Is this what you want?” I rasped.

“Yeah,” she moaned.

With a grin, I pushed deep inside of her, while also bending over to kiss her lips. Unconsciously, my hips moved in and out, touching her cervix and then pulling back out to the tip again. She writhed beneath me, her thick sexy body moving like a wave. I gripped her sides and pushed harder, her screams echoing through the apartment.

“Fuck baby, you take it so good. You’re so fucking horny too,” I rasped through deep, thorough pounds.

I could see her body becoming more frantic, shifting against me with need. Abby was close to explosion and I wanted to feel every second of it. I pulled my lips from her and tilted my head down to her ear. “I want to feel you cum, sweetheart.”

She gasped as my hips slammed down against her, before stopping and grinding in circles. My body rubbed tight against her clit, and her hands flew up, digging into my back.

“Yes,” she screamed. “Oh, God. Yes. Ryder!”

Suddenly, her mouth opened wide and her back arched. Her entire body stiffened, but I didn't stop. I pounded her right through her eruption. A hot surge of female fluids burst forward, running down my cock and over my balls.

A deep groan reverberated from my chest as her pussy squeezed my shaft. She didn't move, didn't breathe, as her body surged through waves of ecstasy. Finally, as her back touched down on the bed, she exhaled deeply. I pulled my cock out and ground my mouth into hers once more. But we weren't done yet. Taking my hands, I gripped Abby's hips and turned her onto her belly.

"What?" she asked, letting out a startled cry.

I merely chuckled deep in my chest.

"We're just getting started, honey. The night is still young."

Abby's fists ran up the bed and gripped tightly to the sheets. Her big perfectly round ass sat high up in the air, and I ran my palm down her cheek and slapped her ass, watching her moan. She giggled and waved her ass back and forth. With a smirk, I licked my fingers and rubbed up through her pussy, sliding a finger inside of her and then back out again.

"Yeah, you like this, don't you?" I growled, enjoying the sight of my finger disappearing into her wet folds. "You're my little cumslut."

Kneeling behind her, I pushed my rock hard cock back into that swollen pussy. She screamed as she laid her face on the pillow, keeping her ass high in the air. I gripped her thick hips tightly and pumped my own, pushing in and out of that sweet, tight mound. My body slammed into her ass, making us both moan. My fingers dug deep into her skin and she put one hand up on the iron headboard, gripping tightly.

Throughout the apartment you could hear the mixed choir of moans, grunts, and the slapping of our skin together. The bed creaked beneath us and the picture above the bed vibrated. I leaned forward and did a series of short fast thrusts. Reaching up I caressed her breasts, massaging as I went. She put her hand on top of mine and squeezed, letting me know she wanted it harder and deeper.

“That’s my little cumbucket,” I rasped into her ear. “You’re new to this yet taking it like a pro.”

Suddenly, Abby pushed back a bit against me, straightening and coming up on her knees with me still deep inside of her. She leaned back and turned her head, kissing me. I pulled her up and down my shaft, gripping tightly to her tits. Suddenly, she moved forward, pulling off of me. But why?

Before I could ask what was wrong, she flipped over and dove down on my dick, sucking it into the back of her throat. She gripped my back and pulled me over so that her lips were at the base of cock before sliding back up. The change in sensation made my head spin. I never had a girl stop mid-sex just to continue to suck my cock. It was amazing, and she was really good at it too, especially for someone who seemed to be very innocent.

“You like that, sweetheart? You like tasting your own juices on my shaft?”

Abby moaned with my cock in her mouth, vibrating it down the stiff length. My mouth fell open and my head tilted back. I twisted my hand through her hair and gripped, pushing and pulling her face up and down my manhood. She moaned loud and fast, enjoying the dominance.

“That’s right. You like it when Daddy fucks your face, don’t you?” I growled.

My hips pumped forward as she sucked, but then she stopped and I let go of her hair.

I could hear her slurp as she pulled up and off, wiping the edge of her mouth.

Slowly, I looked down at Abby's face, her eyes tilted up to mine. Her lips were bright red and swollen and she smiled at me seductively. She climbed up my body and put her lips next to my ear. "Now fuck me until you cum. And don't hold back."

With that, Abby lay down and pulled her legs out wide, crooking her finger at me in a come-hither fashion. She was so gorgeous, that pink slit dripping with need and her big breasts huge and ripe. I gripped my cock and stroked it as I moved forward, lining up to meet her.

My dick was pulled into her pussy so fast it was like a suction. I gripped her body to stabilize myself before falling into full deep thrusts, pumping almost out of control. Abby screamed, moaned, scratched at my chest, and pulled the sheets up off the corners of the bed.

"Oh god, Ryder! Fuck!"

Her body convulsed beneath me as it reached another peak. She tilted her head back and thrust her breasts up in the air. Her fists white knuckled the sheets and she gasped. Every inch of her vibrated as she exploded around my cock, sweet tremors running from her body to mine.

I groaned, gripping harder as I thrust once, twice, and finally on the third I pushed as deep inside of her as I could. My cock jerked as it blew my seed wildly inside of her. I could feel the ecstasy roll through my stiff shaft and down to the tips of my toes.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

Holy shit, what just happened? We sat in suspended pleasure, our ecstasy overwhelming. Once it passed, my hips started to move again, reflexively, as the heat slowly simmered off. Her body relaxed as well, and I slowly pulled out, watching as my enormous meat showed itself once more, covered in her sticky fluids.

She turned her head and looked at me, catching her breath.

“Wow,” she gasped. “That was amazing.”

Through my own daze, I smiled and nodded. “Damn right it was. I can’t wait to do it again. Just give me twenty minutes to reload.”

Abby looked at me wildly and then burst into laughter. I grinned too, grabbing onto her curvy form and rolling her into my arms. Our lovemaking was wild, and yet fun and lighthearted too. Hands down, this girl was absolutely amazing, and all I wanted was more.

12

Abby

I locked my car, my flip flops in my hand, and a smile on my face. My knees felt weak, and my hair, I was sure, looked like it was out of a bad 80’s flick. I didn’t care because I just had the best night of my life. Ryder and I made love four times, and I didn’t even think about leaving his bed until the next morning. He made me breakfast in bed suggesting all the fun things we could do that day. I was just astonished he still wanted me to hang out.

After all, he's a busy physician. Not only was he subbing for Dr. McNamara, but he'd picked up extra shifts at the local hospital too. To me, it sounded like two jobs, and it basically was.

"How do you do it?" I asked as his phone went off.

He grabbed it and smiled ruefully.

"You get used to working like a dog," he said. "It's okay, Gorgeous. We'll go out again."

I groaned, getting my stuff together to go. As I left, he pecked my lips with a devilish smile.

"I promise, we'll go out again Abby. Soon."

My heart fluttered and I got into my car, driving in a daze. But now, I was back to real life. As I passed by the back of my mom's house toward the stairs to my apartment, I could see my mom giving my sister a kiss on the head, heading out for weekend overtime. I didn't want her to notice the state I was in so I hurried up to the apartment and shut the door just as she came around the corner. Breathing heavily from the sprint up the stairs, I leaned against the doorway, a smile pulling on my lips.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, and I pulled it out, seeing a text from Ryder. "Don't forget. Next weekend we are going away. I'll plan it. Be ready for a good time."

I giggled like schoolgirl and raced to my room, changing my clothes. I stopped suddenly in front of the mirror, seeing my wild hair and smudged makeup. So that was the walk of shame look that Mary had talked about so many times. I straightened my shoulders and tilted my head back. Well, I was going to wear it like a badge of honor. It was a walk of a woman who just experienced the most erotic night of her

life. I didn't know how anyone could ever top it.

Skipping into my bathroom, I grabbed my hairbrush and pulled it through the tangles. I needed a shower, but I also was bursting at the seams to talk to someone about everything that had happened. Mary was out of town on some retreat with her family. She had bitched about it for months knowing she couldn't have her phone, internet, or any other electronic device that could take the burden of her family away.

So instead, I pulled my hair back in a ponytail, brushed my teeth, and headed down to grab something to eat and hopefully corner my sister. Melody and I were never close, except for when she was tiny and had to rely on me for care. Then, as a teenager, she acted almost like she resented me. There was always a competitive vibe when it came to her, and for no reason either. But I guess that's just how it is between sisters. Melody was like me in some ways, but in others, she struggled.

After all, I'm the girl with a smile on my face. I have a naturally sunny disposition and am rarely ever down. Melody wasn't like that. My mom always said it was her teenage years and that she would grow out of it, but I'm not sure about that. Melody has been brooding since before she even hit puberty. She went through phase after phase, trying to find her place in the world. I tried to tell her that things would get better but she hates my advice. Melody doesn't think I'm old enough to be even giving advice.

Plus, our values are different. For a while she begged my mom for designer clothes and bags, trying to fit in with the popular girls and the jocks. We just weren't equipped financially to support that. Then she got in with the goths, wearing fishnets and short skirts, dying her hair blue at her friends' houses, and wearing more eyeliner than was healthy. Luckily, that phase was short lived. I thought she had started to settle in with a more normal persona, but I quickly realized she had pretty much just given up.

Yet after seventeen years of struggling with my sister and having her tell me she hated me a million times, I still have hope for a better relationship. As I walked in the door she glanced up and then back down at whatever book she was reading that day and didn't say a word.

"Good morning," I chirped at her, trying to seem positive and normal.

She grumbled something incoherent. I grabbed a coffee cup off the shelf and poured some joe. Then, locating a yogurt and a croissant, I sat down at the table across from my sister. I glanced at her as I fixed my coffee.

"Not out and about with friends today?"

It was more of a rhetorical question. My sister doesn't have very many friends, and the ones she did have were wishy washy. Sometimes they were there for her, but sometimes they blew her off. I didn't have a ton of friends either, but at least my friends were real.

She looked up and then back down.

"Obviously not."

I ignored her snotty tone, hoping she would shift gears when she realized I wasn't a threat. "So, I went on a date last night."

I could see her eyes stop moving with the words on the pages, and then start again, trying not to show she cared.

Page 26

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“Oh yeah? Who’s the lucky guy? Old Marv that owns that scary gas station on the edge of town?”

“Ew,” I chuckled throwing a piece of croissant at her.

She half smiled and put down her book. “Okay, I don’t do riddles. Just tell me. Obviously, I will get no peace until you do.”

I smiled sweetly and lifted my chin proudly. “I went out with Dr. Ryder Rivington.”

Immediately Melody’s mouth dropped open.

“The doctor filling in for Dr. McNamara? The one that every woman in town has been whispering about since he drove his fancy car up to the hotel last week?”

“Yep, that one,” I replied with excitement.

Melody narrowed her eyes. “Wait. I know for a fact you didn’t come home last night. Your car was gone and not here when I woke up this morning. I didn’t tell Mom because I didn’t want to hear her tell me to mind my own business.”

“I appreciate it,” I replied. “I’m not ready for that mom speech.”

Melody didn’t say anything. I sipped my coffee, wanting to spill over with information but waited for her to ask the questions.

Finally, she sighed and waved her hand.

“Go ahead. It’s obvious you want to talk about it.”

I smiled and began, leaving out the whole sex in the doctor’s office part. That was going to stay with me. After all, rules were broken and the fewer people who knew, the safer it would be.

When I was done, my sister stared at me blankly for several moments.

“So, you meet some hot shot doctor who travels, and you hook up with him? And why are you so smitten about this? He’ll be gone before you even learn his middle name.”

My heart thumped in my chest, realizing that I hadn’t really considered that fully. I kind of pushed it to the back of my mind.

“Yes, but when you meet someone, and it’s right, you work it out.”

Melody rolled her eyes.

“You would think that it would be you telling me this since you’re older. Abby. Look at my face. He is playing you.”

I scoffed, starting to get defensive.

“He is not. You have no idea the kind of connection we have.”

She shook her head and put her hands on the top of her book.

“I know we live in the middle of nowhere but there are men here. Sure, they’re not great. The ones here with any sort of good 9-5 job act like they are God’s gift to women. They know that they have the pick of the litter. Meanwhile, men like Dr.

Rivington don't belong in our town. He's a fantasy."

I put my hand out and pursed my lips.

"No. You're wrong. Ryder is different from those guys. He has lived. He has seen the world, and experienced tragedy. He wants something better from life. He has a huge heart and, like I said, there is a connection between us that is unlike anything else."

"And how do you know that?" Melody asked with raised eyebrows. "You have so much experience with relationships, Abby. You know, they're just lining up at the door. Get real, girl! Guys are sneaky and they know just what to say. This one, he's got the life. He's handsome, rich, successful, and he can literally make you fall in love with him and then get the hell out of Dodge. You need to be careful with him. Just think about his motivations and whether he seems like the kind of guy that would drop that amazing lifestyle just to sit here and rot in the middle of a cow pasture."

I gritted my teeth. Irritation had long passed and now I was pissed. It was like Melody was allergic to being happy for me.

"Well, I think if he wanted to hit and quit it, he would have cut this off quickly. Instead, he's invited me to go away with him for a weekend. Just the two of us, something romantic. Why would he do that if he knew he could just have me over to his place and be done with it?"

Melody was speechless for a moment, but only a moment.

"No. You cannot go away with him, Abs. Seriously, that's only going to make it worse."

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I rolled my eyes at her and brushed the crumbs off my hands. Standing, I walked over to the sink and put my plate down. I stood there for a minute stewing.

“I don’t know why you can’t just be happy for me. I want to go away with Ryder. How often does anything like that happen to a girl in this town? It’s so different from our boring old existence.”

“But it’s dangerous for your emotions,” Melody snapped, turning around in her chair.

My eyes drifted off to the window, thinking about her words.

“When someone here goes on a date, it’s either a group date with our friends from high school, or the guy takes us to some shitty burger joint. Why would I choose greasy hell when I could have filet mignon?”

“Because filet mignon can make you sick,” Melody replied. “Sometimes it tastes gross and you end up wishing you had just grabbed a hamburger.”

I shook my head, but she wasn’t going to get it.

“Well, I want to take my chance on the filet. Ryder is, at this very moment, planning a wonderful weekend getaway at some place called Breaker Villa about three hours from here. It’s on the ocean, it’s nicer than anything you or I have ever been to, and it’s just for the two of us. I’m excited about it, and I won’t let your distaste for me, or men, or whatever is your problem, dim that excitement.”

Melody turned back to her book, sniffing.

“Well, don’t say I didn’t warn you. Dr. Rivington breezed into this town, money in his pockets, and he will breeze right back out the same way. He’s enjoying the fun part of a relationship, but he will never stay to see it through. He’ll leave before normal ever settles in because that’s what men like him do.”

I stopped and stared at her for a minute, lowering my tone a bit.

“Melody, Ryder isn’t going to do that. Not all men are like Dad.”

I could see Melody’s shoulders stiffen and she stood up, almost knocking the chair over. Pointing her finger at me, her face twisted in anger.

“Don’t. Don’t turn my commonsense warning into some psychobabble bullshit. I wasn’t talking about Dad. I was talking about your fake ass new boyfriend. I warned you, Abby. Don’t come crying to me when you’re left with nothing but a broken heart.”

She huffed and stomped off. I stood there listening as she climbed the stairs and slammed the door behind her. Nothing she said was going to get to me. Melody has been a pessimist since the first moment she learned how to speak. She expects the worst from everyone, and I knew it was because our father left us. But having that mentality would keep us locked up in a mental prison forever, and I wasn’t going to let my father ruin anything else in my life.

Besides, I wasn’t my mother and Ryder wasn’t my father. Our connection was something real and special. It was definitely meant to happen, and my sister just doesn’t get it because she’s an eternal Debbie Downer. Well, no matter how much I loved my sister, I wasn’t going to let her ruin my mood because now, I had a romantic weekend to look forward to.

Abby

The week seemed to move at a glacial pace. I spent my days at work at the call center and my nights texting with Ryder. We met up for coffee a couple of times, but overall, he'd been busy. He wasn't getting out of the office until six or seven each evening and then every other night he pulled duty at the Emergency Room to boot. It was hard, and he was exhausted.

While I wanted to see him more, I knew that weekend we would be able to spend as much time together as possible. So, I hunkered down and just worked through it. At night I would read one of the hundreds of books I had on my shelves, trying to put my mind somewhere other than on him. I'd already devoured every book on that shelf, but I loved to read, especially fantasy with the damsels in distress, dragons, and deep emotional love affairs.

It was Thursday and I was on the couch, a blanket up over me, and my comfy fleece pants and socks to keep me cozy. Sure, it was hot outside, but I liked to be warm. I leaned back and opened up the book, ready to pick-up at Chapter 7 when there was a knock on the door. I sighed and threw the blanket back.

When I opened the door, I was greeted by my mother's smiling face.

"Hi sweetheart, I brought you a cookie. They gave them to us at work."

I stepped to the side, letting her in. "Thanks. I love to have visitors."

Belinda was still dressed in her work clothes, and she looked exhausted. Every time I saw her, she looked that way. I could remember very hazily a time when she looked rested but ever since my dad left, her face showed deep lines and wrinkles. She looked around and tapped her hands at her sides.

I raised an eyebrow and moved the blanket so she could sit.

“What’s up? You look like you have something on your mind.”

My mom sat down on the couch, rubbing the fabric with her hand.

“You did a nice job re-storing Grandma’s old couch. I remember laying on this when I was a kid.”

Plopping down next to her I grinned. My mom had given me the couch when I moved upstairs. It had been sitting in the basement since my grandmother had died. I re-upholstered it myself, and I was proud. “Thanks.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“So, Melody mentioned you’re going out of town this weekend,” she said nonchalantly.

That bitch. I threw on the best irritated impression I could give.

“Oh yeah. I was going to tell you about that.”

Belinda shrugged.

“No biggie. She didn’t say where or why, just that you had mentioned it in passing.”

Ok, only half a bitch.

“Yeah,” I replied uncaringly. “The call center has organized some sort of group training. They thought it would be best if we started working better as a team or some crap like that. And there’s some job training we have to do too.”

Belinda nodded, with not a hint of suspicion in her tired eyes.

“Ok. I’ve been to several team-building off-sites too. Actually, if you force yourself to interact, you can have a pretty good time. Where will you be staying?”

I clicked my tongue. “Some corporate hotel. I don’t remember the name of it. It was one of the usual big ones.”

My mother squinted, and I could tell I needed to give her a bit better detail than what I was. I wasn’t usually vague with her. She leaned back crossing her arms. “And what

city did you say this training is taking place?”

“I didn’t,” I chirped. “But it’s in downtown Philly.”

She huffed slightly. “I don’t know if your car will get you there. The thing is coughing and hacking on the edge of life. You’ve taken care of her, but we all have our limitations.”

I chuckled. “I won’t be driving. The center organized big tour buses to take us all there. I’ll have a nice relaxing ride in a comfy bus seat with air-conditioning. They took care of everything, actually. I don’t even have to worry about food.”

I was relieved to see my mother’s shoulders lower and relax a bit. She was starting to let the suspicion fade but I had to watch what I said. I rarely ever lied to my mother, but this was one of those things that could easily start a battle. While Melody discouraged me from seeing from Ryder due to her own need to bring everyone down, my mother’s dismay would be based in fear. Fear for my heart and my reputation. Belinda didn’t know him, but I knew from the outside it seemed like a bad situation.

That very familiar worry look started to creep onto her face. I had to act fast.

“It’s going to be really boring, nothing to worry about at all. It’s just a bunch of training sessions, and then dinners with my co-workers. Most of the dinners are right there in the hotel too. I won’t even have to brave downtown Philadelphia. But yes, I will take my mace just in case.”

There was a small sigh of relief.

“Right. Good. I was going to suggest that. Cities can be dangerous. I do have to warn you though, usually these dinners offer alcohol. And when the dinner is over people

always like to go out and see wherever they are staying. I don't mind if you have a drink, but don't go wild. Getting drunk like that can be a recipe for disaster. You work with these people, but you don't know them, not really. People worked with Ted Bundy before he was found out."

I raised an eyebrow and my mother shook her finger at me. "Don't give me that look Abby, bad things happen to girls who get drunk at corporate events."

Without thinking I laughed and then straightened my face.

"Mom, you know I don't drink, unless its wine with you on your birthday. Besides, I'm only twenty, so I can't even get into a bar."

Belinda nodded and patted my leg.

"I know you're a good girl, Abby. But that doesn't mean there aren't bad people out there. And no matter what a company says about your free time, you are still under scrutiny. More than one woman has lost her job at a corporate training session because things got out of hand. I just don't want to see you suffer the same fate. You know they are harder on women than men. A little youthful excitement could ruin everything you've been working so hard for, and you don't deserve that. You deserve a good life."

I took a deep breath, thankful that I had a mother that loved me that much. She truly cared about my wellbeing. It actually kind of made me feel guilty for lying to her, but the conversation would have been totally different if she knew I was going away with a man. Any man, much less Dr. Ryder Rivington, who was only in town temporarily. That alone would cause her to stroke out, so keeping things to myself was the best option.

"Don't worry, Mom," I said. "Everything is going to turn out great, and I'll be home

and safe before you know it. Please tell me that you have tomorrow off from work.”

The change of subject was perfect timing. “I signed up for overtime. But only for four hours Sunday morning. Then I have the rest of the day off to catch up on laundry and cleaning.”

I wrinkled my nose. “Sounds exhilarating.”

She stood up, letting out a deep breath. “It is. It’s a nice break from the hustle of putting food on the table.” She looked down for a minute, and I saw how old she was. But then Belinda looked up again. “Well, I need to get something to eat and make sure your sister isn’t up to no good. You know teenagers.”

Standing I embraced my mother and kissed her on the cheek. She smiled and walked out, leaving me with my guilt and a cookie. I was pretty sure, though, that things would be good with Ryder. I had something that could be really amazing, and I wasn’t going to let anything come in the way of my happiness. I’ve always prioritized everyone else, and it was time I started looking out for myself.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I knew one person that would be happy for me, and that was Mary. My friend needed to hurry her ass up so I could tell her everything before the vacation started. She was supposed to be getting back home late tonight from her family camping trip, which meant she'd be free to talk soon. She was going to freak.

The cookie was pretty damn delicious, and I ignored the crumbs cascading down over my clothes. I took a huge bite of the thing and my cheeks puffed out as I chewed. Of course, that was the precise moment that my phone started to buzz. I grabbed it and turned on the speaker phone.

"Hero?" I said with a full mouth.

"What have I told you?" Mary sighed. "If you are going to suck dick, you shouldn't answer the phone. And if you do answer the phone, fucking swallow first."

I smiled, gulping down the cookie. "I missed you."

Mary laughed. "I missed you too, bitch."

"Was it torture like last year?" I asked, sitting down on the couch.

"No, not so bad," she replied. "Mostly because I managed to sexually coerce one of the hot hippy park rangers. Every night we went frolicking naked through the land of granola and kale."

Giggles were erupting from my stomach. "That sounds healthy."

“Oh girl, he was definitely healthy,” she snarked. “So, what’s up with you and the good doctor?”

I let out a deep breath. “Well, I went to the appointment and he asked me out on a date that night. So, we went to Vincent’s, ate, danced, and then went back to his place.”

“Uh-huh,” she snickered, breaking out into song. “Booty time. Yeah, it’s booty time.”

My cheeks were burning. “I stayed the night. And then, he invited me to go away with him this weekend to Breaker Villa.”

“Whaaaat?” she squealed. “See? I told you to go to that appointment. I am a genius. If you get married, I am the maid of honor and I get my pick of the doctor groomsmen.”

“Slow down,” I laughed. “It’s a weekend away, not a proposal. Besides, you were the first one to tell me to be careful.”

“First?” she questioned. “Who else did you tell?”

“Melody,” I said, scrunching my forehead.

“Oh, good grief,” she groaned. “What did that little evil bitch say?”

I rolled my eyes. “Basically, that Ryder’s playing me and I am stupid for ever getting involved. But she didn’t tell my mother.”

Mary chuckled. “Good old Belinda. She would do anything to keep you from going out with him. But you’re an adult now so it’s your choice. And I, for one, am all about this little tryst. Even if it isn’t forever, it’s good for you. It’s freeing.”

“Freeing for everyone else, anxiety for me,” I replied. “What if he wants me to put a bathing suit on?”

“Then you break out that bikini and flaunt those curves,” she replied. “He’s seen you nude on a table at the office already. I’m sure a bathing suit won’t shock and appall him.”

“I don’t own a bikini.” My head was starting to hurt.

Mary giggled loudly. “Oh yeah, that’s me. Sorry.”

Shaking my head, I turned and put my feet up.

“I guess you’re right. Ryder finds me sexy naked and clothed. I should feel free to be who I am around him. I guess I still have a nervous tendency since its all new to me. And because he has muscles for days and not an ounce of excess fat on his body.”

“Good, he’ll need you to keep him warm in the winter,” she cracked. “And you need to shut up with all this body dysmorphia shit. You are sexy as hell with those thighs and that big booty. Thick is in girl. Thick. Is. In.”

I smiled and leaned my head against the arm of the couch. “I missed you. You can’t leave me alone again.”

“YOU? I was the one stuck singing songs by a fire trying to ignore my uncle’s incessant need to wear socks with sandals and bathe in insect repellent,” she scoffed. “I seriously contemplated tossing him in the bonfire and seeing just how flammable he is.”

“You really need to stop going to these things,” I replied, rubbing my forehead. “You are becoming homicidal. It used to be suicidal.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“Well, I’m too amazing to die,” Mary said with a yawn. “Besides, I think my uncle is leaving his stamp collection to me. That’s like three trips to Tahiti girl. Might as well just off him now and get it over with.”

Shaking my head, I picked up my book. “You are losing it. I’m going to go and finish this book I’m reading. I’ll text you when I leave tomorrow.”

“Fine, fine,” she sighed. “You better be texting me pictures of that doctor’s hot body. Give a girl something to live for.”

“No way,” I replied, shaking my head. “No evidence. Not yet. Besides, you have had your hot bodies, now it’s my turn.”

“Stingy bitch,” she grumbled.

Laughing I got off the phone. “Bye, girl. See you Monday.”

“Toodles,” she yelled out before disconnecting the call.

I still don’t know how Mary and I stayed such good friends over the years but I was damn glad to have her on my side. I knew everyone else would have a negative opinion of me and Ryder, but I didn’t need their opinions. I needed someone to recognize I was capable of making up my own mind and have my back for it. Mary was always good with it. She doesn’t hold back, but once I had made a choice, she supported and cheered me on. That’s how I knew she cared.

Staring down at my book I realized that focusing on anything was going to be a

failure. I was already fully packed so there was nothing more to do there. And there were still fifteen or so hours until we left for our long weekend together. I needed to occupy my mind, because otherwise, I was going to go insane.

Ryder and I were about to embark on what could be the beginning of something incredibly amazing, and I could only hope that my sister was wrong. So what if he was a traveling doctor? So what if he'd been brushing me off recently? People can get different jobs, and people can change.

14

Ryder

I lifted Abby's suitcase into the trunk of my car. It was way lighter than I assumed it would be. I was so used to high maintenance girls that I forgot not every woman packed her entire house when going away for three days. Besides, I had no plans on letting her keep her clothes on for very long, so it was all for the better.

"Oh, sorry, I could have put that in there," Abby said, hurrying down the steps from the apartment building.

I playfully kissed my bicep. "I got this, young lady. You just stand back."

Abby giggled. I loved how she giggled. The fluttering in my stomach threw me off for a minute. There were definitely more emotions swirling around in my head than there should have been, but I didn't want to think about it. I wanted to get away and be with her.

I put out my hand and opened the passenger door to the car. "You ready for this?"

She smiled, reaching up and kissing me on the cheek. "I've been looking forward to it

all week.”

She sat comfortably in the front seat and I closed the door, hurrying over to jump into the driver’s seat. When I got in, she looked over at me with wide eyes. “This car is fancier than my entire apartment. No, than the entire town.”

I laughed, starting the engine and checking to make sure I could pull out. As I did Abby’s eyes opened wide with amazement.

“You can barely even hear the engine. This is amazing.”

Pressing the button on the sunroof, she gasped at the light shimmering down. I smirked. For some reason, it felt really good to show off to her. Even though it sounds lame, I really wanted to impress her.

“I bought this after my residency was over. I spent a couple years living on tuna and noodles after it was over, just saving up. Then I bought this when I started my current gig because I was traveling all the time.”

“Is it comfortable for long distances?” she asked, sounding shocked.

I rubbed the seat back.

“More comfortable than anything I’ve ever ridden in, and my father had his own luxury jet when I was a kid. That thing was crazy. But yeah, I like having nice things because, why not? I can’t take the money with me when I die and I make enough to be able to do what I like.”

Abby’s cheeks blushed a little and she fidgeted with a piece of lint in her lap.

“I drive an old Camry that I’ve had since I turned sixteen. When I was ten, I knew my

mom wouldn't be able to buy me a car so every summer I would go around doing chores for people. I would cut grass, pull weeds, grocery shop for them, clean houses, and babysit. I took that money and hid it away. When I got my driver's license, I went and bought the Camry used. It's done me good, and I worked hard for it."

"That's awesome, Abby," I replied with a grin. "You know what you want and you go for it. That's amazing. I would be proud if I were you."

"I am," she said with a small smile. "But it is definitely not one of these."

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

My hand rubbed across the steering wheel.

“But the Camry’s reliable, gets you where you need to go, and you have other things in your life that are more important. I guess I don’t have a lot of that. So in a way, me being so in love with this car is kind of sad.”

Slowly Abby turned her head toward me and then rolled her eyes.

“Nice attempt to make me feel better but you can be obsessed with this car. I would be. No matter what.”

We both burst into laughter. Abby got me. She even saw through me when I tried to spare her feelings. Granted, I was never a very good liar, but still. We raced down through the town and out onto some backcountry roads. I put my hand out the window and felt the warm air quivering around it. Abby leaned her head back and smiled, the sun glinting in her hair. She looked like a glowing angel in the passenger seat.

I reached my hand over and took hers, winking as we headed for our mini-vacation. We didn’t even need to talk to have a good time. We spent half of the three-hour drive in silence, just enjoying the view, the wind, and the feeling of freedom. It was exciting to say the least.

“Have you been here before?” she asked, seeing the sign for the resort.

I looked out the window at the town coming up ahead.

“Nope. But I hear it’s a really amazing place to go for the beach, small crowds, and privacy. I knew we could have shacked up in Farmington, but I figured we should get away.”

Abby’s eyes darted out the window. “True. I mean, we aren’t doing anything wrong, but still. People in small towns tend to have small minds. To them we have a huge age gap and you’re my doctor too. It would be the scandal of the century.”

She giggled watching the buildings pass by. “But in reality, it’s just easier to not give them fuel for their fires. I like to stay under the radar, if at all possible. The old women are worse than high schoolers.”

I shook my head. “Believe it or not, Farmington isn’t the first town I’ve ever been to that has that problem. It’s insane. But hey, what else are you going to do when you’re old and brittle?”

Abby leaned forward as I turned down a long stone drive. Up ahead on the hill was a huge mansion. She gasped at its enormity and beauty.

“Oh my gosh, is this Breaker Villa?”

I grinned.

“Yep, it’s an amazing bed and breakfast,” I said. “It was converted a long time ago. It’s beautiful, right?”

Her mouth dropped open. “I’m going to be a princess. I’ve only seen places like these in magazines and on television. This is gorgeous. How did you find it?”

I pulled up to the curb in front of the valet. “I have an uncanny ability to always pick amazing places. I’ve had friends ask me to pick their vacations because they trust me

so much. I don't know. Maybe I'm just meant for vacation."

"Ha!" Abby took off her seatbelt and climbed out of the car, smiling at the valet.

He gave me my number and I gave him the keys. "Do we take our luggage now?"

The guy shook his head. "Oh no, no, Dr. Rivington, we'll see that it's delivered to your room."

"Thank you." I handed him a tip and put my hand on Abby's lower back as I guided her to the front doors.

Remembering my manners, I opened the door for her, watching her amazing ass as she walked in front of me. She was wearing a short peach colored sleeveless dress with a wide brown belt around the waist. Her sandals matched the belt and I wondered if she paid attention to those things. Not because it was important to me, but because I threw on a brown belt with black shoes that morning.

My eyes were glued to her, watching as she attempted to hide her awe at the hotel. There were lush thick carpets strewn across the stone floors, enormous sparkling crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, and art and décor that was reminiscent of what a castle might have been like for a royal family. She turned in circles finding every beautiful piece of art she could.

Pointing at a piece on the column in the center of the room, her mouth dropped open.

"That's the Three Trees. It is a 1643 print in etching and dry point by Rembrandt. It was his largest landscape print ever. I thought for certain it was either at the Rijksmuseum, the Musée des beaux-arts du Canada or the Bibliothèque Nationale de France."

“The Bibliothèque Nationale de France, actually,” a man’s voice stated. We turned finding a middle-aged gentleman in a dapper suit with a flower in his jacket pocket. “We have it on loan. Fortunately, the owners of the castle have an amazing connection to the arts. We’ve been able to feature art by some of the most brilliant artists in the world here.”

Abby shook her head, looking back at it. “That is amazing.”

The man nodded. “Are you checking in?”

“Oh,” I said reaching in my pocket and pulling out the reservation. “Yes, we are.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

The man took the paper and bowed slightly. Abby followed along behind me, still looking around in bewilderment. It was really cute actually, and it made me want to take her all over the world. The man cleared his throat as he walked up behind the counter. "I am Hodges, your hotel manager."

Abby stood to the side, her hands locked in front of her, swaying from side to side. Hodges typed quickly on the computer and smiled. "Ah, Dr. and Mrs. Rivington, here you are."

I held back a smile as Abby's head whipped around, surprised to hear him say "Mrs." But then she smiled to herself and put her head down, nodding. It was just easier to book us as a married couple, since we were sharing a room.

Hodges handed me a large black key with a red ribbon tied around it. He pointed at the map and traced his finger along the route. "If you and the Missus need anything day or night, please don't hesitate to call the front desk. And have a very enjoyable stay."

"Thank you, Hodges," I growled.

I turned away from the front desk and put my hand out. Abby and I walked toward the large staircase. "I hope you don't mind that I got us a suite."

Her eyes went wide again. "A suite? You mean it has a kitchen in it? That's so amazing."

I opened my mouth to correct her but stopped myself, realizing it would have been

incredibly rude of me. Instead I leaned toward her and kissed her on the forehead.

“It’s much more than that. Just wait and see.”

She giggled in excitement. When we got to the top of the stairs, we both looked at each other and took off running down the hallway, laughing. I slid to a stop at the door and put my arm out, catching her at the waist. She was giggling so hard tears were coming down her face. I couldn’t help but join her in her mirth.

The key dangled from the red satin ribbon and Abby smiled, taking it and inserting it into the door. When we walked into the space, I heard a gasp from her. I walked in behind and shut the door, finding Abby standing in the living room.

Her hands were pressed to her mouth as she turned in circles again.

“This is beautiful. There’s a kitchen, a dining area, a living room, and a separate bedroom! And everything is so beautifully decorated.”

I chuckled at her as she ran over to the art, shaking her head.

“Oh, man. This is a Federico. It’s so gorgeous. Did you know he was homeless when he was discovered? He lives in Manhattan now.”

“I did not know that,” I said, still watching her with amazement. “Though, to be honest, I’m not well-versed in art.”

Abby shook her head at the painting and walked over, peeking in the bedroom. She perked up and looked around, putting her fingers to her lips playfully gasping. “There’s only one bedroom?! Scandalous!”

I smiled, stepping closer and wrapping my arms around her waist. My eyes went

dark, staring into her beautiful face. “Of course, sweetheart. I intend on sampling your body all weekend, so I don’t want us to sleep separately.”

“I think I like that,” she cooed seductively.

Lifting up on her toes she gently pressed her lips to mine. I leaned into it, upping the ante. I parted her lips with my tongue and she opened willingly, entangling her tongue with mine. My hands slid down to her ass and I gripped it tightly, lifting up. She giggled with delight.

Laughing, I pulled back. “Come on, let’s go test out that bed and show this place what scandalous really means.”

She walked ahead of me and I reached out, playfully swatting her in the ass. She jumped and squealed as I chased after her, running up to the end of the bed. I grabbed her wrist and spun her into my arms. She put her palms on my chest and bit her bottom lip.

“You better not be gentle with me, Mister.”

“Don’t worry sweetheart, I won’t.”

Putting both my hands down, I lifted her dress up. She moaned as I ripped her panties down to her ankles and spun her around. Pushing down between her shoulder blades, I bent her over and slapped her ass. Abby let out a pleasurable moan, making my cock rock solid.

Leaning forward I whispered into her ear. “Kneel on the edge of the bed and take the top of your dress down. Let me see those beautiful tits swing.”

She did as told, pulling the straps down her arms and unclasping her bra. With a low

growl, I wrapped my arms around her and massaged her breasts. She leaned her head back on my shoulder as I twisted her nipples between my fingers, the hard nubs so sensitive. Her breathing was heavy and her legs were trembling. My tongue ran up her neck and to her earlobe, pulling it into my mouth.

“Mmm,” she groaned, her nipples rock solid.

I smiled as I released her ear. “Now bend over and let me see that pussy.”

She smiled and lifted off my shoulder, bending over on all fours. I pressed my lips together and pulled my shirt off, tossing it to the side. Then I took two fingers and ran them down between her ass cheeks, stopping and rubbing her hole for a moment. She shivered all over and began to moan louder. She liked it.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I trailed down from there, gently touching her swollen lips. They were red and almost pulsing with pleasure as a trickle of juices dripped down her inner thigh. I pushed her knees further apart, opening her wide, that beautiful pink blooming like a flower. She gripped the bedsheets and let out a high pitched moan as I rubbed my fingers through her juices and then gently slid them deep inside of her.

“Shit baby,” I rasped. “You want it so bad that you’re fucking drenched.”

Abby said nothing, merely letting out another wail of ecstasy. I grinned. My cock wanted to claim her so badly, but I wasn’t ready to let go quite yet. I licked my lips and started to finger her slowly, smiling as she writhed her hips, bumping up and down a bit. This woman was perfect for me, and I knew exactly how to make her go wild.

15

Abby

Ryder was in control. A control that I was more than ready to relinquish. My whole life I thought I was somewhat vanilla, but I was so wrong. When Ryder told me to get on all fours there was no way I was refusing. When he told me to spread my legs, they were open wide. It was so hot for him to put me right where he wanted me, and to fulfill my desires simultaneously.

My head hung down as he pushed his face into my ass, rubbing his tongue from my clit to my asshole. He held open my swollen pussy lips, the juices dripping as he ran his warm wet tongue through my folds. I screamed out in pleasure, but I only wanted

more. I wantedallof him inside of me.

“Please,” I gasped, unable to verbalize much. “Yes.”

The man merely chuckled.

“That’s right, sweetheart. You’re so fucking horny, aren’t you? Daddy will give it to you, never fear.”

He gripped both of my ass cheeks and dipped his tongue into my swollen slit. He pulled out and went back in, out and in, out and in. The sensation was amazing and I cried out again with pleasure. But then, to my surprise, his right hand slid up and rubbed circles around my asshole. I moaned in pleasure, gripping the bed sheets.

“Oh my God,” I groaned. “Don’t stop.”

“Yeah baby, cum for me,” he growled.

“Yeah,” I screamed.

His tongue came out and lapped hard against me as his thumb put pressure on my ass. The feeling was indescribable. As I reached the tip of ecstasy, he slipped the tip of his finger into my ass and I burst. Rolling tides of orgasm rammed through my body, hitting every nerve along the way. My mind went cloudy and my voice caught in my throat. He lapped at my juices as they flowed from me, rubbing my clit over and over again. Then, out of nowhere another wave hit me and my whole body shook. I was double orgasming, something I only thought happened in pornos.

“Oh Ryder!” I screamed. “Yes, fuck yes!”

A string of saliva dripped from my lips and my lungs ached for air. Finally, I took a

deep gasping breath and let it out with another rolling moan. As the orgasm began to fade, Ryder pulled back, rubbing his finger through the wetness as he took his pants off with his other hand. There was the clunk of his belt hitting the ground, and then the soft shuffle of his pants. A few seconds later the head of his cock slid down through my lips, catching all the juices there.

“Are you ready, my horny little girl? Ready for Daddy to teach you a lesson?”

I didn't think I could possibly want more, but I couldn't have been more wrong. As soon as he nudged my hole, I leaned backwards, slowly easing him inside me. He spread his feet apart wide and readied for work. Gripping my hips with both hands he pulled out and then pushed back in. My whole body rocked forward and then back again. It was pure bliss.

“Mmm, Daddy's little girl is so good at this,” he rasped. “So good at taking ten inches like a pro.”

He dug his fingers into my flesh and pulled me onto him, holding it there long and hard. Then he began to pulse. His balls swung back and forth, slapping my pussy as he thrust. I reached up and grabbed a pillow and held it to my face as I let loose, moaning over and over again. Oh god, this was incredible.

“Please Ryder,” I cried out. “Fuuck!”

My tits bounced wildly back and forth and my hair streamed down my back. I looked to the right, finding the mirror. I watched the muscles flex in Dr. Rivington's stomach and ass as he pushed into me. He was biting his bottom lip and staring down at my ass like it was the juiciest peach. It was more than hot to watch him. As my eyes lowered down to his cock sliding in and out of me, I got an overwhelming need to put it in my mouth.

I made my move, scooting forward and flipping over. He watched me with half curiosity, and half amusement as I crawled toward him. His cock was so hard I only had to open my mouth before it slid down my throat in one go. I don't know where I learned that, but I never did have much of a gag reflex.

The sound that came out of him, though, it was erotic, needy, and the sexiest thing I had ever heard. He gripped the back of my head and I looked up at him with his cock in my mouth. He was breathing heavily as he pushed my head back down so that I was completely stuffed with his pole.

"Mmph!" I cried out, saliva dripping down my chin. "Mmph!"

But I let him have control because it felt so hot to do so. When Ryder realized it, he gripped my hair and pulled me up and down his cock like a machine. When I got to the bottom, he held me there for a moment before pulling back up. My eyes were watering and spit was everywhere but I didn't care.

"That feels so fucking hot," he growled.

I smiled and moaned with him in my mouth, feeling his cock jerk. Closing my eyes, I moved faster, taking it all in and back up over and over again. He was growling and groaning, his thighs twitching in pleasure. The last time up I slowly swirled my tongue around the tip of his cock and wiped the spit from my chin.

He laughed and shook his head, laying down beside me. Turning over, I faced away from him, feeling his hands grabbing and massaging my tits. I reached behind me for his cock, wanting it so bad again. He had no problem giving it to me either. I bent forward and stuck my ass out, lifting one leg up into the air. He rubbed his shaft through my juices as he stroked it up and down my waiting slit.

Page 34

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I could feel him push in just a little, putting pressure with his cock. Every time I moved onto it though, he would pull back. I leaned my head back and bit his lip.

“Keep messing with me and I’ll just take it.”

He smiled. “Oh yeah? I’d like to see you try.”

I gasped, shaking my head. “You can’t handle this tight pussy.”

“Oh no?” he rasped.

Right then he grabbed my hip and rammed his cock in me. I wailed, closing my eyes and writhing in his hands. “Yes. Fuck yes.”

“Who can’t handle what?” he growled in my ear.

His hips were pumping fast and I could feel every inch of his ten inch shaft sliding in and out of me. I wanted to show him just what I thought I could do but he had a hold on me. His dick kept me from moving. God it felt so good.

Ryder chuckled behind me and leaned forward, whispering in my ear. “I don’t think you have it in you to take me.”

That drove me to action. I pulled off his dick with a pop and then jumped up, straddling him. His cock slapped against my belly as I leaned forward, pinning his arms down. Sure, he was way stronger than me, but it didn’t matter.

Slowly, I lifted up and positioned myself over his dick. Carefully, I used my body to guide it to the right spot and then carefully slid him inside of me. It was so deep I could feel that spongy head press against my cervix. I moaned in ecstasy, releasing his hands. My hips began to move almost instantly, rocking back and forth. My clit rubbed against his stomach and almost rendered me unable to move.

Meanwhile, Ryder was getting a great view.

“I love how your tits bounce, baby. That, plus I can see how my cock moves up and down in your belly.”

My eyes flew open. What? But it was true. As I looked down, still going up and down his shaft, I could literally see the head of his cock going up and down inside my abdomen. Fuck! It felt so good.

“That’s right, you’re such a little slut,” he groaned. Then, Ryder’s hand came around and rubbed the top of my pussy, putting deep pressure on my clit. A high-pitched moan rang out from my throat.

He gripped my waist again, this time holding me in place just inches above him.

“Stay still,” he commanded. “Let me fuck up into you.”

His hips started to pump up and down, slapping faster and faster against my body. My mouth dropped open and I threw my head back. I grabbed my tits, gripping hard as my body began to stiffen. He could feel that I was on the edge, and pumped faster. As he slapped against my hard nub I blew, my ecstasy bursting from every seam. I screamed as my juices streamed down his cock, coating his balls.

But he hadn’t come yet.

“Oh, I’m not done yet, sweet girl,” he grinned. “Just you wait.”

He pulled out and re-arranged my limbs so that I was on all fours again, and then moved behind me before I could even settle in. I didn’t mind because I was already warming back up, the heat in me tingling in my chest. Sure enough, Ryder brought his cock forward and rubbed it down through my ass crack. Then he pulled back and spit in his hand, rubbing the saliva down and over his shaft. Next thing I knew, he was pressing against my asshole, and it felt surprisingly good. I took a deep breath and relaxed, sticking my ass out.

“That’s it,” he growled. “The more you relax, the better it feels, sweetheart.”

Ryder slowly pushed harder, entering me just a bit and pausing. I let out the air in my lungs with a deep moan. I pulled my hand up under me and rubbed my clit as he moved again, pushing in just a little further and stopping.

“Is this okay?” he whispered deeply.

“Mhmm,” I moaned.

It was tight, but it was the kind of discomfort that made me want to cum all over the place. He moved in a bit further and pulled back, this time going back in with one fluid motion. I rubbed my pussy harder and faster, matching his newly increasing intensity. I screamed out in ecstasy as my body writhed, moving with him, wanting more.

Never in my life did I think I would fall in love with anal but the deeper he went, the more I craved it. He slapped my ass gently and continued to fuck me in the butt. I could hear his deep grunts as he pumped from behind, going harder as I loosened up, relaxing my whole body.

“Shit,” he said breathlessly. “I can’t keep going, otherwise I’m going to burst.”

I felt him pull out of my ass and take a moment, holding the end of his red veiny cock in his hand. I turned over and lay back, gripping my ankles in both hands and pulling my legs wide so my pussy was exposed. He smiled, shaking his head.

“God, you are amazing.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“Make me cum with you,” I said seductively.

His lip twitched and he fell forward, catching himself on either side of me. He puffed air from his lips and laughed, shaking his head. “Man, you make me want you so bad that I’m struggling.”

“Don’t quit now,” I said, giving him a pouty face.

“Trust me, I will never quit,” he said with determination.

Almost instantly his cock was back inside of my pussy. He was in it to win it this time, rolling his body up mine, pushing deep inside and then back out. My breathing increased as he pushed, rubbing himself against my clit. He spread his legs out and I pulled mine up, hooking them over his shoulders.

Using his massive arms to hold himself up, he humped his dick in and out of me. With a pace I hadn’t experienced before, he pounded against me, closing his eyes and gritting his teeth. His jaw flexed just like his pecs and his arms. I rubbed up his chest and flicked his nipples as he pumped me harder and harder.

Ryder’s mouth fell open and he groaned long and loud. Suddenly his legs moved together and he gripped me tightly. I could feel his cock enlarging and pulsing within. Dr. Rivington took a deep breath and slammed deep, his expression intense, chest dripping sweat. As his body exploded, he rubbed my pussy hard with his fingers.

I don’t know what he did to me, but it was pure magic. In about two seconds I was exploding just like him. Our bodies tangled with each other. My pussy gripped down

on his cock as it pulsed and vibrated inside of me. He fell forward, his mouth landing on mine as we exploded in mid-air.

“Fuck!” he roared. “Shit!”

I was no better. I let out a few curse words myself as spasms wracked my entire form in a full-body orgasm. We pulsed and quivered, as my pussy milked him of every last drop of sperm. Finally, the air slowly came back and I could feel his weight shift to one side and I opened my eyes wide.

“Wow,” I whispered. “I did not expect that last one.”

He smiled and fell to my side. “I didn’t expect that as soon as I came, I would want to fuck you again.”

I looked at him and laughed. “Calm down, Romeo. We have more than enough time.”

He grinned and kissed my cheek, jumping up to go to the bathroom. I lay there staring at the ceiling, a smile permanently carved into my lips. If this was what it was like to have someone you couldn’t get enough of, I wondered if I was going to become an addict. I used to wonder why Mary craved sex so much, but this was clearly the answer.

I looked up as Ryder came back into the room, his eyes dark. His cock was standing at attention. Oh my god, he wasn’t kidding, was he? My doctor was ready for round two already.

I bit my lip and opened my legs, gripping them by the ankles as I lifted them up and over my head.

“I’m ready,” I cooed. “Come and get it.”

I might have given him a hard time for wanting to go again, but I was primed and ready too. What in the hell was going on with me? By the time we got back I wouldn't be able to walk.

Ryder laughed low in his chest and then came stalking towards me like a lion hunting its prey. I giggled loudly as he rolled my curvy form toward him. His hands slid up the back of my neck and pulled my lips to his. My whole body relaxed as he kissed me passionately, rolling his lips from side to side, his tongue gently smoothing through my mouth. My heart thumped in my chest and I could feel butterflies taking over as the fire in my belly burst into flames. This man was amazing, and either I was lucky as hell, or completely doomed. Only time would tell.

16

Ryder

All day we were either on the beach or making love in the room. It was incredible, and Abby and I were inseparable. I couldn't keep my hands off of her. There was an insane attraction, no matter how hard I tried to push it back. I didn't want to overwhelm her, but seeing how she couldn't go more than a few minutes without touching me either, I was pretty sure she wasn't bothered by it.

We came in from the beach as the sun started to dip low, as the clouds turned vibrant shades of pinks and blues. For the first time in a really long time, I held a woman's hand, stood in silence, and didn't think about racing off or getting away to save myself. When we got back to the hotel, we both took a long, very hot and erotic shower, and I got out first.

Already dressed, I poured myself a glass of bourbon and stood at the patio doors, looking out at the darkening sky. My thoughts tried to sound the warning, but I told them no. Not quite yet. I still had one night left with her. Then, and only then, would

I start to tackle the heavy stuff.

The door to the bedroom creaked open behind me and I turned to find Abby coming out. I was speechless. She looked absolutely gorgeous. Her long dark hair was down, the curls cascading over her shoulders. She wore a long floral sundress with a scooped neck that tied in the back. A matching thin belt was tied around her waist, and the dress fabric billowed to the floor. Her perfectly painted toenails peeped out from below the hem.

On her wrist a small gold chain sparkled. She could see me eyeing it and immediately grabbed it, fiddling uncomfortably.

“It’s just something my grandmother gave me before she passed away. Simple but it makes me feel close to her.”

I smiled and walked to her, running my hands down her arms. I leaned forward and kissed her forehead. “You look absolutely beautiful.”

She laughed, relaxing. “Thank you. So, are we ready?”

“We sure are,” I replied, giving her my arm.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

Breakers, Maryland was a cute little town, modeled like an old fishing village. The décor included fishing nets, mounted fish, old pictures of fishermen, driftwood floors, and the smell of the saltwater wafting through the air. Down about six blocks was a small Italian restaurant that I had seen coming in. It sat right at the water and had an outdoor patio.

When we got there the hostess took us to one of the seats outside, lighting the candles on the table. The breeze off the ocean was warm and felt good against my bronzed skin. Meanwhile, Abby was pale and creamy, with curves to die for.

“Can I get you some drinks while you decide?” The waiter’s voice pierced my thoughts.

I nodded. “We’ll have a bottle of your 2010 Chateau Cantemerle please. Something easy to start with.”

“Very good selection, sir,” he said, nodding before walking off.

When I looked up, I found Abby staring at me with a small smile on her face. “You look content.”

She shrugged. “I enjoy being with you. The world doesn’t seem so heavy. It makes me happy.”

It made me happy too, it just wasn’t easy for me to say the words. I wish there was a way to tell her that. I hoped my actions let her see that, even as we sat quietly by the water. The waiter came back with the wine, poured us both glasses and set the bottle

in the center of the table. The entire time Abby and I kept our eyes locked on each other.

Before the waiter left, I ordered our food, having seen where Abby's finger stopped on the menu. When he walked away, she looked at me wildly. "How did you know what I wanted?"

I smiled.

"I'm psychic." She shot me a deadpan look and I laughed. "You stopped on it when you were scanning the menu and then put it down."

She giggled.

"Oh. So you pay attention. I like that."

I grinned right back.

"I'm glad you do, sweetheart. I like what I see too."

She laughed.

"Seems we like a lot about each other. You know, I was just thinking about how handsome you are by candlelight. Your dark hair looks almost blue-black, and your eyes flash." She licked her lips and leaned forward and whispered. "You are so gorgeous, my pussy's dripping even here at dinner."

She bit her lip and stared into my eyes. I leaned forward as well and lowered my voice. "And if you keep looking at me like that, I'm going to have to take you either back to the hotel right now, or into the bathroom and bend you over the sink."

Abby giggled and put her hand to her blushing cheek.

“I am not looking at you any different than before.”

“Not true,” I replied, waggling my eyebrows.

She pursed her lips, laughter in her eyes.

“Ok, how am I looking at you then?”

I reached out and grabbed her wrist, lifting up off my chair to get close to her luscious lips. “You’re looking at me from beneath those long sexy eyelashes, and that makes you look utterly fuckable.”

Abby let out a quick exhale, leaning back as I did. Her breasts looked even perkier than normal and I could see her nipples poking through her gown. She liked it when I talked dirty to her, and I liked her response. All I wanted to do was bend her over the pier rails, lift up her skirt, and give it to her in the moonlight. At the same time, there was something more than that. Something deeper than just the physical.

The waiter appeared, holding our plates. I moved back and watched as he set them down. “Thank you.”

“Of course, sir. Let me know if you need anything else,” he replied.

Abby immediately dug in, rolling her pasta around her fork and putting it in her mouth. She savored her food like it was the best in the world. It was almost entrancing to watch her. She glanced up, covering her mouth with her napkin.

“Sorry, I was hungry.”

I let out the air I was holding in my lungs.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“No, please don’t apologize. I think it’s so sexy the way that you devour food. The way your whole body interacts with the meal is glorious, sweetheart.”

She looked away smiling and then looked back. “I’ve always enjoyed eating. My mother says when I was a baby, I was insatiable. The problem is, it makes me heavier than what’s fashionable. Most women these days are rail thin and subsist on cabbage.”

Abby laughed a little, but she also looked a little sad. I didn’t like that in the least. I growled and pointed at her. I was serious enough to catch her attention.

“Don’t you talk about yourself like that. I love how you look. I love every curve, every beautiful heave of your body. In fact, I believe if you gained a bit more, it would only bring more beauty. There is not a person in the world, no matter what they say out loud, that could ever truly find you anything but gorgeous. I want you to remember that every time you get ready to talk down to yourself.”

Abby’s mouth opened slightly and her cheeks burned red. “I’ve never had anyone say something so kind and amazing to me before. My whole life the only voice I’ve heard was the one in my head. But your words, Ryder, well they lift me up. I don’t know how to explain it.”

My heart fluttered. There was something about building this woman up that just seemed natural to me. “I can sense these things about you. I can read you a bit, I guess.”

She smiled, shifting in her seat. I narrowed my eyes and watched her. It was obvious

there was something about her that was uncomfortable. I shook my head and glanced around, thankful we were the only ones on the patio.

“Are you sore?” I asked in a low voice.

Abby pressed her lips together, her eyes growing wide as she blushed beet red. Before I could clarify, she put up her hand.

“I know what you’re asking.”

Of course, she did. Her pussy and her ass were likely sore and for good reason too. We had had so much sex that even I felt a bit chafed. And when I was inside her, I couldn’t help but ram her with everything that I had. She was so sexy. My cock was constantly hard whenever I was around this gorgeous curvy woman.

She finally spoke up, putting her chin up confidently.

“Yes, I am sore, but in a good way. You know, if you want, you can kiss it to make it better.”

I jumped up as if to dive under the table and she reached out grabbing my arm, laughing wildly. I acted dumb, shrugging my shoulders.

“What? You asked.”

Giggling, she slapped my hand.

“Later. I think we might get kicked out if we start going at it here.”

I glanced around and sighed.

“Civilization always gets in the way.”

We sat on the deck eating, drinking, and talking for hours. By the time the last guest had left we were both three sheets into the wind and laughing like children. Feeling bad for the waiter, I tipped him generously, and we headed out for our walk back to the hotel. Abby put her arm through mine and I pulled her hand to my lips. She smelled so good.

The lights in the streetlamps flickered like candles and there was barely anyone around as we strolled up the cobblestones. The moon was shining brightly in the sky and the breeze whipped around us. With the waves hitting the shore with a gentle chorus, I grabbed Abby’s arm and spun her toward me. She giggled a little, and I put my hands on both sides of her face while staring deeply into her eyes.

On such a romantic night, there was no reason to hold back. I leaned forward and kissed Abby deeply. There was no other sexual touch, no foreplay, just a passionate and embracing kiss. I could feel her melting in my arms and that is exactly where I wanted to be. Whether we lasted forever, or if this was only a moment in time, it didn’t matter.

The rest of the trip was spent in each other’s arms, and when we arrived back in Farmington, neither of us really wanted to be apart. But life has to move forward, and reality settled in soon enough. I watched her drive off in her Camry, and as soon as she was gone, I felt strange somehow. Almost incomplete. I paced my apartment, unsure of what to do next.

I sat in the living room in silence, wishing I could still hear the ocean. Wishing I had Abby there to turn to. Whether to crack jokes or jump each other’s bones, her presence had become normal to me. The silence of the apartment no longer felt comfortable, and it made me think about what she said about a home. About feeling like everything was right in the world.

Those thoughts weighed on me, and I jerked when my phone buzzed on the table. I quickly picked it up, hoping to see Abby's name on the screen, but it was just Jack, my best friend. I put the phone down again without answering. I didn't want to hear him tell me how I was betraying my own goals. How I could be free, how I could be sleeping with anyone I wanted while on the road, untethered.

My phone beeped insistently again, and I stared at it for a moment. Jack had been the only one in my life besides my sister to be there for me through the years. But in that moment, I didn't want to hear his words. I wanted to bask in the glow of the weekend for just a bit longer. I wanted the butterflies to continue to flutter in my stomach. I could still smell Abby's sweet scent on me.

I put the phone down and let out a hoarse laugh while heading to the kitchen for a bourbon. My laugh wasn't from anything funny at all. It was the fact that one girl, in one small town had managed to derail me so completely. How quickly they fall, I mused to myself as I sipped my drink. On the one hand, I was single and fancy-free, living a life as a playboy doctor. On the other, I'd just met a woman who changed my world view. Who made me think that the word "soulmate" actually can mean something. But what did I want?

Whatever choice I made, it was going to completely tear apart my life. The question was, did I want that? Was I ready to change? Was it even realistic to think I could change?

The evening was getting dark and the moon was already high in the sky. I forced the memories of the weekend from my mind. In its place I thought about work, about my patients, and about all the things that normally occupied my thoughts. But it was hopeless. Abby kept appearing in my mind's eye, gorgeous and vibrant. Her laugh. Her smell. Her sweet, sensual curves. Was Ryder Rivington, playboy doctor, a thing of the past?

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

Abby

“So, what did you do while you were frolicking at the beach?” Mary asked, sucking the jelly from her donut from her fingers.

My appetite still wasn't what it should have been, or what it had been in the past. I wasn't sure why. Maybe it was this distraction called Dr. Rivington. My mind, my heart, and even my stomach tingled every time I thought of him. Every time the phone buzzed or blinked, I lost my breath. I figured by now it would have ceased but the reaction was still there, making me weak at the most inopportune moments.

I knew Mary was curious, I just wasn't sure exactly what to tell her.

“We went to dinner at this cute Italian place. We spent time on the beach and hung out. You know, the normal vacation stuff.”

Mary paused. “Normal vacation stuff? Really? He hardly seems like a normal vacation type of guy. But sure, I'll go with it. So, you hung out on the beach. You do look pretty tan.”

I glanced at my skin, realizing I was tan for me. Instead of my usual pale cream color, I now had a slight tinge of gold. Hopefully my mom wouldn't notice, seeing that I was supposed to be in a convention center the whole time.

“Yeah. I mean, we spent a lot of the time inside.”

Mary smirked and she shook her head as she pulled apart another donut.

“Yum, that’s more like it. I knew you would. It was a wild sex filled weekend, right? Come on, fess up. How many times?”

My cheeks blushed. “I don’t remember.”

She gasped, putting her hand to her chest like she was shocked.

“How scandalous could you be? So many times, you can’t even remember? I bet you learned a whole lot of things you didn’t know before. That’s good. If it doesn’t work out with Dr. Rivington, you’ll be a sex goddess from all the experience. The men will line up for a chance with you.”

I popped a piece of my chocolate pastry in my mouth. “I don’t really think that’s the way it works, but sure. I’ll be much more informed then I was last time.”

Mary put her donut down and looked me up and down. “Why do you not seem enthusiastic enough about this? You act like it was a ho-hum kind of weekend for you, when I know it wasn’t.”

I shook my head with a sigh.

“No, it’s not that. The vacation was amazing, and probably the best weekend I’ve ever had. But it wasn’t just sex on the beach. There was more to it than that. There were conversations about who he is. Who I am. Hand holding, cuddling, and he kissed my nose like we were in a romance novel. This kind of thing doesn’t stay perfect forever. I’m not stupid.”

Mary wiped her mouth and leaned forward on her arms.

“Look, I know you aren’t, Abs. And I’m glad that you realize that life isn’t actually a fairy tale. But right now, it’s playing out like one, so stop worrying, and enjoy it. If it

lasts forever you are the luckiest girl in the world, and if it doesn't then you had one hell of a time while it did. Experiences, my dear. Collect all the experiences that life will give you, and even if you end up with a broken heart, you'll be fine. You'll be better for it in the long run."

I didn't want to think about a broken heart. I wanted to keep up the fantasy that Ryder would stay right here in Farmington, and never leave. I wanted it to be real. But in a way, Mary was right. I needed to make the best use of the time I had.

Still, I smiled a small, sad half-smile. Mary was my best friend and protector. She didn't want to see me unhappy or hurt, but this one was out of her control. Hell, it was out of my control too. I was on a crazy, heart-spinning ride, and unfortunately, I couldn't get off until it was over.

My phone buzzed and I pulled it out, smiling at the screen. It was Ryder. It's been a few of days since we got back and he's been texting me non-stop. Unfortunately, my man was crazy-busy at work, so we hadn't actually been able to see one another, but the texting was an okay substitute. Once we were together in person, we could discuss our future.

"That's the face of a girl that just got a message from her lover boy," Mary teased with a giggle. "What's he saying? Dirty things? If it's dirty I want to read them."

I rolled my eyes. "Not dirty things. And even if it was, they are for my eyes only."

Mary's smile faded. "God, please don't tell me he's a dick pic kind of guy. Or worse! Like a foot fetish kind of guy. Is he sending you naked pictures of his BDSM little people collection? Tiny men in leather? All the hot ones always end up with the weirdest fetishes."

I laughed loudly. "No! God, no. I don't even know what I would say if he sent me

something like that. I mean what would one say to that?"

Mary shrugged. "Nice chaps? That latex looks good on you? How do you walk in those eight inch heels? Whatever strikes your fancy."

"Does that leash and collar come in pink?" I added.

Mary giggled. "There's my sarcastic bitch. Unless you were being serious. If you were, get out. Now."

I chuckled. "No, Ryder and I have been talking about our days. He sends me funny pictures of himself from work. The normal stuff. Nothing too crazy. He wakes me up with a sweet message every morning, and we're supposed to hang out this weekend but I don't know when. I'm going to drop by his place after work Friday and surprise him. Hopefully he'll have time to hang out and let me cook him dinner."

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

Mary pouted. “You never do that for me. Bitch.”

“You don’t make my knees shake and my mouth hang open,” I replied, sticking out my tongue.

Mary looked at me proudly. “Look at you with the dirty talk. I like this new Abby. Now I can make disgusting sex jokes at you and you’ll get it. It’s like leveling up in a video game, except instead of getting stronger, you get even more sarcastic. You level up enough and people won’t know whether you are just angry, or funny.”

I popped another piece of donut in my mouth and grinned.

“If Ryder has anything to say about it, I’ll be the Queen of Sarcasm by the time my twenty-first birthday comes around.”

Mary shook her head.

“Lucky you. My last date ended because the guy had a curfew. And I don’t mean we went to dinner and then he dropped me off with a kiss goodbye. I mean, we were back seat, parked out at the old factory on Interstate 81, my mouth wrapped around his cock, and he looked down at me and said, ‘Oh shit, I gotta go. My mom is going to be so mad.’ I literally said, ‘What?’ with a dick in my mouth.”

We both laughed.

“I don’t know what’s more disturbing. A, you making out by the old factory where homeless people live; B, he was thinking about his mother while getting some; or C,

that he finds it so normal to have a curfew that he tells people about it.”

Mary put her hand out. “I know! As far as the location, everybody needs a little entertainment sometimes. There was another car there too, all steamed up, with the girl moaning while riding some guy to town. Let me tell you, the place was happening.” I giggled but Mary just shrugged. “And he texted me this morning about finishing it up but I told him my mother said he couldn’t come over to play.”

I snorted, covering my mouth. “That is not nice. Ha! Oh my God. You are too much.”

Mary pointed her spoon at me, now eating pudding. She was pigging out this morning, which actually was nice to see since I was usually the one with the most food.

“It’s too much maybe for the momma’s boy, but just right for the type of hot guy I want to take me back to hobo factory number four.”

I didn’t even know what to say to my friend anymore. I laughed and glanced down at my watch.

“Oh, shit. I need to get to work. I have a lot to catch up on since my head was in the clouds yesterday and I pretty much just said, screw it. Call me tonight.”

Mary waved. “Yep. Tell midget porno guy I said hello.”

“I will,” I said through a laugh. “I’ll send one of them over to you later to satisfy those needs.”

Mary winked. “You’re starting to get it now. Good. Send two.”

As I walked out the door Ryder sent another sweet message. Between Mary’s

ridiculous jokes and Ryder showing me so much attention, I was on cloud nine. Now all I had to do was make it to Friday and then I could see his face again. I was dead set on having the conversation about “our future” during our next meeting, because it’d been on my mind non-stop.

But I wanted to make sure I was prepared for the worst. I wanted to be able to stand there, no tears, no anger, and be okay if he said he was going to move on to his next job. While I would most definitely be devastated, I would save the ugly tears for a private time. But despite my preparation for the worst, I still hoped for the best, or at least something somewhere in the middle.

After all, men can be pigs. They can be shallow and unemotional but that was not Ryder. He truly felt something for me deeper than physical attraction. I could see it on his face, and hear it in his voice. And he was a good guy, there was no denying it. I really couldn’t imagine him just telling me *hasta la vista*, baby.

Then again, I had a scarred past, and shouldn’t be surprised no matter what happened. After all my father pretty much flipped us the bird and said peace out. I can still remember what my mom’s face looked like when she read his note left on the table. It looked like someone hit her, out of nowhere, with a giant metal wrecking ball. So I guess men could be that way, but I really didn’t want to believe that it was Ryder. I wanted to believe that I knew him better than that.

I guess I would have to wait for Friday to find out.

* * *

“Happy Friday, Abby,” one of my colleagues yelled as I pushed the door open with my back.

“You too, Heidi,” I replied with a smile.

My arms were full, carrying all the stuff I had brought in for our normal Friday fun day at work. We did finger foods all day, wore crazy hats, and talked in accents when we answered the phones. At first my boss was terrified it was going to affect our ratings, but when they came back the next week, they had spiked, starting that Friday. Ever since then, he had implemented a mandatory fun day on Fridays. Mandatory and fun didn't really go together, but hey, I got to munch on good food and wear a unicorn horn on my head. Why would anyone complain?

I tossed the box in the trunk of my car and took the unicorn horn off, hanging that on my rearview window. Checking myself out in the mirror I found that my makeup had lasted, and there was even a little glitter on my cheeks from the horn. I looked cute, and I couldn't wait to wrap my cuteness around his hotness. I was dying to see Ryder, and I bounced in my seat, practically vibrating with energy.

I put on music and tapped my hands on the steering wheel as I made my way to his apartment. We had still been texting non-stop, except for this morning, when I oddly did not get my normal, "Hello, Beautiful," text message. I didn't think anything of it, though. Fridays were wildly busy at his office, so he was probably just slammed. Either way, I looked forward to seeing his surprised smile as I handed him my homemade brownies that were in the work box in the trunk before getting on to thereallyfun stuff.

How could a man turn down brownies after a long day at the office? They can't. That's the entire point.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I hummed to the radio as I pulled up in front of Ryder's brownstone. The door was propped open and I could see that the old lady who lived next door had changed her décor. Her place was all decorated in red, white, and blue for the Fourth. She was an interesting woman. I was just glad she didn't know me personally because the town can get awful small when it comes to things like that.

Hopping out of the car, I grabbed the brownies and went up the steps and to the second door on the left. I rang the bell and stood back, smiling to myself. There was no answer. I rang again, but still no answer. Meandering back outside I looked up and down the street but I didn't see Ryder's car.

Weird. He must have had way more work than I thought he did. It was even possible he got called into the hospital for some sort of emergency. It's okay. I cleared my whole evening for him so there was no harm in waiting a bit. I sat down on the steps outside and put the brownies in my lap. At least it was a beautiful day.

Cars passed by, people strolled along the sidewalk, and the bright sunshine quickly began to fade to dusk. Ryder still didn't come. I texted him to see what he was up to, but he didn't respond. As dusk turned to dark, the air became crisp and cool, and everything fell almost eerily silent. My heart had already dropped into my stomach hours before and now it was flip-flopping around and making me queasy.

A door creaked open behind me and I stood up nervously. The old woman who's his neighbor came out, looking at me with a worried face.

"Hello, dear. I noticed you've been sitting here for hours. Are you alright?"

I smiled kindly at her. “Oh, yeah, I’m fine. I was just waiting for Ryder to get home. I came to surprise him thinking he would be off work already. I guess he had to stay late or something.”

She used the rail to help her along, her brow creasing.

“You mean the young man staying next door?”

I nodded.

“Yes. The doctor.”

She shook her head.

“But dear, the doctor moved out this morning. I saw him loading all his things with my own eyes, and he even said goodbye. Didn’t you know?”

My heart plummeted to the floor as rolling waves of nausea overcame me. What? How could this be happening?

18

Abby

I couldn’t have heard her right.

“I’m sorry. Did you say he moved out? There’s no way.”

“Oh yes,” she said turning toward the door. “He parked his pretty little sports car out front, brought all his suitcases out, and loaded them into the trunk. He was quite the looker too. Even at my old age I couldn’t help but stare a little.”

I gave a fake chuckle, a smile barely formed on my lips. “Did he say where he was going?”

The old woman shook her head. “No, just that he enjoyed his time in Farmington and he was sure he would eventually make it back around. Honestly, he didn’t look to be in the mood to be talkative. That’s usually how those good-looking fellows are. Standoffish. Still, he was nice and quiet so it was good to have him here.”

I rubbed my forehead, looking at the brownies. “This is impossible. I’ve been texting with him all week and he didn’t say a word about leaving for good.”

All the blood drained from my face and my legs felt wobbly and weak. I grabbed onto the railing to the stairs and shook my head. I had no idea what was going on. Where did Ryder go? Nothing made any sense at all. I was here to surprise him. We just spent three amazing days and nights together at the beach. How could things change that rapidly?

I glanced up at the old woman who was staring at me, unsure of what was wrong. “Do you think he was just moving some stuff out? Was there a fumigation or something today?”

“Oh no, sweetie, this brownstone is very clean,” she said, waving me up the steps. “I’m Edna by the way.”

“Abby,” I managed, feeling like I was going to choke.

She pulled a set of keys out of her pocket. “I watch the place when no one is here, and the doctor’s definitely gone. Take a look around if you like.”

She rattled the keys in the door and opened it up. His scent still lingered strongly inside, and it made me feel like puking right there on the floor. I couldn’t get my feet

to move so I stood there staring around the place. The furniture was obviously still there but every remnant of Ryder was gone. Every personal touch. Even the dishes were cleaned and put away, and the liquor cabinet was closed and locked. It looked like he had never been there at all.

Slowly I backed away from the door and let her close and lock it. Edna's voice lowered and softened, and she put her hand on my shoulder. "I can see now that this wasn't a mistake. Whatever happened, trust me, it won't hurt forever. I'm sorry I had to be the bearer of bad news."

My eyes focused in on the old woman's face and I realized she wasn't just some wrinkly old soul. She was a woman too, and she could see that pain radiating off my face. I shook her hand and thanked her, heading back out to the car. Slowly I got inside and sat behind the wheel, still clutching the brownies in my lap.

Page 41

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I was tense, angry and now heartbroken with what had just happened. I needed to go home and let it all out but for some reason, I could not get my body to do what it was supposed to do. It was shutting down, and refusing to listen to me.

Just start the car, Abby. Start the damn car and go. There is nothing left here for you.

Hearing those words in my head started an instant flood of tears. The key was in the ignition, though, and my fingers turned it automatically. I just needed to make it home.

After all, I should have known that what I had was a pipe dream. Ryder Rivington wasn't some movie hero. He was a normal man in town for a gig, and he warned me about his itinerant lifestyle. In fact, I was prepared to let him go, and to say goodbye if needed. I just didn't expect for it to happen like this.

Five minutes later I found myself sitting in the parking lot of the donut shop in town, eating my feelings, and sobbing on the phone with Mary.

"Abby," she said kindly.

"Yeah?" I sniffled.

"I need you to take a deep breath because honestly, I think out of everything you just sobbed in the phone I heard "wrinkled," "doorstop," "brownies," and "donut cream,"" she replied.

I threw my donut back in the box and wiped my nose on my sleeve. Leaning back, I

closed my eyes and took in a raspy deep breath. Slowly I let it out from my drooping lips and started to talk again.

“Ryder’s gone,” I whispered. “He is just gone. He left and didn’t tell me anything.”

Mary was silent for a moment. “Oh girl, I’m so sorry. That is not right. Fuck. Why are men such assholes? Why are they always such huge dickheads? Why can’t they just be honest with us?”

I sniffled, my breathing calming down. “I don’t know. I guess they’re too chicken shit to see a couple of tears or get yelled at. I didn’t ask for this. All I wanted was a goodbye.”

“Aw, I know sweetheart,” Mary said sympathetically. “Listen, I know a couple people here who can take him out. What do you say? Ryder Rivington, subject of the next murder mystery on TV? Either Dirty Joe or Top Hat Harry would be happy to make a couple bucks as a hired killer.”

I laughed and cried at the same time. “Thank you.”

“That’s what you pay me for,” she said. “Why don’t you come over and we can get that ice cream and wine? We can kill two birds with one stone.”

I half smiled and put the box of donuts in the other seat. “No. I need to go home. I just want to be alone for a while to clear my head and get through this mess. I appreciate it though. Maybe tomorrow. My weekends for the rest of eternity are now free.”

Mary scoffed. “Please girl, we will fill those date nights right up. When you’re ready of course.”

“Which will be when I’m seventy,” I said morosely. “I don’t know why any woman would go searching for this kind of misery.”

“Because it’s like a drug. And once your heart heals, you magically forget all of the pain you just went through. It’s gross and mean, and genetically fucked up.” Mary was pissed, but I could tell she was holding it back for me.

I sighed and started the car. “I love you Mary Berry.”

“I love you too, Snickers,” he replied with my old nickname. “Call me tomorrow.”

“I will,” I whispered, hanging up the phone.

I was calm enough to make it back, which was the best that I could do at that point. The shock of the rejection had started to wear off and, in its place came self-disgust. How could I have possibly been that stupid? I told everyone that they were wrong, when in fact, they were right. They all warned me and I sat back all smug thinking about how lucky I was. Meanwhile Doctor Evil was planning my heartbreak from the beginning. How could anyone be so cruel and uncaring?

Because while I thought we had something special, it was actually the opposite. Ryder gave zero shits about me or my feelings. He left here in his fancy car, with his fancy job, while I melted into a giant puddle of regret and heartbreak. This is not the way it should be. I would never, never, let anyone treat me that way again. I was going to be smarter and I was done crying.

* * *

Later that night...

Okay, maybe done with crying wasn’t really in the cards. Melody plopped down on

my bed and looked at me partly as if I were an alien or disgusting bug, and partly as if she pitied me. What did I care? I pitied myself at that point.

My sister handed me a tissue.

“Pull yourself together, Abby.”

I took the tissue and wiped my nose.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“Thank you. God, where did I go wrong?”

“Would you like me to tell you exactly or...”

I shook my head. “I mean, rhetorically. I was a shy, quiet person with a simple laugh and then this happens to me.”

Melody put up her hands. “Whoa, whoa, whoa. Happened to you? I am pretty sure that people told you this was a bad idea. People like me.”

I sighed dramatically. “I know. I should have listened but I fell in love with Dr. Rivington.”

“No way,” she said crossing her arms. “There is no way you could be quote, unquote, ‘in love with him.’ Things don’t happen that fast.”

I shook my head. “That’s not true. Mom knew she loved Dad after the first date.”

Melody scoffed. “Yeah, and we all see where that got her.”

“It doesn’t matter anyway,” I grumped. “He’s gone. Done. Out of here.”

Melody clicked her tongue, holding her chin up with indignance.

“See? I was right all along. He is just a worthless cad who uses women for whatever his little desires are at the moment. Then, in a really easy escape from responsibility, he leaves. He even made you fall in love with him because that’s his MO. He’s not

the only one either. There are a bunch of those fuckers out looking for their next target.”

Melody wasn't exactly being nice about the whole thing, and it did not help the situation. In fact, with every snide remark, I just started crying harder.

But then, Melody had a change of heart. With a wrinkle of her nose, my sister gingerly patted me on the back. “Good lord. Deep breath, woman. You'll get over this. You're young. You'll meet someone else and the memory of this guy will fade right off into the sunset.”

I groaned, rolling my eyes. “Like who? I've lived here my whole life and no one's been interested in me. Why would they start now?”

Melody gave her a side glance and her trademark smirk. “I know one guy who is interested in you.”

“Who? Old Jim at the creek?” I asked angrily.

“No, Derek McHutt has been asking about you every time I see him,” Melody replied in a conspiratorial tone. “Maybe you could go out with him sometime. Sure, he's no Doctor McHottie, but he likes you and always has.”

“Ugh yuck,” I snarled. “Derek McHutt is the literally the definition of gross. He's a boy compared to Ryder. He's nineteen, has braces on his teeth, and the worst halitosis I have ever encountered. Then there was the whole school dance fiasco where he tried to feel me up, sweaty hands and all. He's so not my cup of tea. Or water. Or bourbon. Or algae infested runoff water for that matter.”

Melody covered her mouth while holding back a laugh.

“See? You already have a romantic history. Not the nicest one, but one none the less.”

I sniffled and soured, giving Melody a look.

“I would have to be dead to handle Derek McHutt. Even then, I just don’t think I could do it.”

Melody shrugged.

“Be a picky loser then. All I know, is you need to take the good you got from Ryder, forget the negative, and move on. He’s gone, and there is nothing you can do to change that.”

I knew he was gone, I understood that firsthand. But hearing it come from my sister’s mouth made me want to cry even more. Melody and I had a complicated relationship. Yet even amid all those snarky comments, she still found a way to be somewhat kind to me. Was it that bad? Had Ryder mistreated me so gravely that even the Queen of Ice could find warmth in her heart?

It just didn’t seem real to me. I wanted to rewind the clocks and go back to the weekend before, but I couldn’t. So instead I was going to sit on my bed and just deal with the pain. I was going to eat chips, ice cream, and candy, and I was going to stare at my new reality until I accepted it.

Meanwhile, wherever Ryder was, I hoped he was absolutely miserable. I hoped that karma would find him wherever he was, and wreak havoc on him. One day he would wake up and be completely and utterly alone because of his uncaring actions. And when that time came, I would be nowhere in sight. It was only fair, but I cried harder at the thought, my heart breaking again.

Ryder

Winchester, Iowa: another tiny town with nice yet non-descript people, and a bunch of patients that had absolutely nothing wrong with them. I didn't know what was wrong with me. I was in a new place exactly as planned, but at the same time, I was absolutely miserable. Maybe I was expecting something more out of Winchester, but it looked exactly like the town I was in the week before, and the one before that, and the one before that. The list just went on and on, and all the towns started blurring into one.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I was filling in for another General Practitioner who was on vacation. I started to notice that I seemed to be the one always filling in for practitioners on vacation but was never actually the one that took a vacation.

Then again, for a while there, I felt like my job was my vacation. Traveling all over, having no real ties, and doing whatever I wanted to do in brand new places almost every week. But standing here today, wiping the crumbs from breakfast off my white lab coat, I wasn't feeling the excitement that I used to feel from being a traveling doctor.

I had always been so dedicated to my work, so ready to go to bat and get my hands dirty, but today I couldn't focus. I couldn't get my mind wrapped around my job. I stood there in the empty examination room staring out the window at yet another asphalt parking lot, my mind somewhere else.

"Doctor Rivington," the physician's assistant chirped out as she burst into the room.

I jumped, spinning around. I had to grab the windowsill with my other hand to make sure I didn't fall over. I had been so lost in my thoughts that she scared the living crap out of me. I hadn't met this physician's assistant yet. She was cute, a bouncy blonde with a pepped up attitude like she drank seven cups of coffee each morning.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," she giggled as she walked forward putting her hand out. "They told me you were in here and I wanted to introduce myself to you. I'm Helena."

I gave her a wooden smile and shook her hand, my heart still beating wildly in my

chest. “It’s nice to meet you. I was just lost in my thoughts.”

Her smile seemed to grow bigger. “Well, you better find your way out because you have a huge patient list today. And I do have to say, I understand why everyone wanted to make an appointment.”

Only half hearing what she said I scrunched my forehead. “Why’s that?”

She laughed and shook her head at me innocently. “Because everyone says you’re super handsome and, of course, now I can see that they were right.”

Was she flirting with me? Oh shit, Helena was definitely flirting with me. Am I really asking myself that question? I used to be able tell within two seconds if a woman was flirting with me, but to be honest, I wasn’t really paying attention. I blinked my eyes at her and glanced up at the clock on the wall. Without warning, as if I was a robot finishing up my charge, I jolted forward and walked quickly from the room.

As I passed her, I mumbled, “Excuse me, I have a patient to see.”

I wasn’t really even sure if I had a patient yet. I just needed to be alone. Helena was a very pretty girl, and most likely was able to hook quite a few guys, especially with that petite body and her flowing blonde hair. She kind of reminded me of one of those women that was super-obsessed with raw foods and at-home workouts.

Normally, a girl like her would interest me. But I wasn’t feeling it at all, which should have been setting off an alarm in my head. But for some reason, I just kept feeling confused. Every time I even tried to think about another woman, Abby came into my mind. If I couldn’t be with Abby, then who would I be with? That’s the question I kept asking myself over and over again.

My conscience was honestly killing me. I felt terrible about leaving Abby like that. I

didn't tell her a thing, I just up and left. Experience had always told me that a clean break was best. There was no sense in dragging things out because long goodbyes are painful and they can last forever. Plus, they usually ended up in tears and snot, with lots of wadded-up Kleenex.

As a result, I was hell-bent on making a clean break, and even changed my phone number because I wanted to start everything new and fresh when I moved. But who really benefited from a clean break? Every other woman in the past had been easy for me to leave. I just left, and within hours I was in a new place with new women. But this time, things were different. My fingers itched to call Abby. I longed to hear her voice and to lay eyes on those sassy curves.

I couldn't get her out of my mind. I've been trying so hard. My best friend counseled me and as a result, I went to bars, I talked to women, and yet still she was right there. All I could think about was how absolutely stunning Abby looked. How she took my breath away when we went on vacation together. How I missed her laugh and her smile. But it wasn't just about her physical attributes, they were just the starting point. Once I got to know the girl, I realized how sweet and giving she was. She said hello to people as we passed them on the street, and even dogs wagged their tails at her in greeting.

She was the kind of girl that when she cared about you, she cared about you a thousand percent. She was the epitome of selfless, and no matter how many compliments I gave her, or how many times I told her she was absolutely gorgeous, she never lost that essential goodness. It just glowed from her. She had a simple life as a call center worker, yet she tried to pay for a doctor's dinner. I wanted to treat her to everything and anything she ever wanted, but she never asked for anything. When it came down to it, I wanted to take care of her. It was the first time in my life I ever wanted to take care of anybody besides myself.

After all, sometimes the people who had almost nothing financially were the most

generous people that you would ever meet. Abby was the embodiment of that. For all intents and purposes, she was poor, yet she was the person who had the most giving heart. She wasn't impressed by fancy hotels and expensive dinners. She was impressed by big hearts and good conversations.

I had never met anyone like this girl, and I had a feeling I was never going to meet anybody like her again. She was one in a million, and I had to be honest with myself: I missed her. I missed her texts, I missed her phone calls, and I missed that excited look on her face whenever we got together. She made me feel so special, and she truly thought that I was special as well, and for no reason at all. The only other person that I could think of that ever thought I was special was my mother, and that's because she was genetically predisposed to think I was god's gift to man.

Yet, I gave it all up. Why? Out of habit, more than anything. And now, I felt hollow and empty. I missed her goodness, her sweetness, and the loving curves of her body. Don't get me started on our sex life. The physical connection between the two of us was more intense than I'd ever felt with any woman in my life. Up until Abby, sex had almost felt like a chore for me. An enjoyable chore once I got started, but a chore nonetheless because there was no emotion behind the movements. It was purely physical with the other women.

Not with Abby though. It wasn't just her body, it was everything about her: the way she moved, the way she breathed, and the way she moaned. She was so giving and willing in the bedroom. She wanted to learn my body, and what I liked so that she could satisfy me. And in return, I was obsessed with figuring out how to give her as much pleasure as I possibly could. I yearned to stroke her plush curves once more. To taste her lips, both top side and bottom, and to feel her shaking against me when she reached ecstasy. The reality of it was, she was so open and honest and ready for me because she trusted me. Yet I took that trust, packed it in my suitcase, and then left.

"Here's your first patient's file," Helena softly said to me this time. "Her name is

Abigail Turner, forty-five years old, complaining of abdominal cramping and sudden weight loss. Her blood results are in the file.”

I shook my head, still a little distracted. Helena looked at me strangely and then walked away. Clearly, I had to pull it together. First, because I was going to scare the hell out of the nurse practitioners and everyone else here. Second, because I took a vow a long time ago that I wasn’t going to form any type of serious connection with a woman.

I took the job as a traveling doctor for myself, to get out there and see the world. I wanted to learn, not just about medicine but about who I was. I wanted to sow my wild oats, and to ride off into the sunset whenever I was ready. Eventually I might settle down somewhere, but eventually to me was another ten years away, or maybe even more.

Plus, I loved this job. I loved moving from place to place and starting fresh every time I went. I loved meeting new people, not just women, but people in general. I’ve made so many contacts in so little time that even when I do decide to stop, the career options are endless for me.

But now something’s changed. I found myself in Winchester, Iowa, not wanting to be here, and hating my life. The sad thing was, I thought this was what I wanted. How could things change so quickly?

I stood there absolutely miserable. I wondered what Abby was doing in that moment. I wondered if she was smiling and happy, or sad and down like me. But what did it really matter? I was gone. I made the decision and I’m the one who left.

With a deep sigh, I opened up my next patient’s file and glanced over the information with unseeing eyes. This would never do, so I opened the exam door and plastered a fake smile across my lips. I had a job to get done, and the job was everything to me.

Or at least, that's what I thought.

Abby

It's been two months. Two very long, painful months. I wish I could say that I had gotten over Ryder, moved on, and become cheery and happy again. But that would be a lie and I've had just about enough lies over the last couple months to last me the rest of my life. Of course, according to Mary, dating and lies seem to go hand-in-hand. That was exactly the kind of thing I did not need to hear while I wondered if I would continue to be single forever.

It's sad, really. At first, when this all went down, I was in denial. I tried calling Doctor McNamara's office, hoping that they would give me Ryder's new contact info. Of course, that was silly because they couldn't legally give me that information even if they wanted to. I sounded like a stalker too. After all, what was I going to do? Get my car in drive to another state just to confront him? Actually, I probably would have done that if I knew where he was. But no, they told me that Doctor Rivington was gone, and that they couldn't forward his contact information to me.

Instead, they offered to let me see Doctor McNamara for treatment. But I declined because what was I going to sit there and talk to her about? How I fell in love with her replacement, had sex on the table in her office, and then ended up being jilted and ghosted by the very same man? They would have his license, and I would become some poor, broken "victim" in the headlines. I didn't want that, not with the #MeToo movement raging.

Nor did I want to call unnecessary attention to myself because lately, I've been feeling sick. It's been two months since Ryder left without a word, and now, I feel queasy. I stood in my bathroom, barefoot, sweat on my forehead, and with the taste of

vomit in the back of my throat. When I first started feeling nauseous a few days before, I thought maybe I caught the flu. The lady behind me at work was constantly coughing, and had also complained about an upset stomach for two weeks. I had battened down the hatches, and gotten my blankets and my tea, ready to wait it out.

However, the third time I made a mad dash for the bathroom, something caught my eye as I hovered over the portal to porcelain hell. It was unusually innocuous, a box sitting on my shelf, minding its own business. But this time around, when I saw that box of Tampax, my sweat covered hair flew back and I grabbed it, shaking it wildly in front of me as the unopened plastic tubes bounced all over the floor. I'm pretty sure in that moment there were sounds of agony reverberating through the entire apartment.

It had been two months since Ryder left, and exactly two months since I had had a period. I counted the days on my calendar ten or eleven times before I realized that no matter how many times I counted them, I was still going to come up with the same number. And as that crumpled paper calendar fell from my hands onto the floor, I instantly lost all ability to use my brain. The only thing I was able to do was call Mary.

"I think this is the second time that I'm going to say this in the last couple months but you really need to calm down because I can't understand anything you're saying," Mary said listening to me sobbing on the other end of the phone. "All I got was something about your heart; something about a crushed box of tampons; and somewhere in there was the lovely sound of you heaving into the toilet. Either you've decided to commit some sort of strange form of seppuku, or something tragic has happened."

Taking in a long deep breath, I calmed myself down and leaned against the counter, feeling the nausea hitting me again. "I thought I had the flu. Maybe I still have the flu. But I haven't had a period in two months and now I'm puking my brains out."

For the first time in our friendship, Mary was oddly silent. “Mary? Did you hear me?”

She started to breathe again. “Sorry, had to collect myself since I seem to be the only rational person in our friendship these days. Okay, this is what I want you to do. You know how you cleaned me out a drawer in the bathroom on the left-hand side for when I spend the night?”

My eyes shifted over to her drawer which she had covered in sparkly unicorn stickers. “Uh-huh.”

“Good,” she replied sternly. “Go in the drawer, and underneath my makeup case is a pregnancy test. And before you ask, yes, I keep one in the drawer because you never know when you might just need one. Case in point, today.”

I walked over to the drawer and pulled it open, lifting up a makeup bag to find just that, a pregnancy test. I held the box in my shaking hands, my heart beating wildly. “So I just take off the cap, pee on the stick, and then wait?”

“You need me to come over there?”

I shook my head sniffing. “No. I got this. I’m going to take it and then I’ll call you back when I know something.”

“All right, good luck,” Mary replied cheerfully.

I was pretty sure I could hear a tremor in her voice. She was finding my ventures into the dating world to be slightly comedic, yet also horrifying. Maybe it was because she’s been through it all. It was a good thing for me though, as now I had a tour guide to walk me through it.

Tearing open the package I pulled out the stick and the instructions. I unfolded the pamphlet and looked at the pictures about how to pee on the stick and how long to wait. I wrote down the time and then shoved the pamphlet back in the box. I knew enough about pregnancy tests to know that a plus sign meant yes and a negative sign meant no.

I took the cap off and hovered over the toilet, attempting not to pee on myself. I counted out loud trying to get the perfect amount on the absorbent tip, put the cap on it, and carefully placed it on the small shelf next to me. After cleaning myself up, I turned away from the counter, not wanting to see it until it was absolutely, positively done.

My brain was screaming at me at that point. I should have realized the possibility that I was pregnant. I was so used to being a virgin though, and missing a period didn't seem strange to me at all. I wasn't a girl who got her period every twenty-eight days. I was the girl that had a visit from Aunt Flo every thirty days, sometimes every forty-five days, and sometimes twice a month. It really just depended. So when my time of the month didn't happen, I honestly didn't even notice. It wasn't until I saw that box of tampons that I realized it had been a little over two months, which spelled trouble.

It was a harsh realization. It definitely was nothing like the commercials on TV where a woman jumps up and down with joy upon seeing her pregnancy test while her husband waits outside. There was certainly no man in the picture for me. It was just another depressing story in my life.

Plus, it was strange being the one waiting for the test results. With Mary, I had been on the other end of things multiple times. Mary was a bit of a hypochondriac when it came to pregnancy. If she was even an hour late for her period, she was peeing on a stick and freaking out. They always came back negative because she's been on birth control since middle school. Her mother saw the wild child in her before she was a wild child. Smart woman.

But there I was, pacing back and forth in front of my mirror, halfway talking to myself, and trying to keep my mind off the pink and blue stick sitting on the shelf. It was amazing how such a small item struck fear into the bravest of women's hearts. Honestly, I really wasn't that afraid. No, the rapid beating of my heart in my chest, and the wild butterfly feeling in the pit of my stomach was more anxiety than it was fear. I was trying my best not to allow my brain to start rolling down avenues of the unforeseen. I wanted to know what that test said before I started thinking about potential ramifications.

After all, there were two sides to everything. On one hand, I was elated. I had fallen in love with Ryder, and that was no secret. From our first steamy meeting at the gynecologist's office, to our warm days on the beach and hot nights in the hotel on vacation, I was head over heels for him. Not only was he my first, but we connected on a level that I didn't think was possible between men and women. At least not from what I had seen in terrible chick flicks.

Plus, the sex was absolutely amazing. Every single time we made love, it was full of passion. Even on vacation when we made love multiple times, the passion was always there. It surged through me every time he put his hands on me, and even now, standing in the bathroom, I could feel that intensity again, hitting me low in the belly.

As a result, I knew that our baby was conceived with love. And while not planned, he or she was not a mistake either. We were two consenting adults that chose not to use protection, and with Ryder's child, I would have a wonderful reminder of this gorgeous man. Call me childish or naïve but that's just how I felt in the pit of my stomach.

On the other hand, what the hell was I thinking? I'm an underemployed high school graduate who lives in the apartment above her mother's garage. How in the world would I support a baby? I'm barely even getting by right now. I have no career prospects, and no hope of furthering my education either. So how would the child and

I scrape by?

At that moment, the phone buzzed on the counter and I picked it up, putting it to my ear. As expected, Mary was on the other side.

“So are you carrying the doctor’s illegitimate child? Is this another Days of Our Lives? I feel like you could be part of a soap opera except you aren’t rich and you haven’t had an affair with a hot shirtless Spanish man named Rico who speaks zero English.”

A soft chuckle came from my chest, cutting through the hurt and pain I was feeling.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“I’m still waiting on it to be done. I was just thinking about everything. How I tried to contact Ryder after he left. How I still wonder if he actually thinks about me.”

Mary breathed deeply into the phone, and I knew she was about to give me some cold, hard truth.

“Listen to me, Snickers. This is hard to swallow, but Ryder Rivington’s gone. He purposely left without leaving his contact information. In fact, he hasn’t reached out to you once in the two months since. He’s not coming back, no matter what the test says. I love you, but the sooner you get over this, the sooner you can move on with your life and do what’s right.”

I didn’t want to believe her, but I knew that Mary was only saying what I already knew in my heart. Ryder was gone, and he didn’t care about me anymore.

21

Abby

“I don’t need you to tell me that,” I replied. “I might have all of these thoughts, and all of these hopes and dreams for the return of my sexy doctor, but I’m fully aware that the chances of him coming back are below one percent. If I’m pregnant, I’ll be doing this on my own.”

“I’m sorry Abby,” Mary said in a low tone, her voice genuinely apologetic. “I know that I’ve been tough on you but I want you to know that it kills me to see you hurting so badly. I never wanted you to go through this. I always wanted you to be that one

friend that ends up with the perfect guy, whom she dates for the perfect amount of time, and has the perfect marriage. A marriage where the only fight that you ever got in with him was over the fact that he didn't put his dirty socks in the clothes hamper. You deserve to be that girl."

"I wish I had been that person," I replied, a little sad. "But after I realized that Ryder had changed his number, I knew it was all over. He's gone. When I think about it, I feel like he never even existed sometimes, like he was a figment of my imagination. The only way that I can prove that he was even here was through the doctor's office."

Mary was being very supportive, listening to everything that I had to say. She knew this wasn't a time for jokes or for cutting in. She knew I needed to talk about it and get it out of my system. I sighed again.

"Do you know how many times I've asked myself if he was just merely a figment of my imagination? I felt like I needed to check myself into a psych ward because maybe I'd imagined an entire weekend vacation with some dream guy in my own head. I'm sorry, I'm going insane."

"No, you're fine," Mary said with a sigh. "You're going to be okay, Snickers. Hang up with me, check that test, and then we can move forward from there. Whatever the test says, we'll move forward anyway, and I'll be by your side. I want you to look at this as an exciting new future ahead of you. Think of it as a second chance at life. You can literally make it into anything that you want to, and you don't have to worry about offending someone else or mashing together ideas. You can let your own genius run free."

I gave a half smile, grateful that my best friend had my back like that. "Thanks, Mary. I'll call you back soon."

Hanging up the phone, I sat it gently on the counter, my eyes going to the pregnancy

test sitting on the shelf. I slowly walked toward it, wishing I could just stay in this limbo forever. Because as soon as I looked at that test, no matter what it read, everything was going to change for me. If it was positive, well then I had some big decisions to make. If it said negative, then it the end of my time with Ryder. I needed to let him go and move on with my life.

I closed my eyes for a moment as I reached up and gripped the stick. I brought it down in front of me and slowly opened my eyes. My head immediately tilted to the side and my mouth fell slightly open. I'm not sure why I wasn't prepared to see the plus sign on the pregnancy test, but it took me by complete surprise. I slowly backed up and flipped the toilet seat lid down, sitting and just staring at the plastic indicator.

Holy shit, I was pregnant. I was going to have Ryder's baby. My heart was beating a hundred miles an hour, and my emotions were twisting and turning like a roller coaster inside of me. I was extremely excited, and then suddenly very sad, and then back up to extremely excited again. I was actually pregnant.

I looked down at my stomach and then shook my head ruefully. It wasn't like you got a positive pregnancy test and then suddenly you have an eight-month round baby belly. But I was still in awe. There was a child inside of me right now. There was a child who was made with passion and love, with a world of potential before him or her.

I sat there quietly, just staring into space. Everything about me felt like it was changing all at once. I was no longer alone, not even inside my body. I had a future that, in an instant, had been completely rewritten. I would have to rethink everything.

"A baby," I whispered. "Ryder's baby."

Walking over to the mirror, I stood there and stared at my own reflection. I was no longer looking at a naïve girl who was afraid of speculums and lubrication. I could

see a mother in my own face. A mature woman who would soon bring another life into this world. I was overwhelmed by the idea that I was actually going to create another human being and then raise them to be an adult. I felt like whoever was responsible for handing out the pregnancies gave me this pregnancy for a reason.

Suddenly, resolve filled me. The child growing inside of me was most likely going to be my only link to Ryder. It was going to be the only keepsake from the happiest time that I had experienced up to that point in my life. The child was going to be a reminder of the pain that he put me through, but it was also going to be a reminder of love. That love was possible. That I am no longer destined to die the old cat lady. That realization alone was worth its weight in gold.

I picked up the phone and dialed Mary's number, feeling calm and clearheaded, like a giving Earth Mother.

"What's the word?" Mary asked.

I smiled at my own reflection, shaking my head. "I'm pregnant."

I wasn't sure if it was my serene calmness or the news that I was going to have a baby that broke Mary into tears. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cry," she snuffled.

"Are you crying because you're sad or happy?" I asked my friend.

"I'm crying for whatever reason you want me to cry for," she replied. "And I feel like this whole conversation is backward. I feel like you should be the one crying and I should be the one asking the questions."

Chuckling, I turned around and rested my butt on the bathroom counter.

"You know us, we like to do things completely backward. But I don't know how I

feel. I'm not unhappy. I'm at peace. I know I'm going to keep this child, and I didn't really even have to think about it. I guess there really are some things in life that reveal themselves to you like a miracle."

"Oh my god, you sound like Deepak Chopra. And I'm going to be an aunt!" Mary giggled. "I'm going to teach your child all about my ninja skills."

Page 46

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I raised my eyebrow. “I’m pretty sure I remember you talking about your ability to pick up men and calling it your ninja skills. So regretfully, I’m going to have to say no until she or he is sixteen.”

“Dammit,” she giggled tearily. “I really thought you didn’t listen to me when I talked. Fine, but I get to be the cool aunt. I get to give them cookies and sugar and take them to bouncy houses and then give them back to you. And I get to be the aunt that buys inappropriate baby clothes like this onesie I saw one time that said, ‘Gimme those tatas.’”

I started to laugh loudly, so thankful that Mary was in my life.

“Okay, it’s a deal. But you can’t cut a mohawk into my child’s hair until they’re old enough to ask for one.”

Mary groaned. “Party pooper.”

We both giggled loudly until it faded out into a silence. I felt oddly peaceful. There was so much that I didn’t know, and so many things to contemplate. I was overwhelmed and yet strangely calm too. It was a nice break from my recent emotional turmoil.

“Are you hungry?” Mary asked. “I can treat you to your favorite waffle place.”

I swallowed hard, still tasting the vomit in the back of my mouth.

“Maybe later tonight. We can do dinner or something. I just stopped throwing up so I

want to make sure that it's not going come back before I start putting waffles into my body. I think I'm going to take a shower and then a nap, and I'll call you when I wake up and let you know how I feel."

"Okay," she said with her normal chipper voice. "And Abby?"

"Yeah?"

Mary paused for a moment. "You're probably going to feel a lot of emotions in the coming days. I'm always here for you to talk to. I don't want you to think that you're ever alone."

It was a sweet thing for her to say. "Thanks. And trust me I know I'm not alone. I just found out that I have a small human leasing my uterus for the next nine months."

Mary laughed. "And your soul for the rest of time. Better you than me, my friend. I will love them, but only because I can give them back."

I chuckled and shook my head, glad of the humor in this world. "I'll call you later. Love you."

She blew me a loud kiss before we hung up. In the silence of the bathroom, I glanced over at the pile of tampons scattered around the toilet, and the pregnancy test on the bathroom counter. I figured it would probably be a good idea to clean that up. I wasn't really sure how I would explain that to someone if they came into my bathroom.

I put the tampons back in the box neatly, closed the lid, and put it away in the drawer figuring I wouldn't need them for quite a while. I stuck the pregnancy test back in the box and looked back and forth unsure of where to put it. The trash wasn't safe unless I took it to the dump and heaved it into the pit myself. Belinda has an uncanny sense

for such things, and I was sure she would find it somehow.

But for now, I put it back into Mary's drawer, figuring if nothing else, I could bribe my friend into saying it was hers. I knew though, that I was going to have to tell my mom at some point.

Lists started to build in my mind of all the things that I would need to do to prepare for a child. Telling my mom was just the tip of the iceberg. I was going to need a place big enough for the two of us, I was going to need clothes, diapers, strollers, cribs, and probably about a million other things that I didn't even know existed for babies. I would have to scour baby registries for hours making a list of items.

Then there was the whole problem of money. I barely made enough money to take care of myself and I lived in a garage apartment that I paid next to nothing to live in. Add another person to that and I wasn't sure that my call center job would support us. Then again, my mom did it and continued to do it. She's been a single mom for a long time, and managed to raise me and Melody on her meager salary. If she was able to support us, then I could do it for my child too.

My child. That was such a strange concept. I felt like I was dreaming, and that nothing was real. My heart was already beating with love for the unborn baby inside of me, and without thinking, my hand slid over my belly and rested there. I wondered if the baby could tell that I was cradling it with my palm.

Staring in the mirror at my hand on my stomach, I felt a flutter in my chest. I whispered to the baby, hoping that it could hear me.

"I promise, no matter what, I'm going to give you the best chance that I can give you and I will love you more than anything in the world, always and forever. Love, Mommy."

It felt a little cheesy calling myself “Mommy” just like that, but it was true. I was this child’s mother, and suddenly I wanted him or her with every fiber of my being.

22

Ryder

A year later ...

“So, you know where everything is? The same nurses are still working at the office, and you’ll probably see most of the same patients,” Dr. McNamara explained.

“Yeah. It was a really smooth sailing last time I was here, so I’m glad to be back,” I said. “I was really happy to hear that you were calling to have me cover for your vacation this year. Go, have fun, get a tan, eat some lobster, and drink far too many margaritas on the beach with your girlfriends.”

She sighed. “Yeah, it’s kind of different when you’re divorced. Maybe I’ll meet a hot foreign man and never come back. I’ll just live on the beach and build a hut for privacy. You can take over my practice.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I laughed loudly. “While that seems absolutely awesome, I think you’ll miss being a doctor. You’ll be back in Farmington soon enough.”

“You’re probably right,” Colleen replied. “Besides, I would miss my grumpy, know it all, irritating patients. I will see you in a week or two and you know how to reach me if you have any questions. But unless something is burning or someone is dying, don’t call me.”

I chuckled as I hung up with Colleen, clicking the side button on my phone and sliding it in my back pocket. Reaching down, I picked up my bags and strode into the apartment. In a weird coincidence, it was the same place I stayed last time with all the same furniture and décor. This must be a popular extended stay residence. Plus, as I headed back out to get the rest of my stuff, my next door neighbor from last time opened her door and smiled widely at me.

“You’re back!” she exclaimed. “Dr. Rivington, right? I’m Edna. You were so nice and quiet last year. If you need anything let me know. By the way, will that nice young lady be coming over to visit?”

I tilted my head to the side wondering if she had mistaken me for someone else. “Who do you mean?”

She snapped her fingers, putting her other hand to her chin.

“What was her name? She came over here and had just missed you after you left last time. She looked so sad about it. Sat out here all night until I finally let her know that you weren’t coming home. Oh right, it’s Abby.”

My breath caught in my throat and I shook my head. “No, I don’t think she’ll be visiting. I’m not even sure that she knows that I’m in town.”

“Well that’s a shame,” the old woman said as she headed for the door. “I could tell that she was in love, but then so was half the town. You were the talk of the gossip circles for about a month after you left. All the women were so sad that they couldn’t see their doctor anymore. I thought it was adorable.”

I helped Edna down the steps and she gave me a kiss on the cheek before turning and making her way down the block. That same unsettling feeling in the pit of my stomach surged, just thinking about the fact that Abby had been here sitting on the steps completely destroyed after finding out that I had left her without a word.

But now, things are different. It’s been an entire year since I left Farmington, Maryland. I had no intention of coming to this city again, but of course, the agency didn’t actually tell me until I was halfway through my last assignment. I still felt absolutely terrible about leaving Abby without saying goodbye, but then again, there’s no sense in crying over spilled milk. It happened last year, and I made myself leave her and not look back. It didn’t feel good, and I hate myself for it.

But my heart still ached for her. It hasn’t stopped aching for the curvy girl. I’ve spent the last year choosing books over bars, and movies over women. I tried to move on, but every time that I chatted up a woman, I merely felt worse about Abby. So instead of subjecting myself to torture, I opted for a quieter life.

Plus, I used to travel but never see the cities I stayed in. Instead, the only things I saw were the bars and the women. So this time, every place I went I made sure to find out what the most popular destination was, and then I visited. Now I’ve seen everything from the biggest ball of yarn to insanely tall skyscrapers. I’ve visited stamp museums and watched a Civil War reenactment. I’ve gone to comedy shows where I laughed my ass off, and I’ve visited patients in rural settings who had no way of getting to a

hospital.

But no matter what, no matter how many things I filled my life with, there was still a longing for Abby. I couldn't escape it. The curvy girl haunted me, even when I sat in the middle of a loud comedy club, listening to jokes. All I knew was that I had these intense feelings for Abby, and that they wouldn't go away.

Shaking my head, I left the rental and drove to Colleen's office. The brick building looked the same as always, and I let myself in the back door. The office was exactly the same, and it was kind of nice coming back a second time. Despite the painful memories, it was almost like returning home after a long trip.

"Well, look what the cat drug in," Alex said with a big grin. "Word got out that you're in town. We are now booked up all week long. Hope you brought your running shoes."

I chuckled and gave her a hug.

"No, but I brushed up on my herbal teas and tinctures."

Alex gave me an impressed look.

"Look at you. Preparing for the patients. I like it. But aren't you tired of traveling yet?" she asked.

I turned with a grin and shrugged my shoulders.

"It's definitely different from the last time I saw you. Hey, did you ever get married?"

"It's sweet that you remembered, but that wasn't me, that was one of the other girls," she chuckled. "I was the one already married. Have you gotten married yet?"

I laughed and shook my head.

“No. This really isn’t the kind of job that is conducive to a marriage. But I’m sure it will happen one day.”

“I’m sure it will. My husband and I, well, we just celebrated ten years,” Alex said proudly. “He took me out to Breaker Villa, a little bed and breakfast, to celebrate. It was adorable.”

I had to do everything in my power to keep a smile on my face and not show how my heart had just dropped into my stomach.

“That sounds great. I could use a vacation too. Maybe next year.”

Alex grinned as she walked toward the door, looking back at me over her shoulder.

“Don’t forget, life is short, Dr. Rivington. Before you know it, you’re ready to retire, and you don’t want to have regrets. But better get your white jacket on because your first appointment is in twenty minutes. Actually, she’s out in the lobby already, but take your time.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I nodded at her as I walked toward the break room.

“Give me ten and I’ll be ready. It’ll give me a head start on the day. You know how my patients like to talk a lot.”

Alex laughed and gave me a thumbs up. I pulled on my jacket and poured a cup of coffee, standing at the window and looking out at the cars passing by. The parking lot was already starting to fill up and there was a pizza delivery guy yawning as he climbed into his car. I didn’t even know they delivered pizza this early in the morning.

I turned my head, looking pensively at the sky. The cold hard truth was that there would be no Breaker Villa, deep conversations, crazy hot sex, or falling for Abby this time around. She probably wanted me dead. I know that’s what I would want if I were her.

I slammed my fist down on the windowsill and shook my head. Dammit, Ryder, what is wrong with you? You fucked up. Get over it.

Why did I have to think about Abby all of the damn time? It was like I couldn’t control my own mind. It’s been a year and I’m still obsessing over her. I kept seeing those lush, bountiful curves in my mind. Her innocent brown eyes. I could hear the way she moaned my name as she came. It was delicious and the truth is, I didn’t want to forget.

Suddenly, Shelley walked back in the room with a clipboard tapping against her leg. “Here’s your patient list for the day. All the files are stacked in their normal spot and

if you need anything just let me know.”

I took the clipboard from her and nodded my head. “Thanks.”

I shook my head, knowing I needed to focus. Today was packed. I scanned my finger down the list just to see if I noticed any familiar names from the year before. When I got to the late afternoon appointments, I skimmed quickly, suddenly slowing down and moving back up the list. I blinked and looked at the page harder, thinking I was seeing things.

“Abby...?” I whispered.

Holy cow, Abby was coming in. Did she know I was filling in for Dr. McNamara? Likely not because word doesn’t travel that fast. I looked up at the clock, slightly disappointed that it was still morning. I couldn’t wait to see the curvy girl, even though she might storm out. Even though she might curse my name to holy Heaven, and wish that we’d never met.

I was going to see Abby again, and in my heart, I prayed for a second chance. Maybe, just maybe, there would be some way to make her love me again.

23

Ryder

It was time. Time to face her, to see the beautiful woman that I haven’t seen in a year. I was nervous and hopeful all at the same time. Flashes of our time together a year before were flying through my mind, trying to find a place to land. I clutched Abby’s files hard in my hands, attempting to keep myself from shaking.

Reaching for the door handle I said a silent prayer to myself, reminding myself to

keep my other “excitement” in my pants. This wasn’t going to be a replay of the first time I walked into the room with her. I also had to be prepared for backlash. I didn’t know how angry she was or if she was going to take it out on me or not.

I pushed open the door and immediately walked in, closing the door behind me. We stared at each other for a moment, the look on Abby’s face one of pure shock. Clearly, my presence was unexpected.

“Dr. Rivington?” she asked with disbelief. “What are you doing here? Where’s Dr. McNamara?”

I didn’t answer, and instead cleared my throat and walked over to the counter, washing my hands like normal. She was just as beautiful as I had remembered her. Even more so, actually. She had more curves, more luscious waves to her body, and she was so damn gorgeous. I wanted to scan her file. Had she gained weight since I last saw her?

Drying off my hands, I flipped her chart open and looked down to her weight. She had put on some pounds. Good. I loved curvy women. There was just something about the extra weight that made her even more damn delicious. She had put on about thirty pounds which was perfect for me. More than perfect. I wanted to take her right then and there.

The silence in the room, though, stopped me in my tracks. I had to remember that I was a doctor, and she was here for a visit. There could be something wrong with her. Instantly I felt a strange twinge in my stomach, the kind that made me want to scoop her up and protect her from the rest of the world.

I picked up her file and turned, my eyes on the information but not actually focusing in yet. I spoke with professionalism, even though my cock was rock hard beneath my white coat.

“Abby, it’s really good to see you. How are you?” She was still staring at me. She looked bewildered like I was some sort of animal at the zoo. I smiled at her and continued. “How can I help you today? Are you feeling ill?”

I really wanted her to say no. I wanted her to raise up off the bed and wrap her arms around me, whispering that it would be okay. I wanted to then take off her gown and gaze at that sumptuous body beneath. I wanted to taste her skin, her juices, and to smother her pussy with my tongue like I had done before. It felt like it had been centuries ago, but in reality, it had only been a year. The most agonizing year of my life.

With shock still evident on her face, she looked down at her hands with her cheeks glowing red.

“I...uh...no...I mean yes. I...though Dr. McNamara was going to be here. Maybe I should...?”

She was completely caught off guard by the fact that I was in the room. I hated it. I wanted her to be happy, and not embarrassed. I wanted her to swoon just like in the movies. But that was unrealistic, and I pushed back those emotions.

“Dr. McNamara’s on her yearly summer vacation. She called me in to cover.”

“Already? It’s been a year already?” Abby asked, her fingers now pushed together and her knuckles white.

Nodding, I fiddled with the stethoscope around my neck. “Yeah. Personally, I feel like I’ve been gone forever.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

Her eyes shifted up toward mine and she started babbling.

“Yeah, me too. Sometimes it felt a little slow, but I’ve been really busy, so time flew by. Carpe diem! Seize the day, right?”

There it was. She had thought of me, but mostly in the negative. It was as if I was nothing but an interlude in her otherwise packed schedule. Dammit. If she only knew the impact she had on my life. How I was a completely changed man now. How every day I thought of her. How each and every minute I kicked myself for changing my phone number and being an ass, in general.

I walked over to the counter and put her file down, scanning through her recent visits. But then as my finger glided over the information, I stopped, my heart beginning to beat faster in my chest. This appointment wasn’t any normal appointment. It was a post-partum checkup.

My feet swiveled around as fast as they could move, and I tried to keep my calm.

“Abby, you’re post-partum? What the fuck? You’re a mother? You’ve had a baby since I was last here?”

She lifted her shoulders almost defiantly and twisted her hands in her lap. Her eyes shot away from mine and no words came out of her mouth. Holy shit. If she’s a mother...? My gut churned and I felt slightly nauseated.

I walked closer, like a tiger stalking its prey. “You’ve had a child? Recently? This past year?”

She licked her lips and took in a long deep breath, nodding her head silently. My eyes shifted down to the floor and I tried to think through it. My brain seemed to be completely twisted in different directions. Connections were made, but then they sparked and fizzled. I was surprised, confused, shocked, and everything in between.

Fuck. Chewing on my lip for a moment, my eyes shifted back up to hers. “You said you were a virgin when we had sex last year. As in, you’d never been with anyone else before me.”

Once again, Abby nodded. My feet began to pace. “Then, were you with someone right after me? Was it some sort of rebound thing? Were you getting over me? Or did you have someone else already?”

She took a deep breath and fiddled with the edge of her examination gown. “There was no one before you and no one since you, Ryder. You are the only man that I have ever been with.”

For some reason the words weren’t computing in my mind. It was like I was unable to understand plain English. Was she saying what I think she was saying? My mouth opened and I tried to find words, but they just didn’t seem to want to come out. Finally, I pulled myself together enough to let out a hoarse bark.

“Is the child mine?” I asked, knowing it was a stupid question. Yet I desperately needed to hear the answer from her mouth.

Abby stayed silent for a moment, looking almost fearful. Finally, she looked up at me, meeting my gaze with hers. She had a brave look on her face, one I can only imagine she had practiced a hundred times in case she ever saw me again. Then Abby took a deep breath.

“Yes, Ryder. You have a son. You have a little boy with your same blue eyes and

blazing smile. No, he does not know who you are, because he isn't old enough for that yet. And I didn't think I would ever see you again."

"I..." My mouth opened and I wanted to say something, anything, but my brain would not compute. "I have a son?" I finally managed in a choked voice.

She let out a sigh and stood up, walking over to her clothes. I turned from her, feeling the world spinning around me and out of control. A son. Abby had just told me that I was a father, something I didn't expect, not in a million years. For some reason, it never occurred to me. I thought about a lot of outcomes, but this was not on my list at all.

Abby turned toward me and held up a picture of a little boy that looked just like the pictures of me as a baby. That did it, and the realization sunk into me hard and fast. My heart started pounding wildly in my chest, and I put one hand to my heart. It felt like I couldn't breathe.

Leaning forward, I propped myself on the exam table and stared at the floor. A son. I had a little boy who looked just like me. Someone with my laugh, and my DNA. Did he like peanut butter but hate jelly? Would he like baseball games but detest basketball? My knees started to wobble and I grabbed at the rolling stool, taking a seat. Abby glanced over at me and turned back, putting her clothes back on.

I watched the curvy girl, my mind still trying to grasp this new reality. I met a beautiful woman, had the most amazing couple of weeks of my life with her, and my seed took hold, creating a child. We were parents now. This is the kind of news you give a man with a bottle of scotch and a really good chair. I was still trying to process while attempting to draw oxygen in my lungs.

In that moment, I wanted a hundred different things. I wanted to cry out in joy. I wanted to scream in anger. I wanted to lash out at Abby for not telling me sooner. I

wanted to bring her close and hold her, while apologizing for my desertion. There were so many emotions flowing through me, so many questions, so many things I wanted to say. But right there, on that stool, none of them came to me. Nothing but shock consumed me.

“A baby,” I whispered in wonder. “What’s his name?”

She turned around and looked at me with caution. “Matthew.”

“Matthew,” I repeated to myself. “Why Matthew?”

She closed her purse and shrugged with a small smile. “I don’t know. I’ve always liked that name, I guess.”

I stood up, launching the rolling stool across the room. Abby drew back, surprised by my actions. But I knew what was happening. A possessive feeling coursed through my veins. Matthew was my son. He was my blood. I needed to be with him, and to lay my eyes on my own flesh and blood.

“I have to see my son,” I said in a grim voice.

She stared at me for a moment, slightly shocked. She stammered a bit, a mother trying to decide what the best thing for her child was. But finally, Abby let out a deep breath and nodded her head. “Alright. Of course. My phone number should be in my medical file. Call me when you’re done with work and you can come meet him.”

I stared at her, and Abby turned to go. But then she turned back and stood in the middle of the exam room, looking at me. “For the record, I didn’t hide him from you. I didn’t purposefully keep him a secret. I had no way to find you. No way to contact you. We’ve been here all along, in Farmington, getting through life on our own. So you can be shocked, you have that right, but don’t be angry at me. I’ve done the best I

can.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I didn't have the ability to respond, nor did she give me the opportunity. She turned and walked from the exam room, closing the door behind her. The click of the latch ricocheted through my mind and I knew she was right. I did everything in my power to disappear, and in the end, it only hurt me. It prevented me from knowing my son.

Plus, I felt like an even bigger douche, knowing the facts. While I was away, Abby was here, protecting, raising, and nourishing our child. She was planning a life for them without me because what else was she supposed to do? I made it seem like I wanted nothing to do with her. Was it true? No. But that was my way to make sure I didn't get attached to anyone in life.

But now, what had my actions cost me? If I wanted see the world so badly, then why had I been absolutely miserable for the last year? Why did I struggle so hard, only to wind up back here, in Farmington?

And now this. A change that was blowing my mind. A child that I never expected but already felt as if I couldn't do without. Those eyes in that picture reminded me of myself. Matthew was beautiful, reflecting both his mother's grace and his father's determination.

I had a son. A beautiful little boy. And he and his mother weremine.

24

Abby

I walked out of the doctor's office, ignoring the receptionist's words behind me. I was

in complete and total shock. I stumbled through the parking lot and back to my car like a zombie. After sitting down in the driver's seat and closing the door, I gripped the steering wheel with white knuckles. Never in a million years did I expect what just happened.

Oh my God, Ryder's back!

Had I walked into some sort of time warp? Had I traveled to some other type of dimension? This was supposed to be an easy in and out appointment. I felt great. I had bounced back after pregnancy like I hadn't just pushed a cantaloupe through a keyhole. Even my mother told me that I was doing a fantastic job, which for Belinda, was a huge thing.

Besides, I'd been doing so well. After I came to terms with the fact that I was going to be a single mother, I put the idea of ever seeing Ryder again out of my mind. I had to. The fact is that life moves on, and I had a baby to think about now. Nonetheless, staring at him face-to-face without proper warning and preparation had thrown me so far off track that I didn't even know what to do.

After all, it's clear Dr. Rivington is going to claim his child. Yet, is that what I want? Mattie is the apple of my eye. He's everything that I need in my life. And yes, he looks like Ryder, but after a while, I stopped thinking about the man every time I looked at my child. All I saw was a beautiful little boy whom I had created, and who meant more to me than anything in the world.

My appointment was supposed to be with Dr. McNamara, so what the hell? Just like last time, the office didn't inform me that I'd be seeing a new physician. They just plopped it on me, like it was business as usual. But I was stunned when Ryder walked into the room, almost to the point where I considered leaving immediately.

After all, I haven't seen Ryder in an entire year. I had his son, but it's been zero

contact. In his defense, he didn't know about the baby. But at the same time, that was his fault. I had never purposefully kept the pregnancy from him. When he left me, he cut off all communication. He even changed his phone number so that I couldn't get a hold of him. There was really nothing I could do except move on.

So there I was, a year later with the cutest little baby boy. I loved him so much. And gosh darn it, but Mattie looks exactly like his dad. He has the same blue eyes and black hair and even the same goofy laugh that starts from his baby belly.

Ours wasn't a fancy lifestyle, but it was full of love. The apartment may not be in the best area, but I made it colorful and homey. And between me, my mom, and my friends, my little boy had every toy he could ever want. In fact, at least once every few months I have to go through his toys and donate them to the needy. If I didn't, Mattie would have nowhere to sleep because of the toys overfilling his room.

Plus, he was growing bigger, and becoming more aware of his environment day by day. His favorite place to be was his play mat during tummy time. He would stretch his legs out long and hold himself up by his arms and chest. His big eyes would look around the room and I would get a huge smile watching him. I was so proud to be his mommy.

Plus, I've been lucky. I'm still working at the call center, and they gave me full-time hours with corresponding health insurance and paid parental leave. It was like the universe smiled at me right after finding out I was pregnant.

Still, even with forty hours a week and benefits, we were barely getting by on my salary. My mom was still working overtime, trying to take care of my sister, and I didn't trust Melody enough to leave Mattie with her. So I was paying an astronomical amount for day care, doctors' appointment co-pays, and everything else that went along with life. It wasn't easy, and some days I got really down about it, seeing how we struggled financially.

But then I would walk into Mattie's room, and all my worries would evaporate. That's when I felt grateful and happy, and at peace with the world. I never imagined that I would be a mother so young, or have to do it on my own, but life has turned out okay. I love my son, and even if it's just the two of us, we're happy together.

But now Ryder's back. What does that mean for me and my son? When he walked into the exam room, the breath caught in my throat. He looked as amazing as always. His tall frame was fit and athletic, and I could see his muscular body move beneath his white lab coat.

It was crazy thinking those things, after what he did. But the perfect line of his jaw, the way he smiled, and the breadth of his chest made my heart go wild. I even caught a glimpse of the way he used to look at me, with those intense cobalt eyes that promised the world.

Sex leads to babies. Remember that, the voice in my head admonished. I tried to keep telling myself that over and over again as I watched him move around the room. He was so gorgeous, but then again, reality caught up, and the situation made me a little angry, not to mention bitter. Here he was, free as a bird and even more handsome, while I took care of his child. Somehow, Dr. Hot and Steamy always has the winning hand.

Plus, I felt so bad about my appearance. I was thirty pounds overweight after having Matthew. I had bags under my eyes from working so much, and I hadn't even brushed my hair before I left the house. I had thrown it up in a messy bun on top of my head and my curls were a rat's nest. Ryder was probably thankful that he dodged a bullet. I expected to be out of there in no time.

But then the bomb dropped. The shoe fell, and Ryder found out that he was a father. All I had been able to do was shake my head and say "yes." The look of shock on his face, for some reason, made me feel as if I had done something wrong. But I know I

haven't. I've done everything right. I also knew in that moment, that he was going to claim his son. A possessive alpha male like Ryder doesn't let things sit. He was here for Mattie.

So what do I do now? Am I going to lose my son to his father? Or can we figure out some situation that works for all three of us? After all, Ryder is a traveling doctor, so he can't possibly take a baby on the road with him. Yet, staying in a small town like Farmington is his ultimate nightmare. So where do we go from here?

My fingers loosened on the steering wheel and I let them drop to my lap. I stared out the window of the car at the tree in front of me as nerves shot through my body. I don't like surprises, and yet I realized right then and there my life was about to change dramatically.

25

Ryder

I won't lie, I was incredibly nervous. I was still battling the realization that I have a son. A little boy, who from pictures, looked exactly like me. Sure, it was unexpected, but there was no way I was turning my back on that little boy. All kinds of emotions ran through me. I was angry at myself, I was upset with Abby, I was shocked, and I was excited all at the same time. It was incredibly confusing.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

After work I didn't stick around. I cleaned up and gathered my things and headed over to the address that Abby texted me. When I pulled up at the house, I was a little bit shocked to see where they lived. It was an older part of town, and I could tell it was the poorer part of town as well. The house itself was a large brick building with older fixtures and rusty metal railings running up to the front door. I wasn't judging, and yet my heart fell seeing these environs.

Goddammit. I was going to fix this immediately. I already wanted to sweep Abby and Matthew up and bring them somewhere nice to live, with me. But how would that happen? I couldn't just come barreling in and take them from everything they knew. So how would this work?

I climbed the stairs over the garage. This was where Abby lived? Over the garage? Wouldn't my son be poisoned from car exhaust fumes? Resolute, I kept my thoughts to myself. I just had to hold my child in my arms for the first time.

I chuckled at myself, not out of humor, but out of pure shock. I still couldn't believe I had a little boy. There was a small part of me that for the tiniest moment, questioned whether the boy was actually mine. Any number of things could have happened in this past year, and I'm a cynic. But as soon as the door opened and I looked at that little boy in Abby's arms, I knew that Mattie was mine. Part of it was gut instinct, the connection I immediately felt with the baby. But the other part was the undeniable physical attributes that we both shared.

The boy had thick black hair, standing on end, just like mine used to do when I was a baby. And his blue eyes were striking. It was like looking into a mirror, albeit his gaze was much more innocent. I did see Abby in him too. The little nose, the rosy

cheeks, and the contented, peaceful aura to him. That had Abby written all over it.

Mattie seemed to know that I was his father. He cooed with excitement, and as I reached for him, a small giggle arose and he was more than happy to come into my arms. I couldn't even make it into the apartment without holding him close to me. The little boy was a warm weight in my arms, and as I gazed into his eyes, I fell in love. My heart spun, then plummeted, and I knew I was head over heels.

"We'll don't stand out in the hall," Abby said. "Come on in."

I glanced up, realizing I was still in the hallway. I walked inside holding Mattie, absolutely enamored. I heard her close the door behind us but it didn't take away my absolute awe and shock at the little human staring back at me. I put my hand up and wiggled my finger. He reached up and grasped it tightly, giggling. I laughed and looked up at Abby who was standing there with her arms crossed, tears in her eyes.

I looked back at the little boy and my emotions grew turbulent. Thinking back, it wasn't anger at Abby, but that's how it must have sounded.

"Why didn't you get a hold of me and tell me that you were pregnant with my child?" came my rough accusation.

Her eyes shifted up and the glaze of tears dried quickly. I could almost see her personality change in an instant. I knew in that moment I had said the wrong thing, but it was too late. The words were out, and I couldn't take them back.

Abby tilted her chin up and gripped her hands next to her sides.

"I tried to get in touch with you. But if you remember correctly, you changed your phone number and my emails bounced back too. You didn't tell me you were leaving, nor did you tell me where you were going. I tried to ask Dr. McNamara's office but

they wouldn't release your personal information and I have no idea what staffing agency books you. You made it kind of difficult to get a hold of you."

I lowered my voice and stared at her.

"Did you tell Dr. McNamara's office you were having my baby? I'm sure they would have found some way to get a message to me."

She rolled her eyes and shook her head. "No of course I didn't. Who would do that? Um, I'm having a baby that was conceived on this very exam table? You'd lose your medical license in about two seconds."

I nodded letting out a deep breath. The girl was smart and I was really grateful for that.

"I absolutely violated medical ethics, you're right, and that's on me. And I appreciate your quick thinking because most women in your position wouldn't even have been able to anticipate the consequences. I just never in my wildest dreams thought that something like this would happen."

She stared at me and I could see the anger building inside of her. I was almost afraid to continue talking but she had it for me.

"You never thought I might get pregnant? Even though we never used contraception, and I was a virgin that first time?"

I looked down at Mattie, who cooed happily while gnawing on his hand. I took a deep breath, trying to keep my voice calm.

"No, I didn't think of it because you're not the type of woman I usually date."

“Oh really?” she snapped. “And what is that woman like?”

I shrugged.

“She’s usually older. She’s been sexually active since she was fifteen, and has been on contraceptives for twenty years. Usually, she doesn’t even want kids, so that’s not an issue. I swear, Abby. Even if it sounds dumb in retrospect, I never thought that you might get pregnant.”

The woman looks like she’s about to kill me, but then she takes a deep breath, calming herself. I made use of the small pause.

“And he’s beautiful, Abigail. Mattie is absolutely perfect, and I wanted to say thank you for having my child. It couldn’t have been easy.”

She looks down, her cheeks growing red. I press my advantage.

“And you’ve made this apartment look really nice. I can tell that he has toys and everything that he needs. When you said that you had a baby, it never ran through my mind that I thought you would be a bad mother. I wouldneverthink that about you. You’re too kind and too sweet, and I’m sure you’re probably one of the best mothers out there.”

My eyes shifted up toward her to see what her reaction was, hoping my words at least soothed some of the hurt. However, Abby’s emotions were flickering back and forth, and when she looked up, I could see the fire had been lit again. Hell, I deserved it.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“Why did you ditch me?” she asked through gritted teeth, careful to keep her tone calm so as not to alarm the baby. “I came to your apartment just to say hello and I had to be told by the old lady next door that you had moved out that morning. You didn’t even have the balls to tell me yourself. I would have understood. I would have been disappointed yes, but I wasn’t going to embarrass you with some teary goodbye. But you didn’t even bother to say goodbye. It was so damn selfish of you.”

I opened my mouth to talk but then closed it again. I could tell she didn’t want to hear my excuses. She needed to get it all out, and she had every right to. She began to pace the floor and I stood there holding Mattie close to me.

“You basically ghosted me. You are a grown adult and you ghosted me. Who does that? You literally changed your cell phone number like I was some weird stalker. And it’s not like you have a social media presence for me to stay in contact with you. How in the hell was I supposed to get a hold of you? Did you think that magically everything would be okay? Did you think you could come back here and act like nothing ever happened? I didn’t do anything wrong, Ryder. You are the one who did everything wrong. You can’t treat people like that.”

My head hung and I felt absolutely terrible.

“I know what I did was wrong. It was just part of my lifestyle at the time, and I felt horrible about it from the moment I did it. I’ve never had well ... feelings before. And over the last year I’ve completely changed because I can’t even look at another woman without thinking of you. I don’t go out to bars anymore, I don’t date anyone while I’m out, and all I think about is you.”

Her face showed me she wasn't impressed with my changes.

“Oh really? Am I supposed to give you a gold star for that? Is that supposed to make me feel better? That you got your life together and realized you had done wrong? So, if you realized all that, then why didn't you get a hold of me? Why didn't you reach out to me and tell me that you were sorry, even if you weren't ready for a relationship? That would have been the decent thing to do, especially after you treated me that way.”

I nodded. “I understand everything you're saying and I agree. And I don't have any excuses. But Abby, what I'm saying is real. I really do care about you, and as a result, my emotions were thrown for a loop. Out of all the places I've been, and all the women I've met, I've never felt bad about leaving. Not once. This was the first time that I felt something, and I admit, I behaved boorishly because of it.”

She gaped at me.

“So you felt emotions, and as a result, became an ass? How does that even make sense? Was it some sort of pride thing? You could have said something like, “Hey, I'm taking some time off to think,” and none of this would've been an issue.”

I shook my head not even knowing what to say really. I just kept repeating myself.

“I know. I know. Like I said, it was just part of my lifestyle back then, and I never thought this would happen.”

Abby was incensed. Her face had gone beet red and her voice was steadily rising in tone. She was trying desperately hard to hold back, and to refrain from yelling at me in front of the baby.

“So, let me try again, just so that I fully understand what you're saying. You cared

about me, but because this was all new to you, you decided to be an asshole?”

I stared at her for a moment and then nodded my head, ashamed of what I was admitting. I had never thought about it like that before. I thought of myself as a man going through a sensitive and emotional time, but in reality, I was a coward.

“I’m sorry, Abby,” I said in a low voice. “I know how this sounds, and it’s bad. But it’s true, and when I finished sorting through my emotional mess, I realized I’d fucked up. But by then, it was too late, and I didn’t know how to fix it. It was messed up, maybe I’m messed up, but I know that what I did was wrong. I don’t know how to make up for it.”

She stomped her foot angrily. “You can’t make up for it. You can’t make up for doing something like that to somebody you care about. There is no going back in situations like this. For the rest of our lives, I will remember that that happened. No matter how well we do at co-parenting, I will remember what it felt like to be ghosted by a man who left me pregnant.”

I stood there, my heart breaking in my chest. I did this to her, and I deserved the verbal beating. In fact, I deserved so much worse than what she was giving me, and the sorrow and anger in Abby’s expression only increased my resolve to make this right somehow. But how? She hated me, and it wasn’t clear that we could ever find a path to be together again.

26

Abby

I don’t think I’ve ever been this furious in my entire life. I managed to stay calm for a year, but having Ryder before me now made my blood boil. How could he? How could he say he was “emotionally lost” and “should have known better”? What grown

man says those things?

I lost all control of my voice and began to scream. Of course, that made Mattie cry which made the situation even worse. I managed to wrest Mattie away from his father and soothed my little boy before putting him in his crib for a quick nap. Fortunately, Mattie settled immediately and was soon sound asleep with a thumb in his mouth.

But that still left the problem of Ryder. I stalked back to the living room with a tense jaw and my hands balled into fists. I paced the floor not knowing what to do with myself. I whipped around and pointed at him.

“How could you do this to us?” I said through gritted teeth. “You knew that we didn’t always use protection. You knew that! It doesn’t take a genius to know how a baby is made. Maybe you should’ve thought about the fact that I could’ve ended up pregnant. You’re a doctor, for Christ’s sake! You should have left me with a way to get a hold of you just in case I ended up pregnant. What MD does that?”

Of course, we’d already discussed this, but my rage knew no bounds. I was going to keep bringing up the same subjects again and again, and he’d have to defend himself again and again. Ryder started to talk but I threw my hand up, cutting him off.

“No. You’re going to listen to what I have to say. There are teenagers out there that are more responsible when it comes to sex. Sure, not using protection was partly my fault as well, but leaving me completely helpless without any knowledge of where you were or if I would ever even see you again? Well, that’s on you. That’s you acting like you’re a seventeen-year-old boy running around sticking his... his...thing in anything that would accept it. You didn’t think about any repercussions. You only thought about yourself.”

I jerked a thumb at Mattie’s room. “Well, now look at the repercussions. You can be angry that you missed out on the first few months of our child’s life all you want to,

but the only person that falls on is you.”

I could see the shame on his face as he listened to my rant. I breathed heavily, not even knowing what else to say at that point. There really wasn't anything else, to be honest. He left me and Mattie, and now had the audacity to come back and act like everything would be fine. His baby deserved way better than that. I deserved way better than that.

My whole life, I've always taken the short end of the stick. I always volunteered to give up my seat for someone else, and to give others the advantage. But that wasn't going to be the case anymore. Ryder taught me a very important lesson, and it was that I am worth it. I am a real human being, and I deserve to be heard and treated with respect.

I stopped and took a deep breath, putting my hand on my stomach while trying to calm my nerves. Mattie woke up in the next room and started squalling. With the baby so upset, my agony only increased, but I did nothing. Instead, Ryder went in to fetch Mattie and returned with our screaming, red-faced boy in his arms. Good. I spent many, many nights holding a colicky baby in frustration, and his father could experience it for a couple minutes longer.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

But then Ryder took me by surprise. While stroking Mattie's back, he managed to say, "You know, I didn't completely cut you off. I did write you a letter. If it was so important, why didn't you reply to me? It had my PO Box on there and I would've gotten it no matter where I was. I always update my forwarding address every time I move to a new location, and sometimes my sister checks my mail for me too."

Exhausted from all the twists and turns and bullshit I was listening to, I turned and gaped at him.

"A letter? What are you even talking about?"

He became defiant.

"A letter, you know, how you sit down and write a letter to someone? Not an email, not a text message, but an actual letter. I wrote it and put it in an envelope and stamped it and sent it to the address that you had on your medical records."

I rubbed my hands over my face and let out a long sigh. Had it really come to this? Was he really making things up now? Putting my hands on my hips I gave him a stern look.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Yes, I know what a letter is. I'm not an idiot. But I never received a letter, and I'm sure about that. Besides, who writes letters anymore? It's not 1935. If you wanted me to know something so badly why didn't you send me an email or text message? That would have been a lot more effective than some mystical letter that I never received."

I could tell my attitude was starting to irritate the shit out of the doctor, but I really didn't care. He shook his head.

"I write letters. I find it cathartic to put pen to paper, so sometimes I do things the old-fashioned way, even if it sounds weird. In fact, I still write in my journal on a day-to-day basis because it helps clear my mind. If you'd like to see that, I'd be more than happy to show you that my journal exists."

I stared at him for a moment, unsure if he was being sarcastic or not. What the hell? What hunky, alpha male doctor writes in a journal, for crying out loud? I shook my head and walked over to the counter before grabbing a baby bottle to start making up some formula for Mattie.

"I don't think you wrote a letter. I think what's happening here is that you're making it up so that you can save face. After all, you ghosted both of us. You ghosted your only son and now you feel bad about it, so you're trying to get out of it by saying you wrote some sort of letter to me."

I slammed my hand down on the counter.

"Just be honest, Ryder. You didn't contact me because you didn't care. I don't want to hear the stories about how much you've changed and how much I affected you. Obviously, I didn't affect you enough for you to come here and to be honest. It's absolutely ridiculous that I have to sort through lies now. At least when you were honest, I knew what was going on, even if it was harsh."

Ryder bounced Mattie slightly in his arms to try to calm him, and the baby sniffled a bit. Then Ryder looked up at me with desperation.

"I'm not lying to you, Abby. I'm telling the honest truth here. I sat down, not even that long after I had left, and wrote you a letter. Granted, I only wrote you one, but I

included my new contact info in case you wanted to get in touch with me. All the information was in that letter. I should've taken a picture of it or something."

I rolled my eyes and continued making the bottle. Maybe he did write me a letter, and maybe it mysteriously got lost in the mail, but I had a hard time believing that he was that unlucky. Ryder turned away in frustration.

"I can see this whole conversation is pointless. The damage has been done, and I guess it's too late. I'm telling you the honest truth though, Abby, I wrote you a letter to give you all of my contact information."

I looked at him and calmly said my last piece.

"If you sent me a letter, then why didn't you mention it earlier?"

He looked at me flabbergasted.

"Earlier than what? We just met up again today."

I shrugged, being stubborn.

"You could have told me at the doctor's office."

Ryder looked ready to come apart with rage now.

"Look, so many things have been happening that I forgot about it until now, okay? I just discovered that I have a son. I'm sorry that I didn't remember the letter until now. I've been in a very emotional state, and I guess, when it comes to you, I don't always use my brain."

I shook Mattie's bottle and walked over, taking him from Ryder. I kissed his forehead

and put him against my body bouncing slightly up and down to try to calm him. Within a few seconds of hearing my heartbeat, he quieted down. He only had the remnants of hiccups, and after his hiccups slowed, I turned him over and began to feed him.

Looking up at Ryder, I shook my head.

“With you, it’s always about your emotional state. When does it stop being about you, and start being about us? I’m tired, Ryder. You can come here, hold Mattie, and feel the awe of having a child. But it takes love and dedication on a daily basis to be able raise a child. Plus, he’s not yours or mine because he’s a person. A person that I love with everything in my body.”

My heart was breaking all over again, but the anger had subsided. I walked over and sat down on the couch holding Mattie close to me as he drank his bottle. Then I looked up again.

“Not only that, but if you’re always going through emotional problems, are you really ready to be a dad? I mean, this has been all about your emotional turmoil, your change of heart, and your realizations. When does it become about us? Having a child means that you put Mattie first, not yourself. Are you ready for that?”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

Ryder made a strange choking sound, but I didn't bother to look at him. Instead, looking down at Mattie's beautiful eyes, I no longer saw Dr. Rivington. I saw my son, a completely separate person, a baby that needed me to stay strong. He needed me to be tough and to do my best by him. Sure, his dad was back, but were we ready to jump into the frying pan again? I didn't think so after hearing these weird declarations about a missing letter sent by snail mail.

After all, when it came to my son, I was a protective mama bear. I wanted to protect Mattie from everything that could hurt him, and that included his own father, if it came to that. I no longer knew if I wanted Ryder to be part of Mattie's life, especially if he was just going to get up one day and leave, and then lie about it. No child deserves that kind of treatment.

I glanced up at him. "You know, all this time you've been gone, I justified it in my head. I thought there must have been some good reason for your absence. But I realize now I didn't do my son any favors by thinking that way because you'll do the same thing to him. When the hard times come once again, Ryder, what are you going to do? Are you going to leave and blame it on your heightened emotional state? Are you going to go running? What happens to Mattie then?"

He stood there staring at me, with a shocked look. I could see tears forming in his gaze, and it touched me, but I had to force myself not to say anything. Ryder's tears wouldn't save him at that point, and frankly, I didn't know if there was anything that could save him. At least not with me, that is.

I gritted my teeth as he walked toward me and dropped down on his knees. He put his hand on my leg and looked up at me like a lost puppy before bowing his head.

“I’m sorry, Abby. All this time, I had all these feelings for you, but I didn’t really know what I wanted. But standing here watching you with our son, cuddling him, I know exactly what I want.”

I lifted my eyebrows.

“Oh yeah? And what’s that?”

He bit his bottom lip and tightened his hand on my leg. His voice wavered as he spoke, and it was hard not to feel emotional myself.

“I want to work it out with you, Abby. I’ve been thinking of you nonstop for the last year, and I want you and Mattie in my life.”

I stared at him for several seconds, trying to contemplate which way to take the conversation. Part of me wanted to collapse into his lap and tell him yes, absolutely. It would make everything so much simpler. But how could I forget everything that had happened? How could I forget what he said today, and his blatant disrespect for his child’s mother? How do I get past the pain?

Staring at him, I sensed that it wasn’t possible, at least not now. And I had to make a decision based on what was best for our son, and not for me. My face stayed hard like a stone and I looked away from Ryder and down at Mattie.

“I want you to leave,” I whispered. “Please go.”

A lump formed in my throat and tears bubbled up in my eyes. But it was better this way. Dr. Rivington was a confused man, and until he got his head on straight, it was better for me and his son to keep our distance.

I felt him release my leg and I lowered my head, hiding the tears that were already

trickling down my cheeks. His footsteps moved toward the door and I jumped slightly as he opened it, before closing it behind him.

Then, I was alone, clutching a baby. I looked down at Mattie.

“You and me, okay big guy? Mommy will always be by your side.”

My son cooed and gurgled, but inside, my heart broke all over again because Ryder had come home, and yet I couldn't let him back into my heart.

27

Abby

The next day I felt like hell, like I had been through a war. I guess, in a way, I had, seeing the massive dust-up with Ryder. It felt useless to sit around the house, moping. As a result, I gathered up Mattie's things and wandered across the way to my mom's house, knowing that Belinda would give her grandson all the attention in the world. I wasn't even sure if I was ready to talk to her about what had happened, to be honest. Hopefully, I could take a deep breath and let things simmer in my mind for a while.

After all, Belinda had been furious when I told her I was pregnant, and that Ryder had left town. She was disappointed in me, sure, because this is exactly what happened to her so long ago. But when she saw me take responsibility, and begin doing whatever I had to do to take care of my son, she relented and began to pitch in. I was thankful. I really needed my mother, and I was glad to have someone on my side.

After all, my mom loves us. I didn't even realize the extent of her love until I held Matthew in my arms for the first time. My heart was overwhelmed and swelling, and I knew for the first time, what it was like to be a parent. This kind of love is unconditional, and I knew that I would do anything for my boy.

As a result, I wanted my mom to know how much I appreciated her and all the sacrifices she made to raise Melody and me as a single mom. It couldn't have been easy, and now that I'm a single mom myself, it only made her love and generosity more apparent.

As I strode across the driveway, I realized that my mom's car wasn't there. Hmm. I hadn't even thought about calling to see if she was going to be home. But then again, Belinda was probably at work, still trying to save up enough money so that Melody could go to any college she wanted to. My mom had offered to give me some money for the baby, but I told her to give it to my sister. My sister would feel resentful if she saw me and the baby getting extra, so it was better to be excruciatingly fair.

I went into the house anyways, and found Melody sitting in the kitchen. Mattie was sound asleep in his carrier so I set it down on the floor and covered him up with a blanket. Melody barely looked at me when I walked in, but she leaned and stared at my son sleeping.

"He's cute," she managed in a grudging voice. At least my sister loved the baby. After all, I made a huge deal out of her being an aunt, trying to make my sister feel special when all the focus was on me and my pregnancy. I could tell Melody liked having the title, and I was pretty sure that that alone was what changed her mind about the baby. Yet, she never held him. The only time I could remember her taking him into her arms was in the hospital when he was a newborn.

I didn't let it bother me though, because Melody has changed a lot in the past year. Somehow, she's lost a lot of weight, which is good in some respects. It's just scary to see her subsisting on diet shakes and bananas. Plus, she continued to lose weight to the point where she was looking extremely thin. When she wore a crop top, I could see her ribs poking out. She looked strung out like an emaciated Barbie doll. Of course, I knew better than to tell Melody my thoughts. With me being thirty pounds heavier than before, she would just say I was jealous.

Yet with her weight loss came a lot of other changes too. For some reason, she bleached her hair platinum blonde and started dressing sexy. Personally, I thought her hair look absolutely awful. She bleached it herself, and it had burned her hair to the texture of straw. It looked almost like she was wearing a really cheap wig, but I didn't tell her that, because she seemed to absolutely love it. Plus, I knew that my opinion didn't matter to her in the least. She would have told me that I was jealous, which absolutely was not the case.

There wasn't a single thing about my sister that I was jealous about. Melody had no aspirations, no hopes for her future, and no motivation. Even though I had no idea what her dating life was like, I suspected she was attracting the wrong type of guy with her new look and crass attitude. Of course, I said nothing about this. After all, Melody would just turn on me.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I walked over to the refrigerator and grabbed a bottle of water out of the fridge. “When’s Mom getting home?”

My sister sighed.

“Hell if I know. Why don’t you call her and ask?”

I held my tongue over her negative attitude. Over the last year our relationship, which obviously had never been great, deteriorated even more. Melody had never been very supportive of my pregnancy, and at one point actually gloated about the fact that I was going to become a single mother.

She thought she was so much better than me, but that wasn’t even what bothered me the most. What bothered me was the fact that she only felt good about herself by putting other people down. Who does that? Nor was I the only victim, I was merely the most convenient one. Melody knew I didn’t like confrontation, and she knew I didn’t want to put stress on our mother, so she knew she could pretty much say whatever she wanted without me returning fire. She was one of the most pathetic people I had ever met, and the fact that she was my sister was becoming less and less relevant as the days went on.

But I held my tongue again. I looked at her outfit, which consisted of a pair of leather short shorts, and a top held up in the back by just a single string. Her straw like blonde hair was flipped to the side and she wore very heavy makeup.

“Are you going out?” I asked in a civil tone.

She didn't look up at me. "Yeah, I can't just sit around here all the time."

"What about Derek?" I asked.

After all, Melody was now going out with Derek McHutt, the very guy she said had been obsessing over me forever. I wasn't interested, seeing that I had just been pregnant and given birth to a baby. The last thing I wanted was a relationship with a man.

"Please, I only dated him for a few weeks." She snickered at the thought. "I had to dump him and fast. He was so lame. Besides, I have much bigger fish to fry and I don't want to be tied down."

I lifted both eyebrows, just staring as she talked. It seems that after she dumped Derek, she became quite the wild child. Evidently, she went out constantly, and usually with a different guy every night. Moreover, Melody even got a job working as a bartender at a strip club. What happened to regular jobs like being a cashier or working at a call center?

"Yeah, I make great tips," she bragged.

I swallowed hard.

"Melody, that place is a dump. The customers are idiots, and your co-workers are strippers. Nothing wrong with that, but can't you be a bartender at a regular place?"

My sister shot me a disgusted look.

"The tips are better because it's a strip club, and please, stop acting like a prude. It's like you're eighty years old, Abby. Just because you have a baby now doesn't mean that you have to act like you're so high and mighty."

I held my tongue once more, knowing that words were useless. Melody figured that because she wasn't stripping, her job was okay. She was just pouring drinks, albeit doing it in a bikini and five-inch heels. Of course, guys gawked at her and groped her every time she came around the bar, but then again, I was pretty sure she liked the attention.

Melody looked back down at Mattie as he yawned. She smiled at him and then glanced up at me.

"Mattie's really cute. He must take after his father."

I pulled up a chair and sat down. "Thanks. Babies' facial features are indeterminate, so he might look completely different later on in life."

She snickered, clicking her pen. "Yeah well let's hope he takes after his dad."

I rolled my eyes, trying to not respond to her dig. Besides, clearly Melody had no maternal instincts at all. Watching her pull a clean diaper from the box and hold it with two fingers at arm's length was enough to tell me that she should probably never have children. The unfortunate part was, if she didn't grow up, she would most likely end up with several.

My sister took a deep breath and shrugged her shoulders.

"I mean I guess it's better for you than me. You've never been the kind of girl that cared much about her future. I have things to do in my life and I can't imagine being saddled with a baby."

I smiled frigidly.

"You know, you should probably not make comments about things that you have no

idea about. Until you've walked in my shoes. Until you've held that positive pregnancy test in your fingers. Until you've had a relationship that actually means something, you should keep your opinions to yourself. Because I'm going to tell you right now, no one is going to care what you think. You have no experience when it comes to this kind of thing. You have no idea what kind of love there is between a mother and a child. You can't even appreciate the fact that our own mother loves you."

Melody's jaw clenched and she narrowed her eyes at me. She stared at me with hatred for several moments. I could tell I'd really gotten to her. It wasn't very often that I stood up to her, but I was tired of her dissing me with every chance that she got. I get it. I made a mistake. But now I had this beautiful baby, which I didn't regret in the least, and I was tired of hearing it out of her mouth every five seconds. She needed to come up with a new routine.

But then Melody turned away, completely disinterested, and I grew frustrated again. Clearly, my sister just didn't care. She had no emotional feelings toward me, and every time it happened, I swore I would not let it bother me. But every time it happened, it did hurt and stabbed me to my core.

I closed my eyes for a moment and decided to move forward, trying to make conversation with her. After all, we were sisters, and one day I hoped that she would see that our relationship was important.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“So, Ryder Rivington is back in town. He’s filling in for Dr. McNamara while she’s on vacation.”

Melody’s mouth twisted into a smirk. She looked at me and batted her eyelashes.

“Really? That guy was hot! Maybe I’ll get an appointment and we’ll go out on a date. I bet he looks really good without his clothes on. I heard he’s always looking for someone easy because that’s the kind of guy he is. No matter. I’m the kind of girl he’ll come back to Farmington for. Then again, he might not come back just to avoid other people.”

My nostrils flared and it took me a moment to really let what she had just said sink into my brain. Then I had to question myself. Did my little sister really just say that? Did she just hint that she wanted to date the father of my child, while making a dig at me?

Yep. She absolutely did.

28

Abby

It felt like my brain just completely stopped. Melody had done a lot of things to me our entire lives. She has said a lot of hurtful things, and she’s done a lot of hurtful things too, but what she just said was completely beyond the pale. At first, I couldn’t even compute. All I could do was sit there with my mouth wide open. I didn’t even recognize the girl that my sister had become. After a few moments of just staring

at her smug face, I finally gathered my thoughts.

“What?” I asked standing up. “What kind of monster are you? That is the father of my child. Have you really become such a pathetic and insignificant person that you would have to stoop so low to make yourself feel better?”

She tried to talk but I put my hand up, tired of her nastiness. “I don’t know where you got this attitude from, but I can promise you that no one finds it attractive. And these guys, all they’re doing is trying to get one thing out of you because they know you’ll give it up. Melody, how could you even consider going out on a date with Ryder? You know who he is to me, and you know what he did to me and your nephew. Don’t you want what’s best for Mattie? I really feel like you’ve lost your mind.”

Nothing seemed to faze Melody. She didn’t give a crap about the fact that she had just hurt me because all she cared about was herself. And of course, she had to be nasty about it.

“No one wants you anymore, Abby, least of all Ryder. Let him go. I know you’re hung up on him, but please. You’re just history at this point.”

My mouth opened but words wouldn’t come out. Melody continued.

“I might as well date him,” she said with a shrug. “If not me, then who? Plus, didn’t you say he took you on some luxurious vacation last time? Maybe this time he’ll do the same with me. Not to mention that he’s rolling in dough, and maybe he’ll buy me some fancy clothes and jewelry. I have that kind of effect on men, you know. When they’re around me, all they want to do is spoil me because they know I’m worth it.”

I blinked several times staring at her, wondering if she was ever going to shut up. Finally, I collected my thoughts.

“And what exactly makes you think that? Because they tell you how fabulous you are? Have you ever thought that maybe it’s because they’re just trying to get in your pants? I mean, I don’t know why they would go to all the trouble to tell you those things. It’s not like you won’t give it up anyway.”

Melody laughed right in my face.

“Look, just because you fucked-up and are now a single mother doesn’t mean the rest of us are going to make the same mistakes you made. It also doesn’t make the rest of us whores like you. So if you wouldn’t mind, stop projecting your insecurities on me. There are actual women out there who have a modicum of self-respect. You probably should’ve thought about that before you went spreading your legs for just anyone. It’s not like I didn’t try to warn you about him. The difference is, I know what he’s after, and I know what I can get from him.”

I was completely astonished. I had no idea that my sister had this calculating, mercenary streak in her. I had no idea that this kind of malice lurked within. Not only did she have zero self-respect, but she had no respect for me as her sister. She was a hateful little thing, and I wondered how we were even related. My mother never raised us to be like this.

Gripping the back of the chair, I looked down and realized that I was shaking. This time, it was warranted. I was trying desperately to figure out what to say back to my sister. I could be nasty, and I could continue to put her down, but that would do nothing but fuel her fire. Melody was immune to my barbs, and it would probably only cause her to attack even more viciously.

I opened up a bottle of water and took a sip, trying to calm my nerves. Between the conversation with Ryder the night before and now this, I was starting to think I was losing my mind. In fact, it felt like the whole world was losing its mind.

Suddenly, my thoughts stopped in their tracks. Ryder said he sent a letter to the address listed in my medical records, but I only moved into my apartment a year ago. Before that, I was living here with my mom. It's not a big deal because we live in the same complex, but still. Did the letter come here, and not to my apartment?

My eyes flickered up to Melody, who was lazily scrolling through her phone. That was when the realization hit me. Oh god, no. Please don't let it be true, but the roiling in my gut told me otherwise.

Could my sister have hidden Ryder's letter from me?

I thought about it carefully and then decided that I needed to know the answer.

"Melody, have you ever, in the last year, received a letter to this house written by Ryder and addressed to me?"

I watched my sister very carefully to see if she'd lie. After all, it's a habit of hers, formed when she was a small child. She couldn't help herself. When she was little she lied about small things, but as she got older her lies grew bigger. It wasn't until she reached her late teens that she realized lies needed to be believable. But still, anytime she lied, I knew it. As her sister, I could always tell.

Her finger stopped momentarily on the phone but she didn't look up. She shrugged her shoulders and shook her head.

"No. I'm the one who checks the mail every day, but I don't recall ever seeing anything like that. I'm pretty sure we would have seen it. God knows you were desperately trying to find him, even though it was very obvious he wanted nothing to do with you. That man ghosted your ass, and I find it hilarious."

I put my hands down on the table very close to her and controlled the tone of my

voice.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“I want you to be very, very clear in your answer to me. I’m going to ask you this question only one more time, and if you lie to me, I will know. I can promise you that this new Abby has zero patience for liars, cheaters, and people who don’t treat me with the kind of respect that I deserve. I’m not afraid of you Melody, and I’m not afraid to make your life a living hell. So let me ask you one last time: did you receive a letter postmarked from Ryder and addressed to me?”

Her finger paused again and she shot me a disgusted look. “Are you deaf? I told you no.”

I watched her lip as it twitched slightly. Then her right eyebrow rocketed upwards, and I knew right away she was lying. The one thing she could never do was look somebody in the eye and keep a straight face, especially when she was telling a lie that she really wanted to hide.

I leaned back, shocked. I didn’t want to believe it was true, yet Melody’s tells were too obvious. There could only be one conclusion. I took a deep breath, and I stood up slowly while scooting Mattie out of the way. I didn’t want under any circumstances for my sister to flip out and accidentally trip over my child.

I glanced up to make sure that Melody wasn’t looking at me and then with a quick movement I took off, running down the hall to Melody’s room. I knew there was a shoebox beneath her bed. I knew that’s where she hid everything, from her childhood letters to her gold heart locket.

What she didn’t realize is that I had found her secret stash years before but never said anything about it because I knew that she needed some privacy. But really, a shoebox

under her bed? It was obvious. I was starting to wonder if she wasn't dropped on her head as a baby.

I rushed inside and slammed the door shut, trying to buy myself at least a couple seconds to grab the box out from underneath the bed. I could hear Melody stomping down the hallway screaming at the top of her lungs.

"Get out of my room! You have no right to go in there! So, help me God, if you're touching any of my stuff, I will beat the hell out of you. I don't care if you're my sister or not!"

Judging from her tone, things were about to get violent. But I had a feeling deep in my gut that my sister was lying, and had hidden the letter in her special box. Could it be? My mom always wanted us to get along, but this time, Melody's depravities had gone too far. What would cause her to act this way? We had the same childhood, but I didn't turn out to be a masochist. Now, my sister was hateful and vicious. I didn't know if she had a mental issue or if she was on some sort of drug, but she clearly didn't give a shit about anyone else's health or happiness.

I bent down and grabbed the shoebox just as she barged through the door. I threw the top at her to slow her down and sure enough, sitting right there in front of me was a letter addressed to me from Ryder. Melody stopped in her tracks, her face a mixture of horror and anger. I put my fingers around the envelope and dropped the rest of the box on the floor, its contents scattering. All I could do was stand there and stare at the envelope.

"How could you?" I managed in a tearful tone. "When you knew how much I was hurting?"

Everything I had hoped for my sister went down the drain. It was true. Melody really was that bad. She had the letter and seeing that the envelope was open and the

paper was wrinkled, she had obviously read it and cackled with glee over my misery.

A barrage of emotions ran through my mind. My chest felt tight and I couldn't even bring myself to look over at my sister. I was so ashamed to even know her. It was one thing if she was protecting me, but she wasn't. She was trying to hurt me, and in doing so, she was hurting my son.

How could my own sister betray me like this? And what did this mean for Ryder, the baby, and our lives going forward?

29

Abby

Both of us stood there, breathless, staring at the letter that was in my hand. My eyes shifted toward her, and I knew she wasn't done. Melody lunged at me and I held the letter out of her reach, thrusting my other hand straight into her chest. I shoved her hard, with tears flooding down my face. Unfortunately, Melody was angry. She came right back and charged me, but I was stronger and heavier than her.

Reaching back with my left hand I slapped her hard across the face, knocking her to the ground. She looked at me wildly, holding her cheek. I pointed and gritted my teeth.

“Get down on the ground and stay down or I will knock you unconscious.”

She clasped her cheek, looking at me with wild eyes while huddling on the floor. All I knew in that moment was that I was so angry I didn't even trust myself. Had she made another move, I was pretty sure I would've knocked her through the wall. All I could think about was this huge mess we were in. Ryder, writing the letter but hearing nothing in return. Me, thinking he'd ghosted me when he'd actually tried to

reach out. And most of all, our son, with his parents rent apart.

Slowly, Melody got to her feet and backed up with her hands in the air.

“I won’t touch you,” she whispered with fear in her eyes.

I stared while putting the letter in my pocket. There was no way she was ever getting it back. There is no way she was ever getting me back, or building a relationship with my son. That was very obvious.

Still, I wanted answers. I shook my head and stared at her.

“Why? Why would you do this to me? I have been your sister your whole life. When you were little, I took care of you. When you were scared, I let you sleep in my bed. When you didn’t understand why Daddy left us, I was there to dry your tears. I dealt with every bit of your teenage angst, including when you were rude and abrupt. I dealt with the fact that you thought you were better than everyone else, and that you are spoiled and selfish even today. But this is going beyond the pale. Why, Melody?”

My heart was broken, and any faith I had was long gone. Meanwhile, my sister was a piece of work. She sneered at me and spit blood onto the floor.

“You deserve it, bitch. You deserve every single bit of it. You deserved never to find that letter and to live the rest of your life in agony. Your son is collateral damage and you can thank yourself for that.”

I wrinkled my forehead and shook my head wildly.

“What you talking about? Why do I deserve this? I’ve never done anything to you.”

Melody’s lip curled and she gritted her teeth. I took a stance, ready just in case she

tried to charge me again. I could see the anger and hate bubbling inside her.

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

“You might not have done anything to me directly, but indirectly you’ve ruined my life,” she spat with a hateful look in her eyes. “You always got all of the attention. Everyone liked you, and it’s not fair.”

I didn’t know what she was talking about. I’ve been unpopular my entire life, and a wallflower when it came to dating and men. But Melody went on, obviously having built up this anger for years.

“Mom likes you better. You were smart and she thought that I was just silly. Everyone likes you better. Meanwhile, they think I’m a joke because next to you, how could I ever even compete? All the boys wanted to date you.”

I stood listening to her with disbelief.

“Melody, I don’t know what you’re talking about. No one ever liked me better. I was always an outcast. I was always the girl that was quiet and read books. How can you say that?”

Melody stood up straight and shrugged her shoulders sinking back into her unfeeling persona.

“Because even though we were both fat, all the boys liked you. Sure, you didn’t go out on dates, but that was because you were clueless and couldn’t even tell that they liked you. It was ridiculous. Even when you got huge, people still wanted to date you, like that stupid Derek McHutt. You were nine months pregnant, and he was still asking about you! What the hell? Why didn’t he want me?”

I blinked at Melody, not really sure what she was talking about. I'd had little to no contact with Derek in the past year, and he certainly never reached out to me. But somehow, my sister had gotten it in her head that I was thwarting her in some way when it came to dating. I took a deep breath.

"Melody, you're wrong. Until Ryder, there wasn't a single boy that was interested in me. I never got asked out on dates. In fact, I was a virgin until I met Ryder. I feel like you're seeing something that's not real."

Melody stomped her foot and grew red in the face.

"You're wrong! Everyone liked you and it's not fair!" She lost it right then and there and began screaming incessantly at the top of her lungs. "It's not fair! It's not fair! It's not fair!"

I stepped back, slightly frightened by how worked up she was. She seemed like she was losing it, so I waved my hands in the air trying to calm her down.

"Melody think about it. Boys weren't interested in me. Not then or now."

My sister grunted, still red-faced and emitting spittle. "Oh yeah? What about Derek? He liked you."

I scoffed and shook my head. "That's nothing, and you know nothing ever happened with Derek. If he asked a couple questions about me, then so what? It was because he knew I was pregnant and alone, and that the father had left town. It wasn't because he was interested."

I paused, taking a deep breath.

"What's gotten you like this? You're seeing things that aren't even there. You're

imagining that you're a victim of some sort, when no one's out to get you. I'm not trying to prove anything. Mom's not trying to prove anything. No one is out to hurt you, Melody, so why are you acting like this?"

But my sister just couldn't listen to reason. She'd worked herself up into a state where nothing made sense.

"That's bullshit! Everyone likes you, even when it's not romantic. I'm super nice to the people I work with, but they still don't like me. No one cares whether I come to work or not. No one cares if something big is going on in my life. I don't have a single friend."

I took a deep breath, looking her straight in the eye.

"Melody, you can't expect to meet real friends working at a strip club," I pointed out. "It's not you that is the problem. It's the type of business that makes it impossible. Half the girls at that strip club are junkies, and the other half you wouldn't want to be friends with because you would never be able to trust them. The people at my work are all family people. We're friendly with one another because we're that type of crowd."

She scoffed and threw her hands in the air. Then, she turned around and walked toward the wall before punching it hard. Bending over in agony while clutching her fist, she flipped her head back up and literally snarled at me like an animal. Her teeth were bared, and there was venom in her eyes.

"You think you're so special, Abby. You think your son is so special. Why? Because you fell in love with a doctor? Because you're going to get out of Farmington? Think again, bitch. You know nothing."

I took in a deep breath and shook my head.

“You’re right, I no longer know anything about you, Melody. And to be completely honest, I have no interest in knowing anything else about you anymore. You’ve betrayed my trust. You’ve gone against everything that Mom taught us. You’re fighting with me today because you think you’ve been dealt a bad hand in life. But that’s false, and you need to grow the hell up before karma catches up with you.”

With that, I shook my head and pushed past her, walking down the hallway toward the kitchen. My heart was heavy in my chest. I wanted to stay and talk to her, to try to calm her down, but the problem was that Melody’s issues ran much deeper. She needed to see a therapist and explore the root cause of her unhappiness with a professional. My words were useless, and I’d be wasting my breath.

With tears in my eyes, I walked back into the kitchen and smiled at Mattie, who was still sound asleep in his seat. I picked it up and made my way out of the house without a second glance. There was no more that I could do for my sister.

Once I was safely back in my own apartment, I carefully put the sleeping Mattie into his crib and covered him with a blanket. Then, I turned off the light and pulled the door almost closed. Back out in the apartment, I grabbed a bottle of water and sat down on the couch.

With trembling hands, I took out Ryder’s letter. Was I ready to read it? Given the turmoil roiling through my chest, I wasn’t sure. But at the same time, I couldn’t put it off forever. With tears in my eyes, I unfolded the paper.

My dearest Abby,

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I hope that this letter finds you well. I'm not very good at small talk so I'm just going to jump into it. From the moment I packed my things in Farmington, I've regretted my actions. The truth is, I don't want to run anymore. I want to be with you, and I want to have a real relationship where we make a life together.

Because how I feel about you is very simple. I love you, and I miss you terribly. I never meant to hurt you, even though I know that's what I've done. My only excuse is that I've never felt this way before. I've never been in love, and finding myself head over heels for the first time threw me for a spin. As a result, I acted like a fool, and did things no man should have done. Can you forgive me?

Maybe you can, or maybe you can't, but at the bottom of this letter, I'm going to include my new contact info in case you want to reach out me. If you don't reply, I'll assume it's because you're not interested in building a life together. It breaks my heart, but I'll accept it. In fact, I'll understand because I would feel the same way if I were in your situation.

But no matter what happens, even if I never see you again, I want you to know that the time I spent with you was magnificent. You are magnificent, Abby. You are a woman in full, and whatever choice you make, know that I will always have you in my thoughts.

Love,

Ryder

When I finished reading, there were tears in my eyes. My heart beat wildly at the

thought of Ryder penning this letter. It was magical, lyrical, and utterly heartfelt. He loves me! But how do I feel in return? Did reading this missive, albeit months late, make a difference? With my pulse pounding in my ears, I only knew one thing. I had to see him to talk about possibilities. Because Ryder is the father of my son, and maybe, just maybe, we have a future together.

30

Ryder

When I got the text from Abby asking to come over, I immediately responded yes. My apartment was kind of messy so I took the time to walk around and pick up any trash or dishes that needed to go into the kitchen. My place was a pigsty because I'd fallen into a bit of a depression, and neglected to clean.

Abby knocked on my door within twenty minutes. I opened it up and invited her in. She looked gorgeous, if a little frazzled.

"Hey, you look upset. Are you okay?"

She hurried inside, setting the baby down in his car seat. Mattie looked like a cherub as he slept peacefully with not a care in the world. Abby glanced around the apartment, puzzled.

"Wait, is this the same place you stayed in last time?" she asked, her brow wrinkling.

I rubbed the back of my neck and nodded wearily. "Yeah, it's the same."

She gave me a quick grin. "Figures. I'm just really glad I didn't have to see the old lady next door because she remembers me, and probably thinks I'm crazy. Not that I blame her." Then she glanced around, looking hesitant.

“Are you okay?” I asked again.

Abby looked at me, biting her lip.

“Kind of, maybe. I can distinctly remember my heart being broken on the front stoop of this building, if you remember. I’d just discovered that you’d left without a word, and well, the memories make me ... I don’t know. Reluctant, I guess.”

I nodded with understanding.

“Listen, I get it. I’m sorry about what happened, and I completely understand if you don’t want to talk, which is why I’m surprised you’re here now. The last time we spoke, I thought we were done. You wanted me to stay away. Did something change?”

Slowly, Abby reached down into her bag and pulled out an envelope before unfolding it. My heart raced. It was the letter I wrote her, and Abby looked sad, and almost heartbroken, while fingering the paper.

“Ryder, I have to apologize. I said a lot of nasty things the last time we were together, accusing you of lying and all sorts of evil motives. Because it turns out that the letter really exists, and I’m so sorry for not believing you. I apologize for being such a bitch, and throwing insults your way while questioning your integrity.”

“Shhhh,” I replied putting my hand over hers. “You don’t need to apologize. I’m the one that owes you an apology and I’m glad you finally got the letter. It took me a while to summon the courage to write it, and to admit how I felt. I never meant to hurt you, and I never meant to leave you alone and pregnant with our child. If I had known, I would have come back in an instant. I never stopped caring about you, sweetheart. I fell in love with you, Abby McAllister, and I have never stopped loving you. Do you hear me? Never.”

I watched as she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. When she opened them, she reached up and put her hand to my cheek in a gentle gesture.

“I understand, Ryder. I had a lot to work through too, including my mistrust and my fear of being abandoned. I had to learn that I deserve respect from people, and not just from you, but from a lot of different people. I had to stop saying things were okay when they weren’t okay.”

Nodding, I took her hands.

“I know, sweetheart, and anything I can do to help you, just let me know because I love you. But let me ask you this: how did you get your hands on the letter? Where has it been?”

Abby took a deep breath and walked over to the couch.

“Do you remember my sister Melody? Well, she was keeping it. She purposefully hid it from me, hoping to keep us apart.”

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I squinted at the beautiful girl.

“But why? It seems so random.”

Abby took another deep breath as tears sprang to her eyes.

“I know, right? She’s never even met you, but evidently, my sister’s had it out for me for a long time. She’s jealous of me for some crazy reason that doesn’t even make sense and wanted to hurt me. When I confronted her, let’s just say it didn’t end well. But what matters is that I was able to find the letter and read it. And Ryder, I’ve missed you so much.”

Hope bloomed in my chest.

“Do you think you can forgive me, Abby? I know it’s a lot to ask, but it would mean the world to me. You and the baby are my world now, and I want to make sure you know it.”

Tears bloomed in Abby’s eyes as she bit her lip.

“I’m not sure, Ryder. I think so, but I can’t say for certain right now because everything is so messed up. With you coming back out of nowhere, this letter, and then the fight with my sister, I literally don’t know what to think anymore. My emotions are on overload, and I feel like I can’t even trust myself to make a decision.”

I reached out and took her other hand, looking her deep in the eyes.

“It’s okay, sweetheart. No matter what happens, even if you never want to see me again, I want you to know that things are going to be fine for you and the child. I want you to know that I’m willing to turn my life upside down to be with you and Matthew. In fact, I resigned from the agency that handles my assignments because I need to see my son more.”

Abby looked up, completely shocked. “What? Ryder, that’s your job. What are you going to do then? Stay here in Farmington? Work at the hospital here?”

I shrugged.

“I guess so. I don’t know yet. I’ve talked to the hospital and they could definitely use some help, but nothing is for certain. It doesn’t matter though because what matters are you and Mattie. My son should know his father, and I’m going to provide for him the way a father should.”

Tears streaked down Abby’s cheeks.

“But what about all that stuff about seeing the world? Traveling and whatnot? Are you really well and done with that?”

I took a deep breath.

“Yes, I think so. During this past year, nothing really had meaning anymore. I did the things I always did: drove my car, took road trips, practiced medicine, and went out. But I didn’t care. It was like I was numb, and nothing made sense without you there with me. I want you to know, Abby - I’m thinking of starting a practice here in Farmington. I talked to my friend Colleen McNamara and she told me that the town is small and could really use another physician. She said that sometimes her patients wait a month just to get in to see her for a cold. So maybe I’ll open my own practice and put down roots.”

Abby looked absolutely shocked.

“Roots? Wait, what? You can open an office by yourself?” she asked. “I mean, of course it’s possible, but I thought you never wanted the responsibility.”

I nodded my head.

“I didn’t for a long time. But things change, sweetheart, and that’s what I’ve been trying to tell you. Nothing is set in stone, except for the fact that I love you, and I love our son. I’m going to do whatever it takes to be a part of Mattie’s life, and even if you never want to see me again, then I’m sorry. But somehow, we’ll co-parent successfully. I know we can do it, Abby, because you’re an amazing woman who deserves the best.”

With that, her tears overflowed.

“I love you Ryder,” she said in a low voice. “You are everything to me as well, but I just need some time to get things figured out, okay? It feels like I’m being hit on all sides with so many new developments that it’s hard for me to even think straight. But I appreciate the sacrifices you’re willing to make, and the changes to your life. We will figure out a way.”

With that, hope blossomed in my chest and I gathered the curvy girl into my arms. She resisted at first, but then I pulled her close, resting my chin on those soft brown curls.

“We’ll find a way, sweetheart. The world was against you before, but now, you always have me on your side. You hear that, sweetheart? You’re not alone anymore. You have me now.”

With that, Abby’s shaking settled a bit, and she let out a big, trembling exhale.

Meanwhile, I pulled her even closer, and my own eyes felt heavy with tears because we came so close to losing it all, but instead, now we're on our way to becoming a family in full.

31

Abby

I can't believe that Ryder loves me. It felt like one of those chick flicks I had been immersing myself in for the last year. Miraculously, an amazingly handsome man had fallen hard for me, and he changed who he was to be with me. Who could have predicted this? But I still had something to say to Ryder.

"Ryder, I want you to know that I never meant to keep Mattie away from you. I just literally couldn't find you. I searched and asked everyone, calling around, and trying to figure out the best way to get a hold of you. If I could have afforded a private investigator, I would've gotten one of those. But there was just no way to find you."

Source Creation Date: August 15, 2025, 7:55 am

I reached out and took her hand while shaking my head.

“I know, sweetheart. It’s because I’m an expert at disappearing. I’ve done it multiple times before, and to my shame, it’s usually because I was trying not to be found. But now that’s all changed. I want to be found by you. I want to stay here, and be with you and our son because you put our son before anything else, and that’s how I know you’re a wonderful mother. You’re the one who’s amazing, sweetheart.”

I felt so happy that I thought I was going to cry.

“But I have to ask, Ryder,” I said in an agonized whisper. “Have you been with other women since you were away? Because you know I haven’t been with anyone. I’ve been pregnant, so it was kind of impossible.”

He took my hands, those blue eyes fierce.

“No, sweetheart. I haven’t touched another woman since you, because I’ve been thinking only of you. Like I said, life had no meaning without you in it. I couldn’t even bring myself to look at another woman, much less go out with one.”

My heart fluttered wildly, and then everything came crashing down. Every emotion that I’d been holding back suddenly burst forth like a waterfall, and I let out a sob while throwing my arms around his neck.

“I love you, Ryder,” was my heartfelt cry. “And I want us to be a family together. I want us to find love again, and to celebrate our son. I don’t want any more pain.”

He pulled me close, stroking my hair before speaking in a choked voice.

“That’s what I want too, Abs, and I know we can have that together. After all, you’ve already given me so much. You’ve given me my son. How could we ever top that?”

I drew back for a moment with tears in my eyes.

“With another baby?”

That made him shout with laughter, looking so handsome that my heart raced.

“I think I’d like that,” he rumbled, pulling me against his chest once more. “You, as the mommy, and me as the dad. Why don’t we give Mattie a few siblings? How many are you thinking? Four? Five?”

But I had a surprise for him up my sleeve.

“I was thinking nine or ten,” I whispered against his bronzed throat. “What do you think?”

Ryder pulled back for a moment, stunned. But then he pressed a heartfelt kiss to my lips, and the passion sizzled between us.

“I think I can make that happen,” he growled, his blue eyes lighting with fire. “As long as we get started sooner rather than later, I think that a dozen children is definitely in the cards.”

With that, our lips joined and our hearts melded into one. After all, the handsome doctor was never supposed to be mine. He was a traveling physician, out to see the world with nary a care in the world. But little did he know, but a sassy, spunky girl from the little town of Farmington would capture his heart.

And who says that people can't change? Ryder has already changed his lifestyle, his goals, his hopes, and his outlook, all for me. Even more, he's embracing the role of father, even though it was one he never anticipated and wasn't even sure he wanted. But Mattie means everything to us, and with more babies in the works, I know our lives will be blissful and filled to the brim with joy.

Epilogue

Ryder

It's crazy what's happened over the course of one year. After all, my life had been somewhat predictable before. I'd been traveling all over the United States, going from place to place, repeating the same things over and over again. It was okay. I'm happy that I was able to see patients and maybe even save some lives, but when I finally stopped and settled in Farmington, I was shocked at the contentment and joy that filled my heart.

After all, I have Abby and Mattie now, and they mean the world to me. So much so, that it was worth the hassle of finding a new career. Initially, my plans were to open my own practice, which would also serve as a clinic for the needier citizens of Farmington. But I was overwhelmed with administrative requirements: there were licenses, insurance, attorneys, boatloads of money, equipment, and a million regulations that threatened to swamp my plans. I was up for it, but then one day, Colleen McNamara asked me to join her practice.

It was almost a no brainer kind of deal. I joined McNamara Health Professionals the next week, purchasing part of the company, and opened up a second location with a health and fitness center inside, and an adjoining wellness clinic devoted to nutrition and maternal fetal medicine.

Not only that, but I even started educating myself about natural remedies like

tinctures and homeopathic medicine. I'm still not sure what I think about these practices yet, but they help me bond with those patients looking for holistic remedies.

But what's even more amazing is my family life. Within two months of settling here, Abby and I bought a five bedroom house on the outskirts of the town. It's an older house, but Abby and I rolled up our sleeves and did some major renovations to the place to make it ours. She's demonstrated absolute genius managing the contractors, and has made this place a home for me and Matthew.

Plus, I've encouraged her to enroll at our local community college part-time, while also taking care of Matthew. The call center job is long gone, but I know Abby still keeps in contact with some of her co-workers because they were like a second family to her.

Speaking of family, one day we were at dinner when the subject of her sister came up. Abby passed me the potatoes and sighed a little.

"I talked to my mom today, and Belinda's doing well. But my sister is a different story. Apparently, Melody is now working as a full-fledged stripper at that strip club on the other end of town. Moving on up, I guess. Obviously, we're not happy about that, but I don't talk to her anymore so she's welcome to it."

I tried to keep calm.

“Is Belinda okay?”

Abby sighed again.

“I don’t know. I don’t think any mother ever wants a daughter to go into stripping, but what can she do? Melody is headstrong and won’t listen to anyone. Oh by the way, did I tell you? She got thrown into lock-up the other day for petty theft. She says it’s just a misunderstanding, but I don’t know. She’s been hanging with a bad crowd, and I think she might end up in jail for a good long while.”

I shook my head.

“Damn. I don’t want to help, but do you think we should?” I still had a lot of resentment towards this woman for coming between me and my love. Sure, Melody was Abby’s sister, but that didn’t mean that I felt particularly charitable toward her.

“No,” Abby shook her head. “I think Melody can’t learn until she hits rock bottom. And clearly, she’s not there yet.”

That was the end of the conversation. Unfortunately, Abby’s words were likely true; some people just can’t change until they have nowhere else to go but up, and it looked like her sister was part of that group.

I put my fork down and stared at Abby across the table. She had lit candles that night for dinner and the low lighting highlighted her glowing complexion and riotous curls.

Mattie was already down for the night, and we were enjoying a romantic meal. She glanced up at me and then smiled.

“What?”

I stayed quiet for a moment and then stood from my chair. I walked around the table and put out my hand, pulling her to her feet.

“Sweetheart, have I told you lately just how absolutely gorgeous you are?”

She giggled and her cheeks glowed pink. “No, but you’re more than welcome to.”

I laughed aloud and pulled her close to me. This woman still got me going every time I saw her, and I leaned forward and pressed my lips to hers, pulling her body into mine. No words had to be spoken between us because the passion was already there, simmering in the background just waiting for the right moment. Holding her tight, I skimmed my fingers down to her ass and gripped both cheeks. Her breath picked up as I squeezed.

“Yes Ryder,” she breathed against the bronzed column of my neck. With that, Abby wrapped her legs around my waist and her hands twined around my shoulders. She kissed me wildly, the passion suddenly ignited. I walked her forward, trying to navigate my way through the house while keeping my mouth pressed to hers.

Once we got to the bedroom, I laid the curvy girl gently on the mattress. She bit her bottom lip and literally growled at me as I pulled my shirt off and threw it to the side.

“Horny, aren’t you?” I rasped.

She giggled a bit, turning red, but then nodded. As soon as I got close, she pushed her nails into my chest and slid them down my skin. Instantly, I was on fire, and I

couldn't get her clothes off fast enough.

I threw her shirt and pants over my head and gripped her panties, yanking them off. Without hesitation, I fell to my knees and planted my mouth on her sopping pussy. Her fluids were so warm and thick, and I couldn't get enough of her taste. She was the perfect dessert to our meal.

"Oh Ryder," she sighed, tossing her head back. "Fuck, that feels so good."

As I licked her from ass to clit, Abby screamed out, gripping her big, bouncing tits tightly in her hands. I could tell she was enjoying herself, and I was so pent up I was already ready to blow.

Moving my mouth up her frame, I wriggled out of my pants and boxers, letting my hard cock fall onto her stomach. Her hands were on it in an instant.

"Oooh, you're so big," she marveled, her eyes going wide. "I love it."

It's true. Her fingers could barely circle the shaft, but Abby was a champ. She stroked it up and down as my fingers played with her pussy, moving in and out, feeling how tight and ready she was.

Leaning down next to her, I sucked on her earlobe. She pursed her lips next to my ear and breathed deeply, sending chills down my back.

"I want you to fuck me, Ryder. Fuck me hard and fuck me good."

I shivered from the words, my cock now insanely hard. Pushing her legs up and hooking them over my shoulders, I gripped her ass and lifted it into the air. Then, I pushed the tip of my dick into her, watching as it sank into her soft folds.

“Yes,” she moaned. “More. Give me more.”

I grinned, slowly easing the rest of my shaft deep down in her. She arched in excitement and I gripped tightly as I began to thrust. She felt so good that it was hard to control myself.

“Fuck baby,” I rasped. “My cock looks so good disappearing into your horny little cunt.”

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It was true. Her lips gripped me tightly, dragging along my veiny shaft whenever I withdrew. Plus, my thickness was now shiny and coated with her fluids, evidence of our intermingled desire.

But I wanted more. Pulling out, I reached down and flipped her over on her stomach, watching her raise her perfect, round ass in the air and shake it at me. She looked over her shoulder and bit her lip, with invitation in her eyes. With a groan, I held her ass cheeks apart and pushed back into her. My thumb smoothed down and dipped into her ass while her pussy gripped my cock.

“God,” I groaned breathlessly. “Fuuuuck.”

Her moans picked up in volume and I could tell she was reaching climax. At exactly the right moment, I pushed my thumb deeper into her anus, making her gasp in delight as my cock pounded that tight little cunt.

“Yes,” she screamed out. “Yes Ryder, don’t stop.”

I couldn’t stop even if I wanted to. I wiggled my thumb in her rectum, feeling her whole body tense. Then Abby took a deep breath and held it as she erupted in orgasm. Her body shook beneath me, that pussy spasming with hard contractions. I grunted and lost it myself, blasting her with jism as my balls pumped.

“Fuck!” I roared. “Shit, baby!”

Our orgasms went on and on and on. Abby had her face pressed into the pillow as her ass and pussy contracted. Moans and exhailes of pure lust reverberated through the

room before our bodies relaxed, giving into the pleasure. Finally, we finished and collapsed onto the bed.

Slowly, I pulled out, watching with avid eyes as my shiny cock exited her depths. I pressed a kiss to her clit and then swatted her ass. “Fuck, you’re going to be the death of me, sweetheart.”

She giggled a bit. “Really? Oh good.”

I swatted her ass again. “Cheeky wench. I’ll be ready for round two in a moment. However, as we wait for the next course, I have a something to keep us busy.”

Disappearing into the closet, I reemerged, holding a box behind my back. She sat up on the edge of the bed, pulling the sheet around her like a toga.

“Something for me, Ryder?”

The moment had come. I stepped forward and lowered down onto one knee, pulling the small velvet box around in front of me. I opened it, revealing a three carat diamond ring, sparkling in the dim lights. She gasped and covered her mouth.

“I truly am the luckiest man on the planet. You are the most beautiful woman I’ve ever met, and I not only have an amazing best friend and a sexy as hell lover, but also the most incredible mother to my beautiful baby boy. Thank you for always being on my side. Thank you for believing in me a year ago. I can’t imagine my life without you and Mattie. You are everything to me.”

She looked at me with wonderment in her eyes, one hand pressed to her mouth. I continued.

“Abby, I can’t do this life without you. My sun rises and sets with you, as does my heart. Will you do me the honor of becoming Mrs. Ryder Rivington?”

Before I could even finish, she cried out.

“Oh my God, yes!”

I stood her up and she wrapped her arms around me as our lips met in a heavenly kiss. This woman is my everything, and as I slipped the ring on her finger, she looked at me with a mixture of joy and devilment in her eyes. I pulled back for a moment.

“What is it sweetheart?”

The curvy girl licked her lips, shooting me a sweet smile.

“Well, remember when you said you wanted a dozen children?”

I grinned right back at her, intuiting her next words.

“Yes, and?”

She grinned right back at me.

“Well, I’m pregnant with triplets, Ryder. Dr. McNamara just confirmed it today, so I guess we’re getting a head start. Soon, we’re going to be a family of six!”

I pulled Abby into my arms, thrilled beyond words. After all, this was never in the cards for me. When I started out, I envisioned a life on the road, totally anonymous, without any responsibilities. But instead, I’m soon going to be married to the woman of my dreams, with a big house in the suburbs, and the beginnings of a new family. Who would have guessed? Maybe I’m not perfect, but I’m definitely a daddy with a future.

The End