



Grumpy Baker (Grump Town #1)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: A Grumpy meets Sunshine, instalove romance (well, honestly the instalove has been percolating for a while). Ms Curvaceous meets Mr Chiseled in this terrific small town slice of life story which will bring goosebumps to places you didnt expect. Maybe even warm your heart and tingle your tastebuds

Mackenna Kenny, to some.

When the only bartender at On the Rocks hits the jackpot, so do I.

The devilishly delicious baker next door steps in and steps up to take over, leaving me thirsty for more.

While Dean and I have a past, Im mostly looking forward to the future we can have as we work together, staving off one emergency after the next. From the way his crisp blue eyes pierce my insecurities, theres no hiding what my heart desires when it comes to the most eligible baker ... bartender ... bachelor in our small town.

Its clear that love wants me to take a shot. Whether its a shot at Deans heart or of his delicious bourbon, or a sample of his devilish sweet, creamy confections only time can tell.

With the loss of my mom and my life turning upside down, Im not sure I can handle any dessert Dean is about to dish out. But his decadent determination opens me up to everything sweet he has on the menu.

I can only hope to deserve what love is ready to serve.

This is a short, steamy, grumpy/sunshine romance. No OM / OW drama and no cliffhangers.

No ddlg. Some lite constrained play. Always a sweet HEA.

Total Pages (Source): 7

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MACKENNA

"What's eating you, Kenny?" Hank asks as he slides my two free shots of bourbon in front of me.

Hank is the most attentive and the only bartender at On the Rocks. Even though it's one of the few bars in our cozy town of Mercy, Ohio, Hank manages the crowd masterfully. Well, the term crowd is generous. It's more like a handful of the unemployed and underemployed drowning their sorrows before the evening rush begins.

"Work is slow," I reply to Hank with a shrug as my eyes get lost in the dark brown liquid swirling around the small glass.

Hank nods apathetically. "You're one of those fancy computer programmers, right? Isn't that AI stuff taking over? You shouldn't be surprised that work is slow when the machines are taking the job of a hard-working woman like yourself. Here, take the last slice of lemon meringue. On me."

Tangy, sweet scents of pie cut through the strong aromas of the alcohol as I decide I want to savor the dessert after slamming down my bourbon. The smooth burn of the free shots warms my throat, and the sweet taste of free pie is comforting.

The baker next door knows his way around everything sweet, and with his bar attached, Dean Rockland is one of the leading businessmen in our town. He's also

leading the pack as one of the most eligible bachelors. My heart flutters every time I think about him, but then disappointment settles in once I remember how much I've distanced myself from him and the idea of dating altogether.

The bar phone ringing over the jukebox rock ballad draws my mind back to what was eating me. What's eating me?

Ha, that's a laugh.

Who's eating me?

That sounds much better than wallowing in my slow-growing client list and lack of income.

Hmm.

When was the last time someone buried their face between my thighs?

Hank's screech of joy stops my mind from scrolling through my memories of sexual escapades past. Everyone in the bar turns their attention to his phone call.

"What's going on, Hank?" I shout at him between bites of pie.

"Joe-Marie hit the jackpot! I'm getting out of here. Take care of the place 'til Dean gets in, will ya, Kenny?" Hank starts to abandon his post slinging drinks.

"Can I at least get a rum and coke before you head out, Hank?" a guy asks as our sole bartender dashes out the door.

One of the best parts about our small town is the level of trust we have in our community. So, I reluctantly get off my stool and out of my funk of frustration to get

behind the bar until Dean shows up. Even though we're not on ' let's talk everyday ' terms, I'd never let his place go to shit because his bartender won the lottery.

Orders are coming in, and I'm serving drinks as more people file into the bar to watch the Bengals play their last football game before the playoffs. This brings me back to bartending in my senior year of college when I was desperately counting down the days until I earned my degree in digital marketing. Perhaps work wouldn't be so slow if I could actually code like a programmer.

Everyone is all smiles until the energy shifts. A glance over my shoulder has me in Dean's sight. He's as chiseled as his name—Rockland—sounds. Thick eyebrows are set in a firm line with a stoic expression on his face. It's not lost on me that he has an amazing body under the apron and smells delicious.

Dean has these soft blue eyes that pull me into a calm space. My mouth waters as my mind draws a blank, but the hustle and bustle of the patrons at the bar snap me out of my trance.

"Two rum and cokes coming right up," I tell the guy at the bar, who's been ordering round after round since Hank rushed out. I turn to Dean and tell him, "Table in the corner is on their fifth pitcher. The Bengals are getting their asses handed to 'em tonight. They might get rowdy. Uh, those girls are on their second round of wine, and I'm about to clock out. Tips are under the drawer."

"Stay." Dean's voice tells me he's asking and not demanding. "Please. I'm not good at this part, Mackenna."

He gestures toward the people lining up at the bar to place their orders, and I get it. It takes a special kind of person to be social when you don't want to be. There's also the fact that he can't ask for help, even when he needs it. So, these few words are the same as hell freezing over, and I won't have him ask me twice.

A glance around the bar shows he won't be able to handle the growing crowd alone. To his surprising relief, I nod. "If we're going to be slinging drinks back to back like the old days, you can call me Kenny."

"No," Dean says with a smile and leans close so only I can hear. "You never liked it when I called you that, and I don't plan to start now. Thank you for staying."

"Thank you for coming," I reply with a wicked grin and a wink as I continue to move from one end of the bar to the other.

Dean grins with a slight snarl, leaning in to give me a chaste kiss on the cheek that stamps a smile on my face. We've always had this ebb and flow where I can let my guard down around him. However, the last time I got too comfortable, I realized I was out of sorts, and Dean did too much to put me back together. I hated myself for a while and tried to keep my distance from him, but here we are, constantly drawn back together.

We move in unison, finding a rhythm easily as I take orders and Dean pours. It's easy to see that I'm far more generous with alcohol than he is, and rightfully so. It's his place. It's only right to be conservative with his inventory.

By the time he announces the last call, the frustration from my lack of work washes away with one last swipe of the towel across the countertop. The last stool is empty, and the TV is off. Dean sighs as he closes the register, yawns, and stretches before looking toward the back of the bar.

A long hallway has restrooms on one side, an office, and a back door leading into an alley behind the buildings lining Main Street.

"Are you going back to Sweet's tonight?" I ask him. It's hard stopping my grin every time I think of a bakery next to a bar, and he owns them both. Sweet Treats. On the

Rocks. I have no idea how he has the energy for it.

Dean nods before running his fingers through his thick brown hair, which he keeps short. I try to remember how soft it is, but then I remember the pain it took me to forget. Still, I hate knowing he will be working until the bakery opens in a few hours.

"How about I come help you prep if you let me keep all the tips from tonight? You get to go to bed before the sun rises for once."

"I don't know, Mackenna. You know how hard it is..." He smiles and lets the end of his sentence drop.

I have to stop myself from reaching for his crotch to see exactly how hard he could be. Control is the name of this game, and neither of us seems to win it. We lose control whenever we're in the same room together, but we decided to give each other space.

It's been almost ten years since we were next-door neighbors and six months since I got so hammered in this same bar, he picked me up off the floor. In those moments of Dean taking care of me while swirling through my grief, I wasn't ready to let him be there for me.

The perfect gentleman at all times. Even when I'm drunkenly throwing myself at him, he protects me from trauma-based choices. However, the embarrassment slithering through me keeps me away from his bakery, but I have my favorite stool as a regular in his bar. A bar I can drink at without dwelling on what I wanted us to be because Hank's the best bartender at On the Rocks. Now Hank is gone, and I might have to deal with all the words I never said to Dean while loathing my career over free shots of bourbon.

"How's your family doing?" he asks, sympathy rolling through his tone.

"Better than me," I admit. "Pop keeps himself busy with all of his furry patients at the vet clinic. Maddie's still flipping that house over on Grave Street. Rye's slinging smiles and sundaes at her parlor."

"Right." He nods. "The ice cream spot on Smith."

I smile because I know he already knows. Dean's been looking after the Monroe sisters since we were little. I pushed him away before, but he didn't push back. He never pushes me to do anything I don't want or anything he knows I don't want.

A sigh of what-if pushes through my lips as I find my voice to silence my thoughts and speak. "The kids are all right. Listen, Dean, I just ... I don't know how to thank you, and this is just me trying?—"

Dean puts his hands up to stop me from talking, and then he holds it out for me. The moment I slip my hand into his, he pulls me close. A hug from Dean is like hot chocolate on Christmas morning. He smells like it, too, but now there's an essence of cognac sprinkling into his sweet cinnamon and pastry aroma.

"You smell too good for me," I moan into his embrace.

"You won't be saying that in the morning," he laughs. "That is if you're serious about coming with me."

"I've always been serious about coming with you," I tell him as I pull out of his hug.

"Tease," he mutters with a slight shake of his head.

My mouth says the things my body wants, but logic forces me to change the subject. "Let's go laminate some dough or fold things into batter."

He snorts and kisses me on the top of my head. Dean keeps his arm around me as we walk out of the bar's back door, into the alley, and through another door that leads into the bakery's kitchen. It's freezing as we step inside, sending a shiver down my spine.

"I'd turn the heat up," Dean says as he glances down to see what's obvious. My nipples are as hard as rocks, and I can see the desire glazing over his blue eyes.

"Heat isn't good for what we need, right?" I ask him, turning toward him and letting the hardness of my breasts brush against his arm. He grunts and shakes his head.

"Fuck me," he mumbles.

I smile and stroke the side of his face. "I'm trying not to."

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DEAN

MacKenna locks eyes with me as her soft fingers slide down my face while her hard nipples glide across my bicep. There's no way I can focus on prepping for tomorrow with her standing this close to me. All night working the bar with her has my mind reeling over what could have been.

Refusing to let the moment slip by, my hand slips behind her neck. I slide the band off her ponytail to let long locks of soft blonde hair fall over my wrist. When my fingertips move up to graze her scalp, soft mewlings of satisfaction rise from her throat just as softly as she rises onto her toes. I lower my face toward hers because of fucking course.

I may be grumpy, which she never fails to remind me of, but I'm not made of stone. My entire being comes alive with her proximity.

When our lips touch, gingerly at first, I want to pull back, but I don't. I won't ... not this time.

Fuck it. Let's turn up the heat.

Primal possession takes over. Her mouth, the way her lips mold against mine, and even the way she tilts her head show how perfectly we fit together. A few passes of my tongue over hers have me wondering if her nipples are still hard because of the coldness in the kitchen or from the anticipation of what's to come. Or should I say,

who's to come?

Only one way to find out.

Our kiss explodes into something passionate, and I grip the bottom of her shirt and tear it open. The flimsy fabric separates like a jacket, revealing perfect tits that fit into the palms of my hand.

"You've been slinging drinks all night without a bra on, daring me not to look," I snarl against her mouth, pulling her back and then yanking her body back into me. I want to touch every inch of her and carve every curve into my memory.

"It was better for tips," she says with a smile.

"I know something that's better for a tip." I pinch one of her nipples as my other hand dips inside her jeans and between her legs.

Our mouths crash back against each other. My finger dips inside of her walls and forces Mackenna to slide her pants down past her ass to give me more room. I coax an orgasm out of her. The way her wetness coats my finger makes me kick myself for not trying harder to get back to this level of intimacy sooner.

The raw emotion that exists between us is undeniable. But every time we get here, something comes up to keep us apart. Mackenna's shallow breaths of passion pull me deeper into this explosive reunion of our bodies. But the sudden realization of where we are pushes logic ahead of my lust.

The redness of her skin fades away, her lust deflating with mine. A simultaneous exhale draws laughter from us both. She fidgets with the shards of her shirt before laughing and giving up.

"I've missed you," I tell her as I walk toward the break room door.

There are lockers inside with a couch and bathroom. Most of us who work odd hours at Sweet's keep a few changes of clothes just in case things get too messy. When I toss her a new shirt, Mackenna smiles and lets her torn shirt fall to the floor.

"I remember this shirt," she replies, ignoring my sentiment.

I let it go, saying, "You were adamant about taking it off the last time you were here. It's clean."

She brings it up to her nose, inhaling deeply before slipping it over her head. "Thank you, Dean. You always seem to have a way to fix me."

"Help you, Mackenna. I've never tried to fix you."

She closes her eyes, clenches her jaw, and huffs out a breath through her flaring nostrils. "You're right. I'm sorry. It's easy to get the two notions mixed up when I feel like a failure."

"You're not a failure," I tell her, walking close to embrace her, but she puts her hands up to stop me.

"Let's just get started. What are we doing tonight?"

Opting not to pry into our can of emotional worms, I shift my focus to what needs to be done before I open in a few hours.

"Once I figure out my muffin of the day, I make a cookie pal for it. We only have to chop a few things to make the toppings."

"What are you going for?" She walks over to one of the three industrial refrigerators along the wall. On that side, there's a walk-in freezer, and on the other side of the room, large ovens are across from them.

Sometimes, I get so lost in my work that I forget the joy my creations bring to customers. The smile of delight on Mackenna's face pours a lightness over me that makes these indecently long nights worth it.

"Is this ice cream cake?" she asks, her eyes widening like a child in a toy store.

"Pralines and cream ice cream is sandwiched between thin layers of pecan cake and a praline brittle dusting over the ice cream frosting. It's one of my best sellers."

"It sounds so good." She moans and licks her delectable lips while walking over to a sink to wash her hands. "A slice of that over some warm Snickerdoodle cookies or a blondie."

"That's not a bad idea. Maybe I can do something like a Snickerdoodle ice cream sandwich as my cookie pal."

"And for your muffin of the day?"

I shrug. "Maybe I can do a pecan streusel coffee cake muffin."

"Yes." Mackenna beams. "I'd inhale that with my hazelnut iced macchiato. Or maybe you can do a collab with On the Rocks?"

"What kind of collaboration do you have in mind?" I ask as curiosity sparks my imagination.

"One where you get an ice cream sandwich with some sort of mudslide. Or wait, is

there a way to make a pralines and cream mudslide, or hazelnut? That would be so good if you don't make the muffin too sweet."

It's brilliant, but it's also too labor-intensive to perfect a mudslide drink recipe tonight. The more I think of the exhaustion looming over me, the less I want to stay in the bakery.

I find myself making excuses, telling her, "I never put much thought into a collaboration between them. The bakery takes up most of my day, and now that Hank quit on me, I think I should keep things simple. It's nearly two in the morning, and I don't feel like doing much prep work. How about you keep all the tips from the bar anyway and let me take you home?"

"You're going to regret not doing your prep work the same way you regret parking your car when it needs gas and promise to go in the morning. Let me help you, Dean. Please."

I relent, and we get to work. Once again, we find a rhythm after I take her through everything we have to do to make the muffins and cookies.

Mackenna's right, too. I would have had to come back and sleep on the couch in the break room to do all of this work before we opened. Thankfully, I can leave instructions for my staff and sleep in late. I'll figure out what to do about the bar later.

The drive to Mackenna's house is quiet, so it doesn't surprise me that by the time I pull into her driveway, she's sleeping against the window. I don't want to wake her, but my car's sudden stop forces her eyes open.

The soft moan and yawn purring from her throat has my imagination leaping to what it would be like waking up next to her in the morning.

"Thank you, Dean." Mackenna's voice is soft as she stretches and reaches across to wrap her arms around my neck. I lean into it, and she plants a soft kiss on my lips that wakes my cock, even though my body is begging for sleep.

While I can sense Mackenna's need, I can't be sure if rekindling our passion is from us working these past few hours together or if she genuinely wants to travel down this road with me. There are dozens of questions circling my mind, and I don't want to stop, but I pull away.

It's for our own good. I know what I want. I know who I want. I won't force her to choose me because we're in this bubble of bliss.

"It is way past my bedtime," she says lazily, bursting our bubble. "Thanks for the ride, Dean."

"Thanks for all your help, Mackenna. Really, I wouldn't have gotten through the night without you."

"It's only right I return the favor, finally." She pauses and lets out a sigh as she pulls her arms from around my neck. With some reluctance, she says, "You don't have to drive home if you're tired. I have a spare bedroom if you want to crash."

My emotions war against my desires. "I'm sorry. I have to get up early, and I don't want to throw your morning off. I'm already running down my list of things to do since I'm going to have to start interviewing folks to replace Hank."

Mackenna strokes the side of my face and lets her thumb run across my bottom lip. I fight the urge to suck on her finger before she offers me a timid smile and gets out of the car. It only takes me a second to get out myself and walk her to the door.

"You're always a fucking gentleman." She giggles as she heads inside.

"The fact that you're wearing a different shirt says I'm far from gentle."

"Far from gentle, indeed. Good night, Dean."

"Good night, Mackenna." I stand in front of the door, mentally kicking myself for not taking up her offer to go inside. If I didn't have to be up in five hours, I would have jumped at the chance, but I tend to put work first.

Instead of beating myself up over sex I'm not having, I head home to beat myself off to fantasies of what should have been. In another life where I didn't care about the health standards of my business, I'd fuck Mackenna all over the bakery and the bar. But no, I have to let my primitive urges subside and let memories of our passionate kisses lull me to sleep.

For now, at least.

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MACKENNA

The sound of my phone ringing forces my eyes open just as the morning sun's rays greet me from outside my bedroom curtains. A groan crawls out of my throat as the soreness in my legs and back flares when I get out of bed.

My sister's voice is far too chipper when I pick up the screeching device. "Morning, Kenny Penny. Where are you? Are you home yet? I'm coming over unless you went home with some rando from the bar, and that's why your car is still parked outside On the Rocks."

My voice breaks as sleep fades further and further away from me. "You are way too hyper this morning, Maddie. I forgot I drove last night when I got a ride home. I'm going to hop in the shower. Come get me so I can pick it up."

"Fine, but you owe me breakfast," she replies and hangs up.

By the time she gets to me, I have to race out of the house before she decides to piss my neighbors off by honking in an obnoxious rhythm. Madison lets her hand hover above the horn, teasing me with impending chaos to force me to trot faster than I already am.

"You're such a dick," I laugh as I plop into the passenger seat.

"Speaking of dick, whose was it that made you forget about your car at the bar?" she

asks with a giggle.

"I helped Dean after his bartender quit in the middle of his shift. He drove me home."

"That's it? He just drove you home? You guys have been beating around that bush—definitely not beating around your bush—for years now." She does an exaggerated roll of her eyes.

"Don't be gross." I scoff and sing my next words playfully. "Stay out of my business, Mad Maddie."

She replies in a similar sing-song way. "I would stay out of your business if it didn't require me pushing my morning meeting back."

"I didn't tell you to wake me up at the crack of dawn, worried about why my car is parked in front of a bar."

She huffs and grins. "Considering you've been parking at this bar more than a few days a week, I'm right to be curious or even concerned. You're lucky Dad didn't see it. But this little ride also gets me breakfast. I want pancakes and?—"

I cut her off, finishing her usual order. "Scrambled eggs, extra cheesy, and an extra large coffee with two shots of espresso."

"Yes, yes, yes. Finally, someone who gets it right every time. I'm sure Dean would get your order right every time if you let him."

Shaking my head, my gaze shifts out the window. "Dean wants all or nothing."

"And why is that so bad? He's always been there for us, for you especially. I mean, you were a mess a few months ago. I know we were all mad that you forgot about our

anniversary dinner for Mom, but you also dropped out of grad school to help our family when she got sick. It sucks that the burden fell on you. We forget how much her loss takes a toll on all of us."

I sigh. "Well, Dad was a mess. It was the right thing to do back then. Finishing grad school just didn't seem important anymore. Five years later, it's still not that important. I've been able to run my business with some degree of success, but these loans are killing me right now because it's so slow."

She lets out a soft exhale. "That's why it's only right that we try to help you after what you gave up for us. So listen to me now when I say, do something for yourself. Dean makes you happy. I know everything isn't perfect, but you should take a chance with him. Even if it's to distract you from work or inspire you to try something new to drum up more clients."

"Why are you sounding so reasonable this early in the morning? I like Dean a lot, but he is so quiet and grumpy, and I'm not. He's so considerate and has his life together, and I'm a fucking mess."

Maddie reaches over the center gear shift to tap my hand as she parks behind my car in front of the bar. In the brightness of the morning, there's a peaceful glow shining on the locked doors and shuttered windows.

I'm ready to get out when Maddie's voice pulls me out of my thoughts. She says, "You're not a mess. You've had a shitty eighteen months, and that's life. You've always told me not to let one setback set me all the way back."

"Maddie, it feels like everything is snowballing. These bills and loans are catching up to me. I can't thank you enough for helping me out, but it's not right for my younger sister to continually come to my financial rescue."

She smiles and inhales deeply with a side glance at me. "Don't mention it. We're family. Mom died your first year of grad school, and you took on everything for us. The least I can do is help you out whenever I can. And my help to you this morning, outside of dropping you off, is to tell you to date Dean. You've been crushing on him for as long as he's been making googly eyes at you."

"God, you're being extra weird this morning."

We laugh together while I try to bury the anxiety over upcoming bills that need to be paid.

She ignores me, playing her classic role as the middle child extremely well, saying, "I have some work for you once I get this house staged. I'll need some brochures and a social media campaign. You can come take a look at the place when you get a chance."

"Thanks, Maddie," I tell her as we both get out of her car.

She tips her face upward, inhaling deeply. "What is that delightful smell? Forget the pancakes. What's baking over there? That's Dean's bakery, too; why not plug him in with Rye and get some bakery ice cream collab working?"

"One thing at a time, Maddie. What you smell is a pecan streusel coffee cake muffin and probably snickerdoodle cookies that will be used to make ice cream sandwiches. On second thought, we should get Rye in on this. I was deliriously tired last night."

Maddie turns her gaze toward me. "How do you know what's on the menu?"

"Because after I helped Dean close the bar, I helped him prep the bakery, which is why my car is still here. He's probably in there right now."

Maddie doesn't let me get another word out before dragging me into the bakery, where I see the assistant baker desperately trying to man the counter as customers pile up. I skip the line to the aggravation of everyone waiting but step behind the glass display case.

It takes some convincing, but after giving her details of what's about to burn in those ovens, she lets me help. Maddie hangs back to watch in amazement as I manage the crowd and get customers out the door.

After I take over the register to help clear the morning rush, Maddie puts in a large order for the crew working on the house she's renovating. With a promise to be back after the lunch rush, she leaves me at the counter while the baker's assistant tends to the muffins and Snickerdoodle cookies. When the bell chimes over the door, I expect it to be Maddie, but instead Dean's shy smile greets me.

"Good morning, sleepy head." I flash him a grin as sweet as the muffins he has on sale.

"Mornin', Mackenna. I thought you'd be counting sheep right about now. What are you doing here?"

My eyes dart around the cozy bakery. White subway tiles line the walls, and black and soft beige floors brighten the place. The light birchwood tables offer warmth for customers sitting inside to eat their sweet treats. While I know Dean hates the social parts of his businesses, I can't help but push him to engage ... even if it's just with me.

I motion my hand over my body behind the counter and then to the satisfied customers leaving the bakery. "Helping. So welcome to Sweet Treats, Mr. Rockland."

"Very funny, Mackenna."

A grin of teasing temptation eases across my face. "Can I offer you our muffin of the day? Pecan coffee cake? Or how about a chocolate chip one? The customers have been pairing it with the chai latte. There's also an order of three dozen donuts being picked up around two."

"You are doing way more work than the tips and day pay I gave you for working yesterday. Thank you for stepping in again." He leans in, and my thoughts scatter.

Fantasies of what could have happened last night erupt as I get the subtle scent of whiskey and coffee wafting off Dean. It's as if the air carries his cologne like snowflakes on a windless day. My heart skips a beat as he licks his top lip before reaching across the glass display case to wipe a smudge of cream off my face that I didn't realize was there.

He pulls his thumb away and sucks on it before asking, "Where is Dana and Evan? You know, my actual employees."

"Dana needed help, so I came in to help out. I only served a few customers and have been upholding the highest standards of service. I don't think Evan came in, so I'm behind here."

He keeps his voice low, whispering, "I'm happy to have you helping me out, Mackenna."

"But?"

He sighs. "But, based on how last night could have turned out, I think it's best if you stick to being a customer."

"That's no fun." I pretend to whine as I walk out from behind the register to stand beside him, inhaling that delectable scent of his.

"We can have all the fun in the world when I don't have a ton of work to do," he says.

"You always have a ton of work. How about you let me do some of that work for you? I can run the bar or help out here. I need to do something, Dean. My savings are drying up, and with Maddie being my only consistent client, I can't keep pushing bills to the side."

"I think I have a better idea. How much are your services?"

"Are you talking about digital marketing?"

He chuckles. "Yes. I've seen some of your stuff around town and think the bakery can use something new to drive business here. I was thinking about putting something together, but with Hank quitting, it looks like my time is going to be spent hiring a new bartender."

"I can put together a few proposals."

He flashes me a killer smile. "And share them with me over dinner tonight?"

"Where are we eating?"

"My place," he replies.

"What are we eating?"

"What do you have in mind?"

While inhaling every inch of his thick cock is the most appealing option to keep my mouth busy, I'm sure he wants me to offer up ideas about food. "I've been around sweets all morning. How about something savory, hearty, meaty?"

He sucks his bottom lip between his teeth and drops his gaze to my mouth. "I have something meaty for you. Does seven work?"

I don't remember the last time Dean was this playful, seductive even. He's usually timid, letting me guess what's on his mind unless his body tells me like it did last night. The anticipation of what can happen at dinner makes my nipples hard with desire. His fingers drove me wild, how much more his length sawing in and out of me? God, I need him like I need air.

"It does," I tell him.

The realization of how much I enjoy this spark between me and Dean feels like a feather could knock me over. I get a lightness in my chest whenever he's around.

I gather my things to leave the bakery. We exchange information about incoming orders and what he's looking for in his marketing campaign. With everything I need to put together my proposals, I leave Dean with his coffee cake muffins and other delectable delights.

It's a boost to my mood and libido as I get to work once I bring my car back home. Excitement courses through me as I research Dean's target audience and all the possibilities for a successful marketing campaign.

When I look at his social media platforms, I'm practically gushing at the possibilities. Ideas flood in as I lose track of time until the sound of my phone's alarm ringing pulls me out of my trance. Thankfully, I won't be late for our dinner date.

A fresh shower, change of clothes, and putting together my proposals get me out of the house and on Dean's doorstep nearly ten minutes to seven. When he opens the door, a gust of aromas hits me just as my eyes take him in from head to toe.

Jesus. He puts all those hunky actors and models to shame.

Broad shoulders and a torso sculpted to perfection sit under a short-sleeved shirt that seems to taper toward his waist. Denim pants fit him nicely but hide one of my favorite parts of his body.

Sheesh. I can't remember the last time I've had sex, let alone go on a date, but seeing Dean like this makes me wonder if my lack of work is enough to keep me from committing to what he wants. Hell, it's time I acknowledge what I want.

And what I want is him. All of him.

"Are you going to come in or give me your proposal on the doorstep?" he asks, the side of his mouth lifting.

With my thoughts slamming to a halt, I follow him inside.

The living room, dining room, and kitchen are all in the same space. There's a large TV playing silently in the background. Some baking show is on as Dean grabs a towel off the dining table to handle a steaming pot in the kitchen.

"It's nothing fancy. Just meatballs, sauce, and, uh, you have some options. Pasta or baguette?"

"Pasta," I tell him, and he nods and makes me a heaping plate of food.

"So, Miss Monroe," he teases me like I did to him earlier. "Please tell me all the wonderful things I should do to drum up business for Sweet Treats."

I pull out my tablet and a few printouts to show him what I've been working on all day since he kicked me out of the bakery. Between work and catching up on time

gone by, I've forgotten how easy it is for us to fall into comfortable conversation. Dinner is delicious, especially with the wine he's paired with it, and I sit back in amazement.

"It's incredible," he whispers, more to himself than to me. "I never thought of delivering videos of baking tips and recipes to devoted fans. Taking a few days out of the month to bank them all and schedule their send-out will take less time than I thought."

"That's only for subscribers, but we can tweak it once your fan base grows. You already have around ten thousand followers, which is phenomenal, considering you barely post. Your muffin of the day should be posted daily."

He chuckles. "It was great when it first started, but then it took off, and I couldn't run the businesses and the social media. I didn't have the time or the funds to hire someone full-time to manage it. I try to get around to it every few days. Thankfully, business in town keeps me floating way more than social media stuff."

"You've been coasting since, which is not bad considering how much you hate human interactions."

He laughs again, flashing me a half-cocked grin. "I don't hate human interactions. Patience with people isn't one of my strong suits."

"You've been patient with me."

He reaches across the table, hooking a finger under my chin to lift my gaze to his. "You're not people. You're my Mackenna."

I can barely stand how sweet he is to me when I don't feel like myself. I have to change the subject, gently moving away from his touch. I'm certain I sound abrupt as

I speak. "This food is great, Dean. How is it that you bake, cook, and run the bakery and the bar so effortlessly? I feel like I'm losing the race of life, struggling to catch up to everyone around me."

Dean gets out of his seat to grab my plate. "It's life, Mackenna. There's no race. We all finish in the same place."

I follow him into the kitchen, where I help clear the dishes and wipe down the stove. We fall into a silent rhythm effortlessly—just like the bar, like everything between us. It's too easy, almost to the point that I don't deserve it.

"Can I ask you something?" Dean's voice cuts through our quiet movements.

"Anything."

"Why would you let me taste you, touch you, but when I want to feed you and help you, it's too much?"

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4

DEAN

I 'm tired of staying away.

I'm tired of waiting.

Mackenna belongs to me, and it's time she accepts that. Yet, as much as I want to throw her over my shoulder and plow her sweet pussy, I can't force her to let me love her. I don't want to force her. I just want her to make a choice.

She inhales deeply and looks at me, tears welling in her eyes. "Because it is. I'm not where I want to be in my career, my life. I feel like letting you in, you'll take over and try to fix it all. This is my mess. A mess of my own making, and I ... I have to take care of it."

"Not on your own, you don't. Listen to me, Kenny." I use the name everyone calls her to show her I'm willing to be her friend. I know she hates it because I'm different, at least I'm supposed to be. I get to call her Mackenna because no one else does. But if she's going to treat me like everyone else...

"Dean, don't call me that."

"You have to tell me what you want." After wiping a tear off her cheek, she nudges her face against my hand. I hold her chin steady, forcing her to look into my eyes. "If you tell me to drop this, I will, just like last time. If you tell me to love you, I will.

But you need to choose. I can't keep avoiding you while you sit in my bar every night."

"I'm not in there every night." She scoffs and rolls her eyes.

"You're in there enough."

"Well, Hank's been nice. He gives me free drinks when I come in."

I let out a sigh of exasperation as I release her face. "You really think that's Hank's doing?"

"No. I know it's not. I want you, Dean, but I have so much debt that it's crippling. It is all I can think about. Pop, my sisters, they're all working their fingers to the bone to help, but it's not enough. They have their own lives to manage, and I hate being a burden. I don't want to drag you down with me."

"What if..." I pause, wrapping my arms around her. She melts into me, and I rub my cheek against her hair. "Instead of you dragging me down, I help pull you up?"

I dip just enough to get some leverage, scooping her up to wrap her legs around my waist. She grips me around the neck with one arm and holds the back of my head with the other hand.

My mouth captures hers with hunger. I carry Mackenna away from the kitchen and my questions. Her body gives me all the answers I need. Every kiss blinds my steps, but I know every inch of my house. I know every inch, just like I'm about to learn every inch of her.

The softness of her lips against mine has blood rushing to my cock. Every step is getting harder until I finally set her down in my bedroom. Our clothes disappear as

my eyes roam over every peak and valley of her curvaceous frame, desperate to devour her.

I kneel in front of her like I'm about to pray at the temple between her thighs. With a slow glance up the center of her body until she meets my gaze, I let out a soft breath. The way she runs her fingers through my hair threatens to end this tryst before it even begins.

"Tell me you want this, Mackenna. Tell me you want me." My voice is low as my mouth lingers in front of the apex between her thighs, but I stop, waiting for her to respond. I have to hear her say it.

"I want you, Dean."

That's all I need. It's all I want.

The painfully tight grip of her fingers on my hair, tugging my head back, brings out something primal inside of me. The world around us fades away when I pull her body closer to my face to drink in her natural scent.

A moan rumbles to life from the back of my throat when I bury my nose between her thighs and slide my tongue between the lips of her sex. There's an indescribable sweetness to her pussy that makes my mouth salivate. My cock hardens as I move my tongue around her clit.

Mackenna's forced to lean back and place her hand on the edge of the bed while she uses her other to grip the back of my head. Passionate groans erupt out of Mackenna as my mouth works her pussy into orgasmic chaos.

The soft but firm bud of her clit hardening between my lips makes my cock even harder. Her climax makes my chin wet, and I can't get enough.

I will never get enough of this woman. My woman.

"Please, Dean. I need you inside of me," she whispers between increasing pants of pleasure.

Without missing a beat, I pull my mouth away from her delicate center to stand up. Mackenna leans back onto the bed, letting me hold one of her legs in the crux of my elbow while I rub my throbbing head at her entrance. Sliding the tip across her wetness makes my first thrust inside of her effortless.

She flinches, snapping her eyes shut against the pressure of my cock burying itself deep inside her walls.

"Breathe, baby," I tell her as I begin moving in and out of her pleasure.

The tight grip of her walls around my shaft has my pulse racing. She blows a breath out, opening her eyes as she adjusts to my size.

A low moan fills the silence, and I'm not sure if it's her or me. But the way my body reacts to her makes me yearn to do this every day. One roll of my hips has my dick gliding across the top of her canal.

Jesus. She feels so good.

Mackenna takes the pleasure I dole out by burying her nails into my back, dragging them down toward my waist while pulling me closer. I give her what her body is begging for—long, deliberate, deep strokes of satisfaction that have her coming all over me.

The sounds of our bodies moving together echo around the room, and I'm so close, I try to shift my mind to perfecting drink recipes to hold onto my erection for as long

as possible. Croissants aren't sexy, but the intense pleasure rippling through my body is too much to forget.

I can't get my mind out of this moment, and seeing Mackenna's face as we move through each of her orgasms has me proud to be inside of her. The grunts coming out of me encourage her body to buck against mine. What started off as slow and methodical shifts into wild abandon.

I pull my cock out of her and flip Mackenna onto her hands and knees. With her ass in the air, I dip back inside her pussy with a loud slap of her ass cheeks. Our skin slapping against each other boosts my speed. She can't keep quiet, and neither can I.

I reach forward to wrap her hair around my hand. I yank back, and her mouth opens. My mouth claims hers in a kiss that silences her cries while I pump in and out of her until my climax washes over me.

MACKENNA

The way Dean owns my climax has my mind reeling with regret for not having him in my life this way sooner. It's overwhelming how well we fit together. My eyes are heavy and ready to sleep, but I can't stop the disappointment from washing over me. I wish we could go all night.

The feeling passes as we curl into each other, where the food, wine, and sex have us practically comatose until the sun rises alongside Dean's blazing alarm clock. I groan, stretch, and yawn before turning over to see he's already sitting on the edge of the bed. The muscles in his back stand out, flexing and contracting as he pushes himself to his feet.

Quietly watching Dean start his day feels intrusive, but he moves with purpose, and I just want to yank the blankets back over my head to return to my dreamless sleep.

"Good morning," I whisper, sleep still coating my voice.

"Good morning, Mackenna." He licks his lips, raises a brow, and drags his gaze down my body. It's only then I notice my nakedness on full display. My nipples perk as my center pulses with waking desire. He moans while adjusting his growing hardness. "I'll never get to work with you lying here like this."

"So don't go," I chuckle. "Or at least, go in a little late."

He shakes his head. "I'm already short-staffed. I'm supposed to have someone filling in at the bar and want to be there when they show up. That means making sure that the bakery is set up to run without me for a few hours, without you stepping in to work for me."

I giggle. "Fine, don't use me or my special talents."

"Oh, I'll get to you soon enough," he says, biting his lower lip before disappearing into the bathroom.

As much as I want to lounge around his place all day, I'm happy to know I have work to do. It reminds me of something else I have in mind for the future of Dean's businesses.

"What do you think about bringing Rye into this?" I ask him once we're sitting in his kitchen, sipping coffee and getting ready to head out for the day.

"Your sister, Mariah?" He taps a finger on the counter. "What do you have in mind?"

"With the wonderful things you can do with ice cream and cakes, I'm thinking of a collaboration that can expand both of your fan bases. You'd save time by not preparing your own ice cream. And it's not as complicated as trying to invent creative cocktails to pair with your desserts."

"I like what I'm hearing so far."

Excitement ripples through me. "Great. I can reach out to her today and figure out a few things. Off the top of my head?—"

"I'd rather you sit on top of mine."

I move closer to him, loving how we can just be together. As soon as I'm within arm's reach, he pulls me in for a kiss. The warmth of his embrace, coupled with the softness of his lips against mine, threatens to keep us in his house even though we both need to get out of here.

When Dean's tongue passes over mine, the vibration of my moans collides with his own sounds of sexual anticipation. We're unstoppable as he lowers his mouth to my neck while his hands work their way under my shirt to cup my breasts. He pinches my nipples, drawing a whimper out of me before I slide my hand into his jeans to grip his growing cock.

Suddenly, nothing we have planned matters as I pull his erection out. My fingers stroke him slowly before I move down to inhale the tip. My mouth works quickly, his palm guiding the back of my head until his climax spills down my throat minutes later.

I pop up with an inkling of satisfaction and a promise to continue what we've started later.

"That's not fair," he says. "You get to taste me, and we don't have the time for me to eat you for breakfast."

"You can have me for dinner," I tell him with a grin.

"I'll hold you to that."

"Back to what I was saying, you can collaborate with the ice cream parlor. I have an idea. Creamy Christmas."

Dean practically chokes on his drink as he laughs. "I'm going to need more information."

"Well, it's not like I'm offering your cock and cream on the menu," I laugh with him.

"I'd hope not. I'm a one-woman kind of guy, and the only woman I want is standing in front of me, trying to tell me about an erotic idea?—"

"Not erotic," I assure him. "Creamy Christmas Cakes, Cones, and Cocktails can be a popup event that brings together some of the businesses around town. We'll offer it to your followers as invite-only because everyone wants to be a part of something no one can get into."

Confusion settles across his thick, dark brown brows.

"It sounds complicated, but over the next few weeks, we'll build up the momentum to the crossover event. I'll make sure that Rye's posts align with yours, and once we tell everyone it's by invitation only or it's first come first serve with a max of two hundred servings, scarcity takes over."

"Ah, that I get. Do I have to do anything with my social media accounts?"

I grin and shake my head. "No. By paying for my services, you relinquish control to me. All posts will be approved by you, and we can even brainstorm a few together if you like."

"That works perfectly for me."

We leave his house, and over the next few weeks, Dean and I work together to bring my marketing campaign to life. We're able to grow his audience and increase business for multiple businesses, my youngest sister's ice cream shop included.

I'm beyond thankful that things finally fell into place. When I stroll into Sweet Treats a week before Christmas, there's a nip in the wintry air and a line out the door. It

takes some convincing to let the customers know I have no intention of cutting the line, but eventually, I make my way toward the counter.

Dean's assistant baker, Dana, works alongside two other employees to serve everyone. When she sees me, she flashes me a smile before ushering me behind the counter and into the kitchen, where Dean puts the final touches on cupcake orders.

"What's the muffin of the day?" I ask with a grin.

"Rudolph's Coconut Rum," he replies with a piping bag of scorching red icing in his hand. "We have a gingerbread cookie ice cream sandwich, too. Tell Rye that the coconut rum gelato is a hit."

"Oh, she knows," I reply with a toothy smile spreading across my face. "We're officially sold out of the Creamy Christmas event seats. I actually have a meeting with the mayor to turn this thing into an annual festival for the town. City Hall wants me to run the advertising and marketing while being the liaison between city planning and businesses around town."

Dean drops his piping bag to wrap me in a hug. "Holy shit. That's great, Mackenna. I'm so happy for you."

"I couldn't have gotten this opportunity without you taking a chance on me and without Hank running out of the bar that night. I've been so busy with this campaign that I forgot to ask about your bartender search. How's that going?"

Dean leans down and kisses me. "You can do anything with the right people on your side, but this opportunity is one you created out of that brilliant mind of yours. People just need to see what you're capable of. As far as my bartender search goes, I'm guessing you haven't been back to On the Rocks lately?"

"Um, it's been about two weeks, but no. What happened?"

"Hank is back." He chuckles as he moves back to decorate his cupcakes.

"Really? When did that happen?"

"Last week. Apparently, after taxes, the jackpot basically wiped out their credit card debt and paid off their house, but bills are still coming in. Hank and Joe-Marie aren't the entrepreneur types, so he asked for his job back."

"That's a good thing, I guess. Right?"

Dean shrugs. "For us, it is. I don't have to interview any more people, and Hank gets to make a living doing what he loves without stressing over a mortgage. It feels like a win-win-win situation."

"What's the extra win for?"

He smirks and winks at me. "I won you."

"Won me, huh?"

"Won you over? Convinced you to let me in."

I giggle. "I've let you in, on, and around me in ways no one else can imagine."

"Speaking of our, uh, creative sex life, do you want me to save some of this red icing?" He wiggles his thick brows up and down.

"Only if we're using it at your place. I can still smell caramel from our last confectionary catastrophe in my wooden floors."

"I can bring the floor buffer, treat your entire place, and see if that helps."

"Well, there aren't any ants or other critters, so it's probably just the scent of our memories playing tricks on me."

"I'll still come by and go over the floors just to be sure. Believe me, you don't want to find out later that something leaked and turned to mold or anything."

"Always the fucking gentleman," I sigh.

"The only gentleman you like to fuck." He holds up a finger full of icing to my mouth, and I suck the red cream off his finger with a moan of delight.

"That tastes like a maraschino cherry," I tell him. "That's delicious."

"It's a slightly altered recipe from my pina colada cupcakes that I offer in summer. I've added some spice to the cake to make it more festive for the winter holidays."

"You're a genius. Will you let me cook or bake something for you? I want to thank you for everything that's happening because you took a chance on me. You're always there to help me, and I just want to do something nice for you."

Dean's silence is loud, but not for long. "I'll let you do anything to me and for me, Mackenna. All I need to know is the time and place."

"How about tonight at my place?"

"Tonight can work. We have some late orders going out, but I should be finished here by seven. Is eight o'clock good for you?"

"Yeah, that's perfect. I'll see you at eight, then."

"Do you need me to bring anything?"

I push myself onto my toes, letting the lingering flavor of the red icing enhance a sultry kiss that draws out a moan from us both. When I begin to pull away, he holds me close a few seconds longer before I step back and swipe a piece of hair behind my ear.

"All you need to bring is yourself, Dean. I have everything sorted out for a meal that's going to knock your socks off."

6

DEAN

I manage to get out of the bakery earlier than expected, giving me time to go home and shower. I opt for a silver tie, dark blue shirt, and black pants under a long black coat. It doesn't take long for me to get to Mackenna's house, a small cottage-style home on a quiet street in our little town.

As Mackenna and I grow closer, I want this to be forever. I'm happy for her success and love that I could help her find new clients. She's a visionary when it comes to marketing. The business at the bakery has doubled, and I see it increasing the longer we implement her ideas. If I'd known she needed the work sooner, I would have hired her a long time ago.

But that's Mackenna.

She doesn't complain. She puts her head down and deals with everything life throws at her. From losing her mom to pausing her college career to taking on the volatile role of a freelance marketing professional, she just gets shit done.

When Mackenna opens the door, I'm blown away. The aroma of savory food greets me, along with a vision of beauty, making me happy that I put in the effort to dress up for tonight. The spaghetti-strap black dress she's wearing frames her body perfectly. Her smile is subtle, drawing me into her hazel-eyed gaze. The way her hair frames her face tugs at my urge to run my fingers through it.

"Well, come inside." She holds out a hand to me.

I plan to do just that, but for now, she leads me into her cozy home.

It's about the same size as my place, but the living room is in a separate room. The dining room is more of an office space than a place to eat, and her kitchen is far bigger than mine. Her bedroom door is down a hallway off the dining room, where I can see the soft flickering glow of candlelight.

"Whatever you're making smells heavenly," I tell her.

"Thank you. It's a recipe my mom taught me. Chicken marsala with roasted potatoes and sauteed spinach. I also have a Chardonnay to go with it," she says with a hint of nervousness.

"I'm sure it's going to be delicious," I assure her as we sit at a table for two in the corner of her kitchen.

Delicious is an understatement. I clear my plate and most of the food she's made effortlessly. After dinner is done and the kitchen is clean, we relax in her living room, music playing softly around us.

"Thank you for sharing that recipe with me, Mackenna. It was truly a masterpiece. Better than the restaurants around here." My back is against the arm of the couch, and she sits between my legs, her head resting on my shoulder.

"You don't have to butter me up. I know you can cook it way better."

"Don't do that. I love the way you cook. Just because people pay to eat what I bake doesn't mean I'm a great chef. I know about ten different dishes that I can put together for dinner and just rotate between them," I admit with a laugh.

"How about dessert recipes?"

I find myself absentmindedly stroking her forearm as we talk. "I have about ten base recipes and just tweak them to make whatever idea I have work. The best thing about the bakery and the bar is that customers don't deviate too much. When I give them a simple menu, most pick the same thing."

"That makes sense. You only serve five kinds of coffee and tea."

"Keeps the costs down, but seriously, Mackenna. Don't sell yourself short. You're a great cook. Seriously, thank you for this. I don't have people cook for me often. It means a lot to me."

She turns to face me, adoration and seduction in her eyes. Mackenna tips her head closer to mine as we fill the next few minutes with a slow kiss. It ends with her lying on top of me.

My hands move down her body, pulling the straps off her shoulders and then hiking the bottom of her dress up to her waist. The voluptuous curve of her ass under the palms of my hand has my pulse racing as I tap it lightly, just to hear the sound of her flesh bounce against my skin.

I grab her soft backside by the handful, switching between a rough grab and a playful smack. When Mackenna starts grinding her lap against my crotch, I know I won't be able to keep my clothes on for much longer.

Still, I want to enjoy her body on top of mine, just the way we are for now. My fingers massage her ass like I'm kneading dough. Every motion is gradually more aggressive than the last. I can't stop us from flipping over so she's on her back, and I'm on top of her.

The top of her dress sits under her tits, pushing her nude nipples upward, putting them in the perfect range for my mouth to capture one while my hand massages the other. My free hand dips between her thighs to feel her pussy.

She's wet, but I don't want to move too fast.

I pull away with a gasp for air, pushing myself to my feet before I lean down to scoop her into my arms.

"Always the fucking gentleman," she whispers as her lips cover mine.

I kiss her with an intensity that almost makes my knees buckle. We move into her candle-lit bedroom, where I spot an ornate bed. It's a cream-colored, velvet, four-post canopy bed. The room has white and gold accents, and the candles make me feel like I'm stepping into heaven.

I place her on the bed, remove her dress, and use the stretchy fabric to tie one of her wrists to the post beside her nightstand. My tie works to secure the other wrist to the opposite post. I take my time coming out of my shirt, letting her eyes etch every hard-earned muscle of mine into her memory.

I use my shirt to secure her ankle to the bottom post, and my belt secures the other. Her gorgeous hazel eyes are wide, questioning me silently with excitement. With her pussy on full display, I clench my jaw to steady my heartbeat and ease my own enjoyment to make sure this lasts longer.

"Time for dessert." I grin and start from her toes.

My mouth kisses her tenderly on the inside of her ankle, drawing out squeals and giggles. As I snake my way up the inside of her leg, Mackenna starts to squirm.

"Dean," she laughs between panting breaths. "You're driving me crazy."

"I'm just getting started."

I continue to blaze my trail of kisses to the delicate center between her thighs. The first swipe of my tongue between her slits causes Mackenna to arch her back and anchor her ass to the bed.

"No, no, we can't have that. I need to eat all of it," I tell her as I hook my arms under her thighs and bring her pussy to my face. I suckle, kiss, and move my mouth over her tender lips the same way I'd kiss her mouth.

There's a duality of flavors erupting across my taste buds. There's a tangy tartness of her entrance contrasting against the subtle sweetness of her skin ... better than any dessert I can conjure in my shop.

I find myself moaning, humming as if I'm dining on a decadent morsel of chocolate. I think I'm enjoying her pussy even more than the food we just finished. My tongue dances against her clit and between her folds until I feel the familiar vibration of her climax.

The way Mackenna's inner thighs tremble makes me proud to be her fucking gentleman.

"Yes, give it all to me, baby. Come for me, Mackenna."

She moans and whispers harshly, "Fuck me, Dean. Please. Just fuck me."

"Not yet. I need you to come for me again, darling." I maneuver one arm from under her thigh so I can finger her while flicking my tongue across her swollen nub.

After slipping two fingers inside of her, I can feel her pleasure tighten around me as I stroke another orgasm out of her. When I feel her release coating my fingers, I pull them out and suck her sweet nectar off them.

My mouth moves away from her pussy, up to her stomach, and back to her mouth, where I claim a kiss. It's a kiss that muffles her yelp of surprise when I rub the tip of my cock against her entrance before pushing inside.

Tight.

Soft.

Warm.

Mine.

Ripples of her pussy welcome my dick like it's been made especially for me. The grip of her around my shaft threatens to finish me, but I blow out a deep exhale toward the ceiling as I anchor my hands beside her torso.

Gritting my teeth, I go slow at first, but my thrusts become faster, wilder, and more coordinated. When Mackenna opens her mouth to scream my name, I help her along by teasing her clit.

She moves in sync with me, and I no longer want her bound to the bed. I release her ties as quickly as possible.

Mackenna doesn't waste time as she wraps her legs around my waist, and I move into a standing position where she can grab the top bar between her bedposts. I grab her by the hips and pick up my speed. The sounds of our bodies pounding into one another echo around the room.

Mackenna doesn't let me maintain control as she releases one hand to wrap around my neck. She straddles me to the point I have to stand still and let her use me, let her fuck me, let her do whatever she desires.

She whirls around after letting her other hand drop to spin me onto the bed. She straddles me so she can ride my cock while I lie on my back. Thank God her bed is sturdy.

She digs her nails into my shoulders to anchor herself as she bounces, glides, and slides herself back and forth over my shaft.

"Fuck yes," I snarl as she rides my cock like she owns it. Fuck it. She does own it. I can't stop the words flowing out of me. "Yes, ride my cock. Just like that. It's yours, fuck yes, it's yours, Mackenna."

Mackenna grips me by the chin forcefully. "Damn right, it's mine."

Her confidence is cocky. The uncertainty that used to exist between us is no longer there. This is the woman I love. She continues to ride me until she arches back with a stuttering stroke.

I reach up, grabbing her tits gently and flicking the nipples with my thumbs while she coats my shaft with another climax. Thankfully, I'm still ready to go. I'm not sure how much more I got in me, but I don't want to lose this momentum.

My hands move from her tits down to her waist and around to her ass cheeks. I spread them slightly, gripping them to get her moving again.

"Hold on, baby," I tell her with a wink.

She plants her hands on my chest and her knees against the side of my stomach. I

hold her tight and pump into her like a beast unleashed. We fuck like we're never going to see each other again.

My body shudders as I spill myself inside Mackenna's walls, leaving us spent but happy.

Mackenna rests on my chest as we come down our sexual high. I can feel her walls gripping my shaft as it softens, but with every pulse of her pussy, I find myself stiffening again.

"You're going to get me all riled up again," I warn her. "This second round won't be long, and it won't be soft if you keep at it."

She laughs softly. "Always the fucking gentleman. I can take whatever you dish out, Dean."

"Say less."

She takes my cue and my warning and reaches her hand beneath our nexus to massage my balls, which gets me hard almost immediately. I begin to flex my hardening cock inside of her pussy.

We flip over so I can stroke myself into a full erection. It doesn't take long at all as I fuck two more orgasms out of Mackenna. It's not long and drawn out, only taking a few strokes after I'm sure she's satisfied to release my second climax inside of her.

The minute we're done, I walk into her bathroom to grab a washcloth to clean us both off. Once we're in her bed, swaddled in her blankets, and the cold snap of winter whirring outside her window, we fall asleep in each other's arms.

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MACKENNA

The weekend after Christmas is the same as the popup event I've been curating for the past few weeks. Happiness washes over me because, even with the limited room, there are people in line waiting to simply take pictures just to say they were there.

My youngest sister, Mariah, is setting up an ice cream station outside.

"It's freezing out here, Rye," I tell her as I walk toward her station.

The spitting image of our mother, with dark brown curls and eyes, stares at me from under a festive snowman hat. "If you come closer, Kenny, you'll see."

She's right. As soon as I step into her twelve-by-twelve space, white space heaters keep the area comfortable and cozy.

"You are right. So what are we serving today?" I ask her.

"I have fruity rice cereal milkshakes, a marshmallow ice cream with a fruity cereal crispy crumble swirl, and I'm pairing that with a strawberry martini, courtesy of your boy toy," she says with a laugh.

"Nice, I'll get that posted, and if we still have any left after the first two hundred, we'll keep the event going until we're sold out. You have enough, right?"

She rolls her eyes and pops her hand on her hip. "Really? I have an ice cream shop that stays open year-round and rivals those fancy franchises. Of course, I have

enough. I'm also giving out coupons for anyone who doesn't get any today to get a free scoop at the shop."

"You make my job easy, Rye." I leave her to finish getting ready for the event to start.

A few steps away is Dean's setup under a canopy that also uses four heaters in every corner to keep the space warm. He has a few tables set up and what looks like a metal cabinet on wheels.

"Good morning, Mr. Rockland." I smile as I get closer to his table.

Dean has three long tables with elegant glass cases to display his confectionary concoctions. A variety of miniature tarts are in one case, and cupcakes are in the case on the second table. The third table holds an assortment of chocolates and candies.

"Good morning, babe," he replies, somewhat distracted and understandably so.

"Are you going to be okay handling everyone?" I ask him.

"No," he laughs. "Evan is going to be here in a few minutes. He'll deal with the crowds. Hank is coming in about an hour or so. He wants to wait until after we start this thing before he brings out the booze."

"What do you have so I can post it along with Rye's menu options?"

"These are strawberry curd tarts with that fruity rice cereal crumble sprinkled on top of a lemonade whipped cream. White chocolate cupcakes with gingerbread flavored buttercream, and Dana whipped up a bunch of fudge and candies for that table. She'll be here too. As a matter of fact, I think I left something at the bakery."

"I can drive you over there once Dana and Evan get here."

"That's perfect, Mackenna. Thank you."

After posting the pop-up's location again, our town's mayor says a few words and wishes everyone a happy holiday season. Every customer is bundled up, and I work with Hank to serve boozy hot chocolate until it's time for me to bring Dean back to Sweet Treats.

Once we're inside the bakery, something seems different. There's a soft, luminous glow coming out of the kitchen, which makes my heart pound against my chest.

"Is something on fire back there?" I ask Dean. He holds his hand out to me, and I take it, letting him lead me behind the counter.

Just beyond the swinging doors that separate the kitchen from the front of the bakery is something I never imagined. Candles flicker, but the flames are from tiny, twinkling LED lights that dance around the kitchen.

"What's going on?" I ask Dean.

Those light blue eyes, reminiscent of glass, pull me closer to him as we stand in the center of his immaculately clean kitchen. White and gold rose petals outline a heart on the floor where Dean stands in front of me. He drops to one knee and holds up a leather black ring box.

My heart feels like it's trying to jump out of my chest.

"Mackenna Monroe, I don't know when I fell in love with you. What I do know is that I can't remember a day when I didn't. It might have been when you pushed me off the swings at the park when we were kids. Or it could have been you stepping up to help me when I needed you most. We've always been there for one another, and I don't want to go another day without you being my wife."

I can hear my breath in my ears. Anxiety, love, affection—all of my emotions are roaring to life until they silence themselves long enough to hear Dean ask me that magical question.

"Will you make me the happiest man in the world and be my wife? Marry me, Mackenna. I love you so damn much."

It's only for a moment that I can't find my voice, and I choke out a sobbed reply. "Of course, Dean. I love you, and I will marry you."

He slides the ring on my finger before rising to his feet, embracing me with a dozen kisses to seal our future together.

The End

Thanks for reading!