







# Jealous Stepbrother (Steamy Shorts #17)

**Author:** *Lena Little*

**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** JEALOUS STEPBROTHER

a stepsiblings romance with steamy instalove, passionate jealousy and a fight for independence

Callum

It's supposed to be nothing more than a one-night stand, but weeks later, I still think about her. Dream about her. Long for her.

The only woman who occupied my mind like it's her home.

I never even got her name, even though I can still play her long moans and whimpers on a loop in my head.

So, when I see her at my mother's wedding, I'm determined to never let her go. It's rare for anyone to get a second chance, and I won't waste mine. The problem?

She's my new stepsister.

Perfect. Just perfect. Like the gods are laughing at me right now.

Of all the people in the world, Mother decides to marry her father.

Because, fu\*k my life, right?

Wrong.

It doesn't take me long to realize something. She IS my stepsister, but so what?

We both knew from the moment our lips touched that we'd be more than just a one-night stand. She felt it, I felt it. The universe and whatever higher power there is felt it.

How can I let something as inconsequential as being related by marriage come between us?

Caroline

# Page 1

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1

CALLUM

“What did the whiskey ever do to you?” A small, angelic voice pierces my dark thoughts, and I turn my head to find a woman.

Not just any woman. The most beautiful one I’ve ever seen. I must be dreaming, or the drink hit me harder than I thought because there’s no way someone like this exists. Not just existing but actually talking to me.

Her brown eyes that remind me of caramel crinkle at the corners, her full blood-red lips tilting on one side. Her brown hair is up in a high ponytail, and she keeps twirling the ends with her finger. The soft, freckled cheeks, button nose, and a dimple on her chin.

God, a woman like this exists, and I haven’t met her until now?

All my anger evaporates like mist. I forget why I’m here, why I’m sulking, why I’m furious.

I forget my mother, who has done nothing but drop one bad piece of news after another.

“I’m sorry. What did you say?”

The house music plays in the background, and the lights in the bar get dimmer. I

don't know if everything is going in slow motion or if the alcohol is doing a fine job of muddling my brain. I'm no lightweight, and I can handle my liquor well, but sitting next to this woman has my senses on overdrive.

She smiles again as if she knows exactly how she's affecting me. "I asked what the whiskey did to you. You're looking at it like you want to kill it."

I snort. "That's how I look when I'm thinking hard."

"Hmm. What else do you do when you're hard? I mean, 'thinking hard'?" She adds air quotes to the last two words, but I don't miss the glint of mischief passing her beautiful features.

A little flirt. I like it.

I raise a brow at her, wondering just how far she's willing to go with this dirty talk. "I get hard just by looking at you."

She slaps a hand to her chest and dramatically flutters her eyes. "Oh, straightforward, I see. Well, thank you, I guess?"

I slide from the bar stool and stand beside her, our faces inches apart.

This close, she's even more beautiful. The kind of beauty that knocks the breath out of me. The sounds of other partygoers and staff milling about fade. I can't see or hear anything past her.

A vanilla scent fills my nostrils, and I inhale it deeply.

"Please tell me you're not drunk, beautiful girl."

“Why?”

“I never take home anyone with alcohol in their system.”

She raises her glass, which is still half-full with something yellow. “Mocktail.” She grabs my shirtfront and pulls me closer, her breath warm on my face. “What makes you think I’m coming home with you or that I even want to?”

At this, I wrap a hand around her slender neck, relishing the way her pupils dilate and her lips part. “Because you want to know if you’re about to have the best fuck of your life.” I brush my lips against hers, and she sucks in a breath. I have to fight to keep my wits about me because my cock strains against my zipper, and it’s far from comfortable. “On second thought, I’m a regular here, and I know the owner. How about coming with me to one of the VIP booths instead?”

She chews on her bottom lip. “I’ve seen those. They just have curtains, not doors.”

“So? Scared to be seen?”

For a minute, I think she’s going to refuse, but she surprises me by leaning forward to bite my earlobe. Holy fuck. “What are you waiting for, then? Give me the best fuck of my life.”

The trip from the bar to the VIP area upstairs is hazy. We were all over each other, and I was nearly delirious with need, so much so that I almost tore her clothes at the stairs, with people passing us by.

By the time we get to our booth, a slight hesitation comes over me.

She’s right. It’s not exactly a room and doesn’t offer any privacy. The only thing separating every circular sofa is black curtains. If someone wants to take a peek, no

one can stop them.

I keep kissing her as I back her onto the table. I grab the curtains from behind me to at least cover us. I don't care if someone sees my ass, but it's another thing if someone sees her pussy. I'll gouge their eyes out without hesitation.

She jumps up to the table and opens her legs, which I graze with my hands. The warm pendant light overhead only highlights her beautiful golden skin. My God, so unreal.

She rests both palms on either side of her and tilts her face to the ceiling, exposing her long neck.

I grab the chance to taste her skin and suck on the sensitive spot on the side of her neck. It's going to leave a mark that will take days to fade. Good. I'm branding her as mine, just the way I like it. More than that, I intend to fuck her so good she's going to feel me long after we part ways. I'll make her feel so great that no other guy will compare. They will always pale in comparison to me. None of them will ever measure up.

She grabs my pants and starts to unbuckle it, but I stop her. "Let me worship your body, baby girl."

With a stubborn glint in her eyes, she shakes her head, tendrils of hair escaping her ponytail. "No. I need you to fuck me right now." She grabs me by the collar and drags a tongue along my jaw before nipping my earlobe. "Right now."

Well, then. Her wish is my command.

A low, deep growl rumbles from my chest, and I unbuckle my belt and unbutton my pants, shoving a hand inside my boxers and taking out my cock. When her gaze falls

on my rock-hard erection, her lips part, forming an 'O', and she swallows hard.

Her eyes turn glassy, and she bites her bottom lip, her voice shaky and a little breathless. "That won't fit."

I suck her bottom lip between my teeth. "It will. Your body was made for my cock."

The music from downstairs continues to pulse through the floor, a rhythmic thrum reverberating in my entire body, but the blood roaring in my ears is louder. The kaleidoscope of strobing lights paints the ceiling in flickers of red, blue, and green, but through it all, this woman in my arms shines like she has her own spotlight.

She wiggles and lifts the dress to her waist. Now the only barrier between me and her is a thin piece of thong, which I rip from her and press to my nose for a deep inhale. Musky and so her.

I shove the fabric inside my pocket before diving my head into the sweet, sweet juices of her pussy. Her back arches, and her fingers wrap around the edges of the table. My cock strains against my pants, but the need to taste her overrides the need to be inside her.

I start with a long drag of my tongue along her slit. She likes it, if the moan is any indication. Good. Then, I flatten my tongue on her clit. She also likes it. Good. I treat her pussy to soft, open-mouthed kisses. Nothing too aggressive. I take my time with her because this woman, despite knowing her for a little over an hour, deserves to be worshipped. How I know that for sure, I have no idea. But I do know that while we did come here for a quick fuck, I can still enjoy every second and not just go for the end goal of coming.

By the time I lift my head, my mouth and chin wet with her juices, she's panting hard and making sounds loud enough to make me go all-caveman on her.



“Please. I need you inside me.” Her voice shakes as she digs her ass into the table, rounding her hips, perhaps seeking my cock.

So I give it to her. My pulse pounds wildly in my temples as I wrap a hand around my cock, hissing at how sensitive the shaft is. It’s been hard since the first time I laid eyes on her.

I wedge the tip in front of her entrance, and when it slides into her, I clench my jaw and let out a long groan. It feels so fucking good, her inner muscles wrapping around me, choking me. Already, I can feel my control slipping. Not sure I had much to begin with.

My hands grope her ass, letting me push deeper into her. I lean down to sweep my tongue against hers. The little seductress sucks my tongue into her mouth.

Fuck.

She rocks against me, and my cock slides in and out of her slick channel. I slowly pull out, then slam back in. Pull out, slam. Pull out, slam. It’s a slow, agonizing pace, but if I go any faster, I’d lose it. I am not going to come before her.

Her hot, wet pussy will be the death of me. A good way to go, I must say.

My eyes snap shut as I go from slow strokes to hard, merciless thrusts. I help her along by teasing her clit with my finger, going round and round, rubbing the sensitive button lightly. She stiffens, but I don’t change my rhythm. I continue until her eyes widen and her mouth opens.

When she comes, she comes hard. So hard that her moan rings through my head.

Her body trembles, but I’m already hot on the heels of her orgasm.

I sink myself deep then draw out. One more and I get thicker inside her. Thicker and thicker until I erupt, coating her walls with my seed. It's the hardest I've ever come, and I almost get blinded by the spots of color dancing across my vision.

We stare at each other, her skin glistening with sweat, and her eyes still have that hazy look of lust in them. My softening cock pops out of her pussy, but we stand there with our clothes on, her pussy exposed, my staff out, and I feel like time has slowed down. The sounds, the lights, even her fast breathing—they're all in slow motion once again.

Until things snap back into focus.

With my heart still pounding, I help her up and fix her dress. Every instinct screams at me to not let her go, but my thoughts are all over the place. I'm disoriented by the intensity of what just happened, so I hook a finger under her chin and lift her face to me. "Baby girl, what's your name?"

She throws me a lopsided grin. "Call me your best fuck ever."

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 12:57 am*

2

CAROLINE

Eight Weeks Later

The sunlight streaming through the curtains is far too bright for comfort. They pierce through my eyelids, and I groan as I bury my face into the pillow.

I hate mornings, and I try to avoid setting my alarm clock if I can get away with it. My phone keeps buzzing on my nightstand, though, and I reach for it, fully intending to hit the snooze button and go back to dreamland.

When my gaze falls on the time, however, my heart stops.

10:25 AM.

The wedding ceremony starts at 11.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

I sit up straight in bed, mentally brushing off the last remnants of sleep. I fling the covers off and rush to the shower. I may be late, but I refuse to look ugly, not after I fought tooth and nail against this marriage. The least I can do is look my best and not show an ounce of proof that I spent the whole night drinking by myself.

For the first time in twenty-one years, I finish showering in five minutes. Since

there's no time for a full face of makeup, I simply slather on some tinted sunscreen, dab cream blush on my cheeks, and swipe bold red lipstick on my lips. I thank my lucky stars that I religiously apply skincare every night.

The tips of my hair are still dripping wet, but I don't have time for a blow dry. I almost forget my stilettos as I bolt out the door, mentally running through my essentials—phone, house keys, car keys, and wallet.

Check. Check. Check. And check.

The church bells chime faintly in the distance as my car skids into the parking lot. 11:05. I should be running inside now. I should stand with the other bridesmaids and plaster on my fake smile, pretending I love being here and enjoy watching my dad get married for the fifth time.

With my hands still on the steering wheel, I take deep breaths to summon the courage to leave this car. My pale lavender bridesmaid dress feels suffocating, the lace itchy, the waist too tight, the straps flimsy.

Why am I even here? Why do I bother?

Oh right. My studies. My tuition fees.

My dad, who was never there for me, showed up after high school graduation and declared he was paying for my college. The only good thing he ever did. Mom and I didn't like it, but we had no choice. She couldn't afford to send me to college with her meager pharmacist salary.

To be fair to him, he did come through and paid for everything, including my books, apartment, and other miscellaneous fees. I should've known he'd eventually come to collect. He would never do anything out of the goodness of his heart. That man

wouldn't know goodness if it hit him in the face.

A few weeks ago, he dangled it over my head and told me if I didn't attend his wedding—to a woman he recently met, no less—he would cut off all the funds. It didn't matter that I was graduating in a year, and I wouldn't need his money anymore.

So yes, that's why I'm here, even though this is the last place I want to be.

In a futile attempt at rebellion, I slam my car door, regretting the childish act a second too late when my car rattles. Great. Perfect. The cherry on top of the most exciting day of my life.

My heels clack against the pavement as I rush to the heavy oak doors. The guests turn at my entrance, and my eyes dart to the front, where Dad stands, throwing me a glare so fierce it can melt steel. Even all the way from here, I see him clench his jaw, disappointment written plain and clear on his face.

Is it still called disappointment when he doesn't really expect anything good from me?

With my head down, I slip into a pew and hunch my shoulders, trying to make myself as small as possible.

I only need to suffer for about five hours more, and then I'll be free. Then, I can rest easy, knowing my school and accommodation are paid for.

“Bridesmaids are on the other side.” A deep baritone voice, oddly familiar, pierces through my internal monologue. I try to place him, but I can't, not while I'm still warding off the last traces of hangover.

I have no time for socializing or pretending I care about this ceremony or pretty much everyone here. It already takes an enormous amount of energy just to be here. Nevertheless, I force a polite smile and look at the man beside me, freezing when I realize who it is and feeling like the floor has disappeared from under me.

I sway in my seat and shake my head, but it's not my imagination. He's actually here. In the flesh.

The guy I met at the club two months ago. The guy who blew my mind and made me come repeatedly on a table in the VIP booth. The guy who occupied my thoughts for the past few weeks. The guy whose touch I still seek.

Oh my God.

Recognition flickers in his eyes, too, and his smile freezes. He searches my face, his gaze on my mouth a few seconds too long, before raising one thick, bushy eyebrow.

“We are all gathered here today...”

He swings his gaze back to the front, but the air has changed between us. It's thicker, the tension palpable, and we're both intensely aware of the other's presence. Too aware, in fact.

Throughout the ceremony, I sit stiffly, my spine straight, and wring my fingers. My breath stutters every now and then, especially when I dart my eyes to the massive, veiny hands resting on his lap. The same hands that caressed me and pulled out sounds from me I didn't know I was capable of making. The hands that grabbed me, gripped me, and wrapped around my neck.

For God's sake, I shouldn't be having these thoughts right now!

“I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

The moment the cheers begin, I rush to the door. The reception is at the only five-star hotel in the city, and I can clear my head as I drive there.

Who is that guy? Does Dad know him? Is he related to Dad’s new wife?

These questions keep swirling in my head even as I arrive in the hotel ballroom and stand to the side, looking as out of place as a snowflake in a desert. Dad’s instruction was for me to attend his wedding, not talk to people, so I’ll stay here until it’s time to leave. Thank you very much.

Dad is across the room, an arm wrapped around his new wife, his smile broad.

I sip champagne and pretend to be busy on my phone when I feel a presence behind me, a shadow looming in my periphery.

“How many times are you going to check your calendar and calculator? Maybe try not to be too obvious and scroll through your gallery instead.” The voice belongs to him, of course, and I don’t miss the mocking tone.

My pulse quickens as I stand straighter and turn to face him. “I’m sorry. Do you need something?”

He stands there with a smirk, all six-plus feet, broad shoulders, sharp jawline, brown eyes, and high cheekbones. He’s like the very definition of someone winning the gene lottery. Even the messy black, slightly curly hair looks perfect.

His suit is rumpled, and that’s when I feel a certain kinship with him. Like me, he didn’t bother pretending this was the event of the century. Like he was here because he was forced to.

“You know, you were nicer to me the last time.” He shoves his hands into his pockets and tilts his head to the side.

“I’m asking you again. Do you need something?”

“I never got your name.”

I’m about to open my mouth to say something sarcastic because being anywhere near my father always turns me into the worst version of myself. I don’t get the chance, though, as a heavy hand lands on my shoulder. “Oh, good. You two have met.”

Dad and his wife, Raya, beam at us as though cameras are everywhere and they’re shooting a reality TV show. It’s as fake as the mop of someone else’s hair on his head.

Raya knows everyone is watching as she lays a hand on my cheek, which I try not to pull away from. “Hi, Caroline. I’ve been looking forward to meeting you.” She moves to the other guy’s side and squeezes his arm. “I see you’ve met my son, Callum. He’s your new stepbrother.”

If she told me the champagne was poisoned, she wouldn’t have gotten a better reaction from me. Tendrils of cold wrap around me, and I feel like I’ve just been submerged in ice water. A heavy weight settles on my stomach, and my skin tingles with discomfort.

No. No way. This isn’t happening. It’s a prank. Any minute now, she’ll tell me she’s joking. That everything is one big fat joke.

My knees buckle, and I feel dizzy.

Dad pulls Raya to him and nods. “This is great. We’re one big happy family here.



Just as it should be.” They turn toward the other guests, but in his usual fashion, Dad says in a low voice meant only for my ears, “You better behave yourself, Caroline. Don’t do anything to embarrass me.”

“Wow, he seems like a fun guy at parties,” Callum says, his eyes trailing our parents.

“Yeah, I mean, if he didn’t insult me or threaten me, I’d think some alien took over his body.”

“That bad, huh? Ah well. I’ve always been Mom’s biggest disappointment, so I might as well live up to the reputation.” He raises his drink to me and tosses it back, finishing it in two gulps.

“Oh-kay, nice meeting you or whatever.”

I turn to head to the bathroom when he grabs my elbow. It’s gentle enough, but he might as well have electrocuted me with the way my nerve endings crackle with sparks. He backs me to the wall and braces his hand above my head, caging me in and shielding me from prying eyes.

My breath comes out in a stuttering gasp. “What the hell? W-what do you want?”

“You screamed, ‘Yes. There. Please don’t stop,’ in a voice that could be heard all over the city block, but today, you hate me. Tell me, baby girl. What did I do to earn your ire?”

I don’t have an answer for him because I don’t understand it myself. I’m just as attracted to him as the night I met him. Actually, scratch that. He was handsome at the club, but in broad daylight, it’s magnified tenfold. He’s insanely attractive in a way that I might have thought of him as out of my league. When I remember how I behaved around him, it embarrasses me. For some reason, that embarrassment shifts

into anger. “I don’t hate you.”

“Yeah? So why does your face scrunch as though I haven’t showered in weeks?”

“I ... I don’t?—”

“Is the reason because you haven’t really moved on from me? Because I get it. I think about that night whenever I lie awake in bed. I can still hear the way you yelled my name or how you fluttered around me or how your body trembled as you came. You were, without a doubt, my best fuck.”

“Callum!”

“Those were your words, baby girl, not mine.”

My eyes dart to the crowd behind him, fear twisting my stomach into knots. “We can’t do this, okay?”

Callum gives me a devilish grin and lifts a thumb to graze my lip. “Why not?”

“We’re stepsiblings.”

“Not related by blood.”

“It’s wrong!”

“Says who? Your dad? My mom?” He chuckles. “Ah, the paragon of virtues.”

“Just ... we can’t ever do that again.”

“Promise?” It’s a challenge. He can see on my face how much that night meant to me,

but he wants me to say it out loud. Probably so I'll end up looking like a fool if I ate my words. His smile softens as he runs a finger down my bare arm. "Dance with me."

I can blame it on the weird vibes of this whole affair or my dad, who never passes up the opportunity to drag me down. Or maybe it's Callum's smugness. He knows what he did to me, and now he's acting all high and mighty because of it. If I met him again under different circumstances, though, I might have flirted back. If I didn't just find out he was my stepbrother, I would ask him to take me home.

But not here, and not now. Not ever. I need to make him stay away from me because I can already feel my resolve wavering because of his proximity.

He knocks me off my axis—something no one has ever done before.

The guests sway on the dance floor, and I scan the room. Without thinking, I sidestep Callum, grab the guy casually leaning against the bar, and march with him to the dance floor, weaving through the throng of dancing bodies.

When we reach the center, I spin around so my back is to the guy's chest, and I'm facing Callum, who grabs a bottle of beer from a nearby server, his gaze burning through me. Without taking my eyes off my stepbrother, I slide the other guy's arm around my waist and begin swaying to the beat.

Despite our distance, I can see Callum's face darken, the bottle arrested halfway to his lips. He doesn't even try to hide it. The thrill of realizing I affect him this way drowns out every other logical thought in my head. Better judgment is nowhere to be found. My actions thus far have been illogical, childish, and stupid. Why not add more to the list?

I grind my ass to the other guy's crotch, chuckling to myself when I feel his erection, but I barely have time to enjoy myself because the next minute, Callum is before me,

his face a mask of fury. He unceremoniously shoves the other guy and grabs my wrist, not caring that some people have turned to look at what's happening.

“Callum, what the hell are you doing?” I try to raise my voice above the music, but if he can hear me, he does a great job ignoring my words. I don't even know where we're headed, but he's basically dragging me, and I jog to keep up with his long strides. “Callum!”

He stops so abruptly that I collide with his hard back. Everything he's done is giving me a whiplash, but when I open my mouth to give him a piece of my mind, he pulls me into the bathroom. Once inside, the chatter and music are muffled, and it feels like the party is worlds away.

I whirl to face him and jab a finger on his chest. But before I can say anything, he grabs the back of my head and crushes his mouth to mine.

Just like that, my resolve to stay away and have nothing to do with him crumbles into dust.

### CALLUM

Caroline tastes as sweet as I remember. Perhaps even more so right now. And for all the attitude she's shown me earlier, she does melt in my arms, and it doesn't take long before her arms snake around my neck, and she's kissing me with the same fervor as that other night.

My hands wrap around her tiny waist as I deposit her on the marble countertop. The silk dress feels cool under my fingertips, and I tug them up her soft thighs. If it were up to me, I would've taken it off and discarded it, but part of my brain understands we could get caught anytime, and I wouldn't want to put her in that awkward position of having to put her dress back on.

I break the kiss to stare at her. "Tell me to stop, and I will."

She takes a few seconds to respond, her eyes searching my face for answers before it hardens. "No."

I can't stop myself from laughing softly, my thumb running along her arm, goosebumps trailing in their wake. "Needy little thing, aren't you? Missed how my cock stretched your tight pussy? Missed the feeling of me pumping you full of my come, the warm liquid dripping down your hole?"

This dirty talk apparently turns her on because her pupils lose their focus, and she purses her lips. "That doesn't mean we should keep doing this."

“Why not?”

“Like I said before, you’re my stepbrother.”

I slide a finger under one strap and let it fall down her shoulder. “Like I said before, we’re not related by blood.”

“Callum...”

My cock twitches in my pants at the sound of my name on her lips. “Goddamn, I’d like it better when you scream my name.”

She doesn’t get to say more as I grab the back of her neck again—something I apparently like doing—and kiss her hard enough to make her moan into my mouth. Without breaking the kiss, I use my other hand to explore her crotch, surprised but not really to find her lacy panties soaking wet. “Oh fuck, baby girl. You’re already ready for me.”

Caroline throws her head back and whimpers as I run my finger along her slit before teasing her clit. “Callum...”

“That’s it, baby girl. Say my name. Say who you belong to.” I end the sentence by dipping my middle finger inside her, burying it to the knuckle, while my palm rests on her sensitive button. “Wet and needy and ready. This pussy belongs to me, you hear? YOU belong to me.”

She’s already unable to form a coherent sentence. Instead, halting whimpers and heavy breathing fill the small space.

“Say yes, Caroline. Say you belong to me.”

When she still doesn't say anything, I pull out my finger and watch in satisfaction as her beautiful face crumples in disappointment. "Please, Callum. I need this."

"Are you mine, Caroline? I won't touch you again unless you give yourself to me—heart, body, and soul."

"A little dramatic, don't you think?" The side of her full lips lifts in a mocking grin, reminding me of the girl from the club.

So this is how she wants to play. Without another word, I step back and take a handkerchief from my breast pocket. Her eyes immediately snap into focus, losing their glazed look. "What the hell are you doing?"

It's my turn to give her a lopsided grin as I wipe my hand. "I'm very particular about answers, Caroline. When I ask, I expect an answer. You didn't give me one. So if you can't be mine, then what's the point of this?"

She huffs, her eyes full of fire. Her cheeks redden, and her nostrils flare. "How about a simple fuck like last time?"

I wag a finger at her. "No can do, baby girl. I realized I wanted more from you than a quick fuck."

"And if I say no?"

"Then it's a no, and I'll leave now, and you can go back to dancing with that loser on the dance floor." I'm bluffing, but she doesn't know that. After learning more about her and watching how easily her body responds to my touch, there's absolutely no way I'm letting her within a foot of that guy she danced with. Any guy, actually. Just the closeness of their bodies made me see red, and I was one second away from committing a serious crime in the middle of the dance floor and a room full of

potential witnesses.

“What about your mom?”

“What about her?”

“She’ll be furious.”

I bark out a laugh. “Do I strike you as someone who cares what she thinks?”

“But what happens if...” Caroline bites her lip, squirming uneasily while she lowers her dress. “What happens if you get tired of me? Are you going to discard me and move on to someone else?”

This makes me stop. “Why did your mind go there, Caroline?”

“I ... We met at a club and fucked barely an hour after meeting each other. You can’t convince me you don’t do that often.”

Ah, so that’s the issue. She thinks I’m a certified fuckboy who’ll bed anyone who wears a skirt. She couldn’t have been further from the truth. My behavior that night surprised me as well. “I don’t usually do that, you know. I go to clubs to get drunk with my friends, not find women to fuck in the VIP booth.”

She turns to look away and absently rubs her arms. “I don’t usually do that, either.”

That confession constricts my chest. So I guess I’m not the only one who couldn’t stop thinking about her. “Then, be mine, Caroline.”

It’s at this moment when I realize that this gorgeous woman is an open book. She can’t hide her emotions if her life depends on it. In the span of a few minutes, I’ve



seen her annoyed, angry, turned on, desperate, disappointed, and hesitant. A faint crease forms between her brows, her eyes flicking to the floor and then up at me.

And then, her face shifts. Her jaw is set, the curve of her lips pressing into a firm line. The hesitation disappears and is replaced by a resolute lift of her chin. Color flushes her cheeks, and she crosses her arms over her chest. “Fine, then. I’m yours.”

Words that will forever be seared into my brain. It’s all the permission I need.

I fully intend to fuck her and make her come right here and right now, but just when I pull her in for another kiss, a knock breaks through our little bubble.

With a groan, I yell sharply, “Occupied. Go away.”

The footsteps retreat, and we both exhale in unison. I’ve barely brushed my lips along hers when a second knock comes, heavier and more insistent. I rest my forehead against Caroline’s and take a deep breath.

“There are other bathrooms,” I snap. “Use one of those!”

“Now, where were we?” Caroline asks, clutching my collar and pulling me into her.

“Well, we can always—” The third knock is enough to make me grip the edge of the countertops tightly, trying to rein in my mounting anger and frustration. I let out a long, resigned sigh. “I swear to God, I’m going to drag that person to the next bathroom myself. You’d think everyone wants to pee at the same time.”

Caroline laughs softly and watches her reflection over her shoulder before fixing her hair and pressing a soft kiss on my lips. “We can mess around some other time.”

I want to protest and insist we finish what we started, but she’s right. The last thing I

want is to leave her hanging because some asshole can't walk a few steps more and find another bathroom. That doesn't mean I can't steal one more kiss before saying, "You get to walk away now, but I will stake my claim next time, Caroline."

### CAROLINE

“ I ’m not a big fan of powder blushes since I tend to gravitate toward creams, but this actually looks good on me. If you’ve been watching me for a long time, you already know how much I love a sunkissed look, and this one gives me that glow. See? Let me try their new line of lippies.”

The one thing about being a content creator is that the process isn’t easy. It does make me feel like a fool, talking to the camera and pretending I’m casually chatting with my girlfriends. I enjoy it, yes, but it’s mostly a means to an end. Meaning, I need money so I can stop depending on my father.

I’ve been doing this for a little over a year, and I’m starting to see a steady trickle of monthly income. Not as substantial as I would have liked, but it’s a start, especially considering I’m only doing it part-time.

I’m not supposed to film today, but what happened at the wedding reception rattled me to my core. It was one surprise after another, the biggest of which was Callum himself. The guy who made me throw all caution to the wind. The guy I couldn’t stop thinking about. The guy that made me want to touch myself and imagine it was his hand.

I was resigned to the fact that I would never see him again, and I mourned the loss of someone I never had. Then, boom.

It would have been fine if he kept his distance, but no. He had to ‘stake his claim’ on me, which made me furious because ... I liked it. I really, really liked it. I never realized how hot it was when the word ‘mine’ left his lips, but even now, as I think about it, it warms my whole body.

“This indie brand was founded back in 2020, and they’ve been making waves because of the longevity of their lipsticks. This one is matte in mauve. I’m skeptical about this shade only because it has never looked good on me, but we’ll see.”

I lean closer to the camera and check my reflection in the mirror. My apartment only has one bedroom, so this is where I always film my videos. With my last income, I purchased a good second-hand camera, tripod, and a pretty expensive ring light. So far, the response from my followers has convinced me that the money was well worth it. It will be even more worth it if I can use this money to fund my own studies.

I swipe the lipstick on my lips and press them together, making a show of checking out the result even though I’ve already tried it on before.

Something moves in the corner of my eye, and I swing my head to check it out, my breath catching in my throat when I see Callum leaning casually against my door. I didn’t even hear him come in. And how did he...?

Oh, shoot. I forgot Dad has a spare key. He asked for it because, as something he never failed to remind me, he was paying for this place. He couldn’t have me doing anything illegal here. It basically means my privacy is nonexistent as long as he’s paying.

To be fair, he hasn’t visited me ever.

I cross my arms in front of me and hold them up. It’s something I’ve learned from other creators, which makes it easier to cut certain parts without needing to scrap the

whole video.

“What are you doing here?” I hiss at him.

He lifts those broad shoulders and gives me that trademark Callum smile—smug, confident, sexy, and playful all in one package. “Thought I’d stop by for a visit. You weren’t there at breakfast.”

“Because I try to avoid spending time with Dad as much as I can.”

“Yeah, well, he sent me to you so I can take you to the country club.”

“I don’t want to go. He said I only needed to be at the wedding ceremony and reception. He never said anything about the country club.”

“It was a last-minute thing. One of Mom’s politician friends couldn’t make it yesterday but is in town today, so they’re throwing him an after-wedding party or, as I like to call it, an expensive excuse to show off how rich they are.” Callum looks over the vanity table before me and lifts a tube. “What’s this? It’s too thick for lipstick.”

I groan and try to take it from him, but he steps out of my reach. “That’s my contour stick. Now will you please leave? I need to finish this video.”

Of course, he doesn’t listen. He’s already popping the cap and twisting it all the way up, making me gasp and panic. “This shade is perfect for you.”

I grab it, twist it back down, and put the cap on. “What the hell do you know about shades?”

There’s that smug look on his face again. “Enough to know that you don’t need any

of these to stop me in my tracks.” He sits on his haunches, so we’re at eye level. “Don’t worry, baby. If you like makeup, then I like it too, even though I prefer you bare-faced.”

In twenty-four hours, I learned one very important lesson. My body has a mind of its own, and it has a habit of betraying me where Callum’s concerned. Or maybe I like his effect on me. I haven’t decided yet.

Callum’s nearness, the way his eyes run from my face to the column of my throat and at the cleavage peeking from my sleeveless top, how he drags his tongue along his bottom lip because he likes what he sees.

My hands clench into fists on my lap as his gaze travels and settles on my pussy, barely covered with tiny shorts. Despite myself, I cinch my thighs together, feeling the heat pool in my apex. The tension between us is so thick I can slice it with a butter knife.

“Callum, you’re distracting me.” I barely get the words out as I try to suck in as much oxygen as I can into my lungs.

“I’m not doing anything.” He looks back up at me, his eyes dark with need. “You want me to leave?”

Before I register my response, my mouth speaks. “No.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.”

He moves to kiss me, but I put a hand on his chest. “The camera’s still on!”

“Leave it. I want you to record me fucking you.” He glances at the camera quickly and does a double take. “And make sure you leave it at 30 FPS. Wait, is that a Canon

6D Mark II?”

The question throws me, and I scrunch my forehead. “Yeah, how did you know?”

“I like cameras. I have a couple at home. How much did you get it for?”

“It’s used, and I got it for \$800.”

Callum looks impressed. “Not bad.” Then his face darkens again. “Now, where were we? Ah yes. Film us fucking.”

I should say no and turn off the camera. I should cover it with cloth in case it accidentally records us.

But why does thinking about a sex video of us turn me on so much? When did I become this woman who wants to get fucked in a club and films herself having sex with her stepbrother?

It’s wrong, so freaking wrong.

And yet...

We collide against each other, the chair toppling behind me. We become a tangle of limbs as we shed our clothes, and I clumsily fumble with the belt of Callum’s pants. I don’t know how long it is—it felt like forever—before we’re both naked, breathing hard, and in front of the camera.

He turns me around to face the wall as he winds my hair around his knuckle and wraps his other hand around my neck. Oh my God. “Tell me you’re my good girl, Caroline.”

I rub the wetness between my thighs. “I’m your g-good g-girl, Callum.”

He takes his hand off my neck, and I grunt in disapproval, but it turns into a moan when he lifts my hips and enters me from behind. Warm tendrils grow inside me as he presses his thick girth into me, and my walls sheath him.

My skin is peppered with goosebumps as sparks zip through my belly with every thrust. He grazes his mouth along my bare shoulder, but that’s as far as his gentleness goes, especially after I grab his hand and wrap it back around my neck.

Callum pulls me to him and whispers, “You like this?”

“Yes.”

“Good girl.”

Two words I never thought could turn me on as much as they did. He claims me with his big, jutting length, and I’m all too happy to give as much as I’m getting, standing on my toes and grinding my ass against his hips.

His free hand grips my hair and yanks my head back. I can feel myself heading closer to the end when he licks the outer shell of my ear. And when he lets go of my hair to reach over and touch my clit, I lose it.

My nipples turn to little peaks as I flutter around him, orgasm crashing into me. A few seconds later, Callum curses under his breath and bites my shoulder lightly. He sinks himself deep into me one more time before I feel a trickle of something warm on my inner thighs.

I collapse against the wall, and he pretends to collapse against me. “My God, Caroline. You weren’t kidding when you promised you’d be my best fuck.”



I'm still dazed, but I catch myself feeling something more than post-orgasm bliss. I'm ... happy. Happier than I've been in a long time. All because of this guy who has claimed me as his.

### CALLUM

The second party—God knows how many they plan on hosting to accommodate all their wealthy, powerful, and influential friends—is in full swing when we arrive. The hum of polite laughter filling the gilded banquet hall grates my nerves. I hate being here, but, like Caroline, I don't have much choice.

After her divorce from my father, he left Mother in charge of MY money as if I was thirteen while he gallivanted all around Europe and Asia. I could get my hands on the trust fund my grandmother left me, but only after I reached twenty-five. Four more fucking years. Parents of the year, let me tell you.

The air smells like expensive perfume and food, mingling with the faint tang of wealth and hypocrisy. My mom's people, I should say, and based on what Caroline has told me so far, she and her new husband are a match made in social climbing heaven.

Before, my life goal was to be like Dad, to fuck my way all over two continents and never settle. But that was before I met Caroline. I woke up the next morning after the club, knowing I would never be the same. I caught fire and, in the space of a few seconds, was engulfed in it.

Even now, I can't take my eyes off her. With her beauty and the energy she radiates, I am helpless. All I can do is stare and stare and stare.

And as she walks beside me, her head held high, her cheeks flushed from fucking, her face glowing, I feel like I conquered something ... or someone. The thought that she's mine, all mine, makes my chest constrict in a funny way.

It has never happened before. Me being this possessive. Like I want to fly her away to a castle on a deserted island so no one else can see her beauty but me.

I sweep my gaze around the room and find our parents holding court by the stage. From the outside, they look like the perfect couple—good stature, plenty of zeroes in their bank accounts, a massive house, a yacht, and Mom's trunk full of jewelry.

Caroline and I know better, though.

This is all for show. They're the type of people who will smile, laugh, and be good-natured in public, but behind closed doors, they'll ignore each other. After all, what's the point of pretending when there's no audience?

"Are we supposed to pretend to be one big happy family?" she whispers to me, clutching my arm and setting me on fire with a simple, innocent touch.

I squeeze her small hand, not missing the way she tries to suppress a shudder. The way the energy flows between us both ways will always be amusing. She's just as lost in me as I am in her, and I wouldn't have it any other way. "Mom's an expert at that. I always thought she missed her calling as an actress."

"Same with Dad because validation is the only thing that matters. He would throw his own child under the bus if it meant he could keep his money and status."

I chuckle at that as Caroline clears her throat. I scan the area and spot the bar, all the seats filled, the two bartenders mixing drinks nonstop. "I'll go get you a drink."

She nods. “Non-alcoholic, please.”

“Aye, aye, madame.” I give her a two-finger salute, and she playfully shoves me back.

I weave my way through the crowd, nodding and smiling at people whose faces barely register with me. As I reach the bar, I hold up two fingers and order a Shirley Temple and a mojito mocktail. This is not the kind of party where we can get drunk and let loose. If anything, it’s one we have to tolerate and drag ourselves through.

Glancing at Caroline over my shoulder, a flicker of heat spreads through my skull. A man in a suit is standing way too close to her, his posture too relaxed, his grin too familiar, his face too punchable.

Caroline laughs at something he says, and something tightens in my chest.

Oh, hell no.

A burning sensation flares within me, and my stomach hardens. My breath comes coarser and faster, and I push myself off the bar, heading back to her at a brisk pace.

I have never felt as angry as I do now. Spots appear in my vision, and a gnawing unease claws at me. What if someone else wants her for himself? What if she realizes all this risk isn’t worth it? That I’m not worth it?

This jealousy is foreign and unfamiliar to me. It knocks me off-balance, and I feel a primal territorial pull that I can’t let go of or ignore.

By the time I get to them, the guy’s phone is out, and he asks for Caroline’s number. In an instant, all her earlier friendliness is gone and replaced by cool indifference. That’s my girl.

“I’ll call you,” he says, inching ever closer to her.

“Nah, I don’t think so.” Caroline crosses her arms over her chest and begins inspecting her nails as if those are the most interesting things in the world.

“Come on. My friends and I are going on a trip to the Bahamas later this year. I could bring you as my plus one.”

“No, thanks.”

“But you’d look so good in a bikini, and?—”

The moment he touches her elbow, I snap.

Jealousy morphs into fury—white-hot anger raging just beneath my skin. My hands curl into fists, and the only thing stopping me from turning his face into mush is Caroline’s wide-eyed warning.

Even as every instinct screams for me to clock him, I settle on a simple shove. Unfortunately, I underestimated my strength ... or not. Who knows?

The guy staggers backward, arms flailing as he tries to regain his balance. A towering glass sculpture is just behind him, and his back hits it with a dull thud. The sculpture, which looks like a rising wave or a clamshell, wobbles for a few seconds before tipping.

The crash is so deafening that everyone else quiets and turns to the source of the sound. Shards of glass scatter on the floor, and those nearest give the three of us a wide berth. The room has fallen silent, amplifying the sharp click of heels behind me.

I don’t need to look to know who it is.

Mom. Of fucking course.

She offers a faint, brittle smile to the onlookers, but when her gaze snaps to me, it's a different story. "What the hell is this, Callum?" Her voice isn't loud, but it's loaded with barely concealed fury.

Other people would have withered under the glare she casts on me, but I have years of experience, years of dealing with the demon inside her. "Nothing, Mother. He was being too touchy; it was making Caroline uncomfortable." I shrug and give her the sweetest smile I can muster. "I was just trying to be a dutiful, attentive, and protective brother."

Her sharp eyes cut to me, her nostrils flaring, but before she can open her mouth, her new husband wraps an arm around her shoulder and addresses the guests. "Sorry for that, everyone. Now, if you please, the drinks in the bar won't finish themselves."

That reminder eases the tension, and he half-drags, half-carries my mother to the people they were chatting with. Still with a smile, he glances at Caroline over his shoulder and says in a voice barely above a whisper, "If you're going to make a scene, Caroline, how about you just leave?"

The look of genuine hurt in her eyes almost sends me into another fit of rage. Caroline must sense it because she tugs on my hand and pulls me outside, where I welcome the cool air, letting it wash over me and calm me down.

Caroline turns around to check before pointing an accusing finger at me. "What was that, Callum?"

"What was what?"

"That show of possessiveness. I didn't think you were the jealous type."

“I wasn’t ... until I met you.”

Caroline runs her fingers through her hair in frustration, but all I can think about is wrapping it around my hand again and tugging it so I can suck on her neck. She groans and lifts her face to the sky as if she can find the answers there. “What does that even mean?”

I pace the parking lot, scrubbing a hand across my face. “I don’t know, Caroline!” My voice is sharper than I intended, my own frustration boiling over. “It was supposed to be a one-time thing with you, but now I can’t keep my eyes and hands off you.”

Her lips part in a surprise, and I know this is the last thing she expects to hear from me. Still, I don’t let that deter me from pouring my heart out. Hell, if you told me months ago that one day, I’d make a confession to my stepsister in the parking lot, I would’ve laughed out loud. Now, it isn’t so funny anymore.

“Callum...” Caroline wraps her arms around herself and rubs them. I don’t even have to think about it as I take off my suit jacket and drape it over her.

“Let me finish, Caroline. Please.” I rub the back of my neck and take a deep breath. “When you’re not around, I keep thinking of you. I couldn’t concentrate at school for the past two months because my mind always strayed to you. Yes, even when you were nothing more than a virtual stranger, you already had me wrapped around your finger. But now you’re here, and it’s driving me crazy because you’re off-limits. Forbidden fruit. Someone I shouldn’t even think about this way. This” —I point to her then me— “Whatever this is between us shouldn’t be happening, but God knows I’d die if I don’t touch you, kiss you, or hold you in my arms.”

Caroline gives me a sad smile. “They won’t approve, Callum. They’ll throw both of us out into the streets.”

“Yeah?” I snort. “My mother never wanted my existence in the first place. Besides, I’m not as useless as you think. I’m twenty years old, and I can find a job. I’m not sure if you know, but I’m good with cameras. I’ve been learning photography since I was in high school.”

“But that means throwing this good life away because of me.” The disbelief is clear on her face.

“What good life, Caroline? Is it the fact that my mother constantly breathes down my neck with everything I do? Or is it her regular reminder that, without me, she would have had a massive career in Hollywood? That night at the club? That was the first time in a year I went out without bodyguards trailing my car.”

“I-I didn’t know, I’m sorry.”

“The thought of someone else kissing you or touching you ... It feels like I’m about to explode.” I stop pacing and stand before her, cupping her face and surprised to find her cheeks wet with tears. “Why are you crying, Caroline? Does it make you sad that I want you as mine?”

Caroline blinks quickly, but it’s no use. Her tears are falling freely now. “Give me time, Callum. I-I need to think about this.”

The words hit me like a gut punch. Here I am, ready to risk it all, but she’s not. I try to keep my voice steady and even, though I can feel my chest splintering. “Sure, take all the time you need.” It tastes bitter on my tongue, of course, but I force them out because if she has learned anything by now, it’s that I will give her what she wants ... every single time.

She nods and darts her eyes away from me, her voice shaking. “T-thank you.”



I watch her walk away, every step twisting in my gut like a hot knife. I follow her with my gaze and watch as she raises an arm to hail a taxi. A yellow cab pulls up, and she glances at me one last time, her lips curving into another sad smile.

As the door closes behind her and the taxi speeds off, the ache in my chest spreads and hollows me out.

There goes the love of my life. The only woman who made me want to become a better man.

### CAROLINE

The only reason I asked for space was because Callum's words struck me so deeply I was surprised I didn't crumple on the ground. He said the same exact thing I felt.

Besides, I didn't think it was real. Love at first sight? Or, more aptly, love at first fuck.

It's the stuff of rom-coms and fairy tales. It doesn't happen in real life. Right? But there's no other explanation for it. From the moment we talked to each other and all the other times we've spent together, I always felt light and happy with him. He's good-looking, sexy, and funny. All those things are true, but there's also a deeper reason. Something I still can't explain, as though a part of me waited for him long before I knew he existed.

That night at the club, the pull was so strong it should have scared me, should have sent me running the other way. But the universe had other plans. Of all the people who could end up being my stepbrother, it had to be him.

What a sick, awful joke.

My dad is going to cut me off and kill me, probably in that order or in reverse, I don't know anymore. I'm not sure what he'll do to Callum, even if he's married to Callum's Mom. God, my thoughts are all over the place. Part of me wants to call Callum, but the other part wants to really think this through. I have to since it will

change the course of my life—for better or worse.

I'm still mulling over what to do when my phone buzzes.

Sperm Donor: Breakfast at 7

Yes, I have that saved as my contact because the choice is either Deadbeat Dad—kind of inaccurate as of now because he pays for everything, and I'm mighty glad I don't need to take on several jobs to get through college—or Sperm Donor. I chose the catchier and funnier of the two.

I respond with a thumbs-up because I can't be bothered with a proper reply. Dad will hate that, but whatever, he'll be furious no matter what I do.

Throughout the taxi ride home last night—thank God for non-chatty drivers who respect my need for silence—I found myself thinking back to the vulnerability in Callum. The raw honesty was so rare in my life that I had no idea how to react. It was just too much, too soon, even though I was well aware he was speaking for both of us. He felt the same thing I did. The only problem was he had enough strength and daring to follow his heart, and I didn't ... at least not yet.

Callum will be at breakfast; that's for sure. And after the way I left last night, I don't know what to expect. I told him I needed time and space, but really, I'm just trying to process my feelings. If I stop lying to myself, I can just fling myself to him, and we'll ride off into the sunset. But that's easier said than done.

What happens to me, then? My content creator money isn't enough to finance my last year in college unless I put in more time and effort. I mean, sure, I can quit school and go full-time as an influencer, but I promised Mom I would come home with a degree. I always fulfill my promises, especially to her. If she finds out my dad has cut me off, she's going to work double shifts at the pharmacy again.

I don't want that to happen. My decisions, my consequences.

My mind is tangled in a mess of worries, doubt, and overthinking. I can't sort them out.

The drive to Dad's mansion is a blur, and even with the windows open, which I usually love, I can't seem to get into a better mood. After this breakfast, I might just bury myself in the mattress and sleep the whole day. Or the whole week.

I arrive in the exclusive neighborhood where every house has at least a few acres of land, an Olympic-sized pool, tennis court, or a luxurious home theater. It's a place I don't belong and never will, and that's okay with me.

I park beside Dad's Aston Martin. My Toyota Camry looks laughable beside his sports car, which is priced north of \$200,000. The vehicle can pay for the rest of my college and let me provide for Mom for the rest of her life, but oh well, that's life, I guess. It's never fair.

My mind is still elsewhere as I walk to the massive front door, and I barely notice the footsteps behind me, soft but deliberate. It's not until I catch a shadow alongside mine that my stomach drops, and I whirl around, my heart pounding like a drum.

I freeze, gripping my keys tightly, the cold metal pressing into my palm.

It's the guy from the country club, the one who wouldn't take no for an answer. He's at least in his late 30s, with a messy mop of brown hair and a beard covering half his face. At the party, I didn't mind him too much. I realize just now that he's so much bigger than I thought. I don't have heels on, so I'm standing at only 5'8. He's at least 6'. He may not be as muscular as Callum, but I'm still no match for him.

Fear creeps up my spine, and every instinct yells at me to run.

“Look what your brother did to me.” He points to his bandaged hand, which he might have injured when he bumped into the statue. Telling him he deserves it is at the tip of my tongue. He was acting creepy. I tried to be polite, but he immediately took that as an invitation to act like a total pervert, invading my space and forcing me to give him my number. “He’s your brother, right?”

“No, he’s not.”

He tilts his head slightly. His smile isn’t friendly, as if he knows something I don’t. “He sure acted like a jealous boyfriend. I mean, do your parents know that you’re fucking each other when they’re not looking?”

I mask the fear by glaring at him and standing straighter. “Stay away from me. I’ll call the cops. Dad is also inside.”

“Why? I mean, just go out with me. Let’s go in the car. After all, you’ve been teasing me for two days straight.”

Cold and sharp panic grips me. I can just scream as loud as possible and run to the door, but my body feels rooted to the ground, my mouth refusing to open.

“You don’t remember, do you?” He sighs dramatically, shakes his head, and takes a step closer. “You danced on my lap and ground your ass against my cock back in the reception. Then, you flirted with me at the country club. Why do you look so scared now? Afraid of what happens when you string men along?”

“Stay away from me. I didn’t flirt with you, and a dance was just a dance. It didn’t mean anything.”

He reaches his hand to me, but it’s wrenched away immediately. A sharp inhale cuts through me as I see Callum gripping the other guy’s arm and twisting it behind him.

The guy loses his cockiness. He may be stronger than me, but Callum is a lot stronger than him.

Callum's jaw is set, his eyes burning with anger. When he turns to me, though, his gaze softens. "You okay, Car?"

I can only nod. Relief crashes over me so sudden and strong that it leaves me weak. I exhale a shaky breath I didn't know I was holding, and my hands tremble.

Callum watches me closely, and when he's satisfied I'm not hurt, he whirls the other guy and unleashes a barrage of punches that makes him fall to the ground. At first, he shields his face with his arms, but Callum is relentless. He doesn't stop, not even as blood gushes out of the other guy's nose.

"Callum! Jesus Christ, what are you doing? Stop!" Someone shrieks beside me, and I turn to find his mom, dressed in a Victorian nightgown no less, her hair perfectly coiffed already, a light dusting of blush on her cheeks, and a swipe of lip gloss.

Callum backs away and props both hands on his waist. He's breathing hard, sweat dotting his forehead. "He's been trying to force Caroline into his car. Sick pervert."

The other guy manages to laugh and choke on his blood. "At least she's not my stepsister."

The silence is so loud I can hear a pin drop. Dad steps forward, his eyes flitting from Callum to me. "What is he saying? What does he mean?"

His mom rushes to Dad's side, pulling on his pajama sleeve as if he can explain everything to her. "What is going on here, Kristoff? What is he talking about?"

Dad's cold eyes slant to me before he lunges and jerks my arm. It's so painful that for

a moment, I think my shoulder has popped off its socket. “Caroline, you answer?—”

He doesn’t get to finish as Callum positions himself between Dad and me, Callum’s bigger hand wrapping around Dad’s wrist. “Let her go.” Callum’s voice has taken on a dangerous, menacing edge.

Dad, as usual, is as oblivious as ever to Callum’s mounting rage. Dad’s inability to read the room is astounding. “She is my daughter. I will do what I want to her.”

Callum tightens his grip until Dad winces and lets go. “Try. See if I’ll let you.”

Realization dawns on Dad, and his face changes, going from fury to disbelief to disgust in the space of a few seconds. “Wait a minute. Are you two?—”

The other guy, who’s still sprawled on the ground, blood dripping from his nose, chuckles. “Yep, they’re fucking each other.”

Callum’s mom gracefully falls to the ground, a hand delicately pressed against her chest. Color drains from her face, and save for the subtle shaking of her hands, she doesn’t move.

Dad tries to sidestep Callum to no avail. His anger goes up a notch, fierce and wafting off him in waves. His eyes shimmer with barely contained heat, and he looks like he’s willing to burn everything in his path, including me. His eyebrows knit together, and his throat works like he’s attempting to swallow all the vile things he wants to say. But Dad is never the type to hold back. “I will cut you off. You will not get a cent from me.” His barrel chest rises and falls with each quick, shallow breath. “You’re an embarrassment. I should’ve known you would be. After all, your mother did raise you.”

Whatever hold he has on me breaks. Just like that. For years, I have endured all the

verbal lashings. All because he's helped send me to college and therefore eases Mom's financial burden. If he wants to insult me, he can do so with abandon. But I draw the line at him insulting my mother, the one who had to juggle two jobs so I could live comfortably. The one who had to work almost eighty hours a week so she could send me to swimming classes or art workshops.

My heart pounds so hard, it feels like they're about to break out of my ribs. I clench my keys and stare daggers at him. "Callum and I met before you both. We're not related by blood." I hold on to Callum's arm as he gives me a supportive nod. "You know what's embarrassing? Knocking up a girl barely out of high school and leaving her to fend for your daughter. Then, coming back only because you need to look good to the public by being a doting father."

His lips curl in disdain. "How dare you? After everything I've given you."

"How dare I? I didn't ask to be born, and I certainly didn't ask for the hollow version of a father you chose to be."

He lifts a hand, and I involuntarily flinch, but Callum catches it. "Not on my watch."

"Callum," his mother says, "if you go with her, I'm going to cut you off, too."

Callum then presses a kiss on my forehead and slides an arm around my waist, pulling me closer. "About damn time, Mother. I'll make sure to tell Dad that, too. I can't let you enjoy the money that's supposed to be my allowance."

Callum and I turn our backs to them, walking to his car, already looking forward to a future together. But I should have known Dad wouldn't let us have the last word.

With a huff, he yells, "I will tell your mother about this, Caroline."



I throw him an amused glance over my shoulder. “How sure are you she doesn’t know yet? She’s my only parent, and I tell her everything.”

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*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 12:57 am*

### EPILOGUE

#### CALLUM

Caroline is so goddamn beautiful I actually ache when I look at her. She's a photographer's dream, with her soft cheekbones, pouty lips, and fuck-me eyes. Although she probably reserves the last one only for me. Well, she better.

I adjust the camera lens and frame her perfectly in the soft light streaming through our living room window.

"Chin up slightly," I tell her in a professional tone, the one I use with all my clients, "and try to look past my camera. Think happy thoughts."

Her lips curl into a mischievous smile, and she raises one brow at me. "Like what? The way you pumped your tongue in and out of me last night? Eating me like I'm your favorite food?"

I sigh and snap my eyes shut. The tables have turned. Caroline is the one who keeps teasing me, not the other way around. "You are my favorite, babe. Now, please, focus and soften your eyes."

She doesn't listen. Instead, she flutters her eyes dramatically. "Like this?"

I give up and laugh. "Jesus, you're impossible."

"And you love it."

“And I love it.”

It’s time. The moment I cannot stop thinking about. The moment that has kept me awake for nights.

I stand and grab a small box from under the seat, pretending to rummage through the items. “Okay, now I’m going to ask you to pose with some random things.”

“Why?”

I don’t look at her because I’m an awful liar, and she’ll quickly catch onto it if she sees my eyes. “I can’t explain it, but you’ll just have to trust my creative vision.”

“Okay, sir.”

First, I give her a vintage birdcage and ask her to hold the hanging hook. Next, a pocket watch. Then, an antique handheld mirror.

Lastly, I hand her a small red velvet box.

She accepts it without question, just like the other items.

My heart pounds in my chest, my palms so sweaty that I have to put the camera down or else it might slip from my fingers. “Now open it, babe.”

She looks at it closely for the first time, her eyebrows drawing together in confusion. “Okay. What’s this?”

Caroline lifts the lid, and her breathing becomes erratic. Her eyes widen, and her tears gather. My heart is in my throat as I kneel before her and take her hands in mine. “I knew you were the one, Caroline, from the moment I met you. My biggest mistake

was letting you go that night and waiting for fate to intervene. I should've asked your name, gotten your number, and married you the same week. I won't make the same mistake again. I'm never ever letting you go. Will you marry me, babe?"

She lets out a sound that's half-sob, half-laugh, and nods, her fingers caressing my face. "Yes, Callum. I will marry you."

My hands tremble as I slip the ring onto her finger. I stand and pull her into my arms, emotions clogging my throat. "I love you, Caroline. Forever mine."

She wraps her arms around me and kisses my chest. "I love you too, Callum. Forever yours."

"And I thought you should know. Your mom's at your favorite hotel. I asked for her blessing last night, and she gave it to me. She's waiting for your call."

Happy tears slide down her cheeks. "Oh, Callum."

I don't know what I did in my past life to deserve her, but I bet I saved the whole world.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 12:57 am*

CAROLINE

“Chloe, love, please put that down.” Callum holds up both hands, his eyes pleading.

The moment I see the camera in Chloe’s hands, my heart stops. It’s Callum’s newest and most expensive yet. He hasn’t even used it outdoors and only takes it out of its case sparingly. Our three-year-old clutches it, her sticky fingers smudging the lens.

“Sweetheart, can you give Mommy the camera?” I ask slowly, my voice soft but firm.

Chloe’s big brown eyes sparkle as she hugs the camera to her chest and giggles. “No, no! Mine!”

Behind me, I hear Callum suck in a sharp breath. He steps forward cautiously, as if negotiating a hostage situation. “Chloe, love, that’s Daddy’s special camera. Let me hold it, okay? I’ll get you something else to play with.”

Chloe considers it for a few seconds, tilts her head, and then shakes it. “No. I take picture!”

For the first time since I’ve met him, Callum shoots me a panicked look, and I bite my lip to keep from laughing. This shouldn’t be amusing to me. “Chloe, that’s really, really important to Daddy, okay? Now, why don’t you give it to me, and we can go play in the park?”

She scrunches her nose, considering my offer. “We take picture there?”

I nod repeatedly. “Yes! We’ll take pictures with my phone.”

“Mommy will also buy you chocolates. You know, the egg-shaped ones,” Callum offers.

I glare at him because chocolates mean a later bedtime for Chloe, but Chloe’s face lights up at that, and she grins. “Egg chocolates!”

“Egg chocolates. Now give it to Daddy, and we’ll go to the store.” Callum’s voice is so full of desperation that I let it go. Chloe can have her chocolates ... only for today.

After a long, agonizing moment, Chloe toddles over and hands him the camera. Callum grabs it quickly before she changes her mind, his shoulders sagging. “Thank you, love.”

But Chloe’s already running to her bedroom, grabbing her favorite bunny stuffed toy to bring to the park and convenience store downstairs. We watch her with a mix of amusement and relief.

Callum sets the camera back to the topmost shelf and slides his arms around my waist before nuzzling my neck, his chest against my back, his breath warm against my skin. “Babe, you’re quite a handful, so I guess the universe thought it would be so funny if they amp up my stress levels and give me a daughter who’s an exact copy of you.”

I burst out laughing. “You have your work cut out for you.”

He nuzzles deeper, tickling me and making me giggle. “I don’t mind, though. I have the best girls.”

“Yes, you do.” I turn around in his arms and kiss him soundly. “And we’ll remind you of that every single day.”

The End

Thanks for reading!