



# Kissing the Grump

**Author:** *Baylin Crow*

**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Forrest Grump is the most confusing man I've met in my life.

No, that's not his real name, but the nickname is fitting. For reasons I may never know, he seems to dislike me on sight and purposely makes my job at the coffee shop more difficult than it needs to be. By some cruel twist of fate, he's also my new neighbor so running into him is inevitable.

He annoys me. He makes me nervous. He also makes me want to kiss him. Maybe it's because he's attractive and I've never been kissed. But maybe it's more.

Kissing the Grump is an MM Romantic Comedy Short Story.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### FORREST

Wiping away the condensation on the bathroom mirror, I look at my reflection. Fatigue is written all over my face after another long night of working to meet a ridiculous deadline I'd been handed down last week. Sometimes I really hate this job .

“Or maybe you're just getting old,” I mutter. I'm only thirty-four, but over the last year I feel like I've tacked on an extra decade or two. The bags under my dark brown eyes are more pronounced, and there's a semi-permanent red tint from only catching a few hours of sleep a night after spending the day staring at a computer screen.

I quickly scan the rest of my body as I run a towel over my skin to dry off. At least I'm still fit, even if I only have time for a quick workout with home equipment each day. And though I'm sure my current work project will trigger the onset of gray hair any day now, there's no trace of them in the russet brown strands or close-trimmed beard just yet. When I'd gone to school for graphic design, I never imagined it would be so stressful or time-consuming.

I yawn as I think about what I need to do today and my head immediately hurts. Coffee. I need coffee. There is no start to my day until caffeine has fully saturated every cell in my body. I don't actually know if that's the way it works, nor do I care. I just know it's the only way I'm ever going to meet my deadline this Friday and it's already Wednesday. I need to get my brain working.

I run the towel over my hair before tossing it into the wicker hamper. Stepping out of

the en suite bathroom, I cross my bedroom to my closet. Snagging a pair of khaki shorts and a dark green t-shirt from my closet, I put them on.

Even though the coffee shop is just downstairs from my second-floor apartment, the heat and humidity here in southern Texas will have me breaking a sweat the second I step outside. Things could be worse, I suppose. I could have to wear a suit and tie to work every day and be drenched by the time I make it to my office.

After slipping on a pair of white canvas shoes, I grab my phone, wallet, and keys from my oak dresser top before heading into the living room, beelining for the front door. I need caffeine, and I need it now.

It's barely six in the morning and everything is quiet as I step out into the hallway, aside from the muffled hum coming from early risers outside. It should always be this way, considering there are only four units total in the building with two units per floor. Unfortunately, that's not always the case thanks to my neighbor. Just thinking about the young punk across the hall stirs my blood with agitation because I know that the minute he wakes up, my apartment will be flooded with unwanted noise.

The convenient coffee shop had been a big plus for me when I'd chosen the dated two-bedroom apartment, but if I'd known the landlord would lease to anyone with a deposit, I would have thought twice about renting the place last year when my ex-fiancé and I had split up. My mood sours when my thoughts turn to my ex, so I shut them down. After locking up, I shoot a glare at my neighbor's door and then haul my sleepy body down the hall.

The worn green carpet should have been replaced years ago, and the peeling maroon and white striped wallpaper should have never been put up to begin with. The old wooden stairs creak as I take them down to the door that opens onto the busy city sidewalk. People zoom up and down the walkway dressed in business attire, clearly on their way to office jobs.

About a mile from central downtown, the shop and apartments are sandwiched between two professional buildings. Luckily, the door to the shop nearly touches the door I just exited from, so I hug the brown chipped brick wall to avoid the crowd and step under the red awning of Quick Fix.

The bell chimes above my head as I walk inside, and the rich aroma of fresh coffee beans floating in the air hits my nose. I inhale deeply, thanking the heavens—or whoever is responsible for that level of perfection. The scent always brings me a level of peace, and my mood lightens. And then the jarring sound of broken glass startles me.

I glance around the man in front of me, spotting a kid I don't recognize working the counter. He's no older than his early twenties and seems to be apologizing to Gina, the plump, sassy, brunette owner of this place. With jerky movements, the young man nervously adjusts the black hat that matches his apron.

His cheeks are flushed and bloom brighter by the second with embarrassment. He ducks down to pick something up behind the black granite countertop. I watch curiously, wondering if he's okay. I'm not sure why I care at all or why I find the pink staining his otherwise pale skin...endearing.

I frown at the thought. No, it certainly is not endearing . That's not even a word I can remember using one single time in my life. He's also young. Too young. And I'm not even remotely interested in being attracted to another man after my breakup last year. Relationships are bad news, and even if I were interested in dating, I'd learned my lesson about being with younger men the hard way.

Why am I even thinking like this? My frown deepens as I consider turning around and leaving. But that would be an extreme overreaction to a stranger, and frankly ridiculous.

When he stands upright again, I tear my eyes away from the kid and pretend to read the menu written on the blackboards hung on the interior brick walls.

I wait behind the only customer in line for what seems like fifteen minutes as the new guy fumbles around, screws up the order, and then has to be taught key by key how to ring up the total. Sighing, I pull my phone from my pocket and check the time. I have a video meeting in less than thirty minutes. I don't have time for this.

“Have a good day,” he finally says to the customer who's had far more patience than me. His voice isn't nearly as deep as mine. It's soft, and he sounds flustered.

Reasonably, I know I should take it easy on the kid, so I approach the counter and force away the annoyed look on my face. At least I hope I do, but I've been told many times over the last year that I appear permanently pissed.

“Hi there. What can I get you?” he asks, but my eyes have a mind of their own, watching his full lips instead of paying attention to the words. When I move my gaze upward, I'm in no better shape. His jade green eyes pop against the black uniform, and his glossy black hair curls from beneath the hat. The combination creates a very attractive guy. He furrows his brow slightly. “Um, do you already know what you want? Or do you need a second? No worries if you do.”

His words finally penetrate. Did he see me staring? There's a curious look in his eyes and maybe...interest.

“No.” I'm not sure why that's the only word I say, but no to all of this. Absolutely not. My eyes narrow as I glance over his shoulder at Gina. “My usual, please.”

She pops her hands on her curvy hips. “Do I look like I'm taking your order? Tell him what you want and try not to be an ass about it, okay?”

Gina is a straight shooter. It's something I usually appreciate about her, but not today.

This is not how my morning routine works. Shower. Coffee. Work. Annoyingly cute men are not needed, much less wanted.

I glare and look back at the new guy. "Fine. May I please have a large brown sugar shaken espresso with an extra shot, a splash of whole milk, pistachio cold foam, whipped cream with caramel drizzle and cinnamon dolce sprinkles. And a croissant."

I hear Gina snort. "That is not your usual. Change your mind in the last fifteen seconds? Or are you just being difficult on purpose?"

I stop just short of rolling my eyes when I look at her. "Is it okay if I change my mind?" I snark, even though I don't have the slightest clue what I've just ordered. "I want to try something new. New employee. New drink. Makes sense to me."

It doesn't make any sense to me, and I'm actually pretty sure I'll hate it. When I glance back at the new guy, he's staring at me like a deer in headlights. His wide eyes don't blink at all.

"Sure. I mean, whatever you want. I just...one sec. Gina?" He glances over his shoulder. "Um, help?"

Gina sets down a notepad she'd been writing on and doesn't hold back an eye roll as she approaches. "For this, I will make it myself just to watch his nose wrinkle when he tries it. It'll serve him right."

I don't look away from the new guy as she's speaking. He looks confused. I want to tell him I am too, but probably not for the same reason. He's likely wondering what the drink I ordered tastes like, and honestly, so am I. But mostly I'm annoyed he caught my attention at all. What is it about him that has me so rattled?

As Gina works, we stand in awkward silence, and I'm all too aware of the situation I've caused. The sooner I can leave, the better. Maybe I'll just find a new coffee shop and never come back. Who knows how long this guy will be here.

I shove my hands in my pockets and rock back on my heels until Gina sets my order on the counter with a smirk. "Here ya go, fancy pants. I hope you hate it as much as I think you will."

When I glare, she only offers me some sort of knowing smile I don't understand. Whatever she's thinking, she's wrong. I just want to try something new, and I think I've almost convinced myself of that now.

After she clearly overcharges me, I grab my cup and paper bag with my croissant. I offer a grunt as a goodbye and then head out the door for the last time because I'm never coming back.

I sip from the cup and cringe. What is this sludge? I immediately regret the decision. But he had messed with my head. I wait to get home before I pour it down the sink, watching my caffeine fix and productivity for the day slip away. I dread the idea of finding a new coffee shop, but the search will have to start in the morning because I have two minutes before my meeting is scheduled to begin.

### CHAPTER TWO

#### ELLIOT

Gina must notice my discomfort as I watch the surly man step outside.

“Don't worry about that old grump,” she says while gently bumping her shoulder into mine. “Forrest isn't a bad guy. Comes in every day, but hardly says a word.”

“Every day?” I reply with a nervous flutter in my belly. Forrest is good looking. I'd even go as far as calling him hot, except his personality leaves much to be desired. I wonder what his last name is. Forrest Grump would be pretty appropriate. He obviously had some issue with me taking his order too, although I can't think of a reason why.

Gina hums in response as she pushes strands of her dark hair behind her ear. “Seriously. Don't mind him. He usually just orders a coffee black...like his soul.” She chuckles to herself, but I can't help wondering why the man is so moody. He definitely piques my curiosity. “He did seem extra cranky today, but I promise you had nothing to do with it.”

I'm not sure how she can make that promise, because it felt personal. Whatever his issue was, I am certain I had contributed to it in some way.

I bite my lip while deep in thought, but I'm not given a chance to really consider why I had affected him so badly. A group of three women come bursting through the door and make a beeline for the counter. I'm hoping they order something simple, but



those hopes are dashed as they rattle off something that sounds more like an ingredients label than a drink. I stifle a sigh and paste on a smile.

Gina helps me fill the order along with several others over the next few hours. I keep an eye on the time because I have somewhere to be after work. Five minutes before my shift ends, she helps me balance my drawer and shows me how to clock out.

“Off with you.” She shoos me away, swatting me with a checkered dish rag covered in coffee stains. “You did great today. Toss your apron in the hamper in the breakroom, and I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Thanks, Gina.” I smile and head toward the employee door while she takes over the register.

I do as she instructed, whipping off my apron and throwing it in the linen bin. After I grab my things from my cubby and put my hat inside, I head out, offering a wave goodbye as I pass Gina.

I need to change clothes and find a cab. I’m still new to the city, and from a small town. Everything feels so complicated here in comparison, and at the same time, everything is so convenient. It’s definitely a culture shock and one I haven’t gotten used to yet.

My apartment is just upstairs from the shop, which suits me perfectly considering my only wheels are public transportation. Well, almost perfectly. Speaking of culture shock, I pause at the door of my new apartment and grimace. I can already hear the music blaring from my new roommate’s speakers, and I know I’ll be walking into a mess. When I’d answered the ad for this place, the price had been right, but the pictures of a clean and tidy home had been a lie in every sense. I’ve regretted the decision since the second I moved in the first box of my belongings. I can’t wait to find something else in the same area.

Just as I reach into my pocket, I hear the door across the hall squeak open and a deep voice grumbles behind me.

“I’ll have it to you by tonight, John. You caught me on my way out, but I’ll send over the proofs for you to look at this evening.”

Curious, because I haven't met our neighbor yet, I glance over my shoulder and freeze. No way. This can't be happening. It's him. The walking bad mood from this morning lives within feet of me because of course he does. And he looks even hotter than he had this morning. His brown hair is messier as if he's been running his fingers through the strands repeatedly.

Recognition lights in his fierce brown eyes as they lock on mine and then narrow. Forrest stills in his doorway, never looking away from me as he listens to whoever is speaking on the phone. I can't stop staring even though I know I must look like a deranged owl, wide-eyed and unblinking.

“Yes, sounds good. I’ll talk to you then.” He continues glaring at me as he finishes his call and then taps on his phone harder than necessary. The screen goes dark, and he shakes his head once at me. “No.”

Why does he keep saying that? What does he mean by no ? My brow furrows. “I'm sorry?”

“Absolutely not.” He shakes his head again.

This guy really does have a problem with me, I realize. But why? And how has he been my neighbor for a week and we’ve never run into each other?

Puzzled, I turn around to face him and cross my arms over my chest. I know I'm running late, but this new development has me too interested. I’ve never been

comfortable with any sort of confrontation, so I'm surprised when I hear myself respond. "Do you want to elaborate on that? Or just simply... no."

"You don't live there." He points at the door behind me. "Parker does."

Okay, maybe this guy is actually crazy. Maybe Gina just hasn't noticed or didn't want to scare me.

"Yes, he does." I agree with the lunatic. "And I moved in last week." He studies me in silence for a moment too long and it happens again. Words burst from my lips with an uncharacteristic edge. "Have I done something to offend you? Or are you just a moody jerk to everyone?"

"Why can't it be both?" he asks in a flat voice, facial features giving nothing away.

He's joking though, right? I'm waiting for the punchline, except it never comes. This guy is serious. "And what exactly did I do?"

"Listen, just stay on your side of the hall. Okay?" He scowls.

"Because there would be a reason for me to ever come to yours?" I ask while arching an eyebrow.

His lips flatten into a straight line. "When do you work at the coffee shop?"

"You want my schedule?" My eyebrows pop up in surprise. "Are you on meds? Like did you forget to take them today or something?"

Where did that come from? I've never said anything like that to anyone in my life. This man seems to bring out the worst in me. And I don't feel even slightly guilty for it.

Then his lips...twitch. And then they flatten again. Did he almost laugh? Is he even capable?

“Nevermind.” He shoves his phone into his pocket and steps out into the hall, pulling his door closed. I'm actually surprised he can stand to bring himself that close to me. To my knowledge, I've never been hated on sight before, and everything about him confuses me. He gives me a pointed look. “Just...don't.”

“Don't what ?” The exasperation is clear in my tone, but seriously, I'm about to call a doctor for this man.

“Don't anything .” Forrest turns and locks his door before he walks away, leaving me staring at his back until he disappears into the stairwell.

“What was that?” I whisper to myself.

The men I'm attracted to always seem to be straight or unavailable, which is unfortunate, but at least they've always been sane. So, why does my imagination turn to shutting Forrest's mouth next time by putting my lips on his? And there will definitely be a next time because my new neighbor is a hundred percent certifiable.

I'm going to blame the fact that I'm not only a virgin, I've never even been kissed. This is just a hiccup in the horny matrix or something. I'm sure of it.

Sighing, I turn around and unlock the apartment door. Now that I've dealt with Forrest Grump, Parker seems like a walk in the park. He's sitting on the couch with a bag of chips in his lap, but many have escaped and are laying half crushed on the blue cloth upholstery. His headset is on and he's laughing obnoxiously into the mic while playing a video game. I don't even think he notices me entering, which suits me just fine.

As I make my way to my room, I wrinkle my nose at the piles of clothes and trash he's somehow managed to double during the short shift I worked. I wouldn't call myself a neat freak, but it wouldn't kill him to learn to work a washing machine or find a trash can.

Once I'm in my room, I close the door and check my phone. I'm not at all surprised to find a couple of texts waiting from Katie. She's the first and only friend I've made in the city so far, and we have plans to meet for a late lunch. I'm already running behind thanks to the jerk across the hall, so I quickly tap on the unread messages.

Katie: Hey, I grabbed us a table near the bar. Just come on back when you get here.

I wince when I see it was sent fifteen minutes ago and then I read the second text.

Katie: Tick tock. I look like an idiot sitting alone. Get your butt here.

That one was sent two minutes ago so she must still be there. I type out a reply.

Me: Sorry, running late. Tossing on some clean clothes and headed your way. Don't kill me.

Another text comes through as I'm slipping into a pair of black skinny jeans.

Katie: You're good. There's a hot blonde at the bar and I'm trying to get her attention anyway.

I roll my eyes. She's said something similar every place we've gone to this week and we meet up often.

Me: Good luck. Be there soon.

I slip on a red t-shirt and slide on a pair of white sneakers before grabbing my things and rushing back through the apartment.

I'm almost positive I'll somehow run into Forrest again, but luck is on my side and there's no sign of him. Good thing too. I'm starving and edging toward a bad mood myself if I don't eat soon. If he says one more word to me at the moment, I might...

The mental image of shutting him up by kissing him once again enters my mind. Maybe he's not the only insane one.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### FORREST

Being a creature of habit, I find it difficult to keep away from the coffee shop downstairs for more than one day. I'd tried a little place down the road yesterday, but the inconvenience was a pain, and the coffee just wasn't as good. Still, even as I plan to go grab a cup from my usual caffeine supplier, I hesitate at the door. Will the new guy be working? I frown. Why does it matter, anyway?

I recall his green eyes, and how they'd widened in surprise when we'd unexpectedly seen each other in the hallway. He hadn't been the only one shocked. What were the chances of the one man I'd noticed since the split with my ex would live directly across the hall? His eyes really were a fascinating, vibrant shade. I immediately follow the thought with a scowl.

“For fuck's sake, Forrest. They're just eyes. Lots of people have green eyes. His are not special,” I grumble to myself, even though I'm well aware the color isn't common.

He's attractive. Okay, I admit it. That doesn't mean I have to act on it. I can ignore him in the name of good java. It's a non-issue really.

I yank the front door open before I change my mind and force my feet to move toward Quick Fix before I take another unnecessary trip to a different shop.

As I make my way downstairs, I ignore the strange fluttering in my stomach and focus on work instead. I have a mountain of things to get done as soon as I get back

and limited time to complete them.

The distraction does the trick, and less than a minute later the ding of the bell goes off over my head as I step inside the shop. I'm engulfed in that rich aroma of fresh coffee I had missed so badly yesterday.

I scan the work area behind the counter, only spotting Gina and another woman who's worked here as long as I've been a customer. I breathe a sigh of relief that oddly feels a bit like disappointment. No, it's definitely a relief, I decide. There's no need to leave with a cup of coffee I hate just because... Well, because apparently the new guy brings out the worst in me for reasons that aren't even his fault.

"Forrest," Gina greets me while popping her hands on her hips. "You gonna have your normal today, or should I make you another drink you probably dug up in some deep hole on the internet that you'll hate."

A knowing smile creeps up on her face, but she'll never get me to admit it had been a mistake. Over my dead body. "It was amazing actually, but I'll just take my normal today."

Gina doesn't even bother to conceal the way she rolls her eyes, nor do I expect her to. "One giant coffee, black and boring, coming up. Croissant as usual?"

When I nod, she quickly pours my coffee and stuffs a croissant in a small, white bag before ringing up my order. She charges me the real price this time, so I guess I was charged a fee for being an asshole last time. Secretly, I don't blame her, so I don't call her out.

"Thank you," I say and take my leave.

Heading back upstairs, I step around the corner into my hall while sipping the liquid



perfection. Without warning, I hear a squeak and then a body slams into mine, knocking me backward. My spine collides with the wall, and the cup crushes between my chest and the one pressed against me. Steaming hot coffee drenches my shirt, and I hiss in pain as I push the person away.

“Damn it,” I growl as I paw at my shirt, pulling it away from my skin before it causes a real injury.

“Oh my god. I'm so sorry.”

The voice immediately registers, and I jerk my gaze up, finding the flustered new kid standing in front of me. I quickly scan his body to see how much of the mess he'd taken. His shirt is even worse off than mine and he's doing nothing about it.

“Jesus,” I grumble and let go of my shirt to pull his away from his skin, revealing the pale flesh of his stomach that has turned an angry red in some places. “Are you trying to burn yourself or something?”

“No, I-I...” he stammers and then goes mute entirely when I meet his eyes. His cheeks are as red as the skin under his shirt as he blushes scarlet. “I'm sorry. I was late for work and didn't see you or even hear you.”

“There are already two people working. And can't you hold your shirt yourself?” I shouldn't be touching him at all, except that the guy seems to have zero concerns for his own safety.

“Gina needs to leave for an appointment and asked me to fill in for a few hours. I can't say no to the money.”

I'm curious about his situation. I'm curious about him in general. His southern accent is thicker than most around here, including mine, and he doesn't strike me as a kid

from the city. “Well, you might want to change clothes before you head down.”

He finally glances down at himself and winces.

“Crap.” His gaze then travels to the mess left on my clothes. “Double crap.”

I want to tell him not to worry about it. Accidents happen. But he'd likely take it as some sort of friendly gesture when I need him to keep a wide berth from me, as often as possible.

“Gina is waiting,” I remind him.

“I'll replace the shirt. Just when I get paid?—”

I put up a hand to stop him. “Not necessary, kid.”

“Elliot,” he says, and I frown. “My name is Elliot. Not kid.”

Why did he have to give me his name? I was just fine thinking of him as some random face I'd pass on occasion. I don't know what to say and wonder if he's expecting my name in return. He won't get it.

“And I really do want to replace the shirt...Forrest.” He sounds almost shy as he says my name. A name I had no intention of giving him.

My eyes narrow. I'm going to kill Gina. “Like I said, it's not necessary. I have plenty just like this one.”

“You do seem to like your plain t-shirts,” Elliot mumbles.

My eyes snap back up to meet his. “You've seen me twice.” Technically, I suppose

it's been three times, but two instances had been on the same day. How would he know what I like and don't like?

Elliot shakes his head. "Saw you yesterday when you headed to that shop down the road too."

"You saw me?" I wrinkle my forehead.

"Well, you did walk by the window and I was clearing tables, so..." He shrugs.

That other place is a block away. He would have had to watch for a while to track where I was going. I want to call him out on it, but I'm unsure where that conversation would lead.

"You're late," I remind him again, and only when he jerks back do I realize I've been holding his shirt this entire time. The fabric slips from my hand and falls back into place.

"I have to go. I'm sorry about the mess."

Once again, I'm tempted to comfort him in some way, so I'm relieved when he turns on his heels and rushes back toward his apartment. After his door closes, I glance at the crushed cup and sigh as I prepare for another day of working without my morning caffeine fix. If I go back downstairs right now I might actually say something to Gina about telling the guy my name.

Elliot . I find the name as endearing as he is. Endearing... There's that word again. What's wrong with me?

I stroll down the hall and let myself into my apartment, clean up, and swap shirts. When I sit at my desk, I huff at the long list of emails waiting for me.

My skin still stings, so I pull up my shirt to examine the injury but it's a dull pink. Nothing serious. I'm more concerned about Elliot. His skin is naturally so pale the red looked painful. The last thing I need to think about is his body in any way, but my thoughts take a turn without my permission.

I glance at the leather couch centered in the living room and imagine all that pale skin on display, every inch of his uncovered. I picture him sitting there just for me, naked and waiting while I work.

This is such a bad idea, but I can't stop myself from unzipping my jeans and sliding my hand into my boxer briefs.

Would he watch me with anticipation lighting up those eyes? I think about him biting that soft lip, stroking his cock lazily to tempt me away from work. I wonder how big or small he is, finding myself not caring either way.

My hand wraps around my dick and I stroke once just to ease the ache building in my balls, but it's not enough. I can't get those wide eyes out of my mind, and how they'd look with him on his knees while his lips are wrapped around my cock.

I stroke faster while imagining his tongue teasing me as he sucks. So eager to please.

My eyes slam shut and a groan rumbles in my throat as I come hard. Panting, I take slow breaths as reality rushes back in and my mind clears.

I just came in my fucking underwear thinking about some young barista I just swore I'd stay away from. I've been single for almost a year and plan to stay that way, possibly forever. I've had no issues even being tempted by a man in that time, so why him, and why now? I'm not in a hurry to let another man into my life, especially one as young as Elliot. Consider that lesson in life learned when I'd gotten engaged to a man around the same age as Elliot. A man who didn't understand monogamy

apparently.

I push back in my chair and head to the bathroom to clean up once again, except this time I need a full shower. I also need to make sure one way or another I never run into Elliot again.

### CHAPTER FOUR

#### ELLIOT

“It was so embarrassing,” I whisper to Katie as we sit in a black leather booth across from each other. “I didn't see him at all.”

The sound of soft music flows from hidden speakers, and the smell of earthy herbs fills the air of the small corner bistro Katie and I had chosen to meet at. The tiny restaurant is buzzing, full of people, so we lean over the table talking quietly as we wait on our orders to arrive. The last thing I want is for anyone to overhear the conversation.

“Okay, I have no idea what you are talking about. What happened?” She quirks a red eyebrow that's a shade lighter than her ruby red, wavy locks that frame her freckled, heart-shaped face. Curiosity, and nosiness, shine in her pale blue eyes.

I had just blurted out the first thing on my mind because it's all I've been able to think about for days now. Katie had made a short trip out of town to visit her family, and this is the first time I've seen her since the hallway collision with Forrest. I hadn't mentioned Forrest to her the day I'd met him because... Well, I'm not sure why. I've been dying to tell her everything and get her opinion, but I've been hesitant to bring it up over text. Because of my lack of social skills, I've had no one else to talk to. The only reason I'd even met Katie was her complete inability to leave someone sitting alone, even a random stranger like me.

I groan as I recall every confusing moment between me and Forrest since I'd laid eyes

on him.

“Okay, so last week...” I begin. “I was at work. I think it was my third day there and I had no idea what I was doing yet, right? I'm a fast learner but there's apparently a lot more to know about making coffee than I realized. And that doesn't include the other stuff, like the register and?—”

She snaps her long, slender fingers in front of my face. “Stop stalling and get to the juicy stuff. I'm hungry and my patience is nearly at zero.”

I roll my eyes. “Fine. So, this guy comes in, and just looking at him, he appears permanently mad. Or bitter. I don't really know.” I frown. “Anyway, when I asked him what he wanted to order, he seemed to instantly hate me. And before you ask, nope, I have absolutely no idea why. He knows I'm new because Gina told me he comes in every day.”

“What did he say?” she asks while narrowing her eyes.

“I'm getting to all that, Miss Impatient.” I sigh. “So, he ordered the most complicated drink on Earth. The thing wasn't even on the menu. And even before Gina confirmed it wasn't his usual order, I somehow knew he only did it to make my job more difficult.”

Katie cocks her head. “Why would he do that?”

I furrow my brow in thought. “I would love to know the answer to that myself. But there's more.”

“By all means, please continue. I have a feeling this gets better.”

“Better for you because you love gossip and drama.” I shoot her a mock glare.

She grins in response, offering a nonchalant shrug. “Guilty.”

“For me it's been awful though.” That's not entirely true. His fingers against my skin were the exact opposite of horrible. The touch had sent my heart racing, even if my skin had been on fire from the coffee mess. “So, after work that day, I headed upstairs to the apartment to change clothes. This was actually the day I was late meeting you for lunch.”

She lifts her hand, rotating her finger in a circle, urging me again to get to the good stuff.

“Well, I'm getting my key to let myself in the apartment and the door across the hall opens. Take one guess who walks out and is also my new neighbor.” I pause, remembering the unlikely coincidence.

“No way. The jerk is your neighbor?” Her voice rises, and she sounds excited for some reason.

I glare, a real one this time. “You do realize this is bad news, right?”

“Well, maybe I will when you stop taking a million years to tell me everything.” She gives me a pointed look.

“Well, it was awkward and he was weird. The guy seriously looked at me and said, “No .” And it wasn't the only time. He's done that a few times now, actually.”

“No what?” she asks, sounding as confused as I still feel about the whole exchange. I shrug again, because what else can I do? “Okay, well, that is weird. I agree.”

“He makes no sense and seems perma-moody. And for some reason he's singled me out to be annoyed at or something.” I puff out a long breath. “Anyway, two days



later, he was coming down the hall and I was running late. I wasn't really paying attention and literally ran straight into him. I'm talking body slamming him against the wall, Katie."

I groan under my breath, remembering how mortified I'd been. The only part of that incident that had been pleasant was feeling a man's body against mine. My thoughts stray once again to his touch on my stomach, but this isn't the time for that. I need Katie's advice on how to handle Forrest. Shaking my head, I refocus on the conversation.

"No," she gasps, but there's a hint of amusement in her tone. "What did he do?"

"Well, he was holding a cup of coffee and it went everywhere. Both of our shirts were soaked, and it burned. But I couldn't even feel it because I was humiliated when I saw it was him. He basically asked if I was stupid and was pulling my shirt to try to prevent me from being injured." Now that I'm thinking about it, the gesture comes as a surprise. Each time I've seen him, I've been given the impression the jerk would happily see me suffer.

"Oh my god. That's terrible." Her words don't mask her interest in the story.

Even though I'm pretty sure my embarrassment is pure entertainment for her, I continue. "It was. I offered to replace his shirt, but he wasn't having it and reminded me I was late for work. I just rushed off to privately die a little inside."

"So dramatic." Katie giggles, confirming she is enjoying this rather than feeling any sort of sympathy. "Then what happened? Did he bust down your door and strip you naked? Throw you on the bed?—"

"No," I interrupt and tack on a scowl I don't really mean. The thought does hold some appeal because I'm apparently losing my mind. "Your imagination is not only

perverted, but borderline psychotic sometimes.”

She shamelessly grins, revealing pearly white teeth. “I know. So, what happened next then?”

“Nothing.” I shrugged, which seems to be my go-to for anything grump-related. He confuses me. “He hasn’t been back to the shop since then. Or at least not when I’ve been working, and there’s no way I’m asking my boss if she’s seen him.”

Katie nods. “Makes sense. But I get the feeling you’re leaving things out. The guy sounds like an asshole, but he’s also not because he saved your precious snow-white skin. And I sort of think you want to do him.”

“What?” My voice rises so high that the word cracks with a mix of an awkward squeak. “No way.”

“If you say so.” She snorts, clearly not believing me. I don’t believe me either.

I’m saved from replying, at least for now, when our server arrives. He sets a plate of pancakes and eggs in front of me and a veggie omelet in front of Katie. After he tells us to enjoy and walks away, Katie immediately starts shoveling food into her mouth. I know she’ll want to know more later, but there’s honestly nothing else to tell her yet. I know run-ins with Forrest are bound to happen again, but maybe eventually he’ll grow tired of glaring at me. And maybe I won’t create some sort of disaster. One can hope anyway.

Katie had to bolt for her shift at a local bar after we’d finished eating, and I have the day off. I’m stuffed and lazy, so I don’t feel like walking around the city to explore. I’m left sitting on my bed alone, streaming a reality show on my phone to cure the boredom.

I feel trapped in this small shoebox of a room because Parker is home as always and gaming. His headset is on as usual, yet he has music blaring from speakers that he's not even listening to. His time would be better spent doing the piles of laundry he leaves around the apartment to make the place habitable. That isn't going to happen any time soon. Judging by his greasy blond hair, I don't think he's moved from that sunken spot on the couch for days to even shower. I honestly don't know how he pays his part of the rent, and I'm afraid to ask.

Over the noise, I hear banging on the front door. I glance toward my closed door and frown. No one ever comes over. Not since I've been here at least. I know there's no way Parker is going to see who it is, so I press pause on my show and set my phone on my nightstand.

I slide off the bed and walk through the apartment, hesitating when the banging starts again. The person doesn't seem happy, and since I have no idea what Parker's friends are like, I'm afraid of what's on the other side of the door.

Taking a deep breath, I open the door and freeze. It's definitely not a friend of Parkers. It's Forrest Grump himself, and he looks absolutely livid, though the expression does seem to ease slightly when he sees me for some reason.

"I was expecting Parker," he says loud enough to be heard. Parker pays no attention to the new arrival, and it's awkward to be shouting at Forrest over the music and my roommate's voice.

I press my hand against Forrest's chest to push him backward without thinking. I think I notice a catch in his breath but can't be sure. Urging him back into the hall, I follow him and close the door behind us. The sound is barely muffled, and I immediately know that's what drew grumpy pants from his bear cave.

"I can't work with all that ridiculous noise, and he knows it," he grumbles, but again,

it's barely audible.

I'm not having this conversation in the hall anymore where I'll just struggle to hear him, so I start walking toward his apartment.

“Where are you going?” He spins around and follows me as I open his door. His tone is laced with annoyance and surprise. Honestly, I'm shocked at the bold move too. Something about this guy eliminates my normal shyness, to a point. But if he wants to talk, this is the only way it's going to happen.

### CHAPTER FIVE

#### FORREST

I blink in puzzlement at Elliot's back as he steps inside my apartment. Did he just open the door and waltz in like he owned the place? Yes, I think he did. And what am I supposed to do with him in my space?

Slowly, I enter through the door and glance at my desk. It's the one place I should not have looked because of what I'd done there while thinking of Elliot. The mental images I'd stroked my cock to immediately flood my thoughts and I fight my body's reaction. But I have no control over my mind. Now that he's physically present, I still think he would look better naked on my couch. I curse under my breath. Having him in my home is a bad idea. I should tell him to leave immediately. But I don't.

“Do you always just let yourself into other people's apartments?” I grumble as I stalk toward the refrigerator and jerk open the door. Grabbing a water bottle, I hesitate, debating whether or not to offer him one. I finally cave and grab two, carrying one back to where he's now standing in the middle of my living room.

“No, but I couldn't hear you and didn't feel like having to shout at each other.” He takes the water before his gaze sweeps around the room, appearing to look at the artwork and few family photos I have mounted on the walls. I don't want Elliot to know anything about my life, because then he might ask questions. The last thing we need to do is get to know each other.

I had a reason for going to Parker's apartment and it's smart to concentrate on the

topic at hand so I can get rid of him as quickly as possible.

I take a seat on the couch and look up at him. "I can't work with all that noise coming from across the hall."

"Believe me, I get it." Elliot sighs, and I know that living with Parker, he really does understand. "But Parker is Parker. I don't know what you want me to do about it."

"I don't expect you to do anything. I was hoping he'd be answering the door." I'd never imagined my trip over there would result in Elliot standing in my apartment.

He rolls his eyes. "Parker wouldn't know how to answer the door if it was the police threatening to break down the thing."

"I'm aware what he's like, and I have no idea how you live with him." I twist the cap off my water and take a long swallow.

Elliot makes his way to the opposite end of the couch and takes a seat, turning to face me. "The ad I answered was nothing like the reality," he explains. "The apartment was clean. He appeared to take showers. Obviously, I was in for quite the surprise when I moved in." He scoffs. "But finding something this cheap again will be difficult in this area. I don't know how long I can handle staying there either."

Elliot would be leaving? The thought should thrill me. Instead, I find myself frowning. "Well, maybe you can save up." And stay for longer, I tack on mentally because I've clearly lost my mind.

"I don't really have a choice. I don't want to go back home. I'm loving the city, even if I'm not quite used to it yet."

"You don't strike me as being from around here. Where did you move from?"

Despite my better judgment, I cave to my curiosity about him. I want to know more about Elliot, and he's already here. I wouldn't throw anyone out if their only option was to go back to Parker's place anyway. Elliot isn't special. Or at least that's what I tell myself.

Elliot looks at me, and I do my best to appear unaffected. But he does affect me just by being near me, and I don't know what to do with that. I want to ruffle that black hair and see what it feels like between my fingers. I want to check his skin to make sure it healed properly. And that's not even acknowledging the much dirtier things I want to do to him.

“A small town about two hours south of here called Clearwater. Wild name considering the closest water to the place is a good thirty minutes away from the city limits.” He arches a brow. “What about you? Are you from here?”

I pull on my beard subconsciously as I consider revealing personal details. Friendly conversation doesn't mean anything, and the interest shining in his green eyes appears genuine. Maybe that's the problem. Still, he'd answered my question, and I'm finding it harder to stay in my comfort zone of being an ass. Finally, I clear my throat. “Similar, actually. I was born and raised in Charleston, Texas. It's the type of town that has one traffic light and one gas station with a population of less than a thousand people. I moved to the city for college and never left or looked back.”

Elliot tips his head, appearing to consider my answer. “I can see that. You give off a sort of rugged vibe. Country roots, I guess.”

Is Elliot seeing me that way good? Is he into rugged men? I want to slap myself. Who cares what Elliot is into. Except that I do. “Is that a bad thing?”

When Elliot looks back at me, his gaze travels down my chest before jerking back to meet my gaze. “No.”

His cheeks are pink and glowing brighter by the second. He's blushing, and it's fucking adorable. I don't bother arguing with myself over the new thought because it would be useless. The way his pale skin flushes so easily is cute as hell. It doesn't mean I have to do anything about it.

I'm not sure when the shy type became my thing, but I really want to see just how pink other areas of his skin bloom. Maybe even his ass if I spank him for things like walking into my apartment uninvited.

The internal argument with myself about Elliot is exhausting. I'm mentally drained and can't form a proper response. I let too much time pass and the silence becomes awkward. But what am I supposed to say? I shouldn't have even asked the question.

Elliot is fidgety, toying with the label on the water label before he sighs and stands up. "Okay, I'll get out of your hair and talk to Parker, but I doubt I can make him listen. Short of suggesting you make a noise complaint, I'm not sure what to do."

I'd considered doing that, but not only did I want to see if it could be worked out between the two of us, I also hadn't wanted to involve Elliot. "I don't expect miracles, but something has to give."

He nods and I feel bad because what I hear from across the hall probably pales in comparison to what he deals with, living in the same unit.

He's taking up too much of my mental space these days, and now, even my time. I need to show him to the door. It's the smart thing to do. A part of me is reluctant, but I shove away the unwanted urge to keep him talking. I need to get back to work, and I need my head examined for loose screws.

I stand and Elliot follows me to the door. When I open it, he pauses in front of me. He doesn't say anything, but he doesn't need to. His gaze dips to my lips, telling me his



thoughts had been running around the same playground as my own. It's on the tip of my tongue to ask him what he wants, but I'm afraid he'll answer me. I'm even more afraid I'll give it to him. He needs to go before I do something stupid like kiss him.

I clear my throat. "Have a nice day, Elliot."

His eyes jerk back up to meet mine as yet another pink tint lights his cheeks. "Have a nice day, Forrest," he says so lightly it's almost a whisper.

Finally, Elliot brushes by me and I watch him as he enters his apartment and closes the door. The noise barely registers over my thoughts.

I want Elliot. And I want him bad.

I groan to myself at the admission and close my door. Leaning back against it, I scrub my hand over my face. It's been months since I've really allowed myself to think about what happened with my ex-fiancé in detail, let alone examine my feelings. I usually shut down that train of thought as soon as the train leaves the station. Now I feel like I need to because I'm losing the war against keeping Elliot at a distance. I can feel it.

Mark had been younger than me, and younger than any man I'd dated when we'd started seeing each other. I'd fallen in love and planned to marry him. I thought he'd been on the same page. And then with one accidental text to my phone instead of the other guy's, that dream had been shattered.

Thinking about it always makes me bitter. Or it had. At this moment, thinking about him and what had happened feels...insignificant. When had that changed? I frown as I consider the unexpected peace I feel over the situation and what that means going forward. Do I want to date again? Am I really standing here considering putting myself in the same situation as before?

Elliot is still another young guy who may not know what he wants. And while I sense interest, I don't even know that he's thinking about more than getting into my pants. I've never been much into random hookups because I never could quite separate feelings from sex.

Why does he have to be so fucking cute? I curse as I push off the door and then make my way back to my desk. I have work to get done, and I'm glad for the distraction because when it comes to Elliot I don't know what to think anymore.

### CHAPTER SIX

#### ELLIOT

As I get ready to leave work, I stare out the glass door as a summer storm rolls through the city. The torrential rain gives me pause, but my apartment is so close I make the decision to run through it, knowing I'll be soaking wet in a split second.

Taking a deep breath, I open the door and dash through the downpour and chaotic wind. I yank open the door to the stairwell and hurry inside. Raindrops roll down my nose and chin, and the upper half of my work shirt is soaked through, making it transparent.

I wipe my shoes dry on the mat the best I can before making my way upstairs. A warm shower and possibly even a nap, if it's quiet enough, sound amazing. I didn't get enough sleep last night, or the night before for that matter. That moment when I'd left Forrest's apartment has been playing in my mind on repeat for two days. There's no reason I should want him the way I do. He's been rude and moody from day one, but I can't shake the feeling there's more to him. I'd seen it that day.

Breathing a tired sigh, I reach into my pocket for my key and unlock the door. To my surprise it opens a few inches and then catches on something, firmly holding it in place. I glance up through the crack and see the chain draped across. Why would Parker use the chain-lock? I frown just before I hear the moans of a woman. Gross. I force away the gag creeping up my throat. I have no clue who would sleep with a guy like that, and I have no interest in finding out. I'm grateful he locked the door so I didn't have to walk in on that scene.

I close the door quietly and look across the hall at Forrest's. Now that my training is complete, Gina moved my shifts to afternoons, so I haven't seen him in a few days. I have no idea if I'm welcome in his apartment, but that hadn't stopped me from barging in last time. Not wanting to sit around the hall in soaking wet clothes, and definitely not interested in walking through the rain again, I make my way to his door and knock before I chicken out.

The sound of footsteps approaching on the other side makes my heartbeat kick up several beats. He could turn me away and tell me to get lost. But despite his rough around the edges demeanor, something different lurks beneath the facade. Forrest isn't a bad guy at all. Moody, yes. I wonder what caused him to be that way and if he's always been that grumpy.

His door creaks open and I'm greeted with a puzzled expression on his face.

"You're dripping wet," Forrest says as he takes a beat too long to check out the part of my shirt he can see straight through. He clears his throat as his eyes meet mine. "What's going on?"

"I got caught in the rain leaving work, and I'm sort of locked out of my apartment." I give him a hopeful look, and he sighs.

"Your roommate really is a dick." Forrest opens the door wider and steps aside. "Come in. I'll find you something to wear."

I'm surprised at the gesture, and don't hesitate to take him up on the invitation. "Actually, would it be okay if I showered? I've been at work all day, and I was going to hop in when I got home, but..." I shrug.

Forrest swallows audibly as he shuts the door. "Sure. It's just through the bedroom." He points toward a room just off the living area. "Towels are in the cabinet. Use what

you like in there.”

I'm not sure where the moody guy is that I'm used to, but I prefer this version of him. I almost feel like I'm getting a glimpse of the real him, maybe something no one else ever sees.

“I appreciate it.” I turn and head toward the bedroom, briefly glancing around the room. The oversized dark wood furniture and earth toned linens are exactly what I pictured when I'd imagined his space. Not that I want to admit how much thought I've put into what his bed might look like.

I don't linger long because my wet clothes are uncomfortable and I can't wait to peel them from my body. I step into the en suite bathroom, noting the decor is simple and matches the color scheme of the bedroom. I have every intention of nosing around more when I have time, but for now I crank on the shower before stripping down.

Not wanting to keep Forrest waiting, and maybe because I want to spend more time getting to know him, I hurry to clean up. I do slow down and take my time when I crack open his bottles of body wash and shampoo. Both smell earthy like him, and I swear I could easily get addicted to the scent.

When I step out of the shower, I grab a fluffy white towel from the cabinet and dry off before tying it around my waist. I'm expecting the clothes he's offered me to be laying on the bed, but when I step back into the bedroom there's nothing there.

I'm a little self-conscious with just a towel on, but I peek out of the door and find Forrest sitting on the couch with his elbows on his knees. He's repeatedly pulling on his beard, something I've noticed must be some sort of habit when he's lost in thought.

My brow furrows. “Everything okay?”

My voice seems to startle him and he quickly lifts his head. His gaze immediately dips to my bare chest, and I feel heat rush across my skin. I hate how easily I blush.

“Everything is fine. I was just thinking.” His voice is rougher than usual, and I'm tempted to ask what's on his mind.

“Sorry to interrupt. I just didn't see any clothes.”

“Oh, right. I forgot. I'm sure I can find you something.” He stands and heads toward me.

I step aside as he passes me, but his hand accidentally slides right across my dick. The contact is so quick that I don't know if he even notices, but I definitely do. Unfortunately, so do other parts of my anatomy. My dick reacts to the barely there touch. In nothing but a towel, I can't hide fast enough how the brief contact affected me.

When Forrest turns around with folded clothes from his dresser drawer, his gaze immediately drops. I'm tempted to shield myself, but the heat that burns in his eyes and the way his nostrils flare have me frozen in place. His chest rises and falls heavily and he doesn't move. He doesn't even blink. With his attention on my cock, I'm getting harder. I can't help it. Considering he hasn't stopped looking, there's no way he doesn't notice the effect he has on me.

I should be more self-conscious than I am. I've never been practically naked with a man before. I am nervous though, because I have no idea what to expect from him. I don't even know what to expect from myself.

“Fuck,” he finally breathes out, and the raspy word coming from his lips makes me throb harder.

“I'm sorry,” I whisper. I don't know what to say or do, so I stand still as Forrest stares at me until he slowly lifts his eyes back to meet mine.

“Sorry,” he repeats back as he begins taking slow steps toward me. “What are you sorry for?”

I feel my cheeks blaze. “Umm, when you walked by...” I can't make myself finish the sentence. “And now this.”

Forrest's eyes narrow as he closes the distance. I half expect him to hand me the clothes and send me to the bathroom to change. He doesn't. The clothes are tossed on the bed as he passes it, and he continues to prowl closer, eventually coming so close I'm forced to step backward until my back meets the wall.

“I'm not sorry at all,” he says and before I can utter another word, his lips are on mine. It's everything I imagined and more, including me not having a single clue what I'm doing.

I mimic his movements as best I can. The slow, deepening pressure. The slide of his tongue as he coaxes me to part my lips for him. The second his tongue touches mine and he presses his body against me, I forget my nerves completely. I can feel him everywhere, lighting me on fire from the inside out.

Forrest slowly consumes me, groaning into my mouth. I can't help the way my hips begin to move on instinct. One of his hands works around my body, palming my ass as the kiss becomes more urgent.

When he reaches for the towel between us, I break the kiss even though that's the last thing I want to do. Pulling away feels like pure torture, but there are things he needs to know.

His eyes are full of heat, and his lips are swollen. And judging by the very large and very hard bulge pressed against my stomach, he isn't quite ready to put a stop to it either.

“Everything okay?” he asks in a rough whisper.

“Of course.” It takes effort to speak through panting breaths. “It's just that I've never... Um, I haven't exactly done this before.”

“You haven't done what?” he asks.

I'm distracted by his finger that is now running lazy circles on my skin just above the towel, so it takes me a second to answer him. “I haven't done anything, and I guess I just thought you should know. I'm a virgin in every sense of the word. That was my first kiss.”

His eyebrows arch in surprise. “How is that possible? Have you seen you? I figured you'd be knee deep in men who want you.”

I smile at the compliment. “Believe it or not, I can be quite shy at times.”

His lips quirk, another new expression I haven't seen before. His rugged looks become almost boyishly charming, and I sort of love it.

“I can see that, but you seem to lose it a bit around me.” His hand falls away from my skin, and I miss it immediately. “Get dressed. Are you hungry?”

I'm confused and maybe even disappointed. “You don't want to...” I glance at the bed even though I'm nervous.

He laughs. “You have no idea how bad I want to, but not tonight. Tonight, I want to



feed you and see where things go.”

“See where things go?” I ask, confused.

He pauses briefly before he sighs. “I knew there was something different about you the second I laid eyes on you. I wanted to avoid it. I tried to avoid you. But life seems to disagree with that plan, and now that I've tasted you, there's no going back for me. One-night stands aren't really my thing, so the ball is in your court. You want to find out what this is?”

My teeth sink into my lower lip as butterflies take off in my belly. I'm scared. I'm also not. Something feels right about being here with him, but I'm not a relationship expert.

“Pizza sound okay?” I ask, and Forrest grins.

“As long as you don't ask for pineapple.” His lips do that quirky thing again, and it makes me smile.

“Deal,” I answer and watch as his gaze once again lowers to the towel.

“Go put on the clothes before I change my mind.”

While I'm not sure Forrest changing his mind would be the worst thing in the world, my thoughts are on other things. New possibilities. The first time I'd seen him in the coffee shop, I'd never have imagined being in this moment. But here I am, and I'm not mad about it.

“Yes, sir.” I salute him.

His heated eyes narrow as he backs out of the bedroom, and I chuckle to myself as he

closes the door. Once I'm left alone, I try to sort through a field of tangled up thoughts. From the moment I'd met him there had been something between us. I thought he'd hated me, but I guess I was wrong. And now anything seems possible.

I drop the towel and pick up the pants from where they'd been carelessly tossed on the bed. I don't know what waits for me on the other side of the door, but I'm ready to find out.

### CHAPTER SEVEN

#### FORREST

##### One Year Later

“Stop making me wait.” Elliot glares over his shoulder from where he's on his hands and knees on our bed in our new apartment.

We hadn't moved far from our old building two months ago when we'd decided to take the next step in our relationship. The location made it easy for him to get to the coffee shop, but we now have beautiful silence surrounding us most of the time.

Over the last twelve months, he's lost all trace of shyness with me. I've made damn sure of that by worshiping his body as often as possible. I knew he'd be just as pale all over, and the first time I'd seen him fully naked, I'd been determined to keep him undressed as often as humanly possible. Without going to jail, of course.

Right now, his ass is lit pink from my hand because he begged for it. He always gets what he wants in the end, and tonight is no exception.

“Such a bossy thing,” I growl as I step behind him at the edge of the bed, guiding my lubed tip to his tight little ass that I've spent thirty minutes teasing and stretching with my tongue and fingers. I press forward, pushing my bare cock slowly inside him inch by inch. I soak up the moans that he nearly drowns by burying his face in one of our pillows. “You feel fucking amazing. So damn tight.”

I can't stop the groan that crawls up my throat. He feels too good, and I've been taunting him for so long that I've driven myself nearly to the edge. Last I checked, Elliot's dick was dripping precome onto our sheets, so I know it won't take much to drain every drop of come straight from his balls too.

“Oh god,” he whispers when I push deep, burying my cock inside him. When I pause to catch my breath so I don't immediately unload, he rocks back. “Move,” he pleads. “I need it.”

Helpless to deny him, I grip his hips and pull back. There's no slow and steady, building rhythm. I slam back inside him. Over and over, I feed off his moans. I could, and plan to, listen to that sound for the rest of my life. We've already started taking steps and I have no intention of ever stopping. He just doesn't know quite how serious I am yet. I hope he's ready, because I want him under me and on top of me every night until the end of time.

“I'm going to come,” he warns as he meets me thrust for thrust.

He's a greedy thing, and I absolutely love it. I love him, and that only heightens the sensation for me.

“Good. Make a mess all over the bed. Show me how good it feels,” I rasp as I try to hold back from finishing before he does. But my balls are drawing tight already, the pressure building to the point I know I'm seconds from blowing.

“I'm there.” The moan that rolls from his lips as he begins to fall apart for me is pure torture in the best way.

I can't hold back. Losing what little control I'd been clinging to, I push deep as I come hard, squeezing his hips in a vice grip. Taking a moment to steady myself, I stay inside him before I gently pull back, sliding my cock from his ass.

While we both pant for air, I can't help but watch as my come begins to leak out. It's sexy as hell. He's mine in every sense of the word. Well not every way. Not yet.

Elliot collapses on the bed, careless of the mess beneath him. I wish we could both clean up and fall asleep early, but we have dinner reservations. If we don't get moving, we aren't going to make them in time.

“Get up, lazy butt. We have plans, remember?” I give his ass another swat just because I want to.

He peeks through barely cracked eyelids. “Do we have to? Can't we just stay in tonight and watch a show?”

“You mean fall asleep on me halfway through one episode.” It never fails, and it never gets old. I love watching him sleep.

He smiles. “Same thing.”

I consider the new plan. I'd wanted to do things the right way, a public gesture of sorts. But in the end, wasn't our future about the two of us? All of our most significant moments had always been alone. Maybe I've had the wrong idea all along.

“Well, at least get up and shower with me. Then we can watch whatever you want.” I walk to the dresser to grab us both fresh lounge clothes to change into.

He sighs as he rolls over and scoots off the bed. “If I must.”

I chuckle as I follow him into the bathroom and crank on the shower. He still looks drowsy, swaying on his feet a bit, so I make quick work of washing us both.

After we're dried off and dressed in loose shorts and t-shirts, I strip the bed and toss the sheets into the hamper. I make a pitstop by my nightstand, and then we plop down

on the couch.

“Hand me the remote, please,” he says as he leans against my side.

I wrap an arm around him, holding him close. When he lifts his hand expecting the remote, I take a deep breath as I slide something out of my pocket and place it onto his palm. He frowns as he pulls his hand down, and then his eyes widen as he whips his head to the side and stares at me wordlessly.

I'm nervous all of a sudden. Well, more nervous than I'd already been.

Pulling my arm back from around him, I slide off the couch, kneeling on one knee in front of him. I take the small velvet box from his hand.

“Forrest,” he gasps. “What are you doing?”

Well, that isn't the response I was hoping for, so I hesitate. “Do you want me to stop?”

He quickly shakes his head. “No, I just... Please don't stop.”

His eyes are tearing up, and it gives me strength to continue. “I knew you'd mess me up in some way from the second I saw you. There was some pull I couldn't explain, and then the universe seemed to see it fit to keep drawing us together. Avoiding you didn't work. Distracting myself from thinking about you didn't work. And now I know why. You were made for me, and I'm hoping I was made for you. This feels right.” I take another deep breath. “It feels more right than anything I've ever experienced.”

We'd talked long ago about my history with my ex, and Elliot had been understanding. But that relationship had never felt the way it did with Elliot. Not even close.

“I never want to let that go,” I continue. “You make my life better, and I want to spend forever trying to make you as happy as you make me.”

“You make me stupidly happy,” Elliot interrupts with his voice shaking.

I smile as I open the box, revealing the platinum band. “Then marry me. Let's do this thing forever.”

He bites his lip as he smiles. “Who'd have thought my first and last kiss would be with the grump from the coffee shop who tried to ruin my morning.”

“I was such a dick.” I laugh. “But is that a yes? I need the word.”

“Yes. That is most definitely a yes.” He nods as I take his hand and slip the ring from the box and onto his finger.

I'm not sure what I did to earn this man's love, but I'll spend the rest of my life trying to keep it and make sure he feels just as loved.

“Kiss me, Forrest Grump,” he demands with a grin.

“For the rest of our lives,” I promise.

The End