



# Sex, Lies, and Margarita Mixes

**Author:** Skye Turner

**Category:** Romance

**Description:** Roxy West is an event planner with a sharp tongue, a color-coded divorce folder, and a husband she absolutely does not love anymore—except when he’s shirtless, charming, or breathing in her general direction.

Chase West is a golden retriever in human form. He wears his wedding ring “for balance,” names his food truck after the woman who threatens his sanity every second of every day and insists that one wild weekend in Vegas three years ago means Roxy is “legally his forever.”

They’ve been married.

They’ve been separated.

Now, they’re accidentally back under the same roof, at a couple’s retreat Roxy did not sign up for, with a house full of people, way too much tequila, and one very unhinged activity night.

Will they finally sign the papers?

Or will round two end with less paperwork and way more screaming (the good kind)?

Marriage in crisis. Check

Chemistry off the charts. Check

And a love story that proves sometimes forever just needs a second try (and maybe a fire extinguisher). Double Check

**Total Pages (Source):** 35

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

TEQUILA FIRST, DIVORCE LATER

ROXY

There are three things you should never mix with tequila:

Texting your husband you're "totally over it."

Online divorce papers and one color-coded manila folder detailing all of the reasons your husband should just sign them... with highlighted parts as to why he should absolutely not sign them.

An emotional playlist titled " Margaritas and Mayhem ."

I've done all three before noon and I still haven't put on actual pants.

The blender roars on the counter like it's judging me.

"Don't start with me, Margarita 9000," I mutter, stabbing the crushed ice button again like it insulted my earrings.

I'm wearing my "Emotionally Unavailable But Well Accessorized" tank top and the fuzzy leopard-print slippers that Chase gave me two anniversaries ago with a wink... while wearing nothing else.

Which is exactly the problem.

He always knows how to ignore my chaos with orgasmic sex, his mouthwatering tattooed body, and stupid, sexy-as-fuck dimples.

Fuck my life.

I hit blend with the kind of aggression usually reserved for flipping off bad drivers or watching my best friend Mari Lynn post another “domestically disheveled and killing it” reel with her hot celebrity chef husband that just so happens to go viral.

It’s been almost eight days since Chase and I “separated.”

Or rather, since I told him to leave...

Again.

Air quotes required because technically , we never signed anything.

We never do. I just told him I was done, and he needed to go.

He didn’t even argue with me this time. He just grabbed a few shirts, shorts, and some boxer briefs, kissed my forehead, and said, “Love you, babe,” before he whistled on his way out of the door.

He’s called and texted me every day—multiple times.

We had sex two days ago. And he just texted asking if I wanted to get some lunch.

We share a last name, a Netflix password, house keys—except when I change the locks, and until a week ago, a memory foam mattress I always refer to as the “Scene of the Crime.”

He drives me crazy!

“Play ‘Baby’” I loudly say in the middle of the kitchen. The speaker starts blaring Justin Bieber like he’s personally invested in my downfall.

As I sing at the top of my lungs, I swing my hips and pour tequila into my blender cup, squeeze in lime juice with zero mercy, add ice and simple syrup, and blend. I chug half of it before remembering that breakfast is a thing normal people do before hard liquor.

Too late.

Screw it, it’s like noon anyway.

It’s five o’clock somewhere, right?

My phone buzzes again.

CHASE

Hey babe. Don’t panic, but I might’ve accidentally booked a couple’s retreat at a beach house this week.

I blink.

The fuck?

ME

You ACCIDENTALLY booked a couple’s retreat.

At a beach house. For a WEEK?

What beach house?

CHASE

One on the beach. I'll send you the address.

Also, surprise—you're co-hosting.

Love you.

I choke on tequila and scream, "Chase!," into the empty kitchen. "He's crazy... he's absolutely crazy."

ME

I hope a seagull shits on your bare foot.

CHASE

Uh huh. See you soon.

Love you.

What the hell is this man doing? No matter what I do, he just loves me. It's infuriating. And hot as hell.

He thinks he can just co-host a couple's retreat with me like we didn't scream the words "irreconcilable horniness" at each other, well, mostly me, in therapy—my mother set it up—three months ago?

No.

No, no, no. I'm not going. He can just forget it. It'd serve him right if I just didn't go!

Shut up, Roxy. You know damn well you're going down there.

And I'm dragging his perfect, toned and tattooed, so-hot-he melts-butter-with-his-smile-ass out of the hot tub by his sun-streaked dark hair.

And I am not going to let him charm me with his smile, or his guacamole, or his "Oops, I wear my ring for balance and I'm never taking it off" bullshit.

Uh huh...

I pack a bag. Loudly, though I'm alone.

Grabbing a pair of wedges, I slam them into my weekender bag like I'm committing fashion homicide.

If he wants me on that beach, I'm showing up with three pairs of sexy shoes and vengeance.

Because stacked sole shoes on a beach... with sand, makes sense.

Let's see how co-hosty he feels when I walk in looking like karma in waterproof mascara.

He'll just grin.

CHASE

Some people say they fell in love at first sight.

Not me, I fell in love at first insult. But probably first sight, too.

Roxy walked into an event we were both at and that was it. I couldn't take my eyes off of her. She walked over and called me a "human frat party in board shorts" and tried to stab my nachos with a fork because I double-dipped guac at an event she and her best friend, Mari Lynn, were hired to plan.

Three weeks later, we were married.

A month after that, after mind-blowing sex in our bed, was the first time she tried to get me to leave and when I refused, she said she wanted a divorce. I kissed her and went to make her a snack. She's tried to divorce me, run me off, and kick me out at least once a week ever since.

This Valentine's Day, I gave her flowers, made her a three-course meal, and told her I loved her more than anything. She freaked out and tried to serve me divorce papers beside my heart-shaped cake.

And yet, here I am—shirtless in our couple's retreat beach house kitchen—whistling and flipping pancakes like a man who definitely didn't book this whole thing without her permission.

I absolutely did. I did it and texted her I did it.

Had to get her here somehow. And this is guaranteed.

"Good morning, Mr. West," I say to myself in the reflection of the cabinet glass as I pour syrup into a little ceramic ramekin like a damn fancy chef, which I am not.

I can cook, but I am not fancy. “You’ve got rock-hard abs, emotional baggage from your wife, and said super-hot, very pissed off wife is probably on her way to attempt to murder you in wedges that showcase her fabulous legs. ”

See you soon, baby.

Leaning back against the cabinet, I take a sip of coffee. I should probably add Kalua to it.

I’m not stupid. I know my Roxy.

She’s on the way. The second she got my text, she was on her way here.

I know she’s packing sexy as hell lingerie just to wear it under something petty, like a graphic tee that says “I’m Not Your Babe, Bro.” And I know I deserve whatever she throws at me for this whole couple’s retreat stunt. This week will end with me going home with my wife.

A week ago, I’d had two too many pineapple jalapeno margaritas, my new recipe, and the scent of her shampoo was lingering on my hoodie—the one she always steals.

She’d left the house earlier for work and wasn’t answering my calls or texts.

She got them. I saw that she read them, but she was ignoring me...

even though we screwed until the sun came up that morning.

We drove each other wild with touches and kisses, and she fell asleep in my arms. In our bed.

She stayed at Mari Lynn and Knox’s place while they were in L.A.



The next day, I went to the store for groceries for a new dish I wanted to try out and couldn't get into our house when I pulled back up.

She changed the locks. Again. I sat out there for an hour and she would not let me in.

And she started posting passive-aggressive thirst traps on her personal socials with captions like "When enough is enough."

So, I did what any mature, responsible husband would do.

I booked the house on the beach. I invited other couples.

Everyone but Mari Lynn and her husband Knox, our friends and her best friend, said they were in.

They had a valid reason for missing out.

They're still shooting their show in Los Angeles.

Hell, I even managed to convince the rest of the friend group it was her idea.

And I knew—I knew—if I tempted her with a shared project, some tequila, and just enough emotional sabotage... she'd show because for all her talk and craziness and trying to kick me out of her life and her bed every day for the past three and a half years, Roxy West loves a theme... and me .

And that is exactly what scares her.

If that theme just so happens to involve cocktails, sex-positive communication workshops, and me shirtless in an apron, that's even better.

The front door bangs against the wall as she flings it open.

Right on time, baby.

I don't even flinch. I just keep buttering pancakes. "Welcome, babe," I call out from the kitchen.

There's a long pause. Like a murderous silence.

Then, she appears in the kitchen doorway.

Red sunglasses are still on her face. A black string bikini top is showing under her totally sheer button-down.

Her denim shorts are so short they should be illegal.

And her signature red lipstick is so sharp it could be considered a weapon.

Damn, my woman is gorgeous.

"You look like a vixen in a skincare ad," I murmur, always appreciative of her beauty.

She tosses her bag onto the kitchen counter without preamble. "And you look like a walking custody battle." She retorts.

"We don't have kids, babe. My kids just swim in your channel. Which I have absolute ownership of." I smile at her as my eyes rove over her.

Damn, I've missed her.

Dude, you had sex with her two days ago.

She growls deep in her throat. It could be arousal, or rage. It's probably both.

I'm counting on both.

Everyone wins with that scenario.

"You booked a couples retreat," she says, voice flat. "We're separated. I kicked you out. I even changed the locks."

Nonchalantly flipping a pancake, I reply, "We're not. But yes, you did. And yes, I'm aware." I watch her as I man the stove.

She exhales. "Without telling me." Her voice is dangerously calm.

She's either about to beat me with her shoe or shove me into the wall and drop to her knees in front of me. With her, it's a coin toss.

"Yup." I'm calm, too.

"With other couples."

I nod. "Correct again."

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

Her perfectly microbladed brows raise and her flame red lips purse. “Do they think I invited them?”

I shrug, grin, and roll onto my heels. My calves flex. Her eyes follow and I see her breathing accelerate. “You’re very persuasive over text, baby. Oh, Mari Lynn and Knox are still filming, so they won’t be here. They send their love.”

She exhales rapidly and lunges for the syrup bottle like she might pour it over my head.

I brace myself— not to dodge, but to enjoy it.

She hesitates.

She knows I’d turn it into foreplay, and she’d willingly and vocally participate.

So instead, she slams it on the counter and snaps, “You’re sleeping on the patio.”

I lean in, close enough to kiss her if I wanted to, which I do, but I won’t. She freezes and her nipples bead under the thin fabric of her bikini top. I drink it in but simply say, “That where we’re keeping the whipped cream this time?”

She blinks and her cheeks flood with color. Turning on her heel, she walks away without responding. I watch her hips sway and glance down, talking to my raging hard-on. “No worries, it’s coming.” Whistling, I remove the pancakes from the griddle, set them on the plate, and pour more batter on.

Score one for the shirtless menace.

There's a note in my bag.

"She's coming. Don't be an idiot."

I wrote it last night, in my not great penmanship on one of her fancy Post-its, with one of the glitter pens that was still in my bag from our last trip. Her glitter pens.

People think Roxy and I rushed into marriage.

We did. But we rushed in the way a thunderstorm rushes a bonfire—loud, bright, and inevitable. It wasn't planned.

There were no actual rings exchanged. None of our family was there. There was no officiant who asked us to "pause and reflect." Just an Elvis-impersonator-preacher in Vegas in a rhinestone blazer and a twenty-four-hour chapel that smelled like insanity, possible regret, and fresh lilies.

I haven't regretted it for a single second. It's still the best decision I've ever made.

Sitting on the back patio, looking out over the waves crashing onto the shore, I remember.

We were three weeks into an ongoing one-night stand that just kept extending itself.

Two hot messes, one of whom didn't own measuring cups or emotional boundaries.

She was wearing a gold dress that looked like it had been airbrushed onto her body.

I was wearing a black button-down she later confessed made her want to "ruin a

man's credit score.

" We were drunk and sharing a thirty-dollar burger the size of a toddler in a casino that looked like Italy and even had gondola rides inside.

By the second glance at a party, I knew she was it for me.

I'd had free drinks in Vegas—no idea how many—and we were starving.

So, around a bite of a pretty damn good Wolfgang Puck burger, it gave me enough courage to spit out what I knew ten seconds after seeing her the very first time. I said, "You're it for me. I'm done."

She said, "You're drunk."

I said, "Marry me before I sober up."

She laughed so hard she snorted more tequila out of her nose, and then, she said, "Only if you promise to never tell me to calm down."

We finished the burger and were married thirty minutes later.

She wore a Ring Pop. I used a bread twist tie. We honeymooned in a cheap hotel seven blocks off of the Strip that had exactly two pillows and one vibrating ice machine.

It was perfect.

Three and a half weeks later, we were at home, eating Chinese takeout in our shared bed.

She reorganized the entire spice rack alphabetically, and then, by flavor scale... multiple times a week.

I always moved the cayenne pepper to the front because I think “cayenne goes with everything and heat makes you horny.”

She told me I was mentally chaotic, with far too much manly sex appeal and too many tattoos that she wanted to lick.

I told her she was a stunning dictator with a label maker and a goddess complex.

Then, we had wild sex on the kitchen counter and when we were both satisfied and sweaty, she grabbed a homemade dumpling from my steamer that her ass knocked over, threw it at my face, and told me she wanted me to leave. I said no. So, she said to sleep on the couch.

I didn't.

Roxy and I have never been good at doing things halfway.

So, when we fight... we don't. Like everything else we detonate.

It's manic and wild and untamable.

Some would call it toxic. But we just call it us.

Three days after the spice rack incident, she packed a bag and said, “We need space,” and I let her walk out the door.

That was the first time we actually “separated” but not really.

I was just too dumb to say, “Take all the space you want—just leave room for me, you psycho. I love you.”

It’s happened hundreds of times over the years. She freaks and kicks me out. I normally refuse to leave and wait until her crazy calms down... enough. Except when she changes the locks. Like last week.

I don’t fancy breaking into my own house, again, so that’s what this week is for.

My second chance times a bazillion.

Operation:           Win-Back-My-Crazy-As-All-Get-Out-Wife-Because-I-Cannot-Be-Without-Her.

Yes, Chase. You know it’s manipulative.

But what else can I do?

And I’m talking to myself. Her crazy must be rubbing off on me.

I’m doing it in a fun, emotionally-vulnerable, maybe-there-will-be-nudity, no, there will most definitely be nudity, kind of way.

As soon as I reread it, the itinerary will be retaped under the bathroom sink. Just in case she tries to snoop.

She totally will.

I scan over it.

Chase’s Totally Chill & Not Desperate “Couples Retreat” Weekend Schedule-



Followed by the Rest of the Week's Schedule.

(S ubtitled: Win Her Back Without Getting Slapped—unless it's with her lush ass cheeks— or Arrested)

Friday:

Arrival cocktails: Passionfruit Palomas

Icebreaker game: "Most Inappropriate First Impression"

Group dinner: Taco bar + aphrodisiac trivia

No "scheduled" activities after 9 PM ( wink )

Saturday:

Morning yoga (led by me in gray sweatpants— weaponized warfare and I'm not even ashamed. It's gonna be hot as hell though. )

Trust fall relay race ( where I will absolutely let her catch me, dramatically )

Couple's cooking competition ( she'll sabotage me, I'll let her win, she'll fall in love-all over again )

Sunset "Naked Honesty" hot tub hour ( see also: emotional foreplay )

Sunday:

Mimosa breakfast

Me, on one knee, pretending it's a joke... ( until it's not.)

Monday through Friday stuff.

Rolling the typed, I'm fancy , paper list back up, I hide it again under the master bathroom sink.

When Roxy finds it, she'll either:

A. Burn it

B. Frame it ironically

C. Use it as Exhibit A in the divorce— she can add it to the color-coded folder she already has —which, frankly, would still be kinda romantic.

The truth is, I don't care how messy it gets. I don't care how many cupcakes she throws at me. Or how many insults she gift-wraps in sarcasm. The number of therapy notes she dramatically reads at dinner is irrelevant.

I'm not giving up. She's not just my wife.

She's my best friend. My favorite argument.

She's my person and my home.

And even if she hates that I booked this thing behind her back... she still came. Because for her, I'm all of those things, too

I'm not wasting it.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

### NO SEX WITH MY HUSBAND (PROBABLY)

#### ROXY

There are only three ways I wake up after a night like last night. Either still drunk, deeply aroused or emotionally unwell but wearing great lashes and with perfect tits.

Today, I'm all three .

I lie in bed, staring at the ceiling fan like it's personally responsible for my marriage. Chase's T-shirt is soft against my skin and smells like him.

The itinerary I found under the sink after my shower last night is under my pillow, smug as hell.

And my thighs are still mad at me for not wrapping them around his waist, or his head, last night and ruining everything.

Rolling out of bed, I grab the scrunchie that dislodged in my turbulent slumber, Chase tried to get in bed beside me, and I shoved him out, so he laid out on the floor. I slept like shit without him beside me. I always do.

Pulling my hair back up, I head into the bathroom to brush my teeth before stomping toward the sounds in the kitchen like I'm headed into a legal deposition.

As I hit the hall, I smell bacon and vanilla and my coffee order—extra cinnamon, a splash of oat milk, and one pump vanilla syrup, topped with thick and creamy cold

foam.

Rounding the corner, I stop in my tracks.

Of course, he's there. Shirtless. Hair messy. The scruff on the lower half of his face instantly causes a reaction.

He's casually flipping French toast on the griddle like he's not the reason I'm contemplating committing a felony before 9AM.

"You're wearing my shirt," he says without turning.

Did he spy? I mean, I wore it to bed and technically it's our room, but whatever.

"You're in my kitchen." I snap.

Uh, what? Since when do I give a shit about the kitchen? That's his domain.

"This is technically our kitchen." He casually replies.

"I claim full custody of the French toast and visitation rights to the bacon."

He plates the food with zero fear and sips from his mug, my mug actually, the one that says, "Have a nice day" but has a raised middle finger on the bottom. He sees me looking and grins. "I love this mug."

I glare. "I hope your eggs curdle."

He slides a plate across the counter toward me.

"You're welcome, babe. My shirt looks better on you." His gaze rakes me from head

to toe before slowly moving back up again.

Why is my husband so damn fine?

I want to jump him. Right now.

I also want to stab him with a butter knife.

Instead, I take a bite and moan as I chew.

It's perfect. Of course, it is.

Sitting down on the stool across from him with the island between us, I look at him.

He blatantly stares back. We eat in silence. Except it's not silent. It's thick with what we almost did last night... what we still might do... what I want to do.

Add in the fact that I dreamed about his hands, and what I know they're capable of doing to me all night, while he was on the floor beside me, and how we always seem to involve food in our foreplay, I can't look at the syrup without blushing

"So," Chase says, biting into a piece of bacon, "how'd you sleep?"

I smile sweetly, though I can't stop staring at his mouth as he chews. "Like a woman who didn't almost make a massive mistake."

He nods. "Cool. I slept like a man whose wife made him sleep on the floor instead of curved around her with her ass on his dick." I swallow and he smirks. "Remember that team-building exercise at the last couple's thing where you dry humped my leg, and then, ran off with my favorite spoon?"

I blink. “I did not take the spoon.”

He holds it up. It’s his favorite spoon. He brings it everywhere. It’s silver... and bent.

Damnit, Chase.

Memories of exactly how it got that way flood my head and my nipples bead.

I curse. “I hate you.”

“Lies.” He winks.

Before I can respond, the door opens and the other couples flood in. It gets loud. Fast.

Three people make a beeline for me.

As soon as I can escape to the deck, I find Chase leaning against the railing, sipping orange juice like a damn sunrise fantasy.

“You’ve been busy,” I say, arms crossed.

He grins. “So have you. Heard you tell Miguel you were emotionally repressed. That’s hot.”

I ignore that. “They think we’re back together.”

His shrugs . “So... we’re never really not together, Rox. No matter what you say.”

My brows draw together. “Did you say something to them for them to come to that conclusion?”

“I mean... what’s the issue? We’re married and we are in fact,” he points at himself, and then, at me, “together.”

I blink. “ Chase! ”

He shrugs. “Non-issue. Moving on.”

“Why not just tell them we’re getting divorced?” I snap.

“Because we’re not.” He growls and sets his fists on the deck railing.

Okay, we’re not, but we are, but...

“Separated, then.” I frown.

“We’re not that either. You say we are. I say we’re not. And we both know I’m going home with you when we leave, so can we just... skip the rest, Roxy?” He asks.

“We are! I kicked you out!” I yell.

He leans in, “It’s not like you’ve never kicked me out before. You freak, you leave or tell me to. It never lasts. Because you love me . And I love you , Roxy West.”

And just like that, we’re too close.

His mouth is a breath from mine. His hand settles on my hip. I can feel his next words in my soul before he says them aloud. “You want me to leave? For real. Say it. Right now. Just say the word, baby. I’ll tell them we’re broken. But you and I both know we’re not .”

Oh, Chase.

I step back like I've been burned because he's right.

I hate it.

Marching back inside, I grab a sticky note pad from the kitchen drawer and scrawl a note in all caps.

**RULE #1: NO SEX WITH MY HUSBAND.**

Then, I slap it on the fridge, right next to the laminated itinerary taped there.

Chase walks in. He reads it. Smirking, he pulls out his phone and takes a photo. "Okay, Roxy. I'll put it in my notes."

I narrow my eyes. "I wrote it in bold, Chase."

"I see that. Whatever you say, baby." He chuckles and leans forward to quickly press his lips to mine. I gasp and he grins as he walks backwards out of the kitchen, his eyes locked on me the entire time.

Liar. He did not put it in his notes.

**CHASE**

Roxy is sitting across from me in a circle of throw pillows and broken boundaries. Soft music is playing. Incense is burning. Sasha, our friend and a licensed couple's therapist, is instructing us all. "Connect with your partner's energy through stillness."

I'm currently trying not to connect with her nipples, visible through her tank top.

It's not going great.



“We’re going to play a little game,” Sasha says, holding up a blindfold.

Roxy’s eyebrows lift so high they nearly leave her face.

“We’ll pair off, blindfold one partner, and let the other guide them in a basic task—pouring a glass of water, finding a specific object, folding a blanket...”

Miguel claps. “Sensory trust! I love this one.”

Sasha beams. “You’ll use only words. No touching. Let your voices lead. Let yourselves fall into one another. ”

Roxy whispers, “This sounds like a cult.”

I whisper back, “You’d be the hot one who sleeps with the leader and poisons the punch.”

She smiles. “You’d drink it anyway.”

Not wrong on that one, baby.

We pair up.

She crosses her arms defensively. It pushes her cleavage together and all I want to do is bury my face between it. “Who’s blindfolded first?” She asks, pulling me back from my mental visual stimulation.

“Trust me?” I ask.

“About as far as I can throw your hunky, tattooed ass.”

“So, impeccably. Awesome. ... I’m up first, then. And the only tattoo on my ass is the one that says, ‘Property of Roxy.’”

Sliding the blindfold on, I sit back.

She clears her throat.

Sasha says, “Your task is to find the pink blanket on the couch.”

Easy peasy.

Or so I thought... until Roxy opens her mouth.

“Take three steps forward. No—stop. You walk like you’ve never used your hips before.”

“Is this guidance or a roast? And you know damn well I know how to use my hips.” I’m exasperated.

“Both. Turn right. Not your other right. Shut up and listen to me. God, can you even listen ?”

I bump into a table with my shin and yelp in pain.

“Oh my... are you injured?!” Her voice is concerned.

“Only emotionally.” I joke through the pain shooting through my shin.

“Good, now crouch. No, not like that! You look like you’re in labor. Just like squat. You go to the gym, Chase. You know how to squat!”

I crouch anyway and mutter, “I have balls and a giant dick. I can’t squat without crushing all of them.”

She snorts just as I feel fabric brush against my hand. “Yes, right there!”

I grab it. It’s soft.

“Got it!” I exclaim.

“Congratulations. You successfully found a pink blanket using zero core strength and absolutely no grace, regardless of the elephant trunk in your shorts.”

She’s talking about my dick.

Pulling off the blindfold, I grin at her. “You’re lucky I still think you’re hot when you’re mean. But you’re always mean, so I must think you’re an inferno.”

She bites her lip as she watches me, saying nothing.

She knows what it does to me when she does that.

Damn, witch.

Next round, we head into the kitchen, and we switch.

She ties her hair back and sits tall. Then, I blindfold her, whispering, “I’m stealing this later.”

She snickers, and says, “Ready when you are, stud ,” purposefully sexing up her voice.

Swallowing back the arousal I have at seeing her blindfolded, I concentrate on the task I was just given by Sasha. “Your task is to find the wooden spoon on the island.”

Roxy stands. She’s confident. Flawless. Gorgeous.

Focus, man. Focus.

“Step forward. Keep your arms out in front of you.”

“Like I’m pushing the universe away?” She flippantly says.

“Like you’re about to ruin my life.” I tease.

She smirks under the blindfold.

I guide her, slow. Gentle.

She moves like she trusts me impeccably. And that— that —nearly undoes me.

When she finally finds the spoon, her fingers wrap around it slow. Deliberate. She moves her hand along the handle, and I watch raptly.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

Then, she lifts it, turns toward my voice, and grins as she cheekily says, “Is this like the one I licked chocolate off of before I ruined your chances at a hand job?”

Everyone laughs. I forgot we weren’t alone in here.

Later, Sasha says Roxy and I “passed with extraordinary synergy.”

Roxy proudly says, “It’s called sexual chemistry and interconnected minds. Not everyone has it.”

I stare at her. She feigns ignoring me.

Trent mutters, “Must be nice.”

Whitney chokes on her lemon water and glares at him

In the kitchen, I corner her while the others talk about moon signs and gluten, oblivious to, or ignoring, the sexual tension between my wife and I.

“You still remember every single spoon I use?” I growl.

“Of course. We’ve been together for over three and a half years.” She flippantly replies.

I lean in. “Exactly, baby. Together.” My voice lowers, “Do you remember what I do with it?”

She steps closer, not backing away. “Do you remember how fast I can make you drop it?”

My pulse spikes but I do remember. Vividly.

Her lip lifts. She smiles sexily, and then, she walks away. Leaving me with a screaming libido and a raging hard-on.

Again.

ROXY

The no sex with my husband rule was a good idea.

In theory. Like Chick-fil-A closing on Sundays. Or gluten-free croissants.

But the moment I walk into the kitchen and see Chase shirtless—again—standing behind the island with a bowl of fresh whipped cream and his hair pushed back from his face like a Greek god who fucks like the Devil—that theory fails.

He doesn’t even look up when I enter. He just keeps whipping the cream while his arms bulge and the need to trace every single tattoo adorning them with my fingers and my lips consumes me. He says, “Morning, babe.”

Sexually frustrated and pissed off about it, even though I made him sleep on the floor again, I snap, “I hope your whisk breaks.”

“Your mouth says mean things, but your eyes say ‘make me scream with my face pressed into this cutting board, husband of mine.’” I smirk even though I really don’t want to— damnit, Chase! I’m so turned on and irate about being that way.

Grabbing a spoon from the counter, I point it at him. “Back up or I’ll launch this into your abs.”

He steps forward, dips his finger into the bowl of whipped cream, and smears it down his chiseled stomach, growling, “Which one?”

I drop the spoon. It clatters to the floor, and I physically force myself not to crouch down in front of him and lick every drop off.

He’s going to kill me. Or turn me on so much that I die from need before he fucks me until I forget my name.

Damnit to hell.

Turning, I race from the room with soaked panties while Chase laughs behind me, fully aware of my predicament.

Today’s activity is “Couples Cook-Off: Communication Edition.”

It’s supposed to promote unity, timing, and trust.

Instead, it promotes me watching Chase drizzle honey onto fruit like its foreplay while Whitney mutters “Jesus, someone get me a fan” and I restrain myself from jumping clean across the island to claw her eyes out.

Miguel narrates while we cook. “Look at the way Chase supports Roxy’s independence by letting her take the lead.”

I retort, “I’m literally slicing a pepper while he stares at my ass.”

Miguel says, “Intentional grounding technique.”

Trent mutters, “I’m gonna need one of those cold towels.”

Chase flatly says, “Stop looking at my wife’s ass, Trent.”

Our dish is simple, balsamic-glazed peach toast with whipped feta and honey drizzle.

It’s also sexy as hell which is completely his fault.

He hands me a piece of toast and says, “Taste it. Take a bite that gets a little of all of the flavors. It should be an explosion in your mouth.”

Bitch what?

I want you exploding in my mouth after I douse your cock in honey and suck, lick, and nibble every bit of it off until you coat the back of my throat with your salty seed.

What? No, stop it, Roxy.

Narrowing my eyes, I breathlessly say, “I freaking know how to eat.”

“Do you though?” His voice is gritty.

Then, he takes a finger, dips it in the whipped feta, and smears it against my lips.

I immediately freeze. He waits. Everyone else is focused on Sasha’s passionfruit salad demonstration, so no one sees us about to strip naked and fuck like rabbits in the middle of the kitchen.

No one but us. We cannot look away from each other.

I part my lips and take his finger into my mouth, slowly sucking the creamy cheese



off of it.

His breath catches and his nostrils flare. “Roxy...” his voice is a warning.

Blinking innocently, I slide the back of my hand over his straining crotch. He jumps and a low moan escapes. “You started it,” I whisper.

He presses into my hand and drags his fingers over my peaked nipples. I gasp and my panties soak clean through. He smiles that smile that melts me. “I’ll finish it,” he promises.

Ten minutes later, as we present our dish through sensual haze you could cut with a knife, Sasha says, “The flavors are layered. Complex. Playful. Perfect.”

Chase winks. “Kind of like our marriage. Huh, babe.” His voice is liquid sex, and I unintentionally moan with arousal.

Whitney whispers, “Oh my God, they’re gonna have sex behind the island.”

Trent mutters, “Or on top of it.” He looks intrigued and a little interested.

Dude what? You are not watching Chase and I have sex.

I pretend I’m fine from the past half hour’s events within this kitchen between Chase and me.

I am not fine.

But I am aroused beyond belief and in need of an orgasm. One only Chase can give me.

We win the cook-off by a landslide. Bree—she and Weston showed up this morning—actually weeps a little when she samples our dish. “It’s the honey. It tastes like affection and... arousal.”

What it tastes like is regret. I regret kicking Chase out. Again.

Like lust. I want my husband between my thighs, like right now.

Like every late-night fight we’ve had while making food that led to hot as hell sex on the closest surface.

But instead, I smile and say, “Thanks. We pair well with red wine and bad decisions.”

And Chase is just looking at me.

He knows I’m going to break the rule.

Soon.

CHASE

There’s a moment every night—right around midnight—when the house goes quiet. The string lights dim. The waves are the only sound from the beach outside. And the walls forget what they heard during dinner.

That’s when I hope she’ll roll over and tell me to get my ass in the bed with her.

Every single night.

Tonight, she does, sort of.

I can't sleep, so I get up, careful not to wake her, though I don't think she's asleep. Pulling on shorts, I head to the kitchen for some water.

A few minutes later, she walks into the kitchen barefoot, wearing the robe I gave her two Christmases ago.

It's short. Black. Dangerous. Very similar to the one I ruined by ripping it off of her the first time she said "I love you", her mouth full of whipped cream and my hand between her soaked thighs after she came undone on it.

I freeze mid-sip of water. She sees me and stops before rolling her eyes as I drink her in.

She's so beautiful.

"Don't flatter yourself, Chase," she says. "I came for leftover cake, not cocky commentary." But her voice is giving her away.

Really, Roxy? You didn't follow me in here?

Okay, we'll play it your way, baby.

I nod. "What flavor are we talking?"

"Salted caramel ganache with a vanilla bean whipped center." She says.

I grin. "So... me."

She opens the fridge like she didn't hear me.

She so did.

Leaning into the fridge, her robe rides up, showing her ass cheeks from her tiny panties. She mutters, “You labeled the Tupperware.”

My cock responds to the view though I manage to reply. “Didn’t want to trigger your storage trauma.”

She pulls out the cake, grabs a fork, and hops onto the counter, crossing her ankles like she’s still wearing my last name like armor. Her robe is almost around her waist and her legs, and the center of her lace panties are on full display.

“You gonna share?” I ask, stalking towards her.

She takes a bite, moans dramatically, and says, “Earn it.”

Oh, I’ll earn it, baby.

I walk closer. Slow. Easy.

She watches me like a threat.

Dipping my finger into the frosting, I bring it up to her mouth.

She doesn’t hesitate.

Her lips part and her tongue slips out. She licks. Slowly, reverently. My cock jumps.

I slide my finger inside of her mouth. She closes her lips around my digit and sucks. Her tongue circles my finger, and then, she starts to move her head. She sucks. Hard.

My entire body goes tight.

“You’re evil,” I rasp.

“You’re easy,” she echoes.

“You’re mine.” I snarl, gripping her thighs and pulling her hips to the edge of the island. Her ankles uncross and her knees part.

Her breath catches as my hands trace lines from her kneecap to just below her heat. I stop shy of where I want to touch and drag my fingers back down.

Her thighs part further, and I step between them.

I move close to her beckoning heat again, but don’t touch... yet.

“I miss this,” I whisper.

She swallows and I can see her pulse racing at the hollow of her neck. “You miss the sex.”

“No. We had sex four days ago, Roxy.”

Her brows lift but she doesn’t say anything. She can’t.

I lean in, encroaching on her space. “I miss the way you look at me when I make you laugh. I miss your bi-polar playlists. I miss arguing over where the cayenne goes in the fucking cabinet.”

Her voice is soft as she says, “You put it by the oregano.”

“Because it deserves more spice time.”

She laughs, and then, for the first time in four days, her hand touches my chest.

Flat. Warm. A promise. A warning.

Maybe both.

She slides her hands over my shoulders and caresses down my chest. Her fingertips dance over my hard nipples, and then, down my abs. She throatily says, “Well, I miss the sex. In fact...”

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

Before she can finish the sentence, I grip her panties and peel them down her legs.

Then, I drop them to the floor and kneel beside them.

Her thighs quiver and her fingers delve into the hair at the sides of my head.

She scoots closer to my face and spreads her legs wider.

She pulls me in. I inhale. Her scent invades my senses.

Then, I flick her clit with my tongue. She jerks on the counter and moans.

I worship her with my tongue, my teeth, and my lips.

She rolls her hips, pressing her clit into me.

She moans, “Not enough... I need your fingers... I need more.” Ever her servant, I add two fingers to her pussy and move them in and out while toying with her clit.

She gasps, “More... Give me more, Chase.” I add a third finger and curl them inside of her.

She bucks and rides my face and my hand while she holds my head hostage.

Her hips raise, increasing the tempo. Curling my fingers again, I hit the spot she loves and bite her clit at the same time.

She screams, “Chase... Ohhhhhh, Chase... Fuck... oh fuck... Chase... ” She practically convulses.

When she’s spent, she slumps back on the island.

Her head lolls to the side and she says, “Now... fuck me, baby.”

Oh, I will, Roxy.

It's not gentle. It's two people, desperate for each other, who come together again and again.

She’s bouncing on the island top as she plants her feet on the tile.

Her knee smacks me in the pec, and I grunt and grab her legs, throwing them over my shoulders and holding onto her thighs as my cock slides in and out of her pussy and my balls slap against her ass.

Her fingers curl around the edge of the counter as she meets my thrusts.

Moving my hips faster as she moans and rolls her head from side to side, I grunt, “I’m about to come baby. I can’t hold back.”

Smiling, she reaches between us, rubbing circles on her clit.

She pinches it and her stomach quivers. “Come for me, baby.” Her thighs tighten, and she comes...

again. Her orgasm and quivering pussy muscles trigger my own release.

Grabbing her thighs so tightly I’m going to leave marks, I pump into her once more.



My cock swells and I come deep inside of her.

When we can both breathe again, I laugh. Her brow rises though she smirks. As I come back to reality, I glance down and really start to laugh. Her cake is smeared all over both of us. Cake and ganache are everywhere. Literally everywhere.

A slow clap comes from the doorway and we both quickly look toward the sound.

Trent is red faced but he smirks and rubs the back of his neck and glances at the wall.

“Uh, I just came down for some tea. I did not expect the show. But uh... good job, I guess. If I’d paid for tickets, I wouldn’t ask for a refund.

I think I’ll just go back to my room and drink tap water though.

” Turning, he heads for the stairs, calling back, “I’m assuming you’re going to clean all that up and like Clorox the counters before morning. Night.”

Roxy and I look at each other. I grin. She blushes, but then, she laughs.

“How much do you think he saw?” she asks.

Slapping her thigh, I pull out. It makes a squelching sound. Laughing harder, I mutter, “Uh, probably enough.”

Grabbing the fork from beside her hip, I scoop some cake from the island, bring it to my lips, and eat it.

She just stares at me.

So, I lean in and kiss her.

Like, kiss her .

It's tongue and teeth, slow but intense. She kisses me back, and then, she stops, pressing her hand to my chest.

Her hand rises to her mouth as she wiggles to sit up. She closes the sides of her robe.

“Roxy, don't. Don't... ”

I freeze as she hops off the counter and walks out towards the bedroom, cake still coating her back, ass, thighs, and the entirety of the island.

She doesn't look back.

I stare at the empty kitchen that looks like a cake bomb just went off like it might explain what the hell just happened.

A bomb did go off. Its name is Roxy West.

This was a fracture but we're both going to break.

It's just a matter of patience and trying not to surrender before she fully succumbs this time.

ROXY

He didn't come back to our room last night.

I don't speak to him all morning. Not because I'm mad but because I'm terrified.

It's not that we had Roxy and Chase sex on the island in the kitchen last night.

It's not the way he looked at me like I hung the moon and baked the cake inside it.

It's that I cannot stay away from him. I literally cannot. When we are together, we are untamable.

Wanting Chase has never been the problem.

It's what happens after . It's me losing myself.

I'm no longer a single person... I'm part of a pair.

It's my needing him and being unable to be without him.

He gives me space. Of course, he does. He's frustratingly good like that.

He cooks breakfast, serves coffee to the other couples, and goes along with Sasha's "relationship affirmations" exercise even though I know he hates being emotionally cornered before noon. But he never pushes me. He just watches from a distance.

Quiet. Calm.

Like he has all the time in the world and he's just waiting for me to turn around.

I spend the morning with Sasha, Whitney, and Bree pretending to care about sage bundles and relationship moon charts. I don't care about any of it. But being here with them means I don't have to think about what happened in the kitchen last night... with Chase.

They ask me what my biggest romantic regret is.

I almost say his name.

That would be a lie. I don't regret loving Chase.

I almost say me.

But instead, I just smile. I lie and say, "Buying a white couch with a sangria margarita habit."

They laugh.

I don't.

Night falls.

Everyone heads to bed early after too much wine and margaritas and one very graphic group game of "Never Have I Ever."

I drank too much and now I'm emotionally compromised.

All I want is Chase. My husband.

I know exactly where he's sleeping... and it's not in here with me. He muttered about taking the small empty room across the house.

I stand outside his door for ten whole seconds. Then, ten more. Without knocking, I open it and go in.

He's sitting on the bed in gray sweatpants, shirtless, flipping through a notebook that definitely contains either love letters or pornographic recipes.

He freezes when the door opens and looks up, startled.

“Rox—”

“Shut up.”

I close the door, cross the room, sit on the bed, and say the three words I’ve been swallowing since I walked out of that kitchen last night. “I love you.”

He drops the notebook to the bed.

I don’t let him speak. “Don’t say anything.

Just... let me talk.” I rush to get out. He nods but his hands are clenched at his hips.

His dreamy eyes are locked on me like I’m the last good thing on earth.

“I hate this. Being apart. I always hate it. Every single time. I pretend I’m fine.

We both know I’m not. I wear your shirts because they smell like you and remind me of every night we don’t sleep. ”

His throat works. “Roxy...”

I hold my hand up to shut him up. “I hate that I know the exact tone of your laugh.... the way you cook when you’re stressed... the fact that you still keep the cayenne next to the oregano just to piss me off. ”

I breathe. Hard. I whisper, “I hate that it feels like home when you’re near me. It always has. Even when I push you away. And you always let me. You just ride the waves of my crazy and wait for me to calm down. You are my home, Chase. I fucking love you and I don’t know why the fuck you love me.”

I kiss him. It's not soft. It's not sweet. It's desperation. It's grief and longing and God, I missed you and I love you.

His hands cup my cheeks, and he kisses me back like he's been dying of thirst and I'm water.

His hands find my waist. He caresses my neck. His love finds my soul.

We undress quickly and come together, finding the rhythm only we have. We fall apart in each other's arms. He kisses me as we come and it's perfect. When we both settle back to earth, I curl into his chest and whisper, "I don't know how to stop loving you, Chase."

He whispers back, "Then, stop trying to." And he kisses the side of my head.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

### COUPLES THERAPY, SWEATPANTS, AND ONE HELL OF A BLOW JOB ATTEMPT

ROXY

I wake up in Chase's bed. We're naked. Tangled together in sheets and limbs but surprisingly, I don't have any regrets. Not even false one's.

What I do have is full-blown crisis brewing behind my ribs and moisture pooling between my legs from the sight of his tattooed chest in front of my eyes and his morning wood waving "good morning" from the sheet barely covering his hips.

Last night wasn't just me welcoming Chase back to my bed. It was us.

That's so dangerous.

Shuffling out of the bathroom, still in my robe, I walk into the kitchen just as he's flipping the last pancake and setting it onto a tray already stacked.

"Hey," he says, softly, watching me.

"Morning," I mumble and longingly gaze at the coffee pot.

He slides a plate toward me. "I put peanut butter on them. And the coffee just stopped brewing. You can grab the first cup."

I pause.

He put peanut butter on my pancakes.

I only eat peanut butter on pancakes when I'm emotionally overwhelmed.

This sexy bitch.

The retreat itinerary says, “ Guided Intimacy Work ,” which is just a very fancy way of saying “Therapy with friends and Sasha’s kombucha-sipping ass as moderator.”

Everyone gathers on the patio.

Trent’s already uncomfortable.

Bree and Weston are holding hands, and wearing weirdly pained expressions, like they’re in a filmed funeral montage for television.

The hell? They clearly are not screwing each other’s brains out.

Sitting down, I cross my legs before sliding my sunglasses down to cover my eyes.

Chase sits next to me. His knee touches mine.

I don’t move. I also don’t breathe.

“Today,” Sasha says, “we’re going to do The Mirror Exercise . ”

Cue the ominous music in my brain.

“You’ll sit across from your partner, hold eye contact, and repeat the sentence, ‘What I’m afraid to tell you is...’ Fill in the blank. Five times. Each. Without laughing. Without looking away.”



Oh, awesome. This is flipping just great.

So, we're just going to rip my soul out and use it as a drink coaster.

Fucking fantastic.

We go last because of course we do.

We can't have done this shit in private. No, when it's each couple's turn, the rest of us are just listening in. Our insecurities are on full display, like entertainment.

Fuck you, Sasha.

Chase sits across from me with his eyes full of love.

Suddenly, I'm furious.

How dare he still look at me like I'm worth... everything.

He goes first. "What I'm afraid to tell you is... I still dream about our wedding night."  
He says it calmly, no hesitation.

I blink.

Shit.

My turn. "What I'm afraid to tell you is... I think I love you more when you get angry, because you're never angry. And you should be. It's real."

He tenses.

Well, he should be. I push him away and take him for granted all of the time. Because I'm scared he's going to realize that he can do so much better than this train full of crazy where I'm the conductor and all of the passengers.

His voice is raw as he says, "What I'm afraid to tell you is... I've never taken off my ring. Not even once."

He flips his hand. There it is. The one I bought him after we got married. Tungsten and sterling silver. It's worn. Familiar. Still his. And he's still mine.

I want to look away... but I don't.

"My turn," I whisper. "What I'm afraid to tell you is... I want you to come home. Every day. Every time I tell you to leave. I don't want you to leave. I just don't know how to do this."

The circle is silent. So is my heartbeat which is insane because the organ responsible is about to jump out of my chest.

Damnit, Roxy.

I just said the most honest thing I've ever said out loud.

And he didn't flinch.

Somehow, we make it through the rest of the session.

We don't touch. We don't talk. We just sit. And somehow, the silence is the closest thing to actual intimacy, not just primal and hot sex, we've had in ages.

CHASE

Later, I find her in the kitchen. Her back is turned toward the door.

Her hands are braced on the counter. Her fingers are gripping it so tightly her knuckles are white.

Her hair is twisted up and clipped which only draws my attention to her neck.

She's wearing a tight sports bra as a shirt and black workout shorts that barely cover her ass.

They're clearly designed to test a man's self-control when his wife is the one wearing them.

I quickly grab a glass and fill it with water, gulping it down.

"I said some heavy shit out there," I offer, trying to sound casual.

She doesn't turn but her spine straightens. "Mmmmmm."

"You said some, too."

She shrugs.

I try to take a sip and realize I've drained the glass. Refilling it, I stare at the back of her neck.

Wisps of dark hair are curling around it and I try not to imagine how it would feel if I pressed my mouth there and said everything I'm still too afraid to say.

I want to say it all. I mean it.

I'm just not sure she's ready to hear it.

"You gonna talk to me, Rox?" I ask.

She finally turns around. Her dark eyes are like storm clouds. Her arms are crossed over her chest. Her lips are full and red, but not from her usual retro lipstick, from her biting and picking at them. Her cheeks are flushed.

"I've been talking to you for three and a half years. You just don't listen."

That's not fair. And it's not true. The only time she ever talks to me is when she's yelling. Other than that, she never talks to me about anything real.

She's kept so much of herself from me. She's been so scared that I'd leave her at any moment that she never listens to me when I tell her over and over and over that I'm not going anywhere.

I wouldn't. Hell, if I'd wanted to, I could have actually left any of the hundreds of times she kicked me out.

But I'm here.

I'm fighting for us and hoping that she'll finally fight her fears, too.

Instead of saying any of my thoughts aloud, I simply nod. "Okay, I'm listening now."

She lifts a brow. "Why though?" She sighs.

Exhaling, I grab the back of my neck, squeeze it, and say, "I'm still here, Rox. We're still married. And I'm still absolutely obsessed with you."

She tenses.

I step closer to her. She retreats until her back hits the cabinets. My hands settle on the counter beside hers, my arms boxing her in... but I don't touch her. I don't have to.

Our bodies remember the rest.

“You think we can be fixed ?” she whispers.

Leaning in, I breathe into her ear. “We’re not broken, baby. But yeah, I think that we’re worth fighting for.”

“You wanna start over?” She breathlessly asks.

I lean in and suck on her lobe while still not touching her with anything other than my lips on her ear.

She shivers and a moan escapes her. Her back arches and her chest brushes against mine.

My voice is gravelly as I say, “As many times as it takes. But I’m really hoping this is the last time we do this dance and that it ends with you on top of the counter again. ”

Her breath hitches but she doesn't move.

She doesn't dip under my arm and race anywhere but here.

Reaching out, I grab a bowl of buttercream frosting off the counter, and dip one finger into it.

Scooping some of the deliciousness I made first thing this morning out, I purposefully drag it across her bottom lip. “Still have a sweet tooth, Roxy West?”

Roxy West. That’s your name. You have my name, wife of mine.

She glares at me, but her pupils dilate. Then, she slowly licks her lips. “Still a cocky as fuck pain in my ass, Chase West?”

“I got your crazy ass to marry me after three weeks of knowing you. Cocky is my love language, baby.”

She smiles and my entire being reacts. When Roxy smiles at me like that, one of two things is about to happen.

One- She’s about to rock my damn world.

Or two- She’s about to try to kick me out of her life... again.

I step back just enough to breathe. She steps forward like we’re dancing. And just like that, we’re kissing.

No, not kissing . Clashing. Our mouths are fighting. Our teeth are hitting. Our tongues are desperate.

I easily lift her onto the counter. She wraps her legs around my waist. Gripping her thighs, I pull her hips into mine. She angles her head to deepen our kiss and claws at my hair, practically ripping it out by the roots.

Sliding my hands over her sides and her stomach, I cup her breasts through her top.

She arches into them and her nipples peak harder under my palms. I slide one hand

inside, fighting against the restrictive fabric determined to stop me.

I succeed and flick my thumb over her nipple.

She moans into my mouth, and then, she covers my trapped hand with hers and pulls her head back.

Her eyes are wide and burning with passion as she says, “Let me.”

Uh, what? Come again?

Let you what?

I blink, trying to get my voice to work. “Let you what?” I question.

She slides off the counter with my hand still trapped. It pulls and I wince, but I forget all about it as she shoves me against the cabinets and drops to her knees.

She tugs at my waistband and my cock slaps her in the face.

She chuckles, “Excited much?” But she takes me into her mouth.

I get lightheaded as I look down at her, her lips parted around my cock as she moves her head, sliding me out to the tip before engulfing me until I hit the back of her throat.

She’s blowing me and I’m fisting her hair and guiding her head while I fuck her mouth.

She continues to work me over, moaning and really working over my cock. It’s so good that my knees are quaking.

The kitchen door opens. I see it but Roxy doesn't hear it.

Miguel walks in holding a yoga mat under his armpit and a container of chia pudding in his hand. He sees us as he's about to take a bite and he drops everything to the floor.

"Oh shit. I'm sorry. Oh no."

Roxy turns her head, releasing me so quickly that her teeth scrape along my shaft.



## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

Yowling as the pain threatens to take me to my knees, I grab my crotch and check for damage. I'm bleeding.

Miguel is just staring at us both. Finally, he shakes his head and starts backing out of the kitchen like he just walked into a live porn taping with his parents.

"I'm so sorry. I'll be back to, er, clean the mess, once your dick is back in your pants or whatever. I hope she didn't skin you. My bad," he yells as the door solidly closes.

Roxy jumps to her feet. We both stand there, breathing hard, staring at the door Miguel just disappeared through. Still ruined and my dick is still throbbing... from my injury.

Roxy groans and leans back against the fridge. She winces as she sees me cradling my wounded appendage. "Is it bad? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to use my teeth." She growls. "I swear, if I ever speak to that man again, it'll be at his funeral."

Adjusting myself with a hiss, I groan again, "Yeah, I'm gonna need like twelve hours and an ice pack."

She exhales, then, she wickedly grins and says, "I'll give you six."

ROXY

"So," I say, flopping face-first onto the couch in the empty living room after our deeply interrupted moment, "I think we need ground rules."

Chase sits beside me, legs wide, arms stretched across the back like he didn't just get a blowjob in the kitchen that abruptly ended with an injured little Chase.

"Rules," he repeats, blinking at me.

"You know, boundaries." I say.

"Sure. Let's make rules, Roxy." He chuckles, and then, his finger drifts over my upper arm. "I mean, you're 'No sex with my husband one' was so effective. What are these rules, babe? I need to know so I can know exactly when we cross them." He waggles his brows.

Oh shut up, you sexy mother fucker. It's not my fault I have no willpower when it comes to you.

Our friend just saw me with your dick in my mouth in the middle of the kitchen.

Rolling my eyes, I shoot him a glare so sharp it could peel paint.

He holds up both hands, but his smirk has my insides twisting. "I'm listening, Roxanne. Go on."

He only uses my full name when he's about to either seduce me or argue for his life.

Probably both in this instance.

I sit up and count on my fingers.

"One: No sex."

Chase laughs. "We've already broken that one. Twice. Irrelevant and voided. Next."

“Yes, and they were a mistake. A moist, frosting-covered mistake, and then, a “my husband is too fine and sweet and I cannot resist him” moment of weakness. That will not be happening again.”

He nods, “Uh huh. Sure. I believe you, baby.”

I slap his thigh.

He grins.

We both know that it’s happening again.

“Two,” I continue, “no sleeping in the same bed.”

He tilts his head and says with exasperation, “Again, already broken. So, voided. Next.”

“Chase, I’m serious.” I growl.

Grabbing my feet, he pulls me over to him on the couch. “Me, too. Rules one and two are hereby voided. But do go on.”

My thighs clench but I mutter, “Three: No touching without permission.” I glance down at his hand on my feet that are now in his lap.

He bites his bottom lip. “Yeah... about that one.”

I can’t help it, I smirk. “Be honest, you’re already picturing how to ask permission in the dirtiest way possible, aren’t you?”

He shrugs and traces the arch on the bottom of my feet. “Consent is hot, babe. So,

I'm going to need you to say that one is void, too."

I shiver as he continues to torment me. Then, I growl, "Fine."

He smirks, "So, we're good for sex, sleeping in the same bed, and touching whenever we want to. I mean... it's like we're married or something, babe."

Damnit, Chase!

I pause, then chuckle as I add one more. "Four: Mouth stuff is on a case-by-case basis."

He nearly falls off the couch from laughing. He finally recovers and says, "My dick was just in your mouth in the kitchen, and I had you for dessert a couple of nights ago on the island top . All of your rules are bullshit. We've broken them all already."

I retort, "Doesn't matter. Rules are rules." I smirk. "Just being realistic."

He leans in, eyes gleaming. "No, you're delusional . You're telling me that if I make you coffee the way you like it, rub your feet, and do your laundry, you might reconsider Rules One through Four if I promise to make you scream my name so loudly the whole retreat hears?"

I don't blink. "I'm saying I reserve the right to sit on your face if the vibes align."

He laughs heartily and presses his fist to his heart. "Whatever you say, my queen."

A beat passes. Then, we both start laughing... because this is so us . This is how we survive. We flirt through heartbreak. We seduce or just say "fuck it" to rules. And time after time after time, we fall back into each other like we never even left.

Ten minutes later, we're still on the couch, half-draped over each other, soft petting and working each other up in "innocent" ways, when Whitney walks in and says, "Sorry to interrupt this sexual tension fest, but the next couple activity starts in five. Sasha says to bring your emotional baggage and your safe word."

Chase mutters, "Same word for both, actually."

Whitney tilts her head. "What is it?"

He grins and says, "Roxy."

The exercise is called "What's Your Fantasy?"

Each couple pulls a card, reads it aloud, and answers the prompt. Together at the same time.

It's supposed to be about "deepening emotional connections."

We are taking it as a challenge not to, "say something inappropriate and get kicked out of the class."

Sasha and Miguel go first.

Their card says- "Describe a fantasy your partner doesn't know about."

Miguel answers immediately. "Blindfolds. Silk ties. Slow jazz. Watching eyes."

Sasha: "You want to role-play as the guy from Bridgerton again?"

Miguel: "You love the accent!"

Sasha: “You kept saying ‘I burn for thee’ while trying to open the condom. It was confusing.”

They high-five.

They use condoms?

I sip my margarita and raise my brow at Chase.

I’d be down for that one.

He grins and I know we’re on the same wavelength.

Next up: Bree and Weston.

Their card says- “What’s the dirtiest thought you’ve had about your partner this week?”

Weston blurts out, “I had a dream she rode me on a paddleboard in the water.”

Bree laughs and exclaims, “I did ride you on a paddleboard.”

Weston grins and stretches, crossing his arm behind his head. “It was still a dream, babydoll.”

Honestly, it’s iconic.

Chase winks at me and I see we’ve added another one to the list.

Trent and Whitney are next. Whitney pulls out a card that says- “Where would you be an exhibitionist?” She shakes her head and nods at Trent to go.

He says, “I fantasized about taking Whitney on the counter in the kitchen during the day while everyone else is right out in the living room or on the deck.”

Whitney’s eyes widen and she blushes as she sputters, “Trent! They could hear or see us!”

He mutters, “Yeah, that’s literally the point.”

Chase winks at me— Been there. Done that— and it’s our turn.

He draws a card and immediately smirks. My nerves kick in as he starts to read it aloud.

“What’s one fantasy you’ve never told anyone... because you thought it was too much?”

The group howls and leans forward. They’re not even trying to hide their interest in our answer.

Sasha murmurs, “Ohhhh, I know this is going to be good.”

Trent and Miguel both laugh, and Trent says, “There is something about these two that’s too much? I walked in on them fucking on the island and Miguel walked in on Roxy blowing Chase in the kitchen. Let’s go .”

I stare at Chase while he stares at me.

And then, like an idiot, I blurt out. “My fantasy involves a hotel room. Late check out. Open windows. Room service delivering strawberries, champagne, chocolates, and whipped cream. Silk sheets. No clothes. And Chase—” I stop and the table goes silent.

Whitney fans herself.

Chase is rooted to the spot with his eyes locked on me.

Miguel whispers, “Shit, go on.”

I clear my throat. “Chase... on his knees. Wrecked and begging. ”

Trent chuckles and says, “Forgiveness or puss?—”

Whitney smacks him with their card.

I try to play it off.

I laugh. Shrug. Sip my wine... but I can feel Chase watching me.

I glance over at him. His whole body is tense. His jaw is tight. His nostrils flare and his light eyes are so dark only the pupil is visible.

I almost fold right there.

“Your turn,” I say, trying to sound casual though my entire body is awake, alert, and humming.

Chase leans back in his chair but he doesn’t break eye contact, and he says, “ My fantasy is simple... she says stay —and means it.”

Oh my... holy shit. He just said that. Publicly. In front of our friends.

It’s not a secret that our marriage is a mess. Or that it’s my fault most of the time.



But he just threw me under the bus. And I can't even be mad. Because his fantasy shouldn't be a fantasy. It's what a normal healthy relationship is supposed to be like.

And I'm definitely not normal... but I feel exposed.

No one makes a sound. Not even Bree. And Bree is always making a sound.

I want to say something.

Anything. But I can't. Because I'm two seconds from breaking again.

So instead, I quickly stand and brokenly whisper, "I need air."

I leave.

I walk on the beach for a bit. But I feel even more exposed out there, so I slip back into the condo and head to our room, hoping it'll be empty. It is.

I pace. I scream into a pillow. I stare at the ceiling and pretend I'm not crying.

I'm a hot mess and Chase is in a toxic relationship with me because he loves me and I don't let him know how much I actually love him, too.

I do. I do love him. I do want him to stay.

I just don't know how to say it without losing myself in the process.

CHASE

I don't even try to fall asleep. I can't.

I'm lying in bed, in the small room across the beach house—the one she came to me in last night—staring at the ceiling, replaying her voice in my head on a loop while she's still beside me.

“Chase... on his knees. Begging.”

She said it like it was a fantasy... but I know better.

It's a memory. It happened . Once.

It was the first time she kicked me out, a mere month after our wedding.

She was almost hysterical, and I had no idea why.

Nothing happened that I could remember. But she took off her wedding ring, her actual ring, the one I bought her the day after our wedding and threw it onto the counter.

She told me she couldn't do it anymore and I needed to get out.

I begged her to calm down. I was on my knees on the cold tile. My hands were shaking. Tears were rolling down her face. She was so panicked and I didn't know why. Not because I was pathetic, but because I meant my wedding vows. Losing her was never an option.

It still isn't.

It's almost 3AM when I stand up and grab the notebook from the nightstand—I've been carrying it since the first day she ever told me to leave—and walk barefoot across the patio to the guest room she's using on the opposite side of the house.

I don't knock. I just slide it under the door. And I leave.

The notebook isn't anything fancy.

It's a black composition notebook. The kind you use in school. The edges are frayed. The spine is bent. It doesn't even close all of the way anymore. But inside... every page is hers .

The first sentence on the first page reads,

“Shit I Should've Said Before You Walked Out.”

The second says,

“I didn't put the cayenne next to the oregano to hurt you. I did it because you always reach for it first, and I live to see you smile.”

Page after page is just filled with my thoughts.. about her.. about us... about how much I'm not going to let her go, no matter how hard she pushes me.

“You were right about the mirror. I look different without you in it.”

“I smell your perfume on my shirts, and it calms me when you frustrate me because you don't know how much I love you.”

“I lied. I liked the pink glitter vase.”

And on the last page, the last entry from earlier today, I wrote.

I'm still here.

Same dumb heart that belongs to you. Same stupid hope that you'll finally realize you're everything I could ever want or need. Still yours even when you say you don't want me. I know that you do.

-Chase

After walking back to my room, I crawl under the sheets, and stare at the dark ceiling for another hour.

I'm not hoping . I'm just waiting. Because if she reads it... and doesn't lock her door, that's a start. And if she opens my door.... that's everything .

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

### LOVE NOTES, JEALOUS RAGE, AND ONE VERY WET YOGA MAT

#### ROXY

His notebook is sitting on the nightstand like it owns the place. Black and white cover, mangled spine, and chock-full of all the emotional stability I lack.

I don't want to touch it again because if I do, I'll cry—more than I already have. Or come. Or both. And I'm emotionally raw enough after his fantasy confession yesterday to know I'm milliseconds away from sobbing into my own cleavage. I stare at the ceiling fan like it owes me money.

My phone buzzes again. I've ignored the two consecutive calls before this one.

I don't have to look to know who it is. Only one person calls this early and this often.

I glance over anyway knowing she'll just keep calling like she's got all the time in the world and the patience of a saint.

She has neither and we do have a business to run.

Mari Lynn is lit up on the screen.

Mari Lynn, aka my best friend, my business—though since she's now married to a hot celebrity chef and they are both regularly on his killing-it-in-the-ratings reality cooking show, I do the day to day stuff and handle the majority of the consults and planning— partner, my reality check, and the woman who once bailed me out of a

Las Vegas drunk-tank while wearing a tiara and no shoes. She's my ride or die.

I answer on the third ring. "Bitch, I'm not dead or is there a bridal emergency? I can be in the car in five."

"Well, that's a start." She claps back, her voice laced with her Texas charm and probably too much caffeine.

"Business is fine. Melody is handling everything just fine. You've got twenty seconds to tell me what fresh hell is happening before I drive down there.

Why are you trying to strangle your sexy ass husband with his own drawstring joggers? Or... should he be strangling you?"

Groaning, I fall backward onto the bed. "He booked this retreat—the one you knew about and didn't tell me— and he's making fresh icing and whipped cream shirtless every day, Mari Lynn."

She's quiet for a beat before she snickers, "Are they for his pancakes or yours?"

I grin because she knows us too well. "Both. "

"God, I love that man. And his pancakes rival Knox's. Don't tell him I said that." I hear the smile in her voice.

"Pick a side." I snap.

"I did. Yours. Always. Even when you're wrong.

But Chase loves you. Even when you don't want him to.

Even when you try to sabotage it, which you do .

You always have, Roxy. You know I love you and I'm always #TeamRoxy, but if you let that man's love, sexual prowess, and jawline go to waste, I swear I'll haunt you. Stop being stupid."

Well, shit! You don't have to be so damn honest, bitch.

You're so right though.

I heavily exhale through my nose, before saying, "He gave me his notebook."

Silence comes from the other end of the phone before she mutters, "His notebook. Like the notebook ? The one from his nightstand that he thinks you don't know about. That notebook?"

I groan. "Yeah. That's the one."

"Tell me you didn't read it." She says, but her tone implies that she's wanting me to say the opposite.

I tell the truth. "You know damn well, I read it. He gave it to me to read."

"Roxy—those are his innermost, honest thoughts. He basically let you read his journal."

Right again. They are.

"I read the whole damn thing. Twice." I rush to say it.

She pauses again. Her voice is softer as she asks, "And?"

I'm not going to lie to her.

She'd know I was full of shit anyway.

I'm honest. "I'm so in love with him."

I expect her to gasp, but she doesn't. She sighs.

"No shit. You fell head over heels in love with Chase West the second you saw him. I was there, remember. And that scared the absolute shit out of you. It still does. But... he loves you, too, Roxy. Instead of walking away from your crazy—and you are off the chain crazy, my girl—he loves it. Because he loves you. Stop trying to make the damn man leave you. He's not going anywhere.

Stop with the bullshit and just accept his love.

Appreciate it. Fuck, enjoy the hell out of it.

Women write books wanting a man like your husband and you have him. "

Shit... talk about brutal honesty. She just called me batshit crazy and told me I better hold onto my devoted man all in the same breath.

I blink. "Well damn, Yoda-With-Tits. Why don't you just unload your wisdom on me all at once? Why haven't you ever clocked my tea like this before?" I ask, exasperated.

She laughs a full on belly laugh and cheekily says, "Because you would've punched me in my tits."

I chuckle and feel the smile spread over my face as I mutter, "I still might."



“Fair.”

We both laugh.

She lets me breathe for a minute. Just us and the silence.

Then she says, “You want me to come down there? I can be there by tonight. Just have to book a flight. I’ll slap a kombucha bitch for you just because kombucha is gross and key a Subaru on the way in for good measure.”

I snort. “Must be nice to just be all ‘I’ll book a flight’ and I actually like kombucha. Some of it is really good. Sasha is your friend, calm your tits. And if you slap me, we’re going to tumble.”

“Being a public figure with some fan pages does have some perks.” She laughs.

“And we’ve tumbled before. On heels... down stairs...

I also seem to remember you tumbling into that husband of yours—and his crotch a time or two or ten.

We’re still filming, but I’d cut out early for you, Rox.

Knox can handle the cameras all by his lonesome for a bit if he has to. You know that.”

She would. She would book a flight and leave L.A. and filming just to come to me if I needed her.

I’d do the same though. I have done the same.

I'm good though.

I smile for the first time all morning. "Thanks, Mari Lynn. I love you. But I've got it."

"No, you've got him. The rest is details. And I love you, too."

I roll my eyes but she's not wrong.

She hums. "So what's the plan, Rox? Are you gonna let him love you or are you gonna keep pretending the only thing you need is working til you fall over, killer red lips, and bronzer?"

"Harsh." I growl.

"Accurate." She retorts.

I sigh. "I don't know what I'm doing, Mari Lynn."

She laughs breezily. "Yes, you do. You're just scared."

"I've never been scared of Chase." I feel my brows furrow.

Chase would never hurt me.

"Not of him, babe. Of what it means to want him. To trust it. To let go of the fear and the hurt you're punishing him with, that he's not responsible for."

Well, fuck me.

She always knows.

I don't respond right away.

So, she softens again. That switch she's so good at—between bestie savage and heart therapist. “I know it's scary. But he's still here, after all of your bullshit over the years, he's still with you, isn't he?”

I nod though she cannot see me. “Yeah, he is.”

“And probably still shirtless.” She teases.

“Tragically.” I chuckle.

“That man knows your weakness. Does he still have your back, put up with your shit, and make you laugh?” I hear the smile in her voice.

“He does indeed still make me completely fucking stupid.” I mutter.

She sighs and her tone sobers as she says, “Then, maybe it's time you stop running, Roxy. Kick off your wedges, dig your toes into the sand, or the sheets, and let him love you.”

It gets quiet again.

Finally, she says, “Look, I need to get back on set. Knox is probably thinking I've stolen a sound stage golf cart by now and I'm being corralled by security. You're allowed to want him, Rox. You're allowed to forgive yourself. And you're allowed to write a second chapter.”

I blink fast, trying to stem the tears that are free-falling down my cheeks.

“Okay,” I whisper.

She hears the wobble and says, “Okay.” And then—classic Mari Lynn style—she adds, “Also, if you don’t sit on that man’s face soon, someone else will certainly try to. Your husband is fine as fuck and he’s a good man . He’s like perfect.”

“Bitch. I will cut you.” I snarl.

She laughs again, “I don’t want your man. I have one of my own. But someone else will want your man. I say it with love, babe. But I really have to go. Love you.”

As I end the call, I look at the notebook again, take a deep breath, and head for couple’s yoga. I’m cutting it close.

I unroll my mat with the intensity of someone preparing for mortal combat. The eucalyptus scent wafting off it pisses me off.

The whole deck is decorated like a Pinterest dream: string lights, wind chimes, tiny bowls of crystal infused water next to each mat like we’re all about to get baptized in cucumber and lemon balm.

Chase is already stretching. He’s shirtless.

His grey sweat shorts are riding criminally low on his chiseled hips, drawing my gaze to his “v” and his muscled ass.

His tattooed back is arched. His colorfully decorated arms are flexed with the veins popping out, begging me to trace them with my tongue.

And then, the bastard moans —like it’s nothing.

He’s determined to cause my premature spiritual death.

“Good morning, everyone,” Sasha chirps, too chipper for a woman holding a 10AM soul excavation.

“We’re going to focus on openness today.”

Great.

She starts with gentle breath-work.

I start with aggressive glaring.

Chase meets my eyes during our third sun salutation and smirks. He knows I’m watching. He’s counting on it. When he shifts into low lunge and flexes his thighs like a damn Calvin Klein ad for forgiveness, I flip him off from downward dog.

It only gets worse as we go on.

Trent is groaning like he’s giving birth.

Bree is whispering affirmations to Weston while he tries to maintain balance.

And Whitney— Whitney —unrolls her mat next to Chase’s and lets out this soft, breathy noise during pigeon pose that sounds exactly like a dramatized orgasm.

I pause mid-flow and blink at her.

Girl, relax your diaphragm and your thirst. Your man is right there.

That is my man, and I will fucking shank you.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

Then she flirtatiously says, “Your wife must love this view.” The last thread of my patience snaps as my head turns so fast, I might sprain my entire dating history.

Chase blinks. His mouth opens and then closes. Before he can respond, I beat him to it. “Back your Brazilian Butt Lift ass up. This view is mine.”

Everyone stops moving. Even the wind seems to pause.

Whitney blinks in confusion and a little fear. “What? Roxy... I’m sorry. I didn’t mean...”

I step off my mat like a woman ready to testify in a courtroom of bitches and almost snarl, “You did. Your man is over there.” I point at Trent.

“This,” I drag my hand down Chase’s chest. “This is mine. The view belongs to me . The thighs? Mine. The shoulders? Also mine. The dick print in those grey sweat shorts? Exclusively mine. ” I point at each area as I address it.

Chase chokes though he’s not even attempting to cover his grin.

Miguel drops his water bottle.

Trent says, “Yeah babe... I’m your man and I’m over here.”

Whitney flushes bright pink and quickly backs away.

Wise move, bitch.

Sasha whispers, “Hallelujah.”

I should stop there... but I don't. I'm too raw, too jealous, and too full of feelings I haven't dealt with.

“Chase is my husband ,” I add. “Just because we're figuring things out doesn't mean he's available for stretching and seduction! So, take a collective breath and back the fuck off of my man.”

There's silence. It's thick. It's awkward.

Then, Bree starts clapping. Miguel joins in. Weston raises a water bottle. “To healthy boundaries.” Whitney retreats to the side of the deck like a kicked puppy and Trent scowls at her.

Well their coupling clearly needs some work.

Chase is looking at me like he's already on his knees.

I grab my mat and storm off the deck before anyone sees the way I'm shaking.

I didn't mean to say all of that.

Out loud.

In front of everyone.

But the truth is, I meant every fucking word.

CHASE

I didn't expect her to say it like that.

She just blurted it out in front of everyone in a tone that sounded like she was ready to throw down over me.

When she said "he's mine" like it was her fucking birthright, something inside me cracked open.

I don't think I'll ever be the same again.

I find her beside the house on a dune, she's sitting with her knees pulled to her chest and her sunglasses on like they can hide her from the world.

They can't.

I know her.

I know that silence.

It's her "I just told the truth, and I hate how good it felt" silence.

"Hey," I say gently. No smirk. No sarcasm. Just... me. She doesn't look up. So, I ask, "You gonna yell at me for stretching too hard?"

"No." The word is breathy.

Nodding, I squat down in front of her, "You gonna deny you marked me like a dog peeing on a mailbox?"

She scoffs. "It was the moaning , Chase." Her lips press together.



“I wasn’t the one moaning.” I remind her.

“She was breathing like a backed-up air fryer.” She snaps. “Over you. In front of me.”

My baby is jealous.

God, I love her.

I sit next to her, close but leave space between us.

She won’t look at me. “I didn’t mean to say it,” she mutters.

“Liar.” I chuckle and reach for her hand. She opens her fingers and links our hands. Fingers entwined, palm to palm.

“I didn’t mean to say it out loud. ”

Admitting this is killing her.

I smile softly. “You meant it though. I’m your husband and your man .”

She pulls her sunglasses off, finally looking at me and whispers, “I don’t know what’s happening to me.”

“You’re telling the truth.” I reply softly and tighten my hand around hers.

Silence.

Then, she whispers, “I—I still need time, Chase.”

I nod. “Take all the time you need.” Leaning over, I kiss the side of her head. Her

dark hair tickles my chin.

Another pause before she leans into me. “I’m scared,” she says.

“I know.” I hoarsely reply.

“I don’t want to fall... to let you in, like really let you in, and get left again. Eventually, you’re going to realize that I’m selfish and insane and that you can do better with someone else.” Her voice is thick.

Roxy, you’re it for me. You’re my Beth Dutton.

All I say aloud is, “Nah. I already know you’re selfish, and a lunatic, but there is no one else for me, baby.”

A tear slides down her cheek, “ Why do you love me, Chase?”

Leaning in, I press my lips to hers. Not heated, just soft, careful. When I lean back, I rest our foreheads together, “Because I can’t not love you, Rox. The day you insulted me and stole my beer was the day you stole my heart. You own it. There’s nothing left for anyone else.”

She looks at me. Really looks at me. And I see it—the pain. The anger. The vulnerability. The fear. And underneath it all... the hope.

Baby, I’m here until the end.

“I miss this ,” she whispers.

Nodding, I say, “I miss your snort-laugh. Your chaos. The way you eat cake like it owes you money.”

She cracks a half-smile. “I miss your hand on my back when I’m overthinking and acting like a lunatic.

I miss the way you can go into a kitchen that has practically nothing in it and whip up something that tastes incredible and feels like home.

And how you always make the first move, even when I don’t deserve it... ”

“That one is my favorite.” I smirk and kiss her again before sliding my arm around her and pulling her more fully into me.

She leans in, her curves aligning against me like we’re the perfect fit.

We are and I’ll never stop clinging to us.

“I wanted to kiss you today,” I murmur. “In front of all of them. After you basically pounded your chest to claim me. I thought you were going to fight her.”

She snickers. “I did not. And I might have. But I’d have kissed you back.”

“I still want to.” I practically growl.

She swallows and stares into my eyes, “So, what are you waiting for?”

I lean in, slowly, trying not to spook her.

Her eyes are full of heat.

She’s not going anywhere.

Our lips touch and the kiss quickly heats up.

Her lips part willingly, and my tongue sweeps through her mouth.

Her tongue licks my teeth, and she lightly sucks on my tongue.

It's hot but not frantic. This is not a game or a fight to see who can exert dominance.

It's two people who love each other, taking the time to show each other that, and relishing the experience. It's home.

Her hands drift to my head, her fingers delving into my hair. My thumb lightly rubs her cheek.

We're kissing like we've forgotten what just being together feels like and we're eager to relearn.

She pulls back and I groan in frustration.

Seriously Roxy. Please don't push me away again.

She doesn't go far, just enough to look into my eyes. Her hands are still in my hair. She exhales as she says, "We're not fixed, Chase."

I nod, "I know."

Her breath bounces on my lips as she whispers, "But I want to be."

God yes, baby!

All I say is, "Me too."

Leaning forward, she closes the distance between us. Her lips press to mine, and they

cling.

When she breaks it this time, I'm not tensely awaiting what she's going to say. I whisper, "Can we try something? Don't run or shove me away next time you get scared, Roxy. And stop changing the locks."

She laughs lightly. Her eyes are clear as she nods, "Okay." Her lips purse. "I'm still mad that bitch hit on you in front of me. And Trent was right there."

I laugh. "Good. Use that anger on me, baby. I think they might be swingers."

Throwing her head back, she laughs. It's rich and deep. "Whatever floats their boat. But I don't share."

My smile spreads over my face. "Neither do I and you're mine."

For the first time in forever... I think we just survived something and are heading toward something really good.

ROXY

Group dinner tonight is... weird.

Like, cold pizza and childhood trauma weird.

Everyone's in comfortable clothes and softer moods, yet the air is heavy with tension and jasmine and plumeria-scented diffuser fog.

The table is laid out beautifully.

Pretty candles. Cloth napkins. A centerpiece that looks like Pinterest and Pottery Barn

had a very vanilla baby. Chase cooked a fabulous meal, but no one's eating it.

Something is brewing.

It starts quiet, like most heartbreak does.

Miguel reaches for Sasha's water glass. She moves it away from him. He laughs like it's funny. She doesn't. Then, he says something low under his breath, that we can't hear, and she goes still.

Oh shit.

I know that stillness.

It's the kind that comes right before the dam breaks.

"I just think," Sasha says, too calmly, "that vulnerability requires actual communication."

Miguel's voice stays flat. "I've been communicating."

"You've been talking, Miguel. Not listening."

"I listen—I just don't always agree."

"Oh, so disagreement means detachment now?"

And suddenly, the table's not a table anymore.

It's a battlefield.

Bree starts to cry before the salad's even put onto our plates.

Whitney clutches her wine like it's an emotional support Chardonnay as her eyes flit back and forth over everyone.

Sasha raises her voice. Miguel yells back. Both slam their hands on the table.

Chase slides his hand across the table and refills my glass without a word as I look from Sasha to Miguel and back again. They trade barbs that cut deep. Uncaring of how hurtful they are.

I sit there, frozen, watching it all unfold like a horror movie written by my subconscious.

I know this fight.

I lived this fight.

Hell, I've started this fight.

They keep going. Back and forth. Ping. Pong. Resentment and silence. Things they have never spoken aloud, little things that are now big things. Words they'll never be able to take back.

And for a second—I swear—I smell tomato sauce.

I'm hit with a flashback.

Two years ago.

Me and Chase standing in the kitchen of our house.

He accidentally deleted a playlist on my phone while scrolling for something.

I snapped at him and said something awful.

He was so upset that I wasn't listening to him. I called him worthless. He cracked and threw a wooden spoon across the room.

I cried. He stormed out of the kitchen after I shoved him.

We didn't talk for two days.

I snap back to the present as Sasha says , "You keep showing up for everyone but me. Everyone else gets your attention. I have to beg for it."

Miguel doesn't answer. He's shell-shocked. It's as plain as day on his face.

Sasha doesn't apologize. She doesn't say she didn't mean it.

She's silent as she glares at him. Tears are in her eyes, but they're not spilling. And her breathing is accelerated.

Miguel swallows. His jaw sets. He abruptly stands and storms off.

She doesn't follow.

We all watch as their love withers... right there at the table .

Silence is a sword, too.

It's quiet. Simple. Final.



My chest hurts as I glance at Chase, but not because of them.

Because of me.

That could have just as easily been us.

Hell, it still could be.

Chase doesn't speak. He doesn't reach for me. He just waits. Like he knows what I'm thinking. He always knows.

I feel his eyes on me, and when I look up, all of the things I've been running from hit me at once.

I don't want to fight like that.

I don't want to flinch when someone touches my glass.

I don't want to be scared of the silence.

I don't want to end with nothing but leftovers and regret.

I just want him.

I just want Chase.

Always.

After everyone disperses, I find him on the back porch—shirtless again, of course, because this man refuses to heal me clothed—and I stop in front of him. He straightens but I don't speak. I just reach out and take his hand and pull him inside.

I'm not ready to say it.

Not yet.

But I'm ready to show it.

We go to our room. We don't have sex, but he holds me on the bed. And I hold him. Eventually, I move and mutter that I need to take a shower. He watches me as I head into the bathroom.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

YOU CAN KEEP THE RING (BUT I'M KEEPING YOU)

ROXY

I find him in the kitchen again—because of course he's in the kitchen. He's cleaning up the remnants of his untouched dinner.

He's always feeding people. Fixing things. Healing the world one skillet and smirk at a time.

But not tonight.

Tonight, I don't want fixing.

I want the man who broke me to put me back together with love, his hands, and his mouth.

He turns when I step through the doorway.

The second his eyes meet mine, he knows. The shift in the room is instant.

I'm not wearing anything under this robe. And I'm not here to make a speech.

He doesn't grin. There's no teasing.

Just hunger . A full-body ache I can feel from across the room.

He sets down the glass in his hand like it's suddenly too heavy.

“Roxy,” he says, voice rough.

I don't give him time to say anything else.

I step into the kitchen... and drop the robe.

He doesn't move. He doesn't breathe. For the first time in a long time, I feel powerful again. Not because he wants me—he always wants me. That's never been a question—I want him.

All of him. It's my choice.

I'm not scared any longer.

He's my choice, and I'm not pushing him away anymore.

I'm pulling him in... to me.

Slowly, I walk up to him. I'm naked. Bare. Exposed. Untouchable—but not. I want him to touch me.

His eyes trace over every inch of me like a prayer he doesn't deserve to say out loud.

“Tell me to stop,” I whisper as I get closer.

He doesn't. He can't.

I slide my hand down his chest and feel the tremble in his stomach. “You said you'd wait and participate in my stupid rules that we already know were pointless.”

“I would’ve,” he breathes.

Leaning in, my mouth is at his ear. I lick the shell before swallowing and saying, “Don’t.”

His hands hit my hips so fast I gasp at the speed.

I’m up. Lifted, slammed against the counter. His mouth is on mine like he’s drowning, and my lips and tongue are his only air.

There’s no hesitation. No soft start. Just Chase West finally doing what he’s always done. Worshipping me.

His mouth moves down my neck, nibbling and suckling, before traveling to my chest. He sucks on and rolls my nipples until I’m squirming on the countertop and panting his name.

“Chase..., Oh, Chase!” He moves lower, peppering kisses over my stomach and hips before swirling his tongue around my bellybutton.

Dropping to his knees, he looks up at me, his dark head between my quivering thighs.

Leaning in, still watching me, he pushes my thighs apart and licks my slit from the bottom to my nub.

He flicks it with his tongue and my hips buck.

Leaning back slightly, he grins, “You like that, baby. Want more?”

In answer, I fist his hair and pull his face into my pussy.

His fingers, lips, teeth, and tongue have me wailing in minutes.

“Ohhhh, Chase... yes, baby. I swear... you could win a pussy eating contest... but I’d kill you...

Oh, God... Ohhhh... unless it was me you were...

eating... Ohhhhhhh... ” He chuckles and the vibrations hit my clit.

Pulling him in closer, I ride his face. His fingers are sliding in and out of my pussy as he toys with my swollen clit.

I feel the wave building and plant my foot on his shoulder, using it to really ride his face just right.

My back arches and I scream at the top of my lungs with my climax.

About to die from the overwhelming sensations that consume my entire body, I forget my name. Forget my dumb rules. And forget why I ever thought he should leave.

I scream his name, “Chase... Oh, baby.... My Chase,” as my back arches with my second orgasm. He groans like it hurts him to hear it.

He wraps his arms around my thighs, and keeps me right there, spread and shameless as I come.

When the shudders stop and I slump back against the cabinets, he growls, “I love this.” He lightly flicks my clit with his tongue and my entire body jerks. I mutter, “Too much... too sensitive. Just a sec.”

He chuckles and leans back to look at me. “I love the way you taste, Rox. The way

you pull my hair. The way you fall apart while screaming my name . ” All I can do is stare at him. His mouth, cheeks, and chin are drenched from my juices and his eyes are full of love.

When I finally stop shaking, I mumble, “This is really uncomfortable.”

He laughs and helps me scoot off the counter. I slide to the floor with him. Naked. Still breathless. His arms wrap around me, pulling me close as we lie on the rug in the kitchen.

We don’t speak for the longest time. And then, as I shift, my knee bumps his groin. He groans as I feel how hard he still is. Smiling, I mutter, “Well, we have to fix this.” He lies back as I straddle him. My hips move as my hands plant on his chest. Soon enough, we’re both shattering again.

## CHASE

We’re lying on the settee off of the kitchen, lightly covered with a blanket. She’s asleep with her head on my chest and her hand over my heart.

We’re both completely naked, sated. Her mouth is parted like she’s still trying to catch her breath.

I swear, I’ve never felt more content. There’s something about the silence. Not heavy. Not scared. Just... earned. Like we’ve fought every fight and finally remembered how to fall.

I run my fingers down her back, slow and careful. She shifts but doesn’t wake. Her leg is still thrown over mine like she owns me.

She does.

She always has.

In the early pre-dawn hours, I lift her and carry her to our room. I don't want anyone walking in here and seeing us like this. She doesn't wake, only settles into my chest. Pressing a kiss to her forehead, I tuck her into our bed and head to the shower.

I want to make her breakfast. Not because I need to... because I want to.

When the person you love more than life itself falls asleep with their heartbeat in sync with yours, the only thing left to do is make them their favorite pancakes and slather them with peanut butter.

Roxy is going to need them after everything.

I know she's going to be starving.

I am. None of us ate dinner last night.

The kitchen's quiet. The floor's cool. I'm barefoot, shirtless, still tasting her on my lips... and I'm humming. I can't fucking help it.

I'm halfway through flipping her favorite almond flour pancakes when I feel her behind me.

"You're humming again," she says, her voice thick with sleep and satisfaction.

Grinning, I turn. "You're awake."

"I woke up to the smell of food and the sound of cocky."

Leaning over, I kiss her. She falls into me, and I happily say, "Sounds like heaven."



“Sounds like you want to get licked again.” She flippantly says.

My body responds and I freeze. “I do.”

She winks, “Maybe if you’re a good boy,” and walks past me—wearing my T-shirt and nothing else —and steals a strawberry off the plate.

“You’re a menace. And you know I’m very, very good.” I murmur.

Shrugging, she smirks. “You married this menace. And I definitely know .”

I manage not to burn her pancakes. Plating them as she distracts me, I top them with fruit, and hand her a fork.

She sits on the counter—the counter where she screamed my name last night like she owns the damn kitchen.

Every part of this space still remembers her.

So do I.

We eat in silence for a minute.

She keeps stealing off my plate—even though it’s the same as what’s on her plate—like she’s done for the last three and a half years.

I don’t mind.

I never did.

Softly, she says, “I love you.” It’s not loud. It’s not dramatic. It’s just... honest.

I have to force myself to breathe.

I smile. “I know.”

She chuckles. “It’s not just the sex, Chase. Though the sex has always been unbelievable.”

I smirk. “That’s a relief. Because if it was just the sex... I’d be too smug to handle.”

She rolls her eyes and mutters, “Shut the hell up. And don’t make a big deal out of it,” but she smiles.

I want to drop to one knee and propose again right there.

I don’t.

Instead, I reach for her hand.

She lets me take it and opens her fingers to weave with mine. They thread like they belong together .

“I don’t know what happens next,” she whispers.

I nod. “That’s okay.”

She looks up. “You’re not scared I’ll flip out again?”

I press my forehead to hers, smile slightly, and nod. “I’m terrified, Rox.”

She exhales. “So... what now ?”

I kiss her. Soft. Certain. And say, “Now we try again, baby. I’m not going anywhere.”

ROXY

I find it in the drawer. Tucked in a small box under a folded T-shirt.

It’s the twist tie he wore at our wedding, along with my Ring Pop wedding ring. Just the plastic part. He kept it. He has it here with him.

The ring I replaced it with the morning after our wedding is on his finger. He’s never taken it off. Even after all the times I tried to kick him out, push him away, and end this crazy love between us.

I hold the trash rings between my fingers like they might bite me.

They don’t.

They aren’t trash though. They’re what we wore when we said our vows.

He kept them.

He’s outside, talking to Weston, still barefoot, still unbothered. I slip them back in their place and slowly close the drawer.

Watching him from the bedroom window, something soft unravels in my chest.

He loves me.

He stays.

Even when I don’t make it easy.

Even when I make it impossible.

He stays.

I make a decision and open the drawer again.

When he comes back in, I'm sitting on the bed. Our original rings are in my palm. His eyes land on them. His breath catches. And for once, he doesn't speak first. I hold my hand out slowly. "I found this."

He nods, watching me, but stays silent.

I smile. "You kept them."

"Of course I did." He mutters. "They're our wedding bands, Rox."

My pulse trips as I lick my lips. "Here's what's gonna happen..."

He freezes. His jaw tightens and he looks at me. I can tell by his face that he has no idea what I'm going to say.

"You're going to lie down. Right now." I say, standing.

He does. Immediately. Like a good boy. Like a man who knows I'm about to turn his whole world inside out.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

I set the rings on the nightstand and crawl over him. I straddle him, settling my knees on both sides of his hips. Leaning in slowly, I lift his hand and spin the ring on his finger.

His eyes are locked on me. My hips are moving, gently, teasingly.

His shorts get soaked from the desire leaking from my pussy lips as they cocoon his rigid length through the fabric.

He swallows. I bring his hand to my mouth and kiss the skin just above his ring before swirling my tongue along the digit and sucking it into my mouth.

My tongue on his ring finger mimics the movement of my hips on his straining cock.

I release it with a pop. “You never took this off... and you kept the originals.”

His eyes burn. “Yup.” His nostrils flare.

“You’re mine, Chase West. You never stopped being mine.

” I settle his hand on my chest, over my heart.

His cock jumps as I continue to slowly grind against him.

My hand trails over his throat, lightly tapping the erratic pulse at the base of his neck.

He groans and his hips lift. I smile and drag my hands over the muscled arms covered

with tattoos that drive me wild.

Leaning down, I flick his nipple with the tip of my tongue.

“Rox...” His eyes are locked on me.

I slide my hands down his chest and over the tight muscles of his abs.

He jerks and inhales quickly. His teeth are clenched, and his hands are curled into fists but still resting on my chest. I wrap my hand around his length and stroke him through the drenched material.

He bucks and I moan, “No one else gets to taste you, touch you, ruin you like I do, Chase.” I stroke him again. He’s barely breathing.

I squeeze him. “Say it,” I gutturally demand.

His fingers dig into my thighs. “Baby, I’m yours.”

“Say it again.” I stroke him again.

“Roxy—”

I grind down again. Slow.

He pants.

“Say it.”

“I’m yours,” he growls. “Always.” He flips me, somehow getting his shorts off before my back hits the bed.

Grabbing my knees, he parts my legs and surges in.

He fucks me, hard, relentless. My ankles are on his shoulders.

I'm bouncing all over the bed, wailing as he jackhammers into me.

There is no sweetness. This is raw, primal.

It isn't sex. It's claiming. Conquering.

It's war yet we're both winning .

When we're both ruined, quiet, and tangled in each other's arms and legs, I kiss his ring finger again.

His Tungsten and silver band glints between our bodies and I whisper, "You can keep the ring."

He pulls me closer. "Put yours back on, Roxy. I'm not going anywhere. Ever. I'm keeping you."

The shower is pulsing. The water is hot.

Steam curls around the room like it's trying to erase what just happened.

But it can't. Because I still feel him. Inside me.

On me. In every heartbeat that stutters when I think about how he looked at me—like I was the only thing he's ever wanted and told me he was mine.

When he told me he wanted me to put my ring back on because he was keeping me

and wasn't leaving... ever, the last of my walls crumbled.

He steps in behind me, close, but he doesn't touch me. He just waits, letting the water bead on his chest and trail down the abs I've dreamed about, cried on, laughed against, licked, kissed, and come completely undone for.

I lean back, pressing my ass to his groin and my back to his chest. His hands are resting on my waist, anchoring me there. His mouth is at my neck. There's no urgency, no need to race to the end for fear he'll leave. It's just him and me.

Familiar. Gentle. Steady.

He grabs the shampoo, pours some into his hands, and lathers it slowly. He washes my hair like he's memorizing every inch of it. Like touching me isn't about sex anymore, it's about devotion.

I let him.

Closing my eyes, I tilt my head back and let him worship me without words.

And when I open them, he's looking at me like he's never seen anything he wants more.

"You okay?" he whispers.

I nod. "Are you?"

His mouth quirks. "I'm in a shower with my sexy-as-fuck wife, fully erect, and emotionally exposed. So, no. Not really but it's worth it."

I laugh. Not because it's funny but because it's real. Because he's real.



He washes my back next. Then, my arms. And he reaches around me to cleanse my chest, taking the time to get every inch.

He cups my breasts in his hands, rubbing them, rolling the soap over my nipples and his hands trail down my sides before he washes my stomach.

I'm so aroused but I stand there, soaking in his delicious torment.

He kneels behind me to wash my legs. He takes his time to wash my ankles, my calves, my knees, and my thighs.

He kneads my ass, washing me and turning me on at the same time.

I rinse and his hands help to remove the soap.

I moan and press my palms against the shower wall, fearful that my knees will give out.

He kisses my hip, and I jerk as he delves his fingers through the curls covering my sex.

He takes his time. My legs part and he kisses my other hip while a finger slides inside of my soaked pussy.

"Lean forward, baby. Open up for me. Let me love you." I do as he asks.

He inserts a second finger, and then, a third.

He's fingering me and rolling my clit while he kisses and sucks my hips and ass cheeks.

His nose slides up my crack and I gasp. “Do you want me to, Rox?”

I do. I want him to.

I breathlessly say, “Yes, oh yes, Chase.” Using some of my natural lube from my pussy, he slowly begins circling my ass hole. I arch back and he chuckles as he inserts just the tip. He stops and I spasm around him. He kisses my cheek again.

“Easy baby... easy...” He moves it deeper, and I moan as I push back against his hand.

His other hand returns to my pussy, and he slowly starts to move them in tandem.

In and out of both of my holes while his tongue traces the curves of my ass and he peppers it with kisses.

I start shaking at the abundance of sensations.

The water is still beating down over us, and Chase is turning me into putty.

His thumb rolls against my clit as his fingers curl inside of my pussy and his other finger fucks my ass.

I move against him. He moans against the back of my thighs as my movements quicken. “Chase... baby... oh... Ohhhh... I can’t... Ohhhhhh... I need... Fuck... Oh fuck... I can’t.. Oh, God... Chase... I’m cumming... Ohhhhhh, f...u...c...k.... Ohhhhhh. ”

I fall apart.

I’m so spent after my orgasm, I slide to join him on the shower floor.

Pulling me into his arms, he smooths the wet hair off of my face. I'm still spasming as he says, "You didn't run this time, baby."

"I can't move. There's no way I could run. Even if I wanted to." I stare up at him. The man I love.

He chuckles but asks, "Did you want to?"

I swallow, "I thought about it."

He exhales. "But you stayed."

I mutter, "Yeah. I did."

We both pause and then, I whisper, "I was always waiting for you to stop loving me, Chase."

He freezes. So do I because that... that wasn't supposed to come out.

Not yet. Maybe not ever.

But... it's the truth.

Ugly. Raw. Real.

I've spent our entire marriage loving him while waiting for the other shoe to drop. Waiting to fail. Waiting for him to see what a mess I am and realize he can leave.

He never has. He just keeps showing up. And I keep pushing him away and being terrified he'll actually leave me when I tell him to.

He stands slowly, reaches down, and helps me up. My knees are still weak when he cradles my face. “You have never made loving you easy, Roxy.”

I nod, feeling the thickness in my throat. “I know.”

“But I have never once wanted to leave you. You push me, shove me, practically throw me off a fucking cliff, but I just dig my heels in and hold on.” He smiles.

Tears blur the edges of him as I cry, “But I always try to make you.”

“I know. I’m a stubborn mother fucker, baby.” He chuckles and kisses my cheek before trailing his lips to the corner of my mouth. My tears are mingling with the now cold water from the shower head as he says, “You were scared.”

“And you were patient.” I cry.

“Still am.” He says it matter of factly.

Turning off the shower, he wraps me in a thick, warm towel.

Pressing my forehead to his chest, I whisper the thing I’ve never said, not even on our wedding night.

“You’re home, Chase.”

He holds me tighter. “I’m glad.”

CHASE

Roxy walks in for breakfast like she owns the whole damn coastline.

Her hair is on top of her head. She's in my t-shirt. She's not wearing a damn bra. Her cutoffs are too short and show far too much of her legs. And she's smiling smugly.

The ring on her finger catches the morning sun like a mic drop.

Sasha gasps.

Whitney stares.

Trent spills his green juice.

Miguel mutters, "Well, shit."

Weston grins and nods like he's personally responsible.

And Bree... well, Bree slow claps.

I just stand back and let her wreck the room. She's not walking into this space like she's announcing she's once again showing the world she's my wife. She's walking in like it's a declaration. And she holds my soul—and more often than not my dick—in one perfectly moisturized hand.

She grabs a croissant, sits down, takes a sip of coffee, and says, "If anyone needs a relationship coach, I've decided to retire from running and start wrecking people's expectations of love instead.

My rates are high. My advice is questionable.

My husband comes with me." Casually, like she's ordering brunch.

Miguel chokes. Trent mumbles something about needing therapy after this retreat.

Sasha raises her cup and toasts her, “To second chances—and knowing when to stop pretending you’re not madly in love with your husband. I’m so damn good.”

Roxy clinks glasses with her. “Cheers, bitch.”

The rest of breakfast is a blur.

Mostly because I can’t stop watching the ring she slipped back on her finger last night move as she steals bites of my pancakes and gives me filthy eyes over her coffee.

At one point, she texts me from across the table.

Roxy

When is this shit wrapping up? Can we leave early and do things that make Bree cry again?

I text back.

Chase

Tomorrow. And only if you keep the ring on while you sit on my face.

She doesn’t respond. But when I look up, she’s biting her lip.

After breakfast, she drags me out onto the deck under the pretense of “helping her rearrange the patio cushions.”

There are no cushions on the patio.

Just Roxy. The ocean. And what I hope is a very bold plan.

Turning to me, she takes both of my hands in hers. She slides the ring off her finger and my eyes widen.

What the hell? Put that damn thing back on.

Holding it up between us, she slips it back on to her finger, very slowly. Very intentionally. Her eyes stay locked on mine the entire time. She says, “I choose you, Chase. I choose us .”

I swallow. Hard. My voice is not calm as I ask, “You’re choosing me ?”

She nods. Then, she smirks. “I also choose your abs. And that glorious dick.”

Alrighty then. I can handle that.

I smirk, “You better. This is the last dick that is ever going to fill any of your holes, babe.”

She snorts, but leans in. She kisses me. No crowd. No performance. Just her. Just me. Just a promise. Just us.

She breaks the kiss, “It’s not official until you give me an orgasm. We have to consummate it.”

I grin. “Is that right?”

Nodding, she glances over her shoulder. No one is around. She pulls me into the small alcove of the beach house that leads to the supply shed. “Uh huh. It’s a rule.”

I mutter, “You and your rules.” But I’m already peeling her shorts down.

I do as she asks.



*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

### TEQUILA, TRUTH, AND ONE HIGHLY PUNCHABLE EX

#### ROXY

The margaritas are heavy on the tequila and flowing like a river. It tastes like poor decisions and perfect timing. Exactly how I like it.

We're on night six of the seven-day retreat. It all ends tomorrow.

Thank heavens!

The intimacy exercises are devolving. The couples are feral.

Miguel and Sasha are still not really speaking, which is super awkward since it's a couples retreat, and Sasha is literally the instructor.

Miguel is drunker than shit and shirtless.

Trent's moaning about handcuffs. And Sasha just suggested a drinking game called "Truth or Tequila: The Relationship Destruction Edition," all while trying not to look at Miguel and absolutely failing miserably.

Naturally, I'm all in.

I'm three margaritas and three shots deep when a question hits me like a glitter bomb.

"Roxy," Bree grins, already buzzed, "what's the wildest place you've ever had sex?"

Chase's smirk is immediate.

I sip.

Everyone leans in.

Raising an eyebrow, I say, "On the back of a Vespa in Florence."

Trent drops his drink.

Miguel bows while still sitting and takes a long sip of his drink.

Whitney gapes. "Like...while it was moving?"

Chase lifts his glass. "It was but we didn't crash. At least not in front of people."

I wink.

Sasha spins the bottle again and it lands on Chase.

"Same question," Bree demands.

He doesn't even blink.

"Well, I was there for the Vespa incident, but I think the rented bounce house during a child's birthday party, tops that."

Gasps follow, along with wide eyes, and then, laughter.

Whitney screeches incredulously, "Seriously... you did what?! Y'all did not. That's... um... No y'all didn't."

Chase shrugs. “We did. But in our defense, the kids were at the cake table, along the house and we were way further back. Plus, the bounce house had dark mesh siding.”

Miguel mutters, “And you’re the reason I don’t trust balloon animals or giant rubber death traps.” He refills his glass with margarita and adds about three extra shots to it. His eyes slide over to Sasha. Chase and I catch it and look at each other, smirking.

We keep going. The questions get worse. Saucier. Messier.

Who’s faked it? Who’s cheated? Who’s fantasized about someone else at the table?

The bottle spins. It points at me. And Bree leans forward.

“Have you ever been in love with someone else while you were in a relationship?”

The air goes still. The tequila goes heavy in my stomach. Chase’s eyes are on me.

Steady. No panic. No flinching. Just... there .

I realize what he already knows.

I haven’t.

Not even close.

I shake my head. “No. I’ve only been in love once.” I nod. “With him .”

A satisfied and feral smile covers Chase’s face.

I take the shot anyway, because that kind of truth...That one’s just for us .

Sasha goes to spin again—when the door abruptly swings open. We all whirl. No one but us is supposed to be here.

A voice cuts through the deck like a rusty blade. “Well. This looks like a fun little disaster.”

We all stare at the door while I gasp. My voice is practically a banshee screech as I say, “Holden?”

What the fuck is he doing here?

The guy who did such a number on me, I swore I’d never trust a man again.

Until I did. Until Chase.

My blood goes cold. The tequila and my temper make me hot. Before I can react, I hear the soft sound of a chair scraping back. I see Chase stand.

CHASE

I don’t even think. I’m on my feet before he finishes his smug little line.

“Well. This looks like a fun little disaster.”

Holden.

The human version of unseasoned chicken and emotional gaslighting.

And he’s standing in the doorway of the retreat house like he belongs here, like he isn’t the reason Roxy had to rebuild her confidence from rubble.

And the reason my marriage has been insane for the past three and a half years.

He broke her and I've been trying to piece her back together ever since.

I will snap his jaw if he so much as blinks wrong.

Roxy doesn't move but I can feel it—her spine's stiff. Her breathing's off. Her tequila haze is... gone .

She's triggered. I'm activated. And he's already dying in my head.

“Wrong house, man,” I say.

My voice is calm. I am not. He smiles like he doesn't hear the warning.

“Still have an attitude, I see, macho man.”

I step forward. Slow. Deliberate. The kind of pace a lion makes before the kill. “You've got five seconds to back out the way you came in. Or I stop playing nice.”

Roxy's still silent. She's standing now, too. Not behind me. Next to me, because that's who we are now.

Partners in violence. I will protect what's mine.

Holden chuckles. His eyes flick between us. He sneers, “Oh, you two are still a thing? Cute. I figured she'd get bored once the novelty of the tatted muscles wore off and the marriage would be annulled.”

Roxy tilts her head. Dangerously slow. “Is that jealousy in your tone, or are you just trying to have your jaw wired shut again?”

Bree gasps and Trent and Weston sit up straighter. They're poised to intervene if they need to.

Miguel mutters, "Oh shit, Roxy is about to throw hands."

Whitney ducks behind the couch still clutching her drink.

I just smile because Roxy's earrings are already in my palm.

My baby is about to fuck this piece of shit up.

"How are you even here, Holden? Are you stalking me?" she asks.

Good question. How is he here?

Holden shrugs. "I know the owners. They mentioned they rented it to Chase West. The name caught my ear so, I thought I'd stop by and see if you were still hung up on me."

Bruh, you heard the name of your ex's husband, who is twice as big as you are, plus, madly in love with the woman you shit on, and you thought rolling in here uninvited was a good idea?

You are dumb as shit.

She blinks like she heard him wrong. Then, she laughs. Not sweet. Not flirty. Ferocious. "Hung up on you? Boy, I forgot your small dick and big ego even existed until just now—and I'm still not convinced you're real."

Boy... small dick... big ego...

Hell yes.

His face reddens but before he can respond, I step between them. Not to block. To finish it.

My voice drops. So does his confidence. “You had your shot. You wasted it. You don’t get to walk into her space and disrespect my wife and expect not to bleed for it.”

His eyes narrow. “Are you threatening me, macho man?”

I lean in and grin, slowly, as I crack my knuckles. “No, Holden. I’m promising. ”

He stumbles back like the weight of it finally hits him and looks at Roxy. “You’re just going to let him talk to me like that? You know I can have him... and you , in a cell in an hour.”

Roxy laughs again, “Step over here and say that.” He blanches, “You want to roll the dice, Holden. You already know I fight dirty. I’ve already broken your jaw once...

you want to eat all of your meals through a straw again?

A cell would be worth that view. And Chase is a grown man, I don’t control him.

He’s a person, not a possession .” Her tone is flat, sure, not scared in the slightest but he catches the implication of the last word.

He looks from her to me to the rest of the room... and notices Sasha is holding her phone up and it’s pointed right at him.

She says, “Yeah, you dumb fuck. Smile, you’re on camera.

One touch and this gets posted to all of my socials...

only about three-hundred-thousand people, give or take.

Unless, of course, it goes viral.” She tsks.

“What would that do for that brand of yours? Millionaire investor and general shmuck breaks in at ex’s getaway with her husband.

Stalking and breaking and entering, plus harassment.

” She hums. “I’m sure there are a few charges I’m forgetting. ”

Security shows up just then. Miguel drunkenly waves from his position on the couch. “I called them.”

They escort Holden out, as he grumbles about “just wanting to talk” and “making them delete the footage.”

When the door closes, the entire room exhales.

I’m still burning. Still vibrating with the need to make sure she feels safe. Turning, I take her face in my hands. “Are you okay, baby?”

She nods, “I’m good. I was ready to throw a fucking chair at his head. Are you?”

“I know,” I say. “I was gonna flip the couch.”

Miguel mutters, “As the dude on the couch, thanks for skipping that.”

She grins at me, “Next time, let’s go full WWE.”



“Deal.” I mutter.

She reaches over, grabs the front of my shirt, pulls me into her, and crashes her lips over mine. In front of everyone while standing on her toes.

She’s fierce. She’s wild.

She’s not his anymore. She never was.

She’s fucking mine.

ROXY

Sasha and Miguel are staring at each other when Chase and I stop kissing.

He says, “Good call on videoing him.”

She says, “Smart move calling security.”

He nods. “Yeah. You stood up to him. That was fucking hot.”

She grins, “Yeah?”

He mutters, “Yeah,” and she climbs into his lap. They start making out and everyone just kind of chuckles. Sasha drags him to their room.

The rest of us continue to hang out and I do the thing where I pretend I’m fine. I cut jokes and laugh with the group. I make another pitcher of margarita’s when it’s empty. But inside, I’m starting to unravel.

It’s not about Holden, the fuckface loser in a leather jacket in summer and thousand-

dollar cologne.

Not really.

It's about who I used to be when he had power over me. And how much I hated that girl.

I slip out after about an hour and stand barefoot on the deck.

Cool air. Dark sky. Heart pounding like it's trying to remember its own rhythm.

Then, I hear him behind me.

Barefoot. Soft steps. Chase.

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

He wraps an arm around my waist and pulls me against his chest, saying nothing.

He just holds me and lets me breathe. He lets me crack .

And when I turn and lean into him fully, my face against his chest, trembling, he just whispers, “You don’t ever have to explain how he hurt you.

But if you want to—if you need to—I’ll hold it, carry some of it, with you.

I know the bits you’ve shared, but I also know there’s more you haven’t. ”

Fuck Chase. Now you’ve done it.

I don’t cry. I strip. Because grief over the power I gave him still lives in my body. Fear that I’m not enough still lives under my skin. And shame still lives in the places he never touched but still somehow controlled. The places I allowed him to control.

I want to give all of me to Chase now.

I pull off my shirt, dropping it to the deck, unsnap my shorts, letting them fall to join my shirt, and crawl onto the lounge without a word.

He follows.

Silent. Gentle. Worshipful.

Uncaring that we’re outside on a deck that anyone could walk out on or pass by at

any moment, he parts my thighs like I'm something sacred.

Like every inch of me is his to heal. Sea air drifts over my heated skin.

It blows across my folds. Then, he's kissing the inside of my thigh like it's a vow.

He whispers, "Tell me what you need, baby."

My voice shakes as I reply, "I need to feel powerful again."

He nods. "Then lie back and let me give you everything. "

His mouth finds me. Soft at first. Then, deeper. Hungrier. My hands curl around the lounge as he brings me to teeter on the edge of the abyss. He stops. I grab his head and yank his mouth back to me as I demand, "Make me come, Chase." He does. Not just for release. For revenge. For repair.

As I hold his head a willing hostage and I shatter, drenching his face, he moans into me like it's him being undone.

Like he needs this more than I do. He growls against my spasming pussy, "That's it, baby. You take everything,"

I scream into the wind.

Loud. Raw. Wild.

When I stop shaking, he doesn't move.

He doesn't even mention the fact that I took pleasure from him, selfishly, and he's still raring to go. He just holds me like I'm the miracle this world forgot to pray for.

I whisper, for the first time ever, “Can I be little tonight?”

He freezes. Then, he kisses my forehead and scoops me into his arms. He grabs a towel that was laid out to dry earlier in the day and covers me with it, shielding my nudity, my vulnerability, from the world.

“You can be anything with me, Roxy.” And he carries me through the now empty living room and to our bedroom.

CHASE

She’s perched on the bed wearing my t-shirt with nothing underneath. And somehow, this is more dangerous than when she was naked. She smirks, “I’m hungry.”

Chuckling, I stand. “Then, let’s get you fed, baby.” She stands and starts for the door. I stop her. “Uh, after you put on something to cover my favorite dessert.” I nod.

She glances down, laughs, and says, “Good call,” and pulls on a pair of pajama shorts.

Minutes later, she’s padding around the kitchen barefoot, hair messy, skin still glowing from the most personal orgasm I’ve ever witnessed, holding a banana like it owes her child support. And I’m fully aware that she doesn’t have on any panties.

“I want banana bread,” she says. “But, like, emotionally.”

I blink. “You want banana bread emotionally?” What the hell does that even mean? I scratch the side of my neck. “Baby, what?”

She nods like I’m not completely lost, and sighs like she can’t believe she has to explain it to me. “You know. Banana bread that says, ‘I see your trauma, I love your

thighs, and I'll bury a body in the backyard for you.'"

Ah... okay.

I grin. "I got you."

I gather ingredients while she sits cross-legged on the counter. "You want chocolate chips?" I ask.

She nods and points at herself. "Duh. I'm emotionally unstable. A basket case. The answer to chocolate is never even a question. It's always just yes." Reaching over, she steals a handful of chocolate chips and starts popping them into her mouth.

As I prepare her banana bread, she sits on the counter and judges my technique, watching me like I'm the Food Network version of her emotional security blanket. I grin at my own analogy.

I am. Happily.

"Do you ever think about what you would've said if we'd met now instead of when we did?" she asks offhandedly.

I stop pouring the batter into the loaf pan and look at her. "What do you mean?"

She shrugs. "Like if we met today. Here. Like strangers."

I think about it.

Then, I smile. "I'd walk up, hand you a cupcake, and say, 'You look like you ruin lives, give life altering blow jobs, and can make a decent lasagna. Where have you been all my life? Marry me.'"

She snorts. “Bold.” Her eyes rake over me and she licks her lips. “So, basically same thing as before.”

I grunt, “Yup. With you, I don’t do casual. I knew that from the millisecond we met.”

Her eyes soften, “No, you do forever. ”

With Roxy... hell yes, I do.

I knew the second those dark eyes flashed at me from across the lawn and those red lips twisted up into that sexy smirk of hers that she’s always directed at me that I was a goner.

Hopping off the counter, she wraps her arms around my waist and kisses my chin.

I pour the rest of the batter into the pan and slide it into the oven with her still holding on. Grabbing her ass, I lean down, kissing her on the mouth while looking into her eyes. “I love you.” She doesn’t say it back, but she squeezes my waist harder.

She loves me.

This is domesticity, and with my Roxy, it’s deadly .

Nothing has ever made me fall harder than Roxy West in my t-shirt and short shorts with no panties wrapped around me like a memory while the smell of banana bread baking in the oven fills the kitchen.

“I never want to face anything alone again,” she whispers.

I stop and look her in her dark, sexy eyes.

“You never will.”

She doesn't cry.

She just believes me.

Like I've finally earned that kind of faith. Or maybe she just finally believes it. And for a man like me? That's everything.

The banana bread comes out of the oven.

She eats half the loaf, and we fall asleep on the couch. Her legs are across mine and her hand is resting on my heart. The list of everything I'd burn for her sits unspoken on my tongue.

I would burn it all.

Every lie. Every doubt. Every ex.

If it means she keeps waking up like this.

Next to me. Safe. Loved. Home.



*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

### A LITTLE BIT MARRIED, A LOT BIT NAKED

ROXY

It's officially the last day of the retreat and we're also officially "that couple" now.

You know the one. Too handsy at breakfast. Too affectionate in group circles. Too smug during reflection hour.

Sasha makes a comment about our "auras glowing in sync."

Whitney just mutters, "Their pelvises are certainly syncing. A lot. Loudly." Everyone chuckles.

Chase hasn't worn a shirt in over forty-eight hours. And I haven't worn underwear in days.

I like for my man to have easy access... very easy access.

We're winning at everything and I'm not being humble about it.

Today's activity is called "Deep Dive."

Which sounds like intense meaningful therapy... but it's actually a literal deep dive. Sasha and Miguel—who are one-hundred-thousand-percent-on-again—have set up a mini beach challenge.

A freaking obstacle course... involving the water and trust-based dares. The winning couple gets a bottle of champagne, a dinner for two at a fancy restaurant, and a “sensual couple’s massage.”

I want the champagne. Chase wants the massage. We both want the date night.

We’re united in our goal to dominate these fools.

“You ready?” I ask him as we all line up on the sand.

He smirks. “Always.”

“Don’t let me fall.” I mutter.

He leans in, nips my earlobe, and says, “You fall, I catch. You jump, I chase. You leave, I follow. And you kick me out, I stay.”

My knees wobble and we haven’t even started the damn game.

The course includes: a rope swing, a water balloon gauntlet, a literal trust fall off a dock into your partners arms—it’s only four feet, but still. And then the final dare... Skinny dip or surrender.

We crush it. He carries me through the water balloon sprint. I launch him onto the rope swing like an Olympian. And we nail the trust fall—he catches me midair, kisses me upside down like Spiderman with a mortgage .

And when we hit the final dare, everyone else bails.

I don’t hesitate. I strip and toss my bikini top at Sasha. “Hold this for me, will ya?” I say. “It’s my ego.”

Chase drops his shorts and grabs my hand. We race into the surf—naked, laughing, glowing.

Like the storm finally passed.

Like we survived it.

We yell as we hit the water. It's still pretty cold. The ocean is wild. We're pummeled with waves. Uncaring, we kiss like idiots until a wave knocks us down. Gasping when we resurface, we laugh.

I look at him. Right in those too-pretty eyes and rake my eyes over his tattooed and fit body. Jumping on him, I knock us both down again and say, "You're it for me, Chase West. No prenup, no exit strategy. You die in this marriage, or you go to Hell trying."

He stares. His chest is rapidly rising. His mouth is parted in an "o." His soul is practically showing. Then, he grabs my face and kisses me so hard I forget we're surrounded by people... until something brushes against my naked ass.

Screaming in terror, I start jumping around, trying to jump over the waves and escape whatever just touched me... it wasn't Chase!

CHASE

She said "no exit strategy." While naked.

I was just about to lose all semblance of whatever sanity Roxy hasn't consumed when she screams in a way that curdles my blood.

She starts slapping at the water and jumping over waves in her haste to escape whatever is in it.

She screeches, “Something just touched my ass, and it wasn’t you! ”

Uh, yeah. It wasn’t me.

My head swivels as I scour the water for the threat and Roxy is racing full speed ahead to the beach.

Her ass is catching the sunlight, and her titties are bouncing like balloons on her chest—but those puppies are all natural.

People are standing on the beach... mouths agape as they stare.

I scream at her, “Baby, you’re as naked as the day you were born and everyone can s— oh, fuck ...

fuck me!” Something smooth rubs against my thigh...

very close to my dick. I look down and bellow, “A shark... a shark thinks my dick is food. Oh, hell no!” It’s grey...

a sand shark, but a fucking shark none the less.

I cup my dick with my hands to protect it—not that I can cover the whole thing—and follow after Roxy, uncaring of the fact that we’re both naked as fuck and causing a spectacle.

Bree, Sasha, and Miguel are on shore pointing and gasping.

Whitney is screaming, “Get out! Get the hell out of the water!” Miguel starts laughing.

That mother fucker is bent over, holding his stomach, and losing his damn mind like this is the funniest thing he's ever seen.

He's laughing so hard, he falls over into the sand.

Roxy makes it to shore and Sasha hands her a towel to cover herself. I finally make it out of the water and my heart is about to jump out of my chest. No one hands me anything.

Still holding my dick with two hands because I am traumatized, I catch the eye of a mother, whose face is the color of a tomato. Her eyes bug out of her head as she stares at me with her hands over her kid's eyes.

Roxy looks around the beach and she starts laughing her ass off. I can't help it, I join her.

I'm naked and cupping my dick while I moon everyone on the beach.

I've had a lot of moments in my life.

This is the moment I'll relive on loop until I'm old, grumpy, and making pancakes for our grandkids.

Trent throws me a towel, and I catch it with one hand and keep my man-meat covered— well mostly, I'm big— with the other.

Roxy is still chortling so hard she's now wheezing. Water drips off her lashes. Her lips are swollen from my mouth. And I know— right then —I'm never letting her go again.

“You're it for me, Chase West.”

God help me.

Towel-wrapped, we leave our captive audience and all head back to the house like minor celebrities returning from battle.

Trent jokingly asks if the shark caught a bite of us.

Roxy grins and says, “Nah, we’re too quick for that. But if he’d arrived two seconds later, he might have interrupted me taking a bite of Chase.” She gestures at me, “I mean, do you see my man?!”

Miguel snorts, “Babe, everyone saw all of your man... and all of you .”

Ignoring him, I almost carry her back to the room right then.

Dinner is ordered in tonight. It’s served on the patio under a string of twinkle lights that look like something out of a fairy tale where the sex is phenomenal and the emotional baggage comes with dessert.

Bree passes out champagne.

Whitney starts clapping.

Miguel stands and tries to make a toast, but Roxy cuts him off. “Actually... I’ve got this one.”

She stands. Her hair is damp. The diamond in her ring catches the light and sparkles.

Her eyes are on me. “My name’s Roxy Ruiz West,” she announces to the group, “and I would like to publicly confirm that I have ruined this man for all others. He cries during Pixar movies, eats pussy like it’s his last meal, and made me banana bread

with chocolate chips because I needed a food hug. ”

Trent starts clapping.

Weston salutes me.

Miguel mutters, “I need to rethink everything.”

Roxy lifts her glass. “To second chances. And third orgasms.”

The group explodes.

I stand next to her. Lift my own glass. And say simple, honest, and loud, “To the only woman who ever made me want to be better. And the only one I’ll ever belong to.”

She’s blinking fast.

So am I.

I pull out the ring. The first one. The Ring Pop base.

Our real beginning. I slide it onto her other hand.

“I loved you from the moment I saw you, Roxy West. Before your first insult. Before my first Roxy headache. Before our Vegas wedding. And through all of the chaos since that day. I’ll love you long after the rest of this burns. ”

She makes a sound I can’t name. Then, tackles me, right into the chair and straddles me in front of everyone. “The blow job you’re getting tonight is going to have you forgetting your name.”

That's my Roxy.

Trent drops his drink and mutters to Whitney, "Babe, take note."

Sasha whispers, "Sweet mercy, I need to sage this patio before we leave tomorrow morning."

I just kiss my wife because she's never been more mine than she is right now.

ROXY

The lights are off. The world is quiet. And I'm wrapped in the arms of a man I once tried to divorce text after a pitcher of premixed margaritas.

I'm not drunk anymore but I'm still spinning. From him .

From that look he gave me when I said "no exit strategy."—before the shark incident. From the way he toasted me in front of everyone. From the way he slid that Ring Pop ring back on my finger—of the wrong hand—like it still means everything.

It does .

He's lying next to me, naked and warm, one hand is tracing lazy circles on my hip. I shift closer and feel him harden the second my leg slips between his and my knee brushes against him. "You're insatiable," I whisper.

"I'm yours. " He replies.

Oh... sweet baby Jesus.

That answer.



It gets me every time.

Rolling on top of him, I straddle his hips and lower my lips to his ear. Blowing into the shell of it, I whisper, “I want you to wreck me , baby.”

He groans, but I don’t stop there. I rub against him, coating us both in the evidence of my need. I moan as his cock head bumps my clit, “But do it soft and slow. Worship me like you’re afraid I’ll disappear.”

His hands grip my hips, anchoring me as his lips and tongue move up my throat. His breath is already raspy as he asks, “You sure?”

Nodding, I move against him again. I’m so wet and he’s so hard, he just sinks in as I lower myself onto him. As I reach the base of his cock, I say the one thing I’ve never said in bed before. “Make love to me, Chase.”

The pulse in his throat jumps. And then, he does.

It’s different this time.

No hair-pulling. No bed-breaking. No coming together so hard and furious that our skin slaps. This is love. This is just connection.

His lips don’t leave my skin. His voice doesn’t leave my ear but sends a shiver down my spine as he whispers, “You’re perfect, Roxy.” My heart fills. He continues to move. In and out of me. “You’re mine, baby. I’d wait forever to touch you like this again.”

I cry. Not loud. Not ugly. Just two tears—quiet, reverent.

He catches them with his lips, kisses them away, and continues to move inside me

like it's a privilege.

We finish together. Whispering each other's names like prayers we finally remembered. Then, we lie tangled in silence. His arms are wrapped around me. My hand is on his chest. And something so sweet and meaningful is between us that I almost can't breathe.

"I don't want to go back," I whisper.

"To our life outside of this? Or to the way things were before?" he asks.

I sigh. "Both, I guess. But we have to leave here eventually. And I have to get back to work. Melody is amazing and fully capable, but it's my business and Mari Lynn is so busy with Knox and all of their fame."

He's quiet. Then, he says, "We do. We have jobs and responsibilities. But we also have each other Rox. I was never going anywhere. I think you get that now." He kisses my head and hugs me tighter.

"Things can be like this when we go back home. As long as we're together and you trust in my love, we can keep this alive. "

I blink. "Together?"

He smiles, "Always. Let's rewrite it all, Roxy. Start where the story got good again."

Just like that... we can start again.

We're leaving tomorrow. Everyone else is about to head out after brunch.

For once, I don't feel like running. I feel... settled. Happy, content, and stupidly in

love... with my husband.

It's weird.

This is me.

And I don't settle—I explode.

But here I am, barefoot on the deck, wearing his hoodie and sipping coconut coffee while palming an affirmation crystal Sasha passed out at first light.

Chase walks out of the house, shirtless, of course. The sun is hitting him like a spotlight and his art-covered muscles are on display like he's a gallery piece.

Mine... that is all mine.

How the hell did I get so lucky?

Standing, I set my coffee down and trail my fingers up his abs. He smiles as I lean up on my tip-toes and kiss him.

A bit later, he makes fried chicken and waffles and dribbles syrup on my shoulder before licking it off.

We do a final trust exercise and don't even cheat.

Growth.

After brunch, everyone's crying.

Bree reads a poem about love and saltwater.

Miguel announces he and Sasha are starting a couples' podcast called " Make Out or Move On. "

Trent and Whitney hug us for too long and whisper things like "Thank you for being horny and vulnerable," and, "You inspired us to let out our inner freaks."

Uh... weird.

Chase thanks them for the sentiments.

I absolutely do not.

Because what the actual fuck?

The van arrives.

The other couples all toss their bags in the back.

Sasha gives everyone one last gift—some moonstone bullshit and a handwritten card that says, "You are the storm and the calm."

Chase leans in and whispers, "You're the hurricane and the high tide."

I retort, "You're the reason I can't keep furniture in one place."

He grins, "You're the reason I'm going to be bald or completely gray before I'm thirty."

Rolling my eyes, I mutter, "My magical pussy is the reason your face is so hydrated."

We're disgusting.

It's perfect.

We spend the remainder of the day, and the night, just us. Loving, laughing, and having wild sex in inappropriate places.

The sun is up, the beach house is empty of our things and it's time to head home.

Just before we leave—in my Jeep because Chase took an Uber here with the sole intention of coming home with me at the end of the retreat—I stop, pull out my phone, and do the thing I've been dying to do since our chat earlier in the week.

I text Mari Lynn.

Roxy

It's 9:12AM on Sunday. Still married. Definitely not naked. Right now.

Might've licked banana bread off his abs. He cried during eye contact sex.

Almost threw a chair at my ex. And a shark tried to eat Chase's penis.

Retreat was a success.

Tequila and a debrief sesh needed ASAP.

She replies almost instantly.

Mari Lynn

I just screamed into a linen pillow.

At the condo. LA was exhausting but it always is.

Get your asses here.

I'm saving you a margarita, a hug, and a tiny bikini you're definitely wearing.

And I want Every. Damn. Detail.

Oh, and everything is all good at work. Melody is the best. She needs a raise.

I grin and slip my phone into my bag while looking at Chase. "You ready to crash someone else's party before we head back to the real world?"

He lifts a brow and grins. "I was born ready to steal the spotlight."

### BIKINI DIPLOMACY AND TEQUILA DEbrIEFS

#### ROXY

The second I see Mari Lynn relaxing in a float in the pool at her and Knox's condo, I do what any emotionally stable, recently re-married—but not really, nothing official happened—woman would do. I take off running, kick off my wedges, and cannonball into her serenity.

She's mid-sip on something fruity and smug, complete with a paper umbrella, when I shout, "Miss me, bitch?" and leap into the pool like a deranged dolphin with boundary issues.

She screams with fright, throws her drink into the air, and immediately starts crying-laughing as she slaps off the water that just doused her and mutters, "Oh my God, I knew you'd show up chaotic."

I float on the surface and adjust my bikini top because my tit is now trying to say hello to everyone. Dark hair is plastered to my head, water is dripping down my face and I grin like I just survived the Hunger Games: Couples Retreat Edition .

"Hope you've got tequila and Knox is cooking something delicious." I wink at her. "I brought trauma, titty sweat, and one hell of a I've-had-so-much-sex-with-my-fine-ass-husband-this-past-week I need calories appetite."

Mari Lynn laughs and rushes to the edge of the pool, jumping out. I hold my arm up and she helps me get out, too. I only flash a little bit of too much cheek as I climb out

and we soggily hug.

“You look radiant and emotionally unstable.” She chuckles.

“You should see my husband’s tongue. That bitch is almost as big as his bicep. It’s been busy. ” We both laugh.

Knox appears on the small patio of their condo, holding a pitcher of margaritas and a look of genuine fear.

He sees Chase—quiet, shirtless, walking up behind me with our bags—and grins. “You almost threw a chair at him?” he asks.

I retort, “No, not at him. At my ex. The piece of shit I wasted time with before Chase came along crashed our couples retreat. Chase was ready to throw down. He held my earrings.”

Knox just nods, sets the pitcher down, and takes a bag from Chase before slapping him on the shoulder. “Hey man. Good to see you.”

Mari Lynn pours three shots, and we take them, before I’m fully dry.

We’re lounging in the sun, half-dressed, and half-feral.

Chase and Knox sit a few feet away, talking about food like they’re not surrounded by our very loud emotional fallout.

They’re used to it.

“So,” Mari says, sliding her sunglasses down and waggling her brows at me over the top. “Tell me everything.”



I inhale like I'm about to deliver a TED Talk.

“First of all, I almost divorced him about fifteen times. He made me scream while I was laid back on the island in the middle of the kitchen and Trent walked in on it. Oh, and Miguel walked in while I was blowing Chase, also in the kitchen. He dropped his shit all over the floor and retreated. Then, Chase made me banana bread with chocolate chips because I needed comfort food. I saw Eden when his head was between my thighs—also in the kitchen—the kitchen apparently makes us really fucking hot for each other—Oh, I accidentally called him ‘home.’ I almost threw a chair at Holden’s face.

We rode a wave naked before a shark copped a feel of my ass and tried to eat Chase’s dick.

We flashed an entire beach. And I might be emotionally repaired. ”

She blinks and laughs as she says, “Oh, Roxy girl, I have missed you. ”

Reaching into my bag, I pull out the Ring Pop ring and slip it on before showing her my hand.

Her mouth drops open. “Bitch, he re-proposed?! ”

I grin. “Nah, just re-claimed.”

From the corner of my eye, I see Chase look over. Mari Lynn follows my gaze and smiles, softly. “He loves you so much it’s annoying.”

“I know. I weaponize it.” I retort.

We chuckle and clink glasses.

Tequila. Sunshine. Second chances.

And just like that, the chaos becomes comfort, and I realize home is wherever I'm loved loudest.

CHASE

Mari Lynn and Roxy have been chugging margaritas and shooting tequila for about two hours now.

They're so wasted.

Mari Lynn reaches over and tries to adjust Roxy's very skimpy string bikini top, muttering something about nipple sunburns.

Roxy replies with, "My left boob's immune to shame!"

Knox turns to me and says, without flinching, "So, this is our life, huh?"

I sip my own drink, just margarita, and nod. "Every blessed day. We're some lucky sons of bitches."

He grins, shakes his head and says, "They're insane. Both of them. Like sexy as hell hurricanes."

"And we live in the eye of it." I laugh.

"You like it there?" He asks.

I snort. "I married her after three weeks and built a fucking condo in it, man. You don't?"

He gruffly laughs and looks over at his woman, shakes his head, and says, “Wouldn’t want anyone else.”

Same, bro. Same.

We’re standing near the edge of the patio, half-watching our wives spiral into full-blown tequila giddiness. Mari’s pulling out sunscreen. Roxy’s trying to convince her to drink it.

I glance at him.

“You good? The show, the wife, the... everything?”

He nods. And his voice is content as he says, “Yeah. Took a minute. A lot of changes, but... yeah. I’m fucking great.”

I get it.

Marriage is war.

And love?

Love’s the battlefield you go back to again and again.

Because some scars are worth it.

He tips his drink at me. “Heard you almost knocked out the toxic ex.”

I shrug. “I would have. But I didn’t need to. Technically, Roxy almost threw hands... and a chair. I threatened with legal action and emotional violence.”

“You’re calm.” He laughs.

“I’m strategic.” I reply.

He laughs. “What’s your strategy now?”

I look toward the pool. Roxy’s perched on a float shaped like a pink sparkly flamingo, hair wet, drink in one hand, sunglasses on crooked.

She’s yelling something about oral fixations and me winning a papaya eating contest with no hands to Mari Lynn, who is on a giant float shaped like a blue llama with a frog on its head.

Their feet are hooked together, and Mari Lynn is laughing so hard she’s crying.

I smile. “Love her like she’s a lightning storm I want to get struck by. Every day.”

He’s quiet. Then, he says, “You’re good at this.”

“What? Being whipped?”

He shrugs. “Not what I’d call it. I’d call it... being all in.”

I nod. “Roxy leaves devastation in her wake... usually that devastation is me. But I get up and rebuild. She’s my endgame.”

Suddenly, Roxy shouts, “Tell them how you almost cried mid-blowjob, babe!”

I choke, “Babe! There are other people out here!”

She looks sheepish and throws her hand over her mouth. She and Mari Lynn look

around, wide-eyed as people either smirk or glare at them both.

Knox laughs so hard he nearly drops his glass and calls out, “How about we take this party back to the condo... inside... away from other people.”

Our women struggle to get back to the pool’s edge. Scrambling, undignified, their arms and legs are being used like oars. It’s a chaotic mess and I love it.

Somehow, they manage and never spill their margaritas.

I walk over and hoist Roxy up while Knox does the same with Mari Lynn. We stabilize our drunk wives and grab their obnoxiously large floats, and I growl. “It was emotional! I was overwhelmed! ”

Roxy grins like she’s queen of the unhinged and Mari Lynn and Knox both laugh outright.

“It was beautiful!” Roxy slurs.

Knox pats my shoulder while holding Mari Lynn upright.

“You know what? You win.” He chuckles.

“Damn right I do.” I mutter.

Looking around, he says, “Uh, wives are priority. Let’s get them inside and we can come back for this shit.”

ROXY

Mari Lynn and I must have passed out. Orgasmic dinner smells greet us when we

wake up.

Grilled shrimp. Grilled scallops. Grilled pineapple. And grilled asparagus. As we eat, Knox, is also grilled emotionally, by me and Mari Lynn.

It's our love language.

Chase's arm is over the back of my chair like a gentleman.

I immediately ruin it by sitting sideways and sliding my foot up his leg under the table. My toes reach my goal, and I tease him. He hardens under my foot, but he doesn't flinch. His jaw tightens though.

He's delicious.

Mari Lynn raises her glass, and I struggle to pay attention to her instead of crawling under the table. "To survival. Marriage. And whatever the hell Roxy just texted me about a showerhead and salted caramel."

I cackle.

Knox looks mildly alarmed.

Chase just grabs his drink and chugs it.

"So," Mari Lynn says, grinning at me as we sit on the balcony. "Real talk. How did you actually survive couples retreat without punching a man-swapping essential oil dealer?"

Chase says, "I knew they were swingers."

I take a bite of shrimp. Chewing slowly, then, I swallow.

“I didn’t. There was almost chair-throwing.

Kitchen sex... a lot of it. A perky-titted—apparently, they are swingers— hoe bag hitting on my man right in front of me—I mean, whatever, they can do them.

But my man is my man and I’m not a sharer—A blow-up, end all, fight that Chase and I were not the participants in.

Crying. Banana bread sex. Rules that never had a chance of being followed.

Anal play... and a lot of frosted moaning. ”

Knox blinks. “Swingers... Anal... Frosted—?” He shakes his head.

Chase pops a scallop into his mouth.

Mari Lynn fist-pumps. “You two are disgusting, insatiable, pervs.” She winks.

“We’re thriving,” I say.

Chase nods. “We’re emotionally devastating, we know.”

The food keeps coming. The sun drops lower. Everything feels soft. Safe. Like we earned this.

Mari Lynn heads back inside to “finish dessert,” and Knox stands to follow, muttering something about “not trusting her with an open flame.”

Chase and I are alone on the balcony. It’s quiet. The breeze from the water is nice and

the sound of the waves crashing onto the beach is peaceful. It should be calming.

I'm not calm.

Chases thumb lightly rubs circles on my thigh under the table. My breathing hitches and I can't stop looking at him.

"You good?" he asks.

I nod. "Better than."



## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

He leans in, takes my hand, and brings it to his mouth before gently kissing the inside of my wrist. His lips linger over my pulse. His voice is rich, warm, and full of love as he says, “You know I’m all in, Roxy. Right?”

I smile. It starts small but it spreads over my face. I sigh. “I do know, Chase.” We just sit, staring at each other, reveling in this new us .

The balcony doors slide open and a flushed Mari Lynn flops into her seat and points a fork at Knox.

“He had to flambé the meringue on top of the coconut pie with a kitchen blow torch. Said I wasn’t to be trusted with fire unless the heat comes from us and not a kitchen gadget.” She glares at him. “I will burn you alive, Levi.

Chase mutters, “That’s how I handle marriage, too.”

Knox chuckles. “Burn me, baby. I love it when you talk dirty.”

I snicker and he looks over at us, “And yet... here you two are. Since I’ve known you, you two have been a train wreck. I mean that with love, but y’all give people whiplash. You’re here. Actually together .”

We are together. In a way we’ve never been before.

I’ve always loved Chase. I have never doubted that he loved me. Even when I was high-tailing it for the hills in platform wedges because I was scared he’d stop loving me and realize that I was too much and he didn’t want to deal with me anymore.

But this... this trusting in our relationship, our connection, our marriage... it's new.

And I want to keep it.

I realize something, we didn't just survive the damage—by damage, I wholeheartedly mean me, my fear and my pride —we rebuilt from the ground up .

Better. Hotter—I didn't know that was possible— and still one-hundred-percent legally binding.

CHASE

We leave the condo the next morning.

The sun is barely up. The seagulls are being too damn cheerful. Mari Lynn waves from the front door in a pink silk robe, while double-fisting mimosas. She calls out, “Go get your happily ever after, slutbags! I'll call you tomorrow to go over business stuff.”

Roxy blows her a kiss.

I mouth, “ Thank you.”

We toss our bags in the back of Roxy's Jeep.

She's in super short denim cut-offs, one of my T-shirts that she has rolled and tucked to show her entire stomach, and a messy braid is hanging over her shoulder.

She looks like summer and sin and every dream I've ever had.

With a side of dirty mouth, sass, and blow job skills that could straighten out a gay

man.

Or at least have him imagining a Hemsworth.

It's her Jeep, but I'm driving. Halfway down beach road, she turns to me.

"I have an idea."

Shit. With Roxy, that's always dangerous.

I glance over.

She's chewing her lip. "What if we didn't go home?"

I raise a brow. "Where would we go?"

She shrugs. "I don't know. Anywhere. Everywhere. A cabin. A ranch. A penthouse with a birds-eye view of my emotional growth."

I chuckle. "I'd love to, baby. But what about work?"

You're practically running the event planning business since Mari Lynn is so busy with Knox, their show, their classes, and thier socials.

And I'm really wanting to get my food truck up and running by fall.

It's a great dream, but it's not really practical.

Adulting and real-world responsibilities kind of suck. "

She sighs and grabs my hand across the center console. "You're right. You're so

mature and responsible. I just wanted to be together. Just you, me, and no expectations. A real reset. Somewhere we could be us without the baggage.”

I don’t answer right away. Because I am thinking about it.

Her. Me. A place where we aren’t broken or rebuilding.

Somewhere we’re just in it.

I pull the Jeep over, right there on the side of the road. Gravel is under the wheels. Palm trees and sand dunes are all around us. A big, wide open sky is above us.

She blinks and gasps, “What are you?—?”

Yanking her into me, I kiss her. Hard. My lips, tongue, and teeth feast on her mouth.

My hands are on her hips. She climbs over the console into the back seat, yanking me with her.

I have no idea how, but we never stop kissing.

Her back bounces on the seat. She grunts.

I chuckle, but it ends on a moan as her hand slides past the waistband of my shorts and she cups my dick.

She strokes me and rubs the pad of her thumb over the head.

I moan into her mouth. She yanks my shorts down and I try to take off her shirt, my elbow slamming into the roll bar.

I jerk back from the pain and bite her lip.

She cries out. We both stop and stare at each other before she smiles.

I start laughing and she follows. We laugh until we can't breathe.

Then, she sits up and says, "We can't move in here without injuring ourselves.

" Climbing over me, she jumps out of the Jeep.

I watch her as she unsnaps her shorts and pulls them off.

She leaves her panties on and grins wickedly.

"I think you should get out here, bend me over the seat, shove my panties to the side, and make me scream as that glorious cock fucks my tight pussy."

Before my flip flops hit the gravel, my shorts are pulled just under my hips, my cock is in my hand, and I bend her over until her cheek presses into the leather seat.

Then, I shove her panties to the side and surge in.

She pushes her ass back against me as I slam into her over and over and over.

Slapping flesh, moans, groans, and breathless words of love merge with the wind and the waves until we both shatter.

When I pull out of her, soft and spent, I whisper, "Baby, I'd go anywhere with you. Wherever you go, I follow. But right now, we can start over, fresh, and together... right at home. Let's leave the past right here on the roadside."

She turns, and exhales as she looks at me.

Then, she chuckles. “Okay, Chase. Deal.” Her nose wrinkles and a squelching sound echoes.

Reaching down, she swipes her finger through her dark curls.

Her finger is coated with my cum when she raises it.

“Apparently, your kids want to stay on the roadside, too.”

I raise my brow. “I’d prefer if they stayed in there where it’s nice and warm... plus, you know, I don’t really want my DNA spread out on the roadside.”

She laughs, “Yeah, thank you for your deposit,” and grabs the blanket she keeps in the backseat. She wipes her hand on it, and then, cleans herself and me, up. All DNA contained within the fluff.. and whatever is still inside of her

We pull our clothes back up and sit there for a second. No rush. No deadline. Just us.

She looks wistful as she says, “Do you want kids, Chase?”

Of course I want a family with you, Rox. It’s my literal dream.

I nod. “I do. I want kids with you. A little girl who’s exactly like her momma. A little boy who is a combination of us both. We’ll have holy little terrors, baby. And they’ll be perfect.”

She grins. “God, I hope so.” Then, she purses her lips...

“I know we have to return to the real world eventually, but does it have to be right

now ?” Her fingers pick at the fray on her shorts.

“Mari Lynn is back for a bit... and you don’t actually have the food truck yet...

so... want to go on the honeymoon we never had? ”

I cannot say no to her.

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

### MOTELS, MILESTONES, AND THE WORLD'S LOUDEST WELCOME MAT CHASE

We've been on the road for five hours.

No destination No plan. No timeline. Just her playlist, two gas station burritos, and a motel reservation made purely because the website said "Beds squeak. Walls don't."

Sold.

Roxy's got her legs up on the dash, her painted toes are tapping to the beat of some aggressively sexy indie girl anthem.

She's wearing white retro sunglasses that are too big for her face and a smile that looks like sin wrapped in sunshine. Her legs are on full display and are distracting me every five seconds.

I want to pull over and eat her out on the shoulder of the highway.

We've got ten miles left... I can last.

Willpower, Chase. You can do it.

"Where are we going again?" she asks between sips of her fountain Cherry Vanilla Coke.



I grin at her. “Technically? Nowhere.”

“Perfect.” She responds.

She cranks the volume and says, “I just wanna get lost somewhere that smells like sunscreen and bad decisions.”

Looking at her, I say, “We just came from two places just like that. And you just described you.”

She flips me off and mutters, “I want what I want.” Then, she blows me a kiss.

We pull into the motel around sunset.

It’s kitschy as hell.

Pink neon. Plastic flamingos. A sign that says NO REFUNDS. NO REGERTS —yeah, spelled wrong.

Parking and leaving my foot on the brake, I rethink our choice to stay here.

Roxy has no such qualms. She hops out, barefoot in the parking lot—her shoes are hanging from her fingers—and she’s already humming.

She does that when she’s happy and she hasn’t stopped since we left Mari Lynn and Knox’s condo.

Check in is easy. I say my name, the clerk swipes my credit card and hands me a key card...

less than five minutes for the whole thing.

Inside the room is pretty basic. One bed.

Mirrors everywhere—and I mean, everywhere.

Even on the ceiling. We're in a porn motel.

The hot tub is heart shaped. I don't trust it for a second, though Roxy's eyes light up, and beside it is a bottle of two-dollar champagne in a plastic ice bucket.

She turns to me, brows raised. "Did you plan this?"

"Nope." I laugh. "How could I have? We booked it on the road after you found it online."

She grins. "Did fate just hand us a sex dungeon with continental breakfast?"

I nod. "Apparently. The things you catch in the hot tub are free."

She wrinkles her nose and throws her bag on the bed, muttering, "Yeah, I think I've seen videos filmed here. We'll skip the hot tub."

I laugh aloud, "Glad we're in agreement on that one."

We shower together—because of course we do—and by the time she's wrapped in a towel and perched on the edge of the bed she ripped the comforter off of and threw in the corner, she's already plotting the rest of our route.

I watch her scroll on her phone as the towel pulls tightly across her ample chest. Those magical things are fighting for their freedom. Her legs are crossed. Her lips are full and pursed. Her thighs are still wet with water droplets.

She looks like a retro pin-up model that guys fantasize about and yank their chains to.

All I can think about is how damn lucky I am that she's mine .

“Hey,” I say, quickly towel drying my hair.

She glances up, her eyes travel from my head to my toes and back up again. “Yeah?”  
She's breathy.

Sitting beside her, I take her phone, set it aside on the nightstand, and tuck her damp hair behind her ear before dragging my finger down her neck. She shivers and I press a kiss to her shoulder. “Let's make a list.”

She smirks but her eyes are hooded as she asks “A list of what?”

“What we want to do next. Together. No rules. No timelines. Just us.”

She exhales. Smiles. And whispers, “Okay.”

We start again.

ROXY

Item number one on the list,

“More sex.”

That's mine.

Chase laughs and mutters, “How much more sex could we have, Rox? My dick would have to live inside of your vagina, babe.”

We do have a lot of sex... but I can't get enough of him. He makes me crazy. I don't know if I'll ever get enough.

He types,

“More road trips with zero underwear.”

We're lying across the bed that only has sheets on it, half-wrapped in towels that hide nothing and showcase everything. Our bodies still warm from the shower and bathroom with no ventilation. Our hearts are completely bare .

We've got an open note app between us. We're typing out our dreams. Together.

So far we've got:

-More sex

-More road trips with zero underwear

-Mountain cabin getaway with no Wi-Fi

-A couple's tattoo—he said ankle. I said ass cheek. We compromised on ribs

-Make our own videos, and then, delete them after watching

-New rings, someday—but only if we both design them drunk

-And a shared goal to eat every regional dessert in the continental U.S.—because trauma may break you, but carbs and sugar rebuild you

I glance over at him. He's sprawled out on the pillows. His hair is damp and waving.

His chest is on full display. One arm is slung over his head like he's modeling for GQ: Reclaimed Husband Edition.

Biting my lip, I lean over him. He watches me. I straddle his lap, hovering over his groin. The towel moves as his erection grows and his eyes go dark. "Item number five," I whisper, grinding, just once.

He groans and raspily says, "Yeah?"

"I ride you on this squeaky-ass motel bed until it collapses and my phone records it in the mirrors."

He yanks the towel. It parts and he throws it before grabbing my hips so hard I gasp.

"You sure?" He growls.

I grind before reaching between us and ripping his towel off, too.

Swiping my phone, I open the camera and hit video.

I point it down at Chase and capture his face before setting it on the side of the bed pointing up.

Looking at the screen, I see us both in the frame.

I sink down onto him. He groans and I say, "We're making a home movie, lover. "

The bed squeaks. Loudly. As advertised.

I ride him while his fingers dig into my hips, holding me in place. Rolling, he flips me under him. I gasp.

His mouth is on mine. His hands are on my boobs. His voice is in my ear, dirty and reverent. “You want soft, or do you want loud?”

Smiling, I plant my feet into the bed. “I want both .”

Oh, Chase.

Oh baby, does he deliver.

He fucks me, then, he makes love to me. He stops to eat me like I’m his last meal , before flipping me over and driving into me over and over and over, like the world might end if he stops. He licks, bites, sucks on, and kisses me like I’m the answer to every question he’s ever asked.

I come on his tongue, on his cock, and then, again on his face when he says, “You’re mine, baby. You always have been.” While I’m still shuddering, he comes deep inside of me, the bed frame cracking on his final thrust.

We both collapse as the bed frame folds in. We’re breathless.

Sweaty. Happy. Home.

When we can breathe semi-normally, we both laugh. He mutters, “You wanted to break the fuckin’ bed, Rox.”

I laugh harder. “I did.” Something cold presses into my thigh. Reaching down, I pick it up and lift it. It’s still recording. I grin, “It’s all on video.”

Chase’s face flushes but he fake pounds his fists on his chest. “Me Tarzan, you Jane, baby cakes. We’ll watch it later before deleting it.” We laugh so hard, we wheeze.

Later, he calls the front desk, and says, “We broke the bed. But we’re emotionally better now. Charge it to my card.”

CHASE

The coffee is terrible. Like, burnt tire with a splash of regret terrible.

But Roxy looks like a dark-haired Shakira as she sits on the edge of the motel bed with her hair wild, her mascara smudged, and she’s only wearing panties. Her eyes are sleepy.

Everything’s perfect.

“I can’t believe you broke the bed,” she says between grimacing sips.

I raise a brow. “I broke the bed? Don’t you mean we broke the bed?”

She looks at me through hooded eyes. “You’re like eighty percent responsible.”

I snort, “You begged for thrust variation and wanted it hard.”

She shrugs. “I need variety.”

I mutter, “As long as the only variety you want is me in different positions, locations, and the choice of my mouth, fingers, dick, or combinations of the three.”

She winks. “Only variety I need, baby.”

We finish packing in quiet sync.

Toothbrush. Playlist. One very broken bed frame. Roxy grabs the side rail. “If we’re

paying for it, I'm taking it. It's a souvenir."

We hit the road again—her feet are once again bare, her hair is bedhead messy, and we have no real plan.

Half an hour in, we stop at a gas station that sells fried pickles, engagement rings, and fireworks.

Roxy beelines for the dirty lighters and zebra-print condoms.

I grab her hand and hold up a cheap mood ring in the shape of a heart.

"Round three?"

She laughs, though her eyes are shining. "You're proposing with a mood ring now?"

I drop to one knee right there, between an ice machine and a microwave burrito rack.

"I am. Roxanne Ruiz West... will you re-marry me in front of this Slim Jim display and spend forever letting me buy you shitty jewelry and even shittier coffee? Besides, this one gives me an indication of if I'm about to get kissed or stabbed. A man needs the insight with you."

She blinks. Then, grins. "Only if we get matching tattoos from the shady van in the parking lot."

Standing, I slide the ring on her finger. It's cheap. It'll probably turn her finger green. The stone shows a bright blue. Leaning over, I read the color chart. Romantic or Happy. I mutter, "Perfect!"

She kisses me through her laughter. "Gas station vows hit harder than therapy." Back



in the car, she takes a picture of the ring and posts it. Caption, “ Married. Again. Poorly supervised and hot as hell.”

I take a photo of her flipping me off wearing it. Caption, “ Third time’s the charm. Or the felony.” And just like that, we’re back on the road.

Married. Feral. Us.

And more in love than ever.

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

### TINY PERFECT TOWNS, TIGHT TIMELINES, AND TROUBLE ON LINE ONE

#### ROXY

The town is called Sugar Creek, and I swear it looks like a Hallmark movie got drunk and came to life.

Candy-colored, Victorian houses. An actual cobblestone main street. A sign at the edge of town that says “Welcome! Stay a while! You want to try the lemon zest and vanilla bean pound cake!”

I’m obsessed.

We stop for gas and end up in a farmer’s market where I buy: a lemon icebox pie, two jars of peach moonshine, a pair of knockoff Ray-Bans from a woman named Cactus Jan, and a twenty-dollar lemon zest and vanilla bean pound cake that is so delicious, I swear I heard angels sing when I tasted it.

Chase buys green chili and passion fruit angus beef jerky and manages to keep me from assaulting a man who catcalls me with “Hey sweetheart, bet you taste like honey and bad decisions.”

He fails in stopping my barbs though. I respond with, “No, sugar, sin, and rodeo dreams where my man is the bull. Keep walkin’.”

An hour later, we check into a boutique hotel with rooms named after types of pie. We’re in the Cherry Crumble room.

How fitting. I plan to be juicy, sticky, leave some crumbs behind and stain the sheets before sundown.

The lobby has live music. I drink two margaritas, take my hair down, kick off my shoes, and start dancing to “Jolene” in the middle of the floor while Chase films me and tries to keep his eyes and his hands off of me.

Obviously, he’s doomed to fail.

He joins me halfway through the song. His shirt is effortlessly unbuttoned, his shorts hug him in all of the right places, and he moves like Jagger—no, seriously—my man can dance.

No shame. Just sweat and smiles and one old man on a banjo clapping like we’re restoring his will to live.

We collapse onto a velvet settee, breathless, and drunk on each other and local moonshine.

I kiss his neck. He whispers, “Let’s never go home.”

I say, “Let’s never get boring.”

And then, my phone rings. Glancing at the screen, I see her name and pause.

It’s Mari Lynn.

“Hey.” I answer. “Chase and I took a little honeymoo?—”

“Roxy, check your email. Now.” She cuts me off.

Uh, what? What the hell? Why does she sound like that?

“Why? What’s going on?”

“Just check your email. One of our clients is viral. And not in a good way. Your name’s all over it.”

My stomach drops.

Just like that, the real world catches up.

CHASE

Roxy’s just got a call from Mari Lynn and something spooked her.

What the hell just happened? Mari Lynn called and now Roxy is as white as a sheet and looks like she might throw up.

One minute ago, we were drunk-dancing and kissing. Then, the phone rang, she got tense, she opened something on her phone, and now, she’s staring at something on the screen like it just bitch-slapped her.

“Rox, what’s going on, baby? What just happened? Talk to me,” I say, gently.

She blinks, swallows, and hands me the phone.

A video is on the screen. I can see the caption, “Bride from Hell- Flaming Wedding Fiasco.”

I play the clip.

A hysterical bride screaming and yanking her veil off her head fills the screen.

She destroys her elegant hair. She shoves a server in a black catering outfit holding a tray of champagne.

The server slips and the champagne goes all over the photographer.

He drops his camera, and it shatters. Pieces of it fly off.

The caterer runs into the scene crying and cussing out the bride for assaulting her employee.

The bride lunges at the caterer and starts beating on her head with her bouquet.

The groom grabs the bride around the waist and lifts her, and she starts fighting him and kicking anyone who comes near her.

She yells “And she called herself a fucking professional. She ruined my wedding!”

Roxy’s name is in the caption, her social page is tagged... so is Mari Lynn and Roxy’s business page.

She stands too fast and runs from the lobby and up the stairs. I follow her.

Once in the room, she grabs her bag and throws stuff into it before she starts pacing like she’s trying to outrun something clawing up her spine.

“I knew she would do this shit. That bitch was psychotic! You think I’m crazy...

I’m a freaking saint next to her! I should’ve shut everything down.

I should've cleared the site. I should've?—”

I stop her. “You’re not doing this.” I say, taking her into my arms.

She looks up at me. “Doing what?”

“Self-destructing because of someone else’s fire. You did your job. I remember this one. So, what she just posted is defamation. That’s not on you... or your business.”

She laughs, her voice cracks halfway through it.

“This is bad. Its public image. She could—she could tank everything, Chase. It doesn’t matter that I did my job...

public perception can make or break a business like ours.

Mari Lynn trusted me with this when she went to L.A.

with Knox. She left the business in my hands.

We talked about this bitch. She said it was my call.

I knew I should have cancelled the contract.

But it was so big... if this snowballs, I’m done.

We’re done. Everything we’ve worked for...

all of the years we’ve dedicated. No one’s gonna book the emotionally unstable, dramatic wedding planner who broke her ex’s jaw and who’s been trying to divorce the man she loves since the second they got married because she’s a mess . ”

I cross the room and take her face in my hands.

“You are not done. We are not divorced. Yes, you are dramatic and a little bit—okay, a whole lot of— crazy, Roxy. But you’re also a very competent and amazing event planner that has handed so many people the wedding and event of their dreams. So, here’s our play...

we contact those clients and let them tell thier experiences.

We hit fire with bigger fire. You are a fucking phoenix in red lipstick, Roxy West. You don’t curl up and die—you burn brighter and rise the fuck from the ashes. ”

She blinks, eyes watery. One side of her mouth lifts. “And you say I’m dramatic.”

“You’re dramatic as hell. I’ve learned from the best over these past three and a half years.”

She chuckles, “Tell me more.”

I grin, “You’re chaos in stilettos with perfect tits and an ass I want to bite like a ripe peach. I’d burn the world down for you, baby. And then, I’d build you a castle from the rubble.”

That was pretty fucking romantic.

But it’s true. I would.

She exhales and shakes her head, “God, I love you.” Then, she kisses me so hard I forget the name of this weirdly almost perfect town.

Leading me to the bed, she shoves me backwards and climbs onto my lap, discarding

both of our clothes in a matter of seconds. Then, I let her have her way, take what she needs, and reclaim her power. Her climax triggers mine. We shudder in unison amid pink ruffled sheets and red drapes.

“I’ve got you,” I whisper, smoothing her sweaty hair from her temples as she wraps her arms around my neck and melts into me.

Once she’s calm, I order room service nachos and open my laptop. “We’re gonna fix it. Together.”

She looks at me, then at the computer. “I fucking love you, Chase.”

I know. But I sure do love having you say it so easily now.

Finally.

ROXY

There’s something about nachos in bed and a man who worships your trauma that makes you forget all about why you ever wanted to run .

I sip my soda, crack my knuckles, and log into the business account email for the first time in over a week.

It’s chaos. Client messages—most of them wanting to do exactly what Chase recommended, give their testimonials. Blog and social media mentions. And a request for a podcast interview titled, “Social Media Mania and the Rise of Bridezillas.”

I snort. Chase leans over my shoulder and reads it. “You should do it.”

I grin. “Only if I get to wear my big red sunglasses and say ‘trauma is trending.’”



I open the viral video and watch it again with fresh eyes. It's worse than I thought.  
But... not on me.

A bride is melting down mid-reception—screaming about tablecloth colors and gluten and how I continuously “abandoned her when she needed me for a shirtless man with tattoos in sweatpants.” She knocks over catering staff.

Then, assaults the caterer with her bouquet.

Her groom and his groomsmen try to calm her tantrum, and she kicks two of them in the face and gives her new husband a fat lip and a black eye.

But what really pisses me off is when she looks dead at the camera and says that I, me, as in me personally , “don't care about love.”

Bitch what?

What the fuck do you know about me?

I have survived love. I've resuscitated it after trying to break it. I've lit love on fire. Literally and figuratively.

My husband and I have crawled through the ashes and still fucked on a kitchen counter after he made me freaking comfort banana bread.

I care about love.

Too much. Especially with Chase.

Bridezilla better check her damn parachute because I'm about to throw her ass straight out of the plane.

Chase sees it in my face, the shift from self-pity to vengeance.

I watch his smile spread as my fury increases.

He backs away with his hands up like he's witnessing a live possession. "I'll order more nachos."

An hour later, I've had a pow-wow over video call with Mari Lynn and gone over my plan.

She is one-hundred percent on board. I've drafted a blog post and sent it over to her to revise as needed.

I've rebranded our services and bought a new domain name.

And I've called the wedding boutique up the street and asked them to send me a wedding dress over for an hour or so that I can record in with the intention of uploading a scheduled spicy little "statement reel" for tomorrow morning that includes me in the wedding gown holding a margarita with the caption, "Still believe in love. Just don't believe in bullshit.

" Then, I send an email to the bride's PR rep.

It's concise. Professional. Savage in a bless your heart you don't want to fuck with me way.

"This is a legal heads-up and a gentle reminder that I can plan a six-figure wedding in twenty-four hours and book a podcast, seven interviews, and call in favors in less than twenty minutes. My lawyer is ready. Is yours?"

Chase walks in just as I hit send. "Fixed it? Feeling good?" he asks.

I stand, strut over to him, and kiss his jaw while looping my arms around his neck,  
“Fixed me. And real good.”

I’m ready to title this new chapter of my life.

Reinvention.

No failure. No retreat. No meltdowns.

I’ll leave that to Bridezilla.

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

### DAMAGE CONTROL AND “THE DRESS”

#### ROXY

The dress arrives in a giant garment bag. I take a photo of it and send it to Mari Lynn.

She texts me back almost immediately.

Mari Lynn

Babe, this dress is giving ‘runaway bride who’s packing tequila and bad decisions under the tulle.’

Use it wisely.

I snort as I read it and stare at the dress.

It really is something.

It’s a strapless ballgown covered in subtle sequins and delicate embroidery that’s practically screaming for a wind machine and a slow-motion twirl. The bodice is snatched tighter than my sanity, the skirt poofs out like a luxury dessert cart, and the whole thing smells faintly of vanilla and sass.

It’s perfect.

Chase whistles low behind me. “Well damn, Mrs. West.”

Turning, I face him. He's leaning in the doorway of the hotel bathroom, shirtless, of course, towel slung low on his hips, showing off that "V" that makes me lose my mind and has me on my knees, literally, far too often.

His hair is damp and messy from the shower.

He's in here looking like he walked straight off the cover of *Smoldering Husbands Who Soak Their Wives Panties Monthly*.

His drags his gaze down my body and it feels like a caress, lingering at the curve of my waist and the deep—and I mean deep —plunge of the neckline. "You planning to reclaim your company's reputation... or start an OnlyFans?"

I smirk and shimmy as I drop my shorts and step into the dress, shooting him a look from over my shoulder as I reply, "Why not both?"

He grins and pushes off the doorframe. "If you're gonna film this redemption reel in that dress... you better let me zip it now and unzip it after."

I roll my eyes but present my back to him. "Fine. But keep your hands on the outside of the dress, Mr. West." His fingertip drags down my spine. "For now."

His warm hands slide to my hips instead, softly squeezing them.

"That's not where my hands wanna be." He zips it.

My head rolls forward as he leans in, his lips brushing against the side of my neck before his warm breath tickles the shell of my ear as he groans, "Baby... you're a vision. You're gonna break the internet."

"Damn right, I am," I mutter, reaching for the makeup bag. "But only after you get

your lusty paws off me so I can film this reel before you make me ruin this expensive as fuck dress.”

“I’ll stick a pin in it.” He steps back but smacks my ass. His eyes meet mine in the mirror. “I’ll be watching from the bed.” He drops the towel. “Naked.” And lies back on the bed, setting one arm behind his head, he stares at me while he fists his cock.

Groaning, I flip him off in the mirror. “Behave.”

He winks and continues the slow stroking. “Never.”

He’s going to kill me... or have me accidentally post a sex tape live on the damn internet!

Setting up the phone tripod in the middle of the hotel room, I try to ignore my mouthwatering husband and test the angles, making sure the balcony doors let in just enough sunset glow to halo me in golden light.

The dress sparkles. My hair’s curled and pinned half up.

My lips are matte red. My face is utter perfection. And Chase is nowhere in the frame.

Thank God.

I lift a margarita glass. Lower my sunglasses.. just enough—and give the camera my best saucy smirk.

“I still believe in love. I just don’t believe in bullshit,” I say, raising the glass in a toast.

A slow-motion spin. A wink over my bare shoulder. I take a sip, smile, then, say the words, “Next chapter. Coming soon.”

Done. I think I killed that shit.

Chase slow claps from the bed. “Oscar-worthy, baby.”

I check the playback. It’s absolute fire. I schedule the post for first thing tomorrow, tag our business account, Mari Lynn, and every other wedding blog I’ve ever bribed with cake pops, plus, a few I just know follow us.

As I hit save, Chase huskily calls from the bed. “Video is done and now... your zipper’s asking to be freed, babe.”

I turn. He’s stretched across the bed, legs wide, hard, beautiful cock in his hand. He looks smug... and hot, as hell.

“You’re an asshole for making me do that in this ” I gesture to myself, “while you laid there... like that .” I mutter.

He grins and raises his brow. “You were a pro.” He sits up watches me. “And now, it’s my turn.” Standing, he stares at me as he slowly crosses the room, stalking me like prey. “I zipped, and now, I get to unzip .”

I watch him watch me and glance at the mirror. The dress fits me like a dream.

He reaches me and his hands drift up my arms. I shiver at his touch and manage to say, “Careful, baby. This is a very expensive dress.”

“I’ll be gentle.” He growls.

“You’ve never been gentle.” I reply.

“Exactly.” He pulls me against him. My back to his front. Through the thick tulle, I feel his erection pressed against my ass.

I moan as he cups my breasts through the corset top. His fingers slip beneath the tight bodice and he touches my nipples. We’re watching him toy with me through the reflection. My head falls back and rests on his shoulder. “The dress stays on.” I groan.

He grins, “Okay, but that means... you’re riding.”

Releasing me, he walks back to the bed. Sitting, he crooks his finger at me. I walk toward him, hips swinging, shoes clicking against the hardwood floor. He watches me like I’m dessert. Like he’s starving.

“God, Roxy,” he murmurs. “You’re unreal.”

I stand between his knees. “Show me.”

His hands manage to get under the massive skirt, and he grips my hips.

Fisting the dress, he bunches it and tries to kiss the tops of my thighs, the skirt is too full.

Growling, he holds the dress with his entire arm while his other hand trails over the slight curve of my belly before reaching the underside of my breasts.

The bodice lifts them sky-high. His hands roam over the sequins cupping me, tracing the embroidery.



“You’re mine,” he murmurs against my skin.

“Always,” I whisper back.

Lifting the skirt higher, he ducks under it, disappearing beneath the layers and layers of tulle. I laugh.

I look like a Barbie dress birthday cake.

“Babe, you cannot?—”

He grabs my knee, lifts my leg, and sets my foot on the bed. Then, somehow, his tongue finds me.

“Oh my— Chase... ”

A muffled groan comes from under the dress. My knees buckle.

He pulls my thighs tighter around his face, his hands anchoring me as his tongue strokes and circles, relentlessly. My hands scrabble at the skirt, fisting tulle, pulling it up to try to see his dark head buried between my thighs.

He glances up, eyes dark and wicked and hair stuck to his forehead and neck with sweat. His lips glisten with my juices.

“We cannot get cum on this dress,” I gasp as I ride his face.

He stops licking me to smirk and growl, “No promises.” Then, he dives back in.

I rock against him. My thighs are trembling. My breath is catching. I moan, “Ohhhh, Chase... Oh, shit... Fuck me... Ohhhhhhh...” I see stars. I see the damn invoice

flashing in my brain as his tongue curls inside me and his thumb presses just right. I scream, “Chase.... Fucking, Chase.... ”

I break apart, my fingers are clinging to the bedpost for balance as my entire body convulses.

He emerges from the tulle a minute later, face shining with victory... and so much sweat.

“Still believe in love, babe?” he teases. “It’s like a sauna down there.”

I pant. “Shut up and get inside me.”

He stands, lifts me onto the bed, flips me onto my hands and knees, and shoves the dress over my head. My bare ass is in the air.

“Wedding night redo,” he rasps as he slides inside of my pussy. Deep. Slow. Delicious.

He ruins the dress exactly the way I knew he would.

Worth it.

So. Fucking. Worth. It.

Best. Business. Expense. Ever.

When we finally collapse, sweaty and tangled in acres of tulle, he kisses the shell of my ear and whispers, “You’re gonna be okay, Roxy. You’re unstoppable.”

I smile, exhausted, sated, and utterly wrecked in the best way possible.

“Yeah,” I murmur.

And for the first time in a long time... I actually believe it.

brIDAL SHOW BLITZ

ROXY

The bridal expo smells like overpriced roses, cheap champagne, and existential dread.

Honestly, I fit right in.

I'm wearing a navy pantsuit so tailored it's practically second skin, with flared legs, a plunging neckline, and red heels sharp enough to stab anyone who tries me today. My earrings sparkle with petty intent. My lipstick perfectly matches my shoes and says, "I dare you."

Next to me, Chase is carrying a box of brochures, looking edible in a tight black tee that hugs his chest like a love letter and tailored slate gray pants that make his ass a national treasure.

Take that, Captain America!

He's calm. Collected. Sexy as hell. Meanwhile, I'm vibrating with equal parts anxiety, rage, and too much caffeine.

"You good?" he asks quietly as we check in and get our badges.

I force a smile. "I'm great. Really great. Amazing. Fabulous. Perfect."

He watches me a beat longer. "Totally believe you, babe."

“Uh huh.” Blowing out a breath, I scan the ballroom. “But thanks for asking.”

Inside, the convention center, the booths are chaos. There’s a floral arch big enough to block air traffic. A four-tier cake shaped like a swan. And three brides in the main aisle screaming at each other over color swatches.

“Ah,” Chase murmurs. “The sweet smell of estrogen and credit card debt.”

“Home sweet home,” I mutter, already checking off to-do lists in my brain.

Mari Lynn couldn’t be here—she’s shooting the next season of their show in LA—but she sent Melody armed with backup in the form of a tote bag labeled “In Case of Emergency, Slay” with a tiara, glitter business cards, four mini tequila bottles, and a sticky note that reads,

“Don’t burn it down. Or do. I trust your judgment.”

I love her.

We’ve been given a prime booth location and—because of the viral wedding fiasco—a prime-time slot on the main stage. The organizers knew what they were doing. Publicity is publicity.

Our company is literally trending under “Hot Mess Wedding Planner Gets Her Groove Back.”

As I reach our booth, I plaster on my best PR smile and check in with Melody, who has already set up our booth and is currently directing the rest of the team I’ve hired to assist us for the day.

“You call that a flower wall? I’ve seen better foliage at a dollar store.” Melody quips.

Smiling at her, I nod.

She's the best assistant ever.

"Gold chargers go on the left of the tablescape. Are we heathens?" I mutter.

"I'm about to throat punch the DJ if he tests the bass one more time. I swear—" I growl as the speakers boom so loudly that the ice sculpture next to us shakes and almost tumbles into our backdrop.

Chase stands beside me, sipping a cold brew, unfazed. "You're kinda hot when you're terrifying."

I raise a perfect brow. "Kinda?"

He leans down and presses a quick kiss to my lips before saying, "Very."

I smirk. "Damn right."

He kisses the side of my head and slaps my ass. "You've got this, babe."

It's our turn on stage and the emcee reads from the card I wrote myself. "Next up is the woman behind the most talked-about wedding event company in Texas... Roxy West, co-owner of Bold Hearts Events."

Chase squeezes my hand. "Go, baby, go."

Ignoring my nerves, I stride onto the stage like I own it. "Hey, y'all." I wave to the crowd. "This is a bridal expo, so let's talk weddings. They're messy. Emotional. Expensive. And totally worth it. Kind of like therapy with cake samples."

Laughter ripples through the audience.

I pace slowly. “I’ve planned a couple hundred weddings. Some have been perfect. Some... well, some involved a flaming dessert cart, a rogue chicken, and a groomsman passed out in a fountain.”

More laughter.

“But here’s the truth. You don’t need perfection.

You need magic. You need someone who can control the chaos.

Someone who will hold your hair while you cry over chair covers.

Someone who can talk you out of a spiral when you realize you’re about to become someone’s wife— for real .

Someone who will play tug of war with a peacock over a tablecloth— don’t ask —and still make sure the cake’s cut on time. ”

A few women cheer. A mom in the third row dabs her eyes. Melody fist pumps from the back of the audience. “And if your marriage is half as good as my makeup sex, you’re doing just fine.”

Applause erupts. Someone yells, “ Yes, queen .”

I grin. “And speaking of my husband... y’all wanna meet him?”

A collective “Yes!” echoes.

I wave Chase onto the stage. He appears wearing a tux jacket, his tailored pants...

and absolutely no shirt underneath.

When the hell did he change? And where is his damn shirt?

The crowd loses it. Women scream. A bridesmaid throws a napkin like a bouquet. Someone yells, “I volunteer as tribute!”

Simmer down. He’s mine.

I grab the mic. “Ladies, calm down. This one is mine.”

Chase smirks and kisses my cheek. “Forever, babe.” He whispers in my ear, “Losing my shirt was a good choice, huh?”

I roll my eyes but grin at him. “Damn right.”

He takes the mic from me. “Hi, I’m Chase. I cook. I lift heavy things. And I love the absolute hell out of this woman. Best event planner in Texas. Come see us at booth thirty-four.”

The screams intensify.

Stepping closer to my man, I murmur, “You’re gonna need freaking security to leave and I might have to shank a bitch.”

He chuckles and leans down, his lips brushing my ear. “No need to bring out the blades, unless it’s to cut the cake.”

I mutter, “You’re going to get me arrested. I need a margarita, hot stuff.”

He chuckles. “I’ll get you two.”



As we exit the stage, he bends me over his arm and kisses me senseless. I'm quite sure we probably violate some bridal show code of conduct. The crowd goes absolutely wild.

Mine, bitches.

But do come book us for your wedding!

Our booth is mobbed after the speech and show we put on.

People snap selfies. Influencers ask questions. Brides, and their mother's, book us on the spot.

Chase answers queries while I sign contracts and our team runs like a well-oiled machine. He's calm amid the chaos, handing out cake samples, talking flavor pairings with overwhelmed future grooms, and even charms a grandma with a checkbook into upgrading linens.

I want to jump him right there.

"Stop looking at me like that," he groans under his breath. "I cannot hide a stiffie in these damn pants."

"You're literally rolling up a tablecloth and I'm picturing you tying my wrists with it," I whisper back.

He flashes a grin. "I'll use the satin ones. Less chafing."

"Noted." I laugh.

I grab his lapels, and the backs of my fingers graze his tattooed pecs. "Fifteen

minutes. Then, I'm taking you behind the curtain."

His nostrils flare. "Make it ten."

Holy shit. Deal.

Nine minutes and fifty-seven seconds later, I tell Melody we're taking a quick break, and the booth is hers.

She nods, but I don't miss the smirk she shoots my way as we leave the space.

Glancing around, I quickly drag Chase behind the booth's backdrop curtain.

It's a mini hall blocked by thick dark fabric in the middle of the floor.

He lifts me instantly, setting me atop a stack of boxes as his mouth claims mine.

"I can't believe you wore this suit," he rasps, squeezing my hips and unzipping my pants. "You're killing me, Roxy."

"Good." I yank open his jacket, my palms hot against his bare chest. "I want to be the cause of your death." I moan but try to keep my voice down.

He nips my jaw. "You will be... one way or the other." He mutters.

His hand slips into my pants. My legs part and I grunt as the material pulls. Letting go of his jacket lapels, I shimmy, pulling my pants down to my ankles. They catch on my heels. His hand returns and he nudges my thighs apart. His fingers find heat and slickness. "Already so wet for me, baby."

"Always." I kiss him hard, grinding shamelessly as I ride his hand. "We don't have

much time, Chase. Take me.”

He leans back, pops the button on his slacks, pushes them down to his upper ass, and pulls me off the boxes, whirling me around as soon as my heels hit the floor.

I stumble and almost trip, a giggle escaping as I moan, “Careful, lover.”

“I’ve got you.” He growls, low. Pressing against my spine, he bends me over. My elbows rest on boxes and my palms grip the sides. He surges in. It takes everything in me not to yell out with pleasure. Biting my lip, I push back against him. He fucks me, hard and fast. His skin slaps against mine.

It's desperate... and perfect. Reaching around, he rolls my nub as he slams into me. My back tightens and I taste blood as I come... I clench around him, and he surges in, locking his arms around my waist. He bites my shoulder through the jacket as he comes.

We both laugh and he steps back, tucking himself back into his slacks and buttoning them up as I lean down and pull my pants back up. Reaching out, he zips them for me and kisses me on the mouth. We’re both still breathing heavily.

“We’re disgusting,” he murmurs.

I grin. “Nah. We’re thriving.”

He laughs. “Yup, and you’re going to hold my cum in for the rest of the day, Mrs. West. You’re on fire today, baby. You really booked five clients while threatening a florist.”

Pursing my lips, I grin, “I’ll wear it like pussy perfume. And thanks. Had to. She tried to upsell me peonies in December.”

Chase shakes his head and chuckles. “Monster.” His brow rises as he looks me over. “You look freshly fucked.”

I wink and he helps me right myself—no mirrors back here—we walk back out like nothing happened. His hair is messier. My lipstick is certainly smeared. Our booth is busy.

Business is booming.

At the end of the day, Chase slings an arm around me as we watch the staff dismantle the displays. “You did it, babe.”

I lean into him. “ We did it. Thank you for coming and for helping... even if multiple women will use shower heads on themselves tonight to the thought of you... my husband.”

He chortles. “You don’t need a shower head. I’ll always go home with you.” He kisses my temple. “Proud of you, Rox.”

“Proud of us ,” I murmur.

I am. We’re together. Doing this and I’m not running or pushing him away anymore.

He squeezes my waist. “Ready to go home?”

I shake my head. “Ready to go everywhere.”

He grins. “I’m starving. Some vixen stole my reserves behind a curtain earlier. Let’s start with tacos.”

I laugh out loud. “I could go for some tacos... and then, maybe I’ll let you have my

taco.”

Chase growls, “My favorite meal.”

## Page 21

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

### FAMILY INVASION

#### ROXY

There's a knock at the door that sounds too polite to be safe. Which, in my experience, means it's either Jehovah's Witnesses or my mother.

Chase glances up from the couch, where he's shirtless, barefoot, and devouring leftover tamales like a Greek god confused about geography in a food coma. "Are we expecting someone?"

"Not unless Mari Lynn decided to teleport in on a luxury cloud of chaos and caffeine," I say, wiping my hands on a dish towel. "But that knock? That knock is laced with disappointment and passive aggression. It's her."

I crack the door open an inch. And there she is... my mother.

She looks immaculate and judgey. She's carrying a casserole dish like it's a diplomatic peace offering—or a Trojan horse—with her it's a coin toss.

"Hello, Roxanne."

Ah, we're using my full name.

Shit!

We're doomed.

“Hi, Mother.” I force a smile and swing the door open. “To what do we owe the surprise drop-in?”

If she can do it, I can, too.

“I was in the neighborhood.”

I blink. “You live two hours away.”

“I had errands.”

“In Dallas?”

She glides past me like a high-end fragrance commercial, surveying the house with a critical eye. Her nose wrinkles. “It smells like cumin and irresponsibility in here.”

“Well, Chase was cooking.”

“I assumed...”

Chase, bless his perfect naked torso, waves from the couch. “Hey, Mrs. Ruiz. You look lovely. Want a tamale?”

She eyes the plate like it’s an alien offering and dismisses him. “No. I’m not hungry.” Her tone says, “And even if I were, I wouldn’t eat anything you offered.” It pisses me off.

“More for me,” he says cheerfully, popping another one into his mouth, blissfully unaware—or uncaring—of her rudeness. “They’re homemade. Roxy bribed the vendor with tequila.”

“It’s called negotiating,” I add, crossing my arms.

Mother sets the casserole on the counter with a drawn-out sigh. “I brought your grandmother’s recipe. She was asking about you and said it’s time you learn to make a proper pot roast before someone thinks you were raised by wolves. Domestication is an attractive... trait.”

An attractive trait? To whom?

I’m married... to the gorgeous specimen of a man sitting on our couch.

And he’s never complained about my domesticity...

Is that even a word?

I deadpan. “Chase doesn’t complain about my domestic skills. Did she send that message by carrier pigeon or just etch it in stone herself?” My voice rises.

“Roxanne...” It’s long and drawn out. “Must you be so... uncouth? You were raised with manners.”

The fuck did she just say to me? She’s in my damn house, being rude and insulting to my husband, and I’m the one with bad manners?

Is she flipping serious?

Of course, she is.

“Thanks for the casserole.”

I glance at Chase, who’s biting back a smile as he licks his fingers clean. He mouths “



good girl” at me, and I roll my eyes.

Okay, so he’s not unaware. Unlike me, he’s just not letting her get to him.

I need to try that tactic.

“So, mother, is this a culinary intervention or a social call? Why are you here?” I ask.

Her mouth purses as she delicately perches on a barstool. “Both. I thought it was time we... caught up.”

Oh god.

She doesn’t get “caught up.”

She audits.

Ten minutes later, we’re awkwardly arranged in the living room. Chase has reluctantly put on a shirt. I’m still mentally cataloging all the ways this ambush could implode.

Mother sips her passionfruit tea—the only one we had in the cabinet— like a Bond villain.

Complete with rigid pinkie... Uh, we live in Texas, not freaking Britain.

Chase is sipping bourbon like a saint. I’m sipping wine from a bottle Mari Lynn left here and wishing I was shooting tequila like a woman two sips away from losing her shit.

“How’s the food truck coming along?” she asks him, tone lightly sugared but sharp

enough to cut glass.

“Good,” he answers easily. “Permits approved. Just ordered the wrap. It’ll be up and running as early as next month.”

She tilts her head and regards him. “And... you’re sure that’s stable ?”

I bristle. “Mother?—”

“It’s a fair question to ask, Roxanne. You carry the weight with your business. A man should provide.”

Freaking bitch. He provides just fine. He works, too. He doesn’t mooch.

Chase smiles gently, but I can see the strain in the set of his jaw. “Like any startup, it’s risky. But it’s mine. And it’ll be damn good. I don’t fail.” He looks at me.

He doesn’t. He commits and works his ass off to make it work.

Look at our marriage.

I say, “It’s going to be great. I have absolute faith in Chase.”

She hums noncommittally, then, she turns her attention to me. “And how’s the... fallout?”

Huh?

My brain short-circuits. “Sorry? What? What fallout?”

“After the wedding incident . And the—” she gestures vaguely at the ceiling, “—viral

situation. Are you seeing someone?"

I blink. "I'm literally married." I raise my brows so high they almost touch the ceiling. "To him." I point.

She sighs like I'm slow. "I'm very aware of that, Roxanne. I meant a therapist. You don't always handle things... maturely... or deal with them in the best way."

Ah. I'm crazy and she doesn't want to see me on the news as well as viral clips online.

I glance at Chase, who watches me quietly.

"No, I'm not. But I'm... working on it," I admit. "Chase is very supportive. As is Mari Lynn. I'm good. I've been busy rebuilding."

She nods and pauses before saying. "Good." Her eyes lock on me." Because pretending you're fine isn't the same as being fine."

For a second—just a fleeting one—I swear I see concern beneath her critical mask.

Chase squeezes my thigh. "She's stronger than she knows."

My mother watches him for a long moment before saying, "She is." Her tone softens. "She deserves someone who sees that. I'm glad she has you."

Uh, who are you and what have you done with my mother?

I blink, stupefied. "Is this... support?"

She smiles faintly and touches my knee. "Don't get used to it."

She leaves an hour later, and the casserole is ominously chilling in the fridge. I curl into Chase's lap on the couch.

"She makes me feel like I'm fifteen again," I grumble. "Like I'm still the girl who didn't get into med school but was glad because I didn't want to go to med school. Like I'm still the girl who dyed her blonde hair black just to piss her off."

He strokes my still black hair. "You're not that girl."

"I know. But she... brings it out."

"She brings out the parts of you that you haven't forgiven yet."

Glancing up, I narrow my eyes. "Stop psychoanalyzing me, Chase West."

"I'm just saying." He chuckles.

"You're annoyingly good at it."

"I watch a lot of Dr. Phil." He shrugs.

I snort. "Liar. You do not."

He outright laughs. "Okay. I listen while you watch it."

I grin, then, lean in to kiss him. "I love you."

"Good. I love you, too. Besides, I really did order the food truck wrap."

Wait, what? What does one have to do with the other?

Damnit, Chase...

“It doesn’t have my face on it, does it?” I ask.

Smirking, he shrugs. “Only a little.”

“Chase.”

“Kidding. But not really. It absolutely has your face on it, baby.”

I’m going to kill him.

“Your food truck has my face on it? It’s your food truck. Why doesn’t it have your face?” I ask.

He wiggles his brows. “Who says it doesn’t?”

I snort. “You’re lucky you’re hot.”

“I know.”

Later that night, I’m standing at the kitchen counter, barefoot in his T-shirt, drinking the rest of Mari Lynn’s wine straight from the bottle.

He comes up behind me, slides his arms around my waist, and rests his chin on my shoulder. “Still thinking about her?”

Shaking my head, I turn in his arms. “Thinking about you.” My arms wrap around his waist, and I set the empty bottle on the counter behind him.

“Good thoughts I hope?” he questions.

“The best.” Hugging him tightly, I move my hands up and down his back, not to entice, just to feel him under my palms. “You make the noise stop.”

Reaching up, he brushes my hair back from my cheek and tucks it behind my ear. “And you make me feel like I could survive anything.” He traces my lips with his fingertip.

I smile under his thumb and kiss the pad. “Even my mom?”

He laughs. “Especially your mom.” Moving his hand, he traces my cheekbone.

Standing on my tip-toes, I kiss him. Slowly and deeply. He kisses me back and it’s beautiful and perfect. Sliding my hands down his back, I slip them into his boxer briefs and squeeze his firm ass cheeks. He breaks the kiss, and I grin up at him. “Want to christen the kitchen again?”

He lifts me onto the counter. “God, yes.” He peels my panties down my legs and shoves his boxer briefs down, all within thirty seconds.

Then, he pulls me to the edge of the counter.

My thighs widen and my ankles lock behind his back.

I grip him, stroke him a few times, and line him up.

His cock head slips past my lips and his hips move. He slides in and we move as one.

The counter is christened. And then, he takes me against the fridge. Where the casserole my mother dropped off earlier is sitting. Because we’re insatiable. We’re in love. We’re in a good place. And because we’re thriving .

### SABATAGE AND SEDUCTION

#### ROXY

It starts with an email. The subject line simply says,

“There’s no way you approved this.”

The email is just an attachment.

I open it. It’s a screen-grab from a wedding blog.

There’s a photo of a wedding reception table under my company’s name...

except the table looks like a sad Pinterest fail.

Plastic chairs. Wrinkled and stained linens.

Centerpieces that might be... dead ? The caption reads, “Bold Hearts Events drops the ball again? Guests say reception looked like a clearance sale at Hobby Lobby.”

I stare. Blink. And read it again. And then, again.

“No. No, no, no.” I screech.

Spinning toward my laptop, my fingers fly across the keys. “What the fuck?”

Chase hastily looks up from where he's chopping peppers. "Everything okay, babe?" His tone is anxious.

Whirling around, I glare at him. "Do I fucking look okay, Chase?!"

Setting the knife down in the sink carefully, he holds his hands up. "Um... you look beautiful. Slightly murderous. I think I'm going to hide the knives, but you look beautiful. Uh, what's happened?"

I jab a finger at the screen. "Sabotage! Someone Photoshopped this bullshit! Or used AI for these because they're too fucking stupid to use Photoshop. But this is fake! That's not our wedding. That's not even our linens... those are poly! That's a... a fucking plastic fork."

He walks over, leans down to peer at my laptop screen. "Wow. That's... impressively bad."

"Exactly!" I wave wildly. "Who did this?! Why?!"

He taps his chin thoughtfully. "Think about it." His eyes lock on mine. "Who benefits if your reputation tanks?"

My eyes instantly narrow.

I know exactly who it was. That bitch!

I practically snarl, "Danica."

He nods. "Danica. My first thought. She's still around?" He whistles.

"Yes, Danica Daniels. Rival planner. She used to work for us, but then, she quit and



started her own business... The Wish version. She's evil incarnate.

Do you remember when she tried to pass off a Costco cake as 'bespoke artisan couture?' I mean, I actually like Costco cake, and their whipped buttercream is delicious, but Costco is not couture! "

He whistles. "So, she's still a nightmare."

"She is." I flop dramatically onto the couch.

"She's been trying to poach vendors for months.

And I saw her glaring at me at the expo.

One of my couples called me to say she sought them out and offered to take over their planning after the Bridezilla incident.

It didn't work, so it appears that she's now trying to sabotage us. "

Chase sits beside me and pulls me onto his lap. I settle against him. "Well, I think the first step is proving it's her. Then, if you do, what are you gonna do about it?"

I smile slowly. "First... get proof. Then, burn her to the ground."

He kisses my temple. "That's my girl. But proof first, babe."

The next day, I'm at a venue walkthrough when my phone buzzes with a text.

Mari Lynn

It's 100% Danica.

Two calls this morning rattled her out. She's been dropping snide comments at industry parties. Another client sent screenshots of a chat.

Want me to leak that video of her crying in the walk-in freezer?

I snort and type out my reply.

Roxy

Tempting.

Stick a pin in that one. We'll circle back if we need to.

I've got a better idea.

Closing the text, I plaster on my best PR smile and turn back to the mother of the bride.

"Yes, Mrs. Carlisle, I promise the doves will not poop during the ceremony. I checked with the trainer personally."

She beams. "You're such a professional, Roxy."

Damn right, I am.

My phone buzzes again.

Mari Lynn

Also... Danica's trying to undercut us with the Martinson wedding.

Told them she can do it cheaper.

Sighing, I quickly respond.

Roxy

On it.

She's about to learn why cheap isn't chic.

By the time I get home, I've been on my feet for ten hours. I've fielded seventeen calls, had three vendors try to defect, and one bridesmaid cry on my shoulder and have her eyeliner stain my shirt.

Why? Because her dress is strapless and the other bridesmaids' all have killer boobs while she's sporting ant bites.

My inbox is a battlefield. My feet ache. My brain is fried. I'm ready to collapse. But when I open the door... I smell garlic, butter, and warm bread.

Chase is standing in the kitchen wearing nothing but an apron that says, "Ask me about my meat."

"Dinner's ready, babe," he says, voice low and eyes mischievous.

I blink. "You're naked."

"Technically, I'm wearing an apron and boxer briefs." He grins.

"Is it tied in the back?" I ask, hoping the answer is no.

He spins slowly. It is tied... with a bow above his perfect ass barely concealed under grey boxer briefs.

Groaning, I start crossing the kitchen. "I love you so much."

He grins and shakes his finger at me. "No touching. Sit. I made you garlic butter shrimp, lemon pasta, and chocolate mousse. Eat first." His brow waggles. "Then , touch."

Sighing, I flop into a chair. "Fine. Why are you perfect?"

"Because you've had a shit week." He sets a glass of wine in front of me. "This dish calls for wine, but I also have a pitcher of margaritas in the fridge. And because I like feeding you."

I sip the wine. Watch him plate the food. Watch the way his muscles flex under the apron. Watch the way he moves like he owns the kitchen—and me.

He absolutely owns both.

By the end of dinner, I'm no longer hungry for food. "You're killing me, Mr. West," I murmur, letting my eyes drift over his chest and arms like a caress.

He leans forward staring into my eyes. "That's the plan, Mrs. West." I lick chocolate off my spoon. Slowly. Deliberately. His jaw tightens. "Babe..." he warns.

"Yes?" I ask innocently.

He stands, comes around the table, and lifts me effortlessly. "Time for dessert," he growls.

“Thought I just had it.” I tease.

His eyes are molten as they look into mine. “ You did. Now it’s my turn.”

He carries me into the bedroom. My clothing is quickly removed.

His boxer briefs hit the floor. We don’t make it to the bed.

My feet settle on the floor as my back presses to the wall.

He drops before me and my knee wraps around his neck while his hands grip my hips.

My hands fist his hair and within moments, I’m screaming his name.

Later, tangled in sheets, he kisses my forehead. “You’re gonna win, Rox. No matter what Danica throws at you.”

I smile sleepily. “With you in my corner? I’m unstoppable.”

He pulls me closer. “I always have been. I always will be.”

For the first time all week... I believe it.

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

### THE BACHELORETTE PARTY

ROXY

Mari Lynn

Wear something slutty.

Oh, Knox is hanging with Chase and we're crashing at your place tonight.

Change the sheets in the spare room.

Which is both ominous and deeply on-brand.

I stare at it, sip my iced coffee, and sigh. "Why do I feel like tonight's going to end with someone getting kicked out of a bar?"

Chase looks up from where he's balancing invoices at the kitchen table. "Because you know your friends?"

"Because I know my friends." I toss my phone down. "It's Mari Lynn. When we're together, it's never a quiet night. You and Knox just going to hang here?"

He quirks an eyebrow. "Want me to hide your keys? And whatever he wants to do."

I nod. "Of course, y'all are our emergency pickup. And cool."

He laughs. “Great. Between the two of us, we have bail money. We’ll keep our phones on.”

By 6:45PM, I’m staring at my closet like it’s personally offended me. “She said slutty, but how slutty? Like ‘hot girl summer’ slutty or ‘Vegas divorce party’ slutty?”

Chase appears in the doorway, towel slung around his neck, damp from his post-run shower. My mouth goes dry, and I have to really concentrate to hear him say, “Wear the red dress.”

I blink and my thighs clench. “Huh?”

He laughs and snaps. “Eyes up here, ma’am. I am not a piece of meat, you know. And the red dress.” His eyes darken. “You know the one.”

I grin slowly. “I love your meat, baby.” He rolls his eyes, but his cock twitches under the towel. I drag my finger down my chest and over my stomach. His eyes follow. “Ah, the one that makes people stare. That red dress?”

His nostrils flare. “The one that makes me want to throw you over my shoulder and carry you home before anyone else stares.”

Grabbing it from the closet, I shimmy into it. Skin-tight, thigh-high slit, deep plunging neckline. My red lipstick matches it perfectly.

When I turn around, Chase is practically panting. “Damn, babe.”

“Still letting me leave the house?” I purr.

He exhales, reaches for me, turns me, and pushes it up past my hips.

We're in front of the mirror. I widen my legs and push my panties down.

He enters me swiftly with his hand on the back of my neck.

We watch ourselves as he takes me. I come unraveled and he follows suit, spilling his cum deep inside me.

He pulls my panties back up and says, "You can leave the house because I know you're coming home to me.

I also know that every man that sees you tonight will want you...

and my cum is inside of you." He slaps my ass and whistles as he pulls on a pair of gym shorts.

A knock sounds on the front door. Knox is there, holding a bottle of tequila and a grin. "Y'all have fun. Be safe. Call if you need us." His thumb jerks over his shoulder. "Mari Lynn's waiting in the party bus."

It's a literal party bus.

Neon lights are flashing inside. Music that gets you moving is already thumping. And a giant inflatable penis is tied to the back bumper.

Grinning, I climb aboard and immediately see trouble.

Bree is wearing a tiara and a sash that says "I Regret Nothing." Sasha is dressed to kill. And Whitney looks nice, too.

Mari Lynn shrieks. "Roxy is here, bitches!"



Someone, I think it was Whitney, hands me a drink in a plastic cup shaped like... well, a giant schlong. The straw is also a penis.

We are full penis overboard here. And I love it.

“Drink!” Mari Lynn orders.

“I don’t even know what this is.” I mumble. It’s bright pink.

“It’s called a Flaming Cowboy.” Bree screams, “Watch!” And she holds a lighter to the top. It ignites and I almost drop it, but it quickly extinguishes itself. “Isn’t it cool?” She exclaims.

My eyes are wide. “I’m terrified.”

“Good. Drink.” Whitney yells. “Next up, we’re doing Blow Jobs.”

Uh, what?

Mari Lynn, Bree, and Sasha laugh. I drink.

It tastes like orange, grapefruit, and Redbull.

The first bar is a country-western dive with a mechanical bull.

“We’re not riding the bull! This dress is not for the bull.” I declare.

“We’re absolutely doing the bull,” Mari Lynn counters.

“Do you remember last time I did the bull?” I ask.

Bree and Sasha nod. Mari Lynn says, “You dislocated your knee, flashed the DJ your whole ass coochie, and still scored us all free rounds.”

“Fair point.” I grin.

I did flash the DJ my entire vagina and I did get us multiple rounds of free shots.

Mari Lynn rides first. She stays on five seconds, lands in a heap of panties on full display and boobs practically escaping her corset top. She pulls up her top and grins as she flips off the operator, before bowing like a champion.

Bree does it next—lasts seven seconds, flashes a titty, and somehow looks incredibly hot.

Whitney refuses to get on it. And Sasha says she needs more alcohol before she gets on.

Then, they start a chant and the whole place joins in.

“Roxy! Roxy! Roxy!”

“Damnit.” I down another shot, hand Mari Lynn my earrings, and strut toward the bull. “Fuck it. Let’s do this.” Hiking up my dress, I straddle it and mutter, “Y’all better have my bail money ready. I’m about to get arrested for indecent exposure.”

Seven seconds in, I’m holding on with sheer spite. Ten seconds in, my dress is dangerously close to betraying me. Twelve seconds—the bull jerks. My thigh cramp betrays me, and I fly. I land on another bachelorette wearing a sash that says “Bride to Be” and my boob full on slaps her in the chin.

“Ow,” she groans.

“Sorry, honey.” I fix my girls, peel myself off her lap, and pick a chicken wing out of her hair. “On the bright side, it’s good luck if a stranger’s boob says hello to your face.”

She blinks, clearly wasted. “Is it? You have really great boobs.”

I snort. “Sure. I read it on Pinterest. And thanks, babydoll.”

Mari Lynn is dying laughing and filming the entire thing.

Whitney hands me a margarita. “That was fucking majestic, Rox.”

I bow. “I try.”

We hit up three more bars. Somewhere between the second and third, a group of cowboys start following us. They’re not threatening, just interested. We are not.

“Are we being stalked?” I ask Mari Lynn.

“Probably. But they’re kinda hot.” She retorts.

“That’s not the criteria for safety.” I reply.

“Babe, we’re in a neon bus with a penis balloon. But the driver is also our security and he’s been with us the whole time. We’re safe, girl. I wouldn’t endanger myself or y’all.”

Shit. She is sort of a celebrity. I didn’t even know we had freaking security.

At the third bar, someone dares me to karaoke.

I flip through the book and pick “Before He Cheats.” Obviously. Carrie is a queen.

I drunkenly and publicly dedicate it to Danica and Holden and Mari Lynn films it to add to our socials. Obviously. By the second verse, the entire bar’s singing with me.

Mari Lynn waves a lighter in the air. Bree dances on the table-top while Whitney makes out with one of the cowboys and Sasha tries to control her face.

The cowboys buy us shots.

“I feel powerful,” I declare, slamming my glass down.

“You are powerful,” Mari Lynn yells.

Bree slurs, “You’re Roxy Fucking West, bitch! And I’m fucking getting married!”

“Hell yeah, I am.” I yell. “And fucking right you are!”

We clink glasses.

Somewhere around 1AM, the party bus ends up at a taco truck.

“Do we even know whose idea this was?” I ask, biting into an al pastor.

“Does it matter?” Mari Lynn shrugs, salsa on her cheek.

“No.” I sigh happily. “No, it doesn’t.”

Bree passes out in a lawn chair someone dragged from a patio. Trent shows up and gets Whitney. Sasha calls an Uber and says she’s going home to have drunk sex with Miguel.

Mari Lynn starts line-dancing in the parking lot.

I check my phone. Chase texted me a few times, checking in.

I send him a quick text.

Roxy

I think we need extraction.

Trent just got Whitney who made out with a cowboy and said he would not care.  
They are 100% in an open relationship.

Sasha went home to ride Miguel like a bull.

Bree is passed out and Mari Lynn and I are wasted and big backing tacos.

He replies instantly.

Chase

Knox and I are on the way.

We already knew that. Or we suspected it.

We'll bring Bree back here.

I don't know what big backing means.

I laugh out loud.

God, I love that man.

Fifteen minutes later, his truck pulls up. Knox is in the passenger seat.

Chase leans out the window. “You alive?”

“Barely.” Racing over to the truck, I kiss him through the window.

Knox gets out and goes over to Mari Lynn.

She grins and throws her arms around his neck, kissing him deeply.

He lifts her and carries her back to the truck before opening the back door, setting her on the seat, and buckling her seat belt.

He says, “Going to grab Bree.” He does just that.

He buckles her too as she drunkenly thanks him and passes back out.

He waves at the driver for the party bus and gets in beside Mari Lynn.

Chase eyes me as I slide into the front seat and I buckle up. “Good night?”

Grinning, I nod. “I rode a bull, flashed a bride, sang karaoke, ate tacos, and might be slightly tipsy.”

He chuckles. “Sounds about right.”

I sigh, resting my head on his shoulder. “You’re the best husband ever.”

He kisses my hair. “That’s because I’m planning to peel that red dress off you when

we get home.”

“Deal.”

“Damn man... I’m back here.” Knox grumbles from the back seat.

We all laugh.

When we get home, after helping get Bree onto the couch and saying goodnight to Knox and Mari Lynn, he keeps his promise... and then some. Because he’s Chase and I’m lucky as hell.

Tomorrow, we plot Danica’s downfall. But tonight, I let myself be worshiped.

I feel like a damn masterpiece.

### HIGH-STAKES brIDE

#### ROXY

The universe must hate me or at least be having a grand laugh at my expense. That's the only explanation for how I ended up on a Thursday morning balancing a clipboard, a laptop, and a latte while sprinting across a venue parking lot because the bride's mother just called in a full-scale panic.

"She's locked herself in the bridal suite," Mrs. Castillo wails into my phone. "She's saying she's not coming out. That she's calling off the wedding."

I dodge a golf cart while precariously holding onto everything. "Is the groom there?"

"He's pacing! And sweating! And asking if he should cancel the mariachi band!"

I rub my temple. "Nobody cancel the mariachi. I'm on my way."

I burst into the venue, hair flying, clipboard banging into my thigh, and immediately hear muffled sobs coming from upstairs.

"It's fine. It's fine. It's fine." I chant to myself.

Mrs. Castillo meets me halfway up the stairs. "Roxy, thank God!"

"What's our window?"



“She was supposed to start hair an hour ago.”

I inhale. “Okay. I’ve handled worse.”

Mrs. Castillo eyes me. “Worse than a bride threatening to elope with her ex?”

“Maybe not.”

I knock gently on the bridal suite door. “It’s me, Roxy.”

“Go away!”

“Babe, I can’t do that.” I lean against the door. “You want to talk, or you want tequila?”

A pause, and then, she mumbles, “Both,” from the other side of the door.

“Coming right up.”

I hand Mrs. Castillo my clipboard. “Stall the vendors. Nobody moves until I say go.”

She nods and rushes off to attempt to slow down wedding prep on the actual wedding day. Thursday weddings are never smooth sailing!

I jog downstairs, grab the emergency bar kit from my Jeep—because of course I have one—pour a shot, steal a lime wedge from the actual bar, and head back up.

I set the tequila shot down. “Tequila is outside the door. You have five minutes,” I say. “Then, I’m breaking this door down with my stiletto.”

I lean against the wall and wait for her to take the bait... in this instance, alcohol. A

nervous bride's best friend.

Three minutes later, the door cracks open.

"I can't marry him. I can't get married. What was I thinking?" she whispers. Mascara streaks are clear on her cheeks. "What if it's a mistake?"

Stepping inside, I close the door gently, and sit on the floor beside her, uncaring of wrinkling my pants. "Every bride thinks that. If you weren't a little nervous, I'd be nervous."

"Did you? Think that?" She asks.

Honey, I've been married to Chase for almost four years now, and until recently, I pushed him away and tried to make him leave when I'd run... every single day.

I smile faintly. "I married Chase in a Vegas chapel with a busted AC and a drunk Elvis after a few weeks together."

She blinks. "But you guys are so..."

"Perfect?" I laugh. "Honey, perfection's a baldfaced lie. Marriage is work. Love is messy. And no one is ever prepared or ready. They think they are, but you aren't. Until you're in it, you have no damn idea. But you know what's worse than making the wrong choice?"

She sniffles. "What?"

"Not making one at all." I say quietly.

She stares at me for a long beat. Then, she sits up and swipes at her face. "I want to

marry him.”

I nod. “Let’s get ready to walk down that aisle.”

Chase shows up an hour later with a tray of shrimp and grits empanadas and a smirk.

“Figured you hadn’t eaten.” He says before he leans down to kiss me.

Groaning, I sag against him. “You’re an angel.”

He kisses my temple. “You’re a warrior.”

I eye the tray. “Are you bribing me with carbs?”

“Carbs and sex are my go-to’s.” He flirts.

I grab two. “It’s working.”

He watches as I practically inhale the food, moaning at how amazing it is between bites. His approval for my vocal appreciation is written on his face. “You’re gonna nail this wedding, babe.”

“I’d better,” I mutter, swiping one more empanada. “I see Danica stalking my Instagram again. Probably hoping I drop the cake.”

Chase chuckles. “Want me to ‘accidentally’ block her?”

“Nah. Let her watch me win.” I laugh.

He grins and slaps my ass. “That’s my girl.”

The wedding starts thirty minutes late but is flawless.

The mariachi band plays. The bride glows as she floats down the aisle. The groom cries and mouths, “Thank you.”

The cake arrives intact. The DJ doesn’t play the Chicken Dance. And all guests are having a blast... at a Thursday night wedding.

By 10PM, I’m barefoot, sipping champagne, and watching the couple’s last slow dance under fairy lights before this shindig wraps up. It’s a weeknight.

Chase finds me leaning against the bar and slides an arm around my waist, pulling me into his side. “You did it.”

I lean into him. “I did, didn’t I?”

He kisses the side of my neck. “I’m proud of you.”

I tiredly smile up at him. “Thanks, baby.”

He pulls me closer. “Dance with me.”

“I smell like hairspray and stress and I’m technically working.”

He shrugs. “Still the prettiest girl in the room and you’re taking a break to dance with your hot husband.”

Melting, I let him lead me onto the dance floor because sometimes... the high-stakes bride isn’t the one in white. Sometimes it’s the woman in a headset with a clipboard and a dream.

And tonight... she wins .

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

THE EX RETURNS... AGAIN

ROXY

There's something about a Tuesday morning email labeled "Heads up" that sets off every alarm in my brain.

Especially when it's from Mari Lynn and includes a screenshot... of Holden . At a bridal expo. Giving an interview.

"Exclusive: Entrepreneur Holden Marks to Launch All Inclusive Wedding Planning Company."

Choking on my coffee, I spray my phone. "Oh, hell no."

Chase glances up from where he's scrolling through food truck supply invoices. "What's wrong, babe?"

I flip the laptop toward him. "This motherfu?—."

He squints at the screen and says, "That's... Holden. What the hell?"

"The one and only." I flop onto the couch. "God, he's like a cockroach. You can burn the whole damn building down and he's still scuttling around with a smug smile."

Chase laughs. "You're feeling spicy this morning."

“I’m feeling homicidal.” I snap.

“You should have thrown the chair.” He smirks.

I narrow my eyes. “I should have thrown the damn chair.”

He shrugs. “You’d have looked so hot in prison orange.”

I grin. “I don’t think I’d like prison. I can’t have liner sharp enough to shank someone, no red lipstick, and someone scary would want to sit on my face.”

“He nods. All true... wanna sit on my face?” He waggles his brows at me.

I laugh out loud. “Yes, actually.”

Laying back, he points at his face.

Standing, I drop my shorts and panties and do just that.

By noon, my phone’s blowing up.

Three vendors ask if I’m “partnering” with Holden because he dropped our name.

Fuck that piece of shit.

Two reporters leave messages requesting a quote. One email from a former client forwarding a gossip blog headline: “Did Roxy West Inspire Holden Marks’ Next Business Move?”

I call Mari Lynn. As soon as she answers, I say, “Did you know?”

She groans. “I didn’t. Last I heard he was building some luxury shopping center in Austin with million-dollar apartments on the top floors. This came out of nowhere.”

“Is he targeting me? It feels like this is directed at me. He dropped our name! And the fuck? A one-stop-shop for all things wedding and hiring a celebrity chef to cater them?” I scream.

“Yeah, he did. And I’m working on that. He’s suddenly targeting the entire Dallas wedding scene, babe. But yeah... probably mostly you. What the hell happened at the beach house?”

I rub my temples. “Nothing. Well, he showed up as I told you and busted in on the couple’s retreat. I was going to kick his ass until security removed him. He was pissed and goaded Chase, but what the hell? I swear if he tries to book our clients?—”

“You’ll what?” Mari Lynn deadpans. “Beat him with a fondant rolling pin or stab him in the eye with your stiletto?” I hear the smile in her voice.

“Don’t tempt me.” I growl.

She laughs and I laugh with her at the image in my head.

At 4PM, the office phone rings.

“Bold Hearts Events, this is Roxy.”

A familiar voice purrs through the line. “Hey, Rox.” It makes my skin crawl.

I freeze. “Holden.”



“You saw the article, huh?”

“I did.” I lean back in my chair, crossing my arms. “Why are you name dropping me and my business? What do you want?”

He chuckles. “Can’t I just call to catch up?”

“You tried that... at the beach house you broke into, months ago. If you recall, it didn’t end well... for you. So, I’ll ask again, what the hell do you want?” I’m flipping a pen on my desktop and Melody has perched on the edge so she can listen, too.

He exhales. “Fair. Well... I’ve got a tasting event next week. Soft launch for my new event catering brand. I wanted to extend an invite.”

Sure you did?

I laugh dryly. “Why? So you can show me how much more money you have now? Not interested.”

“Come on, Rox.” His voice is low, pleading in the way that used to get me to do whatever he wanted. “We were good together once. We can be again. I miss you.”

Absolutely the fuck not.

I grit my teeth. “No thanks. We were toxic as hell, and you know it.”

“Maybe.” A pause. “But we were also fire.”

I stare at the ceiling and exhale before saying as clearly as I can, “I’m fire with my husband and I’m hanging up now.”

“Rox—”

Click.

Dropping the phone onto the desk, I scream into my arm.

Chase walks in the front door with a smoothie just then. “Do I want to know?”

I sigh and wave at the phone. “Holden. He invited me to his launch party for his new event catering thing.”

Melody stands and says she’s heading out for lunch and will be back in half an hour.

Chase nods at her and sets the smoothie down before leaning against my desk and crossing his arms. “He wanted to invite you ... Interesting. You going?” His tone is different than I expected.

I glance at him. “Do you want me to go?”

Looking down at me, he smiles. Slowly. “Of course, I want you to go... and I want you to steal his shine. Need a plus one?”

I blink up at him. “You’re dangerous.”

He leans down and kisses me deeply. My toes curl as his tongue slides over mine before his lips cling. He pulls back and I’m totally breathless as he growls, “You love it.”

“Damn right I do.” I mutter and grab his head, pulling his face back down to mine.

The night of the event, I wear a black satin jumpsuit with a plunging neckline and a

blazer thrown casually over my shoulders. My dark hair is in soft waves. My makeup is flawless, and my red lips are on point and match my stilettos.

Chase, wearing a tailored black suit that looks like it was designed just for him, whistles low. "Babe. You're gonna give him a heart attack."

"Good." I grab my clutch. "Ready to watch me burn down the room, baby?"

Taking my hand, he grins. "Lead the way, wife of mine."

The venue is packed. Reporters. Bloggers. Influencers. A few familiar vendors who wave sheepishly when they spot me.

Holden's at the center of it, basking in the spotlight, standing next to his celebrity chef, who's wearing a designer chef's jacket. He spots me instantly and makes a show of coming over. "Roxy Ruiz!" He opens his arms theatrically. "The legend herself."

My maiden name... really?

I smile coolly. "Holden. And it's Roxy West as you well know."

He waves his hand as though it was a simple mistake before kissing both of my cheeks. "God, you look incredible." He gestures to the man next to him. It's the guy who lost to Knox on Hottest Chef. "Are you familiar with my chef, Easton Calibre?"

Chase steps forward, sliding an arm around my waist and pulling me into his side. "She always does." He holds his hand out to Easton. "Oh, yes, I believe you know our friend Knox Levi."

Damn, baby. Savage.

Holden's smile tightens. "Ah. Chase. Good to see you, man."

Easton smiles. It's friendly. "I know Knox well. It's nice to meet friends of his."

"You too," Chase says calmly to both men. "Congrats on the catering gig."

"Thanks." Holden gestures grandly. "Big dreams, right?"

I sip my champagne while watching him over the rim of my glass. "Is that what this is? Or just another flex?"

He grins. "Why not both, Rox?"

We circle each other verbally all night. Chase stays glued to my side, quiet, solid, the rock I cling to without even realizing.

He slips off to the restroom about the time the dessert trays are walked around. Holden, as though waiting for this moment, corners me by the champagne tower.

"You're really not going to work with me, Rox?" he asks softly. "Think of how good we could be."

I look him dead in the face and wonder why I ever thought his too light eyes and thin lips were attractive. "Not in this lifetime, Holden." He reminds me of a snake.

He exhales. "God, Rox. You're the one that got away, and I'd do anything to get you back."

Is he serious right now?

I smile faintly. "No, Holden. I'm the one that walked away, just like I'm doing now."

I leave him standing there, feeling his gaze bore holes into my back. I nod at Easton on the way out. I hope he knows who he's agreed to work with.

Chase meets me at the door.

"Well?" he asks.

I smile "Let's go home, baby."

He kisses me hard right in the doorway. He gets heated. When our lips retreat, he mutters, "My favorite words.

That night, tangled in sheets, his hand tracing lazy circles on my back, I whisper, "Thanks for being there tonight."

He kisses my shoulder. "Always. You couldn't get rid of me when you tried, so I'm damn sure not going anywhere now that you're holding on, Roxy West."

I'm not letting you go, Chase.

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:05 am*

TRIAL RUN PARENTS

ROXY

Vivian

Reminder, you said y'all would keep the kids today.

Rolling over, I squint at the phone screen and try to blink the sleep from my head.  
“Huh? What kids?”

Chase groans into the pillow. “My niece and nephew, of course. She’s got work and the babysitter canceled.”

I sit up slowly. “Wait. We’re babysitting?”

He rubs his face. “I told her we could handle it.”

I blink again. “Chase. We’re not even equipped to keep a cactus alive.”

He grins sleepily. “Babe. It’s two kids. We can handle it.”

I stare at him. “How old are they again? They’re like little.”

“Four and six.” He deadpans watching me.

“Four and six?!” I screech.

What the hell?

Who would give me a small human and think I was capable of taking care of it?

This is going to be so bad.

He kisses my temple and chuckles. “You’ve handled nightmare brides, Rox. You can handle a couple of hellions. We’ll be fine.” His tone says he’s second-guessing that confidence.

I flop back onto the bed. “This is gonna end in a hellacious mess and horror.”

At 9:30, Chase’s sister drops them off. Bella is a whirlwind in a tutu clutching a stuffed frog that weirdly looks like a stubby penis. Liam is solemnly clutching a toy dinosaur and looking at me like he’s uncertain of my abilities.

Me, too, lil dude. Me, too.

“Be good for Uncle Chase and Aunt Roxy,” Chase’s sister calls as she practically runs out the door.

“Bye, Mommy!” Bella yells, immediately dumping an entire container of beads I didn’t even see her with onto the floor. They spread into a ten-foot area.

I stare at the mess. “That feels symbolic .”

Chase laughs and ruffles Liam’s hair. “What do you guys wanna do first?”

Liam shrugs. “TV?”

Bella tugs on my hand. “I wanna bake cupcakes!”

Chase looks at me with a twinkle in his eye. “Kitchen’s yours, babe.”

I point at him. “You’re helping.”

He salutes. “Yes, chef.”

I mutter, “You’re the cook. I just look hot beside you.”

Half an hour later, I walk into the kitchen after sending an email. My eyes widen. It looks like a frosting bomb exploded. I think one did.

Bella’s face is covered in pink buttercream and sprinkles. Liam is also licking a spoon. And Chase is attempting to wipe batter... off the ceiling.

The hell? How did that get up there?

“Did you let her use the mixer unsupervised?!” I ask.

He shrugs and continues to clean, unaware of just how fine he looks with his hair all disheveled, frosting on his cheek and the front of his shirt, and flour on his nose. “She said she’d done it before.”

I blink at him. “You asked her? She’s four!”

He grins. “Prodigy?”

“Chaos goblin.” I mutter.

Bella beams proudly holding out a cupcake with a pound of icing and half a bottle of sprinkles towards me. “I made this for you!”



I sigh, unable to stop the huge smile that spreads over my face. “You did? Just for me?”

That is the sweetest thing. Ever.

She nods enthusiastically. “I made it pretty all by myself.”

I take a huge bite.

At noon, we order pizza from the pizzeria on the corner.

At 12:30, Chase and Liam build a blanket fort while Bella insists on giving me a “makeover.” Which apparently means super pigmented shimmery eyeshadow that covers my entire lid up into my brows, black eyeshadow as blush, ten different lip glosses that continue halfway down my chin, and a tiara.

When Chase peeks into the bathroom, he bursts out laughing. “Babe... you look like a drag queen and a clown had sex and made a baby.”

I glare. “Say that again and you’re sleeping in the fort tonight.”

He waggles his brows, rakes his gaze over me, and winks. “Only if you join me. We can role play.”

I bust out laughing and mutter, “Something is wrong with you. You’re into drag queens and clowns now?”

“I’m into you.” He blows me a kiss.

After lunch and a triple face cleansing, we walk them to the public park near our place.

Bella immediately bolts toward the swings, Liam climbs halfway up the jungle gym and freezes.

“I’m stuck!” he calls, his voice full of six-year-old fear.

Chase jogs over while I stay with Bella, pushing her on the swings. They’re next to each other, so I hear him talk to Liam. “Buddy, you’re not stuck. You’re just scared. I’ve got you. Come down the same way you got up.”

Liam whimpers. “I’m too scared. I’m gonna fall.”

Chase shakes his head. “You’re not gonna fall. You got up there, you just have to take your time to get down. You can do it. And if you do fall, I’ll catch you. Promise.” He gently guides him down, encouraging him the whole way while he crouches beside him, ready to catch him if he does fall.

“Brave doesn’t mean you’re not scared, buddy,” Chase says softly. “It means you do it anyway. And I’m right here.”

Oh, my God... that is so sexy.

Liam nods solemnly and slowly makes his way down. When he reaches the ground, he jumps around and screams, “I did it! I did it all by myself, Uncle Chase,” proud of himself.

Chase hugs him and ruffles his hair. “You did! I knew you could do it. Good job, buddy!”

My heart squeezes.

God, he’s gonna be such a good dad.

That is so damn hot.

I blink hard.

And realize for the first time... I really do want this... with him .

By 4PM, both kids are passed out on the couch. Both are sprawled with arms and legs everywhere, tangled in blankets, and their angelic little faces are absolutely adorable.

I curl up in the chair with Chase, resting my head on his chest as we both watch them sleep.

“Well?” he murmurs.

I smile. “We survived.”

He chuckles. “We crushed it.” He looks down at me. “Today was a good day.”

I chuckle softly. “You were amazing with them, Chase. And it was a good day.”

He kisses my forehead. “Don’t shortchange yourself, Rox. You were too.”

I trace lazy circles on his chest before I freeze and quietly say. “I want this... more moments like today.”

He stills for a moment before asking, “What do you mean? You want to babysit more? Or do you actually want... kids?”

Lifting my head, I meet his gaze. His dark eyes are vulnerable and filled with so much emotion.

I smile and kiss his chin. “Both... I would love to keep them again. And... I want... our own kids... I know we briefly mentioned it at the beach house, but... I do want this. For so much of our life together, I’ve been trying to make you leave...

but you didn’t... but... do you- do you want kids with me, Chase? ”

His smile spreads slow and tender. He nods. “I do. I’ve always wanted kids. I’ve wanted kids with you... a future with you. I said that and I meant it. I was just waiting for you to realize you wanted it... no, you deserved it, too.”

We kiss sweetly. Then, we sit in the quiet for a while, just watching the kids sleep.

I want kids with Chase. He wants them with me.

I want everything with this man.

When his sister arrives to pick them up, Bella doesn’t want to leave. She hugs my knees and looks up at me. “I love you, Aunt Roxy.”

Swallowing back the lump in my throat, I bend down and tap her nose with my finger. “I love you, too, munchkin. You can come spend time with us anytime. I had fun today. Thank you for taking care of me.”

Her nose wrinkles and she blinks at me. “I had fun, too. And you were a good girl.”

We all laugh.

Liam high-fives Chase as we walk them to the door. He pauses and turns back, “You’re the best uncle ever.”

Chase grins, “Thanks buddy. You’re a pretty awesome nephew.”

I swipe at a tear as they leave.

Chase pulls me close, kissing the side of my neck. “We’d rock this parenting thing, huh?”

I chuckle. “I think we would actually. After I nap for a month.”

He laughs and closes the door. “Deal. But first... how about we practice baby making so we get a really good nap after?”

Tangled in his arms, after we practiced the hell out of making babies, I realize...

The future might be messy but with Chase.... it’s also gonna be magic.

And I’m ready to live this life of ours to the fullest.

I’m not pushing or running anymore.

I’m all in.

brEAKING GROUND

ROXY

The day starts with a knock at the bathroom door and a shit-eating grin on Chase's face.

"Come with me," he says. His eyes are dancing and he's practically bouncing on his toes.

What the hell?

What is going on?

I squint at the time on my phone. "Babe, it's 7:13AM. I haven't had caffeine. My hair looks like a crime scene. What are you doing?"

"Doesn't matter." He grabs my hand and pulls. "Come on."

Groaning, I let him lead me. "Where? Chase, I don't even have a damn bra on." I'm exasperated.

He kisses my temple. "You'll see. I'll shield your boobies." Grabbing a hoodie from the hall closet, he hands it to me.

I mumble, "It's like September, babe. It's a bazillion degrees outside." But I slip it on and shove the sleeves to my elbows.

Ten minutes later, we pull into a mostly empty lot near downtown. Something is gleaming white in the early morning sun.

I look closer and gape. “Is that?—”

He beams as he jumps out and runs around the hood to pull open my door. “Yup. She’s mine.”

Jumping down, I face him, cupping his cheeks. “Chase West, is this your food truck?!”

“Yup.” He throws his arms wide. “Finally finalized the lease to park her here. Signed the paperwork. Wrapped the loan. She’s officially mine.”

I squeal, “Babe!,” launching myself at him,

He catches me midair. My legs wrap around his waist as he spins me around. “You like her?” His hands are on my ass.

“I love her!” I lean down, kissing him hard. When we come up for air, I almost yell, “She’s perfect. You’re perfect. This is perfect.”

He laughs. “You haven’t seen her yet. Want the grand tour?”

“Hell yes.”

Inside, the truck smells faintly of new paint and big dreams.

Counters gleam. Some appliances shine. The layout’s cozy but completely functional. Everything has a place and a purpose.

He walks me through every detail, pointing out where the fryer he's ordered is going, shows me composite sketches of the cabinets he's installing, and even pulls up the listing for the chalkboard menu on his phone.

"Her name is Foxy Roxy," he adds casually.

I freeze. "What?"

He grins. "Actually, it's called Foxy Roxy's Fork Yeah! After you, obviously."

He named his food truck after me?

He's too much. He loves me too much.

"Chase..."

As if he's a mind reader, he asks, "Too much? Too late to change it now. It's registered."

I blink fast, trying not to start sobbing in the middle of this stupidly amazing food truck with the crazy man that married me, and no matter what I've done to make him leave, he's been steadfast and stubborn in his adoration.

I swallow. "It's just... you're crazy. Why do you love me so much you incredible, sexy man?"

He steps closer. "I am crazy. About you, Rox. And the answer is easy... you're my everything. Duh."

Damnit, Chase West.



I fucking love you.

Throwing my arms around his neck, I hop onto the counter, grip his shirt with my fists, and pull him close. I lick the seam of his lips and say, “I love you.”

He mutters, “I know,” and crashes his mouth to mine.

Clothing is shed fast. The door is unlocked.

I’m pretty sure his truck is wide open in the middle of downtown, and we’re getting lost in each other.

His mouth is everywhere. He cradles my breasts in his palms and sucks one peaked nipple into his mouth as his thumb flicks the other before he switches it up.

Releasing one with a pop, he growls, “See, no need for a damn bra.”

I laugh before it ends on a moan as he yanks me to the edge of the counter.

My bare ass is on it and he’s kneeling between my thighs.

His mouth finds me, and I pull his face deeper into me.

His tongue, fingers, and lips leave me wailing and bucking on the counter.

Fisting his hair, I yank as hard as I can.

He stands, and as he enters me, I slam my mouth against his.

He fucks me with the same tempo as our tongues.

My nails are digging into the tattooed muscles of his shoulders as his fingers dig into my hips so tightly, I'm going to bruise. I don't care.

The slapping of our flesh and the joining of our hips bounces around the small trailer. It echoes and reverberates. I moan, "Chase... baby ... Ohhhh, Chase... Yes, baby ... Yes."

He groans and grunts. The angle of my being on the counter has him hitting my sweet spot with every thrust and it vibrates against my clit...

I can't... Leaning forward, I bite the hell out of his shoulder as I come.

It triggers him and he bellows, "Rox... Oh, Roxy... I fucking love you... " as he shatters.

He pulses inside of me as he fills me, and I continue to tremble.

My eyes slowly open and I snicker as I glance around. "Babe... we just christened your food truck... in a parking lot..."

Pressing a kiss to the curve of my breast, he chuckles, "Of course we did. I mean, we're us."

Slapping his shoulder, I mutter, "Gonna get arrested for public indecency or some shit."

Chase laughs outright, "Nah. We're inside the truck. Besides, I'll feed the police for free. With my food and your face, we're golden, Rox."

After we get dressed, we grab the antiseptic wipes from Chase's toolbox and clean everything. Then, we spend an hour inside, sketching ideas on the counters with dry-

erase markers and arguing over menu names.

“No, babe, you can’t name a burger ‘The Wedding Crasher.’” Chase exclaims.

“Why not? It’s fun!” I retort cheekily, loving the banter between us.

“It sounds like it comes with divorce papers.” He growls.

I laugh. “I could never serve you with any.”

He mutters, “We should name it Dressed Hot Mess, after you.”

By the time we lock up the truck, my cheeks hurt from smiling and laughing.

He laces our fingers together and walks me back to his truck “Can you believe it? It’s happening.”

I hop into the seat as he opens the door but wrap my arms around his neck and hold him close. He leans in, resting his forehead against mine. “I’ve never believed in anything harder, baby.” I kiss him.

Back home, I curl into him on the couch.

“Next step’s inspection,” he says. “Then, finishing the wrap design and I hopefully get my liquor license.”

I nuzzle his shoulder sleepily. “What’s the design?”

He grins while watching me. “Your face.”

“Chase! Are you serious?”

Is he? Is my face really on his food truck?

He nods. “Dead serious. It’s Foxy Roxy’s Fork Yeah! Why wouldn’t your gorgeous face be on it? But you’re illustrated and holding a margarita in one hand and a shrimp and grits empanada on a fork in the other.”

I shake my head, laughing. “You’re being serious.”

He shrugs. “I already told you I was dead serious, babe. You love me.”

Pressing a kiss to his jaw before settling back into his arms and sighing, I mutter, “God help me, I do.”

We take a midnight drive and end up at the roof of the parking garage overlooking the food truck lot. The truck glows under the streetlamp, gleaming like a promise.

Chase hands me a bottle of Dos Equis from the cooler in the bed of the truck. “Thanks for being here, Roxy.”

I clink bottles with him and lean into his shoulder, “No where I’d rather be, baby.”

He leans over, kissing me slowly. When he leans back he says, “I’m glad. Someday, it’ll be more than a truck.” His tone is sure.

I smile. “Someday, it’ll be an empire.”

It will. I believe in him.

In this moment, with his arm around me and his dreams in front of us, I know with certainty, whatever we build... we’ll succeed. Because we’ll build it together.

RUNNING SCARED... AGAIN

ROXY

I'm lying in bed, staring at the ceiling, and Chase's breathing is steady beside me. But there's a weight, a whisper, a quiet panic sliding under my skin that I just can't shake.

What if I can't do this?

What if I ruin him?

What if everything good between us... isn't enough to hold?

Things are too good. Too easy.

I slide out of bed. My feet are cold against the hardwood as I softly pad to the kitchen. With shaking hands, I pour a glass of water and stare out the window at the streetlight glowing across the street.

The outline of the food truck glows under a similar light in my head. It's beautiful. It's everything he's worked for. And somehow, my brain twists that into pressure. Into fear.

What if I'm the weak link?

The very thing that causes his dreams to crash and burn.

“Rox?”

I turn. Chase is standing in the doorway, sleep-ruffled, shirtless, worry evident within his eyes.

“Can’t sleep?” he asks softly.

I shake my head. “Just thinking.”

Crossing the room, he pulls me into his arms. “Thinking what, babe? What’s racing through that gorgeous head of yours?” He kisses my temple.

I inhale and hold it before exhaling quickly and blurting out, “I don’t want to mess this up.” My voice cracks.

He exhales. “Mess up what exactly, baby?”

“Us.” My voice cracks. “Your dream. Everything. ”

His finger settles under my chin, and he tilts my head, wanting me to look at him. I stare at the floor, too scared to look into the eyes that I know will be full of love... for me. “Hey. Look at me. Please.”

I do. My head slowly raises.

His lips curve up, but his expression is wry.

“I need you to stop, Rox. You’re overthinking and creating disaster scenarios again.

You’re not messing anything up,” he says firmly.

“You’re the reason I’m doing this. You’re my why.

And if it fucking fails, so be it. But it won’t be because of you .

I’ll start over with something new. Don’t you know by now...

you are my dream.” His head cocks though his gaze stays connected with mine. “It’s not going to fail though, babe.”

I swallow hard. “I know... I believe in you. And I know I’m talking crazy... You’re just... you . I’ve never had something this good. You love me and I don’t know why. I’m scared one day you’ll wake up and realize you don’t need me and I’m more trouble than I’m worth. That terrifies me, Chase.”

He brushes his thumbs under my eyes and shakes his head.

“Baby, I wish you could see what I see when I look at you. I love you... because how the hell could I not love you? You’re smart.

You’re driven and so fucking brilliant. You’re sunshine and a hurricane mixed with some good old fashioned southern crazy.

And I love that about you. From the first moment you orbited my space, you stole the damn air.

You frustrate me and you inspire me, and you make me insane with desire that makes me want to be inside you every second of every single day.

All while I also want to shield you and protect you even though you don’t need me to.

You’re literal chaos. But you know what? ”

“What?” I whisper.

“You are the perfect chaos. You’re my chaos and you make this life worth living.

When we’re ninety, I’m still going to chase you around the kitchen in my walker because I know that I’ll be just as in love with you then as I am right now.

I’m going to be that freaky old man who still gets hard for his still smoking wife while the grandkids scream about how disgusting we are all while they dream that they find a love like ours. ”

Oh, Chase.

I exhale. “You always know what to say.”

He grins softly. “It’s a gift.”

I laugh, burying my face in his chest.

“Come back to bed,” he murmurs. “We’ll worry about everything tomorrow.”

For tonight... that’s enough.

The next morning, Chase leaves a sticky note on the coffee maker.

You’re braver than you think. And hotter than you know.

My wife, that’s you, is a BADASS!

XO – Chase



I smile as I sip my coffee in our quiet house before heading to get ready to meet Chase at the food truck.

Maybe I'm not failing as badly as I think.

We're standing inside the food truck as the health inspector walks through, carefully going over every centimeter and jotting stuff down on her clipboard. .

"You planning to pass this?" she asks without looking up from the fryers.

Chase grins. "You bet we are."

She drags a finger down her checklist. "Clean surfaces. Food-safe storage. Proper sink installation."

Chase follows every note. I hover anxiously, jotting down my own reminders, asking questions, trying not to vibrate out of my skin.

Finally, she nods, hugging the clipboard to her chest. "I'm approving your provisional permit. Get your final signage up by the end of the week."

We exhale together.

Chase pulls me into a hug. "We did it, babe."

"You did it," I say proudly.

"No, we ." He kisses my cheek.

That night, we test recipes in the truck.

I perch on the counter, tasting angus beef with sautéed green chilies sliders, chipotle and lime fries, and Chase's secret sauce. Chase works the grill and the fryer simultaneously. His shirt is damp with sweat and humidity, and his smile is wide.

"What should we call this one?" he asks, handing me a fried shrimp and andouille taco.

I take a bite. "Mmm. Call it the 'The Perfect Mistake.'"

He laughs. "Babe, you're crazy."

"You love it." I retort, scarfing down the rest of the taco.

"Damn right I do." He mutters before he kisses me, tasting lime and spice and everything us.

I'm no longer scared... I'm just ready... for whatever comes next.

### THE FIREWORKS

#### ROXY

The fireworks start before the fireworks start.

It's the morning of the grand opening. Chase's food truck.

His dream. The lot's decorated with string lights, chalkboard signs, and red picnic tables.

There's a playlist blaring from a Bluetooth speaker.

Other vendors are arriving. My phone is buzzing with last-minute deliveries and texts and reminders from Melody. I'm working offsite today.

Chase is pacing, "I don't think I'm ready." He's about to wear a hole through the floor.

Tucking my clipboard under my arm, I slide in front of him. "Babe... shut your sexy mouth. You're more than ready."

"What if no one shows up?" He questions with his forehead furrowed.

I grin. "Baby, have you not looked outside? You've already got a line."

He spins, grinning as he sees the cluster of people hovering on the sidewalk, all

craning their heads to peek at the chalkboard menu.

He exhales shakily. “Holy shit, Rox. There are customers out there.”

I laugh aloud, “Yup, there are. And they’re going to love your food just as much as I do.” I take his hands in mine. “You’ve got this, babe.”

Leaning down, he kisses me. Our lips cling before he pulls back. “You’re staying, right?”

I snicker. “Are you trying to get rid of me?”

By noon, the line is wrapped clean around the block.

I text Mari Lynn and Melody.

Roxy

I’m out of pocket for a bit!

Helping Chase at the Grand Opening.

Y’all handle it.

I’ll check in later.

My phone lights up.

Mari Lynn

Good luck! I know he’s going to kill it!

I'll be there as soon as we wrap up this show promo shit and I can slip out!

Another text comes in.

Melody

Kill it!

And save me some empanadas!

I work the window, scribbling orders, laughing with customers, and hyping the new specials, especially the Roxy Deluxe while Chase prepares the orders.

Chase plates tacos, empanadas, sliders, and tamale balls at record speed. He's hot and sweaty but his grin is wide.

"Order up!" he calls.

I spin, passing plates, wiping counters, throwing thumbs ups and "thank yous" at every 'this is amazing' I hear and reminding people to post photos on socials and tag us.

Mari Lynn swings by mid-shift, sunglasses perched on her head, camera crew in tow.

"Look at you, boss bitch," she teases, snapping photos. "Our event planning and Chase's food truck... didn't I say we were gonna own this town?"

I grin tired, but happy. "Remind me of that when my feet fall off and I pass out on this counter."

She hugs me. "Knox is sorry he can't be here. He's shooting some solo stuff for the

show. But we're both proud of you. Proud of Chase. Proud of this."

I glance back toward Chase. He looks up. Our eyes lock. And in that moment, the whole chaotic, beautiful mess makes sense.

We're doing it.

We're really doing it.

His dream is alive and so is mine.

By mid-afternoon, we've sold out of everything.

Chase collapses onto a folding chair, guzzling water.

I plop beside him. My feet are throbbing, but my heart is full.

"You killed it," I murmur.

He nudges my knee. "We killed it."

We sit in the quiet for a while, watching the sun sink behind the building that make up the backdrop behind the truck. The lot hums with lingering guests, still sipping Chase's signature margaritas, as string lights blink overhead.

Suddenly, somewhere across the city, a firework explodes in the early evening sky. Chase jumps with a start at the unexpected noise, throwing his water into his own face. As water drips off his nose, he tilts his head and raises his brow. "Did you... plan that?"

Grinning, I try not to laugh. "I did not. But you can pretend I did."

Another firework explodes in pinks and oranges. Then, another fills the night with hues of blue.

He laughs, pulling me into his lap after ripping off his soaked t-shirt. "I'll pretend you did, Rox. I think you just wanted to get me to strip out here."

I smirk, "Well, keep your pants on. That would sure as hell bring in the customers, though it might also bring in the police. They would have to take me to jail for fighting a thirsty hoe for lusting after my husband. But I did want your first day to be magic. So, I'll take credit for the fireworks.

"I press a kiss to his chest. "And appreciate your pecs."

He laughs aloud before kissing me, deeply.

I melt into him, wrapping my arms around his neck and pouring everything he makes me feel into the kiss.

Leaning back, he rests his forehead on mine.

"It already is. You're my firecracker, Rox.

You're the magic." He chuckles. "You're also the reason I can't get up anytime soon.

I'd be able to sword fight anyone out here with my dick. "

I laugh heartily against his lips before kissing him again and intensifying the issue.

Chase groans inside of my mouth as the fireworks burst above us, painting the sky in sparks and color that I can still see even though my eyes are closed.

I soak it in.

For the first time in forever, I'm not waiting for the other shoe to drop.

I'm right in the middle of the fire.

And loving every second of it.



### THE PLOT TWIST

#### ROXY

I wake up to my phone violently vibrating on the nightstand.

Mari Lynn's name flashes across the screen.

"Hello?" I croak, rubbing my eyes. "What's wrong? Are you okay?"

"Emergency," she practically snarls. "Turn on channel six. Right now."

What the hell?

Leaning over Chase's side of the bed, I slap around on his nightstand, fumbling for the remote. Finding it, I jab the power button. The TV turns on.

A news anchor smiles brightly. "In other news this morning, investor Holden Marks has just purchased more property with plans to open a brick-and-mortar restaurant Downtown... adjacent to a popular new food truck."

I sit straight up and scream out in horror, "No ...." just as a shot appears of the building behind... Chase's food truck.

Holden is smug and smirking on my television screen. He's standing right in front of the building. The For Sale sign is gone and a giant Coming Soon sign has replaced it. A sign with Holden's fucking face on it.

Chase walks in, towel around his waist, damp from the shower. “I heard you shriek, babe. What’s wrong?”

I point at the TV and growl. “This piece of shit... I swear... I loathe him... He’s moving in next door to your food truck.”

Chase freezes as he stares at the tv. His jaw clenches as he mutters, “Seriously?”

“He’s doing this on purpose.” I throw the remote down and it bounces off the bed. “He’s trying to steal your thunder because he didn’t get his way with me.”

Chase exhales slowly and pinches the bridge of his nose. “Well, he thinks I stole his girl. And we did just goad him at the launch for his event catering shit.” His eyes meet mine, hard and determined. “Let him try.”

What?

“Let him try?”

How is he so fucking calm?

I blink at him. “You’re... not mad?”

“Oh, I’m mad as hell,” he says calmly. “But I’m not worried.”

I shake my head. “You’re calm as hell and I’m ready to go rip his limbs off his body and beat him with them. You’re infuriatingly Zen, husband of mine.”

He grins. “And you love it.”

“Damn right I do.” I mutter and crook my finger at him. He smiles wider, drops the

towel, and takes me to another galaxy.

Chase is prepping for the lunch crowds and I'm sitting at the small desk, working on my laptop and my phone when Mari Lynn and Knox show up at the truck.

"First off, we have news. Danica's company just filed for bankruptcy.

It's everywhere this morning. She owes money to everyone.

In fact, she hasn't even paid her two employees in three months.

That's why she was so desperate. I almost feel sorry for her.

Almost." Mari Lynn declares as she looks at me.

I just raise my brow. She continues, "And second, we brought eggs. Let's egg the shit out of that expensive car over there." She nods at Holden's hot rod.

Knox deadpans. "I'll cover by distracting anyone and everyone while you two put shrimp peels inside of his rims."

I laugh. "I see Mari Lynn has rubbed off on you, Knox. Who even are you?"

"He's a man in love. Plus, he gets that freaky good poonanie, and he's putty in my hands." Mari Lynn shrugs.

Chase snickers as he cleans the already clean grill. "Y'all both have that voodoo pussy. But no egging or shrimping will be necessary. He's gonna throw money at us. We're gonna win with flavor. And as for Danika... karma doesn't play around."

Voodoo pussy?

I smirk. “That’s my man.”

Mari Lynn rolls her eyes. “Fine. One bitch down, one to go. We’ll be the mature ones.”

Knox chuckles. “Mostly,” and kisses the side of her head. Then, he nods at Chase.

That night, Chase pulls me onto the roof of the truck.

We sit side by side, legs dangling over the edge, sipping beer.

“I’m proud of you,” I say softly as I lean into his side.

His arm tightens around my waist and his finger draws lazy circles on my hip. He glances down at me. “For what?”

For everything. For being you.

But I say, “For not letting him get under your skin.”

He nudges my shoulder. “Well, I already won. I got you. Besides, your crazy keeps me grounded.”

I turn to face him. “That literally makes no sense. My crazy has kept us in chaos for years, Chase. Yet, you still think I’m a prize.”

He leans in, “You are .” He kisses me slowly and deeply before smiling down at me. “No matter what he does... he can’t take this away from us.”

I rest my head on his shoulder though my body is humming. “Exactly.” I murmur.

As the city hums below us, it comes to me.

Holden can try whatever in an attempt to beat us. He can compete. He can build walls and freaking restaurants right next to us. But he can't touch what we've built, because Chase is right.

We're already winning.

We have each other.

And nothing's stopping us now.

### THE TRUTH COMES OUT

#### ROXY

It's the quiet after the storm that always scares me.

A week has passed since Holden's big announcement. Every day the construction trucks rumble next door. Every day the sign on his building gets brighter, flashier, and more obnoxious. And every day, Chase keeps his cool.

Me? Not so much.

"I swear to God, if I see one more of his 'Opening Soon' flyers under the windshield wipers of your truck, I'm gonna lose it. Forget throwing a chair at his head, I'm going to swing a mallet," I mutter, peeling off the latest one and crumpling it into a ball.

Chase just smiles and shakes his head, "He needs the advertising, babe. And he's not worth your energy. Save it for me... for later."

"You are too calm." I retort.

He kisses my cheek and slaps my ass. "I have better food. We've got better people. And... I have the one thing he wants most of all... you. Let him play his game. He's giving small dick energy."

I huff. "You do have me. And he does have a smaller dick than you. In fact, I think you should show it to me... right now."

He laughs jubilantly. “While I would absolutely love to do that, I cannot. I open in half an hour and those dude’s working on his place are far too close. Besides, you said you had to head to the office at ten and it’s two minutes til. Raincheck.”

This sexy mofo just told me I get a raincheck on his dick.

Bet your ass, I’m cashing that bitch in later.

Saturday looms hot and humid. I have no events and it’s the soft opening for Holden’s restaurant.

After riding to the truck with Chase, we watch the crowd spill in. Cameras flash and socialites pose. His celebrity chef beams and waves to the crowd. Every news station within a fifty-mile radius is here.

Chase forms burger patties, rolls tamale balls quietly, and fills his empanadas with his jaw clenched tight. No one is here. But then again, the swarms of influencers and big wigs are blocking access to us.

“You okay?” I ask, sliding beside him and wrapping my arms around his waist.

“Yeah,” he says softly. “Just... didn’t think it’d feel like this.”

“Like what?” I ask.

“Like watching someone throw a parade next to your lemonade stand and the throws are free drinks.”

Cupping his cheeks, I make him look at me. My fingertips smooth the lines between his brows. “You’re not a lemonade stand, baby. You’re the whole damn block party.”

He laughs hoarsely. “I love you, Rox.”

I nod. “Good. Because I’m about to steal his customers.” I fluff my boobs, smooth my black pants, and check my lipstick before winking and heading out of the truck.

Twenty minutes later, a nice-dressed couple with phones and selfie lights strolls by. I smile at them. “How are y’all doing today?”

“What’s this?” the woman asks, looking over the truck.

“Best Mexican American with a Cajun flare food in D-Town,” I chirp.

“What an interesting combination. It’s good, huh?” The female says.

I hand her a sample of the shrimp and grits empanada and another of the fried shrimp and andouille soft taco. “Taste for yourself.”

She takes a bite of the empanada. Her eyes widen and she moans as she chews.

She points at her man. “You have to taste this.” He takes a sample of Chase’s Tamale Balls.

She tries the taco next. “Holy—this is better than what we just paid \$80 for. Far better. The flavors meld beautifully. It’s a celebration in your mouth. ”

Her man takes a bite and nods. “We’re food influencers. We try and rate food around here. We have a pretty large following. Do you mind if I shoot a quick video?”

I wink. “We don’t mind at all. Please do.” She sets up her phone, facing the truck, on a portable stand I didn’t see she was holding, and turns on the lights. Chase makes them a few more items fresh, and then, they begin shooting.



Holden watches from across the parking lot. He's scowling.

As they pull my fine ass husband into the frame and ask his name, the name of the truck, and a few questions, they rave about the food. I raise my margarita glass in a mock toast, nodding at Holden.

He flips me off.

The influencers say they're going to tag us, and I grin wider.

Checkmate, muthafucka.

It's late. I had to put out some fires with an overstimulated bride-to-be at work all day and it took far longer than I expected. Chase and I are on the hood of his truck in the Downtown lot.

"He—Holden—doesn't seem like he's gonna stop," I say quietly. "First the event catering and planning and now the restaurant literally on top of your food truck."

"I know." Chase says, linking his fingers with mine. "I don't care."

"You don't care?" I question. "How? How are you just so okay with how much of an asshole he is?"

He shrugs, looking at me. "Is me stressing about his jealousy going to change anything?"

I shake my head. "No, probably not."

He smiles. "Then, why should I give him that energy? That would give him power." He brings our linked hands to his mouth and presses a kiss to my wrist. "I've already

told you, I won. We won.”

I smile, leaning into him. “I love you. I just—I get scared sometimes, you know. That it’ll be too hard. That we’ll get tired. That you’ll get tired of how exhausting it is to be with me. To love me.” I sigh. “And I know what you’re going to say. But it doesn’t mean I don’t get scared.”

He kisses my temple. “It’s okay to be scared, Rox. I get it. I am, too.”

I blink up at him. “You are?”

“Of course.” He runs a hand through his hair. “But you know what I’m more scared of?”

“What?” I ask.

“Not doing it with you.”

I inhale sharply. “Chase...”

“Roxy, I’d rather fail next to you than win without you.” His voice is so sure.

My throat tightens. “You’re gonna make me cry again.”

He smiles gently and pulls me closer. “Good tears I hope?”

“The best. I love you.” He kisses me.

We explore each other’s mouths as fireworks explode in the distance.

Under the glow of borrowed sparks, I come to a realization.

Chase isn't a what if.

He's the truth I've been scared to admit.

He's it. He's always been it.

And maybe it took everything falling apart for me to finally see...

I'm not pushing him away...

I'm not running anymore.

Because Chase... is home.

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 8:06 am*

MARRY ME, AGAIN... WITHOUT ELVIS

ROXY

The idea hits me in the middle of the grocery store, right between a wall of pastel napkins and a pyramid of discounted paper plates.

I'm staring at Easter colored paper, I don't need for an event I haven't booked yet, thinking about centerpieces and cake toppers and photo booth props.

And then, quietly, like a whisper under all the noise, I think, " We never wrote vows."

I don't realize I've said it out loud until Chase looks up from the freezer section, holding a pint of mint chocolate chip ice cream in his hand. "Huh?"

"Our wedding," I clarify, facing him fully. "Vows. We never exchanged actual vows."

He smiles faintly. "We were kind of busy being drunk and getting married by Elvis. He said 'Do you?' and I said 'Yes.' And then, he looked at you and asked if you did and you said, 'Sure do.'"

I grin. "Exactly. We skipped actual vows, Chase."

He strolls over, slides the ice cream into our basket, and cups my face with one warm, calloused hand. "Well, we're still married anyway. But you wanna do it now?"

What? Is he serious?

I blink. “Like... now now? In HEB?”

He laughs. “Well, not like in the ice cream aisle.” His thumb traces my cheekbone. “We do everything backward anyway. So, Roxy West... will you marry me, again? With actual vows this time and maybe a real wedding dress?”

Oh my God, my husband is proposing to me in front of Bluebell and Creamy Confections ice cream in the middle of our favorite grocery store.

I bite my lip. “Yeah. I think I do. No, I definitely do.”

He kisses me softly, like a promise. “Okay, babe. Let’s do it. Right this time.”

We’re at Mari Lynn and Knox’s beach condo.

A justice of the peace is before us in the sand as waves roll and crash onto the beach.

Seagulls fly about and the wind blows my white dress between my legs and my hair dances about on the sea breeze.

Chase is beside me in khaki shorts and a white linen shirt, unbuttoned, of course.

Mari Lynn and Knox are beside us. The air tastes like salt and summer and lime. It’s a perfect day.

I think about how far we’ve come—from that neon-lit Vegas chapel to Chase’s food truck—with my face and name on it—parked in a lot he fought tooth and nail to lease.

From strangers who collided at a party to two people who stitched together a life full of laughter and mess and midnight tacos after sex that's still so hot it ignites our blood.

I flash back to that night in Vegas: the heat, the neon, the sticky chapel floor.

Chase, laughing as he slid a Ring Pop onto my finger.

Me, holding my breath because I knew, even in the chaos of getting married to a man that terrified me because I was so in love with him after only three weeks, this was it. And now, four years later, here we are.

"You first," I say nervously, my heart doing somersaults under my ribs.

Chase turns toward me, taking my hands in his.

His gaze is steady, and his eyes are shining.

"Okay." He clears his throat, takes a breath, and then, he says, "Rox, I never knew love could be loud and quiet at the same time. You're the chaos and the calm.

You drive me crazy and somehow keep me sane.

You're the reason I wake up wanting to try harder every damn day.

I promise to show up, even when it's messy.

Especially then. I promise to keep laughing with you, keep fighting for you, and keep learning how to love you better every day.

And when we're old and yelling at our grandkids from the porch, I promise I'll still

think you're the hottest girl in the room.

Plus, you tried to drive me away for three point five of these last four years and I refused to budge.

I hope you know that I'm never leaving. I don't want to, and you don't want me to either.

I'm like a love leech. I'm here to stay. ”

I burst into laughter while swiping at my eyes. “Oh, Chase... a love leech. Really?”

He grins. “Your turn, baby.” The justice of the peace nods.

Okay... my turn.

I clear my throat, heart pounding so loud I can barely think.

“You,” I say softly, “Chase, you are my anchor. You see me when I don't even see myself.

You're the calm in my hurricane and the match that lights the fire of every dream I've ever dared to have.

You're every piece of home I didn't know I was missing.

“I promise to keep fighting for us, to keep choosing us, to never let the chaos drown the magic we've made. I promise to show up, even when I'm scared. Even when I'm stubborn. Even when I don't have the words. Because you are my words. You're my beginning and my always. You're my home .”

Before the justice of the peace even says it, he pulls me into his arms, kissing me like he's memorizing the taste of forever.

Mari Lynn and Knox clap when our lips part. The justice of the peace chuckles, "Mr. and Mrs. Chase West, I now pronounce you Mr. and Mrs. Chase West. You've renewed your vows."

Mari Lynn snorts, "These are their first vows, Sir. Elvis didn't care about vows in that sleazy Vegas chapel. But damned if that wasn't fun."

Knox mutters, "Viva Las Vegas."

Chase laughs and stares into my eyes. "I love you, Rox."

I stare back at the man I love more than life itself and reply, "I love you, too, Chase."

Much later, we're on the balcony, sitting in silence, wrapped in each other under a blanket, letting the night carry our promises into the sky.

It feels... complete.

Not flashy. Not fancy. Just real.

Our real vows.

Our real forever.

No cameras.

Just us.



Exactly how it was always meant to be.

The opening of the balcony door rouses me. “Did y’all sleep out here?” Mari Lynn asks, raising an eyebrow as she sips her coffee.

Chase grins. “Kinda.”

“Ah, sexcapades on the balcony... good times.” She winks.

I smirk. “Amazingly good.”

She laughs. “Well, we didn’t hear y’all from inside. Amateurs.”

I lean against Chase and the blanket slips slightly. He quickly grabs it and pulls it up over our nakedness. “It was perfect.” He kisses my shoulder and my insides warm.

Mari Lynn grunts, “Yeah, I know that look. No, it’s daylight. There are kids right there.” She points at the beach. We look.

Shit! There are literally kids right there and we’re both buck ass naked.

Mari Lynn snickers. “Uh huh. And I’m pretty sure those are your shorts and your panties in that palm tree.”

Seriously? Son of a bitch.

My white satin thongs are indeed stuck in the fronds, waving about in the sea breeze like a surrender flag.

Knox appears in the door, shirtless and grinning.

“Coffee is ready and so is breakfast.” His brow arches as my panties continue to flap in the wind.

“Nice... but since you two are both naked and there’s only one blanket, would you like me to grab you a towel?

” He waggles his brows. “Can’t be scarring the neighbors. ”

Chase winks. “That’d be great, man. Appreciate it.”

Knox shrugs. “Yup. It’s really good to see y’all in such a good place now.” He disappears into the condo and tosses a towel out. Chase catches it as Knox yells, “Breakfast in five.”

We book it back to the city after breakfast. After deliveries and vendor calls and a last-minute mixer malfunction, Chase finds me wiping down the truck window and reading through emails on my phone.

He wraps his arms around me from behind. “Glad we did it? Again?”

I lean back against him. “More than anything.”

He nuzzles my neck. “Me too.”

We stand like that, quiet and steady, the hum of the city swirling around us.

And for the first time in a long time... everything feels exactly right.

Like the chaos has settled.

Like the has story found its heartbeat.

Like home.

We're curled together on the couch with Golden Girls reruns playing in the background as white noise. My head rests on his chest. His fingers trace lazy circles on my arm.

"You know what's wild?" I murmur.

"What?" he asks sleepily.

"This started with a drunken wedding and somehow turned into a life."

He kisses my hair. "You're the best bad decision I ever made, Rox."

I laugh softly. "Bad decision? I'm a bad decision, huh? I'll show you a bad decision."

The TV flickers and his heartbeat races under my lips.

Maybe we've been writing vows all along.

In the breakfasts and late nights and quiet apologies. In the forgiveness and laughter and stubborn love, maybe the vows were never words. Maybe they were always actions.

And if that's true... we've already kept every promise that matters.

### THE BIG DECISION

#### ROXY

The thing about big decisions is they never wait until you're ready.

They show up at the worst times: in the middle of your busiest season, when you're wearing a T-shirt with salsa stains, when your inbox is on fire and your voicemail's full and you've already scheduled six tastings and two site visits and promised Mari Lynn you'd be at the venue by three.

"I've been offered a spot at the state food truck expo," Chase casually says over coffee, like he's telling me we're out of oat milk.

I freeze mid-sip. My brows rise. "The Expo?"

He nods. "In Austin. Three weeks from now. They just invited me this morning."

I set my mug down slowly and look at him. I nod. "That's... huge."

"Yeah." He watches me carefully. "It is."

My brain scrambles to connect the dots. I mumble out loud, more to myself than to him, "That's... four hours away. During peak wedding season."

He nods again. "Yeah."

I press my hands to my temples and exhale. “You’d have to close the truck here for a week.”

“Maybe longer. The Expo is a month long. And if it goes well... I could get offered a permanent spot...” He pauses.

I know what he’s about to say.

Looking up, I swallow. “Chase...”

“I’d have to consider relocating,” he finishes quietly.

The words hang between us.

Relocating.

He wouldn’t go without me. I know that. He wouldn’t leave... us.

“You want to do it?” I ask softly.

He hesitates. “It’s... everything I’ve worked for.”

I nod, my heart twisting and threatening to jump clean out of my chest. “It is.”

“Roxy, I want you to come with me.” He says it so matter of factly.

He wants us to go to Austin.

I blink hard. “Chase...”

He crosses the table, kneels beside me, and takes my hands. He weaves out fingers

together. My palms are sweating as he says, “We’ve built everything together so far. I don’t want to take the next step without you. I can’t.”

I swallow as my ears ring and my heart races. “I have clients. Bookings. The company... my company.”

“I know.” He searches my face. “I’m not asking you to give it up, Roxy. I’m asking you to take it with you.”

I exhale shakily. “You make it sound so simple.”

“It’s not,” he says softly. “But it’s ours.”

I stare at him, at this man who’s made every day brighter and harder and louder and better. And I realize... I’ve never been scared of him. Just scared of losing him.

“I need time to think,” I whisper.

He nods. “Okay. I have to let them know by tomorrow morning, baby.”

Kissing my knuckles, he stands and heads out of the door, leaving me in the quiet to think.

I sit there, my coffee cooling and my brain spinning.

How the hell I choose between everything I’ve built and everything I’ve ever wanted and taking off to support the man who’s always supported me and my dreams living his?

I call Mari Lynn and tell her everything. “What do I do? Tell me I’m not crazy.”

She laughs dryly. “Babe, you married a man you knew for three weeks in Vegas four years ago and look at you now. Crazy is your brand.”

“I don’t want to give up my portion of our company and I can’t just ask you to take it all on with all you have going on with Knox.”

“I would never ask you to give it up. And why not? I basically handed it all to you when I went to Los Angeles with Knox. Sure, I still work, but you’ve been carrying the weight for too long now.” She says.

“Mari Lynn, that was different. I can’t manage stuff here from Austin.” I remind her.

“Maybe you won’t have to.” She quietly replies.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Knox and I talked about it. The show is established now, there’s not a lot to do when we’re not shooting in LA.

Not that I can’t do from here anyway. I can run our socials from anywhere.

Our classes are already here. Melody is deserving of a promotion, and I think we can hire more staff now, too, to help with the events,” she replies.

“You’ve been carrying this company solo for too long.

Maybe this is the push we both needed. And instead of thinking about it in terms of losing something, why not think about it as gaining?

Austin is a huge ass city and there’s a whole lot of money there.

Plus, we have some connections... I think an expansion might be in order...

if that's something you're interested in. "

I go quiet.

Can it really be that simple?

"You're not abandoning it, Rox," she says gently. "This is growth. And it's time."

I blink back tears. "You really think we can do that, Mari Lynn?"

"For you? For us? Always."

God, I love her.

It's dark when I pull into the lot. Chase is sitting on the truck roof again, looking at the lights of the city.

He tenses when I climb up beside him. He's quiet, just... waiting.

Settling next to him, I lean my head on his shoulder.

"I—I'm scared," I whisper.

"Me too," he admits taking my hand and setting both on his thigh.

"I don't know if I'm strong enough."

He kisses my hair. "You are. I believe in you, Rox. I believe in us."



I smile faintly and turn my head, staring at his profile. “I’ll go with you.”

He exhales shakily, his fingers tightening around mine. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” I kiss his jaw. “We’re gonna figure it out.”

He exhales and lightly kisses my lips. “We always do, Roxy.”

Under the blanket of city lights, I finally let myself believe it.

We’re not starting over.

We’re just starting the next chapter.

Together.

### THE EDGE OF FOREVER

#### ROXY

Chase loads the last cooler into the truck, securing it with a bungee cord.

I stand on the curb, coffee in hand, watching him double-check every latch, every hinge, every strap.

He's meticulous, methodical, quietly buzzing with that mix of excitement and nerves that always makes him even softer, even steadier.

"Ready?" he asks, turning toward me.

I nod. "Ready."

He crosses the parking lot, cups my face in his hands, presses his forehead to mine. "Last chance to change your mind."

I smile. "Not a chance."

He kisses me, long and lingering, then pulls back with a grin. "Let's go build forever, babe."

The highway rolls out ahead of us, endless and open.

Chase is in the food truck and I'm following behind him in his truck, pulling my Jeep.

I blast old playlists with the windows down, as my hair whips in the hot wind.

I stick my arm out the window, letting my fingers ride the sauna breeze, watching mile markers tick by like chapters in a book.

“Tell me again why we’re doing this?” I ask through my speakers since I’ve called Chase on my phone.

He chuckles. “Because we’re crazy.”

I laugh. “Fair enough.”

The road noise is muted in the cab and Chase’s voice filters through my speakers. “And because we’re brave.”

I smile softly to myself. “Yeah. We are.”

He says, “And because anywhere with you is already home . Love you, baby.”

God, he’s gonna wreck me.

We pull into Austin just after noon. The expo grounds are sprawling, a maze of trucks and tents and banners snapping in the breeze. It’s chaos. It’s magic.

Chase checks in at registration and I wait in the truck and respond to emails. He comes out forty minutes later and tells me to follow him. I do. We weave through the throngs of trucks and trailers, and he parks in his assigned spot. I pull in behind him and cut the engine, exhaling slowly.

Shit! We’re here.

We're really doing this.

He pulls open the door and murmurs, "We're here."

Taking his hand, I jump out of the truck. "We're her—" My ankle rolls as I hit the ground in my wedges. I scream as I grapple, trying to find something to hold onto so my face doesn't meet the gravel. "Chas?—"

I find purchase and exhale as I think I'm safe.

I continue to pitch forward as Chase's shorts fall to his ankles.

I wail, "Shit... Oh, shit..." He catches me before my face slams into the rocks.

My eyes are level with his groin and my own face stares back at me.

My eyes widen as I see various images of my face all over his boxer briefs.

Right on his crotch is me with my tongue sticking out and the words, "Property of Roxy West." My eyes rise to his and I smirk, "Damn right that's my property, but why in the hell are you wearing those right now? "

He grins, "So everyone knows I'm taken."

My brow rises, "Who the hell would be close enough to your crotch to see this is my property, Chase West?"

His smile spreads. "Right now... everyone, since you decided to strip me out here in the open, Roxy West."

I glance around. There's a circle of phones and gazes all aimed at us. I mutter, "I

should bite your dick.”

Throwing his head back, he laughs, and then, helps me to my feet. “I do love it when you talk dirty to me, baby.”

Slapping his shoulder, I growl, “Pull your pants up, weirdo.”

He does and pulls me into his arms. “I freaking love you, Roxy.”

Leaning into his chest, my arms close around his waist, and I mutter, “I love you, too.”

He kisses me softly, and then says, “No matter what happens, we win as long as we’re together.”

I grin, “Damn right we do.”

Setup is a blur. The fryers are tested, the menus are wiped until they gleam, and then, I rewrite them and hang them. The smell of spices and oil and ambition fills the air. Other trucks circle like friendly sharks, competitors and comrades alike.

I catch Chase watching the bigger setups. He takes in their flashier signs.

“Don’t compare,” I whisper, sliding an arm around his waist. “We’re not them.”

“We’re us,” he agrees. “And that’s enough.” He kisses my temple. “More than enough.”

Opening day hits like a wave. A line forms before noon. People post photos. Reviews trickle in. The crowd grows. And somewhere in the middle of all of it, I catch Chase leaning against the counter, watching me scribble orders, his eyes soft and full and

entirely mine.

“What?” I ask breathlessly.

He grins. “I like watching you work.”

I roll my eyes. “Pervert.”

He winks. “Only for you.”

By sundown, we’re totally sold out. We collapse against the truck, sweaty, exhausted, and exhilarated.

“Chase, you did it,” I whisper.

He shakes his head. “ We did it.”

I tuck my face into his neck, breathing him in. My heart pounds with something wild, electric, and steady all at once.

“Thank you for coming with me,” he murmurs.

“There was never a chance I wouldn’t,” I say softly.

He kisses me again, slow and sure. “Forever, Rox.”

I smile against his lips. “Forever.”

The city lights blink to life around us, as laughter and music drift across the expo grounds. It comes to me.

Forever isn't a destination.

It's a choice.

Every day.

Every messy, beautiful, ordinary day.

And I'll keep choosing him.

Always.

### THREE YEARS AND NEW DREAMS

#### ROXY

If someone had told me four years ago that my life would look like this—a pink tricycle tipped over next to a food truck with my face on it, a booming business that is one of the top event planning companies in both Austin and Dallas, a glitter slime experiment gone wrong coating half the patio, and a French bulldog wearing a tutu while dragging a half-eaten quesadilla across the yard—I would’ve laughed so hard I cried.

And yet, here we are.

It’s perfect.

I lean against the truck, looking through the window, sipping my margarita, watching Chase fry tortillas and assemble tacos while wearing a tiny human, we created together, strapped to his chest in a carrier that says “Daddy’s Sous Chef.

” Our daughter, Stella, babbles happily, gumming a piece of dough between her perfect little lips.

“Babe,” I call. “She’s got a tortilla in her mouth again.”

He glances down at her with a lazy grin. “She’s fine.”

“Chase, it’s raw dough.”



He shrugs. “Organic. Builds immunity.”

I groan, but I’m smiling. “You’re impossible.”

He shoots me a grin—the one that still melts me. “You love it.”

“Damn right I do.” I mutter and glance around the yard.

Mari Lynn’s voice carries from the kitchen. “Alright, hellions! Five minutes to find every glitter egg or I’m adding your juice boxes to mommy’s sippy cup!”

A swarm of tiny feet stampede past. Mari Lynn’s two-year-old twin boys, Leo and Lucas, are already shoving each other toward the nearest flower bed, trailing glitter, dirt, and sticky fingerprints in their wake.

Knox trails behind them. He’s wearing a pink feather boa, and a tiara is perched precariously on his head.

“Why are you wearing that?” I ask, barely holding in a laugh.

He lifts the boa and flips it over his shoulder. “Apparently, I lost a bet to a certain one-and-a-half-year-old.”

Mari Lynn cackles. “Correction... you underestimated a certain one-and-a-half-year-old.” She shoots a pointed look at me and grins.

“Where is my princess? Marnie, where are you, baby?” I call out.

She comes running out from behind Knox with red lipstick smeared all over her face, shorts, a swimsuit top, a tutu, and a baseball bat. “I wite here mommeeee. Unca Knox is a pwincess. I saving him from da dwagon.”

I cheer her on. “Good job, baby girl! You save weak Unca Knox from that dragon!”

Chase laughs as he leans out of the food truck window, handing me a plate. “Are we officially a dynasty now?”

I bite into a taco and raise my margarita glass. “A sexy, chaotic, tequila-fueled dynasty. But yeah.”

He grins. “Best damn dynasty ever.”

Chaos reigns supreme. Kids zoom through the kitchen.

Leo is running in circles and dragging a string of Christmas lights behind him like a cape.

Lucas is trying to climb into the dishwasher.

Stella giggles from her highchair, covered in frosting while Marnie stands on the couch and waves a wooden spoon around like it’s a magic wand.

The dog is licking spilled queso off the tile.

Mari Lynn plops beside me at the kitchen table, sipping a margarita. We both look around at the mess that is my kitchen and living room. “How do three toddlers and a baby make such a mess? Did you ever think this would be our lives?”

I shake my head. “Not even close.”

Knox walks in holding two juice boxes and a Nerf gun. “I’m officially outnumbered by smart little people who are weirdly accurate with foam darts.”

“Right? Like how are they freaking Nerf sharp-shooters?” Mari Lynn quips.

Chase enters with a tray of tacos and a fresh pitcher of margaritas. He sets them down like an offering. “Temporary peace offering. Their favorite. The tacos, not the margaritas. Do you think they’ll eat and crash?” He sounds wistful.

I refill my glass. “You’re a saint, baby. And no... probably not. Unless they pass out right in their plates from exhaustion. You know they will fight it until they can’t anymore.”

“Well, Daddy needs some Mommy time.” His brows waggle and my stomach clenches. “And they should, they’ve been slaying dragons for five hours now,” he adds, leaning down to kiss me. “Mommy looks too damn good in those cutoffs.” He growls it in my ear.

I drag my finger over his abs, “Mommy approves of this plan.”

Mari Lynn fake gags, “Y’all are so gross... You have two kids. Control yourselves.” She laughs.

Knox leans down to whisper something in her ear and she groans before yelling, “Kids, come eat! It’s food, and then, bath time.” Then she looks at Knox and bites her lips, “Mommy and Daddy are going to practice making them a sibling later.”

Chase throws a tortilla at her. Knox catches it, takes a savage bite, and winks before saying, “The couple that makes another baby fastest wins.”

After the party winds down, after the last glitter egg is found and busted, after the toddlers crash in a massive blanket fort in the middle of the living room and Stella is tucked safely into her crib, Mari Lynn and Knox head to the guest room with the baby monitor for the living room.

Chase and I climb onto the food truck roof again with the baby monitor for Stella’s room.

Same spot. Same stars. A little more tired. A lot more grateful.

He reaches for my hand, linking our fingers. “You ever think about Vegas?”

I snort softly and lean my chin on his chest, looking up at him. “Only every time Marnie crawls into bed between us, or Stella throws food down to the dog, or the house looks like a bomb went off three point two minutes after I straighten it.”

He grins. “Still the best bad decision we ever made.”

I snuggle into him. “The best.”

He pulls me close, kisses me slow, deliberate—the kind of kiss that tastes like the vows we finally said on the beach, almost four years after Elvis married us.

“Would you do it all again?” he asks.

Smiling against his lips, I nod. “Every crazy, messy, glitter-bombed second of every damn day.”

He leans back, looking out over the backyard, the string lights still glowing. Mari Lynn and Knox are now on the patio, her feet are in his lap, they’re both sipping drinks, and watching their boys and our daughter snore in the fort through the glass.

“I used to think forever had to be big,” I whisper. “But this? This quiet chaos? This is it.”

He rests his chin on my shoulder. “Forever’s whatever we make it. I still choose you, Rox.”

“I choose you, too, Chase.”

And as quiet laughter drifts up from Mari Lynn and Knox keeping watch over our motley crew, our daughter lets out a tiny snore in her sleep from her crib, visible on the monitor, and I look at our beautiful chaos, I realize something.

We didn't just build a life. We built a family.

Not perfect. Not polished but absolutely, wonderfully, unapologetically ours.

And I wouldn't trade a second.

Not the glitter. Not the frosting in the curtains. Not even the tricycle that trips us every time we walk past, even though we know it's there.

Every bit of that crazy brought us closer to here.

And here is exactly where we're meant to be.