



# Totally Yours (Love & Wine #5)

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**Category:** Romance

**Description:** Totally Yours is a hilarious insta-love, family-drama, workplace romance set in beautiful Napa, California. It features hilarious workplace antics, a few laughs and a whole lot of steamy goodness!

Love finds a home in truth...

What do a former boss and a current boss have in common? Other than both being an employer...nothing! One is a narcissistic jerk on a huge ego trip and the other is a handsome, tattooed smooth talker.

At least that's how Hannah Murphy feels when she takes a job as a sous chef at the famous Somerville Winery and Vineyard. And her new boss, Leo Marsh is definitely easy on the eyes.

But Leo is determined to get to the bottom of Hannah's secret former employer. Even if the fiery beauty has her past locked up tight.

As their cooking heats up in the kitchen, so does their attraction to each other. But it's Hannah's secret that could ruin it all.

And you know what they say about secrets...

Totally Yours is the fifth book in the Love Wine new adult romance series. While each book can be read as a standalone, it offers so much more if read as a series. Happily ever after guaranteed with each book!

**Total Pages (Source):** 35

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

“Anna!” my boss screams from across the kitchen.

“It’s Hannah,” I mutter under my breath. “Hhhhh,” I add, annoyed, accentuating the letter H sound for only me to hear.

He doesn’t care what my name is and I really should be quite pleased that he at least came close to getting it right. He’s been calling one of the sous chefs Ben despite his name being Curt.

Not even close, bud.

“Yes,” I now answer, this time so he can hear me.

“Anna!” he screams again, slamming his knife down and sending diced onions flying in all directions.

I’m literally standing directly in front of him and when he lets out a perturbed huff, it blasts out of his mouth and right into my face.

It’s hot and foul, and it takes everything in me to control my reaction, attempting not to throw up in my mouth or let on that I’m disgusted. He thrives on that kind of shit.

Dickhead.

“Yes, Mr. Langston?” I ask, my faux-polite demeanor nearly choking me to death.

“Did you get the schedule finished for next week?”

“Yes.”

“Orders placed for delivery next week?”

“Yes.”

“Seasonal menu created?”

“Yes.”

This is getting redundant, and I can feel my blood pressure rising with every word. I’m sure his is too, but I’ve done nothing to make him mad other than do the job he hired me to do. And I do it damn well.

“Bring it to me!” he shouts, like I’m an idiot and can’t possibly understand him.

“Yes,” I reply.

“Is that all you can say? Yes. Yes. Yes,” he chides, mocking my voice and I really want to punch him in the throat. But I need this job because moving back in with my parents sounds equally as bad as working here.

There’s rent to pay and bills to keep up with and a life to live that doesn’t involve my mother asking when I’m going to get married and have a baby.

It’s fucking 2022, I thought it was uncouth to judge women on their marital status or their choice on whether or not to have kids. Guess not in my mother’s eyes.

I’m certainly not going to meet anyone when all I do is work, work, work, work,

work.

I don't answer him and his question that is designed to intimidate me.

He doesn't scare me in the least. He obviously has a small penis and has spent his entire life trying to compensate for it by being a colossal asshole.

I can't even believe he's married and has kids.

Their life must have been awful. Bad enough that his own kids don't even work here.

They probably went in the total opposite direction when choosing their careers just to get away from him.

I feel like I spend most of my day muttering under my breath and hating my job, but I still trudge back to the office and grab the seasonal menu.

I've spent the better part of a month working on this and every single time I bring it to him, it's the same thing.

He hates every suggestion, calls me incompetent and I spend the rest of my night attempting to re-do it. On my own time, nonetheless.

I would never indulge a guy the way I do this jerk I call my boss.

It's the sad reality of needing a job and being trapped by the all-mighty dollar and my mother's judgment that I can't make a living as a cook.

I'm not a cook; I'm a chef, an expertly trained and completely professional chef, who has the very expensive degree to prove it.

The other reason I don't leave this job is because it's one of the highest end restaurants in San Francisco with five-star write-ups everywhere you turn.

Getting to put this on my resume would mean doors will open at just the restaurant name.

I have to make it at least two years so it doesn't look like I couldn't hack it in this high-stress environment.

I've only been here for three months. Three fucking months. The longest three months of my life.

It has to get easier, right?

Sometimes I wonder if he's just testing me, seeing how I perform under pressure and once I prove I'm competent, he'll come around. Or maybe I'm just living in a dream world because I can't imagine this dick being nice to anyone. Ever.

I hand him my ideas for the seasonal menu and he lets out a scoff of disapproval, running a hand through his gray speckled hair as he grabs for the pen I'm holding. Yanking it from my hand with far too much animosity, he begins crossing off ideas.

"No," he bites out as he draws a harsh line through the first suggestion. "Nope. No way. No. What the fuck were you thinking?" He's huffing away as he enthusiastically strikes out all but one of my ideas.

He pauses, reading the last one, the pen poised to destroy it, the tip leaving a swelling black blot where he's left it on the paper.

It feels like time is suddenly moving in slow motion, the sound of the ticking clock, loud and ominous as I wait to see what happens.

Hours pass, days, lifetimes, while I wait.

Okay, I'm being dramatic, it's only like thirty seconds, but thirty seconds with Roy Langston not speaking is unheard of.

He's either stunned into silence by my genius suggestion or he's questioning why he hired someone who he thinks is basically the stupidest person on Earth.

"Okay," he breathes out, the bark still there, but it's certainly less harsh.

"Keep this one." He shoves the paper back at me and I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from showing my excitement.

He doesn't need to see that I've been pining away trying to impress him since I started working here. That makes me a total loser.

This damn job is like an abusive relationship. I have got to get the hell out of here.

"I want the completed menu back in the morning," he now hisses, glaring at me, because he knows I'm working till midnight, and I won't possibly have the time to finish the menu to his liking unless I work through the night. "I don't have time for your incompetence, Anna. Get it right this time."

Like I've literally sat around and thought, how can I make this menu so bad that it screams incompetence? How can I make it so bad that I get shamed on a regular basis at my job? I swear he's an idiot if he thinks I'm not working my ass off.

"Yes," I reply, hating myself with every yes reply I give.

Set some boundaries, Hannah!

Maybe I should start with telling him my name isn't Anna, again. But that just feels like a waste of breath. He has zero interest in knowing anything about his employees other than making them work till they hate their life. He's winning.

I spend the rest of the night doing what I love about my job. Cooking and preparing and presentation of plates alongside the other sous chef, with Roy conveniently missing, which makes doing our job so much easier.

"I gotta find a new job," I mutter to Curt as the night winds down and we begin cleaning up.

"You say that every single night," he quips back, shaking his head.

"I have no idea how you've lasted six months. I'm pushing three and it feels like I've been here for ten years." I scrub my hands over my face, letting out an exhausted sigh.

"I cry myself to sleep at night," he says, his words laced with humor, but I can't help but think there may be some seriousness to them. Not like I haven't cried myself to sleep after leaving here.

"I have to work on the seasonal menu tonight," I wail, each word coming out as a desperate cry for help. Not that I expect Curt to help me. He was the only one working on them before I was hired. He's done his time.

"Oh yes. Good luck. My last one went through six revisions before he finally gave his approval," Curt admits, and I don't feel so bad about myself. I'm on revision number four. "My best was three. That night I drank an entire bottle of wine in celebration."

"I might just end up drinking an entire bottle of wine out of necessity."

We both laugh a little, but we know not to make it seem like we're enjoying ourselves at all. If Roy hears us, it will spur him to lose his shit and we'll end up staying here later than either of us wants to.

We finish up quickly, and scramble out the door without a word, knowing if we leave without talking to Roy, we might actually get home at a decent hour. Not that it matters since I'll be up working on this damn menu.

I wake up the next morning to my watch vibrating on my wrist. I have no idea what time it is or what time I even went to bed last night. I look down and see my brother's name popping up on the screen.

"Fuck!" I yell out to the empty room, the word reverberating back at me.

I grab for my phone on the nightstand, answering it with a groggy hello that I know will only annoy Dylan.

"Where are you?" Dylan asks and it's not that I forgot I was meeting him for breakfast, it's just that I've spread myself a little too thin with all this work shit. Staying up too late and stressing myself out about getting this menu right.

"Sorry, I overslept. I'll be there in twenty minutes," I answer back, climbing out of bed and attempting to pull on a pair of leggings with one hand as I defend myself to Dylan, the phone now tucked against my shoulder.

"We meet for breakfast every Sunday and for the last three months you've been late. Good news, I haven't even left my house yet," he teases.

"You're a jerk," I spit out. "I'll be there in twenty."

"Love you, Hannah," he calls out in a sing-song voice, making fun of me but still

making me smile.

I scramble to get ready, whipping my hair into a knot on the top of my head and brushing my teeth. Dylan's lucky that I showered last night, or I'd smell like mushroom risotto and seared tuna.

We meet at the same place every Sunday and it's the one part of my week that I actually enjoy. It sucks that it's now become sort of a chore, but I don't want to give it up. Plus, I'm still working on Dylan to try and get me a job at one of the restaurants on the Somerville property.

He's waiting outside the door for me when I walk up.

He's stopped getting a table because he says it's rude to take a table from someone else when he has to sit around and wait for me to arrive.

I find this whole thing comical because up until just recently he was the most self-absorbed person I knew.

He couldn't have given a shit about anything but hooking up with girls and working out.

"I'm starving," I whine, as he holds the door open for me and I walk in.

The hostess greets us with a smile and brings us right over to our usual table.

The table that she pretty much reserves for us despite Dylan's complaints about not being seated until we both arrive.

We've been doing this since we graduated from college as a way to make sure we see each other regularly.

Otherwise, work and life get in the way, and we'd go months without seeing each other.

"How's work going?" Dylan asks, like he doesn't already know it's a nightmare.

"It's awful. Like the worst experience of my life," I wail, sounding far too dramatic.

"When are you going to get me a job at Somerville's?"

"I now ask, pleading with him to help me get my ass out of this situation.

Not that I need his help, but it would be nice to have an in somewhere.

I should probably just put myself out there and hope no one asks why I'm leaving The Yellow Door after only three months.

I could even just leave it off my resume altogether, like I did when I gave Dylan my resume for Somerville's.

"There's an opening at Somerville's," he says, enthusiastically.

"I've been talking you up, but here's the thing, it's probably a step down from where you are now, Hannah.

It's a sous chef position at a smaller restaurant.

You sure you want to take a possible pay cut and work at a place that doesn't hold the same prestige?"

"Fuck yes, I do," I hiss, my words low, but the intensity high. "Not everyone is independently wealthy like you and can choose to work a low-stress job just for the

fun of it.”

“I’ve told you before, I’m happy to loan you some money so you can start up your own restaurant,” Dylan adds, and as much as I’d love to take him up on his offer, I also know the failure rate of new restaurants.

“Just work on your boss to hire me at Somerville’s.”

“I think it’s the head chef Leo, who is in charge of hiring for the restaurants,” Dylan says, like I give a shit who it is. I just need a damn job. I don’t care who hires me.

“Whoever it is, tell them I’m amazing.”

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

It's been a month since I fired Gina for stealing and about a week since I finally reached my breaking point, realizing we really need to get another sous chef in before the rest of my staff walk out in protest. It's not that they are lazy or anything, it's just that business at Apple Jacks has been rapidly increasing and most weekends the restaurant is fully booked, with decent traffic throughout the week as well.

The restaurant over at Somerville's is no different and will only get busier with the planned renovations starting soon.

I've been trying to coordinate kitchen staff between the two places for weeks now and it's starting to get to be too much for everyone.

It's definitely time for a new chef. Probably a couple to be honest.

"Yo, dude, can we get some lunch?" Dylan yells from somewhere across the kitchen.

"Um, yeah, sure," I say, not looking up. "Check in with um..." I trail off, waving my pen in the general direction of the prep station, hoping there's someone there who can take care of this for him.

"Leo, dude, what's going on?"

I look up to find Dylan standing on the other side of the steel counter from me, a goofy grin on his face, because he's a loved up fool these days who can't seem to keep the smile off his face or his hands or mouth off his girl.

“What?”

Dylan laughs, shaking his head a little. “You’re blowing me and my baby mama off and telling someone else to make our lunch, what gives?”

Oh yeah, he’s also gonna be a dad, which is making him even more nauseating to be around because that’s made him even more loved up than usual. The cheeky fucker has certainly landed on his feet since starting here.

“Sorry,” I say, biting the end of my pen as my eyes drop back to the resumés I am once again going over in the hopes that I can find someone to replace Gina. “Got interviews this afternoon and I’m just trying to figure out who I’m hiring.”

“Easy, Hannah,” he says, pushing the papers in front of me to the side as though the decision is now made.

I look back up. “Yeah, I know she’s your sister and all, but I’m not just hiring anybody, okay. After the last chef, I need someone who’s reliable and good in the kitchen. No offense or anything.”

Dylan’s brow narrows. “Look, I asked you not to do me any favors, right, and I meant it. But seriously, Hannah is an amazing chef and she’s willing to take a pay cut if she has to.

I mean I have no idea if she’d have to but anyway.

Give her a chance, dude, she’s been working at all these amazing places in San Francisco, and you loved that dessert of hers I brought in last week, right?

Fuck, Tessa can’t get enough of Han’s chocolate mousse. ”

I smirk at him. “Okay, your girl is knocked up, so she’s probably got chocolate cravings or whatever, so—”

“Actually,” he says, cutting me off with a grin. “If anything, she’s got dick cravings. It’s fucking fantastic.”

I roll my eyes at him. “First, I so did not need to know that. But second, why’s she willing to take the possible pay cut and what’s she been doing these last few months?

There’s a gap in her resume?” I point my pen at her list of previous occupations, indicating the blank space in work for the past few months.

Dylan shrugs. “I don’t know. She is working though, but it’s for this total dick apparently. Maybe she doesn’t trust him to give her a good reference or something. But seriously, Leo, you know I wouldn’t fuck around with this. You can trust her, she’s my sister.”

I nod at his words, knowing that it does count for a lot.

Often the best hires are word of mouth, who you know, type of scenarios.

Unfortunately, sometimes they are also the worst, especially when the recommendation comes from a friend.

“Look, she’s coming in at three. She’s one of two candidates I’m interviewing today, so I’m giving her a shot. ”

Dylan smiles, slapping me on the shoulder. “Great, I know she’ll convince you. Now, about that lunch for me and my baby mama. What’s good?”

After the lunch rush is finally finished and my staff are taking a quick break before

they start the dinner prep, I finally sit down in my office to start the interviews. The first guy who comes in is good, trained at one of the top culinary schools and mentored under a well-known chef in Boston.

Apparently, he's looking to travel though, which is how he's found himself on the other side of the country now.

It also likely means in a couple of months I'll be looking for a new sous chef again because he'll have moved on.

Still, I do the full interview, getting a feel for what he's like and how much he knows.

When he eventually leaves, I pull out Hannah's resume again, giving it a quick once over.

"Hey, Leo, Hannah Murphy is here."

I stand from my desk as I call out, "Thanks, show her in."

I smell her before I see her, this intoxicating aroma of sugar and cinnamon that wafts through my door before quite possibly the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life walks into my office.

Fuck me.

She's maybe a couple of years younger than me. Tall, with long brown hair that's loosely tied back and these seriously amazing green eyes. I actually have to clench my jaw to stop it from falling open at the sight of her.

How the fuck is this woman related to Dylan?

“Hi,” she says, smiling as she holds out a hand to me. “Hannah Murphy, nice to meet you.”

I take her hand in mine, fully intending to introduce myself but instead, I find myself lost for words the second my hand touches hers. By the way her green eyes widen at the touch, I’m pretty sure I’m not the only one who feels whatever this is between us.

Shit, how the hell is this going to work?

“Uh, um, hi,” I eventually stutter, sounding like a total moron. “Leo Marsh, nice to um, nice to meet you.”

God, I need to get a fucking grip.

I let go of her hand, gesturing to the chair on the other side of my desk, indicating she should take a seat.

After I go over the job description and expectations, Hannah gives me a quick rundown of her training and experience, even though it’s all here in front of me.

She’s confident and assured in the way she talks, never dropping the eye contact, even as this weird crackle of electricity, that started the second she walked in here, seems to linger between us.

“Okay, and can you tell me about the last few months?” I ask when she’s done. “You don’t seem to have been working anywhere?” I ask the question even though I know Dylan told me what was really going on, because I want to get a feel for her reaction to this dick she apparently works for.

Hannah takes a deep breath, letting it out slowly, her posture slumping just a little.

“Actually,” she starts, “I have been working somewhere, but it’s been awful.

I know I could tell you where and then you could ask them about me, but honestly, I have no idea what the head chef will say. He’s...he’s...”

“A bit of a dick?” I suggest, wanting to ease the tension a little.

We’ve all been there, trapped in a kitchen with a raging egotistical lunatic who thinks he or she is god’s gift to the world.

Unfortunately, it seems to be a common trait in chefs and one I have always been keen to avoid.

It’s why I insist on every one of my staff calling me Leo. Not Chef and not Mr. Marsh. Fuck that.

Hannah lets out a breathy laugh that I swear actually makes my dick twitch.

“I was going to say unpredictable, but yeah, dick also works.” She opens and closes her hands a few times, fidgeting a little as though she’s contemplating telling me who she works for.

There’s a part of me that’s dying to know, but at the same time, I get it.

I actually get it more than she probably realizes.

“It’s okay, you don’t have to say,” I tell her, smiling, wanting her to know I understand. “Are you still working there?”

Hannah nods. “Yes, but I...”

“How much notice do you think you need to give?” I ask when she doesn’t finish her thought, realizing only after the words are out of my mouth that my question almost implies that she has the job. A decision I wasn’t even aware I’d apparently already made.

She doesn’t seem to notice though, as she scrunches her nose up in thought in a way that’s honestly, fucking adorable. “I actually think I could probably get away with walking out right now,” she says, chuckling. “I certainly wouldn’t be the first.”

I smile, leaning back in my chair as I run a hand over my buzz cut and watch her.

She still doesn’t look away, her back straightening a little as her eyes lock with mine.

It’s confident and hot and quite honestly, a bit of a turn on.

I’d put money on this girl being a little feisty in the kitchen. Maybe other places too.

Hannah blinks, a tiny smile tugging at her mouth as though she knows exactly what I’m thinking. I find myself smiling back at her, shaking my head a little as I change the subject and say, “So your brother gives you a pretty good rap.”

Hannah laughs. “Yeah, but that’s because he knows I have a ton of dirt on him.”

Now it’s me laughing as I sit forward, my arms resting on the desk that separates us. Hannah’s eyes briefly drop to my forearms, maybe taking in the ink that decorates them. “Now that could actually be an asset around here,” I murmur.

“Does this mean I have the job?” she asks, smiling.

“Do you want the job?” I ask, a teasing tone to my voice.

“Wouldn’t be here if I didn’t,” she fires back, a playful tone to hers.

Shit, it actually feels like we are flirting right now, which is seriously dangerous.

But if it’s one thing I don’t do, under any circumstances, it’s get involved with my staff.

I’ve seen it happen before and to say it leads to nothing but trouble, is an understatement.

Working in a kitchen filled with extremely sharp knives when you’ve just busted your fuck buddy or significant other hooking up with someone else in the storeroom or walk-in fridge is a recipe for disaster.

On more than one occasion, I’ve had to step in and possibly prevent a potential murder charge from being filed.

I rub a thumb across my bottom lip, not missing the way her eyes track the movement. “You have any questions about the job or anything?” I ask.

She tilts her head a little, as though she’s thinking about my question, that playful smile still on her face. “I’m not working today, so do you think I could hang out here tonight and watch you work?”

My hand stills, my thumb tugging on my bottom lip as I take in her question. She wants to watch me work? Why? Swallowing hard, I hit her with a grin as I just come out and ask it. “You wanna watch me work?”

“You, the rest of the kitchen,” she says casually, lifting her shoulder a little as though it’s no big deal.

Chuckling, I sit back in my chair. “Trying to figure out if you’re up for the challenge of working in my kitchen?”

Hannah laughs now, mirroring my pose as she sits back in her chair. “Or maybe trying to figure out if this place is enough of a challenge for me.”

I shake my head, still chuckling. I was right, she is a feisty little thing and I fucking like it. “Okay, you can hang out here tonight,” I say, leaning down to open the bottom drawer of my desk, as I add, “On one condition.”

“Oh yeah, what’s that?” she asks.

Hitting her with a grin, I slide a contract toward her as I say, “You put on a uniform and help me cook. We can consider this your induction into my kitchen.”

Hannah smirks, her hand on the papers even though she hasn’t looked at them yet. “Deal.”

After she leaves, I sit back in my chair, letting out a long exhale, hands behind my head and eyes on the ceiling as I wonder if I haven’t just made a huge mistake.

While her resumé is definitely impressive and I know Dylan well enough to know she’s gonna be trustworthy and reliable, there is now the unexpected issue of the obvious chemistry between us.

How the fuck am I supposed to work with someone I suddenly realize I want to strip naked and do all sorts of dirty things with?

“Jesus, Leo,” I say to myself, standing and heading out to the front area of the restaurant to grab a coffee before the dinner prep starts. I don’t even know why I’m thinking about Hannah naked, especially when I know it absolutely cannot happen.

When I walk out the front, I'm surprised to find Hannah is still here, sitting with Tessa at one of the tables in the restaurant, laughing and chatting. Dylan is behind the counter at the coffee machine, apparently making them one and I walk over to him.

"You sure you know how to use that?" I ask, nudging his shoulder. "Because it's damn expensive if you break it."

Dylan scoffs. "I got this. Don't you worry."

"Mmmm," I murmur. "Well, make me a double shot espresso while you're standing there and we'll see."

Dylan glances up at me, a smirk on his face as he tips his head in the direction of his girl and his sister. "So, she's got the job?"

I tip my head from side to side. "Yeah, mostly," I say. "She's helping out tonight and we'll see if it's a good fit."

"It will be," he says confidently, as he hits the coffee grinder again for another shot of beans.

I lean back against the counter, watching Hannah as she talks to Tessa. They obviously get along well and given Tessa is around all the time now due to work and hooking up with Dylan, that can only be a good thing. Having good working relationships is crucial to having a happy workplace.

Which is yet again, another reason I can't even entertain the idea of anything happening with Hannah.

She suddenly lets out a loud laugh at something Tessa has said, her head falling back and only highlighting her long neck. Of course, this only gets me thinking about

running my tongue along all that beautiful, tanned skin.

Shit, fuck. Stop!

Turning back to Dylan, I ignore the look he's giving me as I take the espresso he's made me, adding, "Don't even start," as I turn and walk back to the kitchen, the sound of his laughter echoing behind me.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

As soon as I close the car door, I scream out in excitement.

If anyone could see me right now, they might assume I'm having some kind of psychotic break.

My arms are flailing all around as my feet stomp on the floorboard of the car so hard I wonder if they might bust through it.

I don't even care what I look like though, because I can finally quit that nightmare of a job.

Fuck that whole two weeks' notice thing. I'm about to storm in there and quit in the most epic fashion ever. Someone might even want to video it and use it as a reminder of how to quit a job. It's going to be that amazing.

I look over at the contract lying on the passenger seat of my car, realizing I never even looked it over.

Like I care what it says though. As long as I get paid, it's good enough for me.

You only need to be stuck in a nightmare of a job once to realize you can make sacrifices to accommodate lower pay if necessary.

I pick it up, scanning it quickly for the part that discusses salary and when my eyes fall on it, I let out a gasp. Guess I won't be needing to worry about that whole pay cut

thing.

“Ten grand over my current salary!” I yell out, tossing a fist in the air. This day couldn’t get any better.

While I know this isn’t a done deal, I’m fine with quitting my job and moving in with Dylan if this whole thing doesn’t pan out. I have no idea why it wouldn’t work. I’m a damn good chef.

I dig through my purse for a pen, signing my name at the bottom of the contract even though Leo told me to return it tonight when I come back. I’m not holding off any longer. I need this final and done or at least as close to done as possible.

I walk back in and find Leo waiting, a smirk on his face, and holy shit if he doesn’t look so damn hot. He’s all tattoos and dark close-cropped hair with these deep brown eyes that stupidly draw me in.

This is your new boss, Hannah! Stop it. Stop it right now.

“I kinda figured you’d be back. Negotiations?” he asks, leaning against the bar, as he motions for me to sit down.

“Nope. Just don’t want this opportunity to pass me by,” I reply, setting the signed contract down in front of him. “I’ll see you tonight.”

“Can’t wait, Hannah,” Leo says and the way he says my name sends a wave of goosebumps washing over my skin.

“Me either,” I murmur back, looking over my shoulder as I walk back out.

Now to go and quit my nightmare job.

I pull into the parking lot of my soon-to-be former employer, taking in a hard breath, I ready myself to do what I've been wanting to do since the day I set foot in this place. I pull down the visor, looking at myself in the mirror, I smile.

"You got this, Hannah," I tell myself, nodding my head. "Go tell that asshole everything you've ever wanted to say to him. Every single thought that has kept you up at night, unload it now."

I slam the car door, my adrenaline pumping, my heart racing with nervous excitement. This is it. There will never be another time in my life where I will feel this vindicated. Someday I'll tell my grandkids this story and they'll think their grandma is a total badass.

When I walk in, I don't bother to ask where Roy is.

I already know he's holed up in his office, hiding from his employees instead of in the kitchen where he should be as the head chef and owner.

He's avoiding interacting normally with his staff and he probably should be. He just makes us all miserable.

"Get that menu done?" Curt asks, when I stroll through the kitchen with the confidence of a runway model.

"Nope. And who the fuck cares!" I shout, tossing up my hands as I walk straight for Roy's office. Without knocking, I throw the door open, catching him off guard. The stupid look on his face makes me laugh out loud. His mouth is hanging open, a pen in his hand, poised like he's going to stab me.

"Anna, you better be here with the seasonal menu. It was due to me this morning," he hisses and again I laugh.

“I quit, motherfucker!” I shout, and I now wish I would’ve gone home and gotten my chef’s coat so I could dramatically throw it in his face.

“I’m done with your bullying and ridicule and your ridiculous demands.

You’re impossible to work for because you’re an egotistical tyrant who has zero respect for his employees and I hope I never see your stupid fucking face again! ”

He’s standing now, his face growing redder and redder with each word I shout at him, but I don’t care. Nothing he says to me is going to matter. I don’t ever have to set foot in here again.

I know the kitchen staff has gathered behind me, pretending to work but also attempting to take in every word of my little Norma Rae style speech.

I’m killing it today!

“So write your own seasonal menu, asshole!” I call out, as I turn my back on Roy, tossing up both middle fingers as I walk out.

I worry for a moment that he’s going to chase me out to my car, but I’m sure he’s still standing there, shocked into silence that someone finally had the guts to stand up to him.

It’s either that or he’s now screaming at his current staff, telling them to pick up the slack my absence has left. And that part makes me feel just a little guilty. Just a little though. Not enough to ever consider working there again.

As soon as I get home, I get in the shower.

I have an hour to get myself ready and head back to Somerville’s for my evening with

Leo.

It makes it sound like a date, when in reality, it's more like an audition.

An audition I can't fail because I really don't want to live with my little brother when I can't pay my rent.

Before I know it, I'm back in the car and pulling up outside Somerville's.

I'm filled with that same nervous excitement I had earlier, but this time it's a feeling that says my future is here in this job.

It's my dream job. A place that is lowkey and fun, a place that will allow me to showcase my talents in food and drink pairings, and a place where I won't begin to question my ability.

I head back toward the kitchen and find Leo waiting for me.

He smiles and I swear my insides turn to jelly, my legs suddenly wanting to give out from underneath me.

This is going to make working for him really hard.

Maybe he has some weird quirk that will make him horribly unattractive.

Maybe he has smelly feet or bad grammar. Doubtful.

"Hey, Hannah," he says, greeting me, and again with my name. Why does he make my name sound so damn sexy coming out of his mouth?

"Hey, Leo. Ready to get started?" I ask, sounding a little overzealous and possibly

desperate.

“I thought we could talk about a few things first and then we can team up on some new menu ideas. What do you say?”

“Sounds perfect.”

He escorts me back to the same office from this morning and pulls out a chair for me to sit down across from his desk.

I scan the room for pictures of his wife or girlfriend or boyfriend or whoever but come up short.

There’s nothing but a few pictures of the orchard and the vineyard, and some before and after shots of buildings that I know were renovated by Tessa.

Score one for me!

You’re not hooking up with your boss, Hannah. Especially a boss who literally hasn’t even formally hired you yet.

“We’ve been a little short staffed, so it’s really good to have you on board. I wanted to give you a quick rundown of how things work here since we’re not your typical city restaurant.”

“Been there, done that, and I’m ready to try something new,” I reply, again sounding stupidly asskissingly desperate.

Shut up, and listen, Hannah!

“You’ll be working at both the Somerville and Apple Jacks restaurants,” Leo says,

tossing a thumb in the direction of the building.

“I’m in charge of both, so I go back and forth.

Some days you’ll be here at Apple Jacks and other days there.

Right now, Jack and Lauren are working on expanding the restaurant at Somerville’s so that means there will be an opening for another head chef once that is complete.

They’re also expanding their catering business which will require a lead chef too. ”

“So there’s definitely an opportunity for advancement,” I add, and Leo nods. I just hope I’m not getting ahead of myself.

“Is that important to you?” Leo asks, and fuck my life, I did get ahead of myself. “Obviously, we’d like to keep employees, but we also understand that the Somerville name is relatively small—”

I cut him off, which is once again, me getting ahead of myself, but my mouth just won’t seem to stop today. “But there’s a sense of respect and camaraderie here, and the idea that the owners appreciate the hard work and effort that their employees put in.”

I stop talking before I tell him I don’t want to ever leave because leaving would mean I wouldn’t be able to stare at his gorgeous face every day at work.

“Jack and Lauren are great to work for. I think you’ll really like it here,” Leo now says, turning on that perfect smile of his.

“I do too.”

“Let’s get to work,” Leo announces, clapping his hands together once and grabbing a binder. He opens it up to the first page, handing it to me, he explains this is a list of new ciders that Jack has been working on, and next to them are Leo’s menu ideas.

We chat for a bit, tossing around ideas and letting things play out before deciding that we’re going to get started on a squash soup. It’s simple but will showcase some of my skills.

Leo points me in the direction of where I can get set up and he begins working a few feet away.

With the restaurant still open, he can’t devote all his attention to me, and given they are short staffed already, he needs to be working.

Orders will be coming in and I can only hope he’ll let me help out if needed.

“The pork chops with onion gravy and cinnamon apples are the most popular dish on the menu, but people really love seasonal specials. The seasonal menu is always a big draw.”

The second he says seasonal menu, I shudder. I’m never going to be able to hear those words and not think of that prick Roy Langston. I must have even made some sort of guttural moan because Leo looks over at me, his eyebrows going up.

“Sorry, my old boss hated every idea I had for the seasonal menu and now I have menu PTSD,” I joke as I begin to create the roux for the soup.

“The guy sounds like a real jerk. You won’t find that here,” Leo says, winking at me, and holy shit, just that simple gesture has my heart fluttering. Forget that dick Roy Langston, Leo Marsh is healing my confidence one wink at a time.

“Thanks,” I reply, as I watch Leo begin to chop an onion and it has never looked sexier. The muscles in his arms are flexed, his tattoos peeking out from his sleeves, making me wonder if he’s tattooed anywhere else.

I quickly look away before he catches me and thinks I’m some kind of weird stalker or worse that I have some kind of kitchen fetish.

We work in silence for a while with Leo filling orders from the restaurant and me perfecting the soup recipe.

The restaurant is buzzing, and I feel bad that I’m working on something that won’t be able to help Leo out.

It’s obvious that they’re in need of more employees and I start to wonder if I should mention that I have some friends I left behind when I quit my other job so abruptly.

“How’s it going?” I hear Leo ask, and when I turn around to answer him, I nearly crash into his firm and perfectly muscled chest. Our faces are only inches apart and if I leaned forward just slightly, our lips would be touching.

I let out a slow breath, and as I do, Leo reaches over and tucks a few stray hairs behind my ear. His touch sends my body into a tailspin, as my mouth goes dry and any chance of answering him is long gone.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

And yep, I'm pretty sure I'm officially fucked when it comes to my new sous chef.

Fucked in that whole, I think she's really hot and I seriously want to get in her pants kind of way. I am not supposed to be thinking about my sous chef like this. And I'm especially not supposed to be thinking of her in this way when she also happens to be the sister of my friend.

But I am and fuck me, if I don't want to lean in and kiss her right now.

We are standing only inches apart; her hands are resting on my chest and my hand is lingering near her neck after I actually tucked some strands of hair behind her ear, like that is a totally normal thing for a boss to do to his newest employee.

And fuck my life, but all it would take now is me leaning in, closing the gap and my lips would be on hers and I could find out exactly what she tastes—

My dirty and highly inappropriate thoughts are suddenly cut off by the sound of something smashing on the floor. Hannah and I jump apart, as though we've both been sprung doing something naughty, which is sort of true. But when I glance around, no one is looking at us.

"Shit, sorry, Leo," Tony, my third-year apprentice says, looking up from where he's crouched on the floor, a broken plate and spilled food at his feet.

"All good," I say, walking over. "You okay?"

“Yeah,” he says with a sheepish grin. “Didn’t realize the plate was hot.”

I tip my head toward the counter. “Heat lamps didn’t give it away?”

” I ask, smirking so he knows I’m only giving him shit.

I could care less about a broken plate or some spilled food.

In the grand scheme of things, this kind of thing is nothing.

The only thing I care about is fuck ups when it comes to the actual cooking of food.

“Yeah, yeah,” he says, his cheeks reddening as he stands, the broken plate in his hands.

I laugh. “All good, throw that out and get a replacement out quick,” I tell him. “And here,” I add, handing him one of the plate cloths, “you might need this.”

He laughs at that, shaking his head as he throws the mess away and turns back to the food prep area. Knowing I don’t need to stand over him while he prepares a replacement dish, I make my way back over to where Hannah is working, both grateful and weirdly annoyed at the interruption.

Stopping in front of her, I notice Hannah has been watching the whole incident, a strange look on her face.

“You okay?” I ask, confused.

She shakes her head. “Man, if that had happened in my old job, it’s...wow.”

I chuckle, grabbing a spoon from the drawer. “Wouldn’t have been good?”

“Shit no,” she says, her cheeks flushing a little as she adds, “I mean, I’m pretty sure my boss’ head would have exploded and the person would’ve been immediately fired. But that...you, that was just—”

“Inspiring?” I tease with a wink.

Her cheeks darken as she bites on her bottom lip. And just like that, all those dirty thoughts I was having come flooding back. Fuck me, I want to bite that bottom lip.

“Yeah,” she eventually whispers, her eyes dark as they stare back at me. “Something like that.”

The rest of the night passes without incident and even though I don’t spend much time chatting with Hannah, I do discover that not only is her soup perfect for the upcoming seasonal menu, but also that she isn’t afraid to jump in and help with the boring tasks, like chopping onions or garnishing dishes, when we get a sudden rush on orders.

She’s exactly the kind of addition I want to my kitchen, from a completely professional point of view, obviously.

“So,” she says, as I wander over to where she’s wiping down the huge stainless-steel counters of the prep area.

“So,” I reply, leaning my hip against the counter as I cross my arms over my chest.

Hannah straightens, a smile on her face as she meets my gaze and holds it. “Do I make the cut?”

“Do I?” I immediately throw back.

She laughs now, mirroring my pose. “Um yeah, I’d say that was a definite yes.”

I nod, trying not to show how happy that makes me, even as my heart gives a hard thump in my chest. “And my kitchen?”

“Uh huh, also a definite yes.”

“The hours?”

“Yep,” she says with a nod.

“Start date?”

Another nod.

“The pay?”

She laughs again, shaking her head a little. “Hell yes, it’s a yes to everything, Leo.”

Now it’s me chuckling as I push off the counter and hold out a hand to her. “In that case, welcome to Somerville’s, glad to have you as part of the team.”

Hannah’s gaze drops to my hand before lifting to mine again. Stepping around the counter so she’s standing right in front of me, she slips her hand into mine and fuck me if a lightning bolt doesn’t shoot up my arm.

“Thanks,” she says, her voice lower now, huskier and totally sexy. “I’m really glad to be here.”

I nod, swallowing hard as I mentally tell myself to drop her hand so I don’t haul her against me and kiss the shit out of her.

“You gotta drive back to San Fran tonight?” I ask, still not letting go of her hand.

She gives me a strange look that I can’t decipher as I add, “I know you worked there, so I assume you live there too?”

A smile tugs at her mouth as her eyes sparkle with amusement. “I do, yeah, but I’ll crash at Dylan and Tessa’s tonight. I’ll probably need to move closer now if I’m working here.”

My dick is practically screaming at me to tell her she can crash at my place, even as my brain tries to tell it to calm down because it has no place going anywhere near my employees. Shaking my head at my idiotic thoughts, I say, “Yeah, it’s a long commute, so would probably be good.”

Hannah continues to watch me, our hands still joined as this weird tension crackles between us. I know she feels it too, that whatever this is, it isn’t one-sided. It’s written all over her face.

“Okay, we’re clear,” Holly, the head server shouts from the kitchen doors. “Staff drinks!”

Hannah’s eyes widen as I suddenly drop her hand, not wanting any of my staff to see us and get the wrong idea.

“Staff drinks?” she asks.

“Yeah,” I say with a smile. “We do it every Saturday after closing. You coming?”

She watches me for a few moments before her gaze moves around the kitchen, taking in the rest of the staff as they finish packing up, take their chef coats off and head out to the restaurant. It’s a relaxed vibe, always has been in my kitchen, but especially on

Saturday nights.

It's something I strived to do, having spent countless years working in the kitchens of egotistical pricks, and I'm proud that all of my staff are happy and hardworking and as result, loyal.

"Yeah okay," she eventually says, with a shrug. "Why not."

We finish our clean up and then ditch our chef jackets and follow the rest of the staff out to the restaurant. It's filled with kitchen and front of house staff from both here and Somerville's. We always get together on Saturday nights in the same place, alternating the restaurant each week.

Sometimes Jack and Lauren stop by, as do the tasting room staff and it's always a fun way to unwind at the end of a long week, even if some of us sometimes have to get up early on Sunday for the brunch crowd.

"So this is a regular thing?" Hannah asks as I lead her over to the bar.

"Yep, every Saturday night," I say, glancing over my shoulder. "It's not a big night or anything, just a couple of drinks and a debrief of any shit that went down."

Hannah laughs. "Everyone behaves themselves then?"

I smirk, meeting her gaze as I grab a cider, holding it up to her as if to ask if she wants one. She nods and I twist the cap off and hand it to her before grabbing one for myself. "Um, yeah," I eventually say. "Most of the time, anyway."

Her brows shoot up as she takes a sip of her drink. I watch, my gaze moving to her neck as she swallows. "I think I'm going to really like working here," she eventually says, watching me.

I take a sip of my drink, giving her a wink as I say, “I think you will too,” even as my dick is practically raising its hand and screaming and we like you working here as well .

Fuck me.

“So, crashing with your brother huh, that must be fun?”

Hannah laughs as she takes a seat on one of the bar stools. “It’s not too bad. Tessa and I actually went to high school together,” she says as I move around and join her. “It’s been great connecting with her again, even if it is kinda gross to think she’s sleeping with my little brother.”

I chuckle. “Yeah, that would be weird,” I agree, even as my own dirty thoughts about fucking Dylan’s sister seem to be on permanent rotation in my brain. “They seem happy though.”

“Oh, they definitely are,” she says, smiling. “That’s also weird, for him anyway. He used to be a bit of a man whore and I don’t think I was the only one freaking out when he suddenly started settling down and getting all serious. And now he’s gonna be a dad, it’s like...god, it’s really weird.”

I nod, taking another sip of my cider as I glance at her hand, wondering if she has a significant other out there. She isn’t wearing a ring, but that’s not unusual given what we do for a living, so it’s not a guarantee she’s single.

It’s also not an excuse for me to continue thinking about her in that way or even consider asking her about it.

“So, anyone special for you?” I blurt out, because apparently my brain hasn’t got the memo to cut this shit out.

Hannah smiles as she takes a sip of her drink. “Not really a career that lends itself to relationships,” she says, giving me a coy smile.

“No, it’s not,” I agree.

“So, no one special for you then?” she asks, repeating my question back to me.

Now it’s me smiling at her, wondering exactly what this is that’s going on between us. It’s definitely more than two colleagues getting to know each other. There’s a flirtiness here, along with the obvious chemistry, which doesn’t seem to give a shit that I’m her boss and she’s my newest employee.

“Not really a career that lends itself to relationships,” I repeat with a casual shrug.

Hannah laughs, her eyes sparkling. “Well, unless you both work in the industry, right? Then it might work.”

I meet her gaze and watch as she pulls that bottom lip of hers between her teeth, her eyes locked with mine as we silently watch each other, almost as though we’re both daring the other to acknowledge what she’s just said or even to make the first move.

I want to, of that I’m certain, no matter how much I know it’s wrong, and the only thing that’s stopping me right now is the fact that this place is filled with Apple Jacks and Somerville workers.

God knows, I do not want to have to go through what Dylan went through, everyone gossiping and offering advice when he and Tessa were getting together.

“Well yeah, then it might work,” I eventually say, giving her a cheeky smirk.

She smiles now, a sexy smile that tells me she is so totally up for seeing where this

thing between us could go. It's dangerous and we both know it, but right now, I'm pretty sure neither of us gives a shit.

"It might," she agrees, as she finishes off her cider.

I watch as she stands, my heart suddenly pounding in my chest as I wonder if she's going to make a move, suggest we go back to my place or something. But she doesn't, instead shooting me a smile as she says, "I guess I should get going."

Disappointment curls through me, even as I know it's the right thing for her to do. She just started working here, like literally six hours ago. How the fuck could hooking up with her boss be a good move?

Still, I can't deny there's a part of me that was expecting something different.

I stand, offering her a smile. "You okay to get home?" I ask, immediately thinking what a stupid question that is.

"Yeah, I'm good," she says, smiling at me. "So, start Wednesday?"

"Start Wednesday," I confirm.

She nods once. "Thanks, Leo. I really appreciate the opportunity you've given me," she says, holding out her hand. "And I'm really looking forward to working with you."

I slide my hand into hers, once again not missing the electricity that shoots up my arm. "Ditto, Hannah," I say quietly. "Ditto."

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

My phone starts ringing the second I walk out the door, but when I pull it from my purse, it's a number I don't recognize.

I let it go to voicemail because for the first time ever, I'll be on time to my Sunday breakfast with Dylan.

Now, I'm not tooting my own horn too loudly since I spent the night at Dylan's last night and he woke me up and has barked orders at me to get my ass moving ever since.

He'd love to flaunt the fact that it's him who has made me on time for once.

"Move your ass, Hannah!" Dylan yells, his head hanging out the car window, a smug grin on his face.

"Shut up, you douche!" I shout back, as Tessa covers her face with her hands, shaking her head at our antics.

Tessa doesn't always join us on Sundays, but today she is and it's nice to have her here too.

It's actually been fun staying with them and not having to make the commute from San Francisco, but eventually, I'll have to go back home and decide what to do.

I can't drive from the city all the way out to Napa every day, especially with the kind

of hours I'll be working.

Although, it might work in my favor, and I could avoid some of the traffic.

But either way, that hour plus commute is not ideal and I know I can't fully move in with Tessa and Dylan with their baby coming.

My lease is up in two months and if I have to, I could make it work to rent something in Napa and pay my ridiculous rent in San Francisco at the same time. It's a good thing I got that pay hike, because I'm going to need it.

"You staying again tonight?" Tessa asks when I get in the car.

"I don't think so. I don't work again until Wednesday, so I'll head home after this and drive in for the dinner rush on Wednesday."

"Good," Dylan quips. "Now Tess and I can get back to—"

"Nope. Don't even say it, Dylan," Tessa shames, shaking a finger at him and hitting him with a nasty glare. "Stop trying to make your sister uncomfortable. She's dealt with enough shit from her crappy boss. She doesn't need you grossing her out."

"Fine, fine. You know you can stay as long as you need," Dylan now says, instantly conceding to Tessa's demands. It's so damn cute how quickly Dylan and Tessa fell in love and how quickly he realized that having a girl in his life would make it all the better.

"Thanks, I appreciate that, but I also want to make sure I'm long gone before the baby comes. You don't need me there and a new baby. I'm sure Mom and Dad will be up your ass too."

“I’m already dreading it,” Dylan laments, rolling his eyes.

“You two are terrible. Your parents are wonderful. I’m sure they’ll be a huge help when the baby comes,” Tessa says, shaming both of us now.

My phone rings again, the same number popping up on my screen as I silence the call.

I’m starting to wonder if maybe my epic quitting is coming back to haunt me.

It could totally be someone from my old job reaching out to bitch at me for leaving them high and dry.

I’m rarely selfish, but in this instance, I was and I really don’t care.

I shove my phone back in my purse and as soon as I do, it chimes out with a notice of a voicemail. Whoever this is clearly wants to get in touch with me. It’s probably a telemarketer calling about my car’s warranty or something stupid.

“Popular today, huh, Han?” Dylan says, glancing over his shoulder as he drives to our usual breakfast spot.

“Guess so,” I reply and again my phone chimes out, a text coming through this time. I pull my phone from my purse, deciding I should probably check in on who this is and what they want.

Leo: Hey Hannah, it’s Leo from Apple Jacks and Somerville’s. I left you a voicemail with this same message. Sorry that seems sorta stalker-like, but I’m desperate. LOL. We got in a huge catering order and I’m wondering if you could come in and help out? Thanks!

I stare down at my phone, excited about the prospect of helping with a catering order, but also wondering if this is one of those times where I need to set some boundaries up front.

I'm not supposed to start till Wednesday and if I say yes to this will I have set the expectation that I will always come in on my days off?

I can't help but think back to the job I left just a few days ago.

I left because of the work-life balance and the demands.

Will this be another one of those demands?

"Who is it?" Dylan asks, and Tessa swats at him.

"Why are you so nosy? Leave your sister alone."

"It's Leo from Somerville's. He wants me to come in and help with a catering order today," I tell both of them.

"That's awesome," Dylan cheers out, holding his hand behind him for me to high-five. He's stupidly cheesy right now and I blame Tessa.

"Is it though?" I ask, letting my thoughts run wild with what this could mean.

Maybe he really does need help. He did say they were short staffed, hence the quick hiring he did with me.

Or this could just be a test to see if I'm willing to give up any semblance of a life I have and come into work.

Or and this is a big or, because looking like he does, I don't think he has to resort to tactics to pick up a girl, but maybe he's interested in me. Like not me as a chef but me as a girl.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

"He's your boss, Hannah," I mutter under my breath as Tessa looks back at me as if she heard what I said and is questioning my sanity.

"Why wouldn't it be? It shows how much you kick ass," Dylan replies.

"Yeah, but I left my other job so I wasn't working day and night and on my days off."

"Leo's not like that. He wouldn't call you unless he was desperate. He's been handling almost everything there on his own for the past few months. I'm sure he's just happy to have someone who might be able to help him out," Dylan adds, and I begin to think I'm overreacting.

"You're probably right."

"I'm sure you're thinking about your old job," Tessa says. "But I can assure you that working at Somerville's isn't like that. Leo's great, and Jack and Lauren are always thinking about their employees and making sure they're happy."

I look down at my phone, thinking about the two missed calls, the voicemail and the text, and it's obvious he's in a bind.

I need to help him out even if it's just to alleviate some of his stress, but I also need to be more assertive and tell him this isn't an everyday thing. Like I'm suddenly that kind of person.

“So should I drop you off at Somerville’s instead?” Dylan asks.

“I’ll text Leo back and tell him I’m coming after we have breakfast. That feels like a good compromise to me.”

“Sounds good,” Tessa answers with Dylan nodding in agreement.

I text Leo back, but I don’t hear anything, assuming he’s probably trying to handle the morning rush and this catering order.

I have to admit, I’m a little nervous. While I’ve always wanted to get into catering, I’ve never handled large scale orders before.

I hope I can hack it or Leo’s going to regret calling me in.

A couple of hours later, I walk in and find the rest of the staff working on lunch orders for Somerville’s, but Leo is nowhere to be seen.

And when I ask where I can find him, they direct me to one of the outbuildings that has been turned into a kitchen to help support the up-and-coming catering business.

It looks like things are going well in the kitchen here at Somerville’s, so I move over to the kitchen at Apple Jacks, checking to see if they’re doing okay. And again, Leo runs a tight ship, because I find everything in order despite the Sunday crowd.

I take the long walk back toward the newly established catering kitchen and this is where I find Leo. I stop in the oversized doorway and watch him work. He’s moving around in a million different directions with multiple burners going on the gorgeous commercial oven in front of him.

I’m in love.

With the space, with the appliances, and maybe even with him. There's something so fucking sexy about watching this man cook. My stomach flutters and I cross my legs, reminding myself that he is my boss and while he looks like the kind of guy I would totally crawl into bed with, he is off limits.

"Hannah," he says, startled by me creeping on him from the doorway, but he brushes it off and continues working.

"You're alone in here," I comment, almost a question as I look around the large space.

"I am. I told you we're short staffed, but I couldn't pass up this opportunity and so I said yes in the hopes that you'd be able to help out and here you are." He opens his arms, smiling at me and once again I find myself far too turned on by the simple gestures of this man.

"What do you need help with?" I ask, after a few seconds of silence and trying to pull myself together. I really need to stop wondering what he looks like under that chef's coat and if his tattoos cover more than just his arms.

"Here's the menu," he says, handing me a binder. "Luckily it's all desserts, but the bad news is that they need to go out today."

I try not to let him see the shock on my face, quickly snapping my mouth shut. Today? He can't be serious. He lets out a sigh, almost in relief that there's someone else here to help him and now I wish I would've ditched breakfast with Dylan and Tessa and come here to help him out.

"Today?" I ask with a slight bit of hesitation.

"Yeah, today. I probably should've said no, but I hate to turn away a client given how

new this whole operation is.”

“I get that, and we’ve got this,” I say, sounding more positive than I really am. “What time does the client need everything?”

Leo fills me in while he continues working and I get started. He’s right that this shouldn’t be difficult, it’s the time constraint we’re under that might cause issues.

“Thanks so much for coming in,” Leo says, as the silence begins to fill the room, both of us working too hard to acknowledge the other for a few minutes.

“No problem.”

“I was starting to think I was gonna have to call my dad to come help,” he jokes, smiling over at me, and I swear I think my knees are going to give out when we make eye contact.

But then he pulls off his chef’s coat, revealing a fitted white t-shirt and now I’m definitely going to lose it.

There’s never been a person who looks so good in something so simple as Leo Marsh does right now.

The sleeves hug the defined muscles in his arm, accentuating just how toned he really is and when he raises his arms above his head, stretching, I catch a glimpse of his perfectly flat, taut stomach.

Focus, Hannah!

“Your dad cooks?” I ask, realizing I’ve let a ridiculous amount of time pass between us before commenting, but holy hell it was hard to draw my eyes away from all the

gorgeousness standing in front of me.

“Yeah, you could say that. He’d have helped me out if I needed it. My mom too, but I’ll admit I was a little embarrassed about calling my parents and begging for help like a kid.”

“Glad I could help you out,” I answer, finally looking back at him as I tell my body to stop thinking about him naked. Luckily, when I make eye contact with him this time, he has a swipe of chocolate smeared across his cheek.

I bite down hard on my lip to keep from laughing, but all that seems to do is cause Leo’s eyes to widen and focus directly on my mouth.

“You have,” I say, tapping my cheek, and Leo wipes at the wrong side, making me giggle a little.

“Well, shit, glad your laugh is so adorable or I’d feel like a real ass right now,” he says, and I swallow hard.

My pulse ramps up a bit as I step toward him. I reach out, pressing my thumb to his cheek, cleaning away the stray bit of chocolate, and without thinking about it, I suck my thumb into my mouth.

Leo’s mouth falls open slightly and his hand wraps around my wrist, my thumb still in my mouth.

The touch of his skin against mine, the feeling of electricity that shoots through me has my body out of control.

All I can hope is he doesn’t feel how hard my heart is beating, his fingers resting on the pulse of my wrist.

“Hannah,” he whispers, and oh my fucking god, when he tugs on my wrist, my thumb now free from my mouth, I think he’s going to kiss me. He moves closer, his breathing hard and warm against my lips, and my body cries out to just kiss him.

“Yes,” I murmur, and I watch his throat move as he swallows hard, taking in a long slow breath.

“You gotta wash your hands now,” he spits out and I’m fucking mortified.

“Of course. Sorry,” I say, shaking my head at my own stupidity in thinking he was interested in more than just keeping the kitchen hygienic.

What a fucking moron I am!

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

Well, that was a total dick move. Although considering my other option was kissing her, it was probably the right move.

It still doesn't stop me from feeling like complete shit at the way I said it though. I can tell by her reaction, the way her cheeks flushed that she's embarrassed, like maybe she thought something else was going to happen just then too.

Fuck my life, what the hell is wrong with me when it comes to this woman? Maybe it was a mistake asking her to come in today, especially with the two of us in here working alone together. But if that's the case, then it was probably a mistake hiring her in the first place.

I need to stop thinking like this. Hannah is my employee. She's also the sister of a good friend of mine. I do not need to be thinking about her in any way except as my sous chef.

End. Of. Story.

Ugh, but fuck, she's hot. Like seriously sexy hot, especially in the hot kitchen, with her hair all piled on her head and her jacket sleeves rolled up, revealing her long, toned arms. I can only imagine what the rest of her body looks like.

And just like that, I'm once again thinking seriously inappropriate thoughts about her and now I'm sporting a semi at the thought of her naked too. God, I'm such a perv.

Walking back over to the oven, I try to refocus on the job at hand, which is essentially smashing out a bunch of different desserts by five o'clock. I'm probably going to have to head straight over to Apple Jacks or Somerville's afterward too, just to help cover the dinner rush.

Wow, what a great life I have. No wonder I'm having all these perverted thoughts about my employee. I literally see no one else but the people I work with.

We manage to avoid any more awkwardness, the two of us working side by side for the next few hours as we work to get all of the desserts made. We don't talk much, but when we do, it's all work related and I end up switching on some music, just so there's something else to distract us.

At five on the dot, the courier shows up to pick up the desserts and both Hannah and I exhale with relief as we pack the last of them into the boxes.

"Wow, we made it," she says, smiling at me.

"Thank fuck," I exhale quietly. "And thank you, Hannah, I seriously could not have done this without you."

Her smile widens, as she picks up a stack of boxes to carry out to the van.

I follow behind her, my gaze of course dropping to her ass before my eyes snap back up.

"You're welcome," she says, placing the boxes in the back of the van.

"It was actually fun. I haven't had the opportunity to make a lot of desserts before."

I nod, knowing that desserts, with all their fancy and highly technical components,

are not something that most head chefs let their sous chefs do. Hannah's lack of experience doesn't show though and once again I find myself wondering who it was she worked for before coming to work for me.

"Well, you can't tell," I say, as I sign the delivery notice the guy holds out to me, taking the receipt that I'll pass off to finance so they can take care of the payment. "You did really good work today, so again, thank you."

She nods, smiling as we head back inside the kitchen to finish cleaning up. "Thanks, Leo, I really appreciate that."

I start to gather up the dirty utensils and take them over to the sink.

"Are desserts something you'd like to get more experience with, because we can make that happen, if you like?"

"Hannah shakes her head, but she's smiling as she starts to fill the dishwasher.

"What?" I ask, chuckling a little. "Are you laughing at me?"

"No, no," she says, holding her hands up in surrender. "You're just so, I don't know, different from my old boss."

Now it's me laughing. "Well, I aim to please and impress, so I'm glad it's working."

And fuck me, if I haven't just made it awkward again.

Hannah turns back to the dishes and I continue to gather them up, before deciding on a whim to grab two beers from the fridge. I've gotta work tonight, but fuck it, right now I think we both deserve this.

“Thanks,” Hannah says, when I place the open bottle on the counter in front of her. I take a long pull of mine as she adds, “You’re not working tonight?”

“Oh, I am,” I say, nodding. “But I’ll take a break for an hour or so.”

“You want some help tonight?” she asks, as she takes a sip of her beer. “I can stay.”

“No, seriously, I already feel like shit for calling you in before you’ve even officially started,” I tell her. “But just so you know, I’ll be back-dating your contract to yesterday, to cover last night and today.”

“No, Leo, that’s not—”

I hold up a hand to stop her. “Not up for discussion is what it is,” I say, giving her a wink. “Now, let’s get this mess cleaned up.”

We work together to stack and empty the dishwashers; Hannah hand washes the knives as I wipe down the counters. I open us a second beer as we work and everything about this feels easy and right and I know that regardless of my attraction to her, hiring Hannah was a really good move.

“Okay, I think we’re done,” I say, as the last of the dishes are put away.

“Sweet,” she says, smiling as she starts to unbutton her chef’s jacket.

I can’t turn away, my mouth going dry as I watch her slowly undo the buttons to reveal a tight tank underneath. She’s clearly hot, her skin flushed and covered in a slight sheen of sweat that I suddenly want to lick off.

She throws it onto a counter, her gaze meeting mine again as I blatantly check her out.

I watch as her eyes widen, her pupils dilating and making her eyes impossibly dark.

I'd like to blame what happens next on the two beers that I've drunk, but that would be complete bullshit because the simple fact is, I want her. Badly.

And that's the only thought running through my head as I now step toward her, my hand reaching out to brush some loose strands of hair from her face. She lets out a gasp, her lips parting slightly as my hand moves lower, my fingers brushing against her cheek.

She blinks slowly, leaning into my touch as my fingers now curl around her neck, pulling her closer as I lower my mouth to hers and kiss her.

Oh my fucking god.

She tastes amazing, unbelievable, totally and utterly addictive as I trace her bottom lip with my tongue, before slipping it inside her mouth.

She lets out the tiniest whimper as she pushes her tits against my chest, her body melting into mine as my other arm wraps around her waist and pulls her flush against me.

Everything else disappears, the kitchen, the restaurant, the idea that someone, anyone could walk in here and see us kissing. I no longer give a shit, unable to stop myself as I give in to what I've been thinking about ever since she came in to interview with me.

I can hear the voice in my head telling me to stop this, but I'm not listening, and clearly Hannah doesn't hear it either, because it's her who deepens the kiss, her arms wrapping around my neck as she kisses me hard and hot now, our teeth and tongues clashing together as we practically devour each other.

“Yo, Leo, you in here, man?”

We jump apart at the sound of Jack’s voice, both of us breathing hard, my heart pounding in my chest and my dick harder than I can ever remember it being. Fuck, if just a kiss can do that, imagine what fucking her would be like.

“Leo?” Jack’s distinct accent calls out again, breaking this moment as Hannah turns away from me.

I suck in a deep breath, trying to get my body under control as I call out, “Yeah, in here.”

Jack strolls in, a huge grin on his face as I brush a hand over the top of my head and turn to face him, praying I don’t look like a guy who was two seconds away from backing Hannah up against the wall and fucking her senseless.

“Hey,” he says, smiling at me. “Oh hey, Hannah, didn’t know you were here.”

Hannah turns, leaning back against the counter as she holds her chef’s jacket in front of her. “Hi, Jack,” she replies, smiling. “Yes, I came in to help Leo out. We just finished.”

Jack glances at me, tilting his head ever so slightly before turning back to Hannah. “Wow, that’s super cool of you, thank you. Well, um...yeah, make sure she gets paid for the overtime,” he adds, turning back to me.

I nod. “Already done,” I confirm.

“Good,” Jack says, clapping his hands together as he glances between us again, an unreadable look on his face that I know only spells danger.

As cool as my boss is, he seems to have a knack of sticking his nose in everyone else's business.

And especially so when it comes to setting people up.

"So, everything go okay then?" he asks. "The order got done?"

"Yep," I confirm, needing to get the hell out of here.

"Great and..." he pauses, once again glancing between us in a way that suggests he knows exactly what he almost just walked in on.

Fuck . "Everything else okay?" he asks, a sly grin on his face now, which tells me he absolutely knows what was just happening in here.

"Cause you seem kinda, I don't know, on—"

"Everything's great, Jack," I quickly say. "Just a long day and now I gotta work tonight."

Jack blinks once, that smile still there like he doesn't believe me before he realizes what I just said. "Oh shit, Leo, that sucks. You um, you need to hire some more staff or?"

"I'm good," I say, shaking my head. "I mean, yeah maybe eventually if this catering takes off more. But with Hannah now here, we'll be good for a bit."

"I can help," she says, her voice husky, like she's just had the shit kicked out of her.

Which to be fair, she has.

Jack smiles at her, opening his mouth to say something. “It’s cool, Hannah, seriously,” I tell her, before he has a chance. “You did me a huge favor today and I really appreciate it. You’re good though, I’ll see you on Wednesday, yeah?”

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah meets my gaze, an unreadable expression on her face that has me rethinking my words and how they will have sounded to her. Does she think kissing me was doing me a favor? Like is that even possible? And that now I don't want her around.

Oh my god, why am I thinking this? What the fuck is wrong with me?

I smile, trying to reassure her that things are cool between us even if I have no idea if that's true. "Thank you," I say again. "Today was great. Go home and get some rest and I'll see you Wednesday."

"Okay," she says, offering me a small smile. "Have a good night."

Jack and I watch as she grabs the rest of her things and makes her way outside. As soon as she's gone, Jack turns to me, a huge grin on his face because yeah, of course he knows what he almost walked in on, because he's a sneaky fucker like that.

I should've known he'd figure things out, given how he was with Tom and Penny and then Dylan and Tessa. The dude prides himself on sticking his smart-ass Aussie nose in everything around here.

I mean don't get me wrong, he's a great boss and I really enjoy working for him, but I also saw the shit Dylan and Tom copped and I do not need to join that club.

"Okay, well, I'm gonna grab a quick dinner and then it's back to work," I say, before he has a chance to start.

"Okaaaay," he says, drawing the word out as he watches me, his arms crossed over

his chest and a huge smile on his face. “And you don’t want to—”

“Nope, not at all,” I say, cutting him off as I hold a hand up in a wave and walk out of the kitchen, leaving Jack to lock up.

I walk quickly back to Apple Jacks, making a beeline for my office and slamming the door behind me as I sink into my chair. Pulling my phone from my pocket, I see the last text Hannah sent me this morning, letting me know she’d be in to help in a couple of hours.

“Jesus christ, Leo,” I mutter to myself. “What the hell was that?”

I scrub a hand down my face, exhaling hard as I try to figure out what I’m supposed to do next. Do I pretend like the kiss never happened or do I say something to her? But if I say something, what? Do I want it to happen again, or do I tell her it can’t?

“Ugh, fuck!” I shout to myself, wondering how it is that a woman I’ve known for all of five minutes can affect me like this.

Sighing, I grab the bottle of honey flavored liquor that Tom dropped off yesterday and pour myself a glass, wishing it was something stronger, but knowing I need another drink right now.

I throw the liquid back in one gulp, pausing only briefly to appreciate how good it tastes before I type out a text.

Me: Hey so...sorry about before, that was...idk, unprofessional? It won’t happen again.

I hit send before I have a chance to overthink it, my eyes glued to the screen as I wait for a response. I watch as my message goes to read, my heart pounding in my chest as

the bubbles, to signify she's typing, immediately pop up.

Hannah: Shame, because I wasn't complaining.

"Holy fuck," I breathe out, not expecting that response from her at all. All of a sudden my heart is pounding in my chest for an entirely different reason, as my fingers fly over the tiny keyboard, typing out a response.

Me: Good to know I certainly wasn't either. Still, it was kind of unprofessional of me and I should tell you that I don't normally behave like that.

Hannah: How exactly did you behave??

Me: Like a guy unable to control himself, that's how!

Hannah: Lol...for the record, I don't think you were the only one.

My eyes close at her words as my brain flashes back to the kiss and the way she deepened it, taking things a step further. God knows what might have happened had Jack not walked in.

Me: Yeah ok, certainly didn't seem like you were complaining.

Hannah: Ummm, see above, I wasn't ;)

Me: Shit, so now what?

I have no idea what happens next. When I first texted her, my intention had been to apologize for practically jumping her and to reassure her it wouldn't happen again, hoping also that I wasn't about to get handed a HR complaint for sexual harassment.

Now though, everything has changed.

Hannah: Idk...I mean we do still need to work together and you are my boss.

Me: I am and I do have two kitchens to run.

Hannah: Which absolutely need to be kept professional

Me: Absolutely

Hannah: Sooooo, guess we just see each other at work and go with it...?

Go with it? What the fuck does go with it mean? We do it again? Or we don't? We hook up, not caring who knows or we act professionally at work and seriously unprofessional when we're not at work? Fuck, I have no idea.

Before I have a chance to respond, a knock sounds at my door. "Boss, we've got an issue with the chicken," comes Tony's voice through the door.

"Shit," I mutter before calling out, "Okay, be right there." I throw my phone on the desk, knowing I can't continue this weird text flirting because I also have a job to do.

Before I walk out though, I grab my phone and type out one last response, my body tingling with everything that's happened today.

Me: ...I guess we do...

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

It's been a week since Leo kissed me and I don't know if he's avoiding me or what, but I haven't seen him since my first actual day of work here at Somerville's.

I mean, we have both been working at different restaurants on the property and I've spent most of my days working in catering while Leo handles the lunch rush.

And then in the evenings, I tend to be stationed at Somerville's while Leo is at Apple Jacks.

Is he ignoring me?

I shouldn't be this weird over it. I told him we'd just go with it, and honestly when I sent that text, I didn't even know what I meant by that.

Go with it like the kiss never happened?

Or go with it like it was the best kiss that I've had in months, possibly years, and pray that it happens again?

Or go with it like when I see him again, we should definitely kiss.

"Fuck my life," I mutter, dragging a hand through my hair, looking out at the beautiful scenery of the Somerville property.

I flop down on a bench, taking my lunch break outside and away from the noise of

the kitchen.

It's actually nice to even get a lunch break and a moment to wind down before the dinner rush begins.

I'm not used to being treated like a normal person, but I'm certainly already getting used to it.

No one has screamed at me for at least a week and if anything, I've gotten tons of compliments from Jack and Lauren on my work ethic and the food I've made.

It's weird, but weirder yet is this whole thing with Leo.

Why did I tell him we would just go with it? And why the hell did he respond like he knew what that meant? Oh my fucking god, I need to get my shit together. Even with all this awkwardness, it's still better than working for Roy Langston.

"Hey," I hear a voice call and I immediately recognize it as Tessa's.

Looking over my shoulder, I see her waddling over, her belly growing with each passing day.

She's the perfect pregnant person though, always smiling and dressed so cute.

If I ever decide to have a kid, I'm going to look miserable and sloppy; I can just feel it.

"Hey, Tessa. How's it going?" I ask, shifting over so she can have a seat next to me.

"Good, good, other than the fact that I'm blowing like a rhino making my way over here," she jokes, sitting down next to me and letting out a hard breath. "This damn

property is getting too big for me to be walking all over it. I need a golf cart.”

“You look great, and you absolutely do not sound like a rhino. How are things going with the restaurant expansion?” I ask, knowing this is one of the things that I hope keeps me here at Somerville’s for a long time.

Expansion means job security. That is if I can keep my hands off Leo.

I’m sure my bosses would not appreciate me seducing my superior.

I must be silent for a bit because Tessa calls my name and I quickly turn to look at her. It’s obvious I’ve missed something she said, and she laughs a little.

“Distracted?” she asks and all I can do is nod. “I’d have thought you’d be used to crowds given you came from such a high-end restaurant in San Francisco. This should be easy for you.”

“Oh, it’s not the job. The job is great.

I mean who wouldn’t love working here?” I toss a hand out, gesturing to the expanse in front of us.

“They should consider opening a bed and breakfast or building some little cottages. People would be flocking here even more than they already are. It’s the perfect getaway from the city. ”

“So that’s what you’ve been sitting here thinking about?” Tessa says with a bit of skepticism in her voice. “How to expand the Somerville name? It feels like it’s something else.”

“It’s something else, that’s for sure,” I mutter.

“Dylan better not be being a jerk to you,” she says, wrinkling up her nose, a glare on her face. “Living together is a lot of togetherness, but he better be being nice to you.”

I officially moved in with Dylan and Tessa a few days ago, but it is definitely temporary. I’ve been on the hunt and will find something soon, at least I hope I do or I’m going to be sleeping in my car once the baby comes.

“He’s fine. His typical douche self,” I tease, winking at Tessa. “It’s...” I don’t finish my thought, catching my tongue and wondering if it’s best to just keep the whole thing a secret. It’s already a secret and it’s kind of eating at me keeping it bottled up.

“I can tell something is bothering you, Hannah,” Tessa prompts, “You were so bubbly and excited about the new job and now you’re just...”

“Weird?” I ask filling in the break in her sentence.

“Yeah, I guess weird works.”

“Well, it’s weird, let me tell you.”

“I think you should tell me,” Tessa now says, smirking, knowing I’m about to unload some gossip on her.

“You have to promise not to tell anyone,” I say, an insistence in my voice, my head cocked to the side, waiting for her to acknowledge me.

“Oh, it’s that kind of secret. Got it. My lips are sealed,” She pretends to zip her lips shut, which only adds to the ridiculousness of this situation.

“I kissed Leo,” I blurt out, covering my face with my hands. “Or maybe he kissed me. I don’t know.”

“Leo, your boss?” Tessa asks and I don’t miss the shock in the way she says it. She thinks I’m a complete idiot.

I spent all this time trying to find a new job, to be free of dealing with the bullshit of horrible bosses and now I’m probably going to find myself fired and looking for a new job.

“I swear, this place,” Tessa mutters, shaking her head, a smirk on her face.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I ask, my curiosity piqued.

“It means that there is something about this place that makes people...” Tessa trails off and again I fill in the gap.

“Stupid?” I comment and Tessa bursts out laughing.

“I was going to say fall in love.”

Whoa, she needs to pump the brakes. No one is falling in love, certainly not me.

I don’t fall in love overnight. That’s for dreamers and wishers and hoppers.

I’m the girl who is just getting by, living with her brother and finally working a job she enjoys.

Falling in love is not even on my radar, even if Leo is epically hot and an amazing kisser and I can’t stop wondering what he looks like naked.

“Um, no one is falling in love, Tessa. It was a kiss and I haven’t been laid in a while.” I drag out that last part, widening my eyes to really drive home the point that I’m pretty much a born-again virgin.

“Keep telling yourself that, but once Jack and Lauren get wind—”

“Tessa!” I whisper-shout, looking around to make sure I haven’t drawn attention to us and attempting to control the urge to slap my hand over her mouth. “Jack and Lauren cannot know about this. I need this job and I don’t want them thinking Leo did anything wrong.”

“Good luck with that,” she says, laughing.

“They can’t find out.”

“Oh, but they will, and they will enjoy every second of it. At least Jack will. He thinks he’s some kind of matchmaker, and to be honest, he’s pretty good at it. He knew Dylan and I were hooking up before we even told anyone.”

“Oh my god, Tessa! I’m gonna have to quit my job and go back to that nightmare of a restaurant and beg Roy Langston for my old job back.

I can’t do that. I tossed him the double bird and told him I didn’t ever want to see his stupid face again,” I say, basically melting down, everything coming out in a whine-wail combo.

“I think you might be overreacting,” Tessa now says. “It might be a good thing. Leo is pretty hot and just imagine him all sweaty in that hot kitchen, taking his shirt off.” She fans herself, her mouth open in a perfect O shape.

“Tessa, he can’t take his shirt off in the kitchen. There are health and safety regulations, not to mention it’s just not hygienic. He’s very into making sure there’s no cross contamination. Like when I licked my thumb, he told me I needed to wash my hands.”

Tessa is listening intently, but I'm not sure if she realizes I'm serious or if she's about to make fun of me. Kitchen hygiene is no joke.

"Hygiene or whatever, Leo is hot and if he's interested, go for it. Jack and Lauren will not care, seriously. Haven't you noticed almost everyone who works here is either married or together?"

"Whatever. That might work for you and Dylan, but the last thing I need is to start hooking up with my boss, only to have it go to shit. Then what do I do?"

There's no way this could ever work, and I do not want to find myself out looking for a job again.

Leaving one job off a resumé is one thing, but two?

That feels like a red flag. No one will hire me, especially after my epic quitting and then possibly hooking up with my boss.

I'm not sure which is worse and having to explain it to anyone is not something I want to do.

I look down at my phone, noticing I have five minutes left on my lunch break and all I've done is whine about kissing Leo and never really solving anything.

"I gotta get back to work. Please don't tell Dylan," I say, scrambling off to the catering barn.

"It's not that big of a deal, Hannah," Tessa calls out and I know she's laughing at me and all my stupidity. I'm like a fifteen year old girl wondering if a boy likes me.

Grow up, Hannah!

I walk into the quiet kitchen, letting out a sigh of relief, strangely enjoying the alone time I've had in here over the past week. But when I round the corner, there he is in all his gorgeous hotness, and I've suddenly forgotten why I thought kissing him again was a bad idea.

"Hey, Leo," I say, trying not to sneak up on him since his back is turned. It's easy to startle a chef in a kitchen.

"Hannah," he replies, but my name sounds like sex, almost a purr, an invitation to definitely kiss him again. "I thought I would come check in on you, but it looks like you've got things under control. No surprise though."

"Thanks for checking in on me," I answer back, making things awkward with weird small talk under the guise that if we're talking work, I can't possibly be thinking about what his lips felt like against mine.

"I just have a few more croquettes to put together and then I'll be back over at Somerville's for dinner. "

"So will I," he replies with what I hope is enthusiasm. I replay the way the words leave his mouth in my head, trying to decipher if I'm confusing dread for excitement.

I don't respond, I'm standing here, trying to decide what to say, trying not to make things even more awkward, but failing miserably.

I step over to where he's standing and when he turns around, I do what we said we were going to do.

I just go with it.

Before I know it, our mouths are on each other and his hands are tangling in my hair.

His tongue slides against mine and I moan embarrassingly loud, Leo smirking against my mouth.

“Hannah,” he growls, gripping the back of my neck and making me moan out loud again. “You smell like vanilla and cinnamon and holy fuck I want to taste every inch of you.”

“Holy fuck is right. Is this us just going with it?” I ask, making Leo let out a low chuckle. “I have a confession,” I now say, as Leo begins to suck at my neck.

“What’s that?”

“I have no idea what I meant when I sent that text,” I admit, my hands sliding under his chef’s coat and along his perfectly toned abs.

“Neither did I, but if this is what going with it means, I’m so fucking in.”

“In for what?” I ask, my heart hammering in my chest, because like when I quit my job, I had no plan for what that meant for future me. And here I am again, not worrying in the least about future Hannah and what this means for her current job situation.

My impulsivity is out of control. Maybe I have ADHD.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

I smile against her neck, inhaling deeply as I lick a path up to her ear. “In for this,” I reply, moving my lips back to her mouth so I can kiss her again.

God, I feel drunk on her.

And even though neither of us has defined exactly what this is, I’m not sure I could stop even if I wanted to. She’s like a drug and I am one hundred percent addicted.

“Leo,” she moans into my mouth, her hands sliding higher under my jacket until they are pressed against my chest.

I turn and back her up against the counter, standing between her legs, my hand on the back of her head as I kiss her hard, our teeth and tongues clashing.

I feel her fingers curl into my skin as though she’s clawing at me, and it makes me groan with lust. Thoughts of turning her around, bending her over this counter and fucking her hard, flash through my brain.

“Fuck,” I breathe out, finally pulling back. As much as I want this to continue, this is not the time or the place.

Hannah smiles up at me, her face flushed and sexy as hell, her hair falling out of the messy pile on top of her head thanks to my fingers. “So that’s what going with it is, huh?”

Chuckling, I brush the hair back from her face. “Yeah, I guess it is,” I reply. “Although to be fair, you started it,” I add, giving her a wink.

She smirks. “Right, so it’s me who was out of control this time, huh?”

“Well,” I say, dragging the word out, “not entirely.”

She slides her hands out from beneath my jacket, resting them back on my stomach as she looks up at me. “What are we doing here, Leo?” she asks, her tone serious now. “Because I really like working here and as much as I like this too, I can’t lose my job. I don’t—”

“You aren’t going to lose your job, Hannah,” I quickly say, meaning it.

She raises a brow in question, a questioning look on her face that makes me laugh. “You sure about that?”

Cupping her face in my hands I lean in closer. “Positive. I’m not that much of a dick.”

“But, what about...I mean how...”

Exhaling, I lean closer until my forehead is resting against hers. “How about this?” I start, not sure if it’s a good idea, much less if she’ll be up for it. “Let’s just see where this goes. No pressure, no expectations and no...”

“No telling anyone at work?”

I lift a shoulder in a shrug. “Yeah, I mean, that might be a good idea. Not that I think anyone will care, it’s just...”

“We don’t need the gossip?”

“Right,” I say with a nod. “We definitely don’t.”

“And I don’t need people talking behind my back, thinking I’m getting special treatment or whatever,” she adds. “I really want this job, Leo, I’m serious.”

I drop my hands from her face, taking a step back. “I know you are, and I really want you working here too. You’re an excellent chef and you’ve really fit in well. Everyone likes you and I know Jack and Lauren are really happy with you too.”

I pause, my own words sinking in and making me wonder if us continuing this is a good idea after all. Maybe I’m not being fair to her, because as much as I might want her, it is different for her and the last thing she needs is to be the subject of kitchen gossip.

“Shit,” I exhale, scrubbing a hand over my face.

Hannah seems to read my mind, nodding slowly. “I need to finish this before the dinner shift,” she says, gesturing to the stove.

“Yep, okay,” I say, tugging on my bottom lip, trying to figure out what it is I want to say here. How I can reassure her that I’m not going to let anything happen to her because of this.

“It’s cool, Leo,” she says, her hand on my arm.

I nod. “Okay, yep. I’ll see you in a bit.” Then I walk out, wondering what the fuck just happened.

Somerville’s restaurant is busy with the usual Saturday night crowd, which means

Hannah and I manage to avoid any awkwardness, even though this is the first time we've worked together since this whole thing between us started.

Whatever this thing is.

Still, that's one good thing about a busy kitchen and an endless stream of orders, there's no time for flirting or trying to figure out what the fuck happened earlier when I kissed her in the catering kitchen, only to walk out more confused than ever.

"Shit," I mutter to myself as I realize I've used the last of the cream. I look around, wondering if there's someone who can grab it for me, but everyone else is busy with their own thing. Pushing the pan off the heat, I walk to the huge walk-in fridge to grab some.

I open the door and step inside, relishing the cold air after hours in a hot kitchen. Closing my eyes briefly, I lean back against the door and take a second. When I open them though, I nearly jump out of my skin at who's standing in front of me.

"Hey," Hannah says, two crème brûlée in her hands as she stands watching me, a tiny smile on her face.

Without even thinking about it, I push off the door, take the desserts from her hands and put them back on the shelf, before pulling her into my arms and kissing her. Again.

She lets out a soft moan as her lips part for my tongue, and we kiss hungrily, unable to get enough of each other.

"I wasn't sure if you wanted to do this again," she murmurs against my mouth.

Letting out a soft laugh, I tell her, "Not sure I can stop, even if I wanted to."

“Do you want to?”

“Do you?” I throw back at her, knowing she’s got more to be worried about here.

She takes a deep breath, her fingers gripping the front of my jacket. “No,” she eventually whispers. “I mean, I meant what I said earlier, but no, I don’t want to stop either.”

Smiling now, I lean in and brush a soft kiss to her lips. “Neither do I,” I whisper, reaching for the desserts, which I hand back to her. “We’ll figure it out, but right now, we should get back to work.”

“Yes, boss,” she says playfully.

I give her a light smack on the ass as she walks past me, which earns me a cheeky smirk that makes my blood heat. God, I don’t know what it is about this woman, but I don’t think I’ve ever reacted to someone like I have with her.

When she leaves the cold room, I grab what I came for before walking back outside, glancing briefly at the dessert station before making my way back to the stove and the pile of orders that have accumulated in the short time I was gone.

Moving the pan back onto the flame, I get back to doing what I’m here to do, which is cook. And not think about my sexy as fuck sous chef and how much I’d like to strip her naked and have my way with her.

The rest of the night passes without any drama. I’m kept busy with orders and making sure everyone knows what they’re doing. I check in with Hannah a couple of times, but it’s quick and all business as I make sure she’s cool with the desserts she’s making and how everything works.

There's no doubt she's been taught well.

She's a quick learner too, easily picking up the recipes we're running here and at Apple Jacks.

Combine that with the awesome work she's been doing with the catering side of things, and I really do owe Dylan big time for suggesting his sister for the job in the first place.

Without mentioning the whole wanting to hook up with his sister part, of course. I'm not quite sure what he'd think about that.

"Okay and we're clear!" comes the call from Michelle, the head server when she pokes her head through the door, which is followed by a cheer from the kitchen staff.

Smiling, I switch off the burners as I start piling up the pans to wash.

Everyone works quickly and efficiently, all of us dying for that post-work drink we've been waiting all week for.

I walk into the wash area to drop off the pans before making the rounds of the kitchen to check everyone is okay.

When I get to the dessert station, I smile at the fact that Hannah is already done and wiping down the counters.

"Impressive," I say, leaning my hip against the counter, arms crossed over my chest as I watch her.

She flashes me a smile. "Just doing my job."

Chuckling, I push off the counter. “You staying for a drink?”

She pauses, looking up at me, a small smile on her face and a question in her eyes, as though she’s wondering whether she should.

“Stay for a drink,” I say, quieter now.

“Okay,” she says with a nod.

“Good,” I reply, before heading back to my office to close out the admin things I need to take care of.

By the time I’m done, the cleaning is finished and everyone is outside at the bar enjoying their drinks. The Apple Jacks crew have also come down and I throw my jacket over my desk and head out there to join them.

Heading behind the bar, I grab a pint of the new wheat beer we have on tap, my eyes scanning the room for Hannah. She’s sitting down at the end of the bar, laughing and chatting with another one of our sous chefs, Jamie, who kind of looks like he’s trying to flirt with her.

Before I even have a chance to feel jealous, Hannah glances up, meets my gaze and gives me a quick wink before turning back to whatever it is Jamie is saying to her.

It’s enough to make my heart pound in my chest and I’m about to walk over and stake my claim with her when someone nudges my shoulder.

“Hey, you good?”

I turn and see Tom standing beside me, a beer in his hand as he quietly observes the room. “Hey, yeah, all good. What are you doing here?”

As much as the Saturday night drinks invite is open to everyone, we don't get many of the other staff joining us regularly, having finished their jobs long before we have. Tommy shrugs, taking a sip of his beer as he says, "They had a bachelorette party in the tasting room, was helping Pen out."

I laugh, shaking my head a little. "Oh, so there to provide the entertainment then?"

Tommy cracks a half grin as he says, "Fuck off." I follow his gaze, which is firmly locked on Penny who is now wandering over toward Jamie and Hannah. I smile at the interruption, silently thanking Penny for going over there as I watch her greet Hannah with a hug and a smile.

"So, how's your new chef working out?" Tommy asks.

"Good," I reply, taking a sip of my beer. "Really good, actually."

Tom glances sideways, a brow raised in question as he hits me with a smirk.

"What?" I say laughing.

He laughs too, shaking his head a little. "Did I say anything?"

"No, well not with words anyway," I reply, knowing he's clearly thinking something. I really like Tommy, he's a cool guy, even if he is a man of few words.

He shrugs, turning back to Penny and Hannah. "She seems nice, and I know Pen really likes her. It's good she's working out."

I nod, even though he isn't looking at me, as my eyes move back to Hannah as she laughs and talks to Pen.

God, she's fucking hot. Tom raises his glass at me, a sly smile on his face as he heads over to join his wife.

I want to go over and join them too, but I'm afraid that if I do, I won't be able to keep my hands off Hannah.

"Fuck me," I mutter, refilling my glass before I turn and head back to my office, knowing I cannot risk outing us in front of everyone.

I'm lost in paperwork when I hear a knock on my door. Glancing up, I see Hannah standing in the doorway, a small smile on her face.

"Hey, so I'm heading out, just stopping by to say goodnight."

I glance behind her, noting the dark and very empty kitchen.

Without saying a word, I stand from my chair, walk around my desk and toward her.

Pulling her inside my office, I close the door behind her and back her up against it.

She looks up at me, her lips parted, her breath coming out in soft puffs.

I brush a thumb across her cheek as I lower my mouth to hers in a soft kiss. Hannah smiles against my mouth as she whispers, "We seem to be making a habit of this."

Chuckling, I curl my hand around her neck. "I'm blaming you for that."

"Me?" she asks, mock surprise in her voice as she pulls back, her head resting against the door. "How is this my fault exactly?"

Smiling, I lean closer, my hips now resting against her hips, as I brush my nose

against hers. “Because you’re so fucking sexy,” I whisper against her mouth. “And I can’t seem to get enough of you.”

She smirks, her hands slipping under my t-shirt, her fingers gliding over my skin and setting me on fire. “I think the feeling is mutual.”

“Is that so?” I ask as I trace her bottom lip with my tongue.

“Uh huh.”

“Fuck,” I breathe out, my hand slipping to her ass and pulling her against me as I kiss her hard and deep. Hannah groans, as a low growl sounds in my chest, possessive and demanding. God, I want this woman so badly.

“I should go,” she eventually breathes out. I can feel her heart pounding in her chest, mirroring my own.

“You’re not driving back to San Fran, right?” I ask, wishing she was coming home with me, wondering if she’d say yes if I asked her.

“No,” she says, shaking her head. “I’ve officially moved in with my brother.” She rolls her eyes in a can you believe it kind of way.

Chuckling, I sneak another quick kiss as I ask, “And I’m guessing he’d notice if you didn’t come home tonight?”

Hannah hits me with a sexy as hell smirk, as though she knows exactly what I’m really asking with that question. “He would,” she says. “He’s already in full-on dad training mode, so yeah, he’d notice.”

“And there would be questions?”

“There would be questions,” she repeats. “Lots of very nosy, painfully annoying questions.”

Laughing, I lean in, kissing the corner of her mouth as I move mine to her ear. “Then I guess we better find you somewhere else to live.”

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

Leo has no idea how badly I need someplace else to live.

Not only is living with my brother not ideal, it's also awkward as fuck knowing he and Tessa are obviously having sex while I'm living here.

And how the hell am I supposed to hook up with Leo while living with my brother?

Dylan will be all over me, wondering what I'm doing, where I'm going, and if I stay overnight, he will grill me with questions.

It's time to go, even if it has only been a couple of weeks. I wonder how quickly I can find a place, move in and then hook up with Leo? If the way my body is responding to his is any indication, I have about two hours before I self-combust.

I'm still lying in bed, staring up at the ceiling, listening to Dylan and Tessa giggling romantically in the kitchen, making me want to puke.

They're so perfect and they're about to start their own little family being all nauseatingly adorable.

And here I am, sleeping in their extra bedroom, dreaming about my boss and wondering if my brother has any of the sex toys he invented laying around.

Ewww, I can't even believe I just thought about my brother and sex toys in the same thought. I get that he literally invented a sex toy, but still.

I really need to get the hell out of here.

I roll out of bed, throwing on a sweatshirt and a pair of shorts, I plod out to the kitchen, only to find Dylan and Tessa making out against the island.

I clear my throat and while Tessa looks over at me, Dylan doesn't seem to care, still sucking at Tessa's neck.

"I'm going apartment hunting today," I announce, slipping past the love birds to grab a cup of coffee. "And hopefully moving out today too."

Dylan scoffs, letting out a half laugh, half gasp. "Good luck with that. You could always move back in with Mom and Dad," he now adds, smirking at me.

"Watch it," I quip back, pointing a finger at him. "Now you're just being an ass. You know I can't move back in with them. Mom will ask me when I'm getting married a million times and Dad will menacingly glare at any guy I do bring home."

"Is there a guy you are planning to bring home?" Dylan asks, and I swear if Tessa told him I've been making out with Leo, I'm going to kill her.

"No. I just got a new job. The last thing I need is the drama of a relationship or dating. It's just me and my pocket rocket," I say, knowing it will make Dylan squirm.

The one perk about living here is being able to make him equally uncomfortable in his own home.

But it's also to deflect from the idea that he might know about Leo.

"Hannah!" he yells out, covering his ears dramatically. "No one wants to hear their sister talk about sex toys."

“And no one wants their brother to invent one,” I jab back, cocking my head to the side and narrowing my eyes at him.

“Touché, you two,” Tessa chimes in, holding up a hand to indicate we need to shut up. “How about I join you on your apartment hunt?” And her suggestion couldn’t have come at a more perfect time because I was just about to ask her what she was doing today.

“That sounds perfect. I was thinking we could look in downtown Napa and the smaller areas closer to Somerville’s. Not that the drive from Napa is that far. I scheduled a few showings starting in an hour.”

“I’m going to head into work,” Dylan now says.

“You two have fun, and good luck finding that instant apartment.” He’s always giving me shit, but I have to admit, I enjoy our banter.

It keeps things between us fun. I don’t know many people who are as close with their siblings as Dylan and I are.

“Meet me for dinner at Apple Jacks tonight?” Dylan adds, kissing Tessa on his way out the door.

“You talking to me or Tessa?” I ask, knowing it’s just going to make him roll his eyes.

“Not you.”

An hour later Tessa and I are in my car driving over to an apartment in downtown Napa that is situated above a restaurant, and the second we walk in, it’s a hard pass for me.

I can hear every voice, every single pan and dish clanging, and the last thing I want after working in a kitchen all day, is to hear kitchen noises where I live.

I can tell by the look on Tessa's face that she's in agreement and we immediately move on.

Tessa and I have gotten closer since she and Dylan made it official.

It's been really nice to reconnect with her after losing touch when we graduated from high school.

We weren't super close back then, but we definitely hung out.

Now it's different, with her making me an aunt for the first time and living with them, our friendship has grown.

"Next one?" she says, looking down at her phone at the listing I sent her. "Oh, you're going to want to skip this next one, too," she says, woefully, flashing me a picture of the building, and again, it's above a restaurant.

"Oh my god, are all the apartments in downtown Napa above restaurants. No chef in their right mind would live in one of these," I wail, like everyone searching for an apartment is a chef.

My place in San Fran was small, but in a gorgeous historic Victorian that was quaint and quiet, and after a hard day of working for that asshole Langston, it was the perfect place to relax. Now I'm not dealing with an asshole boss any longer, but I'd still like a place that I can wind down in.

"Maybe we should head away from Napa and out into the country a little farther," Tessa suggests. "It will put you a little farther away from Dylan and me, but I think

you're looking for some peace and quiet."

It's like she can read my thoughts and I nod in agreement. After working with a bunch of different clients through her job, she makes a few calls and sets us up with some places that sound more my speed.

I think I was just so eager to get out of Dylan's place that I didn't think about what I actually wanted. What I don't want is crowds of people, clanging pots and city living. Leaving San Fran has given me an opportunity to start over and find a place that's bigger and more secluded.

Tessa gives me directions, telling me when to turn and I can't help but feel like we're heading straight to Somerville's. And when she begins to giggle a little, I know something is up.

"What's the deal?" I ask, turning to look at her as I pull around the back side of the Somerville property.

It's an area that I've only been to once before when Leo took me on a tour.

It was quick and he basically said the only reason I would need to be back here would be for oversized deliveries, and I more than likely wouldn't need to deal with that.

Although, with the catering business slowly getting off the ground, I'm thinking those types of deliveries will start popping up.

"What is this?" I ask, looking around, basically coming up to a gravel parking lot and a small area to turn around. "You want me to pitch a tent out here? Use one of those composting toilets? I think you know me better than that," I tease.

"Just wait. I think this is exactly what you're looking for," Tessa says, climbing out

of the car and signaling for me to follow her.

We walk down a small gravel path and suddenly a little cottage appears. It's quaint and adorable, like something out of a Hallmark Christmas movie. I have to control my urge to squeal out loud.

"Okay, so I've been working on this little project with Jack and Lauren. That was who I called just a bit ago, and while they are thinking the cottages will eventually be used for weddings and guests visiting the property, they'd be happy to rent this little gem to you."

"What? Seriously?" I haven't even been inside yet, but it's perfect.

It's walking distance to work, but away from the hustle and bustle of the winery.

The Apple Jacks property is off to the left, separated by the orchard and Somerville's in the opposite direction.

It's literally in the middle of nowhere but surrounded by everything.

"I don't think I could ask them to live here.

This is something they're doing to try to draw more people—"

Tessa cuts me off. "First of all, you'd be paying them, so it's a good thing for them. Second, it's at least two years from being finished. This would give them an opportunity to test it out, have someone live here and see if it works."

"I had no idea this cute little place was even back here," I tell Tessa, opening the front door that she just unlocked. I gasp out loud. If I thought it was cute from the outside, the inside is unreal. If I end up living here, it would be like being on a

vacation every time I come home from work.

“It wasn’t back here just a few weeks ago.

Well, it was, but it was an old shed that was used to store tractors and equipment.

I had some of my guys come back here and turn it into this.

” She extends her arms out in front of her, indicating the room around us.

“Lauren and Jack had maintained the shed really well, so all I really had to do was add some walls, plumbing, a foundation, electricity...” Tessa trails off, giggling a little.

“Okay, so I guess it was a little more detailed than I remember, but it’s yours if you want it. ”

“If I want it? Yes, I want it.” I don’t even bother to ask how much per month, and again my impulsivity is back.

Accepting a job without knowing the salary? Check.

Kissing my boss without worrying about the repercussions? Check.

Choosing a place to live without knowing the rent? Check.

“One thing though,” Tessa says, holding up her finger and I knew there was a catch.

“What?”

“There’s going to be construction going on back here after the baby is born and I

return to work. It won't be starting for a while, but I just thought I would give you a heads up."

"Who cares. If this means I can move in tomorrow and prove Dylan wrong, then I'm in."

Tessa laughs, shaking her head at the sibling rivalry between Dylan and me as she says, "Don't tell Dylan I helped you win this one, got it?"

"As long as you keep your mouth shut about my make out sessions with Leo," I chirp back.

"Make out sessions? That sounds like more than just a kiss, Hannah," Tessa now says, eyeing me with far too much curiosity.

"Okay, okay, things got a little heated the other day."

"Like how heated?"

"Like we were making out in the kitchen and had we not been at work, we would've taken off our pants," I say, not even trying to censor it.

Why should I at this point? She knows I kissed him, and she knows I'm kind of obsessed with him.

Who wouldn't be? He looks like he belongs on a TV show that would be titled Hottest Chef in America.

"Yeah, that's heated," she says, shrugging. "Good luck keeping it a secret. This place loves gossip, and better yet, it's hard to hide from Oscar and Olivia."

“Who are Oscar and Olivia?” I ask, feeling a little clueless.

“Oh, you’ll meet them soon enough,” she says, not elaborating. “Why don’t we go find Lauren and get this finalized,” Tessa now says, changing the subject, leaving me wondering just who Oscar and Olivia are and why they would have anything to do with Leo and me making out.

We find Lauren in her office and as soon as she sees me, she jumps up, squealing with delight. “So, do you love it?” she asks.

“Um, of course,” I reply. “Who wouldn’t love it?”

I’m just so grateful. I have a job here that I love and now you’ve saved me from having to live with my brother.

It couldn’t get any better.” I’m rambling, and I know it could get better, like maybe having Leo naked in my new bedroom would be good. But beggars can’t be choosers.

“So Jack and I were thinking five hundred a month,” Lauren says and my mouth falls open.

She really can’t be serious. She already pays me way more than I thought possible to work here, and now she’s offering me a place to live at a rent price that would’ve been low in the nineties.

“Too much?” she now asks, her teeth clenched as if she’s embarrassed herself.

“Oh my god, no. That’s really low. You sure you don’t want to up it?” I reply, stupidly, realizing I should just take the offer and run with it.

“We know it’s not really an ideal place for someone to live, so we decided to keep the

rent low.

And with the construction coming in six months or so, you might be re-thinking your choice,” Lauren jokes.

“The good news is, that while it’s pretty secluded, Tommy’s house is a quick drive up the gravel road, and mine and Jack’s house is up front.

And you’ll have Leo close by,” Lauren adds, and I swear I don’t mean for it to come out as loudly as it does.

“Leo? What?” I spit out and Tessa laughs immediately, her hand moving to cover her mouth.

“Yes, he lives above the catering kitchen. The barn we converted,” Lauren clarifies, and holy shit, that boy has some self-control because we could’ve been upstairs in his house within seconds.

“Is that okay? I know he’s your boss, but he’s really great and if you need anything, he’ll jump to help you. ”

I nod, unsure of what to say, but knowing if I open my mouth, I’m sure to say something stupid.

“You can move in whenever you want, and Jack and I said we don’t need a formal lease unless you want one.

You can pay us the first of the month and let us know if you need anything,” Lauren continues and I’m not sure what is more overwhelming, finding a place on a whim or knowing Leo is my closest neighbor.

Again, I nod, agreeing to whatever because all I can think about is making out with Leo in my new house or should I be thinking about not making out with him since I live in a house owned by the big boss?

“Welcome to the family!” Lauren squeals, pulling me in for a hug, and holy shit, my life is getting a little overwhelming.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

It's been a couple of days since I saw Hannah and all but said I'd be taking her home with me if we didn't have to worry about her brother asking us a million questions about what's going on with us.

It's not that I'm hiding whatever this thing is that's happening between us from him, it's more that it's so new that I'm not even sure how I'd explain it. I also don't need the drama that comes from everyone knowing my business, which seems to be the norm here at Somerville's.

Plus, I really need to remember how this all looks for Hannah.

I'm her boss and she's only just started working here.

The last thing I need is for the rest of my staff, or anyone else for that matter, thinking she's getting special treatment or whatever, because that is definitely not what's happening.

Even if I do think about her literally all the time now.

Still, in a bid to not make it obvious that I do constantly think about her or want to spend all my time hanging out with her, I've taken to rostering her on at the other restaurant to the one I'm working at most days.

I'm hoping this helps hide the obvious attraction I have to her and also saves me from potentially chopping my fingers off because I just can't take my eyes off her.

Not that any of that is happening today, because it is a rare couple of days off on account of the restaurants being closed on Monday and Tuesday nights.

I was half tempted to text her last night and see if she could maybe sneak out and come over for a couple of hours, but that had felt kind of weird.

Almost like I thought of her as a booty call. Which I don't, not even close, and I certainly don't want her thinking that. This whole sneaking around thing is hot, except for when it isn't.

So, I'd spent the night alone, killing time in front of the TV while I made a half-assed attempt to work on some new menu ideas.

I'd woken up this morning horny and frustrated, really wanting to see her, maybe spend a couple of hours with her with no pressure or expectations. No risk of being caught either.

Pulling on some clothes and my sneakers, I decide to go out for a run while I try to come up with a plan. I usually try to get one in every day, enjoying the peaceful quiet that comes from living at a winery.

Most people probably think it's weird that I live at my workplace, but I honestly love it. I love that I can come and go as I please, that I have a place that perfectly suits my needs and an awesome view anytime I step outside my door.

I run down the steps of the loft apartment I live in above the catering kitchen.

Outside, I make a right turn and head away from the main property and down through the vineyards, looping up past Tom and Penny's place before making my way back down the gravel road that leads to some old buildings that Tessa has been working on.

As I round the corner, my heart pounding in my chest and sweat dripping from my body, I suddenly stop in my tracks at the sight of Hannah, carrying a box into one of the newly renovated cottages that sits out here.

“What the fuck?” I mutter to myself, scrubbing a hand over my face as though to clear my vision. But she’s still there, not having noticed me as she struggles with the box and trying to get the door open.

Without thinking, I jog over, Hannah finally noticing me as she turns at the sound of my sneakers on the gravel.

“Hey,” I say, taking the box from her hands. “What are you...you live here?”

Hannah laughs, opening the front door now that her hands are empty. “I do now, yep.”

“Wow, I...” I trail off, as my gaze finds hers, an unspoken promise floating between us because we both know what this change in living arrangement means.

She’s no longer living with her brother.

She has her own place and it’s right here at Somerville’s. Where I also live. In the middle of nowhere with no one else around.

Holy fuck, the possibilities are endless.

“Thanks,” she eventually says, moving to take the box back as though remembering where we are.

“I’ve got it,” I say. “Just tell me where to put it.”

Hannah pulls her bottom lip between her teeth, nodding once as she turns and walks into the cottage.

I follow her in, my gaze taking in all of the changes and improvements.

I remember when this place used to be nothing but a shed, and I can't help but be impressed by what Tessa has done with the place.

"Just in here is fine," Hannah says, indicating the kitchen island. It's all sleek wooden counters, stainless steel appliances and white cabinets, with a huge window that overlooks the vineyards.

"Shit, this place is amazing," I say, putting the box down as I take in the small but well-appointed kitchen.

"I know," Hannah replies, moving to a cabinet and grabbing two glasses and filling them with water from the fridge. "I don't know how I got so lucky, but Lauren is happy for me to live here, and the rent is like...well, it's..."

"Too good to be true?" I say, smiling when she nods. "I know, I feel the same way about my place. But Ellen, Lauren and Jack aren't just amazing employers, they're great people too."

"They are," she says, handing me the glass. "Here, you look like you need this."

Chuckling, I glance down at myself, my t-shirt soaked with sweat and sticking to my skin. "What I need is a shower."

When I look up, I find Hannah's eyes glued to my torso, that lip of hers between her teeth again.

The look on her face is intoxicating and I find myself stepping closer.

When she lifts her gaze to mine, I can see all of the lust and want there, the same things I know are written all over my face too.

“So do I,” she murmurs, and I can’t help it, my eyes trailing slowly over her body.

She’s clearly been working all morning, probably hauling more boxes of stuff inside. She looks hot, her cheeks are flushed and the hair that’s piled on her head is messy with loose strands hanging around her face.

God this woman is fucking gorgeous.

“Hannah,” I murmur.

She swallows hard, her green eyes pulling me in. “Yeah?”

I step toward her again, closing the distance between us as my hand curls around the back of her neck and I haul her against me. My mouth lands on hers, kissing her with a raw desperation as her hands claw at my sweat-soaked t-shirt, pulling me even closer.

I put my glass on the counter as my other hand finds her hip, my fingers slipping under her t-shirt and grazing her skin, teasing along the waist of her shorts before sliding under the waistband.

She moans into my mouth, her body swaying into mine and holy shit, I could literally fuck her right here in the kitchen, I’m that turned on.

The fact that I can, because no one else is around to bust us has me backing her up against the kitchen island, my mouth never leaving hers. Our hips are pressed

together, and I know she can feel everything this is doing to me.

“I like that you’ve moved here,” I murmur, my lips against hers.

“Yeah?” she says, smiling against my mouth. “Think I’ll be a good neighbor?”

I chuckle, my fingers slipping from her shorts and moving up now, under her t-shirt, my fingers curling around her ribs. “I think you’ll be a great neighbor,” I whisper.

Hannah chuckles softly as she pushes my t-shirt up, pulling back a little as she peels it up and over my head, the sweat-soaked material hitting the floor with a soft thud.

“Well, I’m always here if you need to borrow a cup of sugar,” she says, smiling as her hands move over my chest, her fingers brushing across my pecs, tracing the lines of my tattoos and lighting my whole body on fire.

My hand moves to her breast now, pulling down the lace of her bra, my fingers finding and teasing her nipple, which hardens at my touch. “Oh, I can think of something much sweeter than sugar that I want from you,” I murmur, as I lift her t-shirt off.

Our gazes meet again, hers filled with so much want it almost brings me to my knees. “Oh yeah?” she whispers. “And what would that be?”

I grin, my fingers pinching her nipple before I lower my mouth and suck it into my mouth. Hannah groans, long and low as she arches into me, my arm banding around her waist as I hold her close.

“This would be a starting point,” I murmur, my mouth still on her breast as I kiss a path back up to her mouth. “But there’s somewhere else I want to taste on you, too.”

“Leo, fuck,” Hannah moans, her arms wrapping around my neck.

Chuckling, I nip at her neck, before moving my mouth back to her breast. “Yeah, I wanna do that too,” I confirm, my fingers now at the waistband of her shorts, itching to push them down and move my mouth lower. “But first I want to taste how sweet your—”

“HANNAH!”

The sound of her name echoing through the house from the still-open front door has both of us freezing. My mouth is still on her breast and neither of us is wearing a shirt and I estimate we have about ten seconds to get dressed before our cover is well and truly blown.

“Fuck,” I say, pulling back as I quickly reach for her t-shirt on the floor, practically throwing it at her. “Here, put this on, quick.”

Hannah doesn’t say anything, quickly pulling it over her head as the sound of two sets of feet on the hardwood floors make their way toward us. Before I have a chance to get my own shirt on, Olivia and Oscar burst into the kitchen, huffing and puffing as though they’ve run here.

“Hey, hi, welcome!” Olivia shouts as she throws her arms in the air.

Hannah looks from Olivia to her brother and then to me, her face flushed from everything we were just doing, even with the look of confusion she now gives me.

“I take it you haven’t had the pleasure of meeting the infamous Oscar and Olivia yet?” I say, my hands on Oscar’s shoulders.

Her mouth drops open a little, her lips still swollen from the kisses we just shared.

“This is Oscar and Olivia?” she asks.

“Uh huh,” I confirm, giving Oscar’s shoulders a little squeeze. “Word of advice, keep the front door shut so...” I trail off, my eyes widening a little as I give Hannah a look, as though she possibly needs the reminder of what we were just doing.

“Noted,” she says, forcing a smile as she glances down at Olivia. “And I’ve heard lots about you two, it’s nice to finally meet you.”

Olivia smiles up at her, all butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth sweetness, as she hands over a gift bag. “Here, it’s a housewarming gift. We just got home from school and Mom said we could bring it to you.”

Hannah’s eyes widen in surprise as she glances quickly at me before taking the bag Olivia is holding out to her. “Thank you, that’s really sweet of you.”

Olivia smiles, clearly pleased, while her brother tips his head back and glances up at me, seemingly registering my appearance for the first time.

“Why aren’t you wearing a shirt?” he asks, an accusatory tone in his voice.

I know this kid, he’s like Jack, doesn’t miss a fucking thing. “Because I was out running,” I tell him, letting go of his shoulders as I reach for my shirt on the floor. “I got hot.”

Oscar gives me a look that suggests he totally does not buy my excuse, but before I have a chance to change the subject, he casts a quick gaze over my torso and says, “What’s with all the tats, man?”

Hannah lets out a soft laugh and when I look over, she’s shaking her head, trying not to smile. I try mouthing the word “help” at her, but it only makes her laugh again as

she shakes her head in disbelief.

“Are you like in a gang or something?” Oscar now asks and this time, I can’t stop the laugh.

“A gang?” I ask, pulling my t-shirt back on and hiding most of the ink that covers my arms and part of my chest and ribs. “Where do you get this stuff, kid?”

“TV, Uncle Jack,” he says with a shrug.

I reach over and ruffle his hair, chuckling at the annoyed sigh he lets out as he pulls away. “Well, contrary to popular opinion, your Uncle Jack doesn’t always know what he’s talking about and a lot of what you see on TV is complete horseshit.”

Oscar and Olivia both giggle now and when I look over at Hannah again, I can tell she’s also trying not to laugh.

“Pretty sure that was a naughty word,” Hannah says, her eyes sparkling with amusement.

“I’ll give you naughty,” I say, my voice low.

“Promise?” she teases licking her lips and I swear to god, I don’t even care that these kids are here, I want this woman that badly.

“Okay seriously, what’s going on here?” Oscar asks, reminding me again that we are not alone and most definitely being watched by two ten-year-olds who don’t miss a damn thing, but who I also know have extremely big mouths and zero filter.

“What are you talking about?” I ask, feigning ignorance as I lean against the counter, my arms crossed over my chest.

Oscar looks from me to Hannah and back to me again, his brow narrowed in concentration. “I’m thinking that—”

“You’re overthinking things, kid,” I say, cutting him off. “And I think it’s time for us to go and leave Hannah in peace,” I add, even though I have every intention of revisiting what we were doing before we were interrupted and as soon as possible.

I shuffle the twins toward the front door, stalling a little as I trail after them, wanting a second to speak to Hannah alone before I have to make like I’m leaving too. When they finally reach the still open door, I stop, turning back to Hannah who’s close behind me.

“Have dinner with me?” I quickly ask.

Hannah smiles, crossing her arms over her chest. “You offering to cook for me?”

I grin back at her. “Among other things, yeah.”

“When?” she asks, glancing over my shoulder to what I assume are the twins, impatiently waiting and possibly trying to listen in on this conversation.

“Tonight, my place,” I confirm. “You know where to find me?”

“I know where to find you,” she repeats.

“Good,” I reply, backing down the hallway, my eyes never leaving hers. “I’m looking forward to it.”

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

Holy shit, I mean I knew Leo was my neighbor, but having him this close could be interesting.

Imagine all the trouble we could get into with me sneaking over there at night after work.

It's the best kind of trouble and I am all for it.

Fuck the fact that he's my boss or that it could totally screw up my job here.

I'm not thinking with my head right now and I seriously don't care.

I'm having dinner with Leo tonight and if things are heading in the direction I think they are, we won't just be having dinner.

And oh my god, it's been way too long since I got laid.

Just kissing Leo has me all hot and bothered, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't come home some nights and get myself off to thoughts of him.

I'm struggling to keep it together currently after seeing him shirtless.

I mean, seriously, who looks like that with their shirt off?

He's all covered in tattoos, with a body that was seriously made for sex with every

line of his muscles exposed, and a face that literally belongs on the cover of a magazine. He's the kind of guy who makes panties drop and I know I'll be dropping mine for him.

I really need to get myself together though. My house is a mess with boxes and if I'm going to meet Leo for dinner tonight, I will definitely need a shower and some clean clothes.

Just as I'm pushing a few boxes toward my new bedroom, my phone starts to ring. I swear it feels like I can't get ahead. Maybe I should just call it done and head to Leo's. It looked like he was about to get in the shower, and everyone can use a hand washing their back.

I scramble over a few boxes, finding my phone lying on the ground by the front door, I quickly answer it.

"Hey," I hear Phoebe's voice say, not even realizing who was calling when I answered. "Meet me at our usual spot tonight?" she immediately says, not waiting for me to reply.

"Hi to you too, but I can't," I quip back, and she immediately lets out a bothered sigh.

"Are you still living with your brother in the middle of nowhere?" she questions, and now that bothered sigh has turned into a bothered tone.

Phoebe and I met at culinary school and both landed jobs in San Fran, which was supposed to be our dream jobs.

Hers went much better than mine with her working at a high-end hotel.

It's a rare occurrence for us to have a day off together, so we had taken to meeting up

around midnight and grabbing a drink together after our day ended.

I haven't seen her since taking the job at Somerville's and she's been annoyed with the thought of me moving to Napa.

She claims it's in the middle of nowhere and she has zero interest in traveling out to the sticks to see me.

I get it though. We said we'd be in San Fran together.

That we'd be all over that city and live the life of two badass single girls.

"I'm not with my brother anymore, but I'm not any closer to the city though."

"Okay, what's that supposed to mean?"

"It means I'm kinda even farther away. I live on the Somerville property now." I clench my teeth, waiting for her to be thoroughly disappointed.

"Seriously?" Phoebe says, but this time there's no bothered sighs or annoyed tones.

"Yeah, seriously. I really like it, actually. It's secluded and quiet and—" Before I can continue to defend my choice, Phoebe cuts me off.

"I'm moving to France."

"Seriously?" I ask, echoing what she just asked me.

"Yeah, seriously," she replies back, and we both laugh at the déjà vu of the conversation we're having.

“It has been in the works for a while, and I didn’t want to say anything to you and overshadow your excitement about getting the job at Somerville’s.

And I also wasn’t sure it was even going to happen.

I had a million interviews, and they flew me out there. ”

I’m completely blown away by Phoebe’s news, but so damn excited for her. Every chef wants to work in France. It’s like a dream come true. And as much as I will miss her, I now have an excuse to make my way to Europe.

“When do you leave?” I ask, hoping I can get together with her before she goes.

“Next week. I know it’s so fast, faster than I thought it was going to be, but I’m excited. It will be good to try something new. Maybe I’ll meet a French guy,” she jokes, and my thoughts immediately go to Leo.

“I sort of met someone,” I tell her, hesitant because Leo and I really aren’t anything. We’ve impulsively made out a few times and he has now invited me to dinner.

“Oh my god, fill me in!” Phoebe squeals, and it makes me smile.

Meeting a new guy still gives me all those butterflies in my stomach and that all-consuming feeling.

I long to run into Leo randomly now and every time I do, I send up a silent plea for him to kiss me.

It’s so teenage girl childish, but the feeling is like nothing else.

“He’s my neighbor,” I start, knowing there’s a little more to this than I’m letting on.

“And he’s kinda my boss.”

“You’re sleeping with your boss? Way to go, Hannah!” Phoebe cheers, making me a little more confident in my decision to pursue this thing with Leo.

“I’m not sleeping with him. At least I’m not sleeping with him yet,” I say, giggling a little. “He invited me over for dinner tonight and we’ve pretty much been making out every chance we get, so here’s to hoping it leads to us sleeping together. I’m getting a little bit desperate.”

“Well, keep me posted,” Phoebe says, and before we hang up, we make plans to get together before she moves.

I also offer to fly out there the day after she arrives to help her unpack, but she declines my help, telling me to visit once she’s settled so we can actually hang out together and make it a vacation for me.

As soon as I set the phone down, I look around at the mess that is my new house.

I know it’ll be great once I get everything unpacked, but it feels a little overwhelming.

Luckily, I had my furniture delivered earlier today and all of that is where I want it, it’s the unpacking of the boxes that is left. It looks like a nightmare.

So instead of unpacking, I flop down on the couch, closing my eyes for just a few minutes. It feels so good to have my own house, my own space, the quiet of Somerville’s and knowing that don’t have to deal with my brother having loud sex any longer. Taking a nap feels like the right thing to do.

The next thing I know is I’m waking up to a dark sky and someone knocking on my

door.

It takes me a moment to realize where I am, looking around trying to remember that I moved into my new place just today.

There are no lights on and I pat around for my phone, using the flashlight on it to find my way to the door.

I really should've set up some lamps before I crashed, but of course I thought I would be up in an hour. I actually have no idea what time it is and then it hits me like a ton of bricks.

My date with Leo.

Fuck my life. He probably thinks I stood him up and I'm going to guess when I open this door, it's going to be him standing on the other side. I look like shit and I'm certain my breath stinks, my hair feels like a ratty mess given how sweaty I was just a few hours ago.

This is not how I wanted my date with Leo to go.

It was supposed to be perfect. I was supposed to smell good, and my hair was supposed to be washed and dried and shiny.

I was supposed to wear my favorite black jeans that make my ass look so damn good, and those tie-side panties I bought at that French lingerie shop because Leo looks like the kind of guy who would tear panties.

I'm so pissed off that I want to cry.

I take in a hard breath, smoothing down my hair as much as I can, and then I open the

door. And there's Leo standing there looking so fucking hot and oh my fucking god, we would've made the perfect couple tonight.

"Hey, everything okay?" he asks, sounding sympathetic, but a little hesitant. I'm sure he's thinking I'm having second thoughts about starting something with him. Far from it.

"Yes, I'm so sorry. I swear I laid down on the couch to rest for a few minutes and I literally just woke up when you knocked on the door," I whine, hating myself for doing something so stupid and hoping I didn't ruin this altogether.

I'm never this irresponsible. Okay, I'm only this irresponsible when it comes to meeting Dylan for breakfast, but that's different.

He smiles and my heart flutters, beating fast at just the look he's giving me. It's the panty-dropping smile. It's the kind that can make a woman do whatever he asks. I'm that woman.

"I'm still up for this," he says, motioning between us, "if you are."

"I am, but can you give me a few minutes, or maybe like thirty. I really didn't want to show up looking like this.

"I throw my hands out in front of me and roll my eyes.

"You see me in my chef's coat on a regular basis and now today in running shorts and a tank, covered in sweat.

I really wanted to..." I trail off as he leans in close to me.

"I think you look fucking stunning, Hannah," he murmurs, his lips brushing against

mine. “But yes, get ready and come over. If you take too long, trust that I will be joining you in the shower.” This time he bites at my neck, his mouth sucking hard, his teeth grazing my skin.

“I’m not sure that’s a threat,” I manage to mutter. “I was kinda hoping...”

“Get in the shower, Hannah,” he growls, swatting my ass. “And don’t keep me waiting.”

“Yes.”

A half an hour later I’m climbing the stairs to Leo’s place, the smell of rosemary is wafting out of the open windows, and it smells heavenly. As a chef it’s funny to have someone else cook for you, and normally I decline. I’m pretty particular about my food, but with Leo, I don’t care.

I knock softly and he calls for me to come in. As soon as I open the door, I’m taken aback by how amazing his place is. Now mine is very nice, but it’s also very appealing to the masses. It should be. At some point it will be rented out to visitors and most don’t want quirky or unique.

The ceilings of his place though, are all exposed beams and it’s basically one wide open room with a massive kitchen.

It’s custom and obviously designed by him.

He has all this oversized furniture that fills the space perfectly and I get a quick glimpse of his bedroom from where I’m standing.

Hopefully it’s not the only look of it I get tonight.

“Hannah,” he says, and the way he says my name makes my panties wet. No one will ever say it the way he does, and no one will ever top the way it makes me feel when he does.

“Better, right?” I ask, turning in a circle so he can get a good look.

“I wouldn’t say better, but you do look gorgeous,” he replies, and I walk over to where he’s standing, pushing up on my toes to give him a kiss.

“You ready to eat?”

“Yes, I kept you waiting so yes.”

Leo motions for me to sit down and I pull out a chair as he brings a plate over to the table. It smells amazing and before he can tell me what it is, I recognize it.

“Steak au Poivre?”

“Yes, one of my favorites.”

“My best friend just told me she’s moving to France today, so it feels very fitting,” I tell him as he sits down, his own plate in front of him.

“That sounds a little disappointing,” he replies.

“It is, but it isn’t. She’s a chef too.”

“Ah, France, yes then.”

He gets it. It’s a place that most chefs have either worked or dreamed of working. I wonder if he studied at all in France. I’m sure he did given his skill level.

“How about you? Have you been?” I ask.

“I have. I went quite often actually. Both my parents are chefs and worked some pretty high-level jobs, so as a kid I lived there for a bit.”

“Really. You come from a family of chefs then, huh?”

“I do, but I worked really hard to distance myself from it. I didn’t want people thinking I used my parents’ name to get ahead in this industry.”

“I get that,” I say, taking a bite of the steak and moaning out loud.

“And this is why I became a chef,” Leo says, a possessive growl to his words.

“Hearing you moan like that at something I made is up there with sex.”

“And knowing a man who looks like you can cook like this is up there with sex too.” I wink at him, the tension in the room going up a few notches. “But I imagine you’re going to be able to make me do a whole lot more than moan with that mouth of yours.”

“Oh, Hannah, I’ve got big plans after we finish eating. I’m thinking I’ll be having you for dessert.”

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

Hannah looks back at me with a sexy as hell smile on her face and a wicked gleam in her eye and fuck me if it doesn't take every ounce of effort I have not to sweep everything off this table and lay her back on it so I can finally get inside her.

"Is that so?" she says, a playful tone in her voice.

"Maybe," I say with a wink, even though it was one hundred percent so.

"Maybe," she murmurs with a laugh, taking another bite of the steak. Her eyes close as she chews, and I swear this woman makes everything look sexy. When she finally swallows, she opens her eyes and looks at me. "So how long have you been working at Somerville's for?"

The change in subject makes me laugh and I drag my eyes away from her as I go back to my dinner. "Since a couple of months before Apple Jacks opened," I tell her. "Probably the same time as Dylan."

"And living here?" she asks, waving her fork around.

"The same. The job and place were offered as a package deal."

Hannah's eyes widen a little, her fork pausing halfway to her mouth. "Wow, that's awesome."

"Like I said, Ellen, Lauren and Jack are really great people to work for."

She nods in agreement as she takes another bite of her steak.

“Yeah, they really are,” she says, that playful tone now gone.

I study her, wondering what she’s thinking about and why the mood suddenly feels like it’s shifted.

Just as I’m about to ask, she blurts out, “How do they feel about workplace hook ups?”

“What?”

Hannah meets my gaze, hers serious as she repeats, “Workplace hook ups?” She gestures between us with her fork.

I lower my knife and fork to the table, sitting back in my chair, my elbow resting on the back of it. “That’s what you think this is?” I ask.

She lifts a shoulder in a shrug. “How would you define it?”

I reach for the wine bottle, topping up our glasses before my eyes move to hers again as I lift my glass for a sip. “I don’t know,” I admit. “But not as just a hook up.”

Hannah takes a sip of wine, swallowing slowly, her eyes never leaving mine. “No?”

“No,” I repeat, shaking my head, already knowing I want far more than just a hook up with this woman.

“But you barely know me,” she whispers.

“And you barely know me,” I say, taking a breath before letting it out slowly. “But I

really want to change that, Hannah.”

“You do?”

A slow smile curves at my mouth as I stare across at her, still not fully understanding what it is about this woman that pulls me in, but definitely wanting to find out. I’ve never felt this kind of attraction to someone before, and I most definitely want to explore it. Badly.

But I also know that there are implications for us getting together, even more so for Hannah because she’s new and I am her boss. So as hard as this is going to be, given the intense chemistry we share, I’m going to do what I have to do here.

“I do,” I tell her, reaching across the table for her hand. Wrapping my fingers around her wrist, I brush my thumb along the inside of it, over her pulse. “Does that scare you?”

“I don’t know,” she whispers. “Maybe a little.”

I lift her hand, pressing a soft kiss to the middle of her palm. “Me too,” I admit.

“Have you...” she trails off, licking her lips before she continues. “Have you ever done this before?”

“What?” I ask, confused.

Hannah lets out a soft laugh. “Dated someone you’ve worked with?”

Chuckling, I shake my head. “No, have you?”

“God no,” she says. “My last boss was a total asshole, remember?”

I smirk. “Oh yeah. What about your current boss? He an asshole too?”

She weaves her fingers with mine, tugging my hand closer as she runs her thumb across my knuckles. “Ah, no,” she says, chuckling. “Quite the opposite actually.”

“Oh yeah?” I tease.

She leans closer, her long hair brushing against my arm and sending a shiver all through me. “Yeah,” she whispers. “So opposite in fact, that I’m finding it incredibly hard not to jump his bones every time I see him.”

I burst out laughing. “Wow, good to know,” I say. “And for the record, the feeling’s completely mutual.”

Hannah smiles at me, our eyes locked as we stare at each other across the table.

Electricity hums between us, the air practically crackling with it as we both wait for the other to make the next move.

I know that if I do, she’ll give in. Give in to what I know we both want.

But given everything, I know I have to do this, if only to prove to her that all of this is worth a shot.

“So how about this,” I start, “We slow things down a little and...” My words trail off as Hannah pulls her hand from mine.

I tighten my fingers in hers, not letting her go as I continue.

“I want this, Hannah. I think you do too, but I also get there’s a lot more at stake for you given the work thing. ”

“Yeah,” she whispers.

“Yeah?” I prompt with a smile. “Yeah to what exactly, wanting this or having more at stake?”

She smiles, a slow sexy smile that actually makes my heart flip in my chest. “Both.”

I nod, grinning back at her. “So,” I say, lifting our still joined hands to my lips.

“As much as I would love to take you to my bed right now and make you moan like you did when you ate the meal I cooked for you, how about we put a pause on that for now and focus on the getting to know each other part. See where things go and make sure you’re...

” I pause, searching for the right word, “comfortable with everything,” I eventually add, gesturing with our still joined hands between us.

Her smile widens, her eyes sparkling as she bites on her bottom lip. “Leo Marsh, are you actually telling me that underneath this sexy, muscled, tattooed bad boy exterior is a total softie?”

A loud laugh falls from my mouth as I lift her hand to my mouth and gently bite her knuckles. “Oh, I promise there’s plenty of bad boy in here too.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” I repeat. “And just to be crystal clear, this bad boy still wants to fuck you. Badly.”

She bites her bottom lip again and a low groan rumbles in my chest. “Good to know.”

The rest of the night passes with the two of us actually taking the time to get to know each other.

She has me laughing my ass off with tales of her and Dylan as teenagers and all the shit they used to get up to and I fill her in on all the places she has to visit in France when she goes to visit her friend.

It's easy and fun and even though I can't explain my attraction to this woman, I know I want more of it.

I like having her in my house, sharing a meal with me as we chat about anything and everything.

I've never managed to make a relationship work, the long hours I spend in the kitchen often killing things before they have a chance to get too serious.

But with Hannah, it all just feels so easy.

And yeah, maybe part of it is because she's also a chef and she gets the long hours and the unpredictable schedule, but I know it's not just that.

The chemistry between us is just unreal, like nothing I've ever experienced before, and it definitely only adds to the whole gorgeous package that is Hannah Murphy.

"I guess I should probably get going," she eventually says, putting her now empty wine glass on the coffee table in front of the couch we moved to after dinner.

I rest my arm along the back of the couch, my fingers sliding under her hair so they're resting lightly on the back of her neck. "This was nice," I whisper, running the tips of my fingers gently over the bumps of her spine. "We should do it again."

Hannah smiles, shifting a little so she's facing me. She's kicked off her shoes and has one leg tucked beneath the other. "We should. Next time, I'll cook for you."

Chuckling, I tighten my grip on her neck as I pull her toward me. "Sounds good," I murmur, my mouth finding hers in a soft, slow kiss.

Hannah moans, moving closer to me, her leg now slung over mine as she deepens the kiss. I feel her hand slide up my thigh and I'm already half hard as I pull her into my lap so she's straddling me. My hands grip her hips, pulling her closer as I continue to kiss her.

I feel her tongue trace my bottom lip before slipping into my mouth, tangling with mine. A growl rumbles in my chest and I slip my hands under her shirt so they are resting against the warm skin of her back.

"Fuck," I moan.

She smiles against my mouth. "Changed your mind already?"

I gently bite her bottom lip. "So fucking tempting."

Hannah giggles and fuck me if it isn't adorable. "Just for the record, this was your idea, you know," she reminds me, her hands resting on my chest.

I pull back so my head is resting on the couch as I stare up at her, wondering where the hell this woman has come from. "I know, and my blue balls will be thanking me for it later, trust me."

She laughs, her hands sliding up my chest. "You could always do what I do."

"Oh yeah?" I ask, tilting my head to the side. "And what's that."

She leans in so her lips are only an inch away from mine. “Get myself off while thinking about you.”

“Fuck, Hannah,” I bite out, sitting up as I press a hard kiss to her mouth. “You do that?”

“God, yes,” she breathes out. “A lot.”

I actually growl at the mental image that conjures up and I swear I am so fucking turned on right now, I’m about two seconds away from saying fuck it to my stupid plan to slow this down and just fuck her right here on my couch.

As if reading my mind, she kisses me again, deep and hard and hungry, her hands roaming over my body, exploring. I pull her close, so her hips are flush against mine and she can feel exactly what this is doing to me.

“Leo,” she murmurs, her hands grabbing at the hem of my t-shirt as she tries to pull it off.

I’m about to let her, when the moment is suddenly broken by my phone ringing, the loud noise cutting through the soft music that’s playing, and startling us both.

“What the fuck?” I mutter, turning to glance at it on the side table.

It’s after ten and I have no idea who the hell would be calling me at this hour.

Before I have a chance to answer it though, the ringing stops and is quickly followed by the sound of an incoming text.

“Do you need to get that?” Hannah asks, still in my lap.

“I don’t know,” I say, my mind still reeling with what she just told me, how she gets herself off while thinking about me. “Maybe, yeah.”

Hannah smiles, reaching over to grab my phone as it chimes again, letting me know about the text or voicemail or whatever it is. When she hands it to me, I wake it up to see a missed call and a text message.

“Oh my god,” I breathe out, laughing a little as I turn the phone to Hannah.

I watch as her eyes scan the screen, her brow narrowing as she reads the text message from her brother.

Dylan: Hey dude, sorry for calling so late, but I forgot to mention that Hannah has moved into that cottage they renovated near your place. Can you maybe check in on her, not now, in the morning? Make sure she’s ok? Don’t tell her I asked though. Thanks, I owe you one.

“Is he fucking serious?” she snaps, reaching for my phone.

I burst out laughing, holding it above my head and out of reach. “He’s just being a protective brother, that’s all.”

“He’s being a shit head,” she says, trying for my phone again. The way she leans forward has her tits brushing against my face and my eyes close as I picture burying my face in them. “I’m twenty-nine years old, I don’t need a babysitter.”

I drop my phone on the couch, before grabbing her wrists in my hands, pulling them behind her back so she can’t move or get my phone.

The move only accentuates her chest and I drop my gaze to briefly admire it, before looking back up at her.

“So does that mean you don’t want me dropping by? ” I tease.

Hannah huffs, shuffling in my lap as she rubs against my hard-on. “What do you think?” she says, smirking.

Chuckling, I pull her in for a kiss. “That’s what I thought,” I whisper, my mouth against hers. “Come on, I’ll walk you home. I think your brother has well and truly ruined this moment.”

I shift her off my lap, before standing. I don’t bother to hide what the latest make out session has done to me, as I adjust my jeans, trying to ease the pressure on my now completely hard dick. Hannah watches the movement, licking her lips as she says, “You don’t need to walk me home.”

I grab her hand, tugging her against me.

“Yeah, I do,” I whisper. “Come on, before I change my mind and take you to my bed after all.” I give her ass a quick smack before letting her go to grab my shoes.

When I turn back, Hannah has slipped hers on and is standing beside the couch, a small smile on her face. “What?” I ask.

Shaking her head, she walks toward me. “You are one seriously sexy man, Leo Marsh,” she whispers, before making her way to the front door.

Fuck me, this woman is going to be the death of me, I know it.

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

I can't believe Dylan. He has no idea that I've been making out with Leo for the last few weeks, but still.

He has no reason to ask Leo to check up on me like I'm a toddler.

But more than that, now Leo thinks I need to go home.

Home is the last place I want to be right now even if it is a new home.

Everything had been set up perfectly for Leo and me to finally hook up and my brother swoops in and blows my chances.

I don't want to sound desperate, but I kind of am.

I'm one hundred percent certain that all the dreams I've had about Leo can't hold a candle to the real thing and I was about to find out.

Fuck my life.

"Sorry about that," I say as Leo and I are walking in the dark toward what I hope is my house. I have no idea if we're heading in the right direction because it's so dark that I can't see my hand in front of my face.

"Sorry about what?" Leo responds, and I think it's really sweet that he's trying to pretend that Dylan messaging him isn't super fucking annoying.

“Dylan ruining our night,” I spit out, growing madder by the second that I’m not in Leo’s bed right now.

“He didn’t ruin our night. At least I hope you don’t feel that way, because I know I don’t.”

And fuck my life again.

“No, he didn’t ruin it. I’m sorry I said that.

I’m just annoyed that Dylan feels the need to check up on me.

I lived in San Francisco, basically in the heart of the city for years by myself and Dylan had zero concerns about my safety.

But now that I live in the middle of nowhere without a chance of something happening and he texts you asking to make sure I’m okay. ”

I’m rambling and by the time we reach my house, I’m certain Leo thinks I’m crazy. If anyone is ruining the night, it’s me.

“He’s your brother and I’m guessing becoming a dad and hooking up with Tessa has changed the way he looks at women now.”

“Yeah, this is probably true,” I concede, cutting Dylan a little slack and then I feel the need to admit that while I’ve tried to play this whole thing cool, I’m losing my mind over Leo.

“I was hoping we were going to hook up tonight,” I blurt out, biting down on my bottom lip as I look over at him.

Our faces are now illuminated by the porch light of my new little house.

He reaches over, his thumb plucking my lip from my teeth, as he slides his hand around to the back of my neck.

“Oh, Hannah, Hannah, Hannah, trust me when I say, I’ve thought about nothing else but hooking up with you.

” I swallow hard at his words, my heart racing in my chest, waiting for this to be the moment we both finally give in.

We’ve come so close over the past few days, getting interrupted by the stupidest shit, but now, here in the quiet darkness of this vineyard, there’s no one to interrupt us.

Screw slowing down.

He leans in close, his hand gripping the back of my neck, moving my head to the side as he kisses a path from my collarbone to my ear. My entire body is screaming at me like it’s been set on fire, heat pools between my legs, begging for him to just fuck me, right here, right now.

His breath is warm against my skin, and I lose myself in his intoxicating smell, a mix of cinnamon and bourbon and woodsmoke. He smells so good that I’m dying to taste him. Dying to run my tongue over his taut muscles and every line of his ink. He smells like a damn dream.

“I jerk off in the shower to your gorgeous full lips, wondering what they’ll feel like wrapped around my cock,” he whispers, his voice husky and deep and I swear to god I nearly come in my pants.

I moan so loud I should be embarrassed, his knee is now pushed between my legs,

and I can't help but grind against it. My head falls back, and he runs his tongue along the hard beat of my pulse that throbs wildly out of control on my neck.

"Come inside," I beg, needing this to be it, needing us to end this game of making out. Not that I'm not wholeheartedly enjoying it. This has seriously been the best lead-up ever. Our sexual tension is off the charts and I'd be lying if I said I didn't also dream of Leo Marsh on a regular basis.

"Fuck yes," he replies, apparently having forgotten his earlier suggestion that we take this slow. I smirk against his mouth, our lips almost touching as he takes my bottom lip between his teeth. Growling possessively, his hands grip my ass, lifting me up and I wrap my legs around him.

"It's open," I murmur, now sucking at Leo's neck as he pushes the door open. But as soon as he steps inside, he falls over, landing on top of me and my ass hitting the wall of boxes I've left in the middle of the room.

We both burst out laughing. It's like the universe is against us hooking up or something. Or maybe this time it was just my laziness.

"You really should've left some lights on," Leo says, as he pushes off me, leaving my body aching for him.

But he's right. It's pitch black in here and I scramble to my feet, telling him to stay where he is as I make my way across the room to turn on the light.

"I'm not really a fan of you coming home to a dark house alone. "

I love his protective side, his possessive growl when he talks about me. This guy has me so turned on that I'm not certain he can leave here tonight without at least making me come once. Twice would be even better.

“I’m not alone,” I chirp back playfully, trying to be cute, but again I crash right into another stack of boxes. Letting out an oomph as I stupidly slam into them just as I reach the light switch.

The room glows with the sudden appearance of light and my eyes immediately find Leo waiting by the door.

Every time I see him it’s like the first time and I’m blown away by his dark thoughtful eyes and his body that I still have yet to get a full look at.

Picturing him naked with all his tattoos and lean muscle has become a favorite pastime of mine.

“Did you do any unpacking?” Leo jokes, his arms gesturing to the great expanse of boxes surrounding us with a smile on his face that makes me want to drop my panties like they’re on fire.

“Not exactly. Remember, I fell asleep on the couch?”

“So where were you planning to sleep tonight?” Leo asks, and I smirk at him, hitting him with a wink, and not bothering to say it out loud.

“Ah, gotcha,” he says, making his way over to me.

“While I’d never turn down an opportunity to have you in my bed, I think we should probably get things settled here first,” Leo says, and I let out a bothered sigh.

It feels like this boy is avoiding me. Who the hell wants to unpack rather than have sex?

“Fuck unpacking. I want to fuck you,” I say, and Leo lets out a deep, sexy laugh.

“You’re a fucking dream come true, Hannah Murphy. But I’ll make you a deal. Let’s get your bedroom unpacked and some sheets on your bed and then I’ll make all your dreams come true.”

“Promise?” I purr, slipping my hand under his shirt, my fingers trailing along his taut stomach.

“Cross my heart,” Leo replies huskily, his hand now finding its way under my shirt, coming to rest on the outside cup of my bra. His fingers dip softly inside, grazing my nipple and making my mouth fall open. This slow, deliberate teasing is making me fucking crazy. Crazy for him.

“Now I’ll make a deal with you,” I acquiesce, wetting my lips and I watch his eyes fall to my tongue now. “For every box we each unpack, we take off an article of clothing.”

Again Leo laughs, and it’s the perfect throaty and deep sound that has me squirming to find my release. He has no clue how incredibly sexy he is, because if he did, he wouldn’t be making me wait.

“Strip unpacking,” he replies, like he’s mulling over the idea. “I like it. Motivation to work faster because the idea of seeing you naked has been on my mind ever since you walked into my house wearing these ass-hugging jeans.”

“Just wait till you see what’s on underneath them,” I reply, winking.

“Then we better get to work. But one thing, I get to call what we take off,” Leo adds with a sly smile on his face. “Start off slow.”

I roll my eyes. This boy is going to be the death of me. “Fine, but I swear...”

“Hannah, I promise you I’m worth the wait,” Leo murmurs in my ear as his hand circles my wrist, pulling me toward my new bedroom.

Luckily all my furniture was moved in and placed by the moving company, but the boxes are all still scattered about. I push one in Leo’s direction, the one labeled ‘bathroom’ and he gets to work immediately. I take over unpacking my dresser.

“Tell me some more stories about what it was like growing up with Dylan,” Leo says, his voice echoing a little in the empty bathroom. It’s almost like he’s trying to distract me from the rules of our little game of strip unpacking. “He’s such a chill guy. I like having him around.”

“We’re nearly five years apart so we didn’t really become close until after high school. Before that he was just a pain in the ass who hit on all my friends.”

“Wasn’t as smooth with the ladies as he is now, huh?” Leo jokes and I can’t help but laugh.

“I’m not even sure I would say he’s smooth with the ladies now.

I still wonder what Tessa sees in him,” I hit back teasingly.

“Tessa and I played volleyball together and it’s just funny to think about how Dylan used to come to my matches.

Who would have thought my brother would be having a baby with one of my teammates?

Back then he was hiding under the bleachers and begging our parents for candy from the concession stand. ”

“You excited about being an aunt?” he now asks, and I love that he’s taking an active interest in my life. That he knows a few things about me already.

“I am. It feels completely surreal that my baby brother is having a baby, but I’m super excited to spoil his kid.” Leo laughs. “How about you? You have any nieces or nephews?”

“I do. I have an older brother and an older sister. They both have kids. My sister has two kids, and my brother has one.”

“Names?” I ask, and even though we can’t fully see each other, the conversation is easy and relaxed. It’s actually a good way to get to know each other.

“My sister is Perry. Her husband is Evan, and their kids are Emma and Sophie. They’re two and four. My brother is Tate, and his girlfriend is Leah. They just had a baby a couple of months ago. Mason.”

“Unique names. Your brother and sister and you. Leo, Perry and Tate,” I reply, noticing the trend.

“Yeah. Perry was my mom’s maiden name, and Tate was my grandfather’s name on my dad’s side. And I...” Leo pauses, leaning out of the bathroom door to look at me. “I was named after Leonardo DiCaprio. My mom’s favorite movie was Romeo and Juliet.” He shakes his head, chuckling a little.

“Seriously?”

“Yes, seriously. Everyone gets named after a family member and I get named after some teen heartthrob my mom was obsessed with.”

“Well, in your mom’s defense, he’s still pretty hot and quite successful,” I defend,

making Leo laugh again.

“Shoes” he says, walking back into the bedroom and it takes me a second to catch up.

“I’m done with my box, and I want you to take off your shoes,” he clarifies.

“My shoes? What the fuck, Leo? Tell me you don’t have some weird foot fetish.”

“Nope, no fetish. Just dragging this out because I want you begging for it,” he replies, a bit of seduction in his voice.

“I’m already begging for it!” I yell, crawling across the bedroom floor to where he’s now sitting as he opens another box. “And I’m done with my box too, so take your shoes off.

I watch as he pulls off his shoes and socks and tosses them to the side. On all fours, I crawl between his legs, my hand skimming across the crotch of his jeans, and he lets out a low groan.

“You’re a tease, Hannah,” he says, mimicking my movement with his own hand, but in between my legs this time.

“You’re the one who made this unpacking deal. I’m ready whenever you are,” I whisper, my lips trailing along his neck, the tip of my tongue tracing the shell of his ear.

He swats me hard on the ass, his hand connecting with it in a way that stings but has me begging him for more. “Leo,” I purr, nipping at his earlobe.

“Do you like toys, Hannah?” he asks, his words dripping with sexual innuendo and when I pull back, I see he’s found the box that has everything from my nightstand.

“I might be a little adventurous,” I reply, peeking inside the box as Leo smirks, his hand pulling out one of my favorites.

“Fuck yes,” he growls and I’m certain he’s going to give up this unpacking bullshit.

“Wanna try them out?” I ask, wetting my lips, my hand once again gliding over the front of his pants, but this time there’s an obvious bulge.

“After we find your sheets,” Leo replies and I collapse on top of him, laughing and shaking my head.

“What the hell do I have to do to get you to fuck me?” I beg, rolling off him as I search for the box with my bedding.

“Find your sheets, Hannah. And unpack your bedroom.”

“You’re awful and I hate you,” I playfully hiss.

“You won’t be saying that in a little bit,” he answers, his hand slapping my ass again. “Get moving because my resolve is fading fast.”

I scamper over to the box that I know contains my bedding and pull it all out quickly.

“Now help me get these sheets on the bed,” I demand, and Leo shakes his head slowly.

“I finished my box of your toys,” he replies, winking at me. “And now I want you to take off your shirt.”

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

I can't believe I ever thought I could slow things down with this woman. And fuck me, I've tried to, but she's damn persistent.

And sexy.

And fuck if she doesn't seem to want me hella fucking bad right now. Consequences be damned.

"My shirt, huh?" she says, grinning as she stands beside an empty box of bedding.

I sit back, so I'm leaning against the wall, my arms crossed over my chest as I get ready to enjoy the view. "Yep," I reply with a nod.

Hannah's grin widens as her hands move to the bottom of her shirt, slowly inching it up and giving me the tiniest glimpse of bare skin. I feel like my mouth is watering as I watch the material get higher and higher, eventually revealing a seriously sexy black bra.

"Fuck," I breathe out as she pulls it completely off, throwing the top onto the floor.

She raises a brow, a smirk on her face as she says, "And here I thought you wanted to put a pause on that side of things."

Chuckling, I shake my head. "Fuck that, I'm not sure I can anymore."

“Good, because I need you to fuck me,” she says. “Now lose the shirt too,” she adds, waving a hand at me.

“What?” I ask, smiling up at her. “Why?”

Hannah gestures to the empty box, the bedding that now lies all over the floor. “I unpacked a box. They were your rules, Leo,” she says playfully.

I stand, shaking my head a little as I reach behind to pull the t-shirt over my head. “Interesting interpretation,” I tease, throwing my t-shirt on the floor. “Not sure the box is technically unpacked, but I’ll concede.”

Hannah bends over, giving me an amazing view of her cleavage as she grabs a set of sheets from the floor. “So, are we making this bed then?”

Shaking my head, I cross my arms over my chest again. “Nope, you are.”

She scoffs, opening the bottom sheet and throwing it over the mattress. “Well, if that’s the case, you’re losing an item of clothing for every piece of bedding I put on,” she says, glancing back at me.

“Same goes for you with these boxes,” I add, motioning to the ones still on the floor.

Hannah’s grin widens. “Race you,” she teases, moving quickly as she gets the fitted sheet put on the bed.

Laughing, I grab a box that’s labeled bathroom, ripping it open to find cosmetics and other toiletries. I have no idea where any of this shit goes as I carry it toward the small bathroom. I quickly empty it onto the counter, but before I’m finished, I hear Hannah’s voice call out from the bedroom.

“You can lose the jeans now, Leo,” she says, and I can tell she’s smiling.

Walking back into the bedroom, I lean against the door frame. Hannah is standing proudly beside her bed, dressed in nothing but her jeans and bra, the bottom sheet now fitted to the bed and a very smug look on her face.

“I’m not sure this is a fair fight anymore,” I say, as I slowly unbuckle my belt.

Hannah’s eyes widen, as she lets out a playful laugh. “You started it,” she says. “I was all for skipping over this whole waiting thing and you know it.”

Chuckling, I pull the belt from my jeans and drop it on the floor, cocking a brow as though to ask if that’s enough.

“No way, mister,” she says, shaking her head. “I said lose the jeans.”

“I see, so it’s like that, is it?” I ask, pushing my jeans down my hips until they fall to the floor.

When I straighten and look over at Hannah, her mouth is hanging slightly open and her eyes are locked firmly on my crotch.

I’m wearing pretty tight boxer briefs, so I’ve got no doubt she can see exactly what this little game is doing to me. “You okay over there?” I ask.

Hannah nods, her eyes never leaving my crotch as she lets out a long, low, “Fuck.”

Laughing, I turn and walk back to the bathroom, quickly unpacking the rest of the box before I call out, “Yep and you can lose your jeans now too.” I walk back into the bedroom to find Hannah scrambling to get the top sheet on the bed and I can’t help but laugh.

“Lose the jeans, babe,” I say, the word babe falling naturally from my lips as I wait in the doorway.

She smirks at me as she mirrors my earlier movements, slowly unbuttoning her jeans before shimmying out of them until they are pooled at her feet and she’s standing in matching black panties and bra.

I scrub a hand across my mouth as I give her a slow once over. Her body is fucking incredible, all long and lean and tanned and I am itching to run my hands and mouth all over it.

“Looks like I have an advantage,” she says, signaling to her remaining two items of clothing.

I quickly pick up a random box and empty it onto the floor, a pile of towels falling out. “Not anymore,” I say, grinning. “Lose the bra.”

Hannah laughs and I half expect her to call no fair on me, but she doesn’t.

Instead, moving her hands behind her back and unsnapping the bra before slowly peeling it off to reveal her spectacular tits.

I mean I thought they were impressive earlier, when I had my mouth on them, but seeing them now, in all their naked glory.

Holy. Shit.

“You know, the bed is basically made,” she says.

I lift my gaze to hers, see the sly smile on her face as she indicates toward the bed, the top sheet strewn across the mattress. “Pillowcases?” I suggest, stepping toward

her and grabbing one of the pillows.

Hannah laughs, throwing me a case as she grabs the other pillow, yanks on the case before throwing it on the bed. “I win, lose the briefs.”

Laughing, I throw my covered pillow on the bed before turning back to her.

“We’re really doing this, huh?” Hannah nods and even though it was me to suggest we slow this whole thing down, right now, I have absolutely no intention of stopping.

“Okay,” I reply, pushing them down my legs so I am now completely naked.

“Oh. My. Fucking. God,” Hannah breathes out. “Your dick is huge.”

I let out a loud laugh. “Keep talking like that, babe and it’s only gonna get bigger.”

Hannah blinks slowly. “No, I mean seriously, do condoms actually fit?”

Chuckling, I reach for my jeans. “Don’t worry, I’ve got that covered,” I say, as I pull a strip of condoms from the back pocket of my jeans. Stepping toward her, I throw them on the bed, watching as she glances down at them.

“Magnums, figures,” she says, almost to herself.

I slide a hand onto her hip, pulling her close, my dick hard between us. “Don’t tell me you’re scared?” I tease, slipping my hand to her ass.

Hannah grins, planting her hands on my chest before slowly sliding them down. A low groan falls from my mouth the second she reaches my dick, her hand curling around it and giving it a long, slow stroke. “Never.”

“Good,” I grin, as I grab the ties at each side of her panties and tug, undoing them so the fabric falls away and we are both standing completely naked in front of each other.

My hands move back to her hips, pulling her so our bodies are pressed together as I lower my mouth to hers, groaning into the kiss.

Hannah’s grip on my dick tightens as she deepens the kiss, her tongue tangling with mine, both of us desperate and needy, as though the past few weeks have been one long extended bit of foreplay that’s about to seriously explode now that we are both finally naked.

“Fucking hell,” I mutter, pulling back before I sink to my knees in front of her. Hitching one of her legs over my shoulder, I press my mouth between her legs and lick her in one long slow move.

“Oh god,” she groans, her hands moving to my head, trying to grip hair that’s too short for her to grab on to.

Smiling against her, I repeat the move, before easing two fingers inside her, loving the way she tightens her leg, drawing me closer.

I lick her again, before closing my mouth over her clit and feeling her tense around me as I start to suck.

Opening my eyes, I look up at her, the view unbelievable. The taste of her on my tongue, amazing.

Fuck, I could eat this woman out for hours.

“Leo,” she groans as I continue to suck, slipping a third finger inside just as her legs

start to tremble. I move them slowly in and out of her, never stopping my mouth or my fingers even as she clenches hard and explodes, her moan loud in the silence of her bedroom.

Easing her leg from my shoulder, I stand, brushing a hand across my mouth, smiling at the dazed look on her face. With my hands on her hips, I walk her back to the bed, easing her down onto it, as I grab the strip of condoms.

Hannah's eyes snap open, her gaze focused on my dick as I rip open a condom and put it on. When I lift my gaze to hers, she's smiling, sexy as hell, her eyes hooded as she crooks a finger, beckoning me closer.

I crawl over her, nudging her legs apart with my knee. "Open your legs for me."

"Yes, boss," she replies, a playful tone in her voice as she complies.

"Watch it," I warn.

"What, you are my boss," she says, all mock innocence.

Chuckling, I press a hard kiss to her mouth before moving mine to her ear. "I might be out there, but in here," I pause, nipping at her ear lobe. "You fucking own me, Hannah Murphy." Then I push inside her in one hard thrust.

"Oh fuck," she moans, dragging out the word, pushing her hips off the bed to meet mine.

"Yes," I groan, my eyes practically rolling back in my head at how good this feels.

"Fuck, yes," I murmur, repeating the movement of my hips.

Hannah's arms curl around my shoulders, pulling me down so my body covers hers.

With my hands on her knees, I push her legs even wider as I continue my movements, thrusting in and out of her, over and over again, slow and deep. It feels endless and amazing and I don't ever want it to stop.

Her mouth finds mine, kissing me hard and deep, her tongue practically mimicking the actions of my dick.

She's so fucking wet and warm and god, I already can't get enough of her.

My whole body hums with an electric tension, my skin is on fire and covered in a thin layer of sweat as we move against each other.

I let go of one of her knees, moving my hand between us, finding her clit again and rubbing in time with my thrusts.

"Ohhh," she moans, biting my bottom lip, her back arching off the bed as she pushes her hips against mine. "Oh, god yes."

I'm so close, so fucking close, but I force myself to hold on, wanting to make this last, wanting her to come again. And just as I feel a jolt of electricity shoot down my spine and my balls tighten, Hannah lets out a long low moan and comes again, pulling me right over the edge with her.

"Shit," I groan, collapsing onto her, my heart pounding in my chest as my head swims with lust and fuck knows what else. "That was fucking amazing."

Hannah's hands slide up my back. "God, was it ever," she says with a laugh. "Doesn't mean we shouldn't do it again though. You know, just to make sure."

Chuckling, I roll onto my back, taking her with me. "Guess it's good I brought more than one of these then, isn't it?" I say, my eyes flicking to the strip of condoms.

Hannah grins, raising her brows as though she likes my suggestion.

And so do I.

We burn through the whole strip.

The next morning, I wake to the sound of someone pounding on a door, followed by a loud, “HANNAH!”

“Fuck me,” Hannah mumbles beside me, her warm and very naked body curled around mine.

I open my eyes, and realize I’m still in her bed, the two of us having apparently passed out god knows when after an all-night sex marathon. “Do you need to get that?”

“No,” she grumbles. “Too early. He can fuck off.” There’s another loud knock that’s quickly followed by the sound of her phone ringing. “Ugh, Jesus Christ,” Hannah shouts, reaching across me, her hand slapping at the nightstand for her phone.

I find it and hold it out for her, not missing her brother’s name as it flashes across the screen. Hannah doesn’t answer and eventually the ringing stops, only to start up again.

“Maybe you should answer,” I say, trying not to laugh at Dylan’s persistence.

I never texted him back after the message he sent me last night, so I guess he figures I never saw it and has come to check up on his older sister himself.

I can already tell Hannah’s got zero tolerance for his bullshit, especially this early.

She sits up, grumbling the whole time as she hits the green button. “What?” she snaps.

I can’t hear what Dylan says, but apparently it’s something annoying as Hannah glances back at me, rolling her eyes. “No, little brother, I was sleeping. Not all of us get up at the ass crack of dawn, you know.”

I bite my lip to stop the laugh as Dylan says something that results in another eye roll.

“Yes, I had a late night,” she says. “No, I didn’t work, but...” she pauses, glancing back at me again, this time with a sly smile on her face. “I was trying out some new things with Leo.”

I spit out a laugh, immediately slapping a hand over my mouth, because I’m pretty sure neither of us needs Dylan to know exactly what those new things were. Or the fact that the second she gets off the phone, we’ll be doing more of them.

Hannah mumbles a few more things before eventually hanging up, throwing her phone onto the floor as she flops back beside me. “Fuck my life.”

Chuckling, I roll over so I’m lying on top of her. “Think I’d rather fuck you, actually,” I murmur, my mouth against hers.

Hannah smiles, her hands slipping to my ass as she presses my morning wood against her. “Didn’t we use all those magnums last night?”

“You don’t have any more? I remember seeing a box of condoms in with your toys?” I tease.

Hannah looks up at me, a smirk on her beautiful face. “No, not magnums, anyway.”

Grinning, I sit back on my heels, reaching for the box of regular size. “We’ll make it work.”

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

“Hey, Han,” Dylan’s voice calls out over the noise of the kitchen, and I know he’s here to grab lunch.

Without missing a beat or even stopping to talk to him, I grab the to-go container where I have it waiting and hand it off to him.

It’s the lunch rush and I really don’t have time to stop and chat, even though I really need to tell him that just because I now live on the Somerville property, that doesn’t mean I want him dropping by unannounced.

This morning was the first unexpected visit in what I’m sure is going to be a long line of them.

He doesn’t need to know I’m hooking up with Leo because it could be a one and done thing.

Even as I think it, I don’t believe it. We were on fire last night and there’s not a chance I’m turning him down if he shows up on my doorstep, and I’m absolutely certain by the way he couldn’t keep his hands off me this morning that he feels the same way.

“Can’t even stop for a second to greet your baby brother, huh?” Dylan quips, taking the container from my outstretched hand. “And to think, without me, you wouldn’t have a job here.”

“Little busy here,” I shoot back, tossing the brussels sprouts and apple mixture around in a pan. “How about I come bother you in an hour when you’re back at work?”

“Wanna have dinner tonight with Tess and me?” he now asks, ignoring my question.

“Oh my god, do you miss me already? It’s only been one day since I left.

” I push my bottom lip out, pretending I feel bad.

Bad is the last thing I feel. No one wants to live with their baby brother and his pregnant fiancée.

And I never would’ve hooked up with Leo the way I did if I had still been living with Dylan.

“Please, if anything, Tess and I threw a party when you left. The kind of party that involves—”

“Nope, don’t say it. It’s not like you two didn’t go at it all the damn time when I lived there anyway,” I hit back, not wanting to hear about their celebration. If he only knew about the celebration I had last night. That would shut him up pretty quickly.

“But I can’t,” I reply. “I’m working dinner tonight too. I have a break for a few hours before I need to be back here for dinner and then I have a catering menu I need to finalize.”

“I thought you took the job here to have more free time?” Dylan says, and while I get what he’s saying, this is the kind of busy I like. I’m appreciated and valued; my ideas are applauded, and we work as a team here.

“Yes, but listen,” I say, holding a finger to my lips, my eyes closed. “Do you hear anyone yelling?” I open my eyes and let out a long, slow exhale. “This,” I add, opening my arms and smiling, “is the sound of happiness.”

“Well, when you get a chance, check your busy schedule and see if you can fit me in,” Dylan teases, planting a kiss on my cheek and thanking me for lunch as he leaves the kitchen.

“Tomorrow?” I call out. “Lunch?”

“Sounds good,” Dylan answers back.

When the lunch rush finally dies down, it’s well after three and I need to be back at Somerville’s at five.

Basically, Leo and I are switching places since we’re down a few assistants this week.

He’s been working on hiring a few more people, so once that’s taken care of, I’ll be over in the kitchen at Somerville’s until they start renovations, while Leo will spend most of his time at Apple Jacks.

But until then, we’re both working our asses off.

And then there’s the catering aspect of it all too.

I toss my chef’s coat into the bin, letting out a hard sigh, and despite being exhausted, I’ve never been happier. I have about two hours to head back to my house, take a quick shower, eat and be back in the kitchen doing what I love.

Living on the property and being close to Leo isn’t the only bonus.

I normally wouldn't have been able to go home and shower between shifts, but today, I'm happily walking back to my little house, the sun is shining, the air smells of apples and I got laid.

Like the best lay I've ever had in my life.

I'm still reliving it in my head and I'm about to relive it in the shower.

I push open the door to my house, laughing when I see the stack of boxes still cluttering up the entryway. At least my bedroom is sort of unpacked. I really need to find the time to get all this stuff put away, but really, I have what I need. My bed, my toys and now Leo.

I start up the shower, stripping off my clothes, needing to wash all this smell and sweat from the day off me.

My mind can't seem to focus on anything but what went down in my bedroom with Leo yesterday and this morning though.

Distracted and needing release, I skitter out of the bathroom and grab a dildo from where Leo had stashed them in my nightstand.

As I'm jogging back to the bathroom, I catch a glimpse out the window of my bedroom.

It feels totally weird to live in the middle of nowhere, but still in the heart of this vineyard.

I'm surrounded by nothing but openness, and I have zero worries that someone is going to see my naked ass scampering around my house.

It's not like living in the city where my neighbors could literally see into my house from their living room.

The bathroom is warm and already fogging up when I pull open the glass shower door and step inside. The hot water hits my skin, setting it on fire and doing nothing to cool down the need to get myself off to thoughts of Leo.

I wet the suction cup on the bottom of my dildo, positioning it on the tile wall and I bend over to make sure it's in the right spot, but just as I do I hear a voice.

"Need a hand."

"Oh my fucking god!" I screech, yanking the dildo off the wall, ready to use it as a weapon. Without even thinking about it, I smack a very naked Leo in the chest with it, hard, and he yelps.

"Fuck, Hannah!" he yells out, his hand covering where I just hit him. "I was trying to surprise you."

"Well, you fucking did," I reply, my heart racing, my breathing amped up as if I've just run a mile.

"What were you going to do there? Beat me with a fucking dildo?" Leo now asks, laughing as he joins me in the shower.

"I thought you were someone breaking in here to assault me, so yeah, I was going to beat the shit out of you with this dildo," I reply, shaking it around in my hand, causing Leo to burst out laughing.

"I mean, I was coming in here to assault you, but in the best possible way. But now I'd like to know what you were about to do." His tone is laced with curious seduction

and there's nothing hotter than making him wonder what I was up to.

"I was going to get myself off in here, but since you've shown up," I say, alluding to exactly what I'm hoping he's here to do, my eyes falling to his already erect dick.

"I'm kinda wondering what you getting yourself off looks like, Hannah," he growls, his fingers moving up the inside of my thigh. "I'm guessing you're wet and ready."

"Yes," I moan, when his fingers slip inside me.

"Show me, Hannah. I want to watch you get yourself off," Leo murmurs, guiding my hand to put the dildo back on the tile.

"But why would I want to when I have the real thing?" I ask, positioning myself and pushing back against it until it's fully inside me.

"Fuck," Leo hisses, as he watches me. "You look so fucking hot." And while I'm sure I'm rocking this thing like a fucking porn star, I'd much rather have him inside me.

"Are you really going to watch me come like this when I have you and your amazing dick here?" I ask, moaning as the dildo begins to hit the spot. "I'm close, you wouldn't even have to try very hard," I add, making Leo smirk.

"We're out of condoms," Leo replies, but the way he says it tells me he's just fucking with me.

The conversation about condoms and birth control was touched on briefly this morning, and while we agreed that we'd make sure we were safe since Dylan and Tessa had an accidental pregnancy, I assured him that I'm clean and I'm up to date on my birth control.

“Just don’t come inside me,” I murmur, letting his imagination run wild, and mine too, if I’m being honest. I love dirty sex and with Leo it feels like I can be myself and he’s totally into it.

“Oh, that feels like an invitation,” Leo groans, his hand gripping his dick as I stand up and hook my leg around his hip, pulling him close.

He backs me up against the wall, the tile cold against my skin and my nipples harden instantly.

Having Leo this close to me, his body flush with mine, our hearts racing together, it’s like a dream come true.

Everything about him is what I look for in a guy and I can’t help but wonder if I was meant to work here, that we were meant to find each other.

I’m not usually a big believer in fate and all that bullshit, but as I stand here with Leo buried inside me, my body responding to him like it never has, that’s all I can think about.

“Your body was made for me,” Leo whispers in my ear, his mouth trailing down my neck, sucking and biting as he goes. “Every fucking inch of it.”

“Mark me,” I moan, my head falling back as Leo’s mouth sucks hard at my breast now.

The tension between us is building, our chests are heaving, both of us close, both of us needing release and when I call out that I’m going to come, Leo pulls out.

Replacing his dick are his fingers, his thumb pressing right where I need.

He guides my hand around his dick, jerking him off, until he comes between us, marking my stomach as the water falls around us.

“Amazing,” I tell him, breathless and exhausted, wondering how the hell I’m supposed to go back to work after that.

“Like high school all over again. I never thought I’d want to go back to heavy petting, but fuck me, you made that so hot,” Leo replies, smiling, his lips connecting with mine.

“Me?” I question. “I think it was us.”

“Us. I like the sound of that,” he says, kissing me again. “I only had an hour and fuck, that was a good way to spend an hour.” He shakes his head, leaning in, he whispers in my ear, “I gotta go, gorgeous.”

When Leo leaves, I collapse against the shower wall, closing my eyes, I let the water run over me, reminding myself that I do actually have to get back to work.

Two hours later I’m back in the kitchen, distracted by orders and cooking and making sure the staff is staying on track.

“Hannah,” one of the assistants calls out as he emerges from the walk-in, “we’re out of onions.” That’s an easy fix, and I shoo him off, telling him to take over the salad prep while I go grab them from the detached storage area.

I open the door, flipping on the light, I begin searching for what I need when I feel someone come up behind me, their arms wrapping around my waist.

“Oh my god, Leo, will you stop scaring me!” I yell, not even turning around to see if it’s him.

“I’m sorry,” he replies, kissing my neck. “I also wanted to tell you I’m sorry for running out on you like that.”

“What are you talking about?” I ask, turning in his arms so I’m now facing him.

“The shower. After I left, it felt like I sorta just fucked you and ran.”

“Well, I was thoroughly fucked and happy, and that pretty much checks off all my boxes. You also don’t have to dote on me. I’m good.”

“But what if I want to dote on you?” he now asks, grabbing the bag of onions from my hand. “Like how about I help you with that catering menu tonight after work?”

“Talking appetizers and entrées, nothing sexier,” I tease.

“And maybe some wine pairings,” he murmurs in my ear, making both of us laugh. “Dirty talk for chefs.”

I push up on my toes, kissing him and when I pull back, I can’t help but be overwhelmed with how well things are going for me.

It’s not just the job, or the house, or even Leo; it’s the combination of it all.

Everything is falling into place after a shitty few months of working my ass off and being screamed at and feeling like I wasn’t good enough.

“Thank you,” I murmur against his lips.

“For what?”

“For everything.”

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

It's been a week since Hannah and I finally gave in and hooked up and to say we've been fucking like crazy every chance we get since then, would be an understatement. If we're not at work, we're naked and in bed together.

Or in the shower.

Or she's bent over my kitchen table.

Or hers.

Or any number of other pieces of furniture at her place or mine.

And fuck my life if it hasn't been the greatest week ever.

We literally cannot keep our hands off each other and our chemistry is beyond explosive.

I always knew it would be good when we finally did this; it was obvious from the way we both reacted to each other.

But I'm not sure either of us could have predicted it would be this good.

It's literally like she was made for me, and I seriously cannot get enough of her. And with both of us now getting clean bills of health, so we aren't bothering with condoms anymore, it's somehow just made everything that much hotter.

“Yo, Leo,” Dylan calls out as he walks into the kitchen, a smile on his face that I know would not be there if he knew about all the filthy things I was doing with his sister this morning.

I mean it’s not like we’re going to keep it from him forever, but right now, we are both enjoying this whole getting to know each other thing, without the eyes of everyone at Somerville’s or Apple Jacks on us.

God knows I witnessed what he went through when he was trying to win Tessa back and I definitely do not need that level of scrutiny thrown my way.

Particularly given our working relationship.

As sex crazy as I am about her, I’m still conscious of the fact that I’m her boss and all of this looks very different for her if anyone was to find out.

“Hey, what’s up?” I ask as he walks into my office.

Technically I’m not supposed to be at work because it’s Monday and the restaurants are closed for the next two days, but with Hannah still needing to finish unpacking her house, I figured I’d come in, try and get a few things done before we meet up again tonight.

I’ve kind of been slacking when it comes to a lot of work-related things since I started my extracurricular activities.

And our last attempt at unpacking her house, while fucking awesome, didn’t actually result in much unpacking.

Dylan flops into the chair on the other side of my desk, his hands resting on the arm rests and that huge stupid grin he’s always sporting plastered on his face. “We’re

going out tonight.”

“What?” I ask, looking up from the menu ideas I’ve been working on for Apple Jacks.

With the renovations planned for Somerville’s, it’s going to mean the restaurant soon closes for a while.

It will help with the staff shortages, but I still want to expand the menu here to provide more options given the likely increase in customers. “No, I’ve got plans, can’t.”

“Cancel them,” he says matter of factly. “Come on, everyone’s going.”

I’m shaking my head before he’s even finished talking, knowing there’s not a chance in hell I’m canceling my plans with Hannah tonight. “Who’s everyone?” I ask, like that’s going to change my mind.

“Me, Will, Jack, Tommy. The girls are doing some baby shower shit for Lauren, so we’re making the most of the winery being shut tomorrow and getting drunk tonight. Boy’s night,” he adds with a chuckle.

I look up to see him watching me, clearly waiting for me to say yes like this is the greatest suggestion ever. And normally it is and I’d be all up for it, but not tonight.

I’m just about to tell him no when my phone chimes out with a text. Pulling it from my back pocket, my own stupid smile is automatic as soon as I see Hannah’s name light up my screen.

Hannah: So I’ve been invited to Lauren’s baby shower tonight...Tessa is making me go...can we hook up after?

I glance at Dylan, wondering if he somehow knows it's from his sister. He's still wearing that stupid grin, although now I'm trying not to read too much into it as I turn back to my phone to reply.

Me: Hook up? Babe, I told you this isn't hooking up. This is us fucking and it's fucking spectacular.

Hannah: It sure is...but tonight??

Me: Your brother is in my office right now informing me that I'm going out with him and the boys, so...

Hannah: I guess it might look suspicious if we both bailed on them tonight then, right?

Me: Maybe, but we are definitely getting together after.

Hannah: I'll probably be drunk ;)

Me: And I'll be only too happy to have my filthy way with Drunk Hannah.

Hannah: That will make Drunk Hannah very happy

I burst out laughing, forgetting for a second that Dylan is still in my office.

"Okay, who the hell are you sexting?" he asks, and I immediately tilt my phone toward my chest, just in case.

"I'm not sexting anyone," I tell him, just as my phone chimes out with another text.

Hannah: BTW, I've finally finished unpacking...funnily enough, thinking about your

gorgeous dick and exactly what it can do to me the whole time really helped keep me motivated. Although I did need to stop a couple of times to...well you know ;)

“Fuck me,” I mutter, my eyes closing as images of Hannah getting herself off, possibly with one of those toys I know she keeps in her nightstand, flash before me.

Maybe we should bail on tonight after all because I have a sudden urgent need to be at her place, ripping her clothes off so I can bury myself inside her and give her the real thing.

“Seriously, dude, who the fuck are you texting? You’re like...I don’t know, weirdly focused.”

I tighten the grip on my phone, not replying to Hannah’s latest text because I cannot think straight with her brother sitting in front of me. Clearing my throat, I turn back to Dylan. “Okay fine, what’s the plan for tonight?”

Dylan is still staring at me, a strange look on his face as though he’s trying to figure out what’s going on.

“What?” I prompt, sitting back in my chair, my phone burning in my hand.

“I should be asking you the same question,” he says. “What’s going on here?” he asks, waving a hand at me.

I clear my throat, as I say, “Nothing. Anyway, my plans have changed. What’s happening tonight?”

Dylan’s brow narrows and I can tell he doesn’t believe me, or at the very least, knows something is going on. “Well, the girls are all at Somerville’s,” he says. “So, we’ve got Apple Jacks. You in or what?”

Exhaling, I figure if Hannah is busy tonight, then I may as well kill some time hanging out with the guys too. At least we'll have later tonight and all of tomorrow with the restaurants closed. "Yep, okay, I'm in."

Dylan claps his hands together, smiling as he stands.

"Great. Now, you gonna spill the beans on who you were sexting with just then or what? 'Cause, dude, you were rocking a seriously huge smile.

You know, the kinda smile that suggests you are sexting and getting laid on the regular.

I mean trust me, I speak from experience on this one. "

Chuckling, I shake my head at his persistence. "You know," I say, grinning, "I seem to recall a time when you hated everyone sticking their nose in your sex life, yet here you are, sticking yours in mine."

Dylan laughs. "Fuck, I knew you were sexting! Tell me, who is it? Do I know her?"

I swallow hard, trying to keep my poker face on as I reply, "I wasn't sexting and anyway, my business, not yours, remember?"

"Come on, this is different."

"Oh, it is, is it? And how so?"

"I don't know," he says with a shrug. "We're friends."

I stand, moving around my desk as I shove Dylan toward the door. "Yes, we are, still doesn't mean I'm spilling the beans on who I wasn't sexting with just now."

Dylan huffs, clearly annoyed. “Yeah well, we’ll see what a couple of drinks does to you tonight. Bet I can get you to sing like a fucking canary.”

Laughing, I push him through the door. “Whatever. I’ll see you later.”

I close the door behind him, immediately opening up the text thread on my phone.

Me: You are so paying for sending me that text when you knew your brother was with me. Be ready Drunk Hannah, I’m gonna enjoy punishing you for that one ;)

Hannah: Well shit, consider me fucking excited!

I burst out laughing as I finish up things in my office before heading back to my place to take a quick shower, my mind reeling with ideas about what I’m going to do to her when I get my hands on her later tonight.

By the time I get to Apple Jacks, everyone else is there. I’m greeted with a cheer as I walk through the door and before I even have a chance to sit down, Jack is thrusting a drink at me and clinking his bottle against mine.

“Cheers, mate, thanks for coming,” he says.

“No problem,” I say, lifting my drink in a salute before taking a sip. “Was a good idea, given what your other half is up to.”

Jack laughs, shaking his head a little. “Yeah, I mean look, I love Lu and I’m fucking excited about the babies coming, but I do not need to watch as she unwraps a bunch of organic nappies or whatever.”

“Unwrap what?” I ask, confused.

Jack narrows his brow. “Nappies,” he says.

“What the hell is that?”

“Oh my god,” he moans, rolling his eyes. “Fucking diapers, man. Shit, you guys say some weird shit.”

Laughing, I slap his shoulder as we join Dylan, Tommy and Will. “Speak for yourself, Jack. Speak for yourself.”

“Leo!” Dylan says, grinning as he shoves a stool at me and motions for me to sit. “Take a seat.” His grin widens, his smile sly as he glances at Tom and Jack before turning back to me. “Seems our boy here has gone and found himself someone to sext with.”

“Oh fuck,” I mutter, scrubbing a hand down my face.

“Whoa, what? How the hell do I not know about this?” Jack asks, an urgent and slightly annoyed tone to his voice.

Dylan smirks, chuckling as he looks at Jack. “Losing your touch, man,” he teases. “And I guess you’re not the only one who notices shit around here.”

Jack shakes his head as he turns back to me. “No, this won’t do, what’s going on here? Start talking. I need details.”

Laughing at the obvious annoyance Jack has because Dylan has apparently got one over him, I shake my head, holding a hand up as I say, “Nothing, Dylan’s talking shit. As usual.”

“Bullshit,” Dylan says, laughing. “You were so fucking sexting someone when I

came past earlier and man, she must be good, because the smile on your face. Fuck.”

I can’t help but laugh, because as much as I do not want to spill the beans here, I know if I did, I would seriously knock Dylan on his ass. Big time. “Look, dude, you’re this big loved up fool right now. You’re imaging shit. Let it go.”

“Oh no, no, no,” he replies, shaking his head. “This is legit, you gotta see, Jack, seriously.”

I turn to Jack who’s still watching me, a look of concentration on his face as though he’s trying to work something out.

Clearly, he doesn’t remember nearly busting me and Han in the catering kitchen a while back.

Either that or I just read too much into things that day.

Tommy is sitting beside him, silently chuckling as he sips his cider, while Will watches Jack, a look of amusement on his face.

“Are they always like this?” I ask Tom.

He nods. “Yep. I mean he’s the worst,” he says, jerking a thumb at Jack. “But he’s not much better these days,” he adds, gesturing to Dylan, who rolls his eyes.

“They’re both as bad as each other,” Will chimes in, making Tom laugh.

“This place,” I mutter, still smiling because as much as the whole everyone knowing everyone’s business is weird, I do really love working here. Even more so with my sexy new sous chef.

Dylan laughs, slapping my shoulder as he flops onto the stool beside me. “There’s no escaping it, Leo,” he says, smiling. “We’ll get it out of you eventually. Now drink up. And Jack, get him another cider. We need to loosen this guy up and get him talking.”

Jack lets out a laugh as though he approves of Dylan’s plan before handing me another cider.

I finish off my drink before accepting the new one, wondering if Hannah is copping this much shit from the girls as I mentally count down the minutes till I can escape and go ravish that sexy as fuck body of hers.

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

I walk into a room full of women, two of them pregnant and I only know a couple of them.

One of them is basically my sister-in-law and the other is my boss and declining to come to my boss' baby shower when she's letting me live in a cottage on her property nearly rent-free, would not have been the best idea.

So here I am, gift in hand, ready to celebrate my boss and her soon to be twins.

"I'm so glad you came," Tessa says, greeting me at the door with a smile and her cute little round belly.

"I think I should probably be planning one of these for you soon," I reply, resting my hand on Tessa's stomach.

"Yep, something Dylan has been looking forward to, by the way, so better make it a co-ed thing," Tessa tells me and it's hard not to laugh at the idea of my brother at a baby shower.

He's been so adorably involved since Tessa found out she was pregnant, something I don't think any of us saw coming.

But I have to admit, it's been awesome to see the change in him.

"Oh, that will be fun. Do you want to have it here?" I ask Tessa, looking around at

the beautifully decorated space within the restaurant at Somerville's.

I can't believe they're closing it down for renovations soon, but that does mean Leo and I will get a break from working at both restaurants constantly.

Although, the catering business is taking off and Leo and I have been running that now too.

"I was thinking we could have it in one of the buildings I designed for P, T and Bee," Tessa says and while I haven't been here long, I do know she's done a ton of work here. It would be awesome to have her baby shower in one of the buildings she's had the honor to work on.

"I'll talk with Penny about getting it set up," I say, walking over to put my gift on the table. "And then I'll start working on the menu, since I know nothing about baby showers and everything about food."

"And I can help with the decorating part since I know a bit about that," Tessa teases.

"I can't believe the restaurant is closing. It feels like it's so successful that they'd want to keep it open," I say, changing the subject.

"Yeah, it's super successful, but they need more space, and you'll love this next part, a bigger kitchen. I think Lauren is planning to keep it open for outdoor dining on a limited menu. Sandwiches and salads and things like that until the reno is done."

"That will keep me busy, plus the catering for weddings and showers and whatever."

"Has Leo been keeping you busy?" Tessa now asks, a smirk on her face, a playful tone to her words as she sidles up beside me, linking her arm through mine.

I'm quiet for a few seconds, wanting to tell her how amazing things have been, but also wanting to keep things hush-hush for both mine and Leo's sake. He's still my boss and I'm still a new employee, and I really don't need this gossip getting out this soon.

"Your silence says so much, Hannah," Tessa taunts, elbowing me in the side. "I promise you Lauren and Jack won't care. Look at Dylan and me, and Tommy and Penny, and even the owners are married."

"I hear you, and it's not so much that I'm worried. I mean I am worried about them finding out, but I'm also worried that if it doesn't work out, we'll be working together after sleeping together. Can you say awkward?"

"So you are sleeping with him," Tessa says, basically announcing it to the room. She clamps a hand over her mouth, giggling a little.

"Oh my god, Tessa. Keep it down. But yes, we are sleeping together, if you must know and it's been fucking unreal."

"Have you shared one of Dylan's toys with him?" she asks, this time quietly, wrinkling up her nose. "Wish he wouldn't have kept that a secret from me for as long as he did," she adds and as much as I hate picturing my brother having sex, she's right about his toy being pretty great.

"I haven't but we did..." I start to say, but trail off when Lauren walks over, not needing everyone to know the intimate details of mine and Leo's very healthy sex life.

"Hannah, thank you so much for coming. I'm so sorry I haven't been around much, but it sounds like you're doing a fabulous job according to Jack and Leo," Lauren says, hugging me. "And how's the cottage? Everything working out for you?"

This woman is currently thirty plus weeks pregnant with twins and is asking how I'm doing. Asking how my essentially free house is working out for me. Like I have any room to complain at all.

"I should be asking you how you're doing," I reply, waving my hand at her very large belly. "How many weeks now?"

"Thirty -four, and they don't seem too eager to evacuate anytime soon," Lauren says. "They're stubborn like their dad. Something tells me I'm going to be one of those women who's pregnant with twins and makes it to forty weeks."

"Poor Tessa is probably in for the same thing since she's growing a baby that's half my brother's," I joke. "But the house is great, Lauren and I'm loving living so close to work."

"Hopefully Leo's treating you well," she says, and Tessa lets out a cross between a scoff and laugh that makes me want to smack her. "He's single, you know, but I'm not the match-maker, Jack is."

"So I've heard and yes, he's been great to work for," I reply, trying to play it coy and hoping Tessa's little vocal tic doesn't give me away.

"And he's got a hot body," Penny adds in, coming up behind us, clearly listening in. "Not that I'm looking because I'm married, but..." She shrugs, making us laugh.

"Hot body for sure and no one is judging anyone for looking," Tessa teases, winking at me. She's totally going to be the one to blow my cover. "I'm pretty sure we'd all like to see him shirtless."

"Oh, I have!" Penny chimes in, excitedly. "Once he was out for a run and I happened to be leaving to go to the store and passed him. Nearly drove off the fucking road."

“If anyone needs to be dreaming about hot, shirtless guys it’s me,” Ellen joins in. “I’m the one with two kids who can pretty much sense when Will and I are horny and ruin it all. Get ready, Lu. You’re about to kiss your sex life goodbye.”

“Can’t wait till my entertainment consists of creeping on my shirtless employees,” Lauren jokes, waddling her way over to the table to sit down. “Sorry, girls, I get winded from standing too long. In a few minutes I’ll be heavy breathing like Darth Vader.”

“Oh, I feel you,” Tessa laments. “I can’t even go up the stairs without sounding like a giant rhinoceros and then there’s the whole food thing. I could literally eat twenty-four hours a day and still want more. I’m going to be the size of a house by the time I deliver this baby.”

“Who cares,” Ellen says, walking over to sit down next to Lauren and we all follow and do the same. “It’s the one time in your life where you can do whatever the fuck you want and can pretty much tell anyone who judges you to fuck off. They should try growing a human.”

It’s hilarious to hear Ellen talk like this.

I don’t know her very well, but I guess from the few times I’ve briefly met her, she’s always been all business.

The longer I work here, the more I’m finding that I do enjoy spending time with everyone here.

It really is like one big family. This is so different to where I previously worked and it’s still hard to believe places like this exist.

Lauren begins to open her gifts and while there aren’t very many of us here, she’s

definitely been showered with presents. Bedding and bath items, clothes, car seats, baby carriers, strollers and tons and tons of diapers, which I imagine she'll need given she's having twins.

"Did you ever decide to find out whether the twins are boys, girls or both?" Ellen asks. "I've been dying to know."

"You think I'd be able to keep it from you?" Lauren replies. "We decided we aren't going to. There are very few surprises left in life and I want this to be one of them."

"Same here," Tessa adds. "Dylan is dying to know, but I keep telling him we'll find out when the baby is here. It's not like we're going to trade the baby in if it's not what he's hoping for."

We spend the rest of the night chatting and eating and laughing.

With only Penny and me able to drink, and Ellen being Lauren's designated driver, we polish off a couple of bottles of champagne, but I'm sure Leo is way more drunk.

We all help Lauren load up Ellen's SUV with her gifts so she can bring them home.

Ellen gives her a ride and the rest of us walk over, to help her get things unpacked.

Turns out I'm now a professional at unpacking since I finally got all my shit organized and put away, no thanks to Leo.

"I can't wait to show you Lauren and Jack's house," Tessa says as we make our way over there and while I've seen the outside, I have yet to go inside and tour all of Tessa's hard work.

We knock, but Tessa doesn't wait for Lauren to say anything, she just opens the door

and walks in.

I follow her and am instantly blown away by how absolutely stunning the entryway is.

If the house is this gorgeous in a space that people don't spend much time in, I can only imagine what the rest of it looks like.

Tessa has an amazing eye for architectural details that really make every room unique and beautiful. She takes me on a quick tour, telling me all about what she did and how she designed it. I hope to one day have her design a home for me and build something this perfect.

We find Lauren, Ellen and Penny in the nursery, the cribs already put together and the room is already decorated.

It's so cute, all decked out in this blissful woodland motif with greens and grays and cream.

We help her get the crib bedding put on and hang up the clothes in the closet and unpack anything that is still in boxes.

It's a pretty good night and when it's time to go, it feels like the babies could come any day now since Lauren is ready.

As the night winds down, Ellen decides to stay the night with Lauren since the twins are spending the night with their grandparents and Will is still out with the guys. Guessing he'll do the same when the guys finish up their night.

Tessa and Penny both head home and I do the same, bidding everyone a goodnight, I make my way back to my little cottage.

The night air is cool, but it feels so good.

My life has really taken a turn. I thought moving out to the vineyard would be isolating and when Phoebe told me she was moving to France, I was expecting to be alone most of the time.

But here I am with a hot guy living close by and having made a few new friends since taking this job.

I do owe Dylan and Tessa a huge thank you for sticking their necks out to put in a good word for me.

As soon as I get home, I pull out my phone and text Leo.

Me: I'm home and horny. When are you coming to help me out?

Leo: You drunk??

Me: Not really, but I'm guessing you are. Can I have my way with you?

Leo: Leaving now.

Me: Don't leave on my account.

Leo: I'm home and horny??? That's not supposed to make me want to leave?

Me: Hahaha. I'd come running if you said it, but you don't need to. I have a drawer full of toys to keep me entertained. ;)

The text message chain goes silent, and I wonder if he's on his way or if the guys are giving him shit about trying to leave. My thought is answered when the front door

opens and there's Leo standing there looking so fucking hot, his dark eyes filled with lust as he looks me up and down.

"You have clothes on," he slurs slightly, a wolfish grin on his face. "Take them off." He stumbles a bit as he tries to kick off his shoes and it makes me laugh.

"You are drunk, huh? You want something to eat first?" I ask, realizing after the words leave my mouth that he's going to come back with something dirty and I'm so ready for it.

"Something to eat?" he echoes back to me with a question in his words as he wets his lips. "You offering me your sweet pussy?"

I moan out loud, so turned on by him and the way he can make me wet with just a few simple words.

I unbutton my jeans and shimmy out of them, I kick them to the side and pull my shirt over my head, standing there in just my bra and underwear.

I hook a finger in Leo's direction as I begin to walk back toward my bedroom, but he grabs hold of my wrist, yanking me back to him.

He nips at my bottom lip, his tongue poking out to trail along where his teeth just touched.

"Most people eat in the kitchen, my sweet Hannah," Leo says, with a voice that basically screams sexy; all deep and possessive and hungry. "I want you on the counter. Spread your legs for me."

"Fuck, I love when you tell me to spread my legs for you," I groan, so fucking ready for him.

Leo

I wake to Hannah's hands and mouth on me, exploring my body, touching, licking and sucking everywhere.

"Fuck, babe," I murmur, my eyes still closed as I lie on my back, one arm tucked behind my head, the other resting on her back as her naked body lies against mine.

I feel her smile against my chest, biting me once before she kisses her way down my stomach, her tongue tracing the lines of my tattoos, her hand pushing the covers back until my dick springs free, already hard and practically jerking to attention at what I'm pretty sure is about to happen next.

Hannah's fingers curl around it, her grip tight as she gives it one slow tug. "God, I love your dick," she murmurs, her breath hot against my skin before she swirls her tongue around the head.

A long, low groan falls from my mouth, my hand now resting on Hannah's head, my fingers weaving into her hair. She swirls her tongue again before sucking the head once and then sliding her mouth down over my dick.

"Jesus," I moan, my hips jacking off the bed as she starts to slowly suck me off.

I force my eyes to open, not wanting to miss a single thing. When I look down at her, Hannah is watching me, waiting for my gaze to meet hers. The second it does, she gently scrapes her teeth along my shaft before taking me all the way to the back of her throat.

“Fuck, fuck...” I breathe out, my eyes practically rolling back in my head as she repeats the movement, her head bobbing up and down on my cock, over and over again.

Her mouth is so wet and warm, and I can’t get enough of how good it feels.

So good that I can already feel myself on the edge of coming, my dick so hard, I feel like I’m going to explode.

“Shit, babe, I’m gonna come, I’m gonna...”

I expect her to stop, to lift her head and climb on top of me so I can come inside her, but she doesn’t, never stopping her movements as I feel my balls tighten and I explode in her mouth.

When I next open my eyes, the bed beside me is empty, the sheets cool. The noises coming from the kitchen tell me Hannah is up, making coffee and food if the smells are anything to go by. Smiling, I throw the covers back, swinging my legs out of bed.

I stand, grabbing my boxer briefs from the floor, I pull them on before I make my way out of the bedroom to the kitchen. Hannah has her back to me and she’s dressed in nothing but a tank and a pair of black panties that make her ass look seriously awesome.

“Good morning,” I murmur as I come up behind her, my arms slipping around her waist and under her tank as I press a kiss to her neck.

Hannah turns her head, her lips meeting mine in a deep kiss. “Morning, how’s the head?”

Chuckling, I press my hips against her ass. “The head was fucking spectacular.”

Hannah laughs, her head falling back against my shoulder. “Uh huh, and the other head. No hangover?”

I tighten my arms. “Pfft, hangover? I’m harder than that, babe.”

“Yeah, you sure are,” she murmurs, pushing her ass back against me and my already hardening dick.

I lower my mouth to her neck, licking and sucking. “What’s going on out here, something smells amazing.”

“I’m making you breakfast,” she replies, angling her head to give me better access.

I slide one of my hands down her stomach, my fingers slipping beneath her panties. “I can think of something I’d like to have for breakfast.”

Hannah lets out a laugh that quickly turns to a moan as my fingers slip between her legs, brushing over her clit. “God, how is it you’re single?” she asks, almost as though she’s talking to herself.

I pause, pulling my hand from her panties and turning her around so she’s backed up against the counter and caged in by me.

“Well, I’m not single, am I?” I reply, knowing we’ve never really discussed or put a label on what this thing between us is, but I’m pretty sure whatever it is, neither of us is single.

I know for certain that we’re both super into it, neither of us able to deny this intense chemistry we have or spend a night apart from each other ever since it started.

And I also know that neither of us is sleeping with anyone else or has any intention

to.

But we also aren't exactly out there announcing to everyone the fact that we are...

dating, fucking, all of the above; whatever this thing is.

I mean I consider us a couple, one hundred percent, but I also know that it's not as simple as us just walking into work together, holding hands and kissing each other goodbye before we go about our day.

Hannah smiles, taking one of my hands and slipping it back into the front of her panties. "You know what I mean. How were you single?"

Chuckling, I slip my fingers back between her legs, groaning when I discover how wet she is as I lower my mouth to hers, brushing my lips across her mouth. "I work long shitty hours and I live in the middle of nowhere. How the hell were you single?"

Hannah groans, her hand still on mine as she urges me to move, trying to push my fingers where she wants them. "I work long shitty hours," she says, breathless. "And I now live in the middle of nowhere."

I slide a finger inside her, loving the moan she lets out as I trace my tongue across her bottom lip. "Sounds like we might just be perfect together then."

"Yes," she moans, although I'm not sure if that's an answer to my question or a response to what I'm doing to her.

I smile against her mouth, kissing her slow and deep before whispering, "Why don't I have a little pre-breakfast snack and then we take the breakfast you've made us back to bed and I can show you exactly what I mean about us being perfect together."

“Yes,” Hannah moans again and I’m still smiling as I sink to my knees in front of her.

With Somerville’s now closed due to renovations, Apple Jacks is busier than ever. We’ve tried to minimize it by offering some limited outdoor dining options for Somerville’s, but they are restricted to lunch and are definitely more on the casual side.

The good news in all of this is I now have a ton more staff who are able to help out at Apple Jacks. The other good news is it means Hannah and I are now working together more.

It’s been interesting and a little weird if I’m being honest. Not because I don’t want her here, more because it’s really fucking hard keeping my hands off her now that she is.

Back when she first started working at Somerville’s and we shared a kitchen more often, we weren’t actually together, just flirting a lot as we both tried to figure out if we should give in to the chemistry between us.

Now that we are sleeping together, working in such close proximity is a whole new ball game. And it’s damn fucking hard not giving the game away every time she’s near me.

Which is not to say I haven’t taken advantage of the situation from time to time, using any excuse to brush past her a little closer than I need to or to follow her into the walk-in fridge or the storeroom just so I can kiss her.

It’s exciting and hot doing all this on the down low and by the time our shift ends and we’re heading home, we’re both so worked up from the prolonged foreplay, we’re practically tearing each other’s clothes off before we’re even in the front door.

“Leo?” Tony, my third-year apprentice’s voice calls, bringing me back to the kitchen.

“Yeah, what’s up?” I ask, walking over to his station.

He glances up at me, a worried look on his face. “I’m not sure about this sauce,” he says, lifting the spoon from the saucepan. I watch as a thin, watery stream of sauce drips from it and I know he’s right.

“Yeah, I think you might be right,” I say with a chuckle. “Ditch it, we’ll start again.”

“I don’t want to fuck it up again,” he says, that same worried look on his face. “I mean, I know I should know how—”

“It’s cool, Tony,” I say, cutting him off. “I’d rather you ask for help than just blindly try fixing it. Hey ba— Han?” I call, swallowing hard as I glance over to Hannah’s station, hoping to fuck Tony didn’t notice that near slip of the tongue.

Hannah looks over at me, a small smile on her face that has my heart skipping a beat and a smile tugging at my lips. Fuck me, this woman, I can’t get enough of her. “Yeah, boss?” she answers playfully.

I smirk, knowing she does this to tease me, both inside and outside of the kitchen. “Can I borrow you for a sec?” I ask, playing right along with her.

Hannah licks her lips and it actually makes my dick twitch.

“Sure thing.” She hands her dish over to one of the assistants at her station before making her way over to me.

I know I’m staring, but I can’t look away.

“What’s up?” she asks, stopping beside me, standing a fraction closer than she needs to, so I can feel the heat radiating from her.

“I think I fucked up your sauce,” Tony blurts out, which gives me a second to get myself under control. I need to calm the fuck down so everyone in this kitchen doesn’t realize that I’m sleeping with my sous chef.

Hannah laughs, her arm brushing against mine as she reaches for the spoon and says, “I’m sure we can fix it.”

“Yeah,” I start, forcing myself to focus. “I thought maybe you could take Tony through it again. I know this is one of your creations, so I figure the master should teach the padawan.”

Tony sniggers at my Star Wars reference, but when I turn to Hannah, she’s staring at me with what looks like disbelief and amazement on her face.

“Is that cool?” I ask, worried I’ve somehow offended her.

She swallows, nodding once before turning back to Tony. “Yeah, it’s um...okay, let’s see if we can get this taken care of.”

I leave them to it, walking around to the other stations to check that everyone has everything under control.

It’s a busy night, the usual Saturday crowd is even bigger thanks to us only having one restaurant open on site.

Everyone is working well though and it’s definitely helped by having the extra staff from Somerville’s working here.

With everything under control, I head back to my office to check on the bookings for the rest of the night, just to get an idea of what we can expect.

As I call up the booking program though, I hear my office door shut and when I look up, Hannah is standing there, leaning back against the closed door.

“Hey, you okay?” I ask.

She doesn’t answer me, just pushes off the door, walks around my desk to where I’m standing, throwing her arms around my neck as she crushes her lips against mine.

“Whoa, hey,” I say, laughing, my arms instinctively wrapping around her. “What’s this for?”

Hannah doesn’t answer, kissing me again as she presses her body hard against mine. I don’t bother questioning it a second time, kissing her back because honestly, I’d never pass up an opportunity to kiss this woman.

Eventually she pulls back, her breathing a little ragged and her eyes a little glazed.

“You okay,” I ask, smiling as I tuck a loose strand of hair behind her ear.

“You...that...” She pauses, letting out a hard breath. “You are the best boss I have ever had.”

Laughing, I press a kiss to the end of her nose. “You just saying that ’cause I really like giving you multiple orgasms?”

A smirk tugs at the corner of her mouth. “Well, that and you have a really big dick,” she teases, making me laugh again. “But seriously, Leo, that thing out there with the sauce. Thank you. No one has ever treated me with that much respect in the kitchen

before.”

Hearing her say these words makes my heart flip. Not just because from a work perspective, this is exactly the kind of relationship I want to have with my staff. It’s also because it’s her telling me, it’s her recognizing what I did and it’s her being grateful too.

It makes me realize how much I want her to see me as a great boss, as someone who treats his staff with respect.

Kind of makes me fall a little bit in love with her too, if I’m being honest.

Like you weren’t already half-way there a voice inside my head screams.

Shaking my head a little, I focus on the woman standing in front of me, the one now looking at me with a mix of amazement and something else.

Something that makes my heart pound hard inside my chest. “You’re welcome,” I say, my words quiet.

“You deserve it, Han. I’m not going to take credit for that. ”

She pushes up on her toes to plant another hard kiss on my mouth, a kiss I wish could lead to more but can’t because right now we have a restaurant and a kitchen full of people to get back to. “You are so getting laid after work tonight,” she murmurs against my lips.

Chuckling, I slide a hand down to her ass, squeezing as I reply, “Don’t I always?”

Smirking, Hannah nips at my bottom lip. “Yeah, well tonight you’re getting laid hard .”

Grinning, I give her another quick kiss before turning her toward the door and smacking her on the ass. “Well, fuck, now I really can’t wait,” I say, my mouth at her ear.

She looks back at me over her shoulder, a sexy as hell grin on her face as she reaches back to rub her hand over my dick. “I better get back to work. As much as I’m sure I’d enjoy the punishment, I don’t wanna piss my boss off.”

Then she gives me a gentle squeeze before walking out without another word, leaving me standing in my office with a semi, wondering if it’s too soon to tell this woman that I love her.

## Page 20

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

I swear to god this guy is working really hard to make me fall in love with him.

After what happened yesterday in the kitchen, I'm having a hard time not blurting out that I am in love with him.

It feels amazing to finally be respected in my career and to have a boss who sees all that I have to offer.

I was beginning to believe my old boss when he said I was incompetent.

Turns out, it was him all along. I fucking kick ass at this whole thing.

This is the first night I have off, but Leo is working. It feels weird not having him here with me, since we've basically spent every night together for the last few weeks. But a little time apart is good and it gives me an opportunity to send him a few sexy texts to get him through the night.

I send him a picture of my shower along with my dildo, all suctioned and ready to go. Of course, I add a couple of emojis to really drive the point home and in typical Leo fashion, he replies immediately.

Leo: Be at my house when I get home, Hannah.

Me: That feels a little bossy.

Leo: Be at my house when I get home, please.

Me: Dressed or undressed?

Leo: Is that really a question?

Me: I'll see you later tonight.

I head over to my brother's house to have dinner with him and Tessa.

Even though I see him every Sunday for breakfast, we haven't seen much else of each other, and I want to get the plans for Tessa's baby shower nailed down.

With the restaurant being closed, I have more free time making it the perfect opportunity to have the shower without me having to take off work.

I walk into Dylan's place and there's zero cooking going on which means he's hoping I'll make something. I get it though. When he does try to cook for me, I'm always hovering over his shoulder or telling him what to do or analyzing the meal while we're eating.

It's kind of understandable given my job, but I guess I don't go around telling him how to bottle cider or invent... That reminds me, I have to tell Leo that story. Obviously under the pretense that he keep it a secret. Dylan is pretty quiet about that part of his life.

"Guess I'm cooking on my day off, huh?" I say when I find Dylan and Tessa on the couch watching TV.

"Not tonight, sis," Dylan says, not even looking away from the screen, too wrapped up in some sci-fi movie he's watching, that if I had to guess, he's already seen a

million times. “Tess and the baby wanted pizza.”

“I hope that’s okay,” Tessa adds, looking up at me. “I’ve been craving pizza from Vito’s and I figured you’d be good with taking the night off from cooking.”

“Totally fine by me. It’ll give me more time to obsess over the menu for your baby shower.” I flop down on the couch across from them, pulling out my laptop, ready to share all my ideas with them. The menu will be my thing, but I know Tessa will want some input on the décor.

“Do you have a color scheme in mind? I know you aren’t finding out what you’re having,” I now say, and Tessa smiles, also reaching for her laptop that is sitting on the coffee table. Coming over, she sits down next to me.

“I was thinking pastels, but neutral. Like yellow and gray, maybe some silver in there too,” Tessa says, pulling up a few examples on her laptop and they’re adorable.

A few of them have cute little bees on them, which would work perfectly since we’re planning to host the shower at one of the P, T and Bee buildings.

Tessa designed the tasting room for P, T and Bee when Tommy and Penny were starting their mead business and it’s the perfect place to host the shower.

It’s a stunning building with a vaulted ceiling and reclaimed wood beams. It has a bar and tables that will make a great location for the small shower Tessa is envisioning. We can add some greenery and bring in the cute little bee theme to really set everything up.

“Do you have any dates in mind?” I ask, knowing Tessa is busy with the restaurant renovation and trying to get ready for the baby. Dylan’s schedule is a little more flexible and while he isn’t hanging on our every word, he has looked over at us a few

times, chiming in with his own ideas.

“Possibly having it on a weekday in the evening would be best since the weekends are usually pretty busy and I would hate to take business away from Tommy and Penny by using the tasting room,” Tessa says, graciously.

“I talked with Lauren and Penny and was able to nail down a few good dates,” I tell Tessa, pulling them up on my phone and letting her select the one she wants.

Once she’s picked the date, I add it to my calendar, making sure I have the day and the day before free so I can focus on the menu.

I’m sure Leo will be happy to help me, but that might mean I need to come clean with everyone that we’re dating.

“So what are your menu ideas?” Tessa asks, rubbing her hands together and smiling. She knows how much I enjoy this aspect of the planning. Just like I know she loves the designing aspect of her job.

“I have so many!” I squeal. “I was thinking an apple cider chili along with seasoned mixed greens with apples and walnuts in a honey vinaigrette for a starter. Totally farm to table, using honey and apples and cider from the property and sourcing meat locally.”

Dylan laughs out loud, shaking his head. “It’s hilarious to see you so damn excited about something. Only you would act like you’re talking about meeting a celebrity, when in reality, it’s just food.”

“Oh my god, Dylan! Just food? What the fuck? You know it’s not just food to me and you’ll be singing my praises once you taste this fabulous menu I’ve created.”

“I already sing your praises,” he says, hitting me with a smug look. “Who helped you land your dream job at Somerville’s? I’ll wait,” he adds, pausing for a second before saying, “Oh yes, it was me, your amazing brother.”

“Dylan,” Tessa warns, glaring at him. “Why don’t you go pick up the pizza?”

“Fine, fine. There better be a steak on that menu,” Dylan says, like I would leave off his favorite thing.

“Don’t worry, despite all your mocking, I’ve got you covered. Filet in a cider reduction with autumnal vegetables,” I shoot back.

“You know you can just say vegetables because I have no idea what autumnal means,” Dylan replies, making Tessa and I laugh.

“Just go get the pizza, please,” Tessa says, flicking her hand toward the door. Dylan lets out a hard sigh, leaning down to give Tessa a kiss.

“You didn’t order the cheesecake,” Dylan whispers against Tessa’s mouth. “I’m going to get it for you because I know you want it and I really don’t want to go out and pick it up later.”

“Thank you.”

Dylan leaves and Tessa’s head immediately whips around to look at me, the room falling silent for a few seconds and then she spits out, “Tell me what’s going on with Leo!”

Her voice is loud and I panic for a second that Dylan could have forgotten something. I picture him walking through the door and hearing his adorable fiancée squealing about my sex life with my hot boss.

“Tessa, shush!” I whisper-shout, widening my eyes at her.

“Don’t worry about him. Right now, he’s sitting in the car trying to figure out if he should bring home one or two pieces of cheesecake and if he should stop and pick up vanilla ice cream in case I have heartburn.”

It really is so funny to see how much Dylan has changed and how much he seriously loves and adores Tessa. She’s changed him for the better, making him into a doting partner and soon to be father, something I thought I would never see. It makes my heart happy.

“So,” Tessa adds, rolling her hand to get me to talk.

I clench my teeth, worried about saying too much.

Leo and I have kept this whole thing pretty hush-hush and not because either of us aren’t all-in when it comes to our relationship.

It’s more about how it looks to the outside observer.

He’s my boss and the last thing we need is people thinking there’s any favoritism going on.

“I don’t know, Tessa,” I reply hesitantly. “It’s still new—”

She cuts me off, a beaming smile on her face.

“I knew it was something. I just knew it. There’s no way Leo was going to walk away from you.

He’s been single since I started working for Lauren and Jack, and I couldn’t figure

out why.

He was waiting for some badass woman chef to come along and sweep him off his feet. ”

She’s talking so fast that I can’t help but laugh.

It feels like she’s more invested in mine and Leo’s relationship than we are.

Not that I’m not invested. Hell, just earlier today I was talking myself off the ledge of telling him I love him.

He’s perfect. We’re perfect for each other.

He understands the job and the hours, and there has not been a single issue, including in the sack.

“Tessa,” I wail, “it’s going so well. I hate to jinx it by talking about it, but I have so much I want to tell you.”

“Then spill it!” she yells, clapping her hands. “And do it fast because Dylan’s going to be home soon.”

“Well, we’ve definitely gone beyond making out and I don’t think I can ever sleep with another guy because Leo and his dick puts them to shame,” I announce, my mind wandering to the first time I saw him without his pants. Sex with anyone else will be like throwing a hot dog down a hallway.

“Leo’s not just hot in the kitchen, huh?” Tessa asks, and I look at her with a what-the-fuck look that only makes her laugh. “I was just trying to use some kind of cooking pun. It failed. Move on.”

“But yes, he’s hot in the kitchen and in the bedroom. The best part, he totally respects me in the kitchen. He’s always game for me to try out new recipes and he’s all about tasting and helping me make things better.”

“Okay, you’re talking about the actual kitchen, right?” Tessa asks. “Not one of these is a euphemism for sex, right?”

“Yes, I’m talking about the actual kitchen, although we have had sex in the kitchen. That man is a genius with his hands and his mouth.”

“Hannah! You’ve had sex in the kitchen at Apple Jacks?” Tessa now asks, sounding appalled and disgusted and rightfully so. Apple Jacks is a restaurant and not a place for us to dirty up with sex.

“Never!” I screech. “What kind of chef do you think I am? I would never contaminate a kitchen like that! But we’ve pretty much done it everywhere else, and he’s super into toys, taking the whole thing up a few notches.”

“Toys make everything way better. Does he know about Dylan’s invention?” Tessa questions, wrinkling up her nose. “That thing is pretty damn epic.”

“While I agree with you, I still have a hard time separating its association with my brother. But no, I haven’t told Leo about it, but I plan to introduce him to it tonight.” I wink and Tessa laughs.

“I was thinking of giving them out as a favor at the baby shower,” she jokes and while I know she’s not serious, I’m pretty sure Lauren, Penny and Ellen would graciously accept it.

We’re both laughing when Dylan walks in with the pizza. Tessa leans over, whispering to me, “Better eat quick and get home. I wouldn’t want you to miss out on

your nightly hook up.”

We finish dinner and thanks to Tessa for her great acting skills, Dylan sends me on my way, telling me that Tessa is tired and needs to get to bed.

It’s eight o’clock and Tessa is not ninety years old, but I don’t push back.

This will give me time to get back to my house, change into some sexy underwear and get over to Leo’s before he gets off work.

I tell them both goodbye with Tessa smiling like an idiot, and if Dylan was a little more observant, he’d know something was up.

But again, I’d rather he not know just yet.

I’m not ready to dive into announcing this to my family, especially my mom who will immediately start asking when I’m getting married and having a baby.

At least I have Tessa to take some of the stress off of me.

On my way home I stop off at a lingerie store, picking up something seriously hot that I hope blows Leo’s mind when he walks in and finds me in his bed.

All I hope is that he’s feeling what’s happening between us, because I’m seriously and totally crazy in love with Leo Marsh.

## Page 21

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

It's late by the time I finally finish up at work. The whole night has felt weird, not having Hannah in the kitchen with me. Even though we've only been sharing a kitchen again for a couple of weeks now, I've already grown used to seeing her in my space.

I like having her here and I've missed her tonight. Way more than I thought I would.

And I really hope she is waiting for me at home like I bossily told her to be in my text earlier.

Locking up the restaurant, I call out goodnight to the rest of the crew as I make my way through the darkness of the property to my place. There are a few lamps to light the way, although I don't really need them anymore, having spent so much time here.

Unlocking my front door, the soft music that's drifting down the stairs, along with the low lighting at the top immediately tells me that Hannah is upstairs waiting for me like I'd hoped.

And I'm now grinning like an idiotic fool as I sprint up the stairs and through the living space to my bedroom.

As soon as I reach the dividing wall and doorway that separates my bedroom from the rest of the loft though, my smile disappears only to be replaced with what I'm going to assume is a look found on the face of every horny fifteen-year-old kid upon discovering his dad's Playboy collection.

“Hey,” Hannah says, smiling up at me from where she lies on my bed.

In nothing but underwear. Seriously fucking sexy underwear.

Red.

Lacy.

Tiny.

Completely fucking see-through.

“Holy fuck,” I breathe out, unable to tear my eyes away from her.

Hannah laughs, low and sexy. “You like?”

“Jesus,” I mutter, scrubbing a hand over my mouth as I step into the room. “Like?” I ask, shaking my head a little. “No, babe, I fucking love it.”

Her smile widens and it’s on the tip of my tongue, the words I really want to say to her.

I love you.

God, I want to confess how I really feel about her so fucking badly. But I’ve never said these words to anyone before and as much as I know they are true now; I also know our situation is complicated.

“But do you love it enough to come over here and peel it off me?” she asks, a teasing tone to her question as she lifts her arms above her head, stretching in a way that makes my mouth water and my dick hard.

I pull my phone from my back pocket, opening the camera app and holding it up so I can take a picture of her. “Babe, I’m in serious danger of ripping it off you, I wanna be inside you so bad.”

Hannah lets out another laugh, the sound going straight to my dick, which is already straining against the zipper of my pants. “Well, now you’ve captured the memory, why don’t you do exactly that?”

“Fuck,” I groan, throwing my phone onto the floor as I kick off my shoes. “Babe, shit... God, I want to, but fuck I really need a shower,” I say, knowing I have spent all night in a hot kitchen and must stink.

Still smiling, Hannah swings her gorgeous long legs off the side of the bed, before she walks toward me. My eyes are locked on her, mesmerized by the sight of this beautiful woman dressed in nothing but scraps of red lace that are all for me.

She stops in front of me, her hands moving to the bottom of my t-shirt and peeling it off me. As she moves to start undoing my jeans, she brushes her lips across mine in the softest of kisses. “I don’t care,” she whispers against my mouth. “‘Cause we’re both about to get really filthy.”

“Hannah,” I groan, my hands moving to her hips as I turn us both and back her up against the wall.

“God, I want you,” I murmur, burying my face against her neck as I lick and suck at her skin, not giving a single shit if I’m leaving a mark.

I want to mark her. Mark her in a way that lets everyone know she is mine.

Hannah sighs, her head falling back even as she shoves my pants roughly down my hips. I manage to kick them off, only pulling back to ditch the rest of my clothes

before my hands and mouth are once again on her body.

“I seriously fucking love this,” I whisper against her neck, kissing a path up to her mouth as I run my hands over the red lace.

She smiles, gently nipping at my bottom lip before she pulls it between her teeth.

I hear the possessive growl that rumbles deep in my chest as my hands slide up her sides and around her back to undo the bra.

As much as I need to be inside her, I don’t want to rip this underwear because I’m definitely going to want to see her in it again.

“Leo,” she moans as I drop my head, my mouth finding her now exposed breasts, my tongue licking at her nipple before sucking hard. I alternate between her breasts, licking and sucking as my fingers now slide into the sides of her panties, pushing them down her legs.

She kicks them off and as soon as she’s naked, I slip my hands to her ass and lift her up, her back against the wall, her legs spread and her pussy now exposed to me. I pause, waiting until her eyes lock with mine before asking, “Filthy, huh?”

She smirks, glancing down, she wraps a hand around me.

“Oh yeah,” she murmurs before she guides me into position and I push inside her in one long thrust, both of us watching.

“Fuck,” she breathes out, her legs wrapping around my waist, her arms now around my neck as her head falls back against the wall with a thud.

I crush my mouth against hers, kissing her hard as I thrust again. “You are gorgeous,”

I murmur, my mouth against hers. “And you are all mine.”

She smiles before deepening the kiss as I fuck her hard against the wall of my bedroom, before taking her into the shower and doing it all over again.

Trying to keep my relationship with Hannah a secret is becoming increasingly hard. Trying not to admit to her how I really feel about her, even harder.

Ever since I came home to find her waiting for me in that sexy underwear, I feel like everything that’s happening between us has only intensified.

I mean it was already pretty fucking epic, but now, it’s practically explosive.

If she’s in the room, I can’t stop looking at her.

If she’s close, all I want to do is touch her.

And with every day that passes, it’s getting harder and harder to resist, to try and hide exactly how I’m feeling.

At this point, I can’t believe that everyone doesn’t already know what’s going on between us. I feel like I’m walking around with a huge flashing neon sign above my head that screams ‘Leo Marsh is fucking Hannah Murphy. Oh and P.S. he loves her!’

I’m absolutely certain we’re going to get busted soon and end up being the talk of Somerville’s. Just like Dylan and Tessa were, and Tom and Penny before them. Jack and Lauren too, if the rumors are true.

Exhaling, I wander around the kitchen, checking in with each station to make sure everything is going well. It’s coming to the end of the lunch rush and given there doesn’t appear to be any drama, I decide to head out to the catering kitchen where

Hannah has been working today.

We've got a cocktail party booked at P, T and Bee for late this afternoon and I've put her in charge of organizing the platters the party has requested for the event. It's not a huge event and I know she's more than capable of taking care of it, but I kind of want to see her too.

Maybe I'll suggest that the time has come for us to come out to our friends and co-workers.

When I get to the shed, I smile at the music I can hear playing, stepping inside, I find the kitchen clean, no sign of the platters and Hannah busy dipping apples on sticks into a pot on the stove.

"Hey, babe," I say, wrapping an arm around her shoulders as I pull her close and press a kiss to her temple.

She looks up at me, a smile on her face as she leans in to kiss my lips. "Hey, platters are all done. Pen picked them up about ten minutes ago."

"You're done already?" I ask.

"Uh huh," she says, turning back to the pot on the stove.

"Wow," I murmur, amazed at her efficiency even though I shouldn't be because I've seen it in action countless times. "You're amazing."

She laughs, nudging me with her hip. "I know."

Chuckling, I lean in and kiss her neck, loving the sexy sigh that falls from her lips. "So, if you've finished already. What's all this?"

Hannah pulls another apple from the pot of what I now realize is toffee, swirling to catch the drips before standing it in the rack she's made.

"Well, it's just an idea and you totally don't have to go with it, but I realized with the casual lunch orders we've got at Somerville's and how popular they've been, that maybe we could keep it going and create some picnic baskets that people can order.

We can use produce from here and people can take them out to the vineyard with a bottle of wine and find a spot to enjoy lunch on the grounds. "

She turns to me, waiting for my reaction to her suggestion. I don't answer at first, my brain and heart both going a mile a minute as I take in her words.

"You hate it, don't you?" she says, when I still can't find the words, mistaking my silence for something more. "That's cool, seriously, I was just—"

"I love you," I blurt out, unable to hold the words in any longer.

"What?"

I turn her so she's facing me, cupping her face in my hands. "I love you," I repeat. "I am so fucking crazy in love with you, Hannah Murphy and I think this a fantastic idea."

She lets out a laugh that I immediately silence with a kiss. "Wait, no..." she says, her hands on my chest as she eases me back.

"What?"

She laughs again, shaking her head a little as she says, "I'm crazy in love with you too."

Now it's me laughing, pulling her close as I wrap my arms around her and kiss the absolute hell out of her. I can't believe how good it feels to finally say those words out loud. To tell her how I really feel about her. To hear her say them back to me.

"Do you really think the baskets are a good idea," she eventually asks. "Or are you just saying that because I like giving you orgasms?" she asks, mimicking the question I asked her in my office after the sauce incident the other week.

"Multiple orgasms," I say with a laugh. "And you also have a great pair of tits."

Hannah slaps playfully at my chest. "Well yeah, but I don't want you to think—"

"Han, babe, it's a great idea. I love it.

We should definitely do it." Her smile is spectacular and god, I just want to make her smile like that for the rest of my life.

"But," I add, dragging out the word, "if you're done being all amazing in the kitchen, what do you say we head upstairs and have a little fun before the dinner rush starts? "

"A little fun, huh?" she says, her hands slipping to my ass. "And what exactly might that involve?"

Chuckling, I lean in, my mouth at her ear. "Oh, I don't know, you sitting on my face, multiple orgasms, that kinda thing."

She exhales, all breathy and sexy as hell. "And your big dick?"

"And my big dick," I confirm with a laugh. "Is that a yes then?"

She slides one of her hands around to my dick, rubbing over the obvious bulge in my

pants. “It’s a hell yes,” she whispers, her mouth brushing across mine.

“Let’s go,” I say, grabbing her hand and walking her out of the kitchen and around the back to the door to my apartment. She laughs as I practically run us up the stairs and it’s not until we’re in my bedroom, do I stop, pulling her close as I press a hard kiss to her lips.

“I think we’re gonna need to come clean about all this,” I murmur.

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah,” I confirm, my fingers already unbuttoning her chef jacket. “I can’t keep my fucking hands off you, Hannah. And I don’t want to anymore either.”

She lets out a soft laugh. “I know what you mean,” she says. “Maybe we can tell everyone at the baby shower tomorrow night?”

“Yes,” I murmur, pulling her coat off and dropping it on the floor. “And everyone in the kitchen?” I ask, as my fingers move to the button and zipper of her pants.

“Can we do that after?” she asks, and I don’t miss the nervousness in her voice.

Pausing my undressing of her, I pull back, my gaze meeting hers. “It’s gonna be okay, Han,” I say. “I’m not gonna let anyone say anything about this or us or anything, okay. I promise.”

Hannah nods, her bottom lip between her teeth. “I know,” she says quietly. “But I just...let’s tell our bosses and my brother first. Then we tackle the kitchen.”

“Okay,” I say with a nod. “I’ve got your back, babe. And I’m not going to let anyone or anything ruin this. I love you.”

She finally smiles, her eyes shining with so much happiness it makes my heart flip. “I love you too,” she says. “Now let’s have really hot and filthy I love you sex.”

Laughing, I rip off my own chef jacket, throwing it over my shoulder. “Fuck, yes!”

Hannah

I take in a deep breath, letting it out slowly as I place the last of the wildflowers on the tables. The room looks gorgeous. So beautiful in fact, it feels like Lauren should consider it for small events.

I took Tessa's ideas and ran with them. Hopefully she's happy with the way it turned out because I forbid her from coming to help me set up.

It's this perfect mix of farmhouse and cute with pale yellow and gray throughout. And these adorable little bumblebee decorations that Penny helped me make.

A few seconds later, while I'm still taking it all in, Leo walks in with the cake. I gasp so loud that he startles, nearly dropping it on the ground.

He laughs, shaking his head as he narrows his eyes at me. "You should know better than to startle someone carrying food," he says, setting it down on the table I have decorated just for it.

"Leo, this is incredible! You made this?" I ask, so overwhelmed that I feel like I might cry.

It's this stunning petite three-tier cake with the most perfect expertly piped bumblebees, all matching the design Tessa requested. Plus, the fresh wildflowers he added, bring the whole thing together.

Penny and Lauren said they'd take care of the cake since I had the menu to organize

and prepare, but I never suspected they'd ask Leo. Pastries and cakes are not his specialty.

"I'm a jack of all trades," he replies, walking over to give me a kiss. "Plus, I'm trying to impress this girl. Is it working?"

"She was already impressed," I murmur against his mouth. "And you're a jack of all trades in and out of the bedroom."

Leo's hand slides down to my ass, grabbing it, he groans, pushing his hips against me.

"My house isn't far," he whispers, and my head falls back, laughing at his insatiable nature.

"I'm sorry, but I'm busy for the next few hours and I believe you are too."

I step back, putting some distance between us before I take him up on his offer.

"But in all seriousness, the room looks so good, Han. Be proud of yourself. Your first full-on catered, decorated and organized event."

I feel my cheeks flush, smiling at how his words make me feel. I am proud of what I've accomplished, but I'm prouder about having him by my side to help me out. It's an amazing feeling knowing your partner fully supports your career. Leo doesn't just support my career, he loves it with me.

"Tell me about these secret cake decorating skills," I say, changing the subject, not wanting to focus on myself. I've always kind of liked being in the background, cooking behind closed doors and making people happy with my food. Like some kind of Wizard of Oz.

“It’s no big secret,” Leo replies casually, like a tattooed, muscled guy is the norm when it comes to decorating baby shower cakes. “Obviously I learned it in school, but I don’t really put it to use. I do prefer cooking over baking, but I wanted to knock you off your feet.”

“Done,” I say, moving closer to him again. “And I’ll be thanking you later.” My hand moves to brush over his chest, but as soon as I do, Dylan and Tessa walk in.

I stupidly jump back like it’s obvious that we were doing something.

Even though we totally weren’t doing something.

At least not for us anyway. We’ve gotten up to much worse than my hand running across his chest, but I still don’t want Dylan to know.

At least not today. Even though I was the one who suggested telling everyone today, this day is supposed to be about Tessa and Dylan and the baby, and me dropping a bomb that I’m now dating Leo, would be like stealing their thunder.

Although, I don’t suspect Tessa will mind given the way she’s looking at me right now.

Standing behind Dylan, her eyes are wide and she has this huge beaming smile on her face, like she wants us to get caught or maybe she’s just excited about how great the room turned out. I’m hoping it’s the latter.

“Hannah,” Dylan starts, walking over to me, my heart still pounding in my chest as he pulls me in for a hug. “Thank you so much for doing this. It looks amazing.”

Tessa is the next to hug me, thanking me for making her dream baby shower come to life. With her lips still near my ear, and a cheeky smile on her face, I’m sure, she

whispers, “So are you ever planning to tell everyone? Today would be the perfect day.”

I pull back, shaking my head, not because I don’t want to tell people, but today is certainly not the perfect day. This is her day. “This is about you. This is all for you and the baby,” I say, knowing no one will know that I’m referring to something different.

“Yes, but—” Tessa starts to say, but I cut her off.

“Have you seen the cake? Leo made it and it’s so damn cute,” I say, pointing her in the direction of the cake table, distracting her from our other conversation.

“Oh my god, Leo, look at this cake. How in the hell did you make these little bees? Could they be any cuter?” Tessa squeals, pulling Dylan over to take a look, too.

Leo humbly thanks Tessa for the compliment and of course he has me swooning with how fucking modest he is.

Someone is definitely getting laid tonight.

He should be bragging about his ability, especially with how talented he is in so many areas of the kitchen.

But that’s not him and there’s something about it that’s so damn sexy.

“Sorry that you’re going to be stuck here, like a third wheel,” Dylan says to Leo, and I swear I’m going to smack Tessa if she doesn’t stop being so damn obvious. She laughs, her hand covering her mouth and attempting to make it sound like a cough.

“Yeah, I think I’m going to be okay,” Leo replies, looking over at me and winking,

and there goes Tessa again. Her fake cough is now sounding more like a laughing hyena.

“You okay, babe?” Dylan asks her, his hand running sweetly over her back. “Let me grab you something to drink.”

Leo walks with Dylan back behind the bar, grabbing drinks for all four of us.

We don’t have a serving team working today, but Leo has offered to help me run the few plates after the kitchen staff gets everything set up.

It’s not like there are a lot of us. Just Lauren and Jack, Tommy and Penny, Will and Ellen, and the four of us.

I’m actually sort of nervous to have Jack and Lauren here eating from the menu I created.

I know that they eat at the restaurants here on the property and I make the food, but there’s something about the intimate gathering that has me a little on edge.

What if they don’t like any of it and that translates over to my job? What if my pairings are crap and that reflects badly on the Somerville name?

“You okay?” Leo asks, coming up beside me and handing me a glass of wine. “You look a little, I don’t know, worried?” he tries and as if he doesn’t even think about it, like it’s a natural reaction, he rests his hand on the small of my back, leaning in to press a kiss to the side of my head.

But it hits him before he can, and like a fool, he pretends to awkwardly look over his shoulder. This sends Tessa into another laughing fit. I can only imagine how stupid the two of us look, trying to avoid looking like a couple, but we clearly are a couple.

Luckily, we're saved by the arrival of the rest of the group, and I quickly attempt to answer Leo's question by shaking my head, but he knows I'm lying.

"They're going to love your food, babe," he whispers, patting me on the ass as I walk over to greet Lauren and Jack.

We start with the chili and salad, which I can barely eat because I'm watching the faces of everyone around me, silently begging the universe to help me out.

Right now, my bosses are eating my food from a menu I created with ingredients I sourced from their land, paired with their wine and cider, that I spent the last few hours preparing.

I don't think I've ever been so nervous about my ability than I am right now. It feels stupid, since I already work here, but it's that whole imposture thing, especially given how my old boss thought I was literally the worst chef in America.

"Take a breath," Leo murmurs, leaning over toward me as the din from the small crowd drowns out his words. "They love it."

It's Leo's words that encourage me to look around, to take in that everyone's plates and bowls are empty, and I let out a sigh of relief. I feel the stress leave my body, my shoulders nearly sagging under the weight of worry.

Leo slips out, returning with the entrées and serving them while I try to pull myself back together. He has no idea how much having him by my side today has meant to me. And when he sits down, his hand slips under the tablecloth, resting on my thigh.

I can't help but smile over at him, silently thanking him for being here and for being mine.

The conversation shifts to compliments about my food and Jack even suggests adding some of them to the menu at Apple Jacks, but Lauren jumps in, saying she wants to revamp the menu at Somerville's and she gets first dibs on my ideas.

It feels totally foreign to have someone fighting over me and my menu suggestions, but I will take it.

We move on to opening gifts with Tessa and Dylan sitting in front of the bar and the rest of us around the table. I hand Tessa the first gift and Ellen calls out that it's from her, Will and the kids.

Tessa pulls off the wrapping paper, revealing a yellow box and smiles when she sees what it is, laughing a little as she passes it over to Dylan.

"What the hell is this thing?" Dylan asks, examining the box.

"It's a breast pump," Tessa replies, shaking her head.

"Like you use it to make your boobs bigger?" he now asks and oh my god, I can't believe he's going to have a baby in a few months. He's never sounded more clueless. "Like a penis pump?" he adds, and the group erupts in laughter.

"Dylan!" Tessa shames, swatting at him. "No, it's for pumping milk for the baby."

"It's kinda a weird gift," Will chimes out, looking a little red-cheeked. "But Ellen claims no one ever buys the mom one, but they're a necessity."

It's hard not to laugh at how much these guys know about babies and pregnancy and then there's my clueless brother. He's going to need to spend a week with Will, learning all the basics.

“It will be the best gift Tessa gets when she decides she wants to go out one night and leave the baby with you,” Ellen adds, and I’m starting to wonder if Dylan is panicking. I can’t picture him alone with a baby, even if it is his baby. Hopefully that whole parenting instinct kicks in.

Tessa continues with the gifts, opening a car seat from Jack and Lauren. “I can help you install that. I’m kinda a pro now,” Jack states, gallantly. “Had to install four, you know. Two in my car and two in Lu’s.”

“Wait, I have to install this?” Dylan asks. “They don’t do that for you at the hospital?”

I know he’s not trying to be funny, but holy shit, he is. I’m really hoping Will and Jack take him under their wings and show him the ropes or poor Tessa will be watching YouTube videos on how to install a car seat while nine months pregnant.

“Yep, you’ve gotta do it yourself,” Jack replies. “But no worries, mate. I’ve got you. We can have a car seat installation tutorial at work tomorrow.”

Tessa and Dylan finish up opening presents, but not without a few more laughs at Dylan’s expense and the guys once again, reassuring him, they’ll help him out.

Leo walks over to cut and serve the cake, and I join him, trying to find a time to thank him for being here and for supporting me. He didn’t have to be here. I’m sure he would’ve come to help celebrate with Dylan and Tessa, but today it feels like he’s here more for me than them.

“Thank you,” I say, setting out plates for him.

“You think I’m going to let someone else cut this baby?” he says, winking at me. “This was fucking hard as hell and if anyone is going to ruin it by cutting into it, it’s

going to be me.”

“I meant thank you for being here with me, but by all means, cut away,” I tease.

“I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else, Hannah.”

Leo cuts several slices and I pass them out, taking a seat across from Jack and Lauren. I watch as he slides his cake over to her, and she smiles gratefully.

“This cake is amazing, Leo,” Tessa says, just as he’s joining us at the table. “What kind is it?”

“It’s honey butter cake with apple buttercream frosting,” Leo tells her, but just as he does, Lauren gasps out loud.

“My cake is that good, huh?” Leo jokes, but Lauren’s eyes are wide, and Jack instantly jumps up.

“I either peed my pants or my water just broke,” Lauren announces, and Jack immediately starts to usher her outside, ordering Will to go get the car.

Will doesn’t miss a beat, rushing out the door with Ellen following behind him. We all follow Jack and Lauren outside, and within just a minute or two, Will has Jack’s truck, and off they go to the hospital.

When I turn to look at Dylan, his face has gone white and once again, I feel like we’re all going to be laughing at his expense.

“What’s wrong, bro?” I ask, linking arms with him.

“Fuck, that hit a little too close to home. What if you go into labor?” Dylan now says,

looking over at Tessa.

“I am going to go into labor. That’s what happens when you have a baby, but don’t worry, we still have a few more months to prepare you,” Tessa replies sweetly, taking his hand in hers. “How about we head home? I think you’ve had enough for today.”

Penny and Tommy pack up all the gifts, and head outside to load them into Dylan and Tessa’s car before everyone says their goodbyes and heads home. As soon as they’re gone, I turn to Leo, laughing, I say, “Remember when your cake made our boss go into labor?”

“Get over here, you cheeky girl,” he replies, grabbing for me.

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

“God, I seriously cannot believe how clueless my brother is at times,” Hannah says. “I mean he’s only twenty-four, but still.”

It’s really late, after midnight. We’re lying in her bed, me leaning against the headboard, my lower body half covered by the sheet. Hannah is lying sideways on the bed, the rest of the sheet covering her as her head rests in my lap.

Laughing, I glance down, brushing the hair back from her face. “Yeah, I mean he kinda seemed a bit surprised about the amount of shit he’s going to have to do when this baby of theirs comes along.”

Hannah rolls her eyes in a can you believe it kind of way . “Poor Tessa,” she adds, chuckling. “She’s gonna end up with a baby and a toddler out of all this.”

“Maybe he’ll surprise us all,” I say with a grin.

“Hmmm or maybe, he’ll cruise through it all like he usually does,” she says with a smirk. “He’s always been like that. He’s like Teflon, nothing sticks, and he just slides through life without a care in the world.”

“Oh man, please don’t tell me you’re jealous, babe?” I tease, pushing the sheet a little lower as I slide my hand over her boob and pinch her nipple.

She lets out a squeal, slapping at my chest. “No, of course not. I’m actually really happy he’s found Tessa and they’re doing this. He might be an idiot at times, but he’s

a fun idiot and he will make a great dad...eventually.”

She’s smiling as she talks, and I know she genuinely means what she’s saying.

It’s obvious she and Dylan share a close relationship and that was even more evident with all the work she put into organizing his and Tessa’s baby shower tonight.

It was a huge success and it had taken everything I had in me not to fucking burst with pride and tell everyone she was mine at the way they all loved her food, or how Jack and Lauren had fought over getting her dishes on their menus.

I’d thought we might have been finally able to come clean about the two of us tonight, but then Lauren had suddenly gone into labor and everyone else had disappeared, leaving Hannah and me with leftovers to pack away and a table to clear.

We still haven’t heard any news, but I knew from my brother and sister’s kids that these things can take hours.

So, with the cleaning done and nothing else to do, we’d come back to her place and gotten naked.

“Yeah, I agree,” I admit, knowing he’ll definitely be a fun dad, if nothing else. “He’s got that whole let’s go out and do fun shit vibe going for him.”

“You mean dumb shit,” Hannah deadpans.

I laugh, giving her boob a squeeze. “Do you want kids?”

Hannah’s gaze snaps to mine the second the question leaves my lips. “What? I mean, shit. Do you?”

Chuckling, I reply, “Pretty sure I asked you first, babe.”

“Yeah, but...I mean...do you though, 'cause...”

“There is no wrong answer here, Han,” I say softly, moving my hand between her breasts. “I’m just asking if it’s something you want.”

She lets out a long exhale, her eyes moving back to the ceiling.

My hand still rests on her chest, and I feel her heart pounding behind her ribs at my question.

She says nothing at first, as she lies here, the wheels clearly turning inside her head.

I don’t push it, knowing I’ve kind of just dropped a huge fucking question here.

One that I guess could have a pretty big impact on our relationship.

“I know people expect me to want to have kids,” she eventually says, her words coming out carefully as her gaze moves back to mine.

“Yeah, but fuck other people’s expectations,” I say, giving her a small smile. “Tell me what you want.”

She licks her lips, pulling her bottom one between her teeth in a way that tells me she’s nervous to answer me. “What if what I want is not what you want?” she asks, her voice quiet.

I trace the line of her eyebrow with my fingertip, my eyes never leaving hers as I study her gorgeous face.

“Well, first of all,” I start, a grin tugging at my mouth, “I really like that in trying to answer this question about wanting kids, that it’s me you’re thinking about the whole kid thing with.”

She blushes now and it’s so fucking adorable I can’t help but laugh a little. “Well, I mean...” she starts, clearly embarrassed as she covers her face with both hands.

“Han, babe,” I say, gently pulling her hands away so she can see me. “Of course kids and you and me is who I meant when I asked the question.”

“Okay,” she breathes out, her body relaxing as she lets out a long exhale and she gives me a half-smile, half-smirk.

“So...” I prompt, twisting a lock of her hair around my fingers.

She chews on her lip again. “I mean it’s not like our jobs are exactly conducive to family life, are they?”

“Babe,” I say, chuckling again, wondering why this is so hard for her to give me an answer. “Fuck our jobs, we can make it work if this is what you want.”

Hannah takes another deep breath, letting it out slowly as she finally says, “Honestly, Leo, I don’t really know what I want.”

“Okay, now we’re getting somewhere,” I tease. “So, you don’t know if you want kids?”

“I don’t know if I want kids,” she confirms. “I mean, I really love my job and I really, really love this, this...this life that you and I have together too. I like being able to stay up late with you like this and not worry about what time it is. I like that we can spend our days off lying-in bed all day and not worrying about anyone else. I mean,

not that that's all we do, but you know what I mean. ”

Laughing, I curl my arms around her, pulling her up against my chest so I can press a soft kiss to her lips. “I really like all of those things too, Hannah. I like them a lot.”

“So what about you then?” she asks, her eyes searching my face. “Do you want kids?”

“Honestly, babe, I don't know what I want either.”

Hannah scoffs, slapping at my chest as she says, “You shit! You made me sweat my answer when you knew all along that yours was the same.”

Laughing, I pull her up so she's now straddling me. “Maybe,” I tease. “But I wanted your real answer on this. I always want you to be real with me, okay?”

Hannah rests her hands on my shoulders, that bottom lip of hers between her teeth again. “So what now?” she asks.

I lift a shoulder in a shrug. “We continue on as we are,” I tell her. “If one of us decides later on we've changed our mind about the kid thing, we talk about it.”

“That's it?” she asks.

“That's it,” I confirm.

“That sounds way too easy.”

My hands move to her hips, gripping her firmly. “It is easy, Han. I love you and loving you and making you happy is all I want to do.”

Hannah smiles now, in a way that lights up her whole face. “That’s what I want too,” she whispers.

“Well then,” I say, my brow lifting as I pull her closer, her legs spread over mine and her pussy perfectly lined up with my dick.

Her mouth drops open into a tiny O, her eyes widening as she says, “Are you seriously hard because of the conversation we’ve just had?”

“Well, I mean, I’m always hard around you, but yeah, it was definitely a contributing factor.”

Smiling, she shakes her head a little. “I see, so what now then?” she asks, smirking as she repeats her earlier question.

Lifting her a little, I push the sheet down so there’s nothing between us. “Now,” I start, my grip on her hips tightening, “you come up here and take a ride on my dick.”

“Oh, now we’re talking,” Hannah says with a smile, lowering her body onto mine as she presses a hard kiss to my mouth and we stop talking altogether.

The next morning, we are woken early by the simultaneous sound of incoming text messages on both of our phones. Hannah grumbles as she reaches over me for hers, while I stay exactly where I am and ignore mine.

“What is it?” I ask, lying on my stomach, my face muffled by the pillow.

Hannah sits beside me, her phone in her hands. “Text from Jack.”

“And?”

“Ella and Benjamin Wilson, born 4:25 and 4:46 am. Bubs are healthy and beautiful, Lulu is gorgeous and amazing. Everyone is well.”

“Oh wow,” I mumble, not bothering to open my eyes even as I hear Hannah typing out a response. “Tell them congrats from me too.”

“Leo!” she half shouts as she cracks a hand across my bare ass.

“What?” I ask, opening one eye.

“I’m not sending a joint congratulations to our bosses at eight o’clock in the morning. What the fuck, they’ll know we’re here together. That we are together!”

Chuckling, I close my eyes again. “Yeah, and I thought that was the plan, we finally come clean.”

“Not via text,” she huffs, smacking me on the ass again.

I half lift my hand, waving away her comment. “Fine, fine. But can you copy your response and send it to them from my phone too, please?”

This earns me another smack on the ass and this time, I open both eyes, rolling onto my back as I look up at her. My look turns to a smirk as I watch Hannah’s gaze drop to my dick, which is well and truly awake and pointing directly up at her.

“What?” I ask with a chuckle.

Hannah rolls her eyes, even as she forces them back to my face. “I’m not sending the exact same message I sent to them from you as well. I mean hello, obvious.”

I reach for my phone on the nightstand, handing it to her. “Fine, type something for

me. Please, babe?" I ask, a playful tone in my voice. She lifts her hand as though to smack me again and I grab her wrist, stilling her. "Don't you dare," I warn.

She smiles now, licking her lips as her gaze moves back to my dick and she pulls her wrist from my grip so she can wrap her hand around my dick. "And what would you like me to say, exactly."

"Fuck, I honestly do not care," I moan, my eyes closing.

Hannah squeezes me once, before letting go and my eyes snap open. "What would you say?" she asks, as she opens the message on my phone.

"Ugh, fuck, I don't know," I say, taking her hand and putting it back on my dick again. "Say whatever you want, but make it quick, babe," I add, closing my grip around hers so she can't let go of me.

Hannah laughs, typing out a message with one hand before she throws both of our phones onto the nightstand. "All done," she whispers, turning to me. "But it's a little early for work still, so any thoughts on what we should do?"

This time it's me smacking her hard on the ass. "Get up here and sit on my face."

A couple of hours later, we're finishing our coffee, before heading off to work. As we walk out of Hannah's place, I squeeze her hand in mine. "Let's just swing past my place so I can grab a fresh t-shirt and a new chef's jacket."

"Or," she says, "I can just meet you at work?"

Chuckling, I shake my head. "Babe, seriously, we can walk in to work together, you know. No one will care."

Hannah lets out a slow breath. “I just don’t want...I don’t want people to think I’m getting special treatment, that’s all. I want them to like me.”

I pull her close, wrapping an arm around her waist. “Everyone loves you,” I tell her. “Including our bosses. No one is going to be bothered by this.”

“You think Dylan will?” she asks, blinking up at me.

“Do you really care if he is?” I ask, knowing Hannah doesn’t usually care what anyone thinks.

“No. I mean, yeah, I kinda do. You’re like the first guy I’ve ever been in love with. It’s important to me that my family is happy about that.”

My heart flips in my chest. “I’m the first guy you’ve loved?”

“Uh huh,” she whispers, looking up at me.

I can’t resist leaning in to kiss her. Even though it’s broad daylight, her place is far enough back from the main part of the winery that no one is going to see us. “You’re the first person I’ve ever loved too,” I murmur against her lips. “The only person.”

“Leo...”

I kiss her again, holding her closer. “Dylan will be fine with this, babe,” I whisper. “I’ll talk to him.”

“What about your family?” she asks, her hands resting on my chest.

Chuckling, I slip my hand down to her ass. “Oh my god, my family is going to fucking love you,” I say. “Shit, I’ll bet my dad will try and steal you away to work in

his restaurant.”

Hannah finally smiles. “I’ll never leave Somerville’s.”

“Oh Somerville’s, huh?” I tease, brow cocked. “What about leaving me and my kitchen?”

“Yeah okay, that too,” she says, playfully rolling her eyes.

I pull her in for another kiss. “Everything’s going to be alright, Hannah,” I whisper against her lips. “Actually, everything will be perfect. We’ll come clean to Jack and Lauren and our families, and everything is going to work out.”

She smiles against my mouth, her hands sliding from my chest as she wraps her arms around me. “Okay,” she says, kissing me once more before we both pull back, only to discover Oscar and Olivia standing there watching us.

“So,” Oscar says, a huge grin on his face as he crosses his arms over his chest. “What do we have here?”

“Oh fuck,” I chuckle, as Hannah buries her face in my chest. “Guess we really gotta come clean now, babe.”

Hannah

These two kids are standing in front of us, horribly judgmental looks on their faces, the kind of look that a parent gives a teenager for sneaking in after curfew. This isn't the first time these two have busted us, but at least last time we were able to cover it up. This time, not so much.

"You know you can get pregnant from kissing a boy?" Olivia shames, her hands on her hips, her lips pursed in disgust. "Do you want to have a baby?"

The way she asks the question once again brings me back to my teenage years and health class.

All those lectures on condoms and teenage pregnancy and the judgment that comes with getting knocked up before marriage.

I am currently being judged by a ten-year-old who thinks a baby will magically appear in my stomach from kissing a boy.

Thank fuck it doesn't work that way or I'd have a hundred kids by now.

I look over at Leo, hoping he saves me from this mess, but all he's doing is smirking, reaching out, he ruffles Oscar's hair, shaking his head.

"You two need to find a hobby," Leo now jokes. "Don't you play baseball or soccer or something?"

“Yeah, but we don’t have practice today and when you’re ten and your family owns a vineyard, you have to stay up to date on the gossip,” Oscar replies and it’s really hard not to burst out laughing.

“I’m not sure we’re the most interesting gossip,” I jump in.

“Didn’t your aunt and uncle just have two babies?

That feels like a bigger deal than finding us sharing a quick kiss.

You know in France, where lots of chefs study, they kiss to say hello and goodbye,” I add, thinking on my feet.

Kids are gullible and will fall for anything an adult says with confidence.

They both fall silent and I’m patting myself on my back for my quick thinking and for shutting these two nosy ninjas up. But just when I think they’re going to slink off and forget what happened, they both start laughing.

“Uncle Jack tried that line before. How dumb do you think a ten-year-old is?” Olivia asks, and I swear this child has perfected the judgmental bitch face like she’s taken lessons from my mother. “And you never answered my question, do you want to have a baby?”

Whoa, it’s like this kid is inside my head, like she knows Leo and I just had this discussion and while kids are cool and all, I’m not sure they’re for me, especially now that I’m standing here being drilled by these two.

“Okay, so first, that’s none of your business and two, it’s rude to ask people about their...

” I stop short, reconsidering using the words “sex life” because that’s certainly not appropriate.

“It’s rude to, I don’t know,” I say, not even sure where I’m going with this conversation.

“You should go check on your aunt and see how the babies are.”

“They’re still at the hospital,” Oscar chimes in, rolling his eyes. “Even we know that.”

“Hey!” a voice shouts and I see Ellen walking toward us and we’re either about to be saved or sold out. “I was looking for you two. Oscar, your homework needs to be re-done, it’s trash and Olivia, you need to clean up the markers that you left thrown about my office.”

“Leo and Hannah were kissing,” Olivia blurts out as if this will distract from the fact that she and Oscar have just been reprimanded by their mom.

Ellen leans down close to them, beckoning them even closer with a hook of her finger. “What have I told you two about being in other people’s business?”

Their eyes are wide as Ellen sternly looks at them, crouched down so she’s eye level, and now I know where Olivia gets that face from. Right now, even I’m afraid of Ellen.

“Not to do it,” they both reply, a mumbled response that shows this is a conversation that has been had several times.

“Then why are you doing it? No one likes a tattletale,” Ellen now says, still glaring at her two children, who look like they’re now scared shitless.

“Olivia tattled, I didn’t,” Oscar immediately defends and it’s obviously not the answer Ellen is looking for. She slowly shakes her head and points a finger toward where her office is located.

Neither says another word, waving goodbye to us, they begin to make their walk of shame back to the office to clean up and get their homework done.

“Sorry,” Ellen apologizes, which is totally unnecessary.

They are two kids who are stuck at a vineyard on a regular basis with only adults and each other to keep themselves busy.

Eavesdropping and gossip seem to be pretty common pastimes around here, and given their Uncle Jack is the ringleader, it’s hard not to be entertained by it all.

“Now, I didn’t hear what they said, but if I did, I want you to know that no one cares.

If anything, Lauren is probably cheering in her hospital bed. ”

“What?” I ask, confused by Ellen’s response.

“We may have been hosting a little bet on when you two would hook up. I’m even starting to wonder if Lauren let you move in here so she could set the whole thing up,” Ellen now admits.

“Wait, I thought Jack was the matchmaker?” Leo adds in. “He’s always claiming he set up Tommy and Penny and Dylan and Tessa.”

“Lauren and I may be as equally involved in the relationships here at Somerville’s,” Ellen hints, winking at us. “I set up Jack and Lauren.”

“So what was the bet?” I now ask, my hands on my hips, wondering if we didn’t hide things as well as we thought.

“Just the over and under on when you two would become a couple.”

This is hilarious. I’ve never worked somewhere where they actively encourage their employees to hook up. I guess they’re not actively telling us to hook up, but there is certainly not a no fraternizing clause in any of our contracts.

“Who would win if we said it was today?” Leo asks, his eyes narrowed in a thoughtful way, as if he’s planning to skew the results of this little wager.

“It would be Jack, I think. He had this week,” Ellen says, and Leo and I both start laughing.

“We’re like a football pool or something. Shit,” he comments, still laughing as he runs a hand over his face.

“Well, Jack isn’t the winner, and we may never tell when we actually got together,” I say, shrugging and playing it coy. “Actually, I’m not even sure either of us could say when it happened. There were a few sneaky kisses here and there.”

“I’m not going to ask any more questions.

Feel free to tell the kitchen staff or whoever you want, you don’t have to at all, but know that we all fully support this thing you have going on.

When our staff is happy, we’re happy,” Ellen says, smiling at us.

“Now, excuse me, I have to get back and make sure my kids aren’t being their usual nosy selves somewhere else. ”

We tell Ellen goodbye and then we stand there for a second, neither of us talking, both of us wondering what we should do. Do we just come clean and tell everyone so we don't have to keep acting like we aren't together or do we just go on this way?

I have concerns about sharing this news because while Ellen and Lauren and Jack might be happy for us, there are people who work below us who might not be.

There are kitchen staff who work their asses off and might see this as a problem.

They might look at me differently and worry that because Leo and I are a couple that I'll be getting preferential treatment.

Not to mention that I also work under Leo, he's my boss and when the staff complain about their boss, they could struggle to report things to me. Not that anyone ever complains about Leo, but still. Fuck my life, this feels like a lot.

"You okay, babe?" Leo asks, slipping an arm around my waist and pulling me closer to him.

"Leo, is it really a good idea to tell people?"

"Is it really a good idea to keep it a secret?" he retorts, and I understand where he's coming from. Keeping it a secret makes it feel like we're doing something wrong, like we're lying to all of them.

"Probably not, but what if they all think..."

"Hannah, they aren't going to think that you're getting preferential treatment or anything like that, and if they do, then they don't know me at all.

I'm impartial and fair and always have been.

When the position opened up for a new sous chef, they all had the option to apply, but none of them did. You know why?"

I shake my head, not sure where he's going with this. I know I'm good at my job, and I know I have the skills that most of the staff doesn't, but I'm still wracked with this feeling of guilt.

"None of them are qualified. The only one who I might have even considered for the job is Tony, but he's still wet behind the ears.

He's too new, and I went into it knowing I would need a head chef eventually, not just a sous chef.

Hannah, you were the most qualified for the position, so you need to stop worrying and be the girl I first met, the badass who knows her place. "

I laugh now, feeling my cheeks grow hot at his compliment.

He's right. I am a badass and if the people who work here can't see that I was great at my job before I started sleeping with Leo, then they can go fuck themselves.

I mean that in the nicest possible way, because they're all really great people.

"Okay, you're right. Want to go tell everyone?" I ask, hyped up from Leo's little speech.

"Yes, I want to. I've wanted to since the day I fucking kissed you. I want to tell everyone so no one tries to hit on you," he teases, grabbing my hand and pulling me toward Apple Jacks.

We walk in and find the kitchen bustling with the noise of pots and pans clanging and

music playing.

It's still about an hour before we open, but they're all here working away like they always are.

They don't even need Leo or me telling them what to do.

Leo has trained a staff of dedicated employees, but that's what you get when you treat them with respect and pay them well.

"Staff meeting!" Leo yells, sweeping a hand in front of him, telling everyone to gather around.

Looking over at me he smiles, a beaming, glowing smile, like he couldn't be happier to make this announcement.

His eyes are lighting up with excitement and I can't help but feel the happiness radiating from him.

I know how he feels because while I'm nervous, I have never been happier in my life to be working here at Somerville's and to be doing it with someone I love.

"We have an announcement," Leo says, when everyone has gathered and is standing in front of us. Leo reaches down and grabs my hand, lacing his fingers through mine. "Hannah and I are a couple," he announces, his smile widening even more.

"Like we didn't know," Tony deadpans and the rest of the crew starts laughing. "I hope you didn't think it was a secret. The number of times you caught yourself calling Hannah "babe" was out of control. We were keeping a tally, but we lost track after like thirty."

The room is hooting with laughter, and Leo and I can't help but be shocked by how badly we hid this whole thing. I guess we were not nearly as secretive as we thought.

"Can we get back to work now boss?" another staff member asks, and Leo shakes his head, making them wait.

"Not just yet, one more thing," Leo says, giving my hand a squeeze, and now I'm nervous he's going to propose or do something crazy in front of everyone.

My heart begins to slam against my chest. He knows I'm not for huge public displays.

It's why I'm a chef. Put me in the background.

"And when the restaurant reopens at Somerville's, you're looking at your new head chef. "

Leo waves his hand in front of me, and the room erupts with applause.

I certainly did not see this coming, but it would've been nice if he had given me a heads up.

I was just telling him how I was worried people would think I was getting a leg up.

Isn't this the definition of nepotism or do we have to be married for that to happen?

Holy shit. This is a dream come true. Having my own kitchen, being in charge of it all. I seriously could cry right now.

"Did you okay this with Jack and Lauren?" I whisper, but the staff hears me and laughs. They must have known something was up too, because they don't seem to be

as shocked as I am.

“Whose idea do you think this was?” Leo replies, pulling me in for a hug.

“Congratulations, babe, you deserve it.”

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

With the lunch rush now over and the kitchen cleaned, I head over to Tony's station where he hands me two bowls of the Mediterranean salad I asked him to prep because I know it's one of Hannah's favorites.

"Thanks," I say with a smile. "Do you know where—"

"Your bae is outside," he says, cutting me off.

"My what?" I ask with a laugh.

Tony turns to me, a smirk on his face as he replies, "Your bae."

"Dude, I literally have no idea what you're talking about. What the fuck is a bae?" I ask, shaking my head at him.

"Hannah, she's outside," he replies with a laugh, like it's obvious I should know what he's talking about.

"Okay," I say, drawing out the word because I still have no clue what the fuck a bae is.

Grabbing some cutlery, I take the salads outside where I find Hannah sitting at one of the bench tables, making some notes. "Hey," I say, sliding a bowl in front of her as I straddle the bench seat beside her.

“Hi,” she says, smiling as she glances up at me.

“Whatcha doing?” I ask, leaning in to press a kiss to her neck as I glance down at whatever it is she’s working on.

“Uh, nope, no way,” she quickly says, closing her notebook and pushing it to the side.

“Whoa,” I laugh, reaching over for it. “Come on, now you have to tell me. And when you do, please say that this is some kind of sex wish list or something?”

Hannah hits me with a look that has me laughing again. “What, you think I can’t just ask you for what I want in the bedroom?” she asks, like she hasn’t told me exactly what she wants me to do to her a hundred times already. Something which I seriously love too.

I lift my shoulder, smirking as I reply, “Well, yeah of course and I fucking love that, babe. But I don’t know, maybe you still have a list of stuff you wanna try.”

Smiling, she leans in to press a kiss to my lips. “Oh, I have a list,” she replies, her voice low as she nips at my bottom lip. “We’re about halfway through it.”

My eyes widen, my smile disappearing as my jaw drops. I slip an arm around her waist and pull her closer so she’s sitting between my legs. “Fuck, now I really wanna know about this list of yours.”

“You will,” she teases, pushing the notebook further to the side. “But that’s not in here. These are my menu ideas for when Somerville’s reopens.”

I pull back, narrowing my brow at her. “Okay, so why can’t I see them then?”

Hannah grins. “Well, aren’t you like the competition now that you’ve made me head

chef over there? I can't go revealing all my secrets to you, can I?"

For a second, I actually think she's serious, like she honestly thinks she and I are competing now and we can't talk about any of the shit we used to talk about with work.

All the food ideas, the roster, everything that made being together and working together so much fun.

That is, until she suddenly bursts out laughing, her head falling back.

"Oh god, I really got you then, didn't I?" she laughs. "You should've seen your face, it was—"

I curl my hand around her neck, pulling her mouth to mine in a hard kiss. "You cheeky shit," I murmur, my mouth against hers. "You're lucky I love you."

She smiles against my lips. "And I love you. And of course you can look at the menu ideas. I value your input, Leo. We're a team."

Now it's me smiling. "Yeah, we are," I tell her. "And this team is definitely talking more about this sex wish list of yours too. Actually, we're going to be putting in some serious teamwork with it."

"Sounds good," she whispers before kissing me again.

"So, the rumors are true?"

Hannah and I pull apart to find Tommy and Penny standing on the other side of our table, holding their own lunches as they stand there watching us, a smirk on Tom's face and a huge grin on Penny's.

Laughing, I wave at hand at them to sit down, as I say, “Yeah, they’re true.

Where do you guys stand in the pool on us then? ”

Tom grins at me as he sits down. “What makes you think we were in on this? You know they had a pool going on us too.”

I hit him with a look that says that’s exactly what I think. “Yeah, we know. Just like we know you were in on this one,” I add.

Penny giggles, nudging Tom as she says, “We took a week either side of Lauren’s baby shower. Are we close?”

Beside me, Hannah laughs, her hand resting on my thigh as she says, “Not even.”

Grinning, I press another kiss to her neck, loving that this whole thing with us as a couple is now finally out in the open.

It feels so fucking good to be able to sit with her like this, to hang out with our friends and not hide the fact that we are together.

I don’t even give a shit about the bet they had going on us, especially as it’s obvious neither me nor Han are going to reveal the truth.

“Really?” Penny asks, sounding genuinely disappointed.

Laughing, I reply, “Really. But hey, do you know what a bae is?”

“A what?” Tom asks, sounding confused.

I glance at Hannah who just shrugs as if to say she has no clue either. When we turn

to Penny though, she rolls her eyes. “Oh my god you guys, a bae is like your significant other. Did someone call you that? That’s so cute!”

Tommy, Hannah and I all look at her, still confused, still not getting it.

“So what, it’s short for babe or something?” Tommy asks. “I mean, why not just say babe?”

Pen giggles, resting her head on Tom’s shoulder. “I don’t know, it’s just something millennials use.”

“You’ve never used it,” Tom teases, throwing an arm around Penny as he presses a kiss to the top of her head. “And technically, aren’t you a millennial?”

“Yes, but I’m also an old soul,” she deadpans. “And I don’t use it, because it’s fucking stupid,” she adds, making us all laugh.

“Hey, what’s so funny?” Dylan asks as he and Tessa now walk up and join us.

I feel Hannah stiffen against me, but I don’t move, my arm still wrapped around her waist as she sits between my legs in a way that clearly screams we are together .

I mean it doesn’t get more obvious than this and even though I haven’t had a chance to talk to Dylan yet, I’m assuming he still knows.

I mean he was in the pool on us, so he has to.

Not that I’m worried he’s going to be against us being a couple. I mean to be fair, we’re both adults so he can’t stop us. But I guess he might be annoyed that we hid from him.

“Someone called these two bae,” Penny says, waving a hand at us.

Dylan looks at us, a confused expression on his face. “Why?”

“Because they are bae,” Penny continues. “Only they aren’t hiding it anymore.”

Tessa smiles, clapping her hands together before she sits down, her hands moving to rest on her ever-expanding stomach. “Oh, thank god,” she exhales. “That was seriously starting to get exhausting trying to keep quiet about it all.”

Dylan is still standing by the table, that same confused look on his face as he turns to Tessa. “Wait, you knew about this?”

She rolls her eyes, turning to look up at him as she pats the seat beside her. “Um yeah, and so did you, remember? We had a pool going, I had some intel?”

“Ugh, I knew you told him,” Hannah mutters, rolling her eyes as she glances up at her brother. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

Dylan shakes his head, that same confused expression still on his face as he finally sits down, glancing over at us before turning back to his fiancée. “I thought the pool was on when Lauren would have the babies?”

Tessa and Penny both laugh. “How the hell would I have intel on that?” Tessa asks.

Dylan slides a hand onto Tessa’s stomach. “Um, because you’re having a baby,” he states, making her laugh even harder.

“Oh my god, Dylan,” Hannah now says. “How are you this clueless?”

“What?” he asks, turning to his sister. “I mean just because I don’t go sticking my

nose in everyone's business like everyone else around here?"

"Oh please," Tessa says, kissing him on the cheek. "You were in the pool, Dylan. You picked like two weeks after Hannah started. I assumed it was because I'd told you about them having serious chemistry and that they'd—"

"I thought you said you'd keep quiet!" Hannah shouts, a smile on her face as she points a finger at Tessa.

Tessa gives her a sheepish smile. "I tried," she pleads. "It just kinda came out!"

"So what, he knew when I came over for dinner that time and we had to wait until he left to get the pizza before I could talk to you about it?"

"Wait, you were talking about me?" I cut in.

Hannah turns to me, a soft smile on her face as she says, "It sorta just slipped out after that first kiss," she says quietly. "And you know, then we kept kissing and I really needed to talk about it."

"Because...?"

She sighs. "Because I really liked you and I didn't know how to deal with that and the fact you were my boss."

Chuckling, I pull her in for a kiss. "Well, technically, I'm not your boss anymore, am I?"

Hannah's eyes widen at the sudden realization that with her being the head chef at Somerville's and me being the head chef at Apple Jacks, we are now on a much more even footing. "Oh shit," she whispers. "You aren't."

I lean closer, my mouth at her ear as I whisper words only for her. “Well, I’ll still let you boss me around in the bedroom from time to time, though.”

She lets out a breathy giggle that seriously turns me on and I’m suddenly wishing all of our friends would disappear so I can suggest she and I head back to my place to fill the few hours we have between shifts between the sheets.

“Okay, so this is seriously gross,” Dylan groans.

Hannah pulls back, glancing at her brother. “What and you think me having to listen to you and Tessa have sex all the time was any better?” she asks, making me laugh and Tessa groan and cover her face in embarrassment.

Dylan smirks at his sister as he fires back with, “Maybe you learnt something? You’re welcome by the way.”

“Oh my god, Dylan,” Hannah shouts as Tessa smacks him on the chest.

He laughs, shrugging his shoulders as he turns to me. “So come on then, do I win the pool?”

I drop my arm around Hannah’s shoulders, as I watch her brother, who’s got a cheeky smile on his face because he knows he’s probably won it. “When did you say you had?” I ask, stalling a little.

“What was it, babe, two weeks after she started?” he asks, turning to Tessa for confirmation.

“Yeah,” she replies. “But considering you thought you were betting on something else, your pick clearly means you have no clue when it comes to pregnancy terms.”

“Or,” Dylan says, crossing his arms over his chest, “I know my sister better than anybody thinks I do.”

“Please,” Hannah deadpans, rolling her eyes at her brother. “Anyway, who says we’re going to tell you when this started.”

“Maybe I’ll split the winnings with you?” Dylan replies.

“How much?” Hannah and I both ask at the same time.

Tom shakes his head laughing as Dylan replies, “I think we were all in for a hundred right, which makes it, what, eight hundred bucks?”

Hannah turns to me, a smile tugging at her mouth, even as she pulls her bottom lip between her teeth. I’m smiling back at her, my arm still wrapped around her shoulders. I feel her squeeze my thigh and without either of us saying anything, I already know what her answer is going to be.

“Nope,” she replies.

“No, what?” Dylan says. “No, you won’t split the pool or no that’s not when you two got together.”

Hannah just smiles, leaning into me as she says, “Both, little brother. Both.”

## Page 26

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

It's been a couple of weeks since Leo and I announced that we're a couple, or should I say that Leo announced it, since I was just sort of nervously standing in the background.

It turned out that pretty much everyone who works here, including our bosses, had this pool going on when we would hook up, and they still don't know when it happened.

Leo and I have been totally silent about it all, but I'm not sure why.

I think it's more to fuck with them than us actually wanting to keep the details private.

It's been fun holding it over everyone's heads and only us knowing exactly what happened.

Secrets at Somerville's don't stay hidden very long, so we're going to keep this going.

The day we announced that Leo and I were together, he also dropped a bombshell on me that I was made head chef of the Somerville restaurant.

I didn't see it coming and I'm still in shock, finding it hard to believe that when it reopens, I'll be the one in charge.

It feels amazing and to have it happen here is even better.

I always thought I would have had to spend years working in the industry and years working for a prick like Roy Langston, taking the ridicule and feeling beaten down, before I would have ever found myself in this position.

I've finally finished the new menu items, trying them out after the restaurant at Apple Jacks is closed with Leo by my side, tasting everything and helping me perfect the recipes.

Today I'm meeting with Ellen to go over them with her and get final approval.

With Lauren on maternity leave and Jack focused on Apple Jacks, Ellen has taken over.

Since Apple Jacks is currently open and thriving, I've invited Ellen over to my little cottage to do some tasting and to talk about hiring new staff. When the restaurant reopens, it will not only have been updated, it will also be almost twice the size, requiring more employees and more menu items.

I'm plating a few small bites of everything just as a knock comes on my front door.

"Come in!" I call out, knowing it's Ellen.

The door swings open and of course, not only Ellen walks in, but she has the twins heading in right along with her.

"Sorry," she starts, shaking her head. "Will's traveling for work and my sitter just canceled, so these two will be joining us.

But they have assured me they will keep to themselves.

” Ellen looks over her shoulder at them as they flop down on my couch, pulling out their iPads.

I hear the theme song to The Simpsons start up and they both seem to be lost in their own world.

After getting busted ratting Leo and me out to Ellen, they seem to have settled down a little bit.

With their crazy Uncle Jack wrapped up in the birth of his own twins, these two don’t seem to have the partner in crime that they used to.

I’m sure that will change once Lauren and Jack are settled, and Olivia and Oscar will be back with a vengeance, getting into all kinds of trouble with Jack backing them up.

“Hey!” she shouts and Oscar and Olivia’s heads spring up, looking at her and smiling sweetly.

You’d never know these two get up to no good when left to their own devices.

They look so sweet and innocent. “Remember what I said?” She narrows her eyes at them and they both nod, giggling at their mom’s funny face.

“We won’t get into anyone’s business,” Oscar assures her, just as Olivia chimes in adding, “And we won’t talk about how Leo and Hannah were kissing.”

I laugh out loud at Olivia’s comment. Either she completely missed what her mom was telling her or she’s a cheeky little shit who’s trying to get under her mom’s skin. Either way, she’s pretty damn funny.

“Yeah, something like that,” Ellen mutters, turning back to me. “Sorry. I swear it’s

like they're being raised by wild animals. I think it's called strong-willed," she now jokes. "I call it wine club."

I laugh at her joke, knowing she's a great mom and works incredibly hard to keep a business running and keep her family in check.

"So, I have a few things for you to try," I say, sliding a plate over to her. "This is a smoky gouda macaroni and cheese, paired with the new rosé that's currently being aged, it will be perfect."

"I was hoping you'd incorporate some of the new wines we have in the works," Ellen says, taking a bite of the macaroni and cheese. "Oh my god," she moans out. "This is amazing. You can really taste the smokiness."

"I think it would also pair well with a lighter chardonnay, unoaked," I reply, and it feels so weird to be sitting here having this conversation with someone who is as excited about this as I am.

"For sure. Hopefully the rosé will be ready to go by the time the restaurant reopens, and we can make sure to add all the bin numbers and pairs to the menu."

"Already on it," I say with far too much excitement and Ellen laughs when I present her with a typed up proof of the menu.

"I love that you're so on top of this. I'll make sure to send you the info for our graphic designer and the two of you can work on new layouts for the menu, and I'd love for her to work with you and Leo to get pictures of the menu items so we can get them on the website," Ellen adds, and it takes everything in me not squeal out loud.

I'm going to be working with a graphic designer and photographers and creating all of this from scratch. All of it will have my name on it; I'll have had a hand in

everything.

“That sounds...it sounds amazing,” I reply, at a loss for a better word.

“We’re just so glad Dylan had you apply here, and that Leo was able to convince you that you wanted to work here,” Ellen answers back, and again, I have to keep my mouth shut.

I have to keep myself from blurting out the truth.

It was me who begged Dylan to get me a job here.

There was zero convincing happening. I would have taken the job if Leo had told me I was going to be peeling potatoes in the back room.

We go through several more menu items, this time sampling them with the wine pairings I have chosen, and Ellen has yet to nix any of them.

I really expected her to have more of an opinion one way or another, but she seems to love everything.

I know I’m a great chef, but even great chefs can make mistakes in combinations or pairings.

Just as we’re about to move onto a few new dessert ideas, Olivia stands up and announces that she has to use the bathroom. My place isn’t very big, so I point in the direction of the small hallway that leads to my bedroom and the bathroom. She can’t miss it.

Ellen and I get back to what we are doing, chatting more now about everything but the food. The conversation is flowing like I’m talking to a friend rather than my boss

and I'm sure Ellen is enjoying the fact that her kids are quiet and distracted.

We're both laughing as she shares the hilarious story about how she met her husband Will, and just as I'm about to ask her a question, Olivia returns from the bathroom. Interrupting us, she asks, "Why do you have a baguette in your bathroom?"

First of all, only a ten-year-old who has grown up at a winery would use the word baguette and second, I have absolutely no idea what she's talking about.

"I don't have a baguette in my bathroom," I reply, chuckling a little as I look over at Ellen, hoping she has some clue as to what Olivia is talking about. Maybe she doesn't even know what the word baguette means.

"You do. Hang on, I'll go get it," she replies with certainty and Ellen shrugs, standing up to follow Olivia. But before Ellen can reach her, she proudly struts out of my bathroom holding my stupid fucking suction dildo.

Both Ellen and I freeze, and it feels like hours tick by as Olivia stands there holding my dildo, it jiggling around in her hand like a Jell-O cube on a plate, and I'm certain my face is bright red.

"Oh my god," Ellen finally spits out, her voice a high pitch wail as she reaches for the dildo, but pulls back, realizing it's in her best judgment not to touch it.

This is not fucking happening to me!

This right here is why I'm never having kids!

In all the commotion and me standing here like a complete moron doing nothing, Oscar walks up, assessing the situation. His eyes float over to his sister and the oversized dong she's holding and as if to make my mortification even worse, he yells

out, “Ewww, Olivia, that’s a penis!”

This causes her to literally toss it in the air and all four of us watch as my dildo flies across my kitchen, hitting the floor with a thud and coming to rest at my feet.

I quickly grab it, not knowing what the hell to even do with it at this point. I put it behind my back, my face feeling like it’s on fire, I have no idea how to respond.

“I’m so sorry,” I stutter out, closing my eyes tightly, far more embarrassed than I have ever been in my life and that’s saying a lot, because one time I actually peed my pants in the Taco Bell drive-thru when I was drunk.

“Nope,” Ellen instantly replies, shaking her head. “This is one hundred percent not your fault. I am so sorry.”

“Why is everyone apologizing?” Olivia asks, a confused look on her face. “Was it a baguette or a penis? Why do you have it in your bathroom?”

I open my mouth to say something, but nothing comes out. Not that I have an explanation that would be plausible or acceptable to say in front of two ten-year-olds and my boss.

“We are going to go now,” Ellen juts in, saving me from having to explain what the fuck is happening right now. I don’t even know what’s happening right now. “Awesome job on the menu. And fudge me and my life, I’m so sorry.”

It’s hard not to smile at Ellen’s use of the word “fudge” in place of the word “fuck” and I nod, assuring her that everything is fine, even though we both know everything is not fine.

“We’ll talk more tomorrow,” Ellen adds and again I nod, at a loss for all words, even

the word “goodbye” seems to be gone from my vocabulary.

She grabs both the kids, ushering them out the door and into the car.

I watch from where I’m standing, my eyes on the window in my living room that looks out over the front of my house.

And when I watch them pull away and drive off down the gravel road, I collapse on the floor, the fucking dildo still in my hands.

I feel like I’m either going to puke or die of embarrassment.

I’m now sitting in the darkness of my house, the dildo on the coffee table in front of me, my legs folded up underneath me as I try to process what the fuck happened.

My boss, her kids and I all had what I can only describe as a traumatic experience and something I will one day talk about with my therapist. I’m forever going to have dildo PTSD, and I can only imagine what is going to happen when Olivia and Oscar realize that I had a masturbation toy in my bathroom.

Someday it is going to hit them, and I’ll be forever embedded in their memory as the lady with the dildo.

This is my life.

“Hey, babe,” Leo says, walking into the dark cottage and flipping on the light switch by the front door, sending the room into a blinding light, almost like a spotlight on the offending item that sits in front of me.

“You okay?” he now asks when I don’t respond, and then adds, “Why is your dildo on the coffee table?”

“Leo,” I wail, burying my face in my hands as he sits down next to me. He wraps a comforting arm around me, not even knowing what is going on, he’s already soothing me. “Olivia found my dildo in the bathroom and oh my fucking god!”

I now throw my head back, looking up at the ceiling. I don’t know whether to start crying or start laughing.

“And Ellen was here going over menu items,” I continue to whine dramatically. “Leo, oh my fucking god, it was so fucking embarrassing!” I flop over to the side, my head falling into his lap.

And just when I think he’s going to say something to help appease my embarrassment, he bursts into an uncontrollable laughter.

“What are you laughing at?” I shriek, sitting up so I can look at him.

“Did you not hear what I said? Ellen and the kids saw my dildo! The one you and I use in the shower! You realize I’m going to have to burn it now and there will be no more of you watching me get myself off and we are never having kids! ”

I shove him as he continues laughing, reaching for the dildo, he’s now shaking it around just like Olivia did.

“This dildo has been a great source of entertainment,” he teases, poking me in the side with it. “We are never getting rid of it.”

Leo

“Yes we fucking are!” Hannah shouts as she grabs the offending item from my hand and throws it dramatically across the room.

I watch as it sails through the air before hitting the wall with a thud and dropping to the floor. “Was that really necessary?” I ask, trying not to laugh, but failing. I have never seen Hannah like this, and it is hilarious.

She slaps at my chest with both hands, a horrified look on her face. “YES!” she screams. “I mean how the fuck are we ever going to use that and not think about what happened today?”

The laugh falls from my mouth before I can stop it as I grab both of her wrists and pull her into my lap.

“Babe, first up, I promise when we’re using that, the only thing I’m thinking about is how fucking hot you look.

Nothing else.” I pause, pressing a hard kiss to her mouth as if to emphasize my point.

“And second, you know eventually you’re totally going to laugh about this one day, don’t you? ”

Hannah’s head drops to my shoulder as she lets out a loud sigh. “How the fuck can I laugh about this? My boss, our boss, literally knows we use a sex toy. Her daughter found it, Leo. Her daughter! Oh my god.”

Laughing, I kiss the side of her head. “Yeah okay, that part is a little embarrassing, but shit, babe. We have nothing to be sorry about here. Just because we have a kick ass sex life, we don’t have to apologize for that.”

“I know,” Hannah groans, her head still on my shoulder. “It’s just so embarrassing. I mean, it’s almost as embarrassing as us using the sex toy I know my fucking brother invented.”

“Whoa, okay, hold up,” I say, my hands cupping her jaw as I push her back so I can look at her. “What did you just say?”

Hannah exhales, blinking slowly as her gaze meets mine. “I’m sure I told you about it?” she starts. “It’s how Dylan lives in that kick ass place in Napa. The clueless shithead accidentally invented a sex toy in college and now he’s rolling in it.”

I slowly shake my head as Hannah tells me this. “Um no, I have never heard this story.”

Her fingers play with the bottom of my t-shirt as she sits in my lap straddling me.

“It’s actually a really good product, though I’d never tell him that.

And I mean, you seem to really like using it on me too, so...

” she trails off as though she’s thinking back to when we did use this mystery toy of hers.

My eyes widen, wondering how the fuck this has never come up before but at the same time, also wondering which toy it is and what time Hannah is thinking about right now.

I mean we don't always use them, but fuck, there have been quite a few times that we have.

I love it though, love everything about our sex life, especially how creative and playful it is.

“Okay, I'm sorta scared to ask now.”

Hannah smirks, her fingers curling into the fabric of my t-shirt. “Remember the pussy licker one?” she asks, a cheeky smile on her face now, the embarrassment of before apparently forgotten.

My eyes widen. “Fuck,” I breathe out. “He invented that ?”

She laughs. “Yep, and if you can believe it, it was legit supposed to lick pussies, only of the kitten variety. He did it as some business project with his roommate who was studying to be a vet. When some corporate guys from the porn industry saw it, they thought it would be more successful if it licked a different type of pussy.”

“Oh my fucking god,” I groan, shaking my head a little even as a laugh falls from my mouth. “I cannot believe he came up with that and if there's any toy we're burning, then it's that one!”

“What, no!” Hannah shouts, a look of genuine fear on her face at my suggestion. “We can't burn it, it's...it's...”

“It's invented by your brother,” I deadpan, although to be fair, I'm not actually that bothered by it.

Honestly, it's kind of funny and like when we use the dildo she now hates, the only thing I'm thinking about when I use any of these toys with Hannah, is how hot she

looks and how much I want to make her come.

“Yeah but, I mean, he doesn’t have to know we use it,” she says, hands slipping under my t-shirt now, her fingers tracing the ridges of muscle on my stomach.

A slow smile tugs at my mouth as I pull Hannah closer. “Oh, so we’re keeping it then?” I ask, my words a murmur against her lips.

“Yes,” she breathes out.

“That and the dildo,” I confirm, tipping my head in the direction of the offending item where it still lies on the floor.

“I don’t know,” Hannah wails, her cheeks flushing a little. “Today was awful, way worse than...” she trails off, waving a hand around as though to explain it.

Chuckling, I grip her ass, holding her to me as I stand from the couch. “Tell you what,” I suggest, as I walk us toward the dildo, leaning down so she can pick it up. “How about we go put this to use in the shower and I make you forget all about what happened today.”

“Leo,” she groans, and I can tell she’s not convinced.

Smiling, I press a kiss to her lips. “And then after our shower, I take you to bed and we can use that other toy you love so much, and I promise I will not think about your brother once while we do.”

She slaps at my chest with the dildo, making me laugh. “Please don’t ever mention my brother and sex in the same sentence ever again. Especially when it’s our sex life you’re talking about.”

“Deal,” I say, chuckling as I walk us into her bathroom, depositing her on the counter before I step back and start to strip off.

Hannah watches me, her bottom lip between her teeth and her eyes wide as she takes me in.

When I’m naked, I walk over and slowly pull off her clothes, pausing to drop wet kisses to her skin with every item I take off.

When she’s finally naked, still sitting on the counter, I grin, sliding my hands down her thighs to her knees and pushing them apart. Hannah’s eyes widen, her mouth falling open as I slide my hands down to her ankles, lifting them up and onto the counter so she’s now spread wide in front of me.

“Leo,” she moans.

“Yes, babe,” I whisper, leaning in to kiss her. She whimpers into my mouth before I kiss a path along her jaw to her ear. A groan rumbles in my chest as I feel her hand wrap around my cock, stroking it once as she positions me against her. “Fuck, Hannah,” I murmur, sucking on her neck.

“Yes,” she groans. “Fuck me, right here. Right now.”

Despite my earlier suggestion, I can’t resist her demand, pushing inside her with one long, slow thrust. “Jesus, babe,” I moan when I’m buried inside her.

“Hard,” she demands, her hands on my ass, her fingers digging into my skin. “Fuck me, hard.”

I push her legs even wider, pulling back so I can see her face.

See all of the love and lust and desire that's written all over it.

Kissing her again, I thrust once, harder this time as a low moan falls from her mouth.

"Touch yourself," I whisper against her lips.

"I want to watch you touch yourself while I fuck you."

"Yes," she groans, as she moves a hand between her legs, her fingers sliding over where we are joined before moving to her clit.

I glance down as I pull out before thrusting inside her again, loving the view. "Fuck, Hannah," I groan, unable to look away.

"Leo," she begs, her fingers circling her clit, teasing herself. "Please."

Grinning, I look up, planting a hard kiss on her mouth. "Hold on, babe," I tell her, the only warning I give before I fuck her hard enough that she forgets all about what happened earlier.

The next morning, I'm standing at the kitchen counter making us some coffee when my phone rings. Glancing down, I smile when I see the name lighting up the screen. "Dad, hey, how's things?"

I hear his deep chuckle on the other end as he replies, "Hey Leo, all good. How's everything with you?"

I turn, leaning back against the counter as I let out a breath. "Really good," I reply, smiling. "Amazing actually."

Dad laughs again. "I take it things with Hannah are still going well then?" he asks.

I'd sort of mentioned Hannah to my dad not long after she first started working here.

I hadn't meant to blurt it out, but it was hard not to given I was that hung up on her.

Plus, I'd also needed some advice and who better than to get that from my dad.

We've had several one-on-one conversations about it all, because I really want his take on how to handle things, with me being her boss.

I knew he'd get it because he and my mom had a similar working arrangement when they first got together and obviously they had made it work.

"Yep, they are," I tell him. "Everyone knows, and honestly, I don't think it could have gone any better than it did."

"That's great, Leo," he says, genuinely meaning it. "So does this mean we can finally meet her?"

Chuckling, I shake my head, knowing he's been gunning to meet her for ages. "Yeah, I guess it does. You guys want to come up to Napa or do you want us to come to you?"

"So yeah, that's kinda why I'm calling. We're actually heading up today, wondered if you might be free for a late lunch?"

I nod, just as Hannah wanders into the kitchen, dressed in undies and a tank, her hair a mess, mostly thanks to what we spent all night doing.

"Wow, you're actually taking a day off?" I joke.

"Who are you and what have you done with my dad?" I ask, as Hannah pauses,

raising a brow in question as she realizes who I'm talking to.

Chuckling, I lean over and grab her wrist, pulling her closer, so she's leaning against me.

Laughing, Dad replies with, "Yeah, yeah smart ass, you know you sound just like your mother," he teases.

"But I have finally found a replacement for the last chef I had working for me. You know, the one who just walked out one day with nothing but a fuck you. And I'm pretty sure they can handle the odd day here and there. "

Grinning, I slide an arm around Hannah's waist. "Sounds good, what time should we expect you?"

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

“Does two work?” he asks.

“It does,” I reply as we finish up our conversation. After I hang up, I throw my phone onto the counter, my hands now moving to Hannah’s ass as I pull her closer. “Good morning,” I murmur, dropping my mouth to her neck.

“Morning,” she whispers, her arms wrapping around my waist. “What was that all about?”

Chuckling, I lick a path up to her mouth, kissing her deeply before I say, “My parents are coming up to Napa today. We’re catching up for a late lunch, they can’t wait to meet you.”

Hannah stiffens in my arms, pulling back a little as she rests her hands on my chest. “Um, what?” she asks, blinking slowly.

Laughing, I squeeze her ass, grinding her hips against mine. “Babe, settle down, it’s no big deal, okay.”

“Ah yeah it’s a big deal,” she says, her eyes wide. “I mean, shit, Leo, what if they don’t like me or what if they think I’m not good enough for you or fuck, what if they think I’m a crap chef?” I burst out laughing now, my head falling back as Hannah slaps at my chest and says, “This isn’t funny!”

“I know it’s not,” I reply, sliding my hands up her back and under her tank. “But I promise you have absolutely nothing to worry about. They are going to love you.”

Hannah exhales, her head falling to my chest. “I hope so,” she murmurs.

Smiling, I lean down and drop a kiss to her head. “I know so,” I say, trying to reassure her. “But hey, I’ve got something that can take your mind off this, you wanna know what it is?”

Hannah lifts her head, hitting me with a look that makes me laugh because of course I know exactly where her mind has gone too.

“Filthy, girl,” I mutter as I reach for my phone, opening up the text thread I have going with Dylan.

“Here, take a look at this,” I say, turning the screen to her so she can see the cheeky text I sent her brother this morning.

Me: Dude! Nice going on the invention...I’m impressed. So is your sister every time I use on her

Dylan: LEO! FUCK! STOP!!!!!! You do NOT get to say this shit to me. Ugh, gross...fuck. I hate you right now.

Me:

Hannah bursts out laughing, shaking her head as she looks up at me. “You are such a shithead,” she says.

“Right? You gotta admit though, it’s hella funny fucking with him.”

“Yeah, it is,” she confirms.

I throw my phone back onto the counter before wrapping my arms around her again.

“So, you wanna help me out with lunch today?”

Hannah shakes her head. “No way, I am not going to be the one responsible for your parents hating me when I fuck up lunch because I’m so nervous!”

Chuckling, I smack her on the ass. “Okay, fine. I’ll take care of lunch even though you have absolutely nothing to worry about. I gotta head over to the kitchen to grab some shit, but we’ve still got some time, so...”

“So...?”

“So,” I grin, slipping a hand inside her panties. “What do you say we go put that toy your brother invented to good use for a while? Give me some more ammunition when I’m next giving him shit.”

Hannah huffs, slapping me across the chest again. “You’re lucky I love you, Leo Marsh.”

A couple of hours later, I’m back at my place, putting the finishing touches on lunch when a knock sounds at the door. I know it must be my parents, because Hannah, who is over at her place getting ready, would just let herself in.

I head down the stairs, opening the door to find my mom and dad on the other side, their hands filled with food and things from the restaurant my dad runs.

“Hey, come on in,” I say, hugging them both before we all head upstairs.

Inside, we all move into the kitchen, and I watch as my dad casts an eye over the counters, taking in the food I’ve prepared. It’s not done in a condescending or bad way, it’s more that this is how he sees what I’ve been up to kind of way.

“Smells good,” he says, glancing back at me with a smile.

It’s probably the best compliment he can give me, and I know they are not something he gives out easily.

As much as I love my dad and as much as I know he is an amazing chef, I could absolutely never work for him.

He and I have two very different styles of working and teaching the staff under us.

Five minutes standing in the kitchen at his restaurant when I was first starting out was enough to convince me of that.

Which is not to say we don’t ever cook together; we do all the time. Family gatherings when it’s just him and me in the kitchen are always awesome and even though I know we will never work together professionally, it doesn’t mean he hasn’t taught me a shit load of the stuff I now know.

I have so many memories of when I was a kid, standing in the kitchen beside my dad as he taught me how to steam a fish or sear a ribeye for the perfect medium rare.

I learnt a bunch of stuff from mom too, but with her catering company, she tended to focus more on sweet things.

The stuff dad did was always more my style.

“Drink?” I ask, as I grab a bottle of Somerville chardonnay from the fridge.

My dad nods, just as mom asks, “Where’s Hannah?”

“On her way,” I reply, handing the bottle to my dad as I grab four glasses from the

cupboard. Just as I put them on the counter, I hear the front door open and close. “Speak of the devil,” I say, winking at my mom.

I walk over to the stairs, waiting for Hannah as she comes up. I can tell she’s nervous as hell, although I can’t help but smile at the huge bunch of flowers she’s brought with her.

“Hey, babe,” I say, pulling her in for a kiss. “Just chill, it’s gonna be okay,” I whisper, before throwing an arm around her shoulders and walking into the kitchen.

My mom is waiting, a huge smile on her face as I make the introductions, smiling as my mom pulls Hannah into a warm hug. When she lets her go, I see my dad turn from the stove, a smile on his face as he waits.

“Hannah, babe, this is my dad, Roy. Dad, this is Hannah, my girlfriend.”

The silence that suddenly falls over the room is deafening and both my mom and I watch confused as my dad and Hannah stare at each other, neither of them saying anything.

My dad’s face is a mix of confusion and apprehension, but when I turn to Hannah, she’s as pale as a ghost and way more nervous than she should be.

“Babe, are you okay?” I whisper, squeezing her hand in mine.

Hannah swallows hard as she slowly shakes her head and murmurs. “Shit, no, this can’t be happening,” before she pulls her hand from mine and turns and runs out of the room.

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

I can't even think straight, but I do know I need to get the hell out of here and that's exactly what I do.

Hopping into my car, I leave before Leo has a chance to catch up to me.

The first place he's going to look for me is my house and the second place is Dylan's, but I go there anyway.

I need someone to talk to, someone who understands why I reacted the way I did when I quit my job, a job I now wish I would have kept because I wouldn't be in this situation if I had.

But then that would mean I would never have met Leo and just thinking about that starts up the tears.

I'm going to lose him regardless. Once he finds out what I did, there's no way he's going to look at me in the same way he does now. I was a complete asshole to his father.

Even though I know Leo will show up at Dylan's, I also know Dylan will turn him away.

He's always been protective of me and seeing me heartbroken will cause that protectiveness to kick in.

There's no way he's letting Leo in while I'm curled up in Dylan's extra bedroom bed, sobbing into his high thread count sheets.

I'm crying so hard that everything looks like a blurry mess as I park on the street outside of Dylan's place and use my key to let myself in.

"Dylan?" I wail, calling out to see if he's home, but I'm met with silence and a few seconds later Tessa is rounding the corner, her eyes wide when she catches a glimpse of me.

"Oh my god, Hannah, what's going on?" she asks, waddling over to pull me into her arms. "Are you okay?"

"Tessa, you're never going to believe what happened," I moan, attempting to sniff back the flood of tears but failing miserably.

It serves me right for being such a bitch when I quit.

I should have taken the high road, but Roy Langston is and will always be an asshole.

Fuck my life, Leo's dad is an asshole. The guy I fell in love with, the guy I seriously considered spending the rest of my life with, has an asshole for a father and I pretty much ruined any chances of getting past that when I told him I never wanted to see his stupid face again.

Tessa pulls back, looking at me, she guides me over to the living room couch and has me sit down.

My head falls into my hands as I replay the look on Roy's face when he realized I was the girl his son had fallen in love with.

Of course he had no idea it was me when Leo was telling his parents about his new girlfriend because Roy Langston thought my name was Anna not Hannah.

I'm pretty sure he even muttered it, confused and shocked when we met just a little while ago.

"Where's Dylan?" I now ask, when Tessa returns, handing me a glass of water. I take it and thank her, but I think I need something a little stronger to kill off this disaster.

"He ran to the grocery store. He should be home soon. What's going on?" She sits down next to me, running her hand down my arm with an air of sympathy.

My head is swirling with a million different thoughts, but most of all, I can't stop thinking about how I ruined this amazing thing that Leo and I had going.

There's no way his father didn't tell him the story of how his sous chef quit, leaving him high and dry.

And not just that, but that she also called him every name under the sun.

There is literally no way Leo and I can get past this. His father hates me, no doubt.

"I can't even talk about it. It's so fucking embarrassing," I mutter through sobs.

Not that I think Tessa will judge me. I know she ghosted Dylan when she didn't want to confront what was going on between them and she also disappeared for a bit when she found out she was pregnant.

If there's anyone who understands relationship disasters, it's her.

"It might help to talk about it. When I thought things were going to go to shit with

Dylan, he surprised me and look at us now,” Tessa says, reassuringly.

But she has no idea how bad this really is.

Getting knocked up accidentally is one thing but telling your possible future father-in-law that he’s the biggest asshole you’ve ever met is another thing.

“Tessa, I love your optimism, but I really fucked up. Leo’s dad is my old boss,” I blurt out, the tears starting again when I think about the whole situation.

Her mouth falls open when she finally hears why I’m a blubbing mess and it feels like we sit in silence for hours. Not even she knows what to say.

“Okay, well that’s a new one,” she eventually says in the way that only Tessa can, avoiding making it sound judgy but somehow making me feel better all in the same breath. “What did his dad say to you when you met him?”

“Nothing. I got the fuck out of there before he could,” I admit, feeling like it sounds super childish to run from something I created.

“I would have done the same thing,” Tessa replies, chuckling a little. “It’s hard to confront something like that and I know you really laid into him when you quit.”

“I did and I’m almost certain I said I never wanted to see his stupid fucking face again. Well, that fucking backfired, huh?”

“You really should talk to Leo about it. I’m sure he’s confused and maybe he doesn’t even know his dad is an asshole?” Tessa suggests and talking to Leo feels like the last thing I want to do.

What am I supposed to say to him? There’s no way I can explain to him what

happened. After all the conversations we've had about his family, he definitely holds his parents in high regard, especially his dad. His father is a world-renowned chef and someone Leo has looked up to all his life.

"And how did you not know that your old boss and Leo were related?" Tessa now adds and it's a question I've been asking myself too. It was a thought that instantly popped into my head when I was in the safety of my car driving away from this nightmare.

"Since Leo's last name is Marsh and his dad's is Langston, there's no way I would have connected them.

I mean, looking back now, Leo said some things about his dad being a famous chef and whatever, but not enough for me to think that in all of the Napa Valley area that they would be related," I wail, realizing all this has done is get me fired up all over again.

"I wonder why he has a different last name?" Tessa asks, like we're ever going to get to the bottom of this mystery since I don't think I can ever see him again.

"Maybe his dad changed his last name after he became a well-known chef?" she suggests, but like it really matters why.

What matters is that I've fucked up a good thing so massively.

Whatever Leo and I had is now long over.

My phone begins to ring again, and I know it's Leo, but I can't bring myself to answer it. I have no idea how to explain any of this to him. It's been ringing since I left his house, and I've been ignoring it.

“You gonna answer that?” Dylan yells as he comes through the front door, his arms loaded down with groceries.

“And what’s Hannah doing here? Saw her car out front.

I thought she was meeting Leo’s parents,” he says absentmindedly, like it hasn’t even crossed his mind that things may have not gone well.

“She was,” Tess answers, speaking for me because I’m sure I’ll start sobbing again should I try to open my mouth. “It didn’t go very well. Leo’s dad is Hannah’s old boss.”

“What the fuck? Seriously?” Dylan shouts, plowing his way into the living room where I’m currently sprawled out on his couch, trying to drown out the sound of my incessantly ringing phone.

“At least turn the damn ringer off if you’re not going to answer it,” Dylan barks, rifling through my purse and switching it off for me.

“And yes, seriously,” I reply to the first part of his question. “He’s probably coming over here right now, but don’t you dare let him.” My words come out as a warning to Dylan to not even think about betraying his sister for his work acquaintance.

“I’ll tell him you’re not here,” Dylan immediately answers, again looking through my purse for my car keys. “I’ll move your car to the back.”

But just as he begins to leave, Tessa rests a hand on his shoulder. “Think about how you felt when I was trying to hide from you,” she says, her words quiet and sweet. I know she means well, but I’m not up for being thrown to the wolves just yet.

Dylan turns to look at her, swallowing hard and the flash of a memory crosses his

face. It's a mix of fear and worry, and I'm sure he's thinking about when Tessa not only tried to ghost him after their hook ups, but also when she found out she was pregnant.

There's no way he wouldn't have wanted to know about his future kid, but this situation with Leo is different.

We don't have that connection to tie us together like Dylan and Tessa do.

We're just two people who fell in love only to find out that starting a relationship based on a lie by omission wasn't the best idea.

Now I feel like a fool for leaving it off my resume and for not telling Leo.

But hindsight is twenty-twenty, and I can't change it.

I have to live with my decision not to and I have to live with the way I behaved when I quit.

"Han, I know you don't want to talk to him, but if he loves you, which we all know he does, you need to figure out how to move past this," Dylan says, his voice comforting, but I find no comfort in it.

"Dylan, I flipped his dad off with both hands!" I wail, my face growing hot when I think about it.

"I told him I never wanted to see his stupid fucking face again and fuck me if the universe doesn't hate me because I totally saw it again.

I saw it at my boyfriend's house, and it was his dad's face!

” I’m yelling and crying and carrying on.

I can literally see no way out of this other than quitting my job and never speaking to Leo again. Problem solved.

“Maybe now’s a good time to talk to Leo about how different it is working at Somerville’s than it was at The Yellow Door. Maybe he has no idea that his dad is a dick?”

“I’m not going to be the one to tell him that!”

“You need to talk to him, Hannah,” Dylan presses and while he’s right, it’s not happening tonight. I’m totally irrational and there’s no way I can say anything without sobbing uncontrollably. Poor choices coming back to bite me in the ass.

“Yeah, not tonight,” I say, drawing the line and holding up my hand to get him to stop talking. “I’m going to take a bath in your huge bathtub and then I’m going to cry myself to sleep in your extra bedroom. I’ll reassess this mess in the morning.”

“There’s nothing stopping him from showing up here, Han,” Dylan now says, and I realize he’s not on my side anymore. Fucking falling in love has made my brother soft.

“You are,” I bite back, glaring at him as I grab my purse and storm toward his guest bedroom.

“He’s calling me!” Dylan shouts, and I feel like I’m going to puke. “I’m not going to ignore him.”

“Fine, do whatever you want, you traitor!” I cry, slamming the bedroom door. I flop down on the bed, my head a huge fucked up mess.

Not only did I lose the first guy I've ever fallen in love with, but I'm also about to lose my job.

Lauren and Jack's loyalty is to Leo since he's their head chef.

Wait...I'm their head chef too, but Leo's been there longer and they don't want all this relationship drama on their hands.

Especially after just having their babies.

I'm supposed to work tomorrow, but there is not a chance I'm showing up there. The last thing Leo and I need is to have this conversation at work in front of all these people who we just confessed to that we're together. That we were together, because we certainly aren't now.

I start the bath, letting the hot water fill the tub and warm the air before stripping off my clothes. I climb in, hoping this somehow makes me forget what happened. If I were lucky, this would all be a bad dream.

My phone chimes out with a text, and being the glutton for punishment that I am, I can't keep myself from checking it. Luckily it isn't Leo, but it's not much better. It's Dylan and his guy code or whatever the hell it is that is making him take Leo's side in this.

Dylan: I told him not to come here.

Me: Thank you

Dylan: Tomorrow is a new day, Han. Talk to him. Think about how he's feeling.

Me: What about how I'm feeling?

Dylan: I know you're a mess, but Leo probably is too.

Me: A mess with realizing that his girlfriend hates his dad.

Dylan: I'm going to let you wallow and ignore that you're being a whiny pain in the ass.

I text him a middle finger back, letting him know that while I appreciate his words, I'd rather not hear them right now.

I also need to do something about work tomorrow.

I can't bring myself to go in and face Leo.

So instead of calling Leo, who I would normally report my absence to, I text Ellen, letting her know that I need to take tomorrow off.

She doesn't ask any questions and all I can hope is that she can see past this mess should she find out. I need to keep my job. But as much as I'm worried about my job, I'm more worried about my relationship with Leo. It's hard to picture my life without him now.

I toss my phone onto the towel I have crumpled up on the floor and I sink down into the water.

I fucked up the best thing that has ever happened to me all because I had to get the last word in with a person who meant nothing to me.

Now these two worlds have collided and I can't even begin to imagine how I can fix this.

## Page 30

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

I'm sitting in the car outside Dylan's place when he finally answers the phone.

I half expected him not to pick up, siding with his sister, who I'm pretty sure is at his place right now, over me.

God knows what she's told him, and honestly, I don't give a fuck.

I just need him to put her on the phone for me, convince her to talk to me so I can start fixing this.

"Hey, Leo," he says, exhaling.

"Is she there?" I ask, not bothering with a hello. "She's not answering her phone and she's not at her place, so—"

"Yeah, she's here," he replies, before he mumbles something I don't catch.

"Is that her you're talking to?" I snap. "Can you put her on? She's not answering her phone."

"I'm talking to Tessa, dude," he says with a sigh. "Look, Han is here, but she's kind of a mess. I think today really threw her and—"

"Threw her?" I shout. "Fuck, Dylan, her leaving has fucking thrown me. Please can you put her on? If you don't, I'm coming up and you better fucking let me in."

“Leo,” he says, his voice weirdly calm and making him sound much older than his twenty-four years.

“Look, I get this is a bit of a clusterfuck, but she doesn’t want to deal with it right now.

She can’t deal with it right now. I think it’s really messed with her, and I know you want to see her, and I’ve told her that she needs to talk to you, but I don’t think it’s happening tonight, okay? ”

My head falls back against the seat as I glance up at the windows of his apartment, hoping to see Hannah, but knowing there’s probably not a chance in hell she’s going to be there watching me.

She clearly doesn’t want to see or speak to me and as much as it pisses me off, deep down, I know I have to respect her wishes.

“Leo?” Dylan prompts when I don’t respond.

“Yeah, I’m here,” I say, scrubbing a hand down my face.

“You okay?” he now asks, genuine concern in his voice.

“No, Dylan, I’m not okay. Today was a total shit fight and the woman I love is now not speaking to me. So yeah, I’m pretty fucking far from okay right now.”

Dylan chuckles a little. “You really love her, huh?”

My eyes close as my mind drifts back to earlier, to the look on Hannah’s face when she walked in and saw my dad.

The look on his face when he realized exactly who my girlfriend was.

I'd heard the stories about his sous chef that quit, and the way it happened, just like I'd heard Hannah's stories about the asshole boss she'd had.

I'd just never in my wildest dreams expected it to all turn out like this.

But even though it had, it doesn't lessen how I feel about her. Nothing is ever going to change that and while I know it's going to be weird moving forward, letting Hannah go because of this isn't an option for me.

Not now, not ever.

"Yeah, I really do. And I want to fix this, badly."

Dylan exhales in a way that tells me he gets it, which given the shit he went through with Tessa, I don't doubt he does. "I know, dude. Look, why don't you go home and try and get some rest? Tomorrow is a new day and I promise I'll make Hannah talk to you."

It's not what I want to hear or how I want this day to end, but I also know I have no choice. I know today wasn't easy on Hannah and I can't even begin to imagine what she's thinking right now. God knows I never told her who my dad was. I mean fuck, we don't even share the same last name.

I use my middle name because when I was first starting out, I deliberately wanted to distance myself from him. I always wanted to make a name for myself based off my own cooking skills.

Not because I was the son of Roy Langston.

Although apparently being that can come back to bite me in the ass in other ways.

“Leo?” Dylan prompts, in a way that suggests it’s not the first time he’s said my name,

Exhaling, I glance up at his place one last time. “Yeah, I hear what you’re saying. Please just make sure she’s okay. For me.”

“I will, dude, I promise. She’s here and she’s safe,” he says and while I know his words are meant to be comforting, they’re not.

We say our goodbyes and even though I should leave, because sitting outside like a fucking stalker is not going to get me anywhere at this point, I don’t just yet.

Instead, I type out one last text to Hannah, knowing she’s not going to answer if I try calling her, the dozen or so unanswered calls I’ve already made are proof of that.

Me: I know you’re freaking out in there, babe, but please talk to me. Please. This isn’t a deal breaker ok. I love you and I’m not letting what happened before ruin what we have now. Please Han, I really need to talk to you.

My text goes unanswered and reluctantly, I throw my phone onto the passenger seat and start the car. I give the apartment one more glance, hoping like hell that she somehow sees me and comes down to talk to me, but no such luck and I have no choice but to head home.

When I get back to my place, I’m surprised to find my parents are still there. Waiting in the kitchen with worried looks on their faces.

“You couldn’t find her?” Mom asks as I come up the stairs.

“She’s at her brother’s,” I reply, heading into the kitchen and grabbing a beer. “She doesn’t want to see me.”

I don’t miss the worried look my parents share before Dad walks over and puts a hand on my shoulder. “I feel like this is all my fault.”

Twisting the cap off the bottle, I throw it into the sink before taking a long pull. “It’s not your fault,” I say, even if a tiny part of me thinks it is. “I never even told her who you were. I should’ve, so maybe this wouldn’t have been such a fucking disaster.”

My words sound bitter, and I don’t miss the way my dad flinches as I finish the rest of my beer. Right now, I just want them both to leave so I can wallow in my own regret and anger. And maybe drink enough that I pass out and tomorrow somehow gets here sooner.

Dad exhales, squeezing once before removing his hand from my shoulder as he now leans back against the counter. “I know I’m harsh on them,” he says, his words quiet, almost as though he doesn’t want to admit these words out loud. “It’s meant to make them stronger, make them better—”

“Look, Dad, I really don’t want to hear this right now,” I say, holding up a hand.

“Hannah is an amazing chef. And she’s strong and feisty and I know she can handle your shit in the kitchen.

So yeah, I don’t want to talk about how you run things.

I’ve never questioned the way you do things, even though it’s not how I run my kitchen.

But in this case...” I trail off, knowing if I continue, I’m only going to say things that

make both of us angry.

Dad meets my gaze, his eyes filled with worry and perhaps a tiny amount of regret.

It's no secret that he and I run our kitchens in totally different ways, polar opposites, really.

And while I don't agree with his methods, I have never once questioned him about them or even suggested he change them.

I know it's not my place to do that and if he ever tried that with me, I wouldn't want to hear it.

Even if right now, all I want to do is scream at him and question how the fuck he could treat the woman I love the way he did.

"Tell me how I can fix this?" he asks, his words barely audible.

I grab another beer from the fridge before I turn to him. "Honestly, I have no fucking clue."

Later that night, I'm sitting on the couch, about eight beers deep and staring at my phone, willing it to ring.

My parents have gone, driven back to San Fran when it became clear that the whole meeting my girlfriend thing had completely gone to shit and that I was in no mood to try and hash it out with them.

I'd spent the time since they left doing what any rational guy in my situation would do. Getting shit-faced drunk.

I take another swig of my beer as I slide down the couch, my bare feet resting on the large wooden coffee table. Waking up my phone, I go straight to the photo app, scrolling through the shots I have of Hannah, alone, with me, in the kitchen with the rest of the crew.

In every single one of them she's smiling or laughing, and just so fucking happy it makes my heart ache. Makes me wish she was here with me right now, that I could hold her or just speak to her. Promise her that everything will be alright.

It fucking hurts like hell not having her here and before I can question whether I should be doing this or talk myself out what I'm sure is a really stupid move, I move to my contacts and hit redial on her number.

It rings and rings and when I pull the phone from my ear to check the time, I can see it's almost midnight. I know it's probably on silent and when her voicemail eventually cuts in, I don't do the smart thing and hang up. Instead, I ramble like the drunken idiot I surely am.

"Hannah, baby," I slur, my eyes closing as the empty beer bottle slips from my hand. "Please come home," I beg. "Please, I miss you and I need to talk to you. Need to see you, hold you. Please, Hannah..."

Even I can tell I sound drunk right now and I'm surely going to regret this phone call in the morning, but right now, I just don't give a shit.

"I love you and I don't care what happened. We can get past this, we can—"

The beep of her voicemail cutting me off sounds in my ear and I'm forced to hang up. With a groan, I throw my phone onto the coffee table, sinking further into the couch as I do the smartest thing I can do at this point and pass the fuck out.

The next morning, the sound of an incoming text message wakes me.

I sit up, my eyes blinking as I try to focus and figure out where the fuck my phone is.

My head feels a little fuzzy thanks to the copious amount of beer I had on an empty stomach, and I have a crick in my neck from sleeping on the couch.

When I reach for my phone though, all of that disappears as the words on the screen slowly register.

Ellen: Hey Leo, Hannah messaged last night to say she needed today off. That's all cool of course and for the record, we are happy for you guys to run this stuff past each other. No need to get our permission. Have a good day!

"What. The. Fuck?" I shout, suddenly feeling a lot more awake. "She fucking texted, Ellen?" I say to my empty loft. "What the hell?"

I flick back to her number, once again hitting redial as the ring tone sounds in my ear. Pushing up from the couch, I pace the large open plan living room as I wait for her to answer. Or her voicemail, anyway.

But the second her automated message kicks in, I stop, knowing I have no right to be angry with her for needing a day off.

For needing some time to deal with the fact that her boyfriend's father is the asshole chef who left her with no choice but to walk out without any notice because she was so fucking unhappy in her job.

I hang up without leaving a message, wondering how the hell I am supposed to fix this. How the hell I'm supposed to unfuck the fact that my girlfriend and my dad hate each other.

I have no fucking clue, because as much as I understand what happened between them, I also know it's an impossible situation, trying to take sides. I don't want to be forced to choose, because deep down, I know exactly whose side I'll be on.

And I hate what that says about me.

That I'll choose my girlfriend over my father, because she is everything to me.

And because I can totally understand why she did what she did when she quit working for him.

My dad does have a reputation for being an asshole. And yeah, while I can try to pretend that the only reason I changed my name was because I wanted to make a name for myself without riding on his coattails, I'd be lying if I didn't also admit that the way he runs his kitchen was a part of it.

It's why I've never been able to work for him.

God knows how my mom ever did and fuck, they ended up married with three kids. But I could never do it and as much as it probably makes me an asshole too, I fully understand why Hannah told him to get fucked and walked out.

It's probably what I would have done if I was in her situation.

"Shit," I exhale, as I head into the bedroom to take a shower, knowing that as much as I wish I could blow today off and go and see Hannah, I can't. We have a function booked for lunch and with Hannah now out, there's no way I can bail too.

I strip off my clothes, leaving them on the bedroom floor as I walk into the bathroom, my phone still in my hand, just in case.

When I step into the bathroom though, I'm hit with a million reminders of the woman who, for all intents and purposes, practically lives here.

But whose absence I am feeling everywhere.

Her toothbrush, that sits in the cup with mine. Her hairbrush on the counter and the second towel that now permanently hangs beside mine.

Fucking hell, I miss her. I miss her so bad and it's only been a day.

Reaching in to turn on the water, I stare at my phone as I wait for the shower to heat up. Just before I step into the stall, I type out one last text to her.

One last text that I hope tells her I understand. That I get it and that I'm not going anywhere. No matter what.

Me: Hannah, I need you to know something and I need you to believe me when I say this.

I get it. I get why you quit and I get why you did it the way you did.

He IS an asshole in the kitchen. It's why I can't work for him either.

It's partly why I don't use his name too.

I wish I'd told you who he was earlier so we could have avoided all this.

I can't change that he's my dad, but I can promise you that I will do everything I can to make this right.

I love you, Hannah. You are everything to me and I'm not giving up on us. I love

you.

I hit send, waiting till the message goes through, before I leave my phone on the counter and step into the shower, hoping to fuck that when I step back out, I've figured out how the hell I can fix this.

## Page 31

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

Leo's text message has me in tears again.

I just can't see a way to get past this even if Leo says he understands what happened and why.

How am I supposed to face his father on a semi-regular basis and not have him hold what happened against me?

How am I supposed to look at him as anything but the man who basically killed my self-esteem?

He could one day end up being my father-in-law, and I'm not sure I could live with that.

Based on the way he behaves at work, I can't see him apologizing to me.

Fuck knows I owe him an apology for the way I quit, but I refuse to cave to him if he can't see his place in all of this.

"I gotta go home," I tell Dylan after I've finally pulled myself out of bed.

"You gonna talk to Leo?" he asks, opening the fridge and pulling out a few things. "I'm going to cook dinner for Tess and me. You want to stay and then go face the music?"

I sit down at the island and let out a hard sigh.

Dylan's offer is really appealing right now.

As soon as I get home, Leo will be all over me.

There will be no avoiding him once he sees my car.

I used to think it was awesome how close we lived to each other and how we are so secluded.

Now it feels like a total fucking nightmare.

"What are you making?" I ask, stalling for time, trying to figure out if avoiding having this conversation with Leo can wait another couple of hours.

More than likely, Leo is at work, busting his ass since I called in sick.

Going home now feels like I'm setting myself up to find Leo exhausted by work, angry that I left him high and dry, and still stressing about me running off.

"I'm not sure. Everything gives Tess heartburn now. Got any ideas?" He smiles at me, using this as an opportunity to distract me from my own thoughts. He knows I can't turn down planning and cooking a meal.

"Cheesy mushroom and parsley risotto," I reply off the top of my head, but thinking there's no way he has the ingredients lying around.

He holds up one finger smiling at me as he stuffs the random things he pulled out back into the fridge. "Fresh parsley?" he questions, and I can't even believe he has to ask. There is no way I'm using dried parsley, especially since fresh parsley helps

digestion.

“Dylan?” I shame, rolling my eyes, and he laughs.

“Got it. I’m going to run down to the store and be back in a few minutes.”

“You want a list?” I ask, knowing he’s going to show back up here with a bag of shredded cheese and some white mushrooms. The only thing he’ll get right is the parsley unless he happens upon flat leaf and curly leaf.

“Yes, you want a list,” I add, not bothering to wait for him to reply.

“Ricotta cheese, cremini mushrooms, peas, flat leaf parsley...”

“And risotto,” Dylan says cutting in and I can’t help but laugh at him. He isn’t a slouch in the kitchen and generally he can follow a recipe pretty well, but when your sister is a chef, it’s kind of hard to show her up.

“If you find risotto labeled as that at the store, it’s more than likely going to be a pre-made thing that has nothing on what I’m about to make.”

“Okay, you don’t have to rub it in that you’re fucking amazing. I know, which is why I asked you to cook dinner tonight,” Dylan chides back, smirking at me.

“I’m not sure that’s how it went down. I’m pretty sure you asked me to stay for dinner because you were cooking and somehow, I got conned into doing the cooking.”

He steps toward me, pulling me in for a hug, letting out a hard sigh when I relax against him.

It hits me now what he was doing and while it was a backhanded way of getting me out of this funk for a bit, I'm grateful.

I need to focus on something else other than this disaster that is still playing out with Leo and his dad.

"Thank you," I say, resting my head on Dylan's shoulder.

"No problem, sis. Now what else do I need to get?"

"Arborio rice, ginger ale and a pint of all-natural vanilla ice cream."

He pulls back, hitting me with a funny look as if he's questioning my grocery store requests. It is an odd order, but it's not all going into the risotto.

"The ginger ale and the ice cream are for Tessa. They'll help with the heartburn, but I'm hoping my risotto does the trick." I wink at him, as he pulls out his phone and begins to make a list.

"I'll be back soon. Tessa should be home in an hour or so, as long as she doesn't get caught up obsessing over something with the restaurant," Dylan jokes. "She's going to be excited that you're still here. She's going to talk your ear off about all the things you want for your kitchen."

And just as I'm about to get excited about the prospect of designing my dream kitchen over dinner with Dylan and Tessa, I'm hit with the realization that I might not be working at Somerville's much longer.

If things between Leo and I don't get resolved, I can't see him wanting to work so closely with me.

I try to hold it together, biting down on my cheek to keep myself from crying and waiting until Dylan walks out the door. He doesn't need me blubbering to him all over again now that he found a way to get my mind off all the craziness.

As soon as the door closes, I'm crying again. I have to figure out a way to fix this.

A few hours later, we're sitting down to dinner, the risotto is made and the wine is poured, while Tessa has a glass of ginger ale that Dylan picked up for her.

"Thank you so much for making dinner," Tessa gushes. "I'm starving. Well, I'm always starving." She takes a large forkful of the risotto, moaning when it touches her lips.

This is seriously what I live for as a chef.

Watching or in this case, hearing how much someone enjoys something I made, makes it all worthwhile.

I just hope I can continue doing what I love at Somerville's.

I've never been more excited about a menu that I've designed as I am about the one Ellen and I discussed just recently.

"I'm glad you're enjoying it. Dylan told me your heartburn has been really bad. Low fat cheese, carbs, and parsley should help and if not, there's a pint of vanilla ice cream in the fridge for you."

"You're the best, Hannah. Thank you," Tessa replies, and the table falls silent. The stillness floats between all of us, basically screaming out the question both Dylan and Tessa have been wanting to ask.

Instead of letting this awkward silence play out any longer, I say, “No, I haven’t talked to Leo, but I’m going home after we finish eating.”

“Are you going to talk to him?” Dylan asks, basically putting it out there for me to say it out loud that I will probably continue to avoid it all.

Hiding out here at Dylan and Tessa’s hasn’t been that bad. Their guest bedroom and bathroom are much nicer than what I have with that giant soaking tub. Maybe I could stay just one more day.

“Han?” Dylan says, prodding when I don’t answer him right away.

“I don’t want to. I could just stay here and be your personal chef and then maybe your nanny after the baby comes?” I try, making both of them laugh a little.

“You don’t really like babies,” Dylan says, narrowing his eyes at me.

“I’m going to like your baby. I’m going to be the baby’s aunt.”

“You’re avoiding him. You’re avoiding it,” Dylan says, hitting the nail on the head. Of course I’m avoiding it. No one likes confrontation. I’m sure there’s people who do, but it’s certainly not me.

“Obviously,” I chide, rolling my eyes.

“It will be good to have it behind you no matter what the outcome,” Tessa says. “I’ve been here and I’m thinking Leo might surprise you.”

I don’t bother to tell them that his most recent text message basically says he doesn’t care what happened, and that he loves me, but I can’t seem to wrap my head around how we can fix this.

I said some horrible things to his dad, things I now regret in hindsight.

Had I known that I would one day fall in love with the son of the volatile Roy Langston, I certainly would not have quit the way I did.

But I couldn't possibly have known, and I was actually really proud of myself for the way I quit. At least at the time I was.

I stood up for myself, I had taken back my voice and I wasn't going to let anyone treat me the way he did, no matter how much I needed a job. It could have been done without all the swearing though.

"Yeah, I'm going. I'll help you clean up, and maybe have another glass of wine, then I'll leave," I say, making it a joke that I'm going to draw it out a little longer.

And here we are a few hours later with the sky now dark, and both Dylan and Tessa yawning on the couch.

I've cleaned the kitchen, put away all the dishes, cleaned the bathroom and changed the sheets on the bed I slept in.

This is comical given there are still boxes at my own house that need unpacking and I rarely put anything back when I take it out.

Case in point, the dildo Olivia found in my bathroom.

I look down at my watch, catching the time, and knowing that Dylan has to be up early tomorrow and I'm sure Tessa will head over to Somerville's with him. I've overstayed my welcome.

"Thank you for letting me stay," I say, both of them looking up at me from where

they are curled up on the couch.

“No problem,” Dylan replies.

“Of course. And thank you for making me a dinner that finally didn’t give me heartburn,” Tessa adds.

They both stand up to hug me goodbye and I know I can’t drag this out any longer. I thank them again and this time, I make my way out the door and down to my car.

When I start the car, my eyes catch the clock once again.

It’s after ten, and I know Leo will be wrapping up at Apple Jacks and heading home soon too.

I let it all play out in my head, trying to figure out how I can get to my house without Leo seeing my car and coming over to confront me for being a coward.

That’s really what this has come down to.

I’m afraid to face the reality of what could happen. There are too many what-ifs.

I start the car, driving toward Somerville’s but taking the long way and driving like an old lady on her way to church on Sunday.

Thirty-five minutes to get from Dylan’s house to my house must be some kind of record.

But the good news is, that it pushed me to almost eleven o’clock and I’m certain Leo is home and hopefully in bed sleeping.

I pull into the small driveway outside of my house, pulling up farther than normal in the hopes that my car is hidden by the house.

I'm not sure how long I think I can avoid him since I do have to work tomorrow.

We're going to see each other eventually.

I guess it would just be nice to do it away from the prying eyes of the staff.

If I would have come home earlier, I could have done that. I'm a fucking mess.

I sit in the car a few minutes longer, trying to figure out how to even start this conversation with Leo.

I don't want to come across like I'm defending myself, but I also don't want to cave and take responsibility for everything that has happened.

His father was horrible to me, and I won't admit fault when it comes to his treatment of me.

I finally exit the car, walking up to my house, hoping like hell I can sleep tonight. It's going to be a rough go, my brain is a fucked up mess of conversations that need to be had and worry. Right now, I could use a massive glass of wine and a Xanax.

I open the front door, the house is dark, but it smells like Leo, and I have to choke back the tears I feel sting my nose. There's this cinnamon and bourbon combo that will always be Leo's scent, all those hours spent in the kitchen.

I reach over and turn on the lamp that sits on a small table near the front door and when I do, I find Leo asleep on the couch in my living room.

He stirs a little, his arm covering his face when the light fills the room and again, I'm swallowing back the tears.

What is he doing here?

Seeing him at my house, his face tortured even in his sleep, and I know it's because of me. Because of all the hiding I've done, and the guilt eats at me. He deserves an explanation. He deserves an apology.

"Leo," I whisper, squatting down in front of him as I run my hand over his hair, my hand coming to rest on his cheek.

"Hannah?" he says, almost like he's questioning if it's real, wondering if it's really me standing here in front of him.

When my name falls from his lips, so do the tears. I can't hold back anymore. I've missed him so much and it's only been one day. I can't even begin to imagine what a lifetime without him would be like. Whatever I have to do to make this right, I will do it.

Leo

The relief I feel at seeing Hannah, at having her back with me, is almost overwhelming as I sit up and pull her into my lap. She's bawling now, the tears streaming down her cheeks as she sobs in my arms, her reaction breaking my heart.

I fucking hate that this is happening to us right now.

"Han, babe," I say softly, my arms wrapping tight around her as I pull her close and she buries her face in my neck. "Shhh, it's going to be okay, I promise."

She shakes her head, still not saying anything as she continues to cry. I have no idea what to say, what words I can possibly say to make her feel better in this moment. So I do the only thing I can, I sit back on the couch and hold her as she cries in my arms.

Eventually she pulls back, sniffing as I brush my thumbs across her cheeks, wiping away the last of her tears before leaning in to press a soft kiss to her lips.

"You okay?" I ask, knowing it's a ridiculous question.

Hannah shakes her head, finally lifting her eyes to mine and nearly breaking my heart all over again with the anguish that fills them. "I'm sorry," she whispers, biting her bottom lip. "So sorry."

I crush her to me again, her head tucked under my chin. "You don't have to apologize, Hannah, I get it. I really do."

She's shaking her head again. "No, you don't get it," she sobs. "It was awful, Leo. Fucking awful."

Easing her back, I cup her face in my hands, forcing her to look at me. "I do get it, babe," I tell her. "Why do you think I don't work with him? Why do you think I changed my last name?"

It's the first time I've actually said these words out loud to anyone, not wanting to admit that as much as I love my dad, I could never work with him. I never wanted to skew anyone else's view of him either, never bad mouthing him to anyone or listening to the gossip I've heard.

But obviously here, everything is different and maybe if I'd known he was her former boss, I would have been more honest from the start.

Hannah blinks at me, a couple more tears falling from her eyes that I brush away. "Why is your last name Marsh?" she asks.

I give her a small smile. "It's my middle name," I admit. "Legally, my last name is still Langston, but yeah, I use Marsh for work reasons. It should actually be Marshall."

"Marshall?" she asks, confused.

Chuckling a little, I shake my head. "Yeah, my real middle name is Marshall. Remember I told you my mom named me after her favorite movie star?" I pause as Hannah nods. "Yeah well, my dad gave me the middle name after his favorite rapper."

"What?" Hannah blurts out.

I roll my eyes, brushing my thumbs across her cheeks again. “Marshall Mathers, Eminem? My dad thinks he’s all gangster and shit.”

Hannah’s eyes widen a little as she shakes her head. “Wow, that’s not...not what I would have expected.”

“Yeah, it’s a bit ridiculous to be honest, but that’s my dad,” I add with a shrug.

Hannah nods, glancing away from me now. Needing to figure this out, to let her know that we can get through this, I tip her face up to mine, brushing a gentle kiss against her lips before whispering, “If we just talk to him, we can make things right. I promise it’s not as bad as you think.”

Hannah lets out a long breath, shaking her head before I’ve even finished speaking. “It’s not just bad, Leo, it’s humiliating!” she shouts. “He was awful to me and I...well, I wasn’t exactly diplomatic when I left either.”

I can’t help but laugh, remembering the story my dad told me, even as Hannah hits me with a hard look. “Babe, I know about the double bird and the fuck you,” I say, smiling. “And just for the record, I think it’s awesome. Word is your resignation is pretty legendary in his kitchen.”

Hannah groans. “All the more reason that this is never going to work,” she says.

“What?”

“This,” she repeats, moving her hand between us.

“What the hell are you talking about, Hannah?” I ask as a spike of fear lances through me. Her head falls and once again, I tip her face back so she’s looking at me. “Talk to me, babe,” I add softly.

She swallows hard, her eyes still filled with sadness as they search my face. “Think about it, Leo,” she whispers. “How could you and I possibly work together when your dad and I hate each other?”

“He doesn’t hate you,” I say, my heart pounding in my chest at just what she’s implying now. “We can talk to him. Tomorrow,” I add. “We can figure this out, Hannah, I promise.”

“And what,” she continues. “At Christmas or Thanksgiving, he and I just act like that whole me working for him, him being awful, and me quitting in an epic rage never happened?”

I suck in a deep breath, letting it out slowly as I seriously wonder if Hannah is legit thinking about ending things with me because of my dad. “I don’t know, okay,” I eventually admit. “But that’s why we have to talk to him.”

“He’s your dad, Leo,” she says, shaking her head again. “You love him, you’re never—”

“I love you too, Hannah,” I say, cutting her off. “I’m not giving you up, you know. Not giving up on us.”

Hannah’s eyes close as her body deflates a little. “Look, it’s late, you should probably go. We both have to work tomorrow.”

“I’m not fucking going anywhere,” I say, standing from the couch, holding her against me. “The sooner you understand that, the better. So yeah, we are gonna go to bed and tomorrow we’re going to make things right. Talk to my dad, so we can go back to doing what we do best.”

Hannah’s head falls against my shoulder, but she doesn’t say anything or

acknowledge my words. But she also doesn't ask me to leave again, which I take as a good sign as I walk us into her bedroom where we both wordlessly undress before crawling into bed.

I feel physically and emotionally exhausted as I pull her close, wrapping my arms around her as she rests her head on my shoulder.

"I love you," I whisper, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

She lets out a soft sigh and I expect her to just fall asleep, but instead, she moves so she's hovering over me, her hand on my face and her lips against mine as she kisses me hungrily.

I kiss her back, desperate to reconnect with her, to prove that what we have is everything to me and there's not a chance in hell I'm giving it up.

Hannah groans and I roll her beneath me, my hand tracing a path down her body to her knee, hitching it around my hip as I push into her, moaning at the reconnection, at how good it feels.

"Fuck, I've missed you," I whisper, my lips against hers as start to move.

Hannah's hands cup my face, her eyes open as she watches me, not saying anything, her stare focused and intense. And it's in that moment that I realize what she's doing.

I stop moving, resisting the urge to continue, even as she digs her heel into my ass. "Don't," I command, my eyes locked with hers.

"Leo, please," she pleads, her hands tightening against my jaw.

I shake my head. "No," I tell her. "You don't get to do this."

“Do what?” she breathes out, frustrated.

“Fuck me like it’s the last time,” I say, my jaw clenched.

“This isn’t goodbye, Hannah,” I tell her, before making the monumental effort of pulling out and rolling off her.

I flop onto the bed beside her, a huff falling from my mouth as I stare up at the ceiling.

I can literally feel the stink eye my dick is currently giving me at what I’ve just done.

“Leo, seriously?” she asks, a bite to her words. “Did you just stop having sex with me in the middle of having sex with me?”

“Yep,” I reply, still not looking at her.

“Why?”

I turn to face her, pissed that she is asking me this, that she seriously thinks I didn’t notice what the fuck was going on just then. “Because, Hannah,” I reply, my words measured. “I’m not doing this with you.”

“Doing what?”

My hand slams down on the mattress beside me before curling into a fist. “I’m not fucking my girlfriend like it’s the last time I’ve ever going to fuck her because she’s planning to walk away from this amazing thing we have going on right now!

” My words are loud in the silence of her bedroom and I swear just the idea that that’s what she was doing is enough to have my hard-on disappear in an instant.

“I wasn’t,” she eventually says, biting her bottom lip as she stares down at me.

“You sure about that?” I ask.

She nods, her eyes never leaving mine. “Yes, Leo, I’m sure.”

We stare at each other for a few minutes, neither of us saying anything as our eyes search each other, desperate to know what each of us is thinking. Eventually, Hannah falls back onto the bed so she’s lying beside me, a foot of space between us as she stares up at the ceiling.

I fucking hate this distance that’s suddenly between us. Hate that we can’t fix this situation. Hate that I doubt whether she still wants this with me.

The silence in the room feels deafening, even as my heart pounds in my chest at the thought of losing her. Just when I can’t possibly stand it for another second, I hear her whisper my name. I feel her hand as it slides over mine, our fingers threading together.

“Fuck, Hannah,” I breathe out, rolling over so my body is covering hers.

She whimpers, her arms wrapping around me as she widens her legs and I fall between them, pushing back inside her in one hard thrust. This time neither of us closes our eyes, neither of us looking away as I fuck her hard.

Fuck her deep.

Fuck her in a way that reminds her with every thrust that she is everything to me and I am not giving her up without a fight.

I feel her nails as they dig into my skin, her fingers clinging to me as though to pull

me closer. I drive into her, over and over, pushing us both closer and closer to the edge until finally she tenses around me, her whole body contorting as she comes hard and I follow quickly behind her.

Collapsing onto her, I can feel the hard beat of her heart in her chest, pounding against mine. Her body is hot, covered in a sheen of sweat as she lies beneath me, the two of us wrapped so tightly together, I don't even know where I end and she begins.

I bury my face in the crook of her neck, my lips pressed to her skin as I inhale deeply, my eyes closed. Hannah's grip loosens as she moves her fingers slowly up and down my back. I roll onto my side, taking her with me as my lips find hers and I kiss her deeply.

"I love you," I whisper, pulling her closer as we both close our eyes and fall asleep.

When I wake the next morning, it feels late. God knows what time it was when we finally fell asleep last night and even though nothing was resolved, I hope that what we did, plus the new day means we can finally start to try and figure this all out.

When I roll over though, my hope quickly disappears as I find the bed empty beside me, the sheets cold and the house silent.

"Han?" I call, even though deep down, I know she's not here.

Grabbing my phone from the nightstand, I see it's almost ten. Scrubbing a hand down my face, I stand and pull on my briefs before wandering out to the kitchen, hopeful that she is here and maybe she just didn't hear me call out.

But the house is empty and when I glance out the front window, I see her car is also gone.

“Fuck,” I mutter, walking back to the bedroom to grab my phone.

I hit redial on her number but it goes straight to voicemail.

Taking a quick breath as I try to calm myself down so I don’t totally lose it with this message, I exhale before speaking.

“Han, babe, just calling to see where you’re at.

I just woke up and you’re...well you’re not here, so yeah. Anyway, call me, okay? Love you.”

I hang up, hitting the bathroom for a piss before I wander back out to the kitchen. I put on some coffee, knowing I’m definitely going to need it today on account of the past forty-eight hours, before I collapse into one of the kitchen chairs as I wait for it to brew.

And that’s when I see it.

The note on the table that’s addressed to me.

Dear Leo,

I know you said we could work this out and I so badly want to believe you that we can, but I just don’t see how. Everything is a mess and a lot of it is my fault, but not everything and I’m not sure how we’re ever supposed to get past that.

Please know that I love you. So fucking much. I wish all of this could be different.

I’ve got to take care of some things, but I’ll be back for my shift tonight.

Love Hannah.

I re-read it several more times, trying to make sense of her words and what they might mean. But I have no fucking clue. I have absolutely no idea if this means she's ending things with me or what the hell she could be taking care of that she'd just disappear like she has.

I try calling her again, but just like before, it goes straight to voicemail and this time, I don't bother leaving a message.

Slumping back in my chair, I let out a long breath.

Fuck.

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Hannah

I pull into the familiar parking garage, my heart kicking up a few notches at the idea of being here.

It's not just because of what happened when I was last here, but more because of what I'm about to do.

It's certainly not something I thought I would ever be doing, but seeing Leo asleep on my couch, waking up next to him in my bed this morning, made me realize, he's worth the risk.

Parking the car, my head falls back against the headrest, letting out a slow breath, attempting to convince myself I'm doing the right thing. In all honesty I could be making things so much worse. I have no idea, but I have to try.

I take the elevator out of the garage, stepping out onto the street where I'm hit with the busyness that comes from a city as large as San Francisco.

I'd like to say I miss the hustle and bustle, but I don't.

I love the quiet stillness of the Somerville vineyards and my house that is basically in the middle of nowhere.

A horn blows and a cab whips by sending a blast of air blowing back into my face.

I stand there on the sidewalk, taking a few small steps but returning to the place I

started.

I'm nervous, but more than that, I'm embarrassed.

I don't want to go in there looking like I'm coming to ask for forgiveness or that I'm cowering with my tail between my legs.

There has never been a time where I would say that quitting The Yellow Door was wrong.

Do I wish I would have done it differently?

Maybe, but even that I'm not certain about.

I've gone back and forth a million times over this whole thing and the only thing I'm certain about still is that I love Leo.

I'm here because of him. I'm here because I need to clear the air and figure out if there's a way to resolve this animosity between Leo's dad and me.

I think if it's going to be hard for anyone, it's going to be me more than him.

He treated me like garbage and in the end, when I quit, he needed to hear that he was awful to work for.

Maybe no one has ever stood up to him the way I did.

I certainly didn't give it a chance to play out there in Leo's kitchen when I was supposed to be meeting his parents for the first time.

Seeing his father's face staring at me, the recognition hitting me almost immediately

and his complete lack of response basically saying everything I needed it to.

Neither of us thought we'd see each other again, so there was no plan to talk it through when we did.

I finally make my way down the sidewalk, stopping in front of the noticeable yellow door, a signature of the restaurant and its namesake. It's still early, but I know Roy will be inside, quietly sitting behind his desk, waiting for his employees to arrive so he can be the tyrant that he is.

I take the alleyway to the backdoor, the employee entrance, and I press the buzzer, waiting for someone to answer. A second later, Roy's voice comes through the speaker.

"Can I help you?" he asks, tersely. He can see me on the camera that is connected to the buzzer.

He knows who it is, and it feels really fucking manipulative.

Or maybe it's me going into this with a preconceived idea of who Roy Langston is.

I need to get myself under control or this will begin as one big argument and that's not what I'm here for.

"Hi Roy. I was wondering if I could speak to you?" I say, and then there's silence. No response from him, no click of the door to let me in.

Great. He's just going to fucking ignore me. Seems about right for how everything has gone up until this point.

I close my eyes and let out a long, slow breath, willing myself to have the patience to

push that buzzer again and basically beg Roy to let me in. I'm doing this for Leo.

Seconds later, the door opens, and Roy is standing there, looking right at me. He steps back, holding the door open for me as an invitation to enter.

"Hannah," he says as I walk through the door.

"At least you got my name right," I bite back, hating that I can't seem to control my anger when I'm in this man's presence.

"You could have corrected me," he replies back, his tone icy, his anger slipping through.

"I did, but it never seemed to matter."

"Did you come here to argue with me?" he asks, walking toward his office, never looking back at me.

"No, but I'm still mad, and rightfully so." It's hard to control the anger I have toward him, and I had no idea that seeing him alone in this place would bring back all the awful memories I have of this job and of working for him.

"You're mad? Imagine my surprise when I meet my son's girlfriend and she's the one who left me high and dry," Roy says, practically slapping me in the face with his words.

"Maybe if you had known my name was Hannah and not Anna you would have put two and two together, but you were—" I cut myself off, not needing this to turn into an argument, even if it already has. I can see that we're getting nowhere with this route.

I swallow hard, letting the tension-filled silence float around us for a few seconds, waiting to see if he has anything to say before I attempt this again.

But neither of us speaks, we're at a standstill, which feels a little ridiculous since he is older than me.

I guess the older, the wiser, isn't always true.

You'd think if his relationship with his son meant anything to him, he'd at least be attempting to smooth things over with me. But it's me who showed up here, bound and determined to make this right.

"I'm sorry, I'm going to start over," I now say, taking in another soothing breath. "I'm here because I love Leo and he is important to me. I can't see us moving forward knowing that his father and I are not on speaking terms."

"I'm glad you're here to apologize," Roy replies, a bit of smugness in his tone. I bite down hard on my cheek to keep myself from lashing back.

"I didn't say I was here to apologize. I won't apologize for what happened when I quit. I firmly stand by my choice and my choice of words."

Roy scoffs, shaking his head as he runs a hand through his hair. "My children don't speak to me like that, what makes you think I will accept it from my son's girlfriend?"

"I would also guess you don't speak to your children the way you speak to your employees, because if you did, you wouldn't have a relationship with them."

My words must have struck a chord because he doesn't come back at me with some snide comment.

My hands are shaking, and I swear to god, I'm going to need to throw this shirt out when I'm done here.

My pits are sweating like there's a faucet under my arms. But I won't back down from this.

I want him to understand that while I love Leo, I won't tolerate being looked down upon, which is exactly what is happening right now.

"There are enough volatile chefs in this business, enough men like you who think that ruling with an iron fist is the way to get your employees to work harder. The rules have changed in the last few years and people's tolerance for being treated like shit is gone."

I pause, hoping I'm getting through to him. He wouldn't have hired me if he didn't think I had the talent, so I know underneath all this harshness, there is someone who understands what it means to be a good chef.

"This isn't a TV show, Roy. You aren't here to bring in ratings and make a name for yourself as the asshole chef. That role is taken. Your restaurant is world famous, but the rumors that follow you are outshining your talent."

Again, there's silence and I'm beginning to wonder if I'm getting through to him.

Is he taking any of this in or is he hell bent on ignoring me and letting it all go in one ear and out the other?

I don't want to keep talking. I'm looking for an open discussion so that we can clear the air.

Then when one day, when we meet up for Christmas dinner or whatever, there isn't a

tension blanketing the room.

I would never expect Leo to choose me or his family. I want us to grow together.

“Why do you think Leo doesn’t work for me?” Roy now asks, his question catching me off guard. My eyebrows go up in response. Does he really think this needs an answer?

“I would guess because you’re a bit of a tyrant and Leo is anything but,” I reply, hoping it doesn’t sound too harsh, but in a way hoping it does. It’s starting to feel like Roy Langston needs someone to say it to his face.

Roy laughs, a soft chuckle falling from his lips, and I’m almost knocked on my ass by the sound of it. I’ve never heard it before. I don’t think I’ve ever even seen him smile.

“He didn’t say that in so many words, and when he told me he wanted to be a chef, I wasn’t sure I wanted him to work for me either.”

“I’m guessing he was a little nicer about it because that’s Leo’s nature,” I say, thinking about his selflessness and his kindness. It’s what drew me to him from the start.

“He was, but what you and Leo don’t understand is that back when I started in this business, you had to be cutthroat to survive, especially when it comes to the restaurant business.

” He’s defending himself and I understand that.

He has built this massive career and wide success using this method, why would he change now?

I'm not asking him to change. I'm asking for him to allow us to move beyond our past and create a future that doesn't involve what happened between us. I can only hope he isn't so set in his ways that he continues to hold it against me.

"I do understand, but you also need to understand that there are some people who don't thrive in that environment.

Some people even begin to break down when treated like that.

In case you're wondering, some people is me.

"I shrug, hoping some humor helps move this along.

"I'm a damn good chef, but when I left here, I felt like shit.

Not only about myself but about my ability in the kitchen.

That's something I never thought I would ever second-guess. "

"You are talented, Hannah," he admits, and my mouth falls open.

"Then why did you drive me away?"

"I don't know. That was the way I was trained, and I don't know any different. It has worked for me for the last thirty years. It has helped me grow several successful restaurants."

"You can't tell me that I'm the first person to quit and tell you that your methods, well, suck?" He doesn't reply, chewing on his lip as he mulls over what I've said.

"I don't remember anyone quitting like you did," he finally replies, making me laugh.

“Of course no one quit like me,” I joke, remembering my epic rant.

It feels like the tension between us is easing, and there have been no apologies passed around, which I’m happy about.

I don’t think either of us are wrong in our methods and my intent when I showed up here wasn’t to make him apologize.

It was to move beyond what happened and recognize that we can have a relationship that doesn’t include our past.

“I’m not the same guy who runs this kitchen as I am with my family,” Roy quietly adds. “I love my children and my wife, and I like the separation of my job and my personal life.”

I’m not sure where he’s going with this, but I hope it’s heading in the direction that I’m no longer included in his work life. That I’ll now be part of his personal life and that he understands how important Leo is to me.

“Don’t we all. Most people can’t make the two work, but Leo and I have found the perfect balance. I honestly love working with him and coming home and having him be there too.” I pause, hesitant to share my feelings. “I love Leo and I don’t want to lose him over this.”

I can’t hold it in any longer. It’s why I came here. I came here to save my relationship with Leo, and I came here to make sure his father sees that that’s what is important to me.

“And Leo needs you, Hannah. I’ve never seen him so happy,” Roy says, catching me off guard. “He hasn’t stopped talking about you and this,” he motions between us, “hit him hard. I’ve always wanted what is best for my kids and you’re what is best for

Leo.”

He reaches out a hand toward me, extending a truce and I take it. Shaking his hand, we both smile at each other.

“Thank you for hearing me out,” I say, grateful that we were able to overcome this. I may have been nervous and worried for no reason, but at the time, it felt like a huge issue. It felt like my life was on hold and that all the happiness I found was nearly lost.

“Thank you for making me see that my children’s happiness needs to be bigger than my ego.” Roy’s smile is huge now, and I catch a glimpse of Leo in his face. If this man raised Leo, then there has to be some good in him too.

“We good?”

“We’re good, Hannah. Now please go home and tell Leo things are good. I can’t take another phone call with him crying about missing you,”

“Wait, he’s been crying?”

“Maybe I wasn’t supposed to tell you that,” Roy replies, sheepishly, shrugging and making us laugh.

“Don’t worry, your secret is safe with me.”

## Page 34

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 10:16 am*

Leo

I'm sitting in my office waiting.

Waiting for Hannah to show up at work. Waiting for her to answer her phone.

Waiting for her to tell me what the fuck that damn note she left on the table meant.

I've lost count of how many times I've read it, but it doesn't matter, because I still can't make sense of her words or what the hell they mean.

She said she'd be back in time for work though, and I really want to believe her, but the more time that passes, the more I'm starting to wonder...and worry.

Where the fuck is she?

"Leo, you want me to prep the beef shin?" Tony asks.

I glance up and see him standing in the doorway, an expectant look on his face as he asks me about one of our signature dishes that's been slow cooking for the past six hours.

It's always a best seller and it's the one dish I always take responsibility for.

Not because I don't trust my staff to handle it, it's just something I've always done.

"Yeah, sure, thanks," I reply, giving him a quick nod before looking away again.

“Ah, okay great, no worries,” he says, rapping on the door frame, even though I know he’s surprised at my delegation. “Also, someone is here for you,” he adds, giving me a wink when I look back up to find Hannah now standing behind him.

I jump out of my chair, halfway to the door when she steps inside, a small smile on her face. “Hi.”

“Hi?” I question. “Hi? What? Where have you been? Why weren’t you answering your phone and what the hell was that note about? I thought we—”

The rest of my questions are cut off when Hannah closes the distance between us, presses up on her toes and kisses me hard, her arms wrapping around my neck and pulling me closer.

Groaning with relief, I slip mine around her waist, pulling her in so her body is flush with mine, not caring about answers now because her kiss is only the answer I need.

She smiles against my mouth, her hand curling around my neck. “I’m sorry I disappeared,” she whispers.

I pull back so I can see her, my hands slipping under her chef’s jacket, holding her close. “Where did you go?”

Hannah’s beautiful green eyes search my face, a small smile tugging at her mouth as she says, “I went to see your dad.”

My jaw drops. “What?”

“I went to see your dad,” she repeats.

“Why?” I stupidly ask, even though this is exactly what I wanted her to do. “I

would've come with you. I thought we—”

She presses another kiss to my lips, silencing my words again. “I know you would have, but this was between him and me. I needed to go and see him alone.”

“And?” I prompt, my heart now pounding in my chest. “How'd it go?”

Hannah tips her head from side to side a little, still smiling.

“Okay, I think. I mean, we both said our bit and even though we will have to agree to disagree on how to run a kitchen, the one thing we did both agree on was that we could and should move past it. At the end of the day, we both love you, and neither of us wants to risk hurting you just because we couldn't work together.

Or we can't put what happened behind us. ”

I swallow hard, so fucking relieved that after everything, this might actually all be okay.

I mean I always believed my dad would be able to move past this, because as much as he's an asshole in the kitchen, I have never doubted his love as a father.

But I didn't know if Hannah would ever really be okay.

And I also didn't blame her if she wasn't either, not after I know what she went through with him.

“And you're okay with it?” I ask. “With how everything went down?”

Hannah nods. “I'm okay with it,” she says.

“In fact, I’m more than okay. I know your dad loves you and I know he only wants what’s best for his family and his restaurant and even though I don’t agree with his methods on the restaurant side of things, I’m not going to lose the best thing that’s ever happened to me just because I couldn’t work with Roy. ”

“Fuck, I love you,” I say, kissing her hard as I walk us backward, slamming my office door shut as I back her up against it, my heart beating hard inside my chest as the weight I’ve been carrying all day finally lifts.

“What are you doing?” Hannah asks, a breathy laugh falling from her lips.

“I’m kissing the shit out of you and probably fucking you right here in my office,” I tell her, my mouth on her neck now as I lick and suck her skin. “Kinda prefer if the whole kitchen didn’t witness it.”

Hannah laughs again, her arms draped around my neck. “As good as that sounds,” she says, tilting her head as I kiss a path up her neck, “we do need to get to work.”

“Fuck work,” I growl, kissing my way to her lips. “I need you. Now.”

She places a finger against my lips, her eyes locking with mine. “You’ve got me, Leo, I promise. I’m sorry about how all this happened, about everything, but I’m not going anywhere. I promise.”

Her words are like a balm for my soul, my heart, my everything and I want to scream to the world how much I love this woman. How much she means to me. Instead, I blurt out the words I’ve wanted to say to her ever since I told her that I loved her.

“Move in with me.”

“What?”

“Move in with me.”

“Leo, are you—”

“Move. In. With. Me,” I repeat, emphasizing every word. “I love you, Han and I want you in my life, in my house, in my bed, always. Say yes, Hannah, please say—”

“Yes,” she says, a huge smile on her face now.

“Yes?” I repeat.

Laughing, she leans in and kisses me again. “Yes, I’ll move in with you, Leo.”

“Fuck,” I groan, kissing her again, deeper this time. “Screw work, let’s just go home now.”

Hannah laughs again. “We can’t just ditch work.”

“Yeah, we can,” I say, my mouth on her neck again. “I’m the fucking boss. We can do whatever we want.”

She pulls her arms from around my neck, her hands cupping my face as she looks up at me. “I love you. Yes, I’ll move in with you, but no, we cannot ditch work.”

I narrow my eyes at her, which only makes her laugh again and as much I do want to take her home and fuck her senseless, I also know she’s right. We can’t just walk out of here, the restaurant is fully booked tonight.

“Okay, fine,” I concede, letting out a dramatic sigh. “We’ll stay and work, but I swear, the second the kitchen is clear, we’re going home, no staff drinks.”

“You’re being awfully bossy and impatient tonight,” she whispers, brushing her lips against mine.

I nip her bottom lip. “That’s because I need to fuck you. Now.”

Hannah gives me a sexy as hell smile as one hand falls from my face and I hear the click of the door locking. “Think you can be quick?”

I raise a brow that only makes her laugh again. “You think I want to be?”

“No,” she says, chuckling as she shakes her head. “But we’ve literally got five minutes.”

I groan, dropping my head so my forehead rests against hers. “Not nearly enough,” I tell her. “But if that’s all you’re gonna give me right now...”

“It is,” she whispers. “For now...”

“Fuck,” I murmur, my hands moving to her pants. “I really fucking love you.”

A few weeks later, Hannah and I walk down the stairs of my loft, well our loft now that we are living here together.

I literally packed up her stuff and moved her in the morning after I asked her, and even though it’s been a few weeks now, a lot of her boxes are still sitting unpacked around the place.

It’s not a huge place and it’s literally next door to where we work, but fuck I love having her live with me.

One day maybe we’ll get something bigger or ask Tessa to design us a place to build

somewhere, but for now, neither of us cares too much about the limited space.

As long as we have a kitchen and a bedroom, we're good.

"You nervous?" I ask, squeezing her hand as we make our way over to Somerville's.

She looks up at me, a smile on her face. "A little," she admits. "But I'm also excited."

I tug her closer, throwing my arm around her shoulder as I drop a kiss to the top of her head. "It's going to be amazing, babe. Your menu is excellent, and you've got this in the kitchen."

She nods. "I'm going to miss cooking with you, though," she adds, elbowing me in the side.

Chuckling, I give her another kiss. "Me too, but we still can from time to time."

"As long as you remember when it's at Somerville's, I'm the boss," she says, a teasing tone to her voice.

Stopping outside the staff entrance to the restaurant, I wrap my arms around her and pull her close. "Babe, you should know, you're always the boss."

"Pretty sure you were the one being bossy last night," she whispers, her hand slipping down to squeeze my ass.

Grinning, I lean down to kiss her. "I love you," I murmur against her lips. "You've got this tonight, okay? It's going to be perfect."

"Yep," she says, giving me a nod.

At eight o'clock, I head into my office to change before making my way back over to Somerville's. Everyone is already seated at the table we've reserved, and I slip into the last remaining seat next to Dylan.

"You seen her yet?" I ask after saying hello to everyone, knowing that Hannah has no clue we've all come in for dinner tonight.

"Nope," Dylan says, shaking his head as he drops an arm around the back of Tessa's chair, his parents, who I've now met on the other side of her. "We told Michelle not to tell her we were all here," he says, tipping his head in the direction of the head server.

"Good," I reply with a nod.

It's not that any of us want to keep this a secret, it's more that none of us wants to make her nervous or have her thinking about the fact we are all out here eating on the opening night of Somerville's. The night she starts as head chef in her own restaurant.

"Hey, Leo," Michelle says as she walks over. "You guys ready to order?"

I give a nod, as Jack tells Michelle which wines to bring to the table while I scan the menu quickly, even though I already know everything that's on it and what I'm going to order for everyone.

We spend the next couple of hours enjoying the food, everyone gushing at how amazing everything looks and tastes and how great the menu that Hannah has put together is.

I feel so unbelievably happy and proud of her and when we finally finish our desserts, I ask Michelle if she could please go and get Hannah for us.

I keep an eye on the kitchen doors, waiting for the moment when she walks through and the second she does, I stand from my chair.

Hannah's eyes widen when she sees me, her mouth falling open as her eyes scan the table, taking in Dylan and Tessa, her parents, Tommy and Penny, Will and Ellen, and of course Jack and Lauren.

Tipping my head, I watch as she slowly walks over to us. "What...what are you doing here?" she whispers as she stops in front of me.

Grinning, I reach over and curl my hand around the back of her neck, pulling her to me. "You really think I was going to miss this?" I ask, before kissing her right in the middle of the restaurant in front of everyone. "I'm so fucking proud of you, Han. Everything was beyond perfect."

Hannah's eyes shine with happiness as she looks up at me, taking in my words. I hold her close, kissing her again as Lauren also stands from her chair.

"Thank you, Hannah," she says, smiling. "This is more than I could have ever hoped for. Everything was delicious and the whole restaurant is perfect."

Jack stands too, his arm around his wife.

"I agree," he says, grinning. "Think you probably give this guy a run for his money, too," he adds with a wink.

"Although I cannot believe I didn't have a hand in this part or that I didn't win the pool.

" He waves a finger between the two of us, making Hannah and I laugh.

“No, Jack,” I tell him, as I pull Hannah close and press a kiss to her temple. “This part is all us.”

He grins as he gives us both a thumbs up before he and Lauren sit back down. Everyone else offers their congratulations, Dylan and Tessa and her parents all coming over to give Hannah their congratulations and a hug.

“There’s someone else who’s impressed,” I whisper, my mouth at her ear as I finally turn her around to the two people sitting behind me.

The second Hannah sees my parents, her smile vanishes, her jaw dropping in genuine surprise.

“Leo, shit,” she whispers, her arm around my waist squeezing tight.

It’s not the first time she’s seen them again since the whole thing in my kitchen and then her going to talk to my dad.

We’d all caught up for a meal in San Fran together a week ago.

Something casual to help smooth the path to Hannah and my dad getting used to seeing each other again.

It had gone well, and I know that both of them were relieved that after everything, they really were able to move past it.

Still, as much as I know she’s surprised by me being here in the restaurant tonight, seeing my dad here has truly knocked her on her ass.

Dad stands, making his way over to us, a warm smile on his face. “Hannah,” he says, reaching for her hand and holding it in both of his. “This meal, the food, all of it. It

was exceptional,” he says, his gaze locked with hers. “Truly exceptional.”

I watch as her eyes fill with tears, as she bites down on her bottom lip. I know she’s completely overwhelmed right now and trying really hard not to cry, but I also know I would not trade this moment for anything. This is everything she needed to hear.

Pressing a soft kiss to her temple, I say, “You know he’s never said that about my cooking. Ever.”

My dad’s brows lift, as he smiles at Hannah and gives a quick nod. “He’s right, I haven’t,” he says with a wink.

Hannah lets out a laugh, shaking her head a little as she says, “Thank you, Roy. You have no idea how much that means to me.”

Dad squeezes her hand before letting it go. “You are an incredibly talented chef, Hannah. Somerville’s is lucky to have you,” he says, giving her another smile before moving back to his chair.

“Oh my god,” she whispers, as I pull her close and wrap my arms around her. “I cannot believe this just happened.”

“Believe it, babe,” I whisper, my mouth at her ear. “You are amazing and incredible and fuck I so want to take you home right now and show you just how much I mean that.”

Hannah laughs as she buries her face against my neck. “God, I love you so much,” she whispers. “And yes, I—”

A yelp cuts off her words, Hannah and I both pulling back and turning to the table.

“What, babe, what’s happened?” Dylan says as he reaches for Tessa, his eyes wide and a look of genuine concern on his face.

Tessa lets out a nervous laugh as she turns to him. “I think my water just broke.”

As the whole table erupts, I let out a chuckle, pressing another kiss to Hannah’s cheek. “Guess I’m not the only one whose food sends our friends into labor, huh?”

Hannah

It still feels like a dream every morning when I wake up next to Leo. Moving in with him was the best decision I've ever made. Actually, quitting The Yellow Door was. Without it, I never would have met Leo, nor would I find myself in bed with him, wrapped around his warm body.

"Good morning," he purrs into my hair, his voice hoarse and raspy but so fucking sexy. I still can't believe I get to wake up next to this man every single day. It's completely crazy to me that somehow, despite all the bullshit, we were able to get past it.

Things with Roy are good. It's like the incident with me quitting never even happened, and if anything, it's made him change his approach.

He's getting better, taking little steps to change the things that have been ingrained in him since he began studying to be a chef.

I understand it's hard to change after so many years, but he's putting in a solid effort and it's showing in his business.

He's retaining employees and he even seems happier when we see him.

"Good morning," I murmur back, sliding my hand down the taut muscles of his stomach and finding what I'm looking for. "How is it that you wake up this way every morning and somehow, we get out the door without having sex?"

“I’m hoping we don’t get out the door today,” Leo flirts back, his fingers tracing soft circles on my bare skin as I begin to stroke him.

“Well, we have to leave at some point, but I think we can arrange a quickie,” I say, smiling as I kiss him.

I take in a deep breath, memorizing his smell and no matter where I go, I have that smell with me.

He smells like the place I love, the place I found myself and the place I found the person I want to spend the rest of my life with.

He smells of wonderfully cooked food and apple orchards and wine. He smells like my forever.

“What if I want to go slow?” Leo asks, dragging out his words, his tongue tracing a path along my neck and up to my ear. “What if I want to taste you and make you come over and over?”

“Leo,” I shame, but loving every word. “You are a very naughty boy, and you are very hard to turn down.”

“The baby isn’t going anywhere,” he replies, settling himself between my legs. Looking up the length of my body with his gorgeous brown eyes, there’s no way I can say no, especially when his mouth begins its delicious assault.

“Yes,” I moan, trying not to make it sound like it’s in response to what he’s currently doing to me, but I fail miserably. “But we still have to go to work and the baby...” Fuck my life, he’s damn good at this. He has my thoughts completely lost in what he’s doing and I totally forget my argument.

“We’ll get there, Hannah,” Leo now says, smirking at me. “But first I need to get you

there.”

A few hours later Leo and I are pulling up outside Dylan and Tessa’s house. We’re shockingly only about twenty minutes late, which isn’t so bad given all we accomplished. And if I’m being honest here, Dylan’s already expecting me to be late. It’s kind of my thing. Why change now?

“You ready to meet your niece?” Leo asks me, and as much as I am ready, what I’m not ready for is dealing with my mother and her million questions about when I’m going to have a baby.

She’s not going to like the answer I give her, and more than likely will brush it off telling me that I just need more time to think about it.

But Leo and I have talked in quite a lot of detail and our decision is firm.

We love our jobs and our quiet life and it’s not like we came to the decision to not have kids lightly.

I’m so happy for Dylan and Tessa and I know Dylan is going to be an amazing dad, and I’m going to be a kick ass aunt, but that’s all I want to be.

I want to spoil their baby terribly and then hand her back over to her parents.

I want to keep my life exactly as it is, working late into the night in the kitchen and falling into bed with Leo.

This is who we are, and I love it. We love it.

“I am and are you ready to give Dylan a bunch of shit again for inventing a sex toy?”

Leo’s head falls back, laughing. “I don’t think today is the time for that, Han. Aren’t

your parents supposed to be here too?"

"They are, but do you think they don't know he invented a sex toy? I mean, he's rolling in the bucks, living in this place, working a job he loves because he doesn't even have to work."

"I gotta say, your family is pretty interesting if they're all cool with Dylan raking in the money off something we keep in our nightstand."

"My family is interesting?" I question, narrowing my eyes at him. "You are named after a rapper and an actor, and there was a time when your dad was known as the meanest chef in San Francisco."

"Ah, yes, but my amazing girlfriend showed him the error of his ways and he's a changed man."

"And to think, I thought it would be the end of us," I tease, reaching over and resting my hand on his cheek. It seems funny now, but I really did believe that what happened between Roy and me would ruin what Leo and I have. Now it feels like nothing could ever separate us.

"Never. You weren't getting rid of me that easily," Leo replies. "I was fucking obsessed with you, Hannah, from day one and I still am."

"The feeling is mutual."

He leans over and kisses me quickly before exiting the car and opening the trunk. I follow him around to the back of the car and we begin to take out the boxes.

"You think this is enough?" I ask, worried that I haven't done enough. Being a new parent is hard but being a new parent and having the dad be pretty much clueless is probably even harder.

“Hannah, you can’t be serious.” Leo slams the trunk, almost like he’s trying to drive home the point of his rhetorical question.

“I am serious. Do you think this will last them a while? I don’t want either of them worrying about what they’re going to eat. I’m sure they’re already exhausted.”

“Well, let’s see, we made seven breakfasts, six lunches and fourteen dinners, and both of us work at restaurants, so if they do run out, I’m certain one of us can whip something up and run it over to them.”

“Okay, fine, you made your point.” I roll my eyes dramatically as we haul everything up the stairs to Dylan and Tessa’s house.

I’m kind of hoping we beat my parents here, but I also can’t imagine my mom staying away for more than a few hours.

I’m sure she’s been up Dylan and Tessa’s ass the second they came home from the hospital with her first grandchild.

I kick the door with my foot, since neither Leo nor I have a free hand. I can hear Dylan grumbling from behind the door, muttering something about me using my key.

“I can’t use my key, you jerk!” I yell, as Dylan flings the door open.

“What the hell, Han?” Dylan quips, reaching out to take one of the boxes I have. They’re stacked so high I nearly can’t see over them. “What is all this?”

“It’s food. Meals for you and Tess so you don’t have to cook.”

“Holy shit, you didn’t have to do this,” he says, walking toward the kitchen with several of the boxes.

“They’re all labeled and ready for you to just put them in the oven or microwave. Breakfasts, lunches and dinners.”

I open his refrigerator, placing a couple of each meal in it and then I begin to unpack the rest, making room in the freezer for them.

“Where’s the baby?” I ask, looking over my shoulder as Leo shakes hands with Dylan, wishing him a congratulations.

I feel like a complete asshole, it totally slipped my mind that I needed to congratulate him too.

Not that I haven’t a bunch of times already, through text messages and phone calls, but still.

Tessa had requested that no one come to the hospital, wanting some quiet time with just the baby and Dylan.

I totally respect that because she knew she would be inundated with visitors once they got home.

“Oh my god, I never even said congratulations,” I wail, flinging myself into Dylan’s arms. “How’s it feel to be a dad?”

“It feels fucking amazing. She’s so fucking perfect and wonderful and Tessa is this badass mom who jumped right into everything like she was made for it.”

The tears well up in my eyes. I’m so proud of Dylan for changing his entire life for Tessa and the baby. I hug him harder, squeezing him and when I pull back, his eyes shine with the same tears that are now spilling from mine.

“Big change, huh?” I say, smiling at him now.

“Yeah, but I wouldn’t want it any other way.”

Just as I lean in for another hug, Tessa comes out of the bedroom carrying the baby. She’s asleep in Tessa’s arms and looks like a tiny little doll.

“Here she is,” Tessa whispers, looking down at the little bundle in her arms. “Meet Birdie Murphy, your niece.”

She hands the baby to me, cradling her in my arms, I can’t help but let out a contented sigh. It feels good to hold her and look at her and see her sweet little face. She’s absolutely perfect just like Dylan said.

“She’s gorgeous,” I whisper, walking over to show Leo. “Dylan with a baby girl. I’m not sure who I feel sorrier for, Birdie or Dylan.”

“It should probably be me. She’s got a little bit of you in her and a little bit of Tessa which to me feels like she’s going to give me a run for my money,” Dylan jokes, making us all laugh. He’s right, this little peanut is going to have Dylan wrapped around her finger before she can even walk.

My parents walk in a few minutes later, my mom immediately coming over to take Birdie from my arms, snuggling her and smiling. I’m happy my mom has gotten to have this as part of her life too. Dylan and Tessa may not have planned this, but it has changed all our lives for the better.

Leo throws an arm over my shoulder, standing next to me as I look on at my mom holding Birdie.

“So, Hannah,” she says, and here it is. The question that really should be banned from being asked of any woman. “Are you and Leo thinking about having kids?”

I look up at Leo, his beautiful face looking back at me, giving me the confidence to

tell my mom our decision.

“Actually, no and more than likely never.”

She looks over at me, her eyebrows narrowed as if she’s trying to judge if I’m joking. No jokes here, just full-on honesty. Maybe she thinks it’s selfish. Maybe she thinks I’ll change my mind, but whatever it is, I’m firm in my decision. We both are.

“That’s a tough decision, but I’m sure you’ve given it a lot of thought. I just want you to be happy, Hannah and it’s obvious that Leo makes you happy.”

Her response nearly knocks me on my ass. This baby has done wonders for our whole fucking family. I step away from her, not fully acknowledging what she said, afraid that if I do, she’ll change her mind and say something crazy.

While my parents are busy swooning over the baby, and Dylan and Tessa are resting on the couch, Leo and I go down the hall to check out the baby’s room. I’m sure it’s perfect, because Tessa never does anything half-assed. But before we get there, I stop off at the guest room.

“This is where I hid from you when everything went down.” I push my bottom lip out being overly dramatic, still feeling the sting of thinking I was losing him.

Leo steps into the room, looking around, he walks toward the attached bathroom. “Seriously, this is where you came? I’m shocked I got you to leave.”

The bedroom and bathroom are pretty fucking epic, especially in comparison to where I used to live and to mine and Leo’s place now.

“Wanna christen Dylan’s bathroom and give him shit about it later?” I tease, winking at Leo.

“Oh, you know how hard it is for me to say no to you, but we have a kitchen to get to and food to prepare.”

“We do, and we’re working together tonight. My favorite kind of night,” I reply, leaning into him. “There’s nothing sexier than seeing you in the kitchen.”

“And there’s no one else I would rather share a kitchen with than you.”

“I love you, Leo,” I say, pushing up on my toes to kiss him.

“And I love you so fucking much, Hannah Murphy.”