



War (The Four Horsemen #1)

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Category: Dark Erotica

Description: Zion lived on the edge. He was the ultimate bachelor he avoided relationships, loved one-night-stands, and filled every moment with excitement. But then he met Amantha, who changed that.

Can Zion settle down? If so, will he and Amantha overcome the obstacles that block their path?

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Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:01 am

I leaned across the middle console to push open the passenger door. Mud caked the outside of the raised pickup truck I drove.

My mouth twisted into a grin under my racing helmet as I asked the brunette woman outside the door, “You sure you wanna ride with me?”

She could join me or not. Sure, it'd be more fun with a partner but I was going out either way.

The woman blushed, but nodded. “Please.”

Yes. I gestured her in and settled back into the driver's seat.

She stepped onto the running boards and climbed into the truck cab, slamming the door behind her.

I handed her a helmet. “My name’s Zion. Wear this and buckle yourself in. The ‘oh shit’ handle is above your head.”

She smiled hesitantly. “Okay.”

This woman's friend had talked her into this. The other woman rode with the other guide, my best friend and co-worker Eric. She hadn't been sold on the idea, especially being without her friend for her ride.

The woman strapped on the helmet and secured her harness.

“You good?” I asked her.

She nodded, timid but excited. “Yes, sir.”

I checked her protective gear. When I was satisfied she was properly secured in, I trailed a knuckle down her cheek and winked at her.

“Don't worry. We're going to have fun,” I reassured her.

Shyly, she smiled.

My gaze trailed over her. She wore a pink sundress and strappy sandals. Not at all appropriate clothing for mudding — if we got stuck, she was SOL — but she looked delicious. I'd bet she'd look amazing with that dress bunched around her waist and her hips in my hands as I pounded her from behind.

I bit my lower lip, the ball of my side-labret piercing jutting forward as I did. The woman was hot, even if she was a little shy.

Wonder if she'd let me fuck her before she left.

I licked my lips and couldn't help but notice the interest she conveyed when she met my gaze and licked hers, too.

I grinned. Oh yeah. I'd get a taste of her. Sure thing.

Ladies — and sometimes guys when the mood was right; personality attracted me, not gender — loved my bad-boy look. Pierced eyebrow, pierced lip, and tattoos from neck to toe. My looks screamed irresponsibility — my past lays loved it because they could say they caught the bad-boy. Sex was always one-and-done, though. I never went back for seconds.

My tattooed hands, flaming skulls on the back of each that trailed down into finger bones, gripped the steering wheel. I smiled wickedly. “Hold on, gorgeous.”

Her hand gripped the door rest.

My grey eyes checked the rearview mirror, and I turned my head to look at the side mirrors. All clear.

I focused back on the dirt road and pushed the gas pedal. The truck surged forward until at the start line, where I abruptly pressed the brake and came to a sudden stop beside a reinforced black Jeep Wrangler. The vehicle was also coated with mud.

Eric nodded at me from his spot in the driver's seat, his long brown hair pulled out of the way in a ponytail and helmet secured around his head. He wore our uniform, a one-piece racing jumpsuit that fit over our clothes.

I held the brake in and revved the engine. Eric's responding rev competed with mine. I grinned.

Before us, a pole-mounted traffic light flashed red. The muddy, pot-hole riddled track stretched beyond it.

“Hold onto the ‘oh shit’ handle, honey,” I said as I focused on the light. “And have fun,” I added.

I don't know whether or not she listened to me.

Adrenaline pulsed through the air as we waited. Eric and I revved the engines. The light would turn at any minute.

My hands gripped the steering wheel, and my heart thudded faster. Anticipation

coursed through my veins.

The light changed, and I floored the gas. The truck raced forward into the muddy track.

We pulled forward so fast that the back fish-tailed in the mud but the vehicle kept moving forward.

The woman shrieked and grabbed onto the handle above her head.

We splashed down into a huge pothole, mud and water flying everywhere around us.

The Jeep appeared beside us.

Oh, Hell no.

I gassed it, water and mud splashing as our tires tore through it.

There was a drop-off ahead holding a mud pit — the biggest obstacle.

“Hold on!” I called out.

The truck went airborne as we drove off the ledge.

My companion screamed and held onto the handle for her life.

The truck landed in the boggy mud and continued forward. We got stuck, and the tires whined as they spun, the back end fish-tailing.

I tapped the brake and, when the wheels stopped spinning, I shifted to four-wheel drive.

We rocked up out of the mud pit.

“Whew!” I yelled as the tires climbed out of the pit.

The mud and potholes that followed were nothing.

Eric pulled out of the mud right behind me, though. Fuck.

We raced neck and neck to the end, the windshield wipers on the truck groaning as they slashed through the mud thrown up by Eric's vehicle.

In the end, I beat Eric by an inch.

The woman in the passenger seat squealed and chattered excitedly about the win.

I smiled and brought the truck back around to the main lot.

I parked the truck in front of the small building that housed the track's office. I turned to face the woman in the passenger seat. Her cheeks were flushed.

“Want to have a little more fun with me?” I asked her with a wink.

Her eyes flashed with knowledge. “Yes,” she said.

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My pulse beat hard in my throat. I stood on the second-story roof in shorts, shingles rough under my bare feet. The cool night air blew against my bare chest. Music thudded and light flashed at the party beneath me.

A crowd on the patio cheered up at me.

I loved the anticipation that hummed through me.

“Zion! Zion! Zion!” My name echoed from the chanting crowd.

Feeling invincible, I took a few steps back and launched into the air with a run. The wind whipped my hair and the feeling of falling rushed through my stomach as I tucked my arms around my knees and tucked my body into a ball.

“Cannonball!” I yelled as I hurled through the air and the water of the pool rushed toward me.

I gasped a deep breath and closed my eyes as I hit the water. Satisfaction and thrill rushed through me while I sank into the dark depths.

Dully, I heard the people cheering through the water surrounding me. I opened my eyes and took in the distorted colors and light above me, the darkness below. I released my legs and paused to absorb the colors. Beautiful.

I reveled in the quiet, and the pretty lights as my body floated under the water. It reminded me of something comforting in a distant memory, but I wasn't sure what. I didn't want to leave.

When my chest ached from lack of oxygen, I kicked off the bottom to propel my body toward the surface of the pool.

I sucked in a deep breath when I broke out of the water. Applause and calls erupted as I swam for an edge of the built-in pool.

I pressed my palms to the rough concrete outside the pool and used my arms to push myself up onto the concrete deck.

Water streamed from my body as I climbed out and stood. The moisture made my tattoos shine under the outdoor lights.

When my feet were firmly planted on the concrete, Eric appeared with a towel. He handed it to me and clapped me on the shoulder. He grinned with excitement.

“That was badass, man. You made that huge drop look easy!”

I smiled and wiped some water off my face, then I slid the towel up to dry my hair. I roughly ran it back and forth on my head.

At 32, Eric and I would soon age out of the party scene, but for now we still blended enough that parties were a good place to relax and meet new people.

Eric's long hair was loose around his face and he dressed casually in a T-shirt and shorts.

He felt more like a brother than only a best friend, and the man was straighter than an arrow. I still liked to tease him.

I smirked devilishly at him. “Wanna take a leap? I'll jump again.”

Eric shook his head. “My feet stay near the ground, thank you. You know I don't do heights.”

I laughed and dried the rest of my body with the towel before wrapping it around my waist.

“I know. Doesn't mean I won't ask.”

Eric rolled his eyes. “Asshole.”

“You love me.” I flashed a wicked smile his way.

Eric started to reply, but he was interrupted.

“Zion. Hi, baby.” Hands slid around my waist, and hair brushed against my shoulder from behind. “That was such a good jump.”

I narrowed my eyes. Why did I know that voice?

A kiss pressed against the back of my neck. I looked at Eric questioningly.

Eric subtly shook his head.

Ah, fuck. That wasn't good.

I turned. A thin but beautiful woman with long black hair, a tight black dress, and red lipstick stood behind me. A smile stretched across her face.

The woman was a prior fuck, but I'd clearly let her know at the time that one night was all we had. I always let my one-night-stands know that.

“Thank you,” I said politely, taking a step back from her.

She took a step forward, her heels clicking against the concrete as she moved.

“Let's go out again. Maybe we can get something to eat.” Her voice dropped to a sultry tone. “Then have a little fun.”

I'd admit, she was a good fuck, but I didn't do anyone twice. I'd have to lie to make her leave me alone. The best way would involve Eric. Eric would be okay with it...right?

...Yeah, he'd be fine.

“Sorry.” I faked a sad smile at her. “Can't. I'm in a committed relationship now. We're monogamous.”

She frowned. “But I want to try again. We had fun, right?”

“We did have fun. But I'm committed to my boyfriend.” I pulled Eric close and put my arm around his shoulder. “There's no one else for me.”

She shook her head. “He's your best friend.”

“True, but sometimes the best love comes from friendship,” I said.

Her arms crossed over her chest. “I don't believe you. Prove it.”

Was that a dare? That sounded like a dare to me. I never turned down a dare.

I raised my eyebrows. “Really?”

“Yeah. I don't believe you. You're trying to get rid of me with a ridiculous lie.”

“A lie, huh? Wanna bet?”

I smiled and turned my head to Eric. His eyes widened when he realized what I was about to do.

My mouth pressed against his before he could say anything. I sucked on his warm lips and teased them with my tongue as I wove my fingers into his hair. Mmm, he tasted like bourbon.

His stubble scraped against my face as I deepened the kiss and made it look real. No tongue in his mouth, though. I didn't want him to kill me.

I felt Eric's lips reluctantly kiss me back and his fingers thread into my hair, selling the act.

Even if it came from someone I wasn't attracted to, the physical touch still felt good. I made a rumble of pleasure in my throat.

Another party-goer wolf-whistled, and we broke apart.

A quick glance around showed that my one-night-stand was gone. Guess our act was good enough to convince her.

I looked at Eric and grinned. “You're a nice kisser.”

He rolled his eyes. “Don't kiss me again. You know I'm straight.”

“Sorry. But I bet you enjoyed it, right?” I wiggled my eyebrows at him, the grin never melted from my face.

Eric snorted. "You kiss me again, I'll punch you. Let's not talk about it anymore. I want something to drink." He turned and walked toward the house.

I followed. "Aww, come on. You didn't even feel a little spark? You aren't the least bit interested in me?"

"Nope. I'm definitely into women." Eric continued walking. He wasn't mad, but he was irritated with me. Just a little.

"Fine. Want to find a nice chick to hook up with instead? Maybe a threesome? I'll pound her ass while you fuck her pussy?"

A wry laugh escaped Eric, and he opened the door. "Yes to the chick, no to the threesome."

"But Eric." I fake pouted. "Your lips would feel wonderful on my body again."

"You heard me. Don't talk about it."

I fake sighed, then I perked up. "Okay. But what if I'm the best wingman ever. Will you forgive me then?"

Eric couldn't hold back his smile as he headed toward the kitchen. "Maybe. But only if you're the best wingman ever."

"I will be. Thanks for the kiss."

Eric flipped me off as he disappeared around the corner.

I smiled. My gaze trailed around the room to find the hottest woman there. Wingman duty called. Only the best for Eric.

I spotted a hot brunette sitting on the couch. Maybe she was a suitable candidate.

She looked up and down my body and licked her lips. That was when I remembered the towel around my waist. Oops. Okay, first dry clothes — including a shirt — then wingman duty.

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The wind whipped against my face and I spread my arms as I free-fell through the air, another skydiver attached to my chest by a harness. As normal as this was, I still felt an adrenaline rush every time I skydived.

My goggles let me see without the wind whipping in my eyes. I pointed out a beautiful view to the man strapped to my chest as we free-fell from the sky.

In the air, I felt weightless, invincible, like nothing could touch me. Adrenaline pumped through my veins.

I guided us in a circle so the man could have a full view.

My co-worker, Joey, had another diver attached to his chest and they free-fell near us, having the same experience.

At the altitude where I needed to deploy the parachute, I signaled at my diver to expect it. He flashed me a thumbs up.

I yanked the cord. The chute deployed and my stomach jolted as we were yanked up when it caught the wind. Business as usual, but it still felt a little thrilling.

I used the handles to steer us to a safe landing. As we descended, I pointed out more scenery for the diver.

Tandem divers were instructed to land in a “butt slide” where the instructor slows the parachute and it pulls us both to a sliding stop on our rears. If something went wrong and we had to make a standing land, divers were instructed to pull their legs up and

out of the way for the instructor to take over.

Luckily, the wind was calm, and we could butt slide our landing.

Joey and I both landed safely.

He was in his early 50s with short silver hair, which I could see when he took his helmet off.

I loved skydiving. The thrill of free-falling got me out of bed some days. I lived for the adrenaline it gave me.

A van with an airplane and the company logo “Airplayne Adventures” painted on the side was parked on the edge of our landing field to transport divers back to the airport afterward. Between clients, one of us would drive the van out with the other following them in another car to leave the van and drive back together.

Joey and I put the deployed chutes and our helmets in the back. And, of course, we took a picture of the divers in their jumpsuits and goggles beside the van logo as a keepsake.

After we took the divers back and repacked the parachutes for the night, Joey led me out of the airplane hangar to introduce me to the newest employee.

“This is our new booking coordinator, Amantha,” Joey said. “No ‘S’ at the beginning, just Amantha. Amantha, this is Zion.”

A pink-haired woman sat behind the reception desk. She turned her head to show us that she spoke on the phone, then she smiled and held up a “one moment” finger to finish her call.

I licked my lips as my eyes trailed over her upper body. She was flirty, her lips were pouty, and her blue shirt showed the perfect amount of cleavage. The woman looked hot. I'd bet she was a tigress in bed. I wondered if I could...

Joey cleared his throat. "Hands off," he warned in a low voice. "If we have to fire her because things get awkward between you two, we're only hiring men from here on out."

I grinned. "That won't deter me." As long as the person turned me on, I didn't care about gender. And I loved to irritate Joey.

Joey shook his head. "Whatever. Don't touch her."

I made a serious face. Solemnly, I raised my hand and positioned my fingers in the Star Trek Vulcan salute. "Don't worry. I'll be a priest."

Joey laughed. "Priest of what?"

I grinned again but didn't answer. Guess I'd used that before. I lowered my hand and stuffed my fingers into the pockets of the jumpsuit.

"Hands off her. I'm serious." He snapped his fingers as the idea came to him. "Senior men. That'll throw a wrench in your game. Wrinkly, saggy balls and limp dicks. They'll be hired next."

Small wrench. I rolled my eyes. "Fine. I'll behave."

"You'd better." Joey eyed the wall-mounted clock across from us. He gestured toward the hangar, which had changing rooms complete with showers. "Sorry to leave you guys early, but I'm going to hop in the shower. I have to be at class in half an hour to prepare for a presentation today."

Despite his age, Joey took evening classes at the local college to earn a new degree. He planned to retire from skydiving soon and wanted to get a desk job to stay busy.

“Okay. See you tomorrow. Good luck.”

Joey nodded and pointed at me, mouthing “hands off,” then headed toward the hangar.

I pulled my hands out of my pockets, bringing a pack of Reese's cups in one of them, and took a seat in the chairs across from Amantha's desk. I waited to introduce myself to my newest co-worker. In the meantime, I opened the pack and peeled a wrapper off a Reese's cup to munch on it. They were my favorite candy. The hangar had a vending machine with them so I also had easy access, a huge plus to working there.

Amantha hung up her desk phone and beamed as she turned her attention to me. “Hi! Zion? It's so nice to meet you.”

A smile stretched across my lips. This woman's confidence amplified her gorgeous features. Her positivity was contagious. “Amantha. Interesting name. Not very common.”

“Same to you. How long have you worked here?”

“I've been a jump instructor for almost two years.” I used my free hand to gesture to the jump suit as though it explained everything.

Amantha's eyebrows raised. “You’ve leapt out of planes for that long?”

I nodded. “Part time. Three days a week for the past two years. My schedule’s pretty sweet. Monday through Wednesday here, Thursday and Friday off, then Saturday and Sunday at the mud racing track. Of course, I do fun stuff on my days off, too.”

“Fun stuff...” Amantha’s eyes trailed over me and she nodded. “You’re a thrill seeker... Maybe an adrenaline junkie. You do whatever you can to get your heart pumping.”

I tilted my head to the side as I weighed the statement. I hadn't thought about it that way, but it was true. Not that I would admit it.

I ignored the statement and jutted my chin at her. “What do you like to do?”

Surprise crossed her face. “Me? I’m pretty predictable. Work, exercise, read, sleep, repeat.”

“A reader, huh? What do you read?”

“Smut. Absolute smut,” she answered with a straight face.

I laughed in surprise. I hadn't expected such a direct answer. Refreshing.

I said, “Nothing wrong with that. You know what you like. Maybe you can teach me a thing or two.” I wiggled my eyebrows at her.

“Maybe I can.” She wiggled her eyebrows back.

I chuckled. She had spunk.

Amantha's desk phone rang.

She said, “Back to work. Nice to meet you, Zion.”

“You, too, Amantha.”

She smiled at me and answered the phone. “Airplayne Adventures, how may I help you?” she asked the caller.

I stood from my seat and walked to the hangar. As I did, I unwrapped the second Reese's cup and bit into it. Maybe I'd listen to Joey and keep Amantha around a little longer.

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“Hey, guys! Did you have a good day?” Amantha asked the next day as Joey and I walked from the hangar into the lobby. We'd already done the end of day work, including re-packing the parachutes, and changed to head out. He and I wore our street clothes, simple jeans and T-shirts.

We moved around to the front of her desk, and I grinned when I saw her bright smile. Contagious.

“Yeah, babe. Great flights today,” I said.

She frowned. “Don't call me ‘babe.’ It makes me think of the pig from that kids’ movie.”

I couldn't help myself. “Is ‘sugar tits’ better?”

She pursed her lips and studied me. “Sure. But if you call me ‘sugar tits,’ I'm calling you ‘salty balls.’”

Unexpectedly, I barked a laugh. “Deal.”

Joey rolled his eyes. “Don't tempt him. He'll answer to that.”

Amantha smiled sweetly. “Well good. I expect him to answer to it if I answer to ‘sugar tits.’”

She wore a purple shirt, and her pink hair was tied in a messy knot on top of her head. She had a devilish but innocent look on her face.

I licked my lips. She was exactly my type. I...

Abruptly, Joey elbowed me in the ribs.

Ow. I cringed and rubbed the spot where he elbowed me.

“Are you settling in okay?” Joey ignored the situation and asked. “Do you need anything?”

She genuinely smiled at him. “Thank you. I have everything I need.”

I wanted to receive one of those genuine smiles.

“We’re going for dinner at McKay’s down the road,” Joey said. “Do you want to come?”

She smiled sadly. “Sorry, but I can’t. I have to be somewhere right after I finish this.” She gestured at her monitor. “Maybe another time, though. I’d love to go.”

Did she have a date after this?

My eyes narrowed. I didn’t like the idea of Amantha dating.

“That’s too bad,” Joey said. “Definitely next time.”

Wait, why didn’t I like it? She could do whatever she wanted.

She beamed again. “Definitely.”

I tried to analyze the situation. What didn’t I like? Amantha was single, same as me — at least, I assumed. She could go out with whoever she felt like seeing. I did it all

the time.

“The pilot left, and we already locked the rest of the shop. Are you good to turn off the lights and close the door behind you when you leave?”

Amantha nodded. “I’m good. You guys enjoy your dinner.”

Going out was different for a woman on her own, though. Someone could hurt her.

...Did I feel protective of her? Was that what this feeling was?

Joey said, “Thanks. Have a nice night.”

“Good night.” Amantha waved and smiled at us.

“Night,” I said, preoccupied.

Amantha gave me a weird look but turned her attention back to her monitor.

Joey and I walked out the door, going to Joey's car in the parking lot. It was a basic silver sedan.

I glanced back at Amantha through the window.

She focused on her monitor. One of her fingers twirled a strand of pink hair around it as she concentrated. Adorable.

Was this what friendship with a female felt like? Was friendship with women that different from friendship with men? I'd never been friends with a woman before.

A text must have come through on Amantha's phone because she glanced down at the

screen and smiled.

Warmth at her happiness filled my chest. But so did jealousy for whoever pulled that reaction from her.

After staring at her for a moment. I opened the passenger door and climbed into Joey's car.

As Joey started the ignition, I decided to set my unusual feelings aside. I wanted to be friends with her. Surely, I could make “just friends” with a woman happen. I’d put all thoughts of sex aside and treat her like a nun... Err, poor comparison. Nuns weren't “off limits” in my mind. A sibling. There we go. I'd treat her like a sibling.

“What's up with you?” Joey asked. “You're acting weird.”

He shifted into reverse and backed out of the parking spot.

“Nothing. I'm tired, that's all,” I said.

“Well, snap out of it. I expect a lively conversation at dinner.”

I appreciated his effort to put me in a better mood. I smiled. “Only if you're buying.”

Joey snorted and shifted to drive. He shook his head and pulled the car out of the parking lot. “I'll pay tonight if it puts you in a better mood. But you get us next time.”

I chuckled. “Fine.”

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During a gap between clients the next day, I perched on the edge of Amantha's desk.

“Hey, sugar tits.”

“Hey, salty balls.” She looked away from her computer monitor, her hazel gaze settling on mine.

I smiled and raked my teeth over my bottom lip. I liked our banter. This friendship thing was nice. Maybe it would work out.

“Busy today?”

She nodded. “Absolutely. Phones are ringing off the hook, and a ton of mobile requests came in. The advertising push really brought in customers. You guys are booked solid for the next two months.”

“Good.” I grinned and nodded. “Guaranteed jumps for the next two months. I like it.”

Amantha smiled softly and shook her head. “Thrill seeker.”

I winked. “Don't act like that's a bad thing.”

She said, “I would never yuck someone's yum.”

A small smile turned up the corners of my lips. “You're definitely a romance reader.”

She shrugged and said, “Don't act like that's a bad thing.”

I smirked, using her own words on her like she did to me. “I would never yuck someone's yum.”

A smile touched her lips.

She looked beautiful. Her pink hair framed her face and her blue blouse hugged her.

Automatically, my hand reached out and cupped her jaw. My thumb brushed over her bottom lip.

“Zion,” she warned.

Realizing what I'd done, I quickly pulled my hand away. “Sorry.”

She smiled at me sadly. “It's okay.”

I cleared my throat. “How was your date last night?”

Her eyebrows creased. “Date?”

“Yeah. You had somewhere to go after work. I thought it was a date.”

Understanding crossed her face. “No date. How was dinner?”

I frowned. “Dinner was good. It would have been better if you were there. Where did you go?”

She shook her head and gave me a look that feigned innocence. “I have to keep a little mystery. Can't have you getting bored.”

Bored? The thought never occurred to me. “Impossible, Ms. ... I don't know your last

name.” I laughed.

“It’s...” A devious smile spread over her lips. “I ought to make you guess. Like the Queen had to do in Rumpelstiltskin.”

I laughed. “I could ask Joey, you know.”

“But where's the fun in that?”

I made an affirming hum in my throat. “What do I get if I win?”

“What do you want?”

What did I want? Hmm. Almost immediately, I knew.

“Skydive with me.”

Her eyes widened. “I don't know how to skydive.”

“That's okay. You can't jump alone at first, anyway, so it would be a tandem dive. You'd be strapped to me.” I bit my lip and trailed my eyes down her torso. I liked that idea.

“If you win,” she said.

“When I win,” I corrected with a smile.

“What about if I win?”

“What do you want?”

She pursed her lips in thought, then a beautiful smile broke across her face.

“If I win, you can't skydive for one full work week. You have to sit here with me and answer the phone. With an accent. You work, what? Three days? So for three days. No adrenaline rush.”

That little demon. That would be torture for me. Evil.

Whatever. It didn't matter how evil her “punishment” was. It didn't matter because I was going to win.

“How long do I have to guess this name?”

She thought for a moment. “Today's what, Wednesday? I'll give you two weeks. That's six work days for you. So not next Wednesday, but the end of the workday the Wednesday after that.”

“You're on.”

Her eyes flashed devilishly. “Good. The bet starts now.”

“Good. Johnson?”

“Nope.”

“Miller?”

“No.”

“Peters?”

“No.”

I continued to guess, receiving no after no. Eventually, Amantha started working on a spreadsheet while I guessed, answering me absentmindedly.

When the next set of customers came in, I stood from her desk. “Be ready to lose when I come back,” I warned.

She smiled. “Good luck.”

I mock saluted her and walked to the hangar. I didn't want to admit it, but I was running out of names. Pretty soon I'd have to turn to the internet.

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“I think you'd sound nice with a British accent,” Amantha said as Joey and I walked by her desk at the end of the day.

I smiled. “You think so, huh?”

“Yeah. I've thought about it and a nice Cockney dialect should do. Start studying.”

I laughed. “You assume I'm going to lose. That's not happening.”

“What's this?” Joey asked.

Amantha said, “Zion and I have a bet going. He has to guess my last name. If he doesn't, I win. So if he asks, don't tell him.”

Joey grinned. “Lips are sealed. You kids have fun. I have classes this evening so I have to go. G’night.”

“Night, Joey.”

“Good night,” Amantha said.

Joey headed out the front door.

“Are you about ready?” I asked her.

“Yeah, let me shut down my computer here.” She focused on the monitor and her mouse clicked rapidly as she shut down.

“Do you want to get something to eat when we leave? I can drive there, then we can come back for your car,” I said.

“Sure.” She smiled at me.

I went to the door to wait for her.

She grabbed her purse out of a drawer and put the short handle over her arm, then glanced at her computer screen. Satisfied the computer was off, her seat propelled backward.

Instead of standing like I expected, Amantha wheeled herself around the desk in a wheelchair.

Surprise shot through my system. Did she hurt herself?

“Are you okay? What happened?” I blurted anxiously.

Did I need to hurt someone? I didn't see any bruises or broken bones. I'd go to battle for her if she needed it. That protective instinct blazed through my body.

“You don't know? I figured Joey already told you.” Amantha wheeled toward me. She wore a simple blouse, jeans, and tennis shoes.

“Joey said nothing.” For which I would kill him later. “What's going on?” Wait, I shouldn't ask that. I was being rude. “I'm sorry. You don't have to tell me anything. But if I need to hurt someone, you need to point me in the right direction.”

She laughed. “It's okay. I don't mind telling you. I was in a car accident about six months ago. The reason for the wheelchair is that the accident shattered my ankle. My foot was on the brake pedal and the impact drove it into my ankle. There's a lot of

metal in there. I've been doing physical therapy, but I can't walk far on it yet. Mostly, I'm wheelchair-bound, for now anyway. The therapist says I'll be on a cane for a while once I can walk more."

What? This wasn't new? "You've been in a wheelchair the whole time you've worked here?"

She nodded. "I have."

"I didn't notice at all."

"Good. I try not to let it limit me." She gestured at the chair. "This doesn't define who I am. I was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time."

I sighed and nodded. My hand ran through my hair. "Sorry. I'm just shocked. I didn't notice."

She smiled. "Well, I've only been here for three days. Don't beat yourself up too much."

I smiled sadly and raised my hands in surrender. "I'm moving on, I promise. Ready for dinner?"

"Yes. Your treat." She raised her eyebrows.

"Well, of course. I am a gentleman."

She laughed in surprise. "Gentleman. Riiiiiiight. In your dreams."

I smirked. "Hey, it could be true."

“Sure. The same way you can guess my name.”

“Oh, I'm getting your name. That's 100% the truth.” I opened the glass door and pulled out my keys.

Amantha steered her chair forward. She flicked off the light switch by the door and wheeled outside.

I closed the door and used a key to lock it behind us.

It was mid-summer, and the sun hadn't set yet.

I gestured to the big four-door black truck in the middle of the parking lot. “I drive that truck.”

A hesitant look crossed Amantha's face. “Maybe we should take my car.” She gestured to the blue car sitting near the door.

I frowned. “Why?” It was a newer truck. There was no rust. There wasn't even mud on it. What was the problem?

“Even without my ankle injury, I'm short. I don't know if I can climb in there.”

Oh. I laughed. “Don't worry. Head over there.”

Amantha gave me a skeptical look but wheeled across the parking lot.

I opened the passenger door as she positioned her chair to climb out. She locked the wheels.

Amantha looked at the running boards and the higher seat. “I don't know about this,”

she said.

I smiled. "You'll be fine. Trust me."

"I really don't think I can cli..."

I scooped her into my arms and lifted her into the passenger seat.

Damn, she smelled good. I inhaled her berry scent.

Her mouth fell open, and she gaped at me as I settled her into the passenger seat. I guess lifting her was a surprise.

I winked and said, "I told you to trust me." I slid my arms from around her. "Put your seatbelt on."

I closed the door and turned to her wheelchair. I'd never done this before so I'd have to figure it out. After a minute of fiddling with it, I finally got the chair folded and loaded into the back of my truck.

I rounded the truck to the driver's side and climbed into the driver's seat.

My eyes trailed over her. She looked right in my truck. "You good?" I asked.

She smiled softly. "Yeah."

I put on my seatbelt and checked that she wore hers, then I started the engine. Quickly, I turned the volume down when music blasted from the stereo. "Sorry." I shot her an apologetic look. "What do you feel like eating?"

Adjusting my focus to our surroundings, I shifted the truck to drive and steered out of

the parking lot.

"Chinese?" she asked.

I nodded. "Sounds good to me."

I pulled onto the main road.

"Were you at physical therapy last night?" I asked.

"Nice guess. I was. I found a therapist that does evening appointments so I can work during the day and attend therapy afterward. Twice a week."

I nodded. "Tuesdays and Thursdays?"

"Yes. I need the days in between to recover." She laughed. "It's really helped to keep a positive attitude with everything that's happened. I've tried to keep life relatively the same."

"Have you succeeded?"

"I think so. I attend concerts and go where I want. Not much is different."

A grin crossed my face. I had to tease her. "Is this going to impact your skydiving?"

She chuckled. "You're not winning the bet."

"Don't count me out. I have two weeks. I'm winning."

"You can try. Good luck. You'll need it," she teased back.

You can try. Did that mean her last name was complicated? “Is that a hint?”

She smiled. “You’ll get no hints from me.”

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When we arrived at the restaurant, I asked Amantha to stay in the truck while I pulled out her chair. Once it was in position, I opened the passenger door. I lifted her from the seat and sat her in the chair.

This time, she wrapped her arms around my neck during the transfer.

Siblings, I had to remind myself. Treat her like a sibling.

I shut the passenger door.

I asked, "Do you want me to help push you inside or do you have it?"

She smiled. "I'm okay. Thank you for asking."

I nodded and walked alongside her as we made our way to the building. Quite a few cars were already in the parking lot, especially for a Wednesday night. The restaurant was popular, to say the least.

When we got to the front door, there was an automatic door button marked with a blue wheelchair for disabled use. I pressed it. We waited... And nothing happened.

"Must be broken," Amantha said. "That's okay. Would you mind getting the door?"

"Got it."

There was a small entryway to keep the wind from blowing inside so there were two doors.

I stepped forward and pulled the first door open. I held it open while Amantha wheeled through.

There was another button inside, which she tried. This one opened the second door.

Amantha wheeled through.

I followed her into the building. A counter with a wall behind it stood at the entrance, blocking the view inside. Patrons were supposed to wait to be seated. No one waited ahead of us.

A small Asian male server smiled as we approached. "How many?" he asked.

"Two," I answered.

He grabbed two bundles of utensils. "Please follow me."

He walked around the counter and led us to the left.

Tables and booths lined the sides as we went through. People ate and talked at several places. At the end, the aisle turned right and led into a buffet.

The server put the utensils down and removed a chair at one of the tables. He placed it at an unused table.

"What would you like to drink?" he asked.

Amantha wheeled into the open spot to clear a walkway in the aisle. "Thank you. Sweet tea, please," she said with a smile.

He nodded. "And you, sir?"

“Same. Thanks.”

The server nodded and returned to the counter.

“I don't want to overreach, but I'd like to get your plate,” I said.

She opened her mouth to protest.

“I know you can do it, but I'd like to. What do you want?”

“Okay.” She locked the wheels on her chair. “Surprise me. I don't like mushrooms but that's it.”

I smiled. “Got it. Be right back.”

I walked into the buffet and loaded up two plates before I returned to our table.

Sliding her plate in front of her, I sat mine down, too, and settled into my chair.

Her eyes widened. “I can't eat all this. It's too much.”

Lo-mein noodles, fried rice, four different types of chicken, frog legs, and an egg roll were all piled on her plate.

“Good ol' college try?” I asked, raising my eyebrows innocently.

She narrowed her eyes at me. She seemed more amused than angry. “This plate is huge. I'm not a linebacker.”

I thought I'd gotten a normal amount. I would admit, though, I was more accustomed to eating with other guys. Maybe it was a lot for a woman.

“Fine. You don't have to eat everything. But at least try a bite of each thing and see what you like.”

“Okay but...” She pointed at the frog legs, coated in breading. “What are these?”

“Frog legs. Haven't had them before. I try something new every time I come here. I figured you might want in on the tradition, too.”

She shook her head slowly but then seemed to decide. She looked at me and smiled. “Good ol' college try.”

I grinned. “There you go. That's the spirit.”

Amantha unbundled her fork and speared a piece of chicken, which she ate.

A different server came by and put our drinks on the table before rushing off.

I picked up a frog leg from my plate and took a bite out of it like a chicken drumstick. Thoughtfully, I chewed.

When I swallowed, I said, “Not bad. Tastes like trout.” I took another bite.

“Did you go to college?” Amantha asked.

I swallowed and shook my head. “Thrill seeker, remember?” I smiled at her. “I couldn't sit in class all day. High school was bad enough. I worked odd jobs and at the mud racing track for several years then began training for skydiving. It takes 500 dives to get your certification as a skydiving instructor. I've had my certification and been working as an instructor for almost two years.”

“How old are you?”

“I’m 32. You?”

“31.”

I nodded and put down what was left of the frog leg. I got out my fork. “What about you? Did you go to school somewhere?”

I twirled some noodles.

Sadly, Amantha shook her head. “I wanted to, but life got in the way.”

I didn't like the sad look on her face. It needed to leave.

“That's okay. You can go anytime you want. Look at Joey. He's in his 50s, about to retire from skydiving, and he's going back to school. There are no rules. You can go whenever you want. You can even take classes online in your spare time.”

I ate a bite of noodles, slurping the ends into my mouth.

Amantha smiled. “True.”

“What did you do before you came to Airplayne Adventures?”

“I've worked as an assistant for most of my career. My last job ‘let me go’ after my accident because they couldn't waste time waiting for me to recover.”

I frowned. That wasn't cool.

“When I was finally cleared to come back to work, I took the booking coordinator position because I could work from a wheelchair. Everyone has been very accommodating there.”

“Where did you work before? I'll never go there again.” And maybe knock some heads together.

Amantha smiled. “And that's why I'll never tell you.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Don't make me ask Joey.”

“I already let it go. It's not a big deal to me. You should let it go, too.”

“That's not who I am. I can't do that.”

Amantha reached across the table and took my hand. “Please. Let it go.”

Her hand felt soft in mine. She squeezed.

Fine, I'd try. I met her eyes and drew in a breath. I counted to ten and blew it out.

“Okay.”

She grinned. “Okay.”

“You said you like to read. Tell me about your favorite book.”

We spent hours talking and getting to know each other. Amantha was amusing and kept my attention, a rarity for this thrill seeker.

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I glanced out a window and noticed it was dark. I pulled my cell phone out of my pocket to check the time, only to see it was after 9:30.

“You have work tomorrow,” I said. “I should probably get you home.”

Amantha glanced around, as though she hadn't noticed time slipping by either.

“Oh, wow. Yeah, we should probably go.”

I left a generous tip on the table, and we made our way to the front counter.

The server told us the total and Amantha pulled money out of her pocket and went to pay.

“No, no, no. Your money's no good here.” I slid my debit card across the counter. “Put both meals on here, please.”

The woman at the counter smiled. She ran my debit card and slid it and a receipt to me. “Sign here.”

I signed the receipt and took my copy and my card. “Thanks.”

“You're welcome. Have a great evening!”

Amantha and I headed toward the doors to the parking lot.

“I was kidding about you buying dinner,” she protested.

“I told you I was a gentleman.”

She snorted. “Paying for dinner doesn't make you a gentleman.”

I held each door open as she wheeled through.

Amantha steered over the wheelchair ramp off the sidewalk and toward my truck. Only a few cars remained in the parking lot.

“Then what does?”

“I'm not sure you can be redeemed at this point.”

I laughed. She was probably right.

She positioned her chair by the passenger door of my truck and locked the wheels. I opened the door then scooped her into my arms.

Amantha looked at me with appreciation in her eyes. “Despite the doubt, you are making points toward redemption.”

Her pink hair framed her face, and her pouty lips begged me to kiss her.

I shook my head. No, I couldn't. I had to keep her around.

A raindrop fell from the sky and hit her on the cheek. Amantha and I both glanced up. No stars shone through the clouds. Drops fell faster. Wow, they were cold.

I placed Amantha into the passenger seat before more rain fell on her.

“Seatbelt.” I pointed at her as I shut the door.

I folded her chair and put it into the backseat so it wouldn't get wet outside in the truck bed.

The rain fell harder as I jogged around to the driver's side. I climbed in the cab and shut the door behind me. I shivered and turned the truck on, immediately cranking up the hot air from the heater.

Cool air immediately blasted me.

“Holy shit!”

I turned the air off.

Softly, Amantha reminded me, “The truck has been sitting here awhile. It needs to warm up first.”

“I know. I just forgot. It's summer, I haven't used the heat in months.”

Goosebumps broke over my skin as I put on my seatbelt and checked that Amantha wore hers. The headlights automatically turned on. I switched on the windshield wipers, shifted the truck to drive, and headed out of the parking lot.

On the highway, I drove toward the airport. I tried to put being cold out of my mind.

“How do you manage your wheelchair and drive?” I asked.

The rain came down hard around us and beat on the surface of the truck.

“I can walk a little so I usually load my wheelchair into the trunk then hold onto the car to walk to the driver's seat. It's worked so far.”

What? I shook my head. “Oh, Hell no. Not in this rain. You'll get drenched or, even worse, you could fall. I'll take you home. Where do you live?”

“No, you don't have to take me home. I need my car to go to work in the morning.”

“I don't work tomorrow, I'll pick you up. What's your address?”

“Zion, you don't have to do that,” she protested.

“You can either give me your address or you can come home with me. Either way, I won't take you to that parking lot.”

I fiddled with the heat and turned it back on. Hot air finally blew into the cab. I sighed in relief.

Finally, Amantha gave me her address.

“Oh, I know those apartments,” I said. They weren't far away from where we were.

“Yeah. Luckily, I'm on the first floor. No stairs to worry about.”

I nodded. “That definitely worked out well. What time do you have to be at work in the morning?”

“I have to be there at 9. You really don't have to come get me. I can—”

I interrupted. “I'll be waiting outside your place at 8:30.”

I clicked on the turn signal and turned onto the road to her apartment building.

“Thank you for everything,” she said quietly.

“There's no need to thank me. And don't be shy. It doesn't suit you.”

Though I wasn't looking at her, I could feel her eyes on me.

“Okay.”

We pulled into the parking lot, which was well lit by outdoor lights.

“Which apartment is it?” I asked.

“2A. To the right.”

There was one parking space open along the sidewalk in front of her apartment. I pulled into it and shifted the truck to park.

“That door there?”

I pointed to a door set to the left under an alcove. A light burned brightly beside it and 2A was clearly visible.

“Yes,” she said.

“Okay. Stay where you are. I'll carry you in.”

She reached out and touched my arm.

I met her gaze.

“You don't have to do that. It's only a little water, and I'm not sweet enough to melt.”

I laughed. “That's cute. I'm still carrying you. Don't protest.”

I ducked out into the rain and closed my door. Quickly, I jogged around the truck. Water pooled on the pavement and sloshed with every move my feet made. It was freakin' cold.

I opened the passenger door and scooped Amantha into my arms.

She wrapped her arms around my neck and I slammed the door shut. When the icy rain hit her, she squealed and buried her face against my chest. I held her tight and jogged to the alcove.

Out of the rain, I turned my attention to the door.

“Want to get your keys...” I asked before the door swung open and a man stood in the doorway.

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The man in the doorway had shoulder-length blond hair and looked worried.

Jealousy raged through me. Who was that? Why was he in Amantha's apartment? Was this who texted her yesterday?

I forgot all about being cold.

“Aunt Amantha! Are you okay?” the man burst out.

She raised her head from my chest and looked at the guy. “I'm fine. Zion thinks I'll melt.”

The man grinned. “You're not sweet enough for that.”

She smiled. “That's what I said!”

I looked at the man again. He was younger than I initially thought, maybe 15. He clearly hadn't filled out yet, still having that high school leanness.

Something was going on that I didn't know about.

My jealousy faded.

“Oh, sorry,” he said. “Bring her in.” The young man stepped aside.

I carried Amantha inside to a living room. A TV was mounted to the wall near the door with a coffee table pushed underneath it, a bay window set on the outside wall,

and a couch stretched against the wall across from us. A bookshelf stuffed to the brim with books stood between the window and couch. A bar counter sprawled through the last wall, connecting the living room and the kitchen, with two kitchen stools sitting underneath the ledge. The door to a hallway stood beside that.

I sat Amantha gently on the couch. The muted TV played some reality show.

“Thank you,” she said.

“You're welcome.”

The young man closed the door.

Amantha said, “This is my nephew, Neo. Neo, this is Zion, the co-worker I told you about.”

Neo nodded. “The thrill seeker.”

I grinned, very pleased by this development. “You've been talking about me.”

Amantha rolled her eyes. “Don't let it go to your head.”

I chuckled. “My truck's still on. Let me grab your chair, and I'll get out of here. I'll be back bright and early tomorrow, though.”

“You don't have to come back tomorrow.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Try to stop me.”

Amantha shook her head. “Well, thank you.”

She looked unbelievably cute, her damp hair hanging around her shoulders and her hazel eyes bright.

I couldn't help myself. I kissed her cheek.

“Sweet dreams, Ms.—”

Neo started to help me. “Her last name is—”

“Ah-ah-ah. Do not tell him,” Amantha interrupted. “We have a bet. He has two weeks to guess my last name. And if you help him, I'll take your phone for a month.”

I stood and whispered behind my hand to Neo, “I'll buy you a new phone. Whatever you want, the newest model. Service paid for a year.”

Amantha added, “And I'll take your PlayStation. And the TV out of your room. For two months.”

I whispered, “You can live with me. I have a bachelor pad that has all of that. And I'll take you skydiving.”

Neo laughed. “You two are perfect for each other.”

My heart lunged in my chest.

No . Think of her as a sibling.

Amantha frowned. “What do you mean?”

“Aunt Amantha, I've lived with you long enough. I know. I guarantee, if you were trying to get your way, you'd do exactly what he is. You're exactly alike.” He

gestured at the door and looked at me. "I can help you grab the wheelchair."

"Great. Thanks, man." I turned to Amantha. "Night, sugar tits."

She laughed. "Night, salty balls."

Neo sighed and shook his head. "I don't want to know."

I laughed and walked outside. Neo followed me, leaving the door cracked behind him.

"Stay here under the roof," I instructed Neo. "I'll grab the chair and bring it to you."

"Okay."

I darted out into the rain.

Holy shit, I forgot how cold the rain was.

I opened the back door of the truck and pulled out the wheelchair. Quickly, I shut the door and jogged it back to Neo.

"Thank you," he said. He put his hands around the handles, which were close together from the chair being folded.

"You're welcome. Will I see you tomorrow? I'm picking Amantha up at 8:30." I rubbed my hands over my arms and hunched my shoulders in an effort to stay warm.

Neo shook his head. "Nah, I leave for school before that."

"Well, it was nice to meet you, Neo." I held my hand out to shake his.

He shook my hand. “You too. I’m sure I’ll see you again, though. Take me skydiving?”

I laughed. “Sure. Hit me up. I’ll take you.”

“Sweet. Night, Z.”

I smiled. I liked that he was giving me a nickname. “Night, Neo.”

As Neo disappeared through the door with the wheelchair, I turned back to the rain. At least the truck’s heat was still on.

I took off running through the rain, intent on my destination.

“Nottingham?”

“No.”

“Myers?”

“No.”

“Whorestershure.”

Amantha looked at me. “What?”

“Westminstershore.”

She looked amused. “I don't understand.”

“Washingtonshire.”

Amantha laughed. “You’re getting worse. Were you trying to say ‘Worcestershire?’”

I sat up. I snapped my fingers and pointed at her. “Yes. That.”

“No to everything you just said.”

Damn. I slumped in my chair and put my hands on the armrests.

Amantha went back to work.

I hadn't slept last night, dedicating it to research, then I'd picked Amantha up that morning for work and had spent all morning in a chair across from her desk, guessing names while she worked. I stayed out of the way when clients came through and let Amantha take any phone calls so no one could say I disrupted business. Unfortunately, so far, I hadn't guessed the right name. I wondered what it would take to bribe Neo.

I pulled a pack of Reese's cups from my pocket and opened them.

Joey walked in from the hangar. Surprise flashed across his face when he saw me.

"I thought you were off today," he said.

"I am." I took the paper wrapper off the Reese's cup.

"Then why are you here?"

"I'm annoying Amantha."

She laughed.

Joey nodded. "Amantha, do I need to make him leave?"

She waved a hand but didn't look away from her spreadsheet. "Nah, he's fine. I wouldn't want him to find a way to say I cheated on our bet."

I probably would, too. Anything to give her a hard time. No shame.

I bit into a Reese's cup and enjoyed the peanut butter and chocolate.

"Well, if he gets too annoying, let me know. I can either put him to work or make

him leave.”

The weather had cleared, so the instructors were taking jumps today. Someone else worked Thursday through the weekend while I was off.

She said, “Thanks. Good to know.” She looked at Joey and smiled wickedly. “Ask him to say ‘Worcestershire.’”

Joey laughed. “I think you have him handled.” Joey turned to me. “If you want to volunteer, I can find something for you to do.”

“I’m good. I’m content with getting on Amantha’s nerves.”

Joey chuckled. “Okay. Let me know if anything changes.” He turned and walked back to the hangar.

“Clint?” I asked.

“No.”

She went back to her spreadsheet. I ate the second Reese’s cup.

When I swallowed, I said, “Thompson.”

“No. That’s Neo’s last name but not mine.”

Interesting. I sat forward in my chair.

“Tell me more about what happened. I know he’s your nephew. He’s lived with you for a while?”

Amantha looked at me sadly.

“Neo is my godson. He's not my nephew by blood. I'm more of an honorary aunt.”

That... didn't sound good.

“What happened?”

“His mom was my best friend. Val. His dad, Sam, treated Val like a queen. They met in high school and instantly knew it was love; they had Neo when they were both 16. People said they were crazy, but they didn't care. They both loved him with everything. Neo was the light of their lives.”

“Was?”

Tears filled her eyes, but she quickly blinked them away. She smiled. “They’d just graduated and gotten married. Beautiful ceremony. They lived together as a happy family. Christmas card cliché, I guess is how you'd refer to them.” Her smile morphed into a frown. “Then... Sam worked construction. A beam fell and crushed him to death. A few months later, Val stopped at a grocery store to pick up some random ingredient for dinner. The store was robbed. For whatever reason, the robbers shot Val. After three days of unconsciousness in the hospital, she died. Her will left Neo in my care. I've had custody of him since he was three.”

I nodded in understanding. Neo was why Amantha didn't go to college. “Life happened.”

Amantha nodded. “I got one semester of college done. Then I dropped out mid-semester to take care of Neo. He knows his parents loved him. I made sure he knows about them. He's seen pictures and heard all the stories I can tell. I've always been Aunt Amantha to him.”

“You raised him, though. Neo is basically your son.”

She smiled sadly. “I wish Val hadn't died, but I will forever be thankful she had Neo. I see her in him every day. I've tried to raise him like Val would.”

“I'm sorry things happened that way, but he seems like a good kid despite all the obstacles you've faced together.”

“Thanks.” She smiled, then turned back to her spreadsheet.

Sending the topic was closed, I cleared my throat and went back to listing names. “Morris?”

“No.”

I shoved the empty wrapper in my pocket. “McKinney?”

“No.”

“Kennedy”

“No.”

“Chenoweth?”

“No.”

“Smithfield?”

She paused then went back to typing. “No.”

“It's not fucking ‘Rumpelstiltskin,’ is it?”

She laughed. “Nope.”

“Dammit, I'm running out of names.”

She hummed innocently. “Give up? How's your Cockney accent?”

I growled. “I'll never admit defeat.”

As she laughed again, I pulled my phone out of my pocket and used the browser to bring up a list of popular surnames. I blinked sleepily at the screen. My all-nighter was starting to wear on me.

“Isn't using outside sources cheating?” she asked.

“No. It's cheating if I find out your actual name by outside means. This should be considered research, which is fair game.”

She chuckled. “Okay.”

I started reading names from the list. Thirty names in and every name received a resounding no.

“I should look you up on social media,” I grumbled.

“Good luck with that,” she said.

“Why? Do you not have any accounts?”

“Oh, I do. But none of them have my last name.”

“Seriously? Fuck.”

Amantha laughed again.

I put my phone down on my lap and ran my hands through my hair. “Let's take a lunch break,” I suggested.

Amantha glanced at the clock. “It's only 11:30.”

“That's okay. Just take your break from 11:30 to 12:30. It'll be fine.”

“I was told 12 to 1. That's what we're doing.”

“Ugh. If you insist. I'm taking a nap. Wake me up at noon, would ya?”

“Sure.”

I closed my eyes and leaned my head back. Sleep quickly overcame me.

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“Zion. Wake up, buddy,” a muffled voice came into my dream.

I was dreaming about spending a relaxing day in bed with a pink-haired beauty. I’d never done that with anyone before but I didn’t want to leave that bed.

Someone else said, “I tried to wake him at noon for lunch but he didn’t want to get up.”

“Zion.”

I came to when someone patted my cheek. Groggily, I looked around, only to find that I still sat in a lobby chair. Joey knelt in front of me, and Amantha sat at her computer.

“Welcome back to reality. You were out,” Joey said. He stood, wearing street clothes like he was ready to go.

I wiped my sleepy eyes and glanced at the clock, only to see it was 5:00.

“Aww, I slept through lunch? You were supposed to wake me,” I chided Amantha.

“I tried. You seemed to need sleep more so I let you sleep.”

“I’ve got to head to class. Are you two okay if I go?” Joey asked.

“Yeah, we’re fine. Thanks, Joey,” I said.

Amantha nodded at him.

“All right. Good night.”

“Good night,” we echoed.

After Joey disappeared through the door, I stretched and looked at Amantha.

“Therapy tonight?”

She nodded. “Yes, I'm headed straight there when I leave.”

I wanted to spend time with her, but I knew she would refuse an offer to take her to therapy.

“What do you and Neo have planned for dinner?” I asked.

“We'll probably find leftovers in the fridge. Why?”

“How about I bring pizza over when you get out of therapy?”

She hesitated. “I'm not looking for a romantic relationship right now.”

“Well, good. Because I don't do romantic relationships,” I said.

“The most we can be is friends. I was warned about how you like to sleep around. I can't let you be involved with Neo then have you suddenly disappear because we slept together. The poor kid has been through enough.”

Ouch. What she said was the truth, but I was a little offended by that.

Defensively, I fell back in my comfort zone.

I held my hand up in the Vulcan salute.

“I’ll behave. Scout’s honor.”

She narrowed her eyes. “That’s not the Scouts’ hand sign, that’s the Vulcan salute from Star Trek.”

“Fine, I swear on my life—”

“I’ve seen your life. It’s a train wreck. Swear on something else.”

I smiled. I liked her a lot.

“I’ll be a priest—”

“Priest of what?”

She was all over my shit.

Maybe I needed a new comfort zone.

Switching gears, seriously I said, “Amantha. I promise. No shit. Friends only. I won’t disappear on you or Neo. I swear.”

She looked at me skeptically. “You need to understand, I’m not always a great person to be around. I have good days and bad days with this recovery. Sometimes, I’m downright mean because I’m in pain.”

“That’s okay.”

She sighed. "Don't make me regret trusting you."

"I won't."

"I'm done with therapy at 6:30. I should be home by 6:45 if you want to come by then."

"Okay. I'll bring dinner. Do you or Neo have a preference?"

A small smile touched her lips. "One pizza chain carries Neo's favorite. The Washburn. You can only get it at Pizza King. Anywhere else, you have to order a meat lover's on barbecue sauce. Order him that, he'll love you forever."

My stomach growled. "That sounds really good actually."

"It is."

Well, that was settled. I would definitely order two of those.

"What about you? What's your favorite?"

Surprise crossed her face. "Me? I usually eat whatever Neo's eating."

She'd raised Neo so long, she adapted her life to make him happy.

"Amantha. What's your favorite?"

"Hawaiian."

I would definitely get one of those, too.

“Okay, thank you. Escort you out?”

She smiled. “Sure.”

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:01 am

“Z!” Neo exclaimed with excitement when he opened the door later that evening.

I guess Amantha didn't tell him I was coming. Maybe she didn't feel she could rely on me? I didn't like the feeling I got from that.

“Hey, Neo. I brought dinner.” I gestured with the pizza boxes. “Is Amantha home? I didn't see her car out front.”

“Not yet. She should be here anytime. Come in.”

Neo gestured me in and had me put the pizzas on the bar top. He shut the door.

“Have a seat. I'll get some plates,” he said as he disappeared around the corner.

I sat down on a stool.

Neo appeared through the kitchen door. “What do you want to drink? We have water, lemonade, or Pepsi.”

“Water's fine.”

Neo opened the fridge and pulled out three bottles. He closed the door then crossed the floor to the bar. He gave one bottle to me and set the other two down on the bar's surface before he went to a cabinet for some plates.

“What did you do today?” he asked as he carried the plates over.

I laughed. "I annoyed Amantha. Pretty productive day, if I say so myself."

I twisted the cap off my bottle of water and took a drink of the cold beverage.

"You worked today, didn't you?" Neo asked. He slid the plates onto the counter.

I set the bottle down and shook my head. "I only work part time at Airplayne Adventures. I'm off Thursday and Friday. Then I work at the mud races over the weekend. Today was exclusively spent trying to guess Amantha's last name. ...And sleeping. But mainly guessing."

Neo laughed and sat down on his own stool. "Did you guess right?"

"Not yet. But I have time. Any chance I can bribe you to tell me?"

"Nope. I'm staying out of it." Neo grinned. "You're going to kick yourself if you don't guess it."

I narrowed my eyes. "Why is that?"

He looked at me innocently. "No reason."

A key scraped in the front door lock then a moment later the handle turned and the door swung open. Amantha came limping in using a cane.

"Hi, guys," she said as she closed the door behind her.

She looked tired.

"Hey," Neo said.

“Hi,” I echoed.

“I see Zion found his way back.” She tossed her purse and keys onto the coffee table and used her cane to walk slowly to her stool. She sat down beside me.

“I did. And I brought pizza.”

“Awesome,” she said. She sounded tired, too.

Neo passed a plate and a water bottle over to her.

“Thank you.” She smiled at Neo.

“You're welcome.”

Neo passed me a plate.

“Thanks,” I said with a nod.

Neo nodded back.

I cracked open the top pizza to peek inside. “Hawaiian.” I put the box on the counter by Amantha. The other two would be the specialty orders.

“Oh, you didn't have to...” Amantha protested.

I looked at her. Her tired face, blinking sleepily back at me, was framed by her pink hair. She looked incredible.

“I did have to. Please enjoy.”

Then I looked at Neo and smiled. "I was told this is your favorite." I opened the top of the barbecue pizza.

Neo's eyes grew wide. "Are you serious?"

"Hell yeah, man. Err... Sorry. Umm... Heck yeah, man. Dig in. There are two of them."

"Thanks!" Neo took two slices of pizza.

I asked Neo questions about school while we ate dinner. It turned out he was a science geek who was doing really well in school. He planned to go on to become a doctor.

"That's amazing, Neo. You should absolutely go for it."

A smile broke across his face. "Thank you."

I ate a bite of pizza and glanced over at Amantha. She'd propped her head against the wall and fallen asleep.

I said, "Aww. Someone fell asleep. Hey, Neo, where's her bed?"

"End of the hall, door on the left."

"I'm going to carry her. Can you make sure the door is open, please?"

"Sure." The boy's stool slid back, and he took off down the hallway.

I stood and scooped Amantha into my arms. She snuggled her face into my chest.

She smelled so good. My heart beat faster in my chest as berries filled my senses. Despite wanting to, I kept myself from kissing her head.

I carried a sleeping Amantha back the hallway. Neo stood at a door at the end of the hallway with the door open.

“Thanks, man,” I whispered as I slipped into the room.

A simple bed, end tables, dresser, and TV filled the small, dark room. The curtains kept any light from coming in through the window. The only light came from the open hallway door. Books and a clock were on the end table I could see.

Neo came in behind us and tugged down the bedding.

I gently laid Amantha down on the mattress, her head on the pillow. I unlaced her shoes and carefully pulled them off, sitting them out of the way on the floor beside the bed.

After making sure she laid comfortably, I pulled the comforter around her sleeping form.

I smiled and bit my lip ring. She looked cute with her hair spread out on the pillow like that.

I brushed a stray strand of hair behind her ear. “Sweet dreams, Amantha.”

I looked at Neo. “Does she need an alarm set?” I whispered.

He shook his head. “Her clock automatically goes off during the week.”

I nodded and whispered, “Okay, let's go.”

Neo and I stepped out into the hallway and pulled the door shut behind us.

“It's early,” I said. “Wanna get out of here?”

Neo looked surprised. “Sure.”

“Let's clean up where we ate dinner and leave a note for Amantha.”

“Okay.” Neo jumped into action and ran toward the kitchen.

Amantha would kill me if I took him to a party. Luckily, I had something kid-friendly in mind.

I walked into the kitchen to help Neo clean up.

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“Oh, ouch!” I winced when Neo wiped out hard roller skating. “Anything broken?”

“I don't think so,” he groaned.

“Okay, let's get you up again and skate it off.”

I helped Neo to his feet.

The smooth concrete floor of the roller rink stretched beneath us. Patio tables and chairs stood outside the barrier walls of the indoor rink, along with a concession stand. Nothing but water was allowed inside the rink. Small tables and benches lined the outer wall of the rink where skaters could sit during their leisurely skate.

“You're gonna have bruises tomorrow. I hope you're having enough fun to make them worth it in the meantime.”

Neo forced a grin. “Absolutely.”

I smiled. “Okay, good.”

I skated a fancy circle around Neo.

He laughed, and we skated some more. His body was settling back down after his tumble.

His face fell when he saw someone come in the entrance.

Anger coursed through my veins. I didn't like that someone took his joy away like that.

“What's wrong?” I asked.

I looked at the entrance but I only saw a group of girls. Was he being bullied by a female?

Neo's cheeks turned red.

We continued skating side-by-side around the rink.

“Neo? What's wrong?” I repeated.

“Nothing,” he said.

“Is someone picking on you?”

He frowned and shook his head. “No, nothing like that.”

“Then what?”

“I like a girl who just came in,” he rushed out.

Did he say what I think he said?

“Slower, in English,” I said.

He sighed. Keeping his voice low, he said, “I like a girl who just came in.”

“Oh.” I smiled and my anger faded. Teenage hormones.

I was the worst person to talk to him about a relationship — playboy bachelor and all — but maybe I could offer good enough advice to try. “You want to talk to her?”

His eyes widened, and he practically shouted, “No!”

I chuckled. He needed a strategy.

“Do you want to take a break and get something at the concession stand?”

Neo craned his neck to catch sight of his crush again. I didn't know which girl he was trying to find, but I remembered those days.

“Uh, sure.”

Neo and I skated to the entrance to the rink. We stepped out and skated over to the concession stand. I bought us nachos, Reese's cups, and fountain sodas. We sat down at a nearby table to eat.

“So you like a girl, huh?” I said before I took a drink from my straw. God, I sounded like a parent.

No, wingman, I decided. This was nothing more than wingman duty. I could be a wingman.

“Shh,” Neo urged.

I swallowed my soda. “Does she know? Have you talked to her?”

Subtly, he shook his head. He looked around warily. “No.”

“You're going to regret it if you don't say anything. What if she moves and you never

talk to her? You'll always wonder 'what if.' At least talk to her. Don't let her become a missed chance. If nothing else, try to be her friend."

"But what if—"

"Hi, Neo," a small feminine voice sounded beside the table.

I turned my head to see a teen girl standing beside the table with her dark hair twisted up onto her head, stick-on star gems pressed beside her eyes, wearing black jean shorts and a black jersey shirt with the number 14 on it. Was this Neo's girl?

"Hi, Mona," Neo said.

"Are you having fun? I love to skate," she said.

"Yeah. This is my first time here, but it's awesome." He hesitated. "Do you come here a lot?"

She nodded. "A few times a week. It's great. I love it. Maybe I'll see you here again?"

"Absolutely."

She smiled. "See you at school tomorrow."

"Yeah. Yeah! See you at school tomorrow."

Mona waved and skated away.

Neo's forehead fell forward onto the table.

I held back a laugh. "That went really well. She likes you. Fight for her."

He raised his head and looked at me. “You think she likes me?”

I nodded. “I do. Go for what you want.”

Neo frowned. “What if she wants to go out? Aunt Amantha said money is tight right now because she was off work. I don't want to stress her out more.”

Wingman duty. “I’ve got you. You go after the girl. We’ll take care of the rest when it happens.”

He was too young for the condom talk, right? I eyed Neo. Yeah, I'd let Amantha handle that.

Neo smiled. “Thanks, Z.”

I fist-bumped him. “You're welcome. You've got this.”

Neo happily ate his nachos and drank his soda. I opened a pack of Reese's cups.

I could do this wingman thing. I was just happy I could help Neo out.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:01 am

Saturday, I pulled my helmet off and tossed it on my desk in the office. I took off my jumpsuit and put it on the chair. Eric also stripped out of his racing jumpsuit at his desk.

A big counter stretched across the room, separating our private desks from the public waiting area. Mark, our 30-year-old male office manager, sat at a desk across the counter beside the front door.

Eric and I had just raced, and I'd won, but I was still restless. The adrenaline rush hadn't helped like it normally did.

I realized I hadn't had sex for a week, not since before I met Amantha. Maybe that was my problem. Maybe I needed some release. I wondered if jerking off would make me feel better.

"I'll be right back. Gotta take a dump," I made an excuse to the guys.

A couple of grunts were the only reaction I got.

I walked into the small bathroom and locked the door behind me. As I walked forward, I undid my jeans.

I leaned one hand against the sink counter and watched in the mirror as I pulled my cock out of my pants and gave it a stroke.

My cock stood hard and tall, ready for action. It throbbed with pleasure, making it jump as I watched.

I brought my hand to my mouth and spit in my palm, then grasped my hand around my cock again.

My eyes closed at the delicious sensation I received when I stroked the makeshift lube over the surface.

I imagined a warm mouth wrapped around the girth of my dick; my cock disappearing as it slid between full, plump lips. A tongue tracing the bottom of my cock and a mouth pulling its way down the length, sucking especially deep when it reached the tip.

My strokes grew longer, faster; my grip tighter. I let my imagination take over.

The lips that encircled my cock changed to a set of pouty ones. My hand pressed against the back of her pink hair to bring her closer.

Fantasy Amantha deep-throated the length of my cock, swallowing around it.

Of fucking course my mind went straight to her. But my brain knew what it wanted.

The fantasy turned me on, and I stroked harder, jacking myself to the edge.

A groan almost escaped my lips, but I choked it back, right as cum spurted onto my hand.

I kept stroking slowly through the aftermath, my eyes still shut, pretending Amantha's mouth milked me dry.

When the feeling was over, I opened my eyes and stared at myself in the mirror.

While I enjoyed the release, I still felt unsettled. Maybe I'd have to make it through

until Monday and skydive to feel normal.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:01 am

I sat on the wall on the roof of my apartment building later that night, dangling my bare feet in the crisp night air.

One more gulp from the Jack Daniels bottle left it empty. I peered into the bottle to make sure I wasn't imagining things, then dropped it onto the roof behind me.

Drinking seemed like a great way to pass time until I could go skydiving again.

The town lights in the distance were all blurred and streaked. Honestly, they were a lot prettier like this.

My phone chirped in my pocket. I pulled it out and looked at it. Apparently, I had a new text message, but the letters all blurred together and I couldn't make out the words.

I hit "call" and brought the phone to my ear.

The phone rang a few times before a female voice answered. "Zion? Are you okay?"

I have to attempt this talking thing. I slurred, "Whatever you texxx-texxx-mess-fuck. Whatever you sss-said with letters, tell me. I can't read it right now."

"Are you drunk?"

I held the fingers of my free hand up in front of my face and pinched them together in front of my eyes. "Little bit."

“Where are you?”

I put my hand down and looked at my surroundings. Moving my head too much made me dizzy. I shut my eyes.

Immediately, I started to drift off.

“Zion!”

I startled awake. “What?”

“Where are you?”

“Roof.”

The lights in the distance caught my attention. Pretty.

“What? Get off the roof!”

“Mmm. But I don't wanna.”

“Please, Zion. For me. Get off the roof.”

“Who isss thiss anyway?”

“This is Amantha.”

I smiled and perked up. “Ma-mantha! How are you?”

“I'm okay. I'd be a lot better if you could check something on TV for me. Mine's not working.”

“Okay, ssssure. Hold on a ssssecond.”

I laid the phone on the wall and twisted my body around to put my feet on the roof.

The movement made my head swim and I swayed backward for a second.

“Whoa,” I moaned and shut my eyes.

“Zion! Zion!” I heard being yelled through the phone.

Oh yeah, I had to do something. I stood on the roof’s flat surface and picked up the phone.

“Onmyway,” I slurred. I trudged toward the door that led inside. Mounted outdoor lights lit the way.

Unfortunately, when I reached the door, I couldn't remember why I was there.

“What... doing?” I asked.

“You were going to check something on TV for me.”

“Oh, yeah.”

I pulled the door open and walked into the building. The top landing, which accessed the roof, had the roof door and stairs that led down. The stairwell was well lit.

I held onto the handrail and slowly made my way down the stairs.

“Are you doing okay, Zion?”

“Shhh. Conce—conce—focu—walking down s—s—” I growled. “Climby thingssss.”

I could've sworn Amantha held back a laugh.

“Good job. Keep going,” she encouraged.

After a few flights, I recognized the door with the big 3 on it. I pushed it open and fumbled through.

My apartment door was the first one in the hallway. Luckily, I'd left it unlocked because I had no idea where to find my keys.

I opened the door and stumbled inside.

“Are you in your apartment?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

“Make sure you lock the door.”

I shut the door and turned the lock.

“There.” I thought really hard. “Was I p'posed to do a thing?” I couldn't remember.

Amantha laughed. “All you have to do is go to sleep.”

The TV was mounted to the wall across the room and the coffee table stood a few feet from the couch.

The couch was right beside me, and, even though it was blurry, it looked inviting.

I laid down on the cushions and propped a throw pillow behind my head. I closed my eyes.

Everything spun. Nausea rose in my stomach, and I felt like I might throw up. I groaned and put one foot on the floor to try to combat the spins. I breathed a sigh of relief when the move did help. My body relaxed into the cushions.

“Are you lying down now?” I heard.

Honestly, I forgot I was holding the phone to my ear.

“Yeah. On the couch. Feel... like heaven. Only thing better would be you here, too.”

I closed my eyes.

Amantha paused, then she said, “Well, if you're going to sleep, I'll get off of here.”

“Want to come over? Mouth, puss—puss—fuck. Cunt. I'll fuck wherever. You'll enjoy. We'll both enjoy.”

Amantha laughed. “You're drunk. Proposition me when you're sober.”

That sobered me almost instantly. “Really?”

She laughed again. “You won't remember any of this in the morning. Good night, Mr. Blackwell.”

Amantha disconnected the call.

How did she know my last name? More importantly, was she serious?

I passed out with that question spinning in my mind.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:01 am

In pain, I rested my forehead against the surface of my desk at the mud racing track. My head throbbed and my mouth was drier than a desert. I suffered from the hangover from Hell.

“I’m never drinking again,” I mumbled.

Eric laughed and shouted, “I’ve heard that before!”

Okay, maybe he didn’t shout, but that’s how it sounded to me.

“Shhhh, you’re too loud,” I hissed.

“You’re going to be useless today!”

“Shhh,” I urged again. More laughter. Asshole.

I heard the door open, but didn’t move from my position.

“How can I help you?” I heard Mark say.

“Can I see Zion, please?” a soft voice asked.

Slowly, I lifted my head and squinted through the bright lights at who stood at the counter.

My eyes adjusted, and I saw that Amantha stood there. She looked like an angel in a simple white shirt with her pink hair loose in waves. Did she have her cane ? I

worried absently.

Amantha saw me and smiled. I hadn't seen or spoken to her since I put her to bed on Thursday. Seeing her was like receiving a breath of fresh air.

Mark laughed. "If you can get him off that desk, you can have him."

She raised an eyebrow and smirked. "Promise?"

"Promise. He's no good here today."

Well, Hell, if he thought that then I was out of there no matter what. Good riddance. I wanted to go back to bed, anyway.

"Okay," she said.

She disappeared as she bent behind the counter, presumably setting a bag on the floor and digging into it. I couldn't see behind the counter from where I was, but I heard something rustle.

She stood back up and grinned at me. "How's this?"

A hand stretched over the counter holding a package of Reese's cups.

My eyes widened. Yes.

I stood from the desk.

"He's all yours," Mark joked.

"Fuck you, Mark," I grumbled.

I moved forward and walked through the gate on the counter. I stopped in front of Amantha.

She stood there holding her cane in one hand. A small paper bag with handles sat by her feet.

Amantha passed me the package of Reese's.

“You're wonderful,” I said.

She smiled. “Let's get out of here,” she said.

I winced at the volume of her voice, but I knew the volume was in my head.

She bent down to get the bag, but I intervened.

“Uh, uh. I've got it.”

I grasped the handles and picked the bag up before Amantha could.

Eric crossed the room to the counter. “Amantha?” he asked.

I cringed at the volume.

She looked surprised. “How'd you know?”

“Zion's talked about you. I'm Eric. His best friend.” He extended a hand across the counter, which Amantha shook.

“It's nice to meet you,” she said.

“You, too.”

I couldn't take any more. “Okay, it's too loud in here. We have to go,” I said to Amantha.

She smiled at Eric and shrugged before we headed toward the door.

Eric flashed me a thumbs-up. I flipped him off. His responding laugh made me cringe at the noise.

I walked beside Amantha as she slowly maneuvered with her cane. We made it through the door and down the building's ramp.

I squinted in the bright sunlight.

“Where's your car?” she whispered.

There was no end to my appreciation for her quietness.

“Not here. I had Eric pick me up because I wasn't safe to drive. ...And I'm not sure where I put my keys.”

She nodded and whispered, “Okay. Get in the car. I'll drive.”

Still squinting, I gave a single nod, afraid that nodding my head like normal might make me queasy.

We both climbed in the car. I put the bag on the floor between my feet and opened the Reese's package. I unwrapped a piece and when my teeth sank into the candy, I closed my eyes and moaned (quietly) with pleasure as I chewed the bite.

Once Amantha was seated, I opened my eyes to watch as she twisted around to put her cane in the backseat.

When she was done, she turned to me and whispered, "Jailbreak successful." The wicked smile on her face was contagious.

She started the engine and turned the radio off. Bless her.

"That bag has stuff for your hangover," she whispered, then she turned her head to back out.

I perked up. "It does?"

She backed out of the spot and pulled forward onto the road.

Intrigued, I pulled the bag up into my lap and looked inside. A bottle of water, a bottle of ibuprofen, sunglasses, a ziplock bag of toast, and another pack of Reese's. The sunglasses weren't even goofy or embarrassing, simply regular men's sunglasses. I could've kissed her.

I stuffed the uneaten Reese's cup inside the bag and put the sunglasses on my face. They dulled the light immediately, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Then I opened the water and used it to down two ibuprofen. The cool liquid on my throat brought intense comfort. I gulped it all down.

But wait... How did she know?

I capped the empty bottle, turned to look at Amantha, and asked, "What are you doing here?"

She spoke quietly. "I'm off work. I came to get you. Figured you weren't up to

working today.”

That didn't answer what I wanted to know. I simply asked her. “How did you know I'd be hungover?”

Amantha glanced at me and smiled. “You called me last night.”

I frowned. “But I don't have your number.”

“Yeah, I got your number from Joey to thank you for whatever you said to Neo. I texted you, then you called me because you were too drunk to read the text. I figured you'd have a hangover today.”

Made sense. But...

“I didn't say anything embarrassing, did I?”

She held back a grin. “Nope.”

Ah, fuck. I covered my face with my hand.

“Liar. I'm sorry,” I muttered into my palm.

Amantha laughed and patted my arm. “You were fine. What do you want to do today?”

I groaned. “Go back to bed.” I moved my hand away from my face.

She clicked her tongue. “Sounds like a wasted day to me.”

I would've rolled my eyes at her but my head hurt too much. “Well, what would you

suggest?”

“You can spend the day with Neo and me.”

I thought about it for a moment. “Do you expect functional?”

“Nope,” she said cheerfully. “As you are.”

I could do that.

“Fine.”

“Awesome.”

All I wanted to do was shut my eyes.

“Can I please take a quick nap?”

She smiled. “Sure.”

Yes.

I sighed and leaned my head back against the seat. I fell asleep almost instantly, the sunglasses holding back the light.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:01 am

By the time the drive ended and I woke from my nap, the pain medicine started to work. I still wasn't taking the sunglasses off for anything; fight me.

Amantha parked in front of her apartment.

“Are you awake?” she asked.

I grunted.

“I'll take that as a yes,” she said.

Amantha grabbed her cane from the backseat.

“Let's head inside,” she said.

I didn't want to move but I grabbed that bag and followed behind Amantha as she walked into the apartment.

Neo sat at the kitchen bar eating a bowl of cereal. He tipped his chin at me when I walked in.

“Why're you wearing my sunglasses?” he asked when I didn't take them off inside.

“He's hungover,” Amantha said.

Neo nodded, then continued like the sight was nothing unusual. “Mona called and wants to know if I can go skating then watch a Roller Derby with her today. Can I

go?”

Amantha looked confused. She sat on the couch and leaned her cane beside her.
“Where? Who all's going? And who's Mona?”

Neo said, “I think it's Mona and her parents. At the local skating rink. In town.”

“Okay. And who's Mona?”

“She's a girl I go to school with. So can I go?”

Amantha didn't look convinced.

“Mona's cool. I've met her,” I volunteered.

I sank onto the couch beside Amantha and put the bag down by my feet. On my way back up, I pulled the opened Reese's cup package out of the bag. I unwrapped the candy and took a bite. As the taste took over my mouth, I hummed happily. The medicine was definitely working.

“Does she want you to meet her there or are they coming here?”

“I think they're coming here.”

Amantha nodded. “I have to meet her parents, but then okay.”

Neo beamed. “Thanks! I have to call Mona!” He rushed down the hall, leaving his cereal abandoned, and slammed his bedroom door.

Amantha cringed at the noise. “Did I do the right thing?” she asked, turning to me.
“I'm winging it as a parent, and sometimes I have no idea what's right and wrong.”

I watched her worried expression through the sunglasses. “Yeah, it's the right thing. He has a huge crush on Mona. You just made his year. Although, you might want to talk to him about sex and protecting himself.”

The worry faded from her face, and she waved a hand. “Oh, we've already had that talk. He knows all about sex, condoms, STIs, all of it. I gave him a box of condoms and told him I didn't care how many he used, he just needed to be safe. He's good.”

My mind flashed back to the “talk” I'd received, which had been significantly different.

I stared at her for a second then chuckled. “You're the cool aunt. Good for you.”

I finished my Reese's cup and threw the packaging into the bag.

She smiled. “I'm trying my best to raise him right. I hope I didn't screw up too much.”

“Nah. He's a good kid. He obviously loves you.”

Neo's door opened and he came running down the hallway. He stopped at the side of the couch. “They're here. Thanks for letting me go.” He kissed Amantha's cheek, then took off toward the front door.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. I have to meet her parents before you leave,” Amantha said as she struggled to stand up fast.

Neo flung the door open and ran outside.

I jumped up and helped steady Amantha with my arm. When she was steady on her feet, I handed her the cane.

“Thanks,” she smiled at me and used the cane to hurry outside.

I followed behind and poked my head out the door.

Neo stood with the back door to the black car open, talking to someone inside, who I assumed was Mona. He climbed in the car and shut the door behind him.

A man waved and leaned out the driver's window. He reminded me of a volunteer baseball coach; his brown hair was short and he wore glasses. I could see a blond woman in the passenger seat.

“Thanks for letting Neo hang out with Mona,” the man spoke loudly from the car. “We’ll have him back after the derby ends tonight. It won't be late. See ya tonight!”

Amantha went to say something, but the car backed out and left before she could.

Her mouth hung open for a second before she said, “That didn't go at all how I imagined.”

“Maybe you can talk to them tonight. I'm sure he'll be fine. They're going to spend the day at a public place in the middle of town.”

She looked at me and gave me a tight smile. “You're right. What do you want to do today?”

I wrapped my arm around her and pulled her back inside.

“Get your purse. And point me to your wheelchair. We're going out.”

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:01 am

Amantha screamed and clung to the zip line's handle as she flew across the river. Her hair was loose and streamed behind her from under her helmet.

To keep from hurting her ankle, the staff strapped her into a seated safety harness and would meet her with her wheelchair on the other side. A thrill ride without a big risk. I loved watching the adrenaline pumping through her.

One of the young male staff called me over. "Come on. We'll get you ready to go."

I couldn't take my eyes (sunglasses free, I finally took them off) from Amantha, though. She'd started having fun. I could hear it in her laughs and cheers as she propelled down the line.

"Gimme a minute. I want to watch her ride." A smile touched my lips as I tracked her with my gaze. "Beautiful," I murmured.

She reached the wooden platform on the other side. Two staff stepped forward to catch her and help her down.

I loved how excited she looked. She had a huge grin on her face and I could see, even from where I stood, that her cheeks flushed red. She was thrilled,

"Okay, wherever you're ready," I said, stepping into position.

The staff secured my helmet in place and hooked me into a standard harness.

"Hold onto the handle above you," I was instructed. "Most importantly, have fun!"

When you're ready, take off with a running leap and hold on.”

I grinned. “You got it!”

The thrill of flying down that zip line coursed through my veins as I looked down its course.

Full of anticipation, I launched myself forward with a couple of steps and I was off.

As I sped down the line, the wind whipped past my face and adrenaline coursed through my veins.

A cheer escaped my lips as the scenery whipped by.

Too soon, the wooden planks of the opposite platform were under my heels.

My cheeks flushed red, and I desperately looked for Amantha. She sat waiting for me in her wheelchair.

The staff unhooked me and took my helmet, then I was on her. I lifted her out of her chair, her legs wrapped around my hips, and I hugged her close.

“You looked beautiful,” I told her breathlessly.

“Thank you.” Her eyes sparkled and she grinned. There was one of those genuine smiles that I’d wanted.

Unable to resist, my lips crashed onto hers. Amantha's warm mouth welcomed mine, our tongues dueling fighting for dominance. As her fingers slid into my hair to deepen the kiss, one of the staff cleared his throat.

Honestly, I forgot they were there. Her body felt perfect against mine.

Amantha broke the kiss and smiled at the man. “Sorry, not sorry.” Her gaze met mine. “Might want to put me down.”

I growled. “No, I don't want to.” My hands squeezed her ass.

She tightened her body around me. “Only for now.” Her voice held a sultry promise for later.

Reluctantly, I sat her back into her wheelchair.

Moving on, she gushed excitedly, “I had so much fun! This was a great idea!”

I smiled. “I'm glad you enjoyed it. You'll be a thrill seeker yet.”

“Are you up for more adventures?” I asked.

“If they're as fun as zip lining was, then he'll yeah.”

We thanked the staff and navigated to the nearby building. I hit the ADA access button to get inside.

Once we got in, we went straight to the indoor skydiving experience. She was going to love this.

Amantha gasped. “I thought I had to skydive if you won our bet. You haven't won yet.”

I leaned down and nipped her ear. “You have to skydive with me, for real, when I win our bet. This is just for fun. Enjoy it.”

Before long, Amantha wore a flight suit, helmet, and goggles.

“I don't know about this,” she said as she looked from her wheelchair at the equipment and the crowd watching the current diver, worry written all over her face. The vertical wind tunnel blew powerful air up, enough to hold a human body suspended, glass circling it to keep viewers out.

“There's no risk involved. You'll have fun. I promise.”

She gave me a hesitant smile. “Okay. What about you?”

“Don't worry. I'll skydive multiple times tomorrow. This is all for you. I want you to have fun. That's your only concern. Trust me.”

She smiled a genuine smile at me. Warmth settled in my chest from being on the receiving end.

“Okay,” she said.

A staff member came to guide Amantha into the machine. I flashed her two thumbs up as they moved away.

Soon, Amantha's body was suspended horizontally in the air of the wind tunnel. Her cheeks blew in the wind and happiness radiated from her.

I could see her screams of happiness, but the wind absorbed the sound.

I knew she felt weightless, as if she were floating. Adrenaline likely pumped through her veins. It probably felt wonderful.

Before long, her flight was over, and the staff who operated the machine helped her

down. When she was back in her chair and wheeled over to me, the happiness and dazed look on her face made me smile. I'd bet that's how she looked after an orgasm.

“That was amazing!” she practically yelled.

I leaned down and hugged her. She wrapped her arms tightly around me. Mmm, berries. I inhaled her scent deeply.

“I'm happy you had fun. Told you to trust me.” I leaned back and winked at her.

She laughed. “I never should've doubted you.”

“Damn right. Don't do it again.”

Amantha smiled at me then went off to get changed. When she was done, we went out to her car.

“Can I drive?” I asked as we approached. My hangover was gone mostly.

“Sure.”

Amantha parked her wheelchair to transfer into the passenger seat, but I clicked my tongue in disapproval and lifted her.

While she was in my arms, I said, “A princess doesn't do this alone. And at least for today, you're a princess.”

She bit her bottom lip. That was one of my weaknesses.

I groaned and kissed her.

Before it got too out of hand, I tore my lips away and said, “Don't bite your bottom lip or I'm going to kiss you.”

She grinned and bit her bottom lip again immediately.

I smiled. “Vixen. You'll pay for that later.”

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

I kissed her cheek and settled her into the passenger seat.

“Be right back.”

I shut the door and folded the wheelchair to put it in the trunk. When I got to the back, I realized Amantha hadn't given me the keys.

As I started around the car, I saw a devious look cross her face and the trunk popped open.

I laughed and loaded the wheelchair inside, then I went to the driver's side. I opened the door and sank into the car.

“Thanks for opening the trunk,” I said as I pulled the door shut behind me.

Before I knew what was happening, Amantha straddled my lap and rubbed her pussy against my dick. She'd taken her pants off and only wore the smallest pink panties on her lower body. The reason for the devious smile, I would guess.

My eyes widened while my hands automatically cupped her ass. Friends. Nun. No,

siblings. Do not fuck!

“Amantha,” I breathed.

Her hand reclined the seat back then stroked my face.

“The adrenaline rush made me so horny. I need you now.”

I shook my head. “We can't. I don't do relationships.”

“That's okay. We're friends with benefits. It's all for fun.”

For fun. Yeah, that made sense to me. And, Hell, who was I kidding? My thoughts were very non-sibling-like.

“No one gets hurt or expects more, right?” I asked.

“Right.”

It didn't take much to convince me.

“Okay. Fuck me, Amantha.”

Her mouth sank onto mine. Our lips and tongues fell into sync perfectly.

Her hands went to my jeans, and I did them. With no hesitation, she pulled my cock out, shifted her panties aside, and sank her heat onto it.

Mmm. I rocked up into her and we kissed frantically. Warm, wet perfection surrounded my dick as I bottomed out inside her. She was tight, perfect for me. I moaned against her lips. She felt better than anyone before. Why did she feel better?

She rocked her hips against mine, riding me mercilessly.

“Yes,” she breathed against my lips.

She needed fast, while her adrenaline high lasted. Plus, we were in a parking lot where anyone could see.

I used her hips to hold her close and helped her ride me.

Her clit rubbed against my exposed skin, and she threw her head back, moaning as we slid together.

The noises she moaned made my climax build quickly. From her wetness and noises, I could tell she was almost there.

“Yeah, that's it,” I encouraged. “Ride me. Take what you need. Make that tight little pussy clench around my cock.”

The words pushed her over, and she throbbed around me with a cry of pleasure. Almost immediately, I followed her, my cum erupting inside her and filling her up. She rested against my chest and a sense of contentment filled me as I clutched her to me. I stayed inside her.

When she caught her breath, she looked at me and smiled. “Your dick is perfect.”

I laughed. “So's your pussy.”

She pulled off my cock, a thread of cum linking us together before she snapped her panties into place. She climbed back into the passenger seat.

A sinking feeling hit me as I tucked my dick into my jeans and re-did them. We'd

been so in-the-moment, I hadn't thought about it. I thought about nothing except getting inside her.

I put the seat back up and looked at her. Flushed cheeks, kiss-swollen lips, fingerprints on her hips, which I saw before she pulled her pants over them. Her look screamed “just fucked,” and I liked it.

What I hated was being the bearer of bad news. I had a sharp tightness in my chest as I said, “We didn't use a condom. I'm sorry.” I grimaced.

She waved a hand. “We did get a little... Eager. Don't worry. I'm on the pill. If you're clean, we don't have a problem.”

“I'm clean.” Immense relief flooded me. I'd never gone without a condom before. Maybe that was why she felt so good.

“Good, me too. We're good.” She smiled. “Thanks for the fuck. I needed that.”

Me, too.

I nodded. “You're welcome.”

I started the car and drove us back to her apartment.

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“Nooooooo!” Amantha threw popcorn at the TV as I answered the question correctly and pulled ahead, playing along with a Jeopardy episode.

After our action-packed morning, we spent the afternoon hanging out at her apartment.

She'd showered and changed into yoga pants and a tank top after we got back. Her wavy pink hair and casual clothes made her look adorable.

I never had sex with the same person twice (more than once in a night only counted as once). I never felt compelled to return once we'd gotten dressed again. But I wanted to fuck Amantha again, after we'd already gotten dressed again. Maybe this friends with benefits thing was the difference?

Whatever, I didn't care. I wanted her.

“I guess if I have to lose, at least the contestant is hot.” The contestant she spoke of was tall, toned, and looked suave.

I nodded. “He is. I'd do him. I'd bet he has a nice dick, can you imagine? His pubic hair is probably neat and trimmed, and that cock's probably a nice mouthful. Or at least we can imagine it is.”

Amantha looked at me with surprise. “Really?”

“Yeah. I don't care about gender. If someone's hot, they're hot. I've had men before.” I turned to her. “But right now, I think you're hot. Let's forget about the TV,” I

suggested with a grin.

She smiled and looked at me. “Oh yeah? What would you suggest instead?”

I licked my lips. “Well, I was thinking...” My mouth crashed onto hers.

“Mmm,” she said.

She set the bowl of popcorn on the floor and slid her fingers into my hair.

I pressed my body against hers. We stretched out on the couch, with me on top of her.

Leisurely, we kissed. There was no hurry.

I took my time exploring her mouth with my tongue and worshipping her. We sipped at each other's lips and licked and nibbled each other's mouths.

That was new for me, casual exploration of someone I liked. Of a friend.

Like teenagers, we made out on the couch for hours. We kissed, and sucked, and explored.

Her nails pulled down my back. My hand cupped her breast above her shirt, lightly thumbing her nipple.

I decided I needed to “explore” further.

My mouth left hers and I kissed down her jaw and down her throat. I pulled her tank top and light, lacy bra under her breasts. I kissed across her chest and sucked one of her nipples into my mouth.

She moaned and arched her chest against my mouth.

My hand came up to cup her other breast and my fingers squeezed that nipple. I worked them together, one with my mouth and one with my hand, lapping, teasing, and tugging.

Amantha writhed under the attention.

I switched nipples, still sucking one and squeezing the other.

Amantha moaned, her fingers threading into my hair to press me closer.

I worked her nipples slowly, taking my time to drive Amantha out of her mind. I worshipped her chest, slowly building her pleasure.

I liked this. Maybe I was missing something before by not being with the same person twice.

“Please, Zion, please,” Amantha begged.

Her nipples were rock hard, and she trembled beneath me.

“What do you want?” I murmured before flicking my tongue over a hard peak.

“If you don't fuck me soon, I'm going to lose my mind.”

I laughed and slid my hand down her body into her yoga pants.

“No panties. That's hot,” I said before sucking her nipple again.

My fingers slipped between her lips. She was soaked.

Slowly, I slid my fingertips around her clit.

My mouth moved to hers, and I kissed her as I circled her clit. I flicked it a little then moved my fingers to dip inside her.

She moaned against my lips as I slowly began to thrust my fingers.

I moved my thumb to circle her nub while my fingers worked their magic.

I edged her, pushing her right to the edge of pleasure then backing off and starting again.

Amantha was panting and begging to come by the fourth time I edged her.

“Please, please let me come,” she whimpered. Sweat had broken out over her body and her eyes looked wild.

I smiled. “You said please. Good girl. You can come for me.”

I dipped my head to suck her nipple back into my mouth and pressed my fingers as deep as they would go. I thrust them hard and rubbed vigorous circles around her clit with my thumb.

Amantha shattered around my fingers, her orgasm pulsing hard and deep. A desperate cry of relief left her lips, and her fingers squeezed my shoulders and the back of my head.

Once the initial wave was over, her body collapsed against the couch. She panted and brought her hands to her hair.

“Wow,” she said.

I pulled my fingers from her pussy and met her gaze as I licked them clean.

“That's hot,” she groaned as she watched.

I smiled and kissed her again, our mouths fusing perfectly together.

In the back of my mind, I heard a ringing. Was I hearing things now?

Amantha broke the kiss. “That's my cell phone. It's in my purse.”

Oh. Guess it wasn't me, after all.

Quickly, I climbed off of Amantha and grabbed her purse from the coffee table across the room. I handed it to her.

She pulled the phone out and frowned at the screen.

“I don't know this number but it's local. Hello?” she asked, raising the phone to her ear. She moved to a seated position and used one hand to adjust her bra and tank top to the correct positions again.

Her eyes widened. Fear filled her face.

Oh, I didn't like that one bit.

She asked, “Is he okay? Is everyone okay? ...Yes, of course! Please treat it. Do what you need to do.”

She listened for a minute then said, “Of course. I'll be right there.”

Amantha ended the call and stared at her phone.

“What's going on? Is everything okay?” I asked.

She spoke with shock. “That was Detective Berger. Neo was in a drunk driving accident tonight.”

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Alarm shot through me. “What? Is he okay?” I sat down beside her.

Amantha looked like she was about to cry so I wrapped my arms around her.

“He's okay.” She sniffled and buried her face in my shoulder. She hugged me desperately. “They said he was a little banged up, but he'll be fine. He broke his arm but they said it's only a few bruises otherwise. I'm supposed to pick him up at the hospital.”

I stroked her hair and held her close.

She lost control and cried against my shoulder.

“What happened?” I asked.

She sobbed. “The detective wouldn't tell me. All he said was everyone's okay. I feel like I failed Neo. He didn't deserve this.”

I tried to call her down. “Shhh. No. You didn't fail him. This was an accident. You couldn't have done anything.”

She sobbed more. “I'm sorry.”

“Nah, don't be sorry. Cry it out. Get out all that doubt and negativity so you can straighten your back and face this head-on. When you're ready, I'll drive you to pick up Neo.”

Sometimes even the strongest people needed a minute to break down and pull themselves back together. That was Amantha's moment.

I held her as she cried.

The feeling her tears gave me was awful. I wanted to rain Hell on the people who caused her to cry. I needed more details, then I would come up with a strategy.

Amantha finally finished crying. She pulled away from my shoulder, wiped her palms over her eyes, and took a few deep breaths.

I hated to say it, but Amantha was a cute crier. Even with swollen eyes and a red nose, I found her irresistible.

I brushed her hair behind her ear. "Come on. I'll drive."

She nodded. "Okay, let's go."

She moved to get up, but instead of watching her walk to the car, I said, "Incoming," and scooped her into my arms.

"Zion!" she protested.

"Shh." I ignored her protests. "Grab your purse."

I stooped toward the couch, and she grabbed her purse from it.

"Got everything?"

She nodded.

Amantha got the apartment door as I carried her to her car. Still early evening, the sun sat high above us.

Likewise, Amantha opened the passenger door of the car.

“Teamwork makes the dream work,” I joked as I sat her in the passenger seat.

She snorted. “You sound like a motivational poster. Please never say that again.”

Exactly what I expected her to say.

I smiled and shut the door. At least she was reacting normally again.

After making sure we were both buckled in, I drove the car to the local hospital. We didn't talk much on the way.

I helped Amantha into her wheelchair in the parking lot, and she let me push her into the building.

We checked in at reception and took the elevator up to the fourth floor, where Neo's room was. The medical halls smelled sterile and of disinfectant.

The room that we were told Neo was in stood at the end of the hallway.

I knocked on the open door and wheeled Amantha inside. A silver-haired police officer sat beside the hospital bed and Neo sat in the bed, an IV in one arm and a blue cast on the other. They both focused on the mounted TV on the wall.

“Aunt Amantha!” Neo said when he noticed us. He sat up in bed.

Neo also sported a black eye.

“Are you okay?” she asked as I wheeled her closer. When she was by the bed, she reached out and took Neo’s non-casted hand.

“I’m okay. Z, thanks for bringing her.”

The kid sounded wise beyond his years. I nodded at him.

The police officer stood. He wore a navy blue police uniform. “Thanks for coming down. I’m Detective Berger. We spoke on the phone.”

He extended a hand to Amantha, who shook it.

“Anything for Neo,” she said. “What happened?”

Amantha let go of his hand, and he stepped back.

“From what we can tell, the driver of Neo’s car was drunk. He drove up the wrong lane of the road. He swerved to miss oncoming traffic, which he did, but the maneuver put the car into a tree. Luckily, everyone involved is only a little banged up.”

“Will he be charged with drunk driving?” Amantha demanded. “I want him charged to the fullest extent.”

Detective Berger nodded. “The driver blew a breathalyzer that read well above the legal limit. He’s in custody now.”

Amantha shook her head. “Thank you.” She turned her attention back to Neo. “Are you okay?”

He rolled his eyes. “I’m fine, mom.”

Amantha drew a sharp breath.

Neo continued without realizing what he said. “You guys have to sign my cast. Oh hey, can I get a hamburger when we leave here? I'm starving.”

Amantha frowned and shook her head. “Let's make sandwiches at home. We can't aff—”

“Yes, we can get burgers on the way home,” I interrupted. The boy had survived a drunk driving accident; I'd buy him whatever he wanted. “Milkshakes, too, if you want.”

Neo's eyes widened with excitement.

“Can we?” he asked Amantha.

She smiled. “If Zion wants to.”

I winked at Neo. “Don't worry. I got you, man.”

I stretched my hand forward for a fist-bump, which Neo returned with a grin on his face.

“I'm going to go,” Detective Berger said. “The nurse is supposed to come take Neo's IV out, then you guys can head home.” He nodded at Neo. “Thanks for keeping me company.”

“Sure. Anytime,” Neo said.

“Thank you, Detective,” Amantha said. “Call if you need anything.”

The detective nodded at us and walked out of the room.

“What kind of burger do you guys want? Where should we go?” Neo asked.

I smiled. Leave it to a teenager to move right on after such a big event.

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We sat around the bar in Amantha's apartment, eating burgers out of fast food wrappers and sipping milkshakes.

“So what happened?” Amantha asked. She'd barely eaten half her food but was making a good attempt for Neo.

Neo shook his head. “Mona's parents got into a fight early in the day. Her mom stormed off, so it was Mona and me with her dad. After the roller derby ended, he drove us home and got into an accident.” Neo bit his burger like it was no big deal.

Teenagers felt immortal, so I guess it wasn't to him.

“I knew I should've met them,” Amantha mumbled.

“Where's Mona?” I asked.

Neo frowned and shook his head. “I don't know. Detective Berger said not to worry, that she was fine and would be at school tomorrow.”

I nodded. “That's good.”

Neo finished his burger and slurped the rest of his chocolate milkshake.

“I have to finish my homework before school. I'm going to head to my room.” He stood to scoop up his trash.

“Okay. I love you,” Amantha said.

Neo smiled. "Love you, too. Night, guys."

"Night," I said.

"Night," Amantha echoed.

Neo threw his trash away and disappeared up the hallway.

When he was gone, I turned to Amantha and extended my arms to her. She fit herself against my chest in a tight hug. I wrapped my arms around her and just held her.

"Thank you for being here," she said.

"I'm glad I was." I stroked her hair.

"Are you going home tonight?"

I smiled. "Well, we're going to the same place in the morning, and I don't have a car with me so I hadn't planned on it."

She pulled back and glared at me. "There's a teenager here so we have to set a good example. You're sleeping on the couch."

I chuckled. I expected no less, but I had to tease her. "Fine. But can I get a blowjob first?"

I laughed when she smacked me.

As I fell asleep on the couch that night, I realized I hadn't felt restless all day. Was it the adrenaline I'd gotten or was it being around Amantha?

“Hart.”

“No.”

I paused. “Weasley.”

“No.”

“Granger.”

“No.”

“McGonagall.”

Amantha laughed. “No. This is not Harry Potter.”

I laughed and shrugged. “They're names. I had to try them.”

I'd taken up residence in a chair in front of her desk between clients.

Sure, there was other stuff I could be doing, but none of those things let me interact with Amantha.

“Well, they're not right, so keep trying.”

Clients came in a few times, and I had to work. The end of the day rolled around before I finally got her alone again.

I turned the lock on the front door, locking us in. It was close enough to the end of the day that no one else should come by.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

I smiled and approached her desk. “Making sure we stay alone.”

She raised her eyebrows. “Oh, yeah?”

“Yep.” I grinned wickedly. “Meet me in the storage closet.”

I bent over her desk and dropped a teasing kiss on her lips, then I crossed the room and entered the storage closet before she could say anything.

The storage closet was really a small room with shelving to hold office supplies and cleaning chemicals. A small spare desk sat on one side of the room. The lights automatically sensed movement in the room and had turned on,

I stripped out of my clothes quickly and posed on the desk, my hard dick sticking out prominently, one knee bent up with my arm across it as I lay across the desk. I sent a sultry look at the door.

Amantha opened the door and burst out laughing when her gaze fell on me. She wheeled in and shut the door behind her.

When she saw me, her voice deepened, and she asked, “What do we have here?”

“A snack, all for you.” I stroked my cock. “We can't be intimate around Neo, so we have to be creative.”

She nodded. “This is true.”

Her eyes trailed over my body and my tattoos. I gave her a moment to appreciate it before I said, "Strip for me."

She raised an eyebrow. "You want me to strip for you?"

"Please?"

"Fine. But only because you asked nicely. Manners are important, you know."

I nodded and licked my lips in anticipation. "They are important."

Amantha locked the wheels of her chair and kicked off her shoes. She stood and slowly undid her pants.

She looked at me and licked her lips suggestively. Her hands moved to her blouse and tugged it out of her pants. She slowly undid the buttons starting at the bottom.

Mmm, yes. My cock grew impossibly harder, and I stroked it as I watched her.

She made a show of flashing her breasts at me and covering them with her shirt again before slowly sliding it off. Her black bra cupped her breasts beautifully.

When she got to her pants, she turned around and looked at me over her shoulder as she slid the material down and bent over. I made a noise of appreciation. The woman was sexy. The naughty view of her ass made pre-cum leak from the tip of my dick.

Her hand went to the waist of her black lacy panties and teasingly pulled the elastic down. But then she released it back up and waved a finger at me.

Gingerly, she turned around and took a few timid steps to reach me on the desk.

As I took in her sexy body, I swallowed hard. I already knew how tight and warm that pussy was. My cock wanted back in.

“You've been a bad boy,” she said. “I'm going to have to punish you.”

I continued to stroke my cock, turned on and anticipating. “What are you going to do?” escaped my throat.

Amantha grinned wickedly. Then she lowered her head and her mouth wrapped around my cock. Seriously, I almost came.

I put my hand on the back of her head and helped her bob up and down. “Oh, yeah.”

Her tongue slid along the bottom of my dick. I moaned at the pleasure I felt from it. A few more pulls, and I was right on the edge.

Amantha stopped sucking my cock and pulled my balls into her mouth. She teased and sucked on them as my pleasure continued but my climax backed down. Then I knew what my “punishment” was: edging.

Amantha gave me the best blowjob of my life, sucking my cock until I almost came, then teasing my balls as I came back down, over and over again. After she'd done it multiple times, I was a panting mess, leaking pre-cum like a faucet.

As good as it felt, Amantha had been on her feet too long for my liking.

I pushed her off my cock and stood. She looked confused until I wrapped my hands around her ass and lifted her.

She giggled when I sat her on the desk and wrapped her legs around me. Her legs pulled me closer so that my cock pressed against the entrance to her pussy. Only her

panties separated us.

I pressed her back so that she laid down and I slid my length along her panties, repeatedly rubbing my dick against her clit and entrance with her panties between us.

My cock was harder than steel. I wanted this woman.

I teased her with my length until she begged. We were both panting and ready before I was ready to give in to her.

I slid her panties to the side. My hand pressed over her pubic bone and I slowly pushed my cock inside her until our hips met and I couldn't move further. We both sighed in relief and I watched the intense pleasure on her face as I filled her, which made my dick throb in her pussy.

She moaned. I licked my thumb and swirled it over her clit.

“Please move,” she begged.

“Whatever you—”

That was when the closet door opened. I turned my head to see a surprised Joey standing there.

“Get the fuck out!” I growled.

Alarmed, Joey shouted, “Sorry, sorry!” and slammed the door.

Wide eyed, Amantha looked at me. After a moment, we both laughed sheepishly.

She said, “I should care, but I don't. Fuck me, Zion.”

Growling happily, I pulled Amantha's chest up to mine and kissed her. I thrust up into her, the seated position pressing us even closer.

Slowly, I fucked her, kissing her throat and squeezing her nipples as I rutted inside her. Definitely the most intimate position I'd ever been in.

Stroke after stroke, her body squeezed around me and I filled her with my cock. My size was just right to stretch her around me; her size was just right to high me tight.

“Fuck, you feel so good,” I mumbled to her between pants.

“You, too, big guy.” She moaned as I adjusted the angle a little and hit her G-spot. “Best fuck I've ever had.”

Easily, I'd agree.

It didn't take long until her body throbbed around me, and I released inside her.

Her mouth found mine, kissing me as we both came down from our highs.

She broke the kiss and said apologetically, “We better go find Joey and apologize.”

“Fuck,” I said with a kiss to her forehead. She was right.

She laughed. At least she hadn't been mortified.

That night, we went to her place. Again, I slept on the couch.

“MacGregor?”

“No.”

“Donahue?”

“No.”

“Blackwell?”

Amantha looked at me and laughed. “No.”

That was my last name.

“Want it to be?” I teased.

I kinda did. This monogamy thing was growing on me. Forget the fact that I'd known her less than two weeks.

She raised an eyebrow. “Nice try. But no one expects more here, remember?” She turned back to her monitor.

I frowned. We had agreed to that. This “going back for seconds” thing was messing with my head. Maybe she was right.

The phone rang, and Amantha had to take a call. In the meantime, Joey called me back to help repack some parachutes before the next client.

He acted normal, completely ignoring what he'd walked in to see.

Over the next few days, Amantha and I fell into a routine. I finally retrieved my truck but still spent my nights on her couch. Whenever I wasn't jumping, I was hanging out at her desk and guessing, even on my days off.

I found myself growing more comfortable around her. To the point that, surprisingly, once I even said, “You should just marry me, then your last name wouldn't be in question.”

She laughed at me, but amazingly I was serious.

“If that was a proposal, you need to rethink your strategy,” she teased. “Plus, we have an arrangement. No one expects more.”

My words had slipped out and I hadn't thought about them before I said it, but it did make me wonder: did I want more than “friends with benefits” with Amantha?

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That Thursday night, Neo and I sat at a table at the roller rink, watching people skate as we enjoyed our refreshments. I munched on a Reese's cup as he ate a chili dog.

Amantha was at therapy so I figured Neo, and I could go out while she was busy.

“Have you seen Mona at school?” I asked.

Neo nodded. “Yeah. She said her mom left her dad and now it's only the two of them.” He drank some soda from his straw.

“Is she skating tonight?”

He looked around. “I don't know. She didn't say.”

A broken arm hadn't held Neo back. He still did most activities like normal, including roller skating.

“Are you still into her?”

His eyes widened. “Z!”

I raised my hands apologetically. “Sorry.”

Almost out of nowhere, Mona showed up behind him. Again, she wore her hair up with star gems by her eyes.

“Hi, Neo!” she said.

He swallowed and acted awkward. “Hi, Mona.”

I smiled when I remembered how awkward I was at that age. I nodded hello at Mona.

“Wanna skate with me?” she asked him.

“Uh...”

Fuck yeah, dude. Pointedly, I nodded at Neo.

“Yeah! That'd be great!” he said.

Excellent, kid.

Neo stood from his seat and joined hands with Mona.

“Have fun!” I said to them.

Neo looked at me in fear. “Go for it,” I mouthed and winked when Mona looked away.

Neo swallowed hard but nodded, then he and Mona skated off into the rink.

I took a sip of my soda from the straw and pulled my phone out of my pocket. A text waited from Amantha.

Sxy Crdntr: How's it going?

Me: grt! Thr sk8ing 2gthr now

Llp0Me: sxy pix?

Sxy Crdntr: LOL

Sxy Crdntr: I'm at therapy

Me: ? Thr's a bthrm

Sxy Crdntr: No

Me: :(

I didn't really expect anything, but I couldn't give her an easy time.

Sxy Crdntr: You'll just have to wait till later ;)

Me: Wt, r u sying....?

Sxy Crdntr: You have to be back on the couch before Neo gets up and we have to be quiet

Yes! That was more than I expected. My innocent text had turned out fantastic!

At work, Joey had awkwardly ignored what he'd walked in on the other night. He hadn't even said anything to me about fucking the new employee. I think he was shocked that I was going back to the same person more than once.

The scary part was, I didn't even think about it. Something in Amantha called to me. I didn't want anyone else.

Me: ys m'm

Sxy Crdntr: Call me ma'am again I'll kill you

I laughed loudly, a grin breaking over my face.

Me: ys m'm ... I mn ...

Sxy Crdntr: frowny face emoji

Me: kissy face emoji

Sxy Crdntr: Promises, promises

Me: Bet, kpng ths prmsses

Guaranteed.

Neo and Mona caught my eye as they skated past in the rink. They were cute together.

I didn't get the feeling that he was looking for the bachelor lifestyle like I lived. I hoped whatever he wanted worked out for him.

Holding my phone over the table, I took a discrete picture of the two skating together and texted it to Amantha.

Me: R lil boy s grwng up

Sxy Crdntr: :(

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:01 am

“How was the skating rink?” Amantha asked later.

She and I sat on the couch as Neo raided the cabinet for food, like a typical teenager.

“Fine,” Neo said. He found a bag of chips and closed the cabinet. “I’m going to my room.”

He disappeared, his footsteps sounding down the hall and his door slamming.

Amantha rolled her eyes. “He’s acting completely different in these teen years. He wasn’t like this before.”

I wrapped an arm around her and pulled her against my side. “This is typical teen boy behavior. I acted the same way. Don’t let it get to you.”

She smiled sadly at me. “I know. Did you have fun this evening?”

“I did. I promised kisses to the new sexy booking coordinator at work.”

She raised her eyebrows and sent me a sultry look. “Oh you did, did you?”

I nodded. “I did. She seemed pretty receptive, but it’s hard to tell by text. I didn’t have any body language so I couldn’t tell for sure. Maybe you can help me figure it out.”

“Hmm. I don’t know. What would you suggest?”

I pretended to think about it. “Hmm. I don’t know. Maybe you could reenact it in-

person with me? We could practice a little? That way someone else can give me some context?"

She nodded with a smile. "Might be a good idea. What did you say to her?"

"Mmm. Something like this." My lips captured hers.

Her mouth moved against mine, her tongue darting out to lick my lip ring.

"I like this," she murmured and kissed me again.

I played dumb. "Kissing in general?"

"Well, yes, but that's not what I mean."

More kisses. Between kisses, the conversation continued.

"My mouth?"

"Getting closer."

"Hmm. My lips?"

"Closer."

She ran her tongue over my piercing then kissed my lips again.

"My lip ring?"

"Mmhmm." She kissed me harder.

“Glad you like it. I got it just for you,” I teased.

She laughed. “Uh-huh.” Her tongue dipped into my mouth.

We lost ourselves in kissing at that point.

“Eww. Get a room,” Neo said.

Our mouths broke apart, and heads turned to spot Neo looking at us from the kitchen.

I smiled. Definitely in his teenage years.

“Is that what we should say when we catch you and Mona kissing?” I teased.

Neo shuddered. “Butt out.” He grabbed a soda from the fridge and disappeared again.

I chuckled and turned back to Amantha.

She smiled and shook her head. “Want to watch TV until he goes to bed?”

I laughed. “Sure.”

We settled in to watch TV. My thoughts were all over the place.

“Is our friends-with-benefits arrangement working for you?” I asked out of nowhere.

“It is. It kind of works out with Neo. I don't have to introduce him to a boyfriend that he won't see again if we break up. You and I have a ‘no one gets hurt, no one expects more’ situation. If we decide to stop, we're still friends and Neo doesn't get left behind by anyone. No harm, no foul.”

I had doubts about that arrangement. Mainly, it was because I liked this. I could see this lifestyle being my new normal. And I didn't want to run away from it. Had Amantha “caught” me without meaning to?

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My tongue lapped Amantha's clit.

She pressed the pillow over her face to moan into it.

I smiled. This quiet thing was fun.

Over the past few nights, I'd come up with more and more creative ways to make her lose her mind. So far, she'd managed to stay quiet, but I wanted to try out new ways to break that.

I also decided that I wanted to keep her.

I circled her nub hard, flicking my tongue out to tease it. I used a fingertip to caress her entrance, circling and pressing but not penetrating.

After a few minutes of this torture, Amantha was ready to be fucked. I could feel it in the tension of her body.

I flipped her over onto her knees and smacked her ass. Amantha pushed her face into her pillow and moaned.

Perfect.

My dick found her entrance and rubbed against it. The woman was soaked.

I pressed a hand against her lower back.

“Say you want to be more,” I said.

She pulled her face out of the pillow. “What?”

“Say you want to be more. Make me accountable.”

“You don't do relationships. You leave when there's sex. Friends with benefits, remember? No one gets hurt or expects more.”

I pushed the tip of my cock into her. “I changed my mind. You caught me. I want you to expect more.”

“What about Neo?”

“I'm not leaving.”

She whimpered and pressed her face against the pillow. “Zion.”

“Date me.”

She put her cheek against the pillow, her head tilted sideways. “I can't. Neo...”

“Is a teenager and doesn't care what you do. I'm not leaving. Date me.”

I pulled my cock out, but I licked my thumb and circled the dampened digit around her asshole. She closed her eyes in pleasure.

I was being unfair and I knew it. But I also knew what I wanted.

I changed tactics, I leaned forward and kissed her shoulder, then I whispered, “Say yes and I'll fill you up.”

“Zion...”

“Say yes.”

Amantha was quiet for a moment, then she whispered, “Yes.”

I grinned. “What was that?”

“Yes,” she said louder. “I’ll date you.”

Yes. Maybe I’d be more fair if I asked her to marry me. Maybe. No guarantees.

I slipped my cock into her pussy slowly and started fucking her, using slow measured thrusts to drive her crazy. My cock dragged back and forth along every inch of her walls.

She moaned quietly as I thrust into her.

I reached around her and rubbed her clit slowly, driving her out of her mind.

When I could tell she’d lost herself in the rhythmic movements, I brought one hand up and wrapped it around her mouth to keep her quiet and licked my other thumb. Slowly, I pressed it into her asshole. She cried out in surprised delight against my palm when the muscle keeping me out gave way and my thumb was fully inside her. The soft warmth around my thumb made my cock twitch as I thrust into her.

“Come for me,” I whispered to her.

A few strokes later, her pussy clenched around my dick and her asshole gripped my thumb.

“Zion,” she cried.

I pressed as deep into her as I could get, grunting as I released my cum inside her.

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Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:01 am

Monday morning, I answered the phone with a terrible British accent. ““Ello, Airplayne Adventures. ‘Ow may aye ‘elp ‘ou?” I asked in a high-pitched voice.

I cringed, but the caller on the other end didn't even react.

Amantha about died from silent laughter as she tried not to let the client hear her.

I ignored her. I brought up the calendar and booked the client's date.

“Thank ‘ou!” I screeched. “Buh bye!” I hung up the phone.

Amantha let loose and laughed so hard it might be described as a cackle.

I grinned.

This was fun.

You could bet, I wouldn't tell Amantha I'd seen her last name on some mail in her apartment but purposefully lost so I could spend three days hanging out with her. Nope, I wouldn't tell her at all.

Smith. Her fucking last name was Smith.

I had to take PTO so I wasn't expected as a skydiver, but that meant I was free to spend all day with Amantha. I didn't mind.

The phone rang again and I picked up the receiver. ““Ello, Airplayne Adventures.

‘Ow may aye ‘elp ‘ou?’

When clients came in, I had to greet them with my fake British accent, too. They had a harder time taking me seriously.

This continued all day until 5:00, when Joey came over to the front desk.

He looked at us and shook his head.

“I hate to say it, but I actually received a couple of voicemails about how helpful the nice British woman was on the phone today.”

Amantha burst out laughing.

I beamed. “Why thank you,” I said. “I tried my best.”

“I’m not sure what the people who met you in person thought because no one said anything, but I’m sure it’ll stand out in their memories.”

No news was good news, right? “Good. I’ll be here tomorrow, too. I’m here till Wednesday.”

Joey rolled his eyes. “Glad you guys are having fun.”

“Oh yeah. Amantha and I are together now. As far as I know, there’s no fraternization policy for employees, but full disclosure.”

Joey blinked. “Those are some big words. I think the little boy is growing up.”

I smiled. “Maybe.”

He nodded. "I never thought I'd see you settle down, but 'attached' seems to be good for you. There's not a fraternization policy. But no sex when you're on the clock." He thought about it and narrowed his eyes. "Or at the office in general."

I saluted him. "Whatever you say, sir."

Joey smiled and shook his head. "I've got to head to class. I'll see you kids tomorrow."

"Good night, Joey," Amantha said.

"Night, man," I said.

When the door shut, I looked at Amantha hopefully. "Sex?"

She laughed. "I thought Joey said no sex in the office."

I shrugged and walked a few steps over to her. I bent so that our lips were level. "What he doesn't know won't hurt him." I kissed her.

The front door whooshed open. "I forgot my—"

I broke the kiss and turned my head to look at the door. Joey stood holding it open. He looked sorry that he came back.

"Goddammit. Nevermind."

He turned around and left. The door swung shut behind him.

I laughed and kissed a smiling Amantha again. I could get used to this.

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:01 am

Saturday evening, I walked into Amantha's apartment with mud smeared on my face. I'd tried to wash it off my hands but there were still streaks there, too. Luckily, the track's jumpsuit mainly protected my clothes.

She gave me her key before I left for work that morning.

Amantha sat on the couch reading a book. She looked up when I came in and laughed.

“What happened to you?” she asked.

I shut the door behind me and threw my keys on the coffee table.

“Got a truck stuck in the mud earlier.” I held up my muddy hands and smiled. “I got it out, though!”

“Congratulations, I guess. You need a shower.”

Oh really? A grin spread across my face.

“I didn't mean with me,” she warned.

“You didn't?”

I rushed across the room and picked her up. Her book fell to the couch and her legs wrapped around me. She laughed as I rubbed my muddy face all over her chest.

“I didn't mean it. But I won't protest. Saving water and all.”

I kissed her throat. “Exactly. That's what we're doing.”

With Amantha wrapped around me, I walked us into the bathroom and shut the door. I sat her on the counter.

“Where's Neo?” I asked.

“Sleepover,”

My eyes widened. “So we get to be as loud as we want tonight? And I don't have to leave your bed afterward?”

She smiled. “Certainly looks that way.”

“Yes, thank God.”

I swooped in on her and gave her one kiss for every button I undid on her clothing, kissing her throat, her shoulders, her breasts. When I was out of buttons, I offered a kiss for every piece of clothing I removed, from socks to panties.

When she was naked, Amantha said, “Your turn.” She placed a kiss somewhere on my body for every piece of clothing she removed.

When I was naked too, I held up one finger. “Hold on one second.”

I pushed aside the navy and silver curtain and started the shower. A matching bath mat cushioned my feet while I adjusted the faucet. I went back to her while we waited for the water to warm.

She smiled at me.

“Hi,” I said, brushing my nose against hers.

“Hi,” she said back.

An intense pull made me want to touch her. My mouth captured hers, our lips tugging and sucking on each other and a delicate battle happening between our tongues.

I pressed my body to hers, my hard cock resting against her pubic bone.

A few minutes passed while we kissed, thoroughly enjoying each other.

Amantha pulled away and cleared her throat. Her hazel gaze focused on me. “The water's probably warm. Limited hot water supply. We should shower before the hot water runs out and it gets cold again.”

Oh, right. Good idea.

“Right. Up we go.” I gripped my hands around her ass and held her against me as I walked over to the shower.

I put a hand under the water to test the temperature. All good.

I grasped her firmly against me as we stepped inside.

Once I set her on her feet, we pulled the curtain shut and took care of showering. Laughter filled the room as we washed each other's hair and bodies. Amantha helped make sure I got all the mud off.

When I turned the water off, we were both squeaky clean.

I smiled in amusement when the realization hit me. “You had me all worked up. And today was laundry day. Guess what we don't have.”

Amantha smiled. “Whoops. Who needs towels, anyway?”

“It's okay,” I teased. “I enjoy having you all wet against me, anyway.”

“You did this on purpose, didn't you?”

I grinned. “Maybe.”

I picked her up, and she wrapped her legs around my hips again. Her lips found mine, and she kissed me as I carried her out of the bathroom, across to the bedroom.

I settled us onto the bed, me on top and wedged between her hips.

Her head rested on a pillow, and her damp hair surrounded her face. She looked amazing.

I tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

“I want you to be as loud as you want to be. Don't hold back. No one's here but us. Moan for me.”

She smiled and bit her lip. “Okay.”

I ran my nose up her neck and pressed a kiss to her pulse point. “You know I can't resist that.”

“I don't want you to resist.”

I kissed down her body, kissing around but not on all the places she wanted my mouth. Around her nipples, on her inner thighs. But not directly on her nipples or her clit. I kissed her all over, until Amantha gripped the sheets and trembled in anticipation.

“Please, Zion. Please,” she begged.

When my tongue finally massaged her clit, Amantha moaned loudly.

Good girl.

I slipped two fingers inside her and pumped them deeply.

Almost immediately, she came around my fingers. She cried out, almost in tears from the denial.

I slid up and kissed her.

When our lips parted, I murmured, “That was one. Let's go for five.”

She shook her head and protested, “But I’ve tried, I can't orgasm more than once.”

“Let's try, huh? Let me worry about making you come; you just enjoy.”

Hesitantly, Amantha said, “Okay.”

“Be loud, be confident, ask for what you want.”

“Yes, sir.”

I smiled.

I was going to play her body like a chessboard. One down, four to go.

My head dipped down, and I captured a nipple between my lips. I plucked the other nipple with my fingertips.

Amantha moaned with pleasure.

I worked her nipples over, switching between them and offering each equal treatment.

She tried to slip her fingers into my hair but I put her wrist above her head and stopped every time she tried to touch me. Eventually, she left her hands above her head.

My mouth sucked, and licked, and tugged on each nipple. I brought her to the pain/pleasure point as she gasped and panted.

I trailed my fingers down her pussy. She was soaked.

I easily slid two fingers inside, thrusting them when they were in her. I kept sucking her nipples, alternating between them.

It didn't take long before she cried out my name and came again,

I pulled my fingers out and came back up to kiss her.

I pulled away to ask, "Can I do what I want to you?" I pressed a kiss to her throat.

She panted, "Within reason. Yes to light spanking, no to caning."

There was an easy reminder that she was a romance reader. I didn't have anything like that, anyway.

“Okay. What about anal play? Has anyone else ever been in the ass?”

She kissed me. “No one has been there. But I trust you.”

Yes.

“Thank you, sugar tits.”

She laughed. “Treat me right, salty balls.”

I went back between her legs. For orgasm number three, I'd finger her and tongue her pussy. For orgasm number four, I'd put her on her knees and see how she liked it when I rimmed her ass and fingered her pussy at the same time. For orgasm number five, I definitely had to fuck her. Maybe her pussy this time so she wouldn't be sore — but I was taking that ass virginity at some point.

I awoke on a cold, hard floor.

What the fuck was going on?

I'd fallen asleep in a nice, warm bed beside Amantha. Why was I asking up here?
Was this a punishment because I was supposed to be on the couch?

Someone groaned nearby.

I blinked toward the noise.

As my eyes adjusted to the dark, I could make out three forms on the floor beside me.
Walls and a low ceiling surrounded us.

A handprint glowed on the wooden door on the wall across from us. A lock?

What was that? Where was I? And who were these people?