PARTMENT NOVEL AMANDA BLACK

# The Single Game

## By Amanda Black



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### To my husband, Luke,

who told me twenty years ago that he didn't see the point in still playing the lottery when he'd already hit the jackpot on the first try.

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#### **Prologue**

"That was great, babe," Riley said in a long exhale, rolling off of me unceremoniously.

"Yeah," I agreed, wishing secretly that it had lasted a few minutes longer. I was *almost* there this time.

I think.

"Well," he said after about ten seconds of staring at the ceiling. "I better get going."

"So soon? Can't we cuddle for a bit?" I asked as he stepped into his jeans. "I thought we were going to spend the day together."

"Eden," he scolded. "How many times do I have to tell you that varsity is no joke? If I want to make captain next year, I need to work my ass off this summer. That doesn't mean I can sit around here all day with you playing house, now, does it?"

I sat up on my bed and crossed my arms in front of myself, feeling more naked than I already was. "You don't need to bite my head off, you know. I thought you'd have more time once school let out. It's not every day that we get the whole house to ourselves." My mother was a romance novelist and worked from home; it was a rare day when I was home and she wasn't, unless she was on a publicity tour. I thought I'd had it made that morning

when she'd told me she was going into the city to shop with my aunt Emma.

"Hey, don't be mad," Riley said, grabbing my hand and pulling me up to my feet. "Give me a hug before I go." I let him wrap his arms around my bare body, which felt odd since he was already fully clothed. "Listen," he explained as he held me, "I didn't mean to snap, okay? You know I've got a lot riding on me this year. But you know it's going to be worth it, right? Who gets to go to homecoming with the king, huh?"

"Me," I grumbled.

"Now, come on," he said, pulling back to look at me. "Who gets to be the envy of all the other girls because she's dating the captain of the football team?"

"I do."

"That's right; you do. I'm doing this for both of us, Eden."

"I know," I sighed. Sometimes I wondered if all the popularity was worth it. "Well, do you want to come back later for dinner? I'm cooking lasagna tonight."

"I don't think so; I've got a few things to do. Besides, you know I'm not a fan of the whole parents thing." He turned to leave before stopping and looking back at me. "Why are you cooking again, anyway? Where's your mom?"

"You know I like to cook, Riley. I used to help her when I was little and then I liked it so much that I sort of took over."

"Well, whatever," he said dismissively. "I think you should go to the mall with Becca and get some hot new bikinis for all the pool parties she's going to have this summer, not hang around here all day cooking."

"She's taking me to the mall this weekend," I replied as I brushed out my long black hair quickly in the mirror. Becca was my best friend at Glenbard East High School and she had the best in-ground pool. It made for a popular party scene every summer. I still didn't have a car so I had to rely on her to get me around all the Northwest suburbs of Chicago. "And don't knock my cooking," I said with a smile. "If I remember correctly, you've loved everything I've ever made for you."

"Yeah, all right," he sighed. "Just don't sit around and get fat."

"Oh, shut up, jerk," I laughed as I threw my bathrobe on. So far I'd been lucky in the metabolism department, so I chose to take his words as a joke, but I couldn't help feeling a little nagging doubt in the back of my mind that he might dump me if I put on a few pounds.

"I gotta go," he said, hugging me one more time. "We'll do dinner another time, okay?"

"Yeah, fine," I replied, trying not to pout. "Go on and get out of here so I can shower."

"See ya." He pecked me quickly on the lips.

"Bye," I called after him as he trotted down the stairs and out the front door. We still hadn't said "I love you." We'd been together for over six months and I wondered if I should be worried about it, but the fact was that I knew I didn't love Riley. I had no intention of saying it if I didn't mean it.

I liked him a lot. We had fun together. He was very cute and extremely popular. I didn't think he was the best boyfriend material all the time, but like Becca always said, what else matters when you have cute and popular? I worried that it made me shallow to agree with her, but there were seriously no other decent prospects at my school. Perhaps love would come in time.

And hopefully we would work the whole sex thing out eventually.

I sighed wistfully at that thought and went off to have a meeting with my shower massager.

\* \* \*

Later that night, I sat at the dinner table watching my parents eat the aforementioned lasagna. I loved whenever they would grab a second helping of something I'd made; it made me feel giddy inside.

"Better than last time, Eden," my dad mumbled around a mouthful of garlic bread.

"Mmhm," my mom nodded enthusiastically, working on her own bite. After she swallowed she turned to look at me. "Sweetie, you make me feel so lazy when you cook like this! Did you do something different to the recipe this time?"

"I played around with the spices a little bit. And I added more ricotta."

"Well it's marvelous!" She swallowed another mouthful before adding, "I wish you would have come shopping with me today. I think you would have had fun. Your aunt Emma can sniff out a sale like nobody's business."

"No, thank you," I groaned. I'd spent more than my fair share of time being dragged on daylong excursions to high-end department stores and up and down the city, looking for the perfect sale. When my mother and her sister-in-law went shopping, they didn't play around.

"Maggie, leave her be," my dad said as he wiped the sauce off his plate with another chunk of bread. "Not everybody loves to shop like you two. Besides, then she wouldn't have had time to make this amazing dinner for us, would she?"

"Thank you, Daddy," I said sweetly when he shot me a playful wink. "Have you guys given any more thought to getting me a car?" I asked hopefully. I'd been bugging them regularly for the last few weeks and I was starting to feel like I was making some headway.

"Eden, we've been over this," my mom sighed. "You only have one more year of high school left. You'll be going on to college and then you won't be able to take it with you. Do you have any idea what it costs to keep a car on campus? Or in the city?"

"But all of my friends have cars already!" I could feel the childish pout beginning to form.

"Then you have plenty of options for rides, don't you?" she snapped. My mom hated it when I pouted like a spoiled brat because she had tried very hard to keep me from becoming one. "Can we have a change of subject, please?" she huffed, setting her fork down with a loud clink.

"Actually, Maggie... I've got some news," my dad said hesitantly.

"Yes?"

"Well, remember how I mentioned I'd been talking to Ethan last week? Well, he told me that they're opening a new sports medicine clinic in Moline."

"Oh, really? That's interesting."

"That's what I thought. I made a few calls and it turns out that the guy who's running it used to work with my dad years ago before he retired. As soon as he realized who I was he remembered that I used to work with the Bears. He was *very* interested."

"Eric, what are you saying?"

"Well... The job is mine if I want it. Full time with benefits."

"Oh my God, that's incredible!" My mom jumped up and ran around the table, hugging him fiercely.

My dad was a physical therapist and used to travel all over the country working with professional athletes. When I started getting older he decided that he didn't want to be away so much, so we moved to the suburbs and he took a job at the local hospital. He had always hoped to find another job working with athletes full time but there was nothing available nearby that wasn't part time or didn't require tons of travel. Plus, he'd always hoped to move a little closer to his hometown.

I knew all of these things, as well as the fact that this was an amazing opportunity for him.

That didn't keep the spoiled brat from rearing her ugly head, though.

"What?!" I screamed. "Dad, you *can't* be serious!"

"Lower your voice right this second," my mom said sternly.

"But Mom! That would mean moving! My senior year! Who does that?"

"Eden, this is a big deal for your father. If you don't change your tone right now you're going to be grounded for the rest of your high school existence anyway, so it won't matter where you live."

"Maggie," my dad interrupted, "sit down and everyone relax, okay? We're still just talking." He looked around the table at us before continuing.

"Now, I called and spoke with my dad today and he said that if we want to do this, we can stay at their place until we find a house. He and Mom are traveling this summer, anyway, so we wouldn't even be in their way. That would also give us time to put this house on the market."

I choked back a sob at the thought of moving nearly three hours away and leaving everything I knew behind.

"Eric, you've really given this some thought, haven't you?" my mom asked. "Why haven't you told me about this before now?"

"I don't know," he shrugged. "I guess I didn't want to start this discussion until I knew it was a sure thing."

"Do you think you want to live right there in the Quad Cities?"

"Well, we can certainly look there, but I really wouldn't mind checking out what Aledo has to offer. I don't mind the short commute and Ethan and Lily really seem to like it."

"Aledo? That's even worse!" I cried, the tears streaming freely now. "It was a big deal when they got a *stoplight*!" My grandparents and my uncle had for some reason settled down in the tiniest Podunk town in the universe. My dad and his siblings had all grown up there and then moved away, but now they seemed to be going back, one by one.

"Eden, you're being melodramatic," my mom yelled at me.

"But Mom, how can you even be okay with that idea?"

"I can write anywhere, and your father has wanted this for a very long time. You certainly aren't the only person in this house who has to make sacrifices." When she saw that my tears weren't abating, she said, "I think you should go to your room until you've calmed down. I'll clean the table."

I ran upstairs and grabbed my cellphone, hitting the speed dial for Becca's number as I sniffled loudly.

Voicemail.

"Call me back as soon as you get this, okay?" I choked out. "I just got horrible news."

I ended the call and dialed Riley.

Voicemail.

"Where the hell *is* everybody?" I cried into the phone, hanging up and tossing it on the bed. I knew I was being ridiculous, but I couldn't believe that Dad just dropped a bomb on us like that. Or that Mom was *fine* with it!

I really needed to let off some steam and calm down, and sitting in my room wasn't going to cut it. I threw a few things into my purse and went downstairs.

"May I please borrow the car?" I asked with a sniffle.

My mother turned around from washing the dishes with a look of disbelief on her face. "Just where is it you plan on going?"

"I'm sorry I freaked out, but I really need to go out and get some fresh air. I was going to see if Riley was home."

"Do you really think that's a good idea for tonight?"

"Well I have to break the bad news sometime, don't I? I might as well get it over with now." I tried not to snap at her, but I don't know how successful I was.

She looked at me for a solid minute in silence before she relented and grabbed the keys out of her purse. "I don't want you out at all hours of the night."

"I won't be."

"I expect you to keep to your curfew, do you understand me? I don't care how upset you are."

"Yes. Thank you, Mom." As I reached to take the keys from her hand she grabbed my arm and pulled me into a hug.

"I know this feels like the end of the world right now, but you'll be able to put it into perspective before you know it. Please, try to calm down and speak to your father with respect."

"I will. I'm sorry."

I hurried outside and jumped into my mom's car, quickly making my way across town to Riley's house. When I pulled into his driveway I saw that just his car was there, which meant that his dad must be working nights

again. I tried calling him one more time but it still went to voicemail. When nobody answered the door, I figured he was probably down in the basement working out with loud music playing and couldn't hear his phone, so I flipped back the doormat and grabbed the spare key.

When I opened the door I could definitely hear loud music, but it wasn't coming from downstairs as I'd imagined—it was coming from down the hall in his bedroom. I made my way quickly toward the door, but as I got close enough to knock I could hear *other* noises as well.

Forgoing the knock, I threw the door open to find two naked bodies intertwined on his bed. I could make out what was definitely Riley's back, pounding away at some girl underneath him. I was about to interrupt when I spotted a very familiar butterfly tattoo on the mystery girl's ankle.

"What the *fuck*?" I screamed at the top of my lungs.

They both jumped in shock and turned to look at me. Just as I suspected, there was my best friend.

"Becca?"

"Oh, shit!" Riley yelled, grabbing for some sweatpants. "Eden, I'm sorry!"

"Sorry you got caught!" I yelled, fresh, hot tears streaming down my face. I looked back at Becca and—I swear to God—she smirked. "You

know what? You two assholes deserve each other." I turned and walked back out of the room.

"Eden, wait!" Riley called after me.

"Just let her go," I could hear Becca say. "I told you she was too immature to be cool about this."

I ran outside, sobbing painfully. My tears weren't even about losing Riley—he was obviously a piece of shit. It was the outright *betrayal*. Before I could make it to the car I was hit with the memory that I'd just had sex with him earlier that very same day. Bile rose in my throat and next I knew, I'd painted his driveway with half-digested lasagna.

I made my way back home slowly, trying to see the road clearly through blurry, swollen eyes.

One thing was for certain now.

Moving didn't sound so bad.

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#### Chapter 1

I was surprised to find I actually liked living in Aledo.

The summer was bumpy at first as we packed up all our memories and adjusted to the move, but I had fun looking at new houses with my mom. We were staying at my grandparents' enormous house until we found one. They probably wouldn't have minded if we moved in permanently, but Mom and I agreed that we needed a fresh start.

So every day we set out to find a home while my dad got comfortable at his new job at the clinic. We kept our realtor extremely busy, looking at places in both the Quad Cities and Aledo. Whenever we found a *maybe*, we would take my dad back to look on the weekend or later that night. He said it was up to us, but we could tell pretty quickly that he was dismissing any houses that weren't in his hometown.

Finally, after about a month of looking, one of the large Victorian homes on College Avenue in Aledo became available and it seemed to fit everybody's needs. It was big and roomy and recently updated with modern appliances and fixtures. My mom loved it because it felt both old and new at the same time, my dad loved it because he'd thought it was a pretty house since childhood, and I loved it because it wasn't far from the school; I could walk there in a pinch if I had to. Plus, it had a beautiful wraparound porch

with a two-person swing, which made an excellent place to hang out and read when the weather was nice.

The realtor was also quick to point out that our housing budget went *way* farther in such a small town.

We unpacked our stuff from storage as fast as possible and set out to make the house feel like our own. Mom and I had fun painting our bedrooms together and did our best not to spill any paint on the hardwood floors. We also had fun picking out just the right area rug to cover the spot where we spilled some anyway.

Our new life was starting to come together.

We made a point of never mentioning Riley or "the incident," as it had come to be called. Once Mom got what had happened that night out of me, she tucked me into bed and told me that some guys were just pigs and some girls were just conniving bitches, but we had to do our best to keep them from affecting who we were inside. She promised me that it would get better over time and that it would be nothing but an unpleasant memory before long.

"They don't deserve your tears or your pain," she'd whispered in my bedroom before kissing me on the head and turning out the light.

The memory still hurt, but it was starting to hurt less. It didn't make me any less gun-shy about the thought of dating someone new, however.

Some days, for a little extra spending money, I would babysit my cousins Mason and Layne, the two sons of my Uncle Ethan and my Aunt Lily. Mason was almost twelve and constantly balked at needing a sitter, but Layne was eight and loved having a new person around to play with.

One such day found me annihilating Mason in video bowling when my Aunt Lily came home from work. The boys ran to give her hugs, so I started picking up the leftover toys scattered on the floor.

"Hey kiddo," she said as she walked over, grabbing another random action figure and tossing it in the Rubbermaid container I was filling up.

"Hi. How was your day at work?"

"Oh, it was work," she sighed. She was a nurse at the local gynecologist's office and had been working there since before I was born. My mom actually met her there when she was a patient. "Have you seen your uncle at all today?"

"He came in for lunch a couple hours ago, but then it was right back to his studio."

"Sounds like Ethan," she chuckled. "At least he's eating." My uncle was an artist and was known to get lost in his own world for long stretches of time. "Thanks again for helping with the boys. It's good for him to have some time to work without them getting in his hair all day."

"Of course, I love the boys. I'm happy to help."

"Well, I'll still be glad when school starts. Are you ready for your last year?"

"I guess. I don't really know anybody here yet, other than you guys and Grandma and Grandpa. There is this younger kid who's been over with his parents—I guess his dad went to school with mine—but he's sort of obnoxious. I hope that's not a sign of things to come."

"Well, there's no shortage of obnoxious boys in any town," she laughed. "He was probably trying to impress you. Pretty eighteen-year-old girl like you, how can you blame him?" We talked for a little longer about mundane things before she cleared her throat and started fidgeting with her hands. "So…listen sweetie…your mom wanted me to talk to you."

"What about?" I had a dreadful feeling that I knew exactly what about.

"We think it might be a good idea if you come in to the clinic for an appointment. I can get you in with Dr. Wilde this week or next and we can get it out of the way."

"Why do I need an appointment?" I asked innocently.

"Honey, this may be uncomfortable coming from your aunt, but your mom assumed it would be more comfortable than if it were coming from her." Okay, she had me there. "She filled me in on...some things. Now, we don't need to talk about those things, but I really think that we should run a few tests just to make sure that you're okay."

It took me a minute to get what she was suggesting. "Aunt Lily, I don't have any STDs! We were always safe, I made sure of it."

"What did you use?" She went into full-on nurse mode. "I know it's embarrassing but it's no joke, believe me."

"Condoms," I whispered, blushing furiously.

"Well that's good, and I'm proud of you. I still want to run a few tests just to be safe. You don't want something rearing its ugly head later. I'm sure you're fine but this way we'll know. Also, I think you should get on the pill."

"Why the pill? I'm not even *thinking* about seeing anyone right now."

She glanced out the kitchen window to my uncle's studio above the garage and then smiled warmly at me. "Because some of the best experiences in life are unexpected, and I'd rather you have a backup. Trust me; you won't always feel this way."

Exactly a week later, I had a clean bill of health and a purse full of pill samples. I thought Lily was worrying too much, but I had to admit that it felt like an enormous weight I hadn't even known existed was lifted off my shoulders.

Now I only had to face a new school year with total strangers.

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#### Chapter 2

Mercer County High School was much smaller than I was used to, but it had its advantages. Because of the small classes, all the kids had pretty much known each other since birth. They still had small cliques here and there, but the lines were much more blurred than I was used to. The most popular jocks were on the honor roll and hung out with computer geeks, cheerleaders hung out with kids in the band, and stoners were friends with everyone. Nobody really gave a crap who you were or what you did, as long as you were true to yourself.

It was a welcome change from where I came from. As Riley's girlfriend, I'd been expected to dress and act a certain way. If I did anything remotely questionable. my so-called "friends" would call me out, from wearing the wrong brand of jeans or playing uncool music to watching TV shows they thought were lame. They drilled their petty rules into my head until I was just like them. I could see now that I had been at serious risk of losing everything that made me who I was.

By the end of my first week, I was back to wearing my favorite hoodie again and my chucks had never felt so good. All of my advanced classes had a nice mixture of different types of people and for once I didn't feel like a freak because I liked to read. Everyone was welcoming and kind—I instantly felt like I belonged.

By the end of my second week, I realized that I didn't miss my last school at all. It also dawned on me that Riley had *always* been a shit boyfriend, even before he started screwing around on me, and I was better off alone than with someone like him. As far as I was concerned, I was done with boys until further notice.

Now, if I could just stop missing sex, everything would be perfect.

\* \* \*

After two months, it wasn't any better. There weren't even any boys that interested me, but I couldn't stop obsessing about sex.

I was also starting to wonder if it might be *better* with someone new, which had me re-evaluating the whole "no boys" plan. The only problem was...who? A few random jocks here and there had tried approaching me, but I shut them down so fast it made their heads spin. I didn't like the thought of dating boys who reminded me so much of Riley. It also wasn't a good sign that the only guys who seemed interested in me were the stereotypical meatheads in town.

"Earth to Eden!"

"Huh?" I blinked a few times to find my friend Amy waving her hand in front of my face. We were sitting at a table in the back of the library during study hall and, apparently, I had zoned out again. "Sorry, what did you say?"

"I asked if you were going to Devon's party after the game tomorrow."

"Oh. I don't know. I guess I hadn't really given it much thought."

"Well, you're certainly giving *something* a lot of thought," she giggled.

"Where were you just now?"

I could feel my telltale blush heating my cheeks. "Uh...nowhere I should have been." I tried to start reading where I'd left off, but Amy wasn't going to drop it so easily.

"Come on, tell me! Are you crushing on someone? You totally had that crush face going on." In two short months, Amy had already become one of my closest friends, and I'd learned quickly that she was extremely observant.

"No, and keep your voice down!" I gave her a scolding look, but she simply arched her eyebrow at me to let me know she was still waiting. I looked around before leaning in closer. "Okay... I'm not crushing on anyone...but I'm starting to wonder if I want to be."

"I don't think I get it," she whispered.

"You and Owen have sex, right?"

"What does that have to do with anything we're talking about?" she asked, surprised at the sudden change in topic. Amy and Owen had been dating since sophomore year, and I had never met a cuter couple. He was this tall, gangly stoner with longish blond hair and a black trench coat he never seemed to take off, while Amy was this tiny little thing with spiky red hair, freckles, and straight A's. They were so different, but when they were together it just made sense.

"Just answer the question," I said, "and don't try to lie because I know he goes over to your house all the time."

"Of course we do, but I still don't see what that has to do with anything."

"Well...when I was with my ex—"

"Riley?" Amy knew I broke up with someone before moving, but not all the gory details.

"Yeah." I grimaced at the sound of his name. "Anyway, we used to...a lot. And while I don't miss *him*, I think I miss sharing that with someone."

"So you're horny," she said, nodding in understanding.

"Not just that," I laughed, shaking my head at her directness. "I miss the closeness, but I've never been one to sleep around and I haven't really noticed any boyfriend prospects so far."

"So you miss playing Slap and Tickle, but there's nobody here you wanna slap and tickle, is that right?"

"Exactly."

"But Eden, there are a lot of cute single guys here. I bet you could have any of them you wanted."

"I don't know about that, but I do know that I've been so against dating that I haven't really paid any attention to anyone. Now that I think I might be ready to try again, I have no idea where to start."

"Ooh!" she gasped, ripping a sheet of paper out of her notebook. "Let's make a list!"

"A list?"

"Yeah, something to help us narrow down what to look for."

I watched as she drew a line down the center of the paper, making two columns. At the top of the left side, she wrote *Must Have*, and at the top of the right side she wrote *Absolutely Not*.

"Okay." Amy smiled brightly, tapping her pen on the paper. "Give me some criteria."

I was about to tell her that I had no idea what to say, but when I opened my mouth, out popped, "No jocks."

"Really?" She frowned, scribbling in the second column. "Well, that narrows it down a bit."

"They remind me too much of Riley. In fact, I think the exact opposite of him is a perfect place to start."

"Okay, well, since I never met him, I'm gonna need more to go on than 'not Riley."

"Right, sorry. Let's see—no blonds, if possible. No brown eyes, either."

"That's all superficial stuff, Eden. It has nothing to do with what kind of person they are."

"All right, then how about no manwhores?" I snapped.

Amy blinked a few times as she absorbed what I'd said before nodding quickly and scribbling a bit more on her list. "Now we're talking," she said with a smile. After a moment, she reached over and simply patted the back of my hand without any further comment. It was her way of letting me know she understood that I had gone through something, but she wasn't going to pry. It was pure Amy, and I loved her for it.

After a few moments of silence she sighed and added, "How about a few musts? It sounds like you want someone who doesn't have a lot of experience, is that right?"

"I don't know. I mean, knowing what to do isn't a bad thing, but Riley was experienced before me and he *still* didn't have a damn clue." We both broke out into a fit of giggles over that before the truth of the situation hit me. "Actually, I think you're right. I'm tired of smarmy guys who think they're all that. I'd rather have someone who didn't know what he was doing, but was honestly willing to learn."

I watched as she thought for a moment and wrote *Eager virgin ready for training* in the left column.

"Nicely put," I chuckled.

"I thought so," she smiled brightly. "Anything else?"

"Yeah..." I tapped my chin in thought. "Maybe a little shy. No more cocky jerks."

"I think that's a good start to our list," Amy said, putting her things away before the bell rang. "Now I just have to figure out who the hell fits it."

"I know—I'm not going to hold my breath on that one."

"You know what you should do? Come to Devon's party. You never come and I think you'd really like it. His parties are always a blast and there'll be a lot of single guys there."

"That's all I need," I groaned. "A bunch of drunken guys slobbering on me." Riley used to drag me to one party after another and I always put up with it, but I never felt comfortable. He would lecture me that we had a duty to make an appearance and everyone would talk about us if we didn't go. I had to dress sexy and make sure all the guys there were jealous of him.

I kept hearing about Devon's parties, but I'd made it a point to avoid them like the plague. I had no interest in a repeat of my last high school experience. "No, they're not like that, really. There's no booze allowed after one of the players got busted a few years ago. The coach told them that anyone caught drinking would be immediately kicked off the team, so Devon makes his parties fun in...other ways."

"I'm not going to an orgy, either."

"Stop jumping to conclusions, Eden," she laughed. "He just has a huge rec room in his basement with tons of things to do. There's a pool table, a dartboard, a pinball machine, and just about every game console you can think of. We always have a good time whenever we go." She looked wistful for a moment before adding, "It's the first place Owen and I ever kissed. Of course, it was during the Single Game, but it made us admit that we liked each other."

"What's the Single Game?"

"You've never played? Oh, it can be really fun! It's sort of like an advanced Spin the Bottle. You should really go; you might just find a new Slap and Tickle partner." She winked at me as she stood up and grabbed her bag when the bell rang. I followed after her, rolling my eyes.

"Slap and Tickle... The Single Game... Spin the Bottle? Jeez, Amy.

That is officially too many games for one conversation."

"Oh, you know you're interested. Stop pretending you're not."

"I'm...considering." I glanced at the clock and then started heading in the opposite direction. "I gotta go, I have zoology. Am I still getting a ride from you after school?" The shitbox of a car my parents finally bought me had broken down *again* and I was left begging my friends for rides until it was fixed. I tried not to complain about it, though, because I didn't want to sound like an ungrateful bitch. I mean, some kids' parents won't get them a car at all, shitbox or not. It also didn't help that the ginormous Oldsmobile used to belong to my aunt Lily before she married my uncle Ethan, so I had to watch that I didn't badmouth it in front of family, regardless of the fact that it was roughly the size of a yacht and as old as my dad.

"Oh, crap! I forgot I have band practice after school." Amy played flute in the marching band during football season. "I can still take you if you don't mind waiting in the stadium for an hour."

"Yeah, that's fine. Thanks!" I figured I could just sit in the stands while they practiced their marching and get my homework done early.

I turned and ran down the hall, just making it to my next class before the last bell rang. As I dumped my bag on the table, I sat down with a huff next to my lab partner. I couldn't get all the things Amy and I had talked about out of my mind.

Was I really ready to start dating again?

Could I trust someone enough to be that intimate again?

And most importantly, how would I ever find anyone like the boy on my list?

"Hey... Are you okay?" a soft, gentle voice asked beside me. "You seem a little upset."

"Huh?" I looked over at the concerned boy sitting next to me, blinking at me behind a pair of black-framed glasses. I think it was the most words I'd ever heard him put together at one time. "Sorry, Logan. Don't mind me today. I'm just a little preoccupied, I guess."

"Okay," he whispered, more to himself than me.

So, where was I?

Oh yeah...

How would I know when I found him?

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# **Chapter 3**

Later that day, I was sitting in the bleachers of our tiny football field, freezing my ass off. I was bundled up in as many layers as I could find and wondering how the hell I was supposed to finish my homework with thick mittens shoved over my gloves.

"A little chilly, are we?" I heard a familiar voice chuckle next to me. I braced myself before looking up at the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. Even now, when I was used to her presence, it sometimes hurt to look at her.

"Shut up, Zoe. I've never liked being in the cold."

Zoe Spencer was my other closest friend so far in Aledo. She and Amy were inseparable, and when I showed up two months ago not knowing anyone, they'd sort of adopted me like a lost puppy. She was the exact opposite of every popular cheerleader I'd ever known in the past: caring, honest, and extremely loyal.

"I still don't think you need all those layers. It's only October, for God's sake, and it's still daytime. How are you going to handle going to all the football games if we make the playoffs?"

"Well, from what I've heard, there isn't a big risk of that," I teased.

"Also, there's an advantage to wearing these thick mittens." I held up my

hand at her to demonstrate.

"What's that?"

"I'm totally flipping you off right now and you can't even tell."

She threw her head back and laughed. Even that sounded supernaturally beautiful, like a fairy's orgasm or something. "Okay, you got me there." She sat down next to me on the bleachers and looked at the textbook in my lap. "So what are you doing here, anyway? This isn't exactly the warmest place for homework, especially for a cold-weather pussy like you."

"Bitch!" I laughed, shoving my shoulder into hers. "Sorry if I'm not comfortable with my ass hanging out in forty degree weather like you are." I nodded toward the little cheerleading skirt she wore over very thin leggings. I often teased that the only reason she was comfortable in this weather was because she didn't have any feeling left in her ass after years of frostbite. "I'm waiting for Amy to get done with band practice so I can get a ride home."

"Oh yeah, the car took a shit again. I forgot."

"Yep," I sighed. "I wouldn't mind so much if it didn't always mean putting up with that douchebag son of my dad's friend coming around."

"That Luke kid you mentioned?"

"Yeah," I sighed. "He always volunteers to work on it for free, then struts around my yard half naked like he's God's gift."

"Ah, so he's a *subtle* peacock," she teased.

"Subtle like a freight train." I rolled my eyes, laughing at the memory of him clearly freezing his ass off trying to impress me. "It's not like he isn't good looking, but I am so over guys who are that full of themselves."

"I know what you mean," Zoe said, nodding her head in agreement.

"That's one of the things that I love about Devon. He knows he's good looking, but he isn't cocky about it. He doesn't act like the world owes him a favor just because he's hot."

Hot was an understatement. It only made sense that the most gorgeous girl I'd ever seen was dating the walking definition of muscle-bound athlete. He was this huge, crazy-ripped guy, but was also one of the nicest people I'd ever met and he had the brightest smile in the world. Together he and Zoe made such a striking couple that you had to gasp when they walked in a room.

"Hey, why aren't you with the squad? Aren't you supposed to be practicing now, too?"

"They're down there," she said, gesturing toward the track around the field. "We're taking a quick break, so I wanted to come talk to you."

"What about?"

"Amy said you might actually come to the party tomorrow, and I'm hoping to lock in a firm yes."

"What is it about this party? There've been others and you guys never made this much fuss about them."

"Because," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "They're always fun, but every party you don't show for just bums us out more each time. We both think you should come hang out because everyone really likes you."

Okay, I'll say it. Fucking awwww.

"Yeah," I choked out over the lump in my throat. "Okay. I'll go."

"You will? Excellent!" She jumped up and started doing her enthusiastic cheerleader clap.

"God, go away before I change my mind," I grumbled. "I can't handle that much energy so close to me."

"Oh, stop being a brat," she laughed, patting me on the head like her good little puppy. "I gotta get back." She went to turn, but suddenly stopped and looked down at me again. "Oh, hey, I've got a few guys in mind. Well, one kind of jumps out at me more than the others, but that's just my opinion."

"For what?"

"For your list, silly!"

"Jesus Christ, Zoe!" I snapped, looking around to see if anybody heard her. "Keep your voice down!" I could already feel my face heating up from total mortification. "What are you embarrassed about? I think it's a great idea. It's about time you started noticing some of the guys around here." She looked past me for a moment before glancing back down, a curious smile on her face.

"I just don't want everyone to think I'm desperate or anything, because I'm not. I'm just trying to open myself up t0 possibilities."

"And like I said, it's about damn time."

"Zoe! Come on, already!" Ashley Sanders yelled up at her. "We'd like to go home some time tonight!"

"Guess break's over," she sighed. "I'll talk to you later, okay?"

"Yeah, later." I was still embarrassed that Amy had shown the list to her, but I couldn't really be mad about it. I hadn't told her not to, and in all honesty, they practically shared a brain. There was no way Zoe wasn't going to find out.

"Hey, Logan!" she called out past me, waving before she turned and ran down the bleachers.

I turned around just in time to see him returning her wave timidly. He was on the same bleacher as me, but toward the other end.

"Oh, hi!" I smiled at him. "I didn't see you over there."

"Hi, Eden," he said quietly, nodding his head in my direction.

His voice didn't carry very well over the wind, so I tossed my book in my bag and walked closer to him.

"What brings you out here?" I asked when I was close enough to hear him. Sitting down next to him on the bench, I pointed to the marching band. "I'm stuck here waiting on a ride. How 'bout you?"

"Devon," he mumbled, also gesturing toward the field with one hand, his other thumb stuck in the pages of a well-worn paperback. I couldn't see the title, but when I looked back up at his face I saw a definite blush creeping up his cheeks, so I didn't ask what it was.

I found myself wondering if maybe he had some secret romance novel fetish. Maybe it was one of my *mom*'s books! Who was I to judge? I'd read them all numerous times myself. It probably should have felt weird to read such steamy things and know that my mother wrote them, but the only thing I'd ever felt was pride.

"Yeah, you give him rides sometimes, right?" Devon was even worse off than me; his parents flat out refused to buy him a car. They wanted him to pay for one himself so he would appreciate it, but they'd also wanted him to join so many afterschool activities that he had absolutely no time for a job. It sounded like some pretty screwed up logic, if you asked me.

Logan simply nodded his head in reply.

I remembered Zoe mentioning something about him and Devon being best friends for as long as she could remember, but I didn't get it. Logan was always so quiet whenever we all hung out that I didn't have any idea how anybody got to know him well enough to be considered best friends.

Just like right now, nodding and mumbling seemed to be his main form of communication.

Being his lab partner wasn't the easiest thing in the world, but somehow we made it work.

"What did you think of that dissection today in class?" At his silent shrug, I kept talking. "I thought it was going to gross me out, but it ended up being kind of interesting." I tried to catch his eye to make sure he was listening, but he kept glancing away at the last minute. It didn't help that his glasses kept blocking any eye contact, either. Sure, they were sort of geekchic cute on him, but at the moment they were pissing me off.

I watched in wonder as he started flipping through the pages of his book nervously, like he needed something to do with his hands. Back and forth, he flipped them loudly like a cartoon flipbook, only to turn the book over and start again from the other side.

"Any idea what Mr. Baker is going to give us to dissect for the final? I know it's a couple months away, but it just keeps getting grosser. I heard they did a fetal pig last year."

"Dunno," he muttered, following it up with another one of his nowfamous shrugs. I saw his eyes dart quickly to mine, then instantly back down to the book he was torturing in his hands as soon as he saw me watching.

It finally dawned on me that I was probably annoying the shit out of him. Great. Take a hint, Eden.

"Hey, listen... I'm sorry for being rude. You're over here trying to read and I'm all up in your face." I waited for him to say something, just in case I was assuming the worst, but he only stared at me like a deer in headlights. His silence was all the confirmation I needed. "Uh... Well... I'll let you get back to it, okay? See you tomorrow in class."

I returned to my abandoned homework, wanting to kick myself for being an inconsiderate jackass. Sure, he was a little awkward, but Logan was a nice enough guy. He was clearly too nice to tell me I was bothering him.

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# **Chapter 4**

The next day in study hall, I couldn't stop myself from leaning over and asking Amy the question that had been bothering me all night.

"Why doesn't Logan ever say anything?"

"Who, Logan Black?" She looked at me like I was crazy. "What do you mean? He talks."

"No, I know he *can* talk; what I want to know is why he chooses not to."

"Eden, I honestly don't know what you're talking about. There are times we can't get that boy to shut up."

"Bullshit," I blurted out bluntly.

"No, really. Don't ever get him and Devon talking about freaking video games or computers; I swear to God, they never stop. Then Owen will go and bring up some dumb shit like *Star Wars* or *Lord of the Rings* and it starts all over again."

"Then why the hell won't he ever talk to me?"

"He doesn't? I thought I saw you two talking last night at practice."

"No. What you saw was me talking and him blowing me off."

"That can't be right." Amy shook her head. "He's a really nice guy. He doesn't blow people off."

"I'm telling you what happened. I thought I was just annoying him last night, but now I'm starting to think he doesn't like me at all."

"Oh Eden, come on! Why wouldn't he like you?"

"I don't know, but I must've done something to piss him off right from the get-go. Maybe he thinks I'm a dipshit and doesn't want to be stuck as my lab partner." For some reason that thought made me feel really sad. I always thought he was a nice guy, if a bit quiet. It upset me to think that I had been annoying him that whole time.

"I'm sure that's not it." A look crossed her face like something had just dawned on her. "Even if what you say is true, which I still say it's not, why does that bother you? You never cared about talking to Logan Black before." She dropped her voice to a dramatic whisper. "Do you think you *like* him?"

"How could I like him, Amy? I don't *know* him! Until thirty seconds ago I thought he never talked to anybody about anything. I've honestly never even considered him because he was always just some quiet guy in the corner."

"Well, maybe you should."

"Maybe I should *what*?" The direction of our conversation was frustrating me, and I didn't know why.

"Consider him. There are certainly worse guys out there."

"Don't talk like that." I shook my head, getting more upset by the minute. "Don't make me look for something that isn't there. How can I consider him when I'm apparently the only person in the world he won't talk to?"

"Won't...or *can't*?" She looked at me meaningfully, willing me to understand what she was saying.

"That doesn't make any sense!"

The bell rang loudly, startling me. I used the chance to end our uncomfortable conversation and told her I'd see her after school.

"Wait, you're still coming to the party after the game tonight, right?" Great. That was all I needed.

"Yeah," I huffed, running my hands through my hair. "But I don't know how much fun I'll be."

"Don't think like that," Amy said, patting me on the shoulder. "You're going to have a great time, I know it. I'll pick you up before the game. Just tell your parents you're sleeping at my house tonight; we'll end up there after the party, anyway."

I nodded and turned around, heading down the hall. After this newest revelation about Logan, I was seriously dreading my next class.

When I got to zoology, he was already seated at our desk. Part of me wanted to run right up to him and shake him until he talked to me, while the

other part just wanted to curl up in a ball and hide. I had no idea what was bothering me more: the possibility that he had quietly hated me for months or the chance that I was starting to like him.

I was so confused. I was starting to think about him as more than a lab partner—my instincts were telling me to try and talk to him, to maybe see if I could get him to open up to me. But then I remembered the way he avoided me the night before, and how obvious it was that I was talking too much and getting on his nerves. Suddenly, talking to him felt like the *last* thing I should do for fear of bothering him even more. I had no idea what to do.

So I took a page out of Logan Black's handbook.

I didn't talk at all.

When I sat down next to him and he mumbled an uncomfortable "Hey," I just nodded and stared straight ahead.

When Mr. Baker handed out our assignments for the day, I slid his copy over without even looking at him.

When we had to work together to identify the different parts of the frog we were dissecting, I simply shoved the tray at him as an indication for him to start slicing while I wrote down the different organs as he revealed them. Apparently, hardly interacting had its advantages, because we won the privilege of sitting out during the pop quiz as a reward for doing our work fastest.

I started thinking that I should have shut up in class a long time ago. Normally I would have asked him about each organ and told him what I thought, trying to get any kind of a reply out of him that I could. Maybe this was for the best; we were already being rewarded for avoiding each other.

However, avoiding him didn't seem to help my nerves at all.

Somehow I was even more conscious of Logan than ever before. Not looking at him didn't spare me any awkwardness; I could *feel* him next to me. When he handed me the last of our tools to put away, his fingertips brushed against mine and I had to stifle a gasp. It was like a jolt of pure electricity shooting over all my nerve endings at once.

Why was this happening to me *now*? Surely we'd touched before and never felt like that…hadn't we?

There were times when I could swear I felt his eyes on me, but I couldn't bring myself to look. I didn't want to see him looking away again to avoid me, or even worse, find out that he hadn't been looking at all.

That's when it dawned on me: I definitely wanted him to look at me. The realization almost made me cry.

It really sucked to already know there was no possibility with the first guy who interested me.

As I gathered up my things, I couldn't help but notice his forearm on the table next to me. It was covered with the prettiest hair, and his muscles kept flexing. I looked farther, landing on his long, slender fingers, which were clenched into a fist.

Why hadn't I ever noticed how sexy his hands were?

I suddenly mourned the loss of those beautiful fingers ever touching me.

And I mourned the friendship that I thought I'd had with a sweet, quiet boy.

When the bell finally rang, freeing me from that torment, I wiped at the traitorous tears that were beginning to spill over onto my cheeks. Tossing my bag over my shoulder, I muttered a barely audible, "Bye, Logan," before busting ass out of the room and heading straight to my locker.

When I finally got the combination to work, I threw the metal door open and shoved a few books inside. Taking a deep breath, I forced myself to calm down. There was no reason to get so worked up over something that quickly.

"Eden?" I heard his voice beside me. Why had I never realized how rich it sounded?

Perhaps because he was always mumbling and avoiding me.

I took another deep breath to steady myself before shutting my locker and turning to face him. "Yeah?"

He was looking down at me through those *fucking* cute glasses, and all I could think in the back of my mind was: When did his eyes get so pretty? They were almost pure gray.

It took him a moment to speak—he kept looking at me, no doubt taking in the redness of my eyes and my puffy lids. It was without question the longest we had ever maintained eye contact.

"You weren't bothering me," he finally whispered.

"What?" I asked, not quite sure I heard him right.

"Last night. You thought you were bothering me. I should have spoken up instead of letting you walk away."

"You don't have to spare my feelings, Logan. I get it. I know I talk too much sometimes." I looked at him and gave him a weak smile. "I'm just sorry that I didn't realize how annoying I was before now."

"No! *Dammit...*that's what I'm trying to tell you!" He looked almost frantic for a moment, like he didn't know what to do, and then the next thing I knew his soft, beautiful hands were holding each side of my face, forcing me to look at him. His thumbs moved slightly over the surface of my cheeks, as if he were memorizing the texture. I wanted to reach my tongue out and lick his thumb as it grazed the side of my mouth. "Listen to me, Eden. You have never annoyed me. *Never*."

He glanced down at my lips as he finished speaking, and I could swear I heard the slightest whimper under his breath. Before I had time to process what that sound was doing to my body, he was gone.

I looked around, but he was nowhere in sight.

Leaning back against my locker for a moment, I let out a huge gust of air I hadn't realized I'd been holding. My pulse was pounding in my ears and my legs felt wobbly.

What the hell just happened?

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# **Chapter 5**

Later that night, after a quick dinner with my parents and a horribly boring football game, I was riding with Amy and Zoe on the way to Devon's place.

They spent the entire ride in the car pumping me for information about what had happened earlier at my locker. I hadn't intended to mention anything about it to anyone, but Zoe had taken one look at me in my next class and knew something seriously rattled me.

"I still say you're holding something back," she said from the front seat as she played with Amy's satellite radio.

"Zoe! Would you drop it already? I swear that's everything that happened."

"Then why the hell did you look so shaken up? You should have seen your face; you looked like he kissed you senseless!"

"I don't know! It was just something about the way he touched me..."

My voice began to fade into a whisper. "And there was this little...sound he made."

"Ooh, what kind of a sound?" Amy piped in, peeking at me in her rearview mirror.

"Yeah, was he like, grunting and moaning?" Zoe laughed, raising her eyebrows at me suggestively.

"No, you pervs, it was nothing like that." I stared off into space as I relived the moment again in my head. "It was like this adorable little whimper or something. It sounded almost...desperate." When I looked back at them, I realized we'd already arrived and they were both staring at me like I'd grown a second head. "What?" I snapped. "It was just sexy, okay?"

"You are so totally sprung on him!" Amy shouted, bouncing up and down in her seat.

"I am not!" I looked back and forth between them. "Am I?"

"Jesus, Eden!" Zoe barked. "How the hell did you ever date anyone if it takes you this long to figure out whether you like somebody?"

"That was different; Riley was way more aggressive. He told me right after we met that he thought I was cute and that we should go out sometime. And then we did; that's all there was to it. There weren't any of these guessing games or feelings of doubt. Well, until I found out he was screwing around, that is," I added sarcastically.

"You can't base all of your future experiences off of that one asshole," Amy advised. "Logan sounds like the exact opposite, and maybe that's a good thing. He might not broadcast how he feels about you, but I can bet you a million dollars he would never screw you over like that."

"I *knew* he was perfect for her list," Zoe said to Amy as if I wasn't even there. "I mean really, does anybody else here fit the bill like he does?"

"Oh my God, Zoe! *Logan* is the guy you were talking about last night?" My voice had risen so loud, it was bouncing around inside the car.

"Fucking *duh*!" She rolled her eyes at me. "He's only been crazy about you since you came here. Are you really that blind?"

"No, I'm not blind, I'm just not used to guys who supposedly like me avoiding me like the plague."

"Eden, the last thing he does is avoid you. Where does he always sit for lunch?"

"Well, across from me, but that's just because the guys all sit on that side of the table. Isn't it?"

"Hell no," she laughed. "He always used to sit next to me so that he could talk across the table to Devon. From the first day we asked you to sit with us, he parked himself right across from you so that he could watch you when you weren't paying attention."

"You're right!" Amy gasped. "Now that you mention it, he's been so much quieter at lunch lately. I never noticed how much he clams up whenever she comes around."

"Dude, I'm telling you, it's Brandi Taylor all over again," Zoe said, causing her and Amy to burst into a fit of cackles so loud that I thought I might have to plug my ears.

"Um, guys? Hello? Focus!" I yelled, waving my hands in front of their faces. "Who the hell is Brandi Taylor, and what is so funny?"

"Brandi Taylor was this little girl we used to go to grade school with, before her family moved out of town," Amy explained to me excitedly, as if her life revolved around this little tidbit of grade school gossip. "Well anyway, Logan must have had a little crush on her, because whenever she came near him, he wouldn't say a damn word. Seriously, he would be in the middle of a sentence, and if he saw her come into the room, he just stopped talking and turned bright red."

"He was so damn nervous and shy around her," Zoe added. "He could be totally comfortable with anyone else in the room, and then he would just get all flustered and embarrassed out of nowhere."

"Aw, that's...kind of cute," I said, thinking of a little sloppy-haired, foureyed boy getting nervous over his crush.

"You haven't heard the worst of it yet," Amy continued. "When we were in third grade, Logan won the spelling bee. I mean, it was like a statewide competition, and there was a huge championship in Springfield that the whole class made a trip to go see so they could support him. You should have seen him, up there on the stage in the little suit and tie his mother made him wear, holding up his trophy with the biggest smile I'd ever seen on his face."

"That sounds so adorable," I giggled, picturing him way too easily.

"Yeah, that was until Brandi happened," Zoe said, interrupting my musings. "She walked up to him after the awards ceremony and told him that she was proud of him, then reached out and gave him a hug."

"What's so bad about that? That was actually really sweet of her," I said, feeling odd for defending the manners of a nine-year-old girl I'd never met.

"Well, she didn't know about Logan's little nervous problem. As soon as she let go, he got this scared look on his face and threw up all over her."

"Oh no!" I couldn't imagine how humiliating that had to be for both of them.

"Yep. All over her, all over his little suit. Even on his trophy. It was really gross," Amy nodded. "I thought he was over his nerves, but now I see that there just hasn't been another girl who made him so nervous until you."

"Great," I grumbled, dropping my head into my hands. "I'll try to kiss him, and he'll puke on me."

"Don't be stupid," Zoe said. "I think it's safe to assume he's gotten at least a small hold on it now, or he would have puked on you already. What I want to know is how the hell we get him to open up for you. We need to get him in a situation where he absolutely must put himself out there so you can snag him up."

"Didn't he sort of do that already today?" I asked, thinking of the look on his face when he touched me.

"No." She shook her head. "It was a step in the right direction, but we need to make him see that he either needs to approach you...or become approachable."

"How are we supposed to do that?" I groaned. "You know damn well that I'm going to go into that party and he'll be holed up in the corner playing a video game all night long, pretending like I'm not even there.

"I know!" Amy practically screamed, bouncing in her seat again. Once she had our undivided attention, she simply looked at us and said, "The Single Game," like it was the answer to some great riddle.

"Oh, that's *perfect*," Zoe laughed excitedly, rubbing her hands together like the evil villain in a Bond film.

"Care to fill me in?" I huffed, tired of not knowing what was going on.

"What is the Single Game, anyway? Amy never really explained it."

"It's kinda like this awesome mixture of Truth or Dare and Spin the Bottle. There are two rounds: the Ice Breaker round, where everybody loosens up a bit, and then the Lip Lock round."

"Wait—so you all just kiss random people all night?" It sounded a little disgusting, to be honest.

"Sometimes. It all depends on what the instructions are for your turn."

"Instructions? God, this sounds cryptic."

"It's actually really fun, and a great way to get to know people better," Amy explained.

"Why do you think this game is going to help me?"

"Because it's never a bad idea to remind a guy that he has competition. We want to force his hand, make him get off his ass for a change."

"Exactly," Zoe jumped in. "I'd be willing to bet that seeing you kiss someone else, even just a tiny little peck, would drive him nuts."

"I don't know," I hedged. "I don't like the idea of playing head games with him. Why can't I just walk up to him and tell him that I know he likes me and I like him?"

"I said I *think* it's safe to assume he won't puke on you, but do you really want to push it?" Zoe said sarcastically. "We need him to man up on his own. If he isn't ready, it just won't work."

"And what happens if I go through all of this and he doesn't do a damn thing? What if seeing me kiss another guy just scares him off?"

They both stared blankly at me for a moment, as if the notion had never occurred to them. It was finally Amy who broke the silence. "Stop talking like that, Eden. You just have to keep a positive attitude."

Sure.

Positive attitude.

Easy for her to say.

\* \* \*

An hour later, I was actually having a good time—or at least managing to act like I was.

Devon's basement rec room was truly impressive and packed with kids from school. They were all split up into various groups, entertaining themselves with the many games he had set up. There was one group shooting darts and another playing pinball, and half the football team fought over the pool table while the other half fought over the video games.

Logan, as I'd predicted, was camped out in front of the computer with a role-playing game.

To the untrained eye, he looked completely oblivious of me and everything else around him, but since I was armed with so much new information about him, I was able to spot a few tells that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. For starters, every single time I glanced in his direction, his eyes would shoot back to the computer screen as if he'd just been watching me out of his peripheral vision. The first few times, I thought I was just seeing what I wanted to see, but then I noted a slight pinking of his cheeks whenever it happened.

That's right. Caught you staring at me, Pukey.

Once I realized what was going on, I felt my confidence growing. Maybe the girls were right; if he already couldn't keep his eyes off me, perhaps it would only take a nudge in the right direction to make him actually *do* something. That started me thinking that maybe I wouldn't have to kiss some other random dude later—maybe I could encourage him another way.

From that point on I did my best to be the life of the party. If he was just going to sit there and watch me, then I would give him a show.

I made my way around the room, joining in on each group's discussions. I didn't really try to flirt with any of the other guys there, although some of them certainly flirted with me, but I did try to make sure that everyone knew I was *obviously* the most fun girl in the room...so Logan would realize that he was an idiot to sit by and let a great catch like me go. I laughed louder than everyone there, I leaned seductively against every inanimate object I could get near, and I made sure to drop things as much as possible so that I would have to lean all the way over and pick them up in front of him.

Because I'm subtle like that.

When none of those things seemed to push him to action, I moved on to my next plan: Operation "Just One of the Guys." I figured maybe Logan would feel more comfortable if we had more in common than he realized. I wanted to prove that I could be someone he could relax with, someone he could be himself with.

I started by beating Devon's ass at air hockey, which caused him to pout like a baby until Zoe told him to grow up. Then I got into a rather loud and heated debate with Owen over who would survive in a zombie apocalypse: Captain Kirk or Darth Vader.

Yeah, word to the wise—don't *ever* argue with a stoner about that shit.

Amy finally had to break it up before things got bloody, dragging me into the bathroom and signaling Zoe to join us. Once they had shut the door behind us Amy spun around and glared at me.

"What the hell are you doing out there, Eden? What's with the desperate act?"

"What do you mean? I'm just trying to have a good time."

"Bullshit," Zoe piped up. "I'm getting whiplash trying to keep up with you out there. What are you trying to prove?"

"I don't know," I frowned. "I guess I was just—"

"Trying to make Logan notice how great you are?" Amy finished, quirking her eyebrow at me.

"Maybe," I whispered.

"Eden," Zoe sighed, placing her hand on my shoulder. "We already know he's into you. He's been watching you all night."

"So what's so bad about trying to entice him?"

"Do you really want to intimidate him even more? Prancing around and showing him how amazing you are could just backfire in your face."

"How?"

"Think about it," Amy explained. "He could start getting it in his head that you're out of his league. For all we know, that's what's been stopping him so far. If he gets too worried about it he might never open up."

"This is getting ridiculous!" I huffed. "Why the hell can't I just ask him out on a date already?"

"Listen to me, Eden," Zoe said, grabbing my shoulders and practically shaking me. "I have known Logan my whole life, and he's my boyfriend's best friend in the entire world. I know this seems like a lot of work, but I also know for a fact that he's worth it. I wouldn't be telling you to do all this if I didn't think you two are perfect for each other. I know he has the potential to treat the right girl like a fucking queen if she lets him, and from what you've told us about your past, it sounds like you could use the royal treatment right about now. Am I right?"

"Yes," I whispered, feeling the truth of her words in my bones.

"Then listen to us. You need to calm down out there. Talk to people and have a good time, but don't try so hard to be noticed—he's already watching. Just be patient until you play the game, and use that as a way to

coax him out slowly. He'll probably just sit there and keep an eye on you while you play, but I know he won't be able to stand the idea of other guys getting that close to you."

"Exactly," Amy said. "I bet he'll find a way to talk to you pretty damn quickly after tonight. Just be patient with him and keep an eye out for any signals that he might be ready to move a little further."

"Okay," I sighed. "I'll back off for now, but when the hell are we playing this damn game? I want to get this over with already." I looked between them both, blushing profusely. "I'd honestly rather just spend this time with Logan, getting to know him."

Zoe looked at the clock on her cellphone. "Well, Devon's mom usually goes to bed around eleven, so you guys will probably start playing sometime soon."

"Wait a minute, what do you mean 'you guys'?" I blurted out, feeling an increasing sense of dread. "Don't you mean we'll be playing soon?"

"No, only single people are allowed to play. That's why they call it the *Single* Game. I thought you knew that."

"No!" I squeaked. "I most certainly did not! You mean I have to be out there all alone?"

"Don't worry, you'll do fine," Amy soothed. "I'm sorry I didn't say anything before, it didn't even occur to me. I'm so used to everybody just

knowing about the game already."

"Why doesn't everyone play?"

"Well, they all used to in the beginning. Everyone played, even the couples. But then a few years ago, the wrong girlfriend kissed the wrong guy too enthusiastically in front of the wrong jealous boyfriend, and a huge fight broke out. From that point on, Devon insisted that if we were going to continue playing in his house, then no couples were allowed."

"Yeah, it also didn't help that it was the year we started dating," Zoe laughed. "He became one of those jealous boyfriends, himself. And in all honesty, I didn't want to let him kiss anybody else, either."

"That makes sense, I guess. I just thought I would have some support out there."

"You will," Amy said. "We'll be there watching. We never miss a game, actually." She smiled wickedly. "It makes for the best gossip on Monday."

"All right, enough of this," Zoe said after checking her makeup in the mirror. Walking over and opening the door, she looked back at us and smiled. "Let's get out there and give that boy something to think about."

Oh, God.

I suddenly felt like *I* was the one who was gonna puke.

Not even ten minutes later, it all played out the way Zoe described to me on our way back from the bathroom. Devon's mother brought down the last

tray of snacks for the night, spent a few minutes saying hello to everyone, then reminded Devon that she trusted him to be responsible...while also reminding him that she could come back down at any moment, just in case he got any bright ideas.

As soon as she turned around to go back upstairs, Devon rolled his eyes dramatically. We were all quiet while he listened to her footsteps climbing upstairs through the house, waiting until they finally settled in his parents' bedroom. "She'll be asleep in five minutes, tops," he laughed. "I love it when my dad is out of town."

As we all watched him walk over to a cabinet in the corner, I realized that a hush had fallen over the room. He opened a door and slowly pulled out four small gift bags, one after the other: a pink one, a blue one, a green one and a bright red one. When he turned back around to face the room, an enormous smile broke out across his face.

"Single Game!" he announced loudly, and I swear to God everyone broke out into applause. "If you came here unattached and have any interest in changing that before you leave here tonight, I highly advise that you sit your ass down here by me." He lowered himself until he was sitting crosslegged in the middle of the floor. "Girls on my right, boys on my left. Make two rows."

There was a flurry of activity after that. Many of the people stopped whatever they were doing to sit down on the floor, leaving the pool table and everything else open to those who either weren't eligible to play because they were dating someone, or weren't interested in playing or watching. However, from the swarm of onlookers forming around us, there didn't seem to be many who fit that description.

Besides Logan, that is.

He just sat there in front of that damn computer like he wasn't even listening.

Those of us who were playing divided into two rows facing each other, with Devon at the end to oversee the game, while everyone else sat around us in an outer circle to watch.

"Shit," Devon cursed to himself. "I forgot extra paper." He looked around until he saw Logan playing away at his game. "Hey, Lo? *Lo*!"

"Huh?" Logan finally broke his attention away from his game long enough to look over at Devon.

"Toss me those Post-it notes over there on the desk next to you. I need them for the game."

"Oh... uh..." his eyes briefly landed on mine as he registered that we were ready to start the game, only to move quickly back to Devon. "Yeah,

sure." He looked around the desk until he found the post-it notes, tossing them across the room easily.

Devon caught them one-handed, peeling off blank sheets and handing them down the rows of players. He followed that up by pulling out a large stack of pens from one of the bags and passing them along behind the paper. "Everyone, write your name on your paper and fold it up tiny. Don't try folding it special or marking it up for someone to find easily, because I'm watchin' for that shit. If there's someone specific that you're hoping to hook up with, just nut up now and ask them to go make out. Otherwise, play fair."

I couldn't stop myself from glancing over at Logan, wishing that he would somehow know to look at me and get inspired by his friend's words, but of course that didn't happen. That would have been too easy and taken away any shred of doubt I was feeling. He was currently too busy with his head bent over the desk, writing something down.

Probably some weapons code or some boring crap like that.

After we had all written our names down, Devon handed Zoe the blue bag and Amy the pink bag. They didn't need to be told what to do, both of them moving to the end of the rows and working their way back up to the front, walking down the middle as they held out their bags to collect the names.

"I hope I get Mike!" Ashley Sanders stage-whispered excitedly on my right.

Barf.

I sincerely hoped that she got Mike, too. The thought of kissing that skeevy douchebag turned my stomach.

When Amy finally passed in front of me with the pink bag, she smiled down at me and winked as I dropped in my name. "That's the spirit," she whispered.

I watched as they both made their way back toward Devon, Zoe taking longer than Amy since the boys all wanted to flirt with her as she passed them. It didn't take long before Devon had seen enough.

"Just toss your fucking name in the bag, Johnson," he growled at Cody, who had the decency to look embarrassed. "No discussion needed."

Zoe took his name and moved a little faster down the line, but before she was finished I heard some sort of argument closer to Devon. I tried to see what was going on, but Zoe kept getting in my way as she moved.

"What the *hell*, Black? We already started!" a whiny voice that could only belong to Mike Davis rang out.

"Shut up, Davis, and move over."

When Zoe finally shifted out of my way, I could see Logan squeezing his way into the line of boys next to Devon. He was pushing and shoving Mike

roughly until he finally got his way and forced the other boy to scoot down.

By the time he was done settling into place, you could have heard a pin drop.

"Dude, what are you doing?" Devon asked him quietly, glancing around at all the people staring at his friend with their mouths hanging open in shock. "You never play."

"Shut up," was the only response Logan gave him.

Everyone watched, holding their breath as Zoe stopped in front of him. She looked at him for a moment as if trying to read something in his eyes. "You sure?" she asked, holding out the blue bag in front of him.

Logan's eyes shifted over to mine quickly before looking back up at Zoe, a bright pink blush blooming under his glasses. Without saying a word, he reached out and dropped his name in the bag.

Call me crazy, but I think Logan just made himself available.

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### Chapter 6

The room was silent for a beat while everyone processed what had just happened. Then, like someone had flipped a switch, a loud wave of whispers starting floating around the room.

Apparently Logan Black finally playing this stupid game was a *really* big deal.

"All right everybody, quiet down," Devon scolded. "Let's get this thing started." He gestured to Zoe and Amy, and they both stood at his sides, holding the bags. When he nodded his head, they each folded over the top of their bag and shook it wildly, mixing up everyone's names. When they were done, they handed Devon the bags and took a seat on either side of him, Zoe settling with a proprietary hand on his thigh and Amy leaning back against Owen for support.

"Okay, round one: The Ice Breaker." Devon looked at the two rows of players before he continued. "I know there are a few newbies here tonight, so this is how it works: when it's your turn, draw a paper from the green bag and read it out loud. Then draw a name from the opposite sex's bag. You aren't allowed to pass or trade...and you have to be honest. Hold onto your papers until the round is over, and then you'll put them back in the bags. Nothing in the Ice Breaker round involves kissing or touching of any

kind, so just relax and get to know everyone better." He looked over to Chloe Waters, who was immediately to my left and the first in our row, which made me second. Holding out the green bag, he smiled broadly and said, "Ladies first!"

Chloe reached inside timidly, pulling out a folded piece of paper. After taking her time unfolding it, she cleared her throat and read aloud, "What is the best physical trait of this person?" She then reached into the blue bag and pulled out a name. "Cody."

Her face blanched a bit as she considered her answer. I didn't know Chloe well yet, but I knew that she seemed like a very sweet girl, if not a bit quiet. I did know that she thought Cody was a huge jerk, though, so her answer might prove interesting.

"Um... I guess his shoulders," she answered shyly.

"My *shoulders*?" Cody scoffed. "Not my face or my ass or something like that?"

"You have broad shoulders. They're nice," she returned with a shrug. It was apparently all she was going to say on the matter, refusing to boost his ego any more than necessary.

"Johnson, don't be a dick," Devon barked. "I said to be honest. If that's her answer, then shut up about it." He smiled at Chloe encouragingly. "Well done. Now pass the green bag over to Logan; it's the guys' turn next."

Logan looked queasy as he reached for the bag, but he pulled it together when it was time to read his paper, his eyes bugging out for a moment before he spoke. "Uh... Have you ever had a sexual fantasy about this person, even once?" He swallowed thickly as he drew a name from the pink bag. "Ashley Sanders."

"Hell yeah!" half of the guys yelled, slapping high fives like a bunch of idiots.

"Guys, really! Grow up, already," Ashley admonished, but I could hear the gloat in her voice without even looking at her.

"No," Logan's quiet voice answered the awkward question.

"What?" Ashley gasped.

Uh-oh. It sounded like the sweet little cheerleader just couldn't fathom the idea of any red-blooded American male *not* jerking off to her.

"Dude, I call bullshit on that!" Mike whined.

"No, I'm sorry," Logan shook his head, taking a cue from Chloe and simply shrugging it off. He looked up and held my gaze. "It's your turn," he said softly. Without looking away, he held out the green bag to me, and when I went to take it from him I felt his fingertips graze over the back of my knuckles.

He might as well have slid his hand between my legs, it felt so intimate.

I felt his feather-light touch all the way down to my toes and back up again, and the only thing I could do after that was wonder what the hell it would be like if I let him *really* touch me.

Remembering that it was still my turn, I forced myself to focus on drawing a question out of the bag. "What is the nicest thing this person has ever done for you?" Well, seeing as I only had two months' worth of memories to pull from, I hoped it was at least someone I knew. "Tate Cramer." Whew, okay. At least he was a nice guy. "Let's see... On my first day of school here, Tate showed me around and introduced me to everyone. He was really nice and he made me feel comfortable right away, so I've always been thankful for that."

Tate blushed at my praise and a few of his buddies patted him on the head in jest.

The first round continued on like that, everyone eventually getting their turn, and everyone eventually having their name drawn. It was super classy when brainiac Cody pulled my name and listed a toss-up between my "juicy ass" and my "smokin' hot rack" as the first things he'd noticed about me.

#### Ewww.

Then the very ladylike Holly Mathers, who also happened to be on the cheer team, claimed that the best thing about Logan was how he looked in his swim trunks at Devon's pool party last summer.

Skank.

Not only was it a completely shallow answer, but I hated the fact that she knew what he looked like in swim trunks and I didn't. I couldn't believe how jealous and possessive I already felt where Logan was concerned, and I'd only realized I had feelings for him earlier that day. I had never been ruled by so many emotions before, and I didn't know how to take it. It was like I had taken so long to see the truth that my emotions were trying to play catch up all at once.

"Okay, that brings us to the end of round one," Devon called out, interrupting my musings. "Which means it's time for round two!"

Everybody starting whooping and cheering, and then I remembered.

The Lip Lock round.

Crap!

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### Chapter 7

"All right, boys and girls, we all know what time it is!" Devon announced.

"I want you to go ahead and refold your papers, and toss them back in the correct bags when Amy and Zoe come around."

Oh, God. I had to draw another name, and this time there would be kissing involved.

I was excited that Logan was a possibility, but the likelihood of pulling his name or him pulling mine out of a bag against seven other names was slim to none. The thought of kissing anyone else was repulsive, but the thought of watching *him* kiss anyone else made me feel homicidal.

What the hell was I going to do?

When it came time for me to drop Tate's name back in, I shot Amy a panicked look as she held the blue bag out in front of me. With a knowing smile, she leaned over and grabbed my shaking hand as I was pulling it away.

"Silly Eden," she giggled. "You need to learn how to calm down." As she pulled her fingers away from mine, I felt something crumpled up in my hand. She winked at me again before moving on to Chloe and I instinctively kept the wadded up piece of paper hidden in my palm.

I didn't need to look at it to know that it said Logan's name.

I glanced over just in time to see Zoe doing something very similar in front of Logan, grabbing his hand and leaning over to whisper in his ear.

I'd been worried for nothing. My two amazing friends had recognized the need to stack the deck in our favor once Logan raised the stakes by joining in.

Well played, ladies.

After everyone's names had been collected and shaken up again, Devon announced that we were going to go in a different order this time; the ladies would all go first rather than switching off with the boys. When one of the guys whined about it and asked him why, he simply smiled and said that it was hilarious to make the guys wait.

"This is played the same way as the other round," Devon explained, "but this time there *is* kissing involved, and also some touching." When a bunch of the guys started making suggestive noises, he quickly shushed them and rolled his eyes. "Nothing nasty, guys; it's not an orgy, for God's sake. Now, by agreeing to play this round, you have to do whatever the note says, with whoever's name you draw. As I said, it's nothing too heavy, but there are a few choices in there that are more...open to interpretation. For those, you only have to go as far as you are willing, no matter *what* your partner says." He shot a death glare to the guys. "Any of you get out of line, and you'll meet the business end of my right hook. Is that understood, gentlemen?"

I couldn't help thinking how refreshing it was to hear Devon say that after some of the parties Riley had dragged me to in the past, where hookups were expected to happen all over the place and the motto was always "black out or back out."

After a few somber nods of acknowledgment from the guys around the room, Devon passed the red bag and the blue bag to Chloe so that she could begin. While I watched her nervously draw from the red bag, I discreetly tucked the paper I was hiding in between my fingers so no one would see it when it was my turn.

"Kiss this person once on each cheek, then once on the lips," Chloe croaked out timidly. After that, she pulled a name from the blue bag. "Tate Cramer." Her face turned beet red as she looked over at her target, and it was cute to see that his cheeks were a matching color.

Tate was seated almost diagonally from her toward the opposite end of the boys' line, so she slowly crawled over to him on her hands and knees. When they were finally face-to-face, she leaned in carefully and kissed first his right cheek, then his left. Pulling back to smile at him briefly, she leaned in again and pressed her lips to his. It was all over quickly and before I knew it she was seated next to me again. The entire exchange had actually been rather sweet.

When Chloe slid the two bags over in front of me, it dawned on me that it was actually my turn. I took a deep breath and reached into the red bag with my empty hand, not wanting to drop the note I already held. Unfolding it carefully, I cleared my throat before reading, "Kiss this person three times on the lips, then bite them once on the neck."

Wow. That was specific.

And hot as hell.

As I grabbed the blue bag, I realized that I was about to do something I'd never done before in my entire life, and had always sworn I would never do.

I was about to cheat.

Part of me felt guilty, but when I thought of doing those things with Logan, the guilt was shoved out of the way by my growing curiosity. I wanted to get closer to Logan, and making out with other guys in front of him wasn't going to accomplish that. I needed to kiss *him*. I needed to explore whatever this spark was between us and see what happened.

From the way I felt when he touched me earlier, I had a feeling we would go up in flames.

Reaching into the blue bag with my right hand, I kept my stolen name tucked tightly between my fingers. Making a show of stirring the papers around, I flipped the one I already held out into my palm and pulled my

hand back out of the bag. Although I knew what I would find, I still felt a rush of satisfaction at seeing the name written in elegant script.

"Logan Black."

Even his name tasted sweet on my tongue. I couldn't wait to discover how his lips tasted.

I heard a few murmurs around me, people whispering about finally seeing him kiss someone, but they didn't even register in my mind at that moment. I only had eyes for Logan.

I crawled across the divide, sitting on my knees in front of him. Looking past his glasses into his beautiful gray eyes, I noticed something that I wasn't exactly surprised to see.

Fear.

"Is this okay?" I whispered. I didn't want to force him to do something he wasn't ready for, rules of the game be damned.

He gulped loudly before nodding sharply.

"You sure?" Translation: Please don't puke on me.

"Yeah," he choked out.

Closing my eyes, I covered his lips with my own, using only the slightest pressure. He didn't kiss me back at first, but I knew he was extremely nervous. His lips were soft and strong, and I wanted to feel more. Pulling

back to show that the first kiss was over, I smiled at him so that he could see I didn't hate it.

His cheeks were tinted pink, but I was happy to see that some of the fear had left his eyes.

I leaned in again for the second kiss, using a little more pressure than before. I felt him pursing his lips under mine, gently returning the kiss. It was sweet, soft, and gentle...and the tingles that it was sending through my body were nothing short of amazing.

It was so difficult to keep the kisses chaste once he finally started responding. All of my instincts were yelling at me to shove my tongue in his mouth, but I didn't want to press my luck with so many people watching.

By the third kiss, I could tell he was becoming a little more comfortable. He kissed me back right from the beginning, and when I pulled away, he leaned forward as if he didn't want it to end.

The feeling was definitely mutual.

We smiled at each other, and then I heard Zoe's voice next to me, breaking through my little happiness bubble. "Don't forget the bite, Eden."

"Huh?" I shot her a confused look.

"You're supposed to bite him on the neck, too."

"Oh." I'd been so absorbed with the feeling of Logan's lips that I forgot the last part of the instructions.

I leaned into his neck slowly, savoring his scent as I got closer. Seriously, how had I never noticed how freaking good he smelled before now?

Bringing my lips to his neck, I kissed him quickly before opening my mouth and pressing my teeth into his flesh gently. I felt him jolt under me, causing me to bite a little harder. His hands clamped around my arms, holding me to him, and I swear I heard him give off another one of those fucking sexy whimpers.

Well, well. It seemed that Logan liked being bitten.

As I pulled away, something wicked inside of me compelled me to flick my tongue against his abused flesh. I wanted him to know that I enjoyed doing that; that I was excited by it, too. I felt his grip on me tighten even more, and when I pulled back far enough I could see that he was slightly flushed, his eyes closed in what looked like ecstasy.

That face made my whole night.

Even if he never kissed me again, I could take the memory of that face and lock it away in my spank bank to use for years to come.

I sat back in a daze and passed the bags to my right. The rest of the game seemed to disappear around me when his eyes met mine. All I could do was

smile stupidly at Logan, and after his cheeks flamed a brilliant red, I saw the corners of his mouth turning up as well.

He definitely liked it.

And I wanted more.

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# **Chapter 8**

I waited patiently through all of the disgusting displays until it was the boys' turn.

Apparently cute ended with me and Chloe. From that point on, every girl had made it a goal to slip tongue in somewhere, almost as if they had a competition going to out-gross each other. There was so much saliva and slurping noises that I thought I might gag.

Yuck.

When it was finally time for Logan's turn, I felt my heart rate speed up. I was excited that we might get to kiss again, but, in all honesty, I just wanted more time with him. I also wanted this stupid game to be over so we could go somewhere and talk in private.

I watched as he silently read the slip of paper he'd pulled out of the red bag, surprised when his eyes shot wide open.

"What is it?" Mike asked, trying to read it.

"Seven Minutes in Heaven," Logan whispered.

"Dude, no fair!" Mike whined. "That's the best one!" A loud round of applause and catcalls rang out, not just from the guys but from the onlookers, too.

"Shut up, Davis," Logan grumbled. He reached into the pink bag next, barely hiding the fact that he was already holding a paper in his hand. When he opened it up, he looked over at me and held my gaze. "Eden Foster."

I don't know if anyone else in the room noticed that his voice dropped lower when he said my name, but that combined with the heated look he gave me was enough to make me combust.

"Very nice!" Devon clapped. "Okay, this is one of those choices that I said was open to interpretation. The only thing you two have to do is spend at least seven minutes in that storage closet over there. What you choose to do while you're in there is entirely up to you." He laughed to himself and smirked. "Although, I'd personally *hate* to waste all that time." Everyone broke out in applause, eager to see what we would do.

Devon stood up and gestured for us to follow, leading us over to the closet with one hand on each of our shoulders. "Don't worry, guys," he whispered. "The closet locks from the inside, so we can't open it to spy on you."

I looked over at Logan and couldn't help but feel worried; he looked like he was being led to his execution.

"Also," Devon continued, "you need a *minimum* of seven minutes. Far be it from me to ruin anybody's good time, so there is no maximum. If you

feel like staying in there for the rest of the party, that's just fine by me." He looked down at me and winked, and I laughed nervously.

Did he think I was actually going to screw Logan in the closet?

I mean, a little petting might be nice, but come on.

When we reached the closet door he leaned in and pulled the chain to turn on the bare light bulb that lit the small space. As he backed up and opened the door wide for us, we could see shelves full of board games squeezed next to old Christmas decorations.

"All right, you two," he laughed. "Get on in there."

Logan swallowed thickly and held out his hand, motioning for me to go first. I walked into the small area, noticing that it was pretty tight quarters for two people. As soon as Logan joined me, Devon closed us in.

"Oh, one last thing," he said, opening the door back up to smile at us. "What?" I asked.

He quickly pulled the light switch again, cloaking us in darkness. "No lights allowed." With that, he reached up and unscrewed the light bulb. "I'll just hold on to this." Then he was gone, the door swiftly shut in our faces.

That bastard.

Somehow the darkness made the space between us feel even smaller, as if we were right on top of each other. Also, the only way to know for certain where the other was would be to reach out and...touch.

Hmm... Maybe this *wasn't* so bad.

Maybe Logan would be able to relax like this, without me being able to see him.

The first thing I did once I got over my shock was grab the door handle and push in the lock. I didn't want to forget that and have some jackass think it was hilarious to open it and take a picture of us doing whatever the hell we might end up doing.

Yeah, that would look really great all over Facebook.

No longer worried about interruptions, I realized that Logan was breathing heavily next to me. I could feel the warm gusts of air flowing across my cheek.

"You're not claustrophobic, are you?" I asked quietly. I heard a shuffling movement, then realized that he had shaken his head. "Logan," I giggled, "it's pitch black in here. I can't see your head move. You're going to need to actually talk to me."

"Sorry," he said after a moment of silence. "No, I'm not claustrophobic."

"Then why are you so upset?" Please don't say that it's because you didn't want to be in here with me. Please don't tell me I read you wrong and I'm the only one feeling this attraction.

"I'm just...really nervous." I heard him swallow thickly again.

Okay, this was progress. We weren't making out in a big sweaty heap like I was hoping for, but at least he was talking.

"Why are you so nervous?"

"I didn't expect to pull Seven Minutes in Heaven out of that bag."

"You didn't want it?" I asked, grateful for the darkness that hid my childish pout. "It sounded like most of the guys out there would have killed for it."

"It's freaking me out, to be honest." His breath was still coming in short gusts of air, and I hoped I could get him to relax.

"Why?"

I heard a bit more rustling and could tell from the sounds that he was shoving his hands in his hair. "Well...the other directions that you guys were all pulling were so exact. Kiss here, touch there, you know? There wasn't any guesswork. I was psyching myself up for something like that, I guess."

"And now?" I pushed.

He sighed loudly, the warmth of it heating my ear. "Now...I don't have any clue what to do. It's too much pressure."

"Hey," I said quietly, reaching out to touch his shoulder, hoping that the contact would soothe him. "I don't want you to feel pressured. We don't have to do anything at all if you don't want, okay?"

"No, it's *not* okay!" he said sharply. I was stunned at his tone, but he followed it up with an explanation. "I'm sorry... It's just that... I don't *want* to do nothing. I just...don't know where to start."

I could hear the humiliation in his voice, and that's when it finally dawned on me.

Holy shit.

"Logan...was that your first kiss?"

"I'm a total loser, aren't I?" I could hear the defeat in his voice, which only bolstered my own need to make him realize I didn't think so.

"No, you're not a loser," I scolded. "I'm flattered that you shared it with me. I think it's sweet. I just wish that you'd talked to me earlier. Maybe we could have done that somewhere else, you know? Without so many people watching."

"I'm sorry...it's so hard for me to get the words out when you're around." His voice dropped down to a nearly inaudible whisper. "I just like you so much."

*Yes!* It was great to hear it said out loud after all the second-guessing he had me doing lately. "You know, this morning I really thought you couldn't stand me. It's the only reason I could think of why you would avoid talking to me for so long."

"No! I've always—oh, screw it!" I could hear his voice rising with his confidence. "I've liked you from the moment I first saw you. I just didn't know how to make you notice me when I couldn't even talk to you."

"I don't think I was ready to pay attention before now," I said quietly. "I wasn't into the idea of dating anybody again. But once I decided I was ready, you were the only one who came to mind."

"Really?" I could hear the doubt in his voice, but there was hope there, too.

"Yes, really."

We grew quiet for a moment until I realized that we were wasting valuable closet time. He already admitted that he wanted to kiss me some more, only that he didn't know what to do.

It was time for me to take control and be the teacher.

Riley had always been the one to lead, trying to school me in the magical art of unfulfilling, craptastic sex. Maybe if I showed Logan what I liked from the very beginning, he would learn how to make it...*good*.

Now there was a thought.

How did Amy word it? Oh yeah—eager virgin, ready for training.

Time to see just how eager Logan was.

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## **Chapter 9**

I'd already made the decision that Logan was someone special, and the way my body warmed up to him without even touching told me that we might have some amazing chemistry together. However, we were still stuck in a closet with a party of people outside, so we couldn't get too crazy yet.

Maybe just a *little* crazy.

I didn't want to overwhelm Logan, so I decided to start slowly.

"Would it be okay if we hugged?" It sounded silly to ask, but I thought it might make him more comfortable.

"You want a hug?" he laughed. "Why wouldn't that be okay?"

"Well, I don't know. I guess we need to start somewhere, and I want to get used to the feel of you against me."

"Oh." His tone quickly became serious. Perhaps it was the mention of our bodies touching.

"Is that okay?" I double-checked.

"Yeah," he replied, his voice much quieter than before.

What followed next was the most seductive hug I've ever had.

I leaned forward, holding my hands out in front of me until I came into contact with his chest. I felt his muscles jerk underneath my fingers, and it made me feel powerful. I flattened my hands against his pecs, moving them

lower until they rested on his stomach. His breath hitched in my ear as I slid them around his sides, pulling him against me tightly as I let my hands wander up and down his back.

He held himself stiffly against me at first, before finally letting go and wrapping his arms around me, almost crushing me.

It felt amazing.

His large, warm hands settled on my lower back, until he began to mimic my stroking movements up and down my spine.

Resting my head on his shoulder, I turned into his neck before whispering, "Mmm...that feels good."

"Yeah?" His voice sounded strained, which made me feel even more powerful. I pressed my breasts against him as firmly as I could manage, giving him the benefit of feeling them without the awkwardness of asking to touch them. I wanted his mind on how good the two of us felt together.

I leaned even further into his neck, making sure that he could feel my breath and lips moving against his skin the next time I spoke. "Logan...can I kiss you again?"

I felt the vibrations of his moan underneath my lips. "Yes," he choked out. "*Please*."

I slid my lips across the surface of his skin, dragging them slowly along the firm edge of his jaw until I found his mouth, even though my vision had started to adjust enough so that I could see him pretty well in the dark.

I was granted another delicious whimper as I settled my mouth over his, and the sound of it set my body on fire. I reached up and grabbed the back of his head, pulling him more firmly into the kiss. I could feel his lips moving back against mine, trying to follow my lead, but still very tentative.

"Kiss me back," I begged against his soft flesh. "I want you to."

"I'm sorry," he groaned between small kisses. "I'm just...so fucking turned on right now...I can't think straight!"

I gasped around his mouth. "You think too much. Just go with it!" I flicked the tip of my tongue over his lips and he shuddered against me, growling low in his chest before opening his mouth to me. He slowly stroked his tongue across mine, feeling the slick textures rubbing against each other for the first time.

From the loud moan he sent into my mouth followed by the way he urgently shoved me back into the shelves, I would guess he liked it.

His large body pressed into mine, unconsciously rubbing up against me as he devoured my lips and tongue. I loved every minute of it, pulling him into me hungrily. Logan's hands were shoved into my hair, anchoring my head in place so that he could continue to kiss me deeply and passionately.

His kisses were a bit sloppy, but in that moment they were perfect.

I could feel his erection digging against my belly as he moved, and the greedy sex demon deep inside me wanted nothing more than to feel him rubbing where I was starting to throb. Before I knew what I was doing, I had lifted one of my legs up around his hip and was trying to raise the other when he reached down and grabbed the backs of my thighs, lifting me up enough so that I could wrap my legs around his waist.

*There* it was.

Thick and solid, pulsing between my legs, just where I needed it.

"Yes," I moaned, pulling him back to my lips for another voracious kiss. I shifted myself against him, seeking out that delicious friction, and it caused him to buck his hips wildly into me.

"Oh...*God*," he panted loudly, doing it again.

I must have gone into sex autopilot or something after that, because I started grinding against him as hard as I could, moaning and groaning at how good he felt.

"Oh...oh, God...oh fuck...*Eden*!" Logan cried out against my throat, his entire body shaking and shuddering around me.

I didn't care that he blew his load after about thirty seconds of dry humping. That was one of the sexiest make-out sessions I had ever had.

As he gently set me back down on the floor, I could practically feel the heat of his blush in the dark. I knew he was going to start feeling awkward

any minute, and I realized how I could head him off.

"I'm sorry, Logan," I apologized.

"Wha—? Sorry? *You're* sorry? What for? I'm the one who should be saying that!"

"I'm sorry because I let that get way out of hand, way too fast."

He was quiet for a moment before I heard a small whisper in my ear.

"I'm bad at this, aren't I?"

"No, not at all, that's what I'm trying to say. I didn't mean for it to go that far. I thought we might have a few steamy kisses, but I didn't mean to do other things with a room full of people right outside. But...after just a few kisses with you, I didn't care about anything else but *more*. You felt so wonderful, I didn't want to stop."

"Really?" He sounded amazed that he'd actually done a good job.

"Yeah. In fact...um..."

"What?"

"Well..." I was embarrassed at what I wanted to tell him next, but I forced my way through it. My days of being the inexperienced one were over. If I wanted to teach him what I liked, I needed to be honest and open. "I think that's the closest I've ever been to, you know, finishing, without extra...effort on my part. Know what I mean?"

"Oh, *God*," he groaned low in my ear, leaning over and dropping his forehead on my shoulder. "Are you serious?" he whispered into my neck.

"Yeah...actually, you aren't the only one who needs to change their underwear right now," I giggled.

"Oh no, did I get something on you?" He sounded absolutely mortified.

"No. It's just..." I took a deep breath. How could I put it without being blunt? Riley was always grossed out whenever I mentioned being wet; he liked how it felt but was too embarrassed to talk about normal physical reactions openly. Screw it. If Logan was going to learn this stuff, then he was going to learn how to be a *man* about it.

I turned my head so that my lips were level with his ear and whispered seductively, "It's just that you made me so *wet*...my body is on fire for you." As I pulled back, I nipped his earlobe with my teeth, trying to convey the fact that what I was telling him was something erotic, not gross.

"Fuck," he gritted through his teeth, and I swear he swayed on his feet a bit. "How do you make me want you so badly?" he moaned. "It scares me, how badly I want you. I've never felt like this before."

"I can safely say that it's not one-sided," I replied, slightly out of breath after his confession.

Logan was quiet for a moment before he reached up and held my face in his hands. He leaned forward and rested his forehead against mine briefly, before running the tip of his nose over my cheek. I heard him take a deep breath, and then his beautiful lips were on mine again, this time in a kiss completely led by him. It was tender and loving, almost as if he were thanking me for admitting my feelings for him.

He pulled back slightly to speak, kissing me continuously between his whispers. "Do you...need me to...*do* something for you? I can...help you finish."

"I don't think we should tonight."

"Right...sorry."

"No, don't be embarrassed. It means a lot to me that you offered and aren't only thinking about yourself. I just think we should wait and take things slowly."

"So this isn't my only chance to be with you?"

"Of course not," I laughed, until a new thought made me sober quickly.

"Unless this was all you wanted?"

"Me? God no!" he said, kissing me quickly. "I've been crazy about you for months. There's no way in hell I only want a few minutes in a dark closet with you. I'm sorry, I've been so backward about this whole thing." He grabbed my face again so that he could find my eyes in the dark. Taking a deep breath, he finally blurted out, "Eden, will you please go out to dinner with me tomorrow night? I would really like to get to know you better."

Who could say no to that?

"I'd love to."

The next thing we knew, our quiet little world exploded with a few loud knocks on the door.

"You guys alive in there?" Devon's muffled voice came through the wood.

Logan sighed deeply. "Christ, what now?" he muttered to himself before turning to face the door. "Yeah, why?" he called out.

"I just wanted to let you know that the party's breaking up. Amy needs to get going, so Eden better get a move on if she plans on staying the night with her."

We both started frantically adjusting our clothes and attempting to flatten down our messy hair. I noticed that Logan tugged his shirt down in front of him before he reached for the door handle to unlock it.

"Ready?" he whispered.

"As I'll ever be."

We walked out into the basement, both of us shielding our eyes from the bright lighting. When we were able to see, we realized that the only people left in the room were our closest friends.

"There they are!" Zoe called out when she saw us, causing the four of them to break out in applause. Owen put his fingers between his lips and whistled while Devon made a bunch of whooping noises.

"All right, you guys," I said when they quieted down, blushing furiously from the attention.

"So?" Amy asked.

"So, what?" I returned. I hoped she didn't seriously think I was going to give her a play by play in front of everyone.

"Are you guys fucking *dating* yet, or what?" Devon barked out.

I felt my face becoming even hotter. "Well, we're going out tomorrow night," I said quietly, staring down at the floor.

"Finally!" They all yelled at the same time.

"Dude, I'm telling you, that closet works every time," Devon laughed. "Remember, Zoe?" He wiggled his eyebrows at her suggestively.

"You guys set this all up?" I gasped. "Even the closet?"

"Duh!" Devon snorted. "We were tired of being the only ones who knew you two needed to get together."

All right, so maybe I had been a little slow to realize Logan's potential. And he was too damn shy for his own good. But as I looked over to find him smiling down at me with a matching blush on his cheeks, one thought kept repeating in my mind.

Now that I had him, I wouldn't let him get away.

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# **Chapter 10**

After that, we said our good-byes for the night. Logan kissed me quickly on the cheek and promised to pick me up at six o'clock on Saturday. He said he wanted to take me to a restaurant in the Quad Cities, and then maybe to a movie. I told him I couldn't wait and then left with Amy and Zoe for our sleepover.

As soon as we got in the car, the inquisition began.

"I *know* you don't think you won't spill," Zoe said, snapping her seat belt shut.

"Yeah, we totally handed him to you on a platter, Eden," Amy added, backing the car out of the drive. "You at least owe us *something*!"

I had no intention of sharing every private detail with them, but I figured that a little girl talk wouldn't hurt anything. "Well, what do you want to know?"

That unleashed the firing squad.

"Is he a good kisser?"

"Was it romantic or dirty?"

"Did you let him touch your boobs?"

"Did you see it?"

"Did you touch it?"

"How big is he?"

"Okay, okay!" I yelled, interrupting them before they got even more inventive with their questions. "That's enough. This is what I will tell you: His kisses were wonderful. I could tell he was new at it, but he made up for his inexperience with enthusiasm. I thought it was all sort of...sweet *and* sexy. No, he didn't touch my boobs, and no, I didn't see it or touch it."

"So, you just talked and kissed?" Amy asked. "That whole time?"

"Well... We might have dry humped a little," I mumbled.

"And?" Zoe goaded.

"Okay, it was the sexiest fucking make-out session I've ever had in my entire life!" I blurted out, unable to hold in my excitement any longer.

"You two are gonna be great together!" Amy squealed. "I just know it."

"Why didn't you tell me before that Logan liked me?"

"Well, I didn't connect all the pieces until recently," Zoe explained, "but we always thought the two of you would be cute together. It completes our little group of friends perfectly."

"Yeah," Amy agreed. "We just didn't want to push you into it. I knew you were still upset about your breakup, and not really ready to think about other guys yet. I was thrilled when you asked me about dating somebody new! I always thought Logan was a good match, but I didn't realize how bad he had it for you."

"She's not always as observant as I am," Zoe teased. "Sometimes she gets lost in Owenland."

"Oh, shut up!" Amy stuck her tongue out at Zoe and we all broke into laughter.

\* \* \*

As we all settled into bed that night, I thought to myself that I had never had such caring, decent friends in my whole life. Just as I was about to drift off to sleep, I heard my cellphone buzzing near my head. I'd placed it on the floor next to my sleeping bag. Picking it up, I saw a text message from an unknown number.

Hope you don't mind, got your # from Dev. Just wanted to say that I'm crazy about you. Can't wait to see you again.

"Oh my God, that's so cute!" I cried out, waking the other girls.

"What is it?" Amy groaned.

"Logan texted me!"

That had them both sitting up, suddenly wide-awake. I leaned over and showed them what it said, and they had the same reaction.

"Told you that boy's a fucking keeper," Zoe mumbled as she rolled back over.

I dashed off a quick reply before I lost my nerve.

Thank you for a wonderful night. Can't wait to see you, either.

I hit send, then realized that I had avoided the sweetest part of his text. Before I could chicken out, I sent another one.

I'm pretty crazy about you, too. \*kiss\*

I lay there smiling, hoping that he didn't mind the second text, when my phone buzzed again.

Even your text kisses are sweet. Good night, beautiful. Thank you for making me so happy.

I couldn't resist sending another one, regardless of the late hour. Like me, he seemed too excited to sleep, so I didn't think he'd mind.

That gets you two kisses. \*kiss, kiss\* Good night to you, too.

I turned my phone off, fighting the temptation to send any more. As I stared up at the ceiling, I wondered if I had ever felt so giddy about a boy in the past.

I could honestly say that I never had; not even about Riley.

Logan Black was something special.

\* \* \*

When I got home the next morning, I figured it was best to just rip the Band-Aid off quickly. I was going to tell both my parents about Logan at the same time, but I'd forgotten that my mom was off somewhere with my grandmother picking up a few new outfits for her upcoming publicity tour. I decided to tackle one obstacle at a time.

"Dad, I won't be home to cook dinner tonight," I called out as I walked through the living room, depositing my overnight bag on the floor next to me as I sat down. "I have a date."

"That's fine," he said distantly, absorbed in SportsCenter on the flat screen. "Your mom should be back by then, or I can just grab a sandwich." I watched his face while I waited for him to realize what I'd just said. I could spot the exact moment—his eyebrows shot up to his hairline and his head whipped around at me so fast I thought he might hurt himself. "A date?! With who? Since when? Last I heard, you didn't like any of the boys in town."

My father had never forbidden me to date, but had been very relieved after one awkward conversation we had on the subject post-Riley, in which I told him I had better things to do with my time than date immature idiots. He had wholeheartedly agreed with me and from that point on considered the subject closed.

"With Logan Black, and since right now," I replied after his eye finally stopped twitching. "I *haven't* been interested in any boys, until now. I've been getting to know him a bit and he seems really sweet." *Plus he makes the sexiest whimper when I suck on his tongue and it drives me crazy*—but I didn't think my dad needed to know that.

"Wait a minute...Black?" He looked thoughtful for a moment. "Douglas's boy?"

"Uh, sure? I really don't know, I've never heard his parents' names." I tried to remember any bit of info I might have picked up about him around school. "I think I heard that his dad's a doctor."

My dad nodded. "Yeah, that's Douglas." He reached up and scratched at the stubble on his chin as he mulled over what I'd told him. "He's a good man, real caring doctor. He's the guy who took over Grandpa's practice when he retired."

"Really? I didn't know that." It seemed that the universe was pulling me closer to Logan with every new thing I learned about him.

He looked at me quickly. "This kid isn't some little entitled, rich brat, is he?"

"Not that I can tell," I answered honestly. "I really hadn't even thought about him having money before. He doesn't act like a snobby rich kid. Believe me, I'd have absolutely *zero* interest in him if he did."

"Good. You don't need another one of those." He thought to himself for a minute before speaking again. "I can't imagine Douglas raising a boy like that, anyway." I watched as he rubbed at the back of his neck, trying to soothe the tension headache that I'm sure was forming at that very moment. Letting out a loud sigh, he finally turned to face me. "I thought you were gonna make this year easy on me, kid."

"Come on, Dad. What kind of teenage daughter would I be if I didn't make you stress out over boys at least *once* while I'm here?" He merely grumbled in reply, so I laughed and kissed him on the top of his head as I stood.

"Does your mother know about this?"

"Nope. It's a very new development. You got the breaking news."

"Where's this kid taking you, anyway?" he asked, already pulling out his cellphone to call my mom as I was heading for the stairs.

"Some place in the Quad Cities, I guess. Maybe a movie after; depends on what's playing."

"All right, well, no later than one o'clock, got it?"

"Yes, Daddy," I said sarcastically, shooting him an angelic smile and batting my lashes as he dialed.

"Get out of here, smart-ass," he laughed. "Hey, baby," he said into the phone. "Guess who has a date tonight? Well, we can if you want, but I was talking about our daughter."

I left him to finish gossiping and flirting with my mom as I threw my bag over my shoulder and ran up the stairs to my bedroom, shutting the door behind me. Flopping face down on my bed, I marveled at my good luck.

For one thing, that whole discussion went much easier than I expected.

For the second—I was only going to ask for midnight.

And third, I didn't even have to tell my mom. He did it for me.

Sucker.

I grabbed my cell and hit the speed dial, scooting back to sit against the headboard while it rang.

"Did you forget something?" Amy giggled, sounding too chipper for the time of day. "You just left here less than an hour ago."

"Yeah, I forgot to avoid you in the mornings," I grumbled.

"Eden, it's almost eleven! It's not my fault you were up texting all night."

"I was not! It was just a couple times."

"Whatever you say," she laughed. I heard a masculine voice muttering in the background for a moment before Amy sighed loudly. "No, Owen, I don't want to watch *The Wall* again." There was more mumbling from him before she continued. "I don't care if it's a classic, it's too early in the morning for that shit."

"But Amy, it's almost eleven!" I teased.

"Oh, shut up," she laughed. I heard her voice get muffled for a moment, as if she were covering up the phone. "No, not you, Owen. Just let me finish my phone call, okay? Then I'll bake us some cookies... Yeah, the chocolate

ones... No, I don't have any ice cream... Yes, that's good, go watch the fish tank."

When she came back I couldn't stop laughing. "Jesus, is he already baked?"

"Of course," she sighed. "He knew my parents were going out of town today, so he started early. He'd be annoying if he weren't so cute about it."

She was totally right, too. I normally couldn't stand hanging around stoners for very long, but Owen just had this way about him. He could mellow just about anyone out within a few seconds of talking, which made him perfect for Amy. She was normally so high-strung, like a little hummingbird flitting around in your face.

They balanced each other out.

"So, what did you need?" she asked, reminding me why I had called.

"Okay, I've been cleared to be out until one o'clock tonight," I explained.

"Ooh, good time."

"I know! And I didn't even ask—Dad offered!"

"Without trying to lowball you first? Amateur," she said to herself.

"Hey, his inexperience is my gain," I laughed. "But now I need to know what I should wear tonight. I mean, a skirt has its advantages, but I don't want to send the wrong signal."

"Yeah, wearing a skirt on a first date walks a fine line between 'I'm totally classy' and 'I'd totally let you finger me during the movie."

"Exactly!" That right there was why I loved Amy. She just got me.

"That's not to say it's a bad signal to send eventually, but it might be a bit much for poor Logan on a first date."

"Right, and I'd like a chance to actually get to know him a little bit without everyone else around. I don't want him staring at my legs all night and tuning out everything I say. So what says 'I'm fun and worth knowing, but a little naughty, too'?"

"You should wear those jeans that make your ass look great and maybe a nice top. Nothing too tight or low cut. That blue V-neck sweater you have would look good, sort of studiously sexy. Just the right peek of cleavage. Men are visual creatures, so you want to give him something pretty to look at with a hint of sex appeal, but nothing too overt in the getting-to-know-you stage."

"Where do you *get* this stuff?" I laughed. "You're like a fashion guru," which was actually perfect, since I'd always gone to my aunt Emma—who now lived three hours away in Chicago—in all matters fashion. It was nice to have some local support.

"Cosmo," she said simply. "Oh, and be sure to wear a necklace."

"A necklace? Why?"

"Because, that way if you catch him staring at your boobs, it gives him an out to say that he really likes your necklace. Believe me, he needs all the extra help feeling comfortable that he can get, and if he thinks you know he's ogling you, he'll get really embarrassed."

"God dammit, Gump! You're a God-damned genius!" I yelled. We both broke into laughter at my over-used movie quote. Every time Amy imparted some valuable wisdom, which she was known to do rather frequently, I would start laughing and yell it at her.

"Hey, it's what I do," she chuckled. "Now I better let you go before Owen starts feeding my fish pizza."

"Yeah, go ahead. You don't want to leave Chong unsupervised."

"No kidding," she grumbled. "Anyway, call me tomorrow. I want to hear a play-by-play."

"All right. Thanks, Amy."

"Sure. Happy to help." Right before she hung up the phone, I heard her muffled voice yell out, "Owen, *no*! Put Nemo back!"

After hanging up, I went to my closet and pulled out the blue sweater she mentioned. Holding it up in front of me, I turned to look at myself in the mirror.

"All right, Logan Black. I'm getting borderline sexy for your cute ass. I hope we can actually get some talking done tonight."

Then a thought hit me. What would happen when we were *done* talking?

I ran my fingertips over my lips, feeling tingles as I remembered our frantic kisses from the night before.

Yes. I definitely wanted more of that.

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# Chapter 11

There was a major flaw in my plan for our date.

I'd spent all my time worrying about how to keep *him* from getting too distracted, how to keep *him* focused on getting to know each other better.

What I hadn't taken into account was how hard it might be for *me* to stay focused.

The moment I opened the door and saw him standing there in a pale blue dress shirt, unbuttoned at the collar, and an adorable gray cardigan, I knew I was in trouble. He didn't just look cute.

He looked sexy as hell.

His little black glasses only made him hotter for some reason. I couldn't wait to rip them off his face and smother him with kisses.

Could girls have librarian fantasies, too?

Or sexy schoolteacher fantasies... *Oh, yeah.* 

"Hi, Eden," he smiled awkwardly, snapping me out of my daydream of one Professor Black forcing me to stay after class to earn a little extra credit. "Um... I brought this for you. I hope that's okay." I looked down to find him holding out a long-stemmed red rose.

"Oh, wow! Thank you!" I took it from him, holding it up to smell the lovely fragrance. "Why wouldn't it be okay?"

"Well, I didn't know your favorite flower, or if you even liked flowers. I figured a rose was a safe bet."

"I love flowers, just about any kind of flower. And roses are beautiful." I smelled it again and smiled up at him. "Nobody's ever given me flowers before," I whispered.

"Really?" He stood up a little straighter, as if that had given him an extra boost of confidence. "Well, I'm glad you like it."

"Why don't you come inside for a minute while I put this in some water, and then we can get going?" I stepped toward the kitchen, beckoning him to follow me.

I couldn't remember where Mom had stored our bud vases when we unpacked, so I did my best to find the tallest glass in the kitchen. Filling it with water and cutting off the end of the long stem, I angled the flower in the glass so that it wouldn't tip over. It was still way too long to fit properly, but I couldn't bear the thought of cutting it any shorter. I figured this would buy me some time until I could ask Mom about the vases later.

"I would have introduced you to my parents," I called out over my shoulder, "but they left early to go on a date of their own." I smiled, turning to him. "I guess we inspired them. Plus, my mom is going to be gone for a couple days doing publicity for her book, and they always like a little alone time before they're apart."

"That's okay," Logan said from the doorway. "Maybe next time." He said the last sentence so quietly that I barely heard him, but it made me feel giddy nonetheless. If he was thinking about a next time, then that meant this was more than just a one-time date to him, and that idea made me very happy.

"Ready to go?" I asked, turning around to find that he was much closer to me than he had been before. Leaning back against the counter, I looked up at him and smiled. "Wow, I never realized how tall you are." He had almost a foot on me, forcing me to tip my head back when he was so close.

"You didn't notice last night?" he smiled.

"Uh, well," I could feel my face heating. "I was a little bit preoccupied last night."

"Me, too."

We stood there in silence after that and just stared at each other, as if we were daring each other to make the first move. I wanted so badly to just reach up, pull him down to me, and kiss him senseless, but I knew I wouldn't stop there. As soon as I tasted his lips I would be done for—I'd end up dragging him upstairs and throwing him down on my bed.

It's kind of hard to have a proper first date if you've already mounted and ridden him like Seabiscuit before even leaving the house.

"We should go," I whispered weakly, my throat suddenly very dry.

"Yeah," he nodded slowly. "That's probably a good idea."

He held out his hand to me and smiled. I slid my fingers into his palm and he clutched them tightly, like a small child being given a favorite candy he had no intention of sharing with anyone.

That suited me just fine. I wasn't a big fan of sharing, either.

He led me outside to his car, which was the first time I ever noticed what he drove. "A Volkswagen?" I asked, quirking my eyebrow at him.

"They're one of the highest rated cars for safety," he said matter-offactly. "My dad and I thought it would be the most responsible choice for a first car."

"That makes sense, I guess." At least it was a newer model—a nice silver Jetta sedan, not one of those tiny little Beetles that I'd always thought of as a girly car. Actually, the closer he got to it, the sexier it started to look.

"So, where are you taking me?" I asked him as we walked together.

"That depends," he said with a smile. "I have two options in mind. Would you like a nice restaurant with cloth napkins and real silverware and the whole shebang, or would you prefer a more casual setting?"

"For tonight, I think I'd actually prefer something more casual. I just want to have fun getting to know you, not worry the whole night that I'm using the wrong fork."

"That works," he chuckled. "Pizza okay?"

"Always!"

"Harris it is, then." Harris Pizza was a local favorite. They were a little mom-and-pop setup that was famous for creating "Quad City Style" pizza. A ton of other imitation places had popped up around them, but as my dad loved to say whenever we'd visit, nobody did it better than Harris.

Logan opened my door—another first for me—then made sure we were both buckled up before starting the forty-minute drive into the Quad Cities.

"Would you like to listen to some music on the way?" he asked, behaving like the perfect host. "I have my iPod, or we can listen to satellite radio."

I was torn. I really loved the Alt Nation channel and had been going through withdrawal from satellite radio since being saddled with the rolling antique that was my car, but something told me that was the selfish answer.

"How about your iPod?" I wanted to get to know him; what better way to start than with music he liked?

From the huge smile he gave me, I could tell I'd made the right choice.

"Okay!" He plugged it into the dock, scrolling through a few different screens before looking at me shyly. "I, uh, I sort of made a playlist. You know, for tonight."

"You made us a date mix?" I didn't think this guy could get any cuter.

"Yeah, well... It's just a bunch of songs that make me think of you."

I stand corrected. He just blew way the hell past cute and was bordering on adorkable.

When he queued it up, I saw that he'd named the playlist *Eden Songs*, which caused a fluttering sensation in my stomach. Needless to say, I was totally blown away when he turned it on and one of my favorite new tunes started playing.

"Oh my God, I *love* this song!" I squealed.

"I know," he replied, clearing his throat nervously.

"How do you know? We've never talked about it, have we?" I may not have paid as much attention to Logan as I should have in the past, but I definitely would have remembered an entire conversation about my favorite music.

"You, uh, you hum it a lot. In class."

"I do?" Jesus, Eden, not only do you ramble, but now you apparently hum.

"Yeah. Once I figured out what song it was, I looked it up and listened to it. The music is good, but the lyrics really make it for me."

"Oh, I know! That's what I love most about it. Although the music is great, too. It just all goes together to me. The tune is so light and bubbly and fun, and then the lyrics are so damn sweet and touching. When they're put together, I can't help but smile."

My favorite part started playing, where the singer breaks into a few lighthearted *la la la's* before repeating the adorable chorus about wanting nothing more than to make his girl happy, so of course I couldn't stop myself from singing along like an idiot and bopping around in my seat.

I glanced over to find Logan staring at me intensely. Figuring I looked like a doofus, I stopped singing along, but it did nothing to lessen the powerful look he was giving me.

"What?" I finally asked, a little embarrassed under his scrutiny.

He blinked a few times and turned back to face the road. "Uh, nothing. I just...really like the words."

We both were quiet as the next song started, one I'd never heard before that was pretty, but rather sad. It was about a guy who keeps waiting and hoping for a girl to notice him and give him the time of day.

I felt Logan's eyes on me again, but when I turned to catch him in the act he was already watching the road again.

By the time his iPod started playing another sad song, I was beginning to detect a pattern.

"Logan?" I finally got up the nerve to ask as he was parking the car at the restaurant.

"Yes?"

I waited until he turned off the engine so that I had his full attention in the quiet car.

"You didn't make that playlist today, did you?"

"What makes you say that?" he hedged, looking away nervously.

"Come on, Logan."

"You're right," he sighed, looking at me with color blooming in his cheeks. "I started making that mix when you first moved here."

"Why? I mean, they're beautiful songs, but they're so sad. At least, they make *me* feel sad."

"I'm sorry; I never wanted you to be sad. Like I said earlier, these are songs that make me think of you. They... It's like they say the words that I never could." He looked deep into my eyes, reaching out to stroke my cheek. "You don't know how long I've hated myself for not being able to talk to you."

I reached up and covered his hand with my own. "You seem to be doing fine now. Right now is all that matters. I meant what I told you last night: I don't think I was ready when I first moved here. I'm sorry that you felt that way for so long, but I'm happy that we're finally trying to see where this is going together." I leaned forward and kissed him softly on the lips before pulling back and smiling at him. "Better late than never, right?"

"Yes," he whispered, kissing me again quickly. "Better late than never."

"Good. Can we go eat now? I'm starving!"

"Yes," he laughed, and his smile reached all the way up into his beautiful eyes. "Yes, let's go eat."

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## Chapter 12

We laughed and talked over our shared appetizer, which tasted delicious but had me repeatedly checking my shirt for spots of marinara sauce. I had a nasty habit of spilling food all over myself whenever I ate, and this was one night when I really didn't want to wear my dinner.

We took turns asking each other questions throughout our meal, which was how I learned that Logan was not only good with computers, but also very creative. He liked to read and sketch in his free time, and he wanted to study graphic design in college.

"So you don't want to be some video game programmer or something like that?"

"No," he chuckled and shook his head. "Don't get me wrong, I love my video games, but they're a fun way to escape for me. If I made that my career, I don't think I would like them anymore. I just want to play them."

"And your father doesn't want you to go into medicine?"

"No, both of my parents have always pushed me to do what's right for me. They would never want me to blindly follow in their footsteps; they'd rather I take my own."

"They sound really great. It's kind of nice that a lot of my friends here have parents who are still together. At my last school I was one of the only

ones. I know divorce is necessary in certain circumstances, but I think it's really sad that its become so common that having married parents makes you the odd man out."

"I agree," he said with a nod. "So, do you have any siblings? I haven't heard of any, but I wasn't sure."

"Nope, just me. How about you?"

"Just me as well. My parents talked about having more, but my mother worried that they'd already missed too much of my childhood working at the office—she manages my dad's practice. So they didn't want to spread their attention even thinner."

"That makes sense, I guess. My parents would have liked more, I think, but they were pressing their luck just to have me, from what I've heard."

"Would you have liked a sibling?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Sometimes I think yes, but after babysitting my cousins I'm *very* glad to be able to go home alone at the end of the day." We both laughed at that, then Logan changed the subject.

"So tell me a bit more about your family. I've heard that your mom is a novelist and something about your dad and the Bears?"

"He used to do physical therapy for the Bears when I was little, but I barely remember it. He's the reason we moved; he wanted to be closer to his parents and his brother, and he got a great job offer here in the Cities."

"That's great."

"Yeah, he seems a lot happier lately. And I think my mom came out of the womb writing, so nothing's really changed for her. Just give her someplace where she can camp out with her laptop and she's good."

"And my dad said that Richard Foster is your grandfather?" I couldn't ignore the stomach flip I felt at hearing that he'd spoken to his father about me.

"Yes, I had no idea our families were connected like that. My dad just told me this morning that your family took over his practice."

"Mmhmm," he nodded. "They were partners for a while when I was little. I always liked him; he would sneak me suckers when my mom wasn't looking." I immediately treasured the image of my grandfather conspiring with a little sticky-fingered Logan. "I haven't seen him in a long time. Is he doing well? I heard he's traveling a lot."

"Yeah," I sighed. "He and my grandmother are living it up like jetsetters lately. I'm happy for them—obviously he worked hard for it—but how many cruises do you need to go on?" I asked with a laugh.

"So that means that Ethan is your uncle, is that right?"

I nodded. "Do you know him?"

"Well, not personally, but he's a great artist. I've always admired his work. I can't believe he lives in Aledo, you know?"

"He didn't for a long time, but when he met my aunt Lily that all changed. I'll tell him you like his stuff; he'll be thrilled that someone our age has any idea who he is."

We ate in silence for a bit, simply enjoying each other's company and the delicious pizza. After a while Logan started looking uncomfortable, as if he wanted to say something but couldn't get up the nerve.

"What is it?" I asked, refusing to let him chicken out.

"Well...you know how we were talking about my parents earlier?"

"Yeah, they sound like great parents."

"Would you, uh," he coughed to clear his throat. "Do you think you might like to meet them?"

"Did you have something in mind?"

"Well...my mother wanted me to ask you over for dinner next weekend."

"Wow, already?" I couldn't keep the shocked tone from my voice.

"Too soon? I *told* her it was too soon," he mumbled angrily to himself.

"Logan, calm down," I soothed, reaching out and patting his hand. "I'm not saying no, I was just surprised that they would want to meet me already, that's all."

"Oh, well they're actually dying to meet you, my mother in particular.

I've sort of been talking about you for a while. When she heard we were

going out tonight, she got so excited."

"She sounds really sweet," I smiled, squeezing his hand, which I still held. "I'd love to go."

"Really? That's wonderful." He grabbed my fingers and pulled them up to his lips, kissing them gently. "Thank you, Eden."

"What are you thanking me for? Thank *you* for inviting me."

We ended up splitting a molten chocolate cake for dessert, and after a few bites I noticed that Logan had a drop of fudge sauce on his lip. Fighting my urge to jump over the table and lick it off, I leaned over slowly and brought my thumb to the corner of his mouth.

"You have a little...right here." I wiped away the sauce, but when I pulled back I noticed that his eyes were staring straight down my top.

Once he realized he'd been caught, his cheeks colored brightly and he coughed a few times. "Uh...is that an amethyst?" he asked.

"What?"

"Your necklace." He pointed to the sparkling purple stone that hung around my neck. "I was trying to figure out what it was."

"Oh, my necklace. Yes, it's an amethyst. It used to belong to my mom's mother. It was her birthstone. She passed away long before I was born."

"Well, I'm sorry for that. But it's beautiful."

"Thank you," I smiled knowingly.

\* \* \*

After dessert, we drove to the movie theater in Moline. Logan took my hand and held it tightly as we walked inside. It felt so nice to be out in public with him that I couldn't help from swinging our arms back and forth between us as we walked. He didn't seem to mind, if the smile on his face was any indication.

We chose the closest thing to a date movie that we could find in the limited selection, some brainless rom-com with a typical movie couple going through typical movie problems. It wasn't horrible, just predictable. It was *so* predictable, in fact, that I didn't think I would really miss anything if I happened to maybe...oh, I don't know, kiss Logan a couple hundred times.

I leaned over slowly, making him think that I wanted to whisper something in his ear. When he angled himself closer to me, I flicked the tip of my tongue against his earlobe before sucking it between my lips and nibbling gently. At first I thought I'd hurt him because he let out a loud gasp, but my worries were put to rest a few seconds later when he followed it up with a combination moan/grunt from the back of his throat.

"What are you doing, Eden?" he choked out as I started to kiss my way down his neck. I could tell that he was trying so hard to be a respectable date, but I'd had enough of respectable Logan.

"Kiss me," I whispered in the dark, and the speed in which he turned in his seat to cover my lips with his own was almost comical. *Almost*.

The second he slipped his tongue between my lips, I wasn't laughing about anything. I was too busy seeing stars.

We kissed and panted and nipped and licked for what felt like hours but was probably only a few minutes. Before long, my hand was reaching down and gripping his upper thigh. I felt the muscles tense underneath the fabric of his jeans, and he let loose another one of those sexy whimpers into my mouth.

I badly wanted to slide my hand up higher, desperate to feel the hardness that I was pretty sure I would find waiting for me, but I had just enough rationality left to know that we definitely needed more privacy for something like that.

"Logan," I whispered after forcing myself away from his delicious lips.

"What?" He pulled back to look at me, but his movements were sluggish, as if he were in a daze. His eyes looked almost hypnotized as he stared at my mouth, waiting for me to speak.

"I think we should leave."

"Where do you want to go?" he asked, looking confused.

"Take me to your car."

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## **Chapter 13**

Once we were in the safety of Logan's car, I suggested that he drive us down to the riverfront to find a private place to park. His eyes grew really wide for a moment and he swallowed thickly, but he nodded and started driving.

I still felt like it was too soon to have sex, no matter how badly my body was screaming at me to do it, because we had really just started talking. But it certainly felt like the right time to step things up a notch or two. It was obvious that we were ridiculously attracted to each other, and in all honesty, his inexperience was a major turn on. I kept thinking of all the things I could show him and teach him, slowly, one by one.

We found a quiet spot to park, and the moment he turned off the engine, he lunged across the center console at me. He pulled me to him quickly, kissing me damn near senseless before I knew what was happening. I wanted to turn and face him straight on, but the bucket seats weren't the easiest to maneuver in.

"Logan...oh... I mean, wait!" I put my hands up on his chest to push him back a bit.

"Did I do something wrong?" he asked shyly.

"No, baby," I panted. "You're amazing, actually."

"You called me baby," he said slowly.

"I did, didn't I?" It had sort of slipped out in the heat of the moment.

The slow smile that crept over his face made my stomach do somersaults. "I like it."

"Good, because I like saying it."

"So, why did you stop me?"

"I was going to say that it's awfully cramped up here. Maybe we should move to the backseat."

At the word *backseat*, all the color drained from his face.

"Uh, Eden... I don't have any, uh... You see, I never dreamed this would happen... I mean, I wanted it, of course I did, but I never thought in my wildest dreams that we would do more than a little kissing tonight... *Shit*, I'm such an *idiot*!"

"Logan, relax," I soothed, stroking the sides of his face slowly. "I don't want to have sex yet."

"Really?"

"No," I shook my head. "Don't get me wrong, sex in the back of your car might be on the menu sometime down the road, but that's not how I want our first time together. I want to take my time with you."

"Oh, God," he groaned, squeezing his eyes shut at my words.

"But there's no reason we can't have a little fun." I winked at him before getting out of the car and into the backseat. I would have climbed over the seat, but there's just no way to look sexy while doing that. When I looked forward, I realized that Logan was still sitting up front in a daze. "Aren't you going to join me?"

"Uh, yeah." He slowly got out of the car and into the other side next to me. Sitting there for a moment as if collecting his thoughts, he finally turned to face me. "Eden, I'm really sorry for wigging out like that. I sort of panicked because I don't have any protection, and I don't think I'd be able to stop myself if we started. I don't want to risk being irresponsible with you."

"I appreciate that. Believe me, when the time is right, we'll be as responsible as you want."

"Thank you." He seemed relieved to have the tricky subject of birth control out of the way.

"I also really like how open you're being with me. I think it'll be better if we can talk. You can tell me anything, okay? I don't care how embarrassing it is; if there's something you want to ask, I won't laugh at you or judge you. I hope that if you're curious and want to try things together, you'll let me know. I know there are things *I* want to try."

His breathing began to pick up, and his gaze darted back and forth between my eyes and my mouth. When he spoke, it was barely a whisper. "What...what do you want to try?"

"That's a pretty long list, Logan," I said, inching closer to him. "How about I start with what I'd like to try *tonight*?"

"Tell me." He was nearly panting now, and I hadn't even touched him.

The husky tone of his voice was more than a little arousing.

"Well," I said, leaning even closer, practically whispering in his ear. "I'd really like to touch you, and I'd love to feel your hands on me. If you're comfortable with that."

He grunted loudly, slumping over until his forehead was resting on my shoulder. When he finally spoke, his words came out almost jumbled, in frenzied gasps and whispers against my skin. He punctuated each brief pause with kisses and licks on my neck and collarbone. "God, Eden! You have no idea—how long I have wished to hear you say something like that to me—I want you so much—I've been afraid to get too close to you—worried you'd think I was weird for how much I want you."

"Weird?" I asked, shoving my hands into his hair and holding him to me firmly as he kissed my skin. "Believe me, it does the opposite of make me think you're weird." He was driving me absolutely insane.

His hot lips and tongue worked their way up higher, biting and nipping along the way until he was panting in my ear and I was breathless. "I've never wanted anyone this way... So much—so much *need*... I think about you all day—all damn *night*..."

"Oh, God," I gasped, pulling his mouth to mine as I leaned back against the seat, forcing him to partially lie on top of me. I could feel his hand settle tentatively on my waist as we kissed, but that wasn't going to cut it. "Touch me, *please*!"

I grabbed his hand and placed it on my right breast, holding him there until he began to grip it himself.

He grunted into my mouth, his hips bucking against me as his large hand squeezed me through my sweater. It felt wonderful, but he still wasn't close enough for me.

"Logan, wait." I pushed him up a bit so there was enough room between us. His eyes were fiery behind his glasses, searching out my features to see why I'd stopped him. "Help me take this off," I said, tugging at my sweater.

His eyes nearly bugged out of his head, but he quickly complied, lifting and pulling at the offending fabric until we successfully removed it. I tossed it down on the floorboard next to me and looked back up at him with a smile. "Thank you."

"No, thank *you*," he croaked, staring down at the pink cotton cloth that was the only thing left covering my chest. "You are so beautiful." His voice was full of wonder and awe, making me feel like a precious treasure.

He leaned forward, kissing and licking across the exposed tops of my breasts, as if worshipping the parts that were in view. His hands slowly joined in the mix, gripping and squeezing them through the thin cotton, eventually pushing them together to exaggerate my cleavage—where he buried his face and groaned.

"Here, let me get this out of the way, too." I didn't want to take my bra all the way off, in case I needed to get dressed again in a hurry, so I started to pull the straps down over my shoulders. When Logan realized what I was doing, he backed up on his knees to watch. I noticed as he looked down at me that his glasses were fogged over. "Why don't we take these off, too?" I asked with a giggle, reaching up to pull at the frames.

"Not yet," he replied quickly, grabbing my hand. "I want to see you first.

I need to see you as clearly as possible." He quickly wiped them off with his shirt and put them back on, staring down at me intently.

Flattered at his obvious desire, I went back to pulling down my straps.

Once my arms were free, I watched his face closely as I pulled the cups downward, turning them inside out to expose my bare breasts.

"So beautiful," he whispered. We both watched transfixed as his long fingers reached out, ghosting over the round swells of flesh, inching closer to the tightened rosy tips in the center, just hovering there, as if he were afraid I would shatter.

"Touch me," I pleaded again.

He made a choked sobbing sound before ripping his glasses off and chucking them in the ledge of the back window. He buried his face in my cleavage again, and I felt his soft lips kissing and nipping at the bare flesh frantically, his hands gripping me firmly and squeezing. I felt more than heard him grunt against one hardened nipple as he took it in his mouth, suckling on it while he pinched and rolled the other between his fingers. After a few moments like that, he swapped sides and repeated his worshipping all over again.

Holy shit!

I'd never been so close to coming over nothing more than some nipple play.

I ran my hands up and down his back, but the fabric of his shirt was blocking me from the warm skin I craved. Grabbing the material, I pulled at it until he got the message and leaned back just enough to yank his shirt over his head and toss it down next to mine.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record... *Holy shit!* 

Logan had *quite* the body going on underneath his clothes. He had great muscles—nothing overly huge like Devon, but firm and toned in all the right places.

"Is something wrong?" he asked nervously when I continued to stare at his chest with my mouth hanging open.

"Uh, no. Not at all." I smiled up at him. "I was just thinking that *you* are the beautiful one."

"Oh," he said, dipping his head down shyly. "Um, Devon's been helping me work out on the weekends. He said it was payback for always giving him a ride."

I reached up slowly and ran my fingertips across his stomach muscles, loving how they twitched at my touch. I dragged them higher up his body until I was circling his own flat, copper nipples. They pebbled instantly at the contact, and the loud groan he let out filled the car.

"You like that?" I asked, watching him throw his head back and bite his lip, getting more aroused by the second. He could only nod, too caught up in the sensation. I rose up a bit, holding myself up by the heels of my hands until I could kiss along his chest. I flicked my tongue over his nipples, one at a time, before sucking on them harder and biting down gently with my teeth.

He groaned again, bucking his hips against me more firmly this time. He pushed me back down and covered my body with his own, the feeling of his warm skin next to mine making my head spin. He kissed me fiercely, swirling his tongue in my mouth as he gripped and fondled my breasts.

Before long I could feel him slowly rocking his hips into mine, the hard bulge in his jeans teasing me where I wanted more friction. I was pulsing and throbbing between my legs, and every brush against me only flooded me with more moisture.

"Logan," I panted. "I'm so wet for you... I want you so much it hurts!"

He buried his face in the crook of my neck and cried out almost painfully, slamming his hips into mine more roughly. "Oh, Eden, please... *please*," he cried. "Please let me touch you. I need to feel you... I really want to try and make you feel good." The raw hunger on his face when he pulled back to look at me spoke more than any amount of words.

His passion was so powerful that all I could do was nod mutely, reaching down between us to unbutton my jeans. I lifted my hips enough to pull them down a bit, just enough to give him room to touch me.

"Why don't you want to take them off?" he asked. "I want to see you."

"Because if I get my pants all the way off around you right now, I might break my promise to be responsible. You'll have plenty of time to see me later. Now, come here." He nodded and moved back over me, propping himself up on one hand. Leaning in to kiss me again, he ran his free hand down my cheek before letting it drop lower. He stroked my breast a few times, pinching my nipple as he went, then ventured lower over my belly until he was playing with the elastic of my underwear. Shooting me one last questioning look to make sure it was okay, he slipped his hand beneath the material.

I was so slick with moisture that it was almost embarrassing. My outer lips were completely covered and my panties were soaked. I felt his long fingers searching, reaching until he encountered the wetness that waited for him.

He made another choking sound, and I looked up to see him clenching his eyes shut. Without opening them, he moved his fingers lower until they slipped right between my folds. A loud groan tore from his throat and he stopped moving for a moment, his entire body shaking above me. He took a few seconds to collect himself, breathing in deep, choppy breaths. When he finally opened his eyes again they had a new look of determination.

"Show me how to touch you."

I didn't even think about being embarrassed. I simply nodded and reached down, covering his hand with my own. I pushed two of his fingers deeper until he was centered over my throbbing bundle of nerves. "This is where you rub when you want to make me come fast for you," I whispered,

swirling his fingers around in tight circles, moaning at the sensation. Logan's breathing was becoming more ragged, but he couldn't tear his eyes away from where our hands disappeared between my legs. "And this," I said, pushing his hand farther down, "This is where you'll fit inside me." I spread my legs a bit wider and brought his fingers to my opening, moaning loudly as he started pushing them inside.

"Does that hurt you?" he asked, slowly moving his two fingers deeper.

"It's so—oh, God, it's so fucking tight!"

"No," I gasped. "It feels amazing."

"What do I do now?"

"Just keep pushing them back and forth inside me," I panted.

"You want me to fuck you with my fingers?" he moaned, moving them a little faster, sliding deeper each time.

"Yes!" I cried out. "Oh, God, *yes*." I wondered if he even realized that what he was saying was totally hot, because whether he meant it to or not, his dirty talk was driving me insane. I started to move my hips with him, rocking into his hand.

"Oh, God, Eden, you look so sexy like this!" he whimpered. "I want to make you come. Please, *please* help me make you come for me."

I reached for his hand again, angling it a bit so that he could rub my clit with his thumb as his fingers moved inside me. "It feels so good when you

touch both at the same time. Just—*God*, just keep doing that… I'm already so close."

He began thrusting his fingers deeper and circling his thumb just right and—holy fucking hell, did that boy have some raw talent. I started to feel the telltale coiling and tightening in my lower belly and, before I knew it, I was grinding into his hand roughly, screaming and crying out his name while my body exploded into a fit of tremors underneath him.

Wow...that was new.

Someone actually *giving* me an orgasm rather than just taking them.

"Was that okay?" he asked quietly, slowly pulling his hand away.

"Logan," I gasped, trying to catch my breath. "That was so much more than okay." I quickly pulled my jeans back into place and buttoned them, really wanting to kick them off the rest of the way and jump on him. "That was *amazing*."

He smiled proudly, but I noticed that he was preoccupied with staring down at his fingers. When I looked closer, I could see that they were glistening in the moonlight, still covered with my wetness, and he was swirling his thumb against them in wonderment.

"So slippery," he whispered to himself. I watched as he brought them up to his nose and sniffed once, grunting low in his chest before flicking his tongue against them. The next thing I knew, he had sucked them into his mouth and proceeded to clean them off with a loud groan.

Oh. My. God.

I didn't care if everyone else in the entire world thought it was gross; that was the most primal, instinctual, and sexual thing I had ever seen in my entire life.

And it made me want him even more.

"Get up on your knees for me," I told him, breaking him out of his trance. "I want you to straddle me."

"Why?" he asked, confusion written all over his face as he moved to appease me.

"Because I need to touch you, Logan. I need to touch you so bad that I'm going out of my mind. But I want you up here over me so I can't get my legs around you." I didn't trust myself to not yank my jeans back down the second I got my hands on him.

"Oh, God," he moaned. "Eden, I don't know how long I can handle this. I'm hanging on by a thread already. Watching you like that, touching you... It was hotter than anything I've ever dreamt about."

"That's okay," I explained. "Don't try to make it last right now. This is about me making you feel as good as you made me feel."

He moved where I asked him, straddling my waist with one knee against the back of the seat and his other leg braced on the floorboard. It was a little awkward, but it allowed me to look up at him like I wanted.

I put both of my hands on his thighs, sliding them up slowly while I looked him in the eye. The closer I got, the slower I moved, until he was whimpering above me. Once I was finally there, right there, at the large bulge straining against the denim of his jeans, I gently covered it with both of my hands.

"*Oh*!" he gasped, his hips jerking forward involuntarily. I gripped him a bit more firmly, feeling him through the material.

"Can I touch you, Logan?"

"Yes!" he gritted through his teeth, looking almost tortured.

I made quick work of his button and zipper, anxious to see what was waiting for me. When he was completely unfastened, I pulled his jeans down over his hips, bringing his underwear with them. His prominent erection sprang free, bobbing up and down in front of me a few times.

Wow!

It was gorgeous.

I mean, I knew bigger ones existed, I *had* seen porn, but his was long and thick and just...*perfect*.

"God, Logan, you are so sexy." I went to reach for him, but thought better of it, pulling my hands up to my mouth and licking my palms thoroughly. "Don't worry if this is over fast. Just enjoy it."

I was gentle at first, sliding my fingers up and down his smooth skin. He made a loud hissing sound and jerked at the contact, slowly relaxing into my touch. Holding himself very still with his jaw clenched so tight it looked painful, he watched as I wrapped my slick palms around his shaft. I used both hands, end to end, to cover his length completely, sliding them back and forth.

"Oh—oh, God... Oh, Eden." His frantic, repetitive words were sexy as hell, encouraging me to grip him more firmly.

"Move your hips," I instructed, loving the feel of my hands slipping over his hardened flesh. "Yes, just like that. Don't stop."

"Oooooh.... Oh *fuck.*..." His moans almost sounded pained, like he was in agony. "Eden—oh, God, baby—I can't hold it!"

"Then come for me. I want you to." God, did I want him to.

"But—where?"

"Here," I said, glancing down at my still-exposed breasts. "I want you to come on my tits."

"Oh *fuck*!" he cried out, jerking his hips forward rapidly. Just hearing me say the words sent him over the edge. I watched as he pumped thick bursts

of warm fluid all over my chest, and I would be a damn liar if I said it didn't turn me on even more.

"Oh my God," he said, breathing rapidly, looking down at me with amazement. "I've never felt anything like that...never seen anything so sexy."

"Really?" I asked, smiling up at him as I brought my hands to my chest, running them through the cooling liquid, smearing it all over my breasts. Lifting my finger to my mouth, I sucked it clean, tasting him the way that he'd tasted me. "God, you're delicious," I moaned, loving his earthy, salty taste.

"Holy shit," he choked out. "I was wrong. *That's* the hottest thing I've ever seen."

We both put our clothes back on, but not before Logan gallantly offered me the use of his shirt to clean off. It had mostly dried at that point anyway, so I told him I'd just wash off the stickiness when I got home.

On the drive back he looked over at me and smiled sheepishly. "Does it make me sick if I say that I like the idea of you going home covered in me?"

"No," I laughed. "It just means you're in touch with your inner caveman. You like marking your territory." I leaned over and kissed his cheek.

"God, I really do. That was... Eden, that was fucking intense. I can't believe that happened."

As he pulled up to my house I turned to face him. "Are you okay with everything we did? I'd hate to think I rushed you if you weren't ready."

"Did I look like I wasn't okay with it?" he teased. "This has been the best night of my life, and I know it will only get better."

"Are you sure that you don't think any less of me? You know, after tonight?" I had to put it out there. Guys were funny about this stuff, and I didn't want to be on one page only to find out Logan was on another.

He paused for a minute, grabbing my hands and holding them before he continued. "Eden, even if we never did anything like that again, I would be thrilled just to spend time with you. And no, I could never think any less of you. I think you're sweet and patient and kind. And sexy as hell."

I took a deep breath and committed those words to memory, filing them away in my mind as the most romantic thing anyone had ever said to me.

"I should get home before it gets too late," he said, glancing at the clock.

"Can I call you tomorrow?"

"I'd love that," I said, smiling brightly. I kissed him quickly on the lips before opening my door and stepping out of the car. "Oh, Logan?"

"Yes?"

"If you're going to be my boyfriend, you never have to ask permission to call me. I'll always love to hear from you. Even if I'm busy, I'll call you back as soon as I can."

"Is that what I am, Eden?" he replied. "Am I your boyfriend?"

"Well, don't you want to be? From the way you were talking, I sort of assumed we were headed that way."

"Yes," he said, nodding quickly. "I would have said something sooner but I just...didn't know how to ask you."

"Well, there. It's settled. Nothing to be nervous about, was there?"

"No." He shook his head, almost in a daze.

"All right, then. Good night, boyfriend," I smiled at him.

"Good night, my beautiful girlfriend." The look of pride on his face as he said those words was indescribable.

He waited until I stepped inside my house before pulling away, making sure I got in safely. Always the gentleman.

After showering off my dirty deeds for the night, I got ready for bed. Laying there in the dark, I couldn't help but replay every single thing that happened, over and over again.

It wasn't just that Logan was attractive and his inexperience turned me on—he was also sweet and thoughtful and fun to be around. I liked him as a person and he treated me with respect.

I couldn't help thinking that this could be more than just the average high school relationship, and he was more than the average boy.

I was certainly not going to turn my back on the rare gift that I'd been given in Logan.

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## **Chapter 14**

Late Sunday afternoon, while I was in the middle of changing out loads of laundry and cooking a meatloaf for dinner, I heard my cellphone ringing upstairs in my bedroom. I slammed the dryer shut and tore up the stairs, answering it just in time as I bounced on top of my mattress.

"Hello?" I gasped, panting from my sprint.

"Is this a bad time?" Logan asked, worry evident in his lovely voice.

"No," I smiled, thrilled that he had followed through on the phone call.

"I was just downstairs helping with the laundry since my mom left this morning. Forgot to take my phone with me."

"Oh, okay," he sighed, audibly relaxing.

"I'm happy you called," I blurted out awkwardly. "I mean, I know you said you would, but it's still nice, you know?"

"Did I wait too long? I didn't mean to worry you."

"No, I wasn't worried. I'm just happy to hear your voice, I guess."

"I feel the same way," he said. "I had to force myself to wait this long to call you. I thought it might freak you out if I called as soon as I'd wanted."

"When was that?" I asked, smiling at how sweet he was.

"Oh, about six thirty this morning." We both laughed, but as we settled down his voice dropped to a whisper. "I couldn't stop thinking about you all

night."

"Same here," I admitted, feeling my cheeks heat at the image of his head thrown back in ecstasy.

"Not just about *that*, although I thought about that a lot, too. I just kept thinking about finally being able to call you mine."

"So you're as happy about this as I am?"

"More."

"Nope, not possible."

"All right, how about we call it a draw?" he chuckled. God, I really loved his laugh.

"I suppose that's fair. So, what have you been up to all day?"

"I had to help my dad clean out the garage earlier, then I worked out with Devon for a while."

I felt lightheaded for a moment, remembering the way his firm muscles had moved under my hands. "How long have you guys been doing that?"

"About a year now. Devon said that he was tired of me looking like a sickly string bean."

"I'll bet you were still a cute string bean," I giggled. Christ, the boy was making me *giggle*.

"You think I'm cute?" he asked. I could hear the smile in his voice.

"Of course I think you're cute. Especially your sexy little glasses; they just kill me."

"My glasses? You're kidding."

"No way. You looked so nice last night, and those glasses just..."

Thoughts of my naughty professor fantasy flew through my mind. "Baby, they just do things to me."

"God," he sighed. "I really like it when you call me that. So," he chuckled, "you think I'm cute and my glasses...*do* things to you."

"Yes. Do you, um..." my voice dropped to a whisper. "Do you think I'm pretty?" I knew I was fishing for a compliment but I couldn't help myself.

"No." He was quiet just long enough for my heart to skip a beat. "I think you're stunning."

"Really?" I swear to God I squeaked.

"Eden, the very first moment I saw you, you took my breath away.

There's just something about you that pulls me in...like a magnet."

"Wow." Was this guy for real? Did I fall down and hit my head and my mind was now running rampant, conjuring up the perfect man? If I suddenly woke up to find out that this was all some elaborate bullshit dream like *The Wizard of Oz*, I would be really pissed.

"My mother was thrilled that you accepted her invitation. You're still coming next weekend, right?"

"Yes, but I'm a little nervous about it. Do you think they'll like me?"

"They already like you because I like you. They've seen how happy you make me. Once they get to know you, I'm sure it will only grow."

"You're so damn sweet," I cried, feeling tears welling up in my eyes at his lovely words.

He was so sensitive and innocent. On one hand, it drove me crazy and made me want to corrupt him; to show him all the dirty things we could do together. On the other, I was secretly worried that, not only would I corrupt him, but that I would ruin him. What if all his sweetness just disappeared one day, and all he wanted was sex?

Or what if he thought that all *I* wanted was sex? What if he was feeling pressured or thought I expected something from him?

"Logan, I hope you know that I really do like you...so much."

"Why do you sound upset?"

"I'm just worried that after our date, you might not have the best impression of me."

"Why? I told you last night that you didn't rush me."

"I know, but I don't want you to think that's all I want from you. We kind of started out backward, getting physical so fast. I'd hate for you to think that's all you mean to me. I don't want that to end up being all I mean to you, either. I swear, we can go out without doing anything like we did

again, for as long as you want. I'll wait as long as you want, absolutely no pressure."

"Eden," he chuckled. "Just because I'm a virgin doesn't mean I don't want to do those things. Yes, last night we went farther than I expected, but I sure as hell don't regret any of it. I was actually a little relieved that you were so forward with me. If you were as shy as I can be sometimes, we'd still be in that damn closet waiting for the other one to make the first move."

I couldn't help laughing at the visual. "True," I sighed.

"I think it's kinda sexy when you show me what you like. I think I need that. I don't feel so self-conscious when you start things. I know if you had expected me to lead last night, I would have panicked." He was silent for a bit, choosing his words carefully. "Listen, we can go as slow or as fast as you want. I'll be comfortable with whatever pace you want to set. Just please don't worry about my opinion of you. I think you're amazing."

"Jesus," I gasped. The butterflies in my stomach were fluttering like mad.

"What's wrong?"

"Well, it's just that every time I think I'm getting used to my feelings for you, you go and say something wonderful like that and throw me off again."

"I'm glad," he said softly. We were both quiet for a moment before he added, "I was wondering how this might change things at school."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we're dating now. Is there any sort of game plan I need to know about? I've never done this before. Do we just do the same things we've always done, or will I see you more often?"

"What do you want to do?"

He thought for a moment. "I don't really like it when couples become so clingy that they don't have their own identity anymore; going everywhere glued at the hip, never doing anything without the other one's approval. It just seems forced to me."

He had just described what I thought a relationship was supposed to be like when I was with Riley, as if we were playing roles that were expected of us.

"You know what, Logan? I totally agree with you."

"You do?"

"Yeah. I think that people need to be true to themselves, not change everything just because they're dating exclusively."

"That's a great way to put it," he laughed. "But I did hope that I would at least see a little more of you during the day. Is it okay if I pick you up in the morning?"

"Oh, that sounds great! Wait a minute—what about Devon? Doesn't he get a ride from you every day?"

"Yeah, well, I sort of reminded him that his girlfriend has a perfectly good car. I can still give him a lift if he's ever in a pinch, but he understands that I want to spend some more time with my girl."

His girl. He just called me his girl. So sweet!

"Okay, as long as it's not going to cause a problem between you two. I'd love to ride with you."

"Great. I can't wait to see you in the morning."

"Me, either," I smiled.

Just then, my father's voice carried up the stairs. "Uh, hon? Why is the oven smoking?"

"Oh shit, my meatloaf! I'm sorry, Logan, I really have to go."

"That's okay, I understand. I'll see you in the morning, beautiful."

"Good-bye," I replied, smiling as I hung up the phone.

"*Eden*?" my dad's voice called up again, only this time it was followed immediately by the high-pitched ringing of the smoke alarm.

Crap.

Guess it's takeout tonight.

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## **Chapter 15**

The following morning, I was surprised to hear my doorbell ringing promptly at seven fifteen.

I was running late so I threw my coat on in a hurry and grabbed my half eaten pop-tart and backpack before opening the door to find Logan standing there in the pouring rain, holding out an umbrella for me.

"Oh my God, you're getting soaked!" I cried, trying to be heard over the storm. I pulled on his arm, dragging him back toward his running car. He kept trying to hold the umbrella out over my head until I finally shoved it back at him, sliding my arm around his waist so that we were close enough to both fit underneath it.

He opened my car door for me, making sure that I was in and completely out of the rain before moving around to his side of the car and getting in.

"Why didn't you just honk the horn?" I asked as he tossed the umbrella behind him onto the floor of the backseat. "I would have run out."

"Don't be silly," he smiled, running his hands through his wet hair. "I didn't want you to get caught in the rain. Besides, I didn't know if your dad was home or not."

"No, he usually leaves around six thirty for work. Why would it matter if he was home or not?"

"I didn't think it would make the best first impression to just pull up and honk; I wanted to introduce myself."

"Oh." I didn't really know what to say to that. I wasn't used to dating a guy who actually *wanted* to meet my father. "Well, unless you see his car here in the driveway, it usually means he's at work. Feel free to honk away."

"Eden," he said incredulously. "Do you really think that I would be okay with not picking you up properly?" He blinked at me a few times through rain-speckled lenses. When he spoke again, it was almost a whisper. "You're precious to me."

There went those damn butterflies in my stomach again.

I reached out slowly and wiped away the little rivulets of water running down his cheeks from the dripping hair plastered to his forehead. Unable to break eye contact, I leaned in closely until my lips were hovering right over his. "And you," I whispered. "You take my breath away."

I closed the gap between us, slipping against his wet lips and loving how it felt. My pervy side couldn't help but wonder what being with him in the shower would be like, while my girly side was exploding in fireworks and rainbows from the sweetness of his kiss.

Logan grunted at first, surprised by my amorous attack, but he followed it up with that whimper that was fast becoming my favorite sound in the

world. I felt his hands cup each side of my face to hold me steady before the slick tip of his tongue flicked out against my lips. I opened to him eagerly, sucking on his tongue before swirling my own around it. The noises he was making were turning me on like crazy, and when he moaned even louder into my mouth, I felt the strangest flip-flopping in my stomach. It was almost painful, as if someone had punched me in the gut, followed quickly by an intense throbbing between my legs.

Oh my God.

Just one kiss from him had given me blue balls. Or blue cooch, or whatever. All I knew was that he was fucking killing me from just one kiss. How the hell was I going to slowly introduce him to this stuff if he had that kind of effect on me?

"Logan!" I panted, forcing myself to pull away from him. "Baby, we've got to stop."

"Is something wrong?" he asked, breathing heavily and staring at my mouth again.

"No, it's...it's all too *right*! If you keep kissing me like that and making those sexy noises, I'm going to end up mounting you right here."

He made a choking sound and squeezed his eyes shut. "And that's a bad thing, how?" he gritted through his teeth.

"Well, for one, we'd be late to school. Not to mention that I don't really want to give my neighbors a peep show, so get me out of here now before I do something stupid."

"You're right," he sighed, shoving his hands through his hair again.

"Christ, Eden, you make me forget myself so easily."

"Don't worry," I said, kissing his cheek quickly. "The feeling is definitely mutual. Now take me to school, boyfriend."

He chuckled lightly before kissing the tip of my nose. "Yes, girlfriend."

When we pulled into the lot at school, I could feel everyone's eyes on us before we even got out of the car. The rain had died down to a light drizzle, so there were more people standing around outside than I thought there would be. It was as if the entire student body turned their heads to us at the same time.

I took a deep breath to steel myself and went to get out of the car, but Logan's hand on my shoulder stopped me. "No, wait! Allow me." He jumped out and ran around to open my door for me. When we started walking toward the building, I felt his arm drape around my shoulder possessively. I looked up at his face and was met with the biggest shiteating grin I had ever seen in my life.

"You're pretty proud of yourself, aren't you?" I teased, trying to ignore the ongoing stares we were getting.

"To let everyone see that you're finally mine? Absolutely."

"Don't forget that it works both ways, mister. You're mine just as much as I'm yours."

The warmth in his eyes as he smiled down at me was breathtaking. "Exactly."

Fucking butterflies.

We walked into the school smiling like idiots, overhearing tons of stupid comments as we passed.

"That's them! I heard they totally fucked in Devon's closet at the party."

"I heard she blew him on a dare in front of everyone."

"Holy shit! Black's with a girl! I thought he was gay."

"What the fuck does Foster think she's doing? She could have had me."

We passed it all without a second glance as Logan walked me to my locker. It wasn't until I put my coat away and grabbed my books that he mentioned it.

"Did that bother you?" he asked quietly, glancing around at the few onlookers in the hall.

"What, the stupid gossip? No."

"Really?"

"It's high school," I shrugged. "Most of what anyone says is misinformation or outright bullshit. Besides, there's always a lot of talk when a new couple starts dating. Did it bother you?"

"Yes and no. I know it's just talk, but I didn't like worrying that what they were saying was upsetting you. I don't want anyone to hurt you... I can't even stand the thought of it."

"Don't worry," I said, reaching out to squeeze his arm soothingly. "I have thicker skin than that." At the sound of the first bell I reminded him that he needed to get going to class, since his first period was downstairs on the other side of the building. "I'll see you at lunch, right?"

"Of course," he smiled, backing away from me slowly. "I can't wait."

"And you'll actually *talk* to me this time?"

"Ha ha, very funny, smart-ass."

"Hey, being a smart-ass is what I'm good at."

"That's not *all* you're good at." He threw me a wink before turning around and running down the hall toward the stairs.

Did that just happen? He totally made a suggestive comment and winked at me.

The little shit actually *winked* at me. I loved that he was getting more playful.

I put my hand over my heart as I walked to class, willing the flutters to calm down. I was seriously falling for this guy.

Hard.

"You two were so fucking cute at lunch!" Amy squealed next to me in Study Hall.

"Oh my God, would you keep it down?" I looked around us quickly, feeling my face heat. "What was so cute? We were just eating."

"Just eating, my ass!" she laughed. "You guys were whispering and blushing and sharing bites of your food. We were all waiting for you two to start going at it right there on the table."

"Whatever," I said, rolling my eyes. "We didn't look any different than you guys look every day."

"Yes you did," Amy nodded. "You're new and bright and shiny. I thought I was going to get a toothache watching you both, you're so sweet together."

"Would you stop?" I said, laughing through my embarrassment.

"You really like him, don't you?" she asked me, her tone growing serious.

"God, Amy, I really do. I never expected to feel like this so fast. I knew I was attracted to him, but he just makes me feel so...alive. All I have to do

is see his face or hear his voice and I feel all giddy and lightheaded. Should I be worried?"

"What the hell for?"

"It's just so *fast*, you know? Isn't it dangerous to feel so much so quickly? I mean, don't these kinds of things fizzle and burn out?"

"Eden, you need to lighten the hell up and just go with it. You don't know how to handle being with a decent boyfriend, that's all."

"It just feels too good to be true," I whispered.

"Well, knock it off. Logan is sweet and considerate, it's really that simple. This is all new to him, and I think he's off to an amazing start. Don't start being weird around him or make him think he's doing something wrong. We need to cultivate the few good ones who are left."

"You're right," I sighed.

"Come on, let me hear it," she smiled.

"God dammit, Gump. You're a God-damned genius," I grumbled.

"You know it!" She looked around quickly before leaning in closer and dropping her voice. "Now, when the hell are you going to spill about your date? Do you have any idea how pissed Zoe is right now? She expected full, juicy details."

"Never, sorry," I replied, shaking my head as I crossed my arms.

"You've *got* to be kidding!"

"Nope. I might eventually share some details after we get more comfortable with each other, but we're too new right now. I don't know how private he is yet, and I don't want to betray his trust."

"That makes sense, I guess," she pouted. "Although, if he's like any typical male, he'll be ready to scream it from the rooftops when you two finally do it."

"You may be right, but we'll cross that bridge when we get there. Until then, I'm going to enjoy my new boyfriend in private, thank you very much."

And enjoy him was *exactly* what I intended to do.

As soon as possible, and as often as I could.

The moment the bell rang I practically sprinted down the hall to my zoology class, already eager to see Logan again.

I mean, really, the boy was becoming *way* too addictive.

My heart began pounding in my chest as soon as I turned the corner to find him waiting outside our classroom for me. Then the damn thing skidded to a halt and dropped to the bottom of my stomach when he looked up and shot me a smile brighter than sunshine.

Holy crap, was he beautiful. His smile made his gray eyes light up behind those cute glasses and his light brown hair was disheveled so adorably that I had to stop myself from running my fingers through it right there in the hallway.

"Hello there," he said when I got close enough, his voice dripping down my back like honey.

"Hi," I panted, not sure whether I was out of breath from my run or from the look he was giving me.

We went inside and took our seats. As soon as class began I realized just how difficult it was going to be to concentrate on anything with him sitting so close to me for an entire hour.

Why was it so much harder now? I'd been sitting by him for months.

...Because now I knew how delicious his lips were, that's why.

I tried hard to pay attention to the lecture, but I could feel him next to me. I had tingles running up and down my side, as if there were a giant electric current connecting us. The only thing I could think about was how much we would tingle together if we were rolling around naked between the sheets. It didn't help things at all when he reached over without looking away from the board and slowly slid his pinky finger down the length of my forearm, leaving a trail of burning flesh in its wake.

I instantly wanted to feel his hands on me again.

I wanted to kiss and lick every square inch of his skin.

I wanted to know how long I could make it before shoving all of our

books on the floor and throwing him down on the lab table.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Logan's notebook sliding toward me.

When it was close enough to read, I glanced down and noticed that he had

scribbled a quick note.

What are you thinking about over there?

I felt my ears go hot as I blushed furiously. Grabbing my pen, I wrote my

response underneath his question and pushed the spiral notebook back at

him.

You. That's all I can tell you.

He sent it back again quickly.

Why?

Okay buddy, you asked.

Because the rest is too *X*-rated to mention in class.

He gulped loudly, and the next thing I heard was a loud snap. When I looked over I saw that he had gripped his pencil so tightly that it had broken in his palm. I watched as he carefully took the top half of the pencil and wrote something else.

#### Will you tell me later?

His gaze was on fire, his pupils dilated as he stared at me intently. I licked my lips slowly and watched his eyes follow the movement. I decided to just go for it, so I wrote the first response that came to me.

#### I'll show you.

"Fuck!" he gritted through his teeth. He reached down and shifted himself in his jeans, which caused my mouth to go dry.

I added one more sentence to my note, unable to stop myself.

*Will you come over after school?* 

He couldn't write a reply, since he had dropped his broken half of a pencil on the floor after reading my question. Looking over at me, he took a deep breath and nodded quickly.

Oh yeah.

I had no idea what was going to happen later, but I was sure I would enjoy every minute of it.

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## **Chapter 16**

The last hour of the day flew by in a daze as I imagined all the sordid things I wanted to do with Logan when I got him alone.

I wasn't stupid; I knew that I couldn't let myself totally lose control and sleep with him already. Not only would that defeat my goal for us to go slowly since we were so new together, but I also knew that my dad would be home by five thirty at the latest. Maybe in the future we would sneak in quickies after school, but for our first time together I wanted to have as much alone time as possible.

Oh, God, it was going to *kill* me to wait.

At the sound of the bell I ran to my locker, anxious to get outside and find my boyfriend. Just thinking the word *boyfriend* sent chills up and down my spine, causing me to run even faster to the parking lot after I grabbed my coat.

I found him standing next to his Volkswagen, talking to Zoe and Devon. When he looked up at me he shot me another one of those killer smiles, which almost made me trip.

"Hey, Eden," Zoe called out to me as I approached them. "We were just asking Logan here if you two wanted to join us at the diner for a slice of pie or something."

"Oh, uh..." I looked back and forth between her and Logan. "What did he say?"

"Nothing yet; you showed up before we got that far."

Hanging out as a couple with our friends sounded really fun, but I was desperate for some alone time with him. Not only for the physical stuff, as much as I was craving it, but also for some time to just get used to *us*. However, I didn't want to be the one calling all the shots. If he would rather hang out for a while, I wasn't going to push him. We had plenty of time to be alone.

"Logan? Did you want to go?"

He blinked a few times and turned back to Zoe. "Well...that sounds like fun, but I promised Eden we would work on our zoology homework before I have to get home." He glanced over to me quickly, seeking approval for his impromptu lie. "Maybe another time?"

"Yeah, he's right," I jumped in. "It's due tomorrow, and we really need to get it finished."

"Dude, that sucks," Devon said. "But like Logan said, we can go another time."

"We'll let you get going then," Zoe smiled at me knowingly. "I know how important some of those *homework* projects can get."

I had no idea if Devon caught on to her innuendo, but I had absolutely no doubt that she saw right through us. She didn't call me on it, though, which was another reason I loved her. I knew she valued her alone time with Devon just as much, and she totally understood.

We climbed into Logan's car and waved good-bye to our friends, pulling out of the parking lot and heading to my house.

"I hope you don't mind what I told them," Logan said nervously.

"No," I smiled. "I didn't really want to go, either. It would be nice to do sometime, but not today."

"That's exactly what I thought." He reached over the center console and took my hand, squeezing it tightly. "So, how did your first day as part of a couple go over?"

"Pretty good, once all the stupid gossip died down. Oh, did you hear that we aren't the only couple who sprouted from that party?"

"No-who else?"

"Tate and Chloe!"

"Tate Cramer? No, I hadn't heard that at all. Good for him. I think he's had a crush on her for a long time."

"I didn't know that. Why hasn't he asked her out before now?"

"Well, you know how she's kind of tall?" He took his eyes off the road for a second to glance at me. "I think he was worried she would think he was too short for her or something like that."

"You're kidding me!" I scoffed. "Chloe isn't shallow like that! If he liked Ashley or Holly I could see it, but Chloe is really sweet."

"Yeah, she's pretty cool. I'm glad he finally got up the guts to ask her."

"I'm glad you *both* did," I teased. "I guess we can all thank Devon's party for that."

He smiled brightly and lifted my hand to his mouth, leaning over slightly to kiss my knuckles. We rode in silence for a few minutes before he cleared his throat anxiously.

"Uh, is your father going to be home yet?"

"No, he doesn't usually get home until after five, and Mom is out of town until tomorrow."

"Am I supposed to be at your house? What I mean is, do I need to leave beforehand...or would you like me to stay so I can finally meet him?"

"He doesn't know that I invited you over. I want you to meet him, but it might make a better first impression if I let him know ahead of time so he's expecting you. Would you like to eat dinner with us tomorrow night? My mom will be back by then and she can meet you, too. I know it's a little soon, but since I'm meeting your parents, too, I wondered if you'd like to meet mine."

"As long as you don't think they'll mind, I'd love to."

"I didn't say they wouldn't mind," I laughed. "I haven't told them that we're official yet, so my dad is bound to grumble at least a bit in the beginning. I'm not worried that he won't like you, though."

"Well, what's not to like?" he said with a cocky smirk.

Oh my... He needed to smirk more often.

"Exactly."

As we pulled into my drive I noticed a rusted Chevette parked in front of the house.

Oh, God, not now.

"Eden, why is there a half-naked boy in your driveway?"

Shit. This was *not* happening to me now.

"Uh...that's Luke. He's the son of my dad's friend. He's an amateur mechanic, so he always offers to work on my car for free whenever it breaks down."

"That's awfully *generous* of him." His voice had taken on a funny tone.

"And why, may I ask, isn't he wearing a shirt?"

"Because he's a douchebag."

"Oh, okay. Shouldn't he go to our school? I don't recognize him."

"No, I guess he's homeschooled by his mom. Come on; let's get this ridiculousness over with." I got out of the car, Logan following me closely.

I approached my Oldsmobile, cringing at the sight of Luke's cutoff jean shorts—they definitely belonged on the cover of a gay porn magazine.

"Hey, Eden!" he said, standing up, away from the engine. "I was just giving the old girl a once-over. I need to get a part first, but it shouldn't take much to fix it once it comes in."

"That's great, Luke. Have your dad tell mine how much money you need and I'm sure he'll take care of it. Why the hell don't you have a shirt on? It's barely fifty degrees out!"

"I, uh, didn't want to get it dirty. Besides, I just run *hot*, anyway," he said suggestively.

Barf.

I knew the moment he noticed that we weren't alone. His smarmy smile began to falter as he looked past me over my shoulder.

"Oh, who's your friend?"

"Sorry Luke, let me introduce you." I turned and grabbed Logan's hand, pulling him up next to me. "This is Logan Black. My boyfriend."

The look on Luke's face was priceless.

"Oh, yeah...uh, hey, man. Sorry, I'd shake your hand, but my hands are dirty."

"No problem," Logan replied, putting his arm around me possessively.

"Thanks for helping Eden out with her car. I know she gets really tired of it

breaking down all the time."

Luke blinked a few times, looking like a deer in headlights. "Well, uh, it is an old car. This thing is a '76. I'll do my best to make sure we keep her running this time."

"That would be really great, Lou."

"It's Luke."

"Oh, right. Sorry." Logan couldn't have sounded less interested, and I had to bite the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing out loud.

"Listen, I don't want to be rude, Luke, but Logan and I have some homework to finish, so we're going to head inside. You don't need me for anything, do you?"

"No, uh, I'm just about done here. I'll just clean things up and get going."

"Thanks again, Luke."

"Bye, Eden," he said dejectedly as we walked away.

I let Logan in the front door, closing it behind us.

"I think it's safe to assume that your car will start running better from now on," Logan said with a huff.

"What do you mean?"

"Eden, that guy was drooling all over you. Don't you think it's a little convenient that your car keeps breaking down, and the only time he gets to

see you is when it needs fixing?"

I was dumbfounded at the suggestion. "You actually think he's rigging it?"

"If not that, then he's doing the bare minimum to get it running for a little bit before it breaks down again."

"Don't you think that sounds a little dramatic?"

"You didn't see how he was looking at you."

"Oh my God... Logan, are you *jealous*?"

His face turned beet red and he began sputtering. "No! I just—he—I—" He took a deep breath before dropping his shoulders in defeat. "I guess I am a little bit. But I still think he could do a better job on your car if he wanted."

"Logan," I sighed, pulling him against me for a tight hug. "You have *nothing* to worry about with Luke. What could I possibly see in him? He's totally repulsive to me with all of that strutting around."

"I'm sorry, Eden," he said into my hair before he kissed the top of my head, squeezing me tighter. "Just the thought of him even thinking that he had a chance with you made me angry. I've never felt that before."

"I understand. I think if someone skanky like Ashley or Holly tried to put a move on you, I would lose my shit a little bit, too."

He laughed, and I felt the vibrations through my entire body.

"Now," I said, pulling back to smile up at him. "Would you like to see my room?"

He nodded quickly, choking out a quiet "Yes."

"Follow me," I said with a smile, grabbing his hand and leading him up the stairs.

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## Chapter 17

"So...this is my room," I said nervously.

I opened the door slowly and motioned Logan inside, closing it again behind us. He took small, tentative steps at first, looking around in wonder, as if the inside of a girl's bedroom was more fascinating than anything he'd ever dared to dream about.

"It looks like you," he finally said after nearly a minute of silence.

"Really? What makes you say that?"

"I don't know...the way the colors work together, and all of the pictures you have up. I just see a lot of your personality in it, I guess. It's very warm and inviting."

"Thanks."

"Is this your mother, here?" he asked, pointing to a group of photos stuck to my corkboard.

"Yeah, that's her on the day her first book hit the shelves. I think my dad took it." She looked beautiful as always with her long raven hair and her huge smile, holding up the smutty paperback proudly in the middle of a bookstore.

"What's going on in this one?" he chuckled, pointing to an old discolored photo in the center.

"Ah, that's my favorite picture," I sighed, feeling a smile break out over my face. We both looked at the infant version of me with little black ringlets of hair stuck to my face, my round cheeks covered in smears of chocolate frosting, my tiny pink tongue licking even more off my fingers. My parents were seated on each side of me, both their heads thrown back in laughter. "I think my aunt Emma took it, but it could have been my grandma. It was my first birthday party."

"You were adorable," he laughed, leaning in to look closer. "Good lord, they gave you your own whole cake, didn't they?"

"It was just a little thing, but yeah. They had a bigger cake for the rest of the party. That's when they realized how much I like chocolate. I dug into that thing with my bare hands. I think I ended up wearing more than I ate, though."

"What makes this picture your favorite?"

"I guess it's the background story that gets to me when I look at it." I blinked a few times, already feeling the traitorous moisture trying to creep in. "Whenever I would look at this picture when I was younger, my mom would always cry happy tears and make a point of telling me that this day was very special to everyone because I was her little miracle. It wasn't until I was older that I got the full story from my Aunt Lily."

"What happened?"

"I guess my parents tried for years to have a baby. My mom had some kind of condition that caused her to have a lot of really horrible miscarriages."

"Oh my God, I'm sorry."

"I guess they'd all but given up when I finally came along. My aunt said that it was a really tough pregnancy, but my mom fought like hell for me. She said that when my family all got together for my first birthday it was a major milestone for them...that all of that pain and heartache was finally worth something."

"That's sort of beautiful," Logan whispered. "In a sad way."

"I didn't mean it to sound sad. This picture is one of the few things in the world that can make me happy, no matter how depressed I am. All I have to do is look at that one loving moment, frozen in time, and I remember that the world isn't always crap." I looked up at him again to make sure that he was following me. "It helps knock me out of those 'poor me, why me' days," I smiled.

"Wow, I need one of those," he laughed. "If you love it so much, why don't you have it in a frame? It's getting yellowed like that."

"I know, I keep meaning to, but then I forget about it. I'll buy one someday," I shrugged.

He walked around a bit more, paying close attention to every little thing he noticed. I watched as he flipped through old CDs and movies, stopping every once in a while to say that he had this one, too, or that he'd always wanted to see that one.

I kept waiting to feel violated, not used to such close inspection, but all I felt was touched. Riley couldn't have told me what color my bedspread was, but here Logan was taking a thorough inventory of my life, filing it away in hopes of getting to know me better.

It made me want to rifle through his underwear drawer just to see what kind he liked.

It made me want to dig up his old report cards just to read what comments the teachers wrote. I bet there were a few that said, *Logan is a joy to have in class, but he's so adorable that he's become a distraction.* 

"Mind if I sit?" he asked, gesturing to the foot of the bed.

"No, go ahead." I sat down next to him, attempting to look around at my walls through his eyes. Would he think I was an immature baby for having so much purple? Was it too messy? I sniffed the air quickly, making sure there wasn't any dirty-laundry funk floating around.

"I like your room," he said finally. "It's really comfortable here. It looks so lived in even though you only moved here a few months ago. You should see mine—my mother did all the decorating, so it looks more like a catalog

display than a teen boy's room. It's nice, but sometimes it feels a bit... sterile."

"I'd love to see it. Will you show me when I come to dinner this weekend?"

"So you haven't chickened out yet?" he smiled.

"No way. I'll be there."

"I can't wait," he said softly, staring at my lips.

Tilting my head up, I leaned in slightly, but only far enough to let him know he could kiss me. I wanted him to get comfortable with the idea of making the first move.

When he lowered his lips to mine, he let out a little hum against my mouth, as if he were tasting his favorite dessert. I kissed him back eagerly, but I shifted too quickly to get closer to him, which caused us to lose our balance and topple back on the bed.

We pulled apart laughing, and the light in his eyes as he looked at me was radiant.

"Well, we're already here. We might as well move up the rest of the way." I started scooting up closer to my pillows at the head of the bed. When I got there, I patted the space next to me. "Come on, loverboy. Let's see how good of a cuddler you are."

He laughed and crawled up after me. "Oh, I can cuddle like nobody's business. I *think*," he laughed. When he'd stretched out with his head on the pillow next to me, he reached over and pulled me close, settling my head on the magical sweet spot where his shoulder met his chest.

I fit there perfectly, as if that spot were made just for me.

His hand began stroking my hair, which felt amazing, causing me to burrow even closer to him. His warm lips kissed my forehead before he pulled back and sighed contentedly.

"God, this is nice. I love holding you like this." His voice was soft and gentle, more than a whisper, but just as intimate.

"Mmhmmm," I moaned, my eyes rolling back in my head at the feeling of his talented fingers massaging my scalp. After a few minutes his hand moved lower, stroking in long, soothing movements up and down my back.

Oh, God.

One thing was for certain: Logan gave good cuddles.

Suddenly he began jostling around, digging his other hand into his pocket.

"What are you doing?" I whined, hating the interruption.

"This," he smiled, holding up his iPhone. He clicked on the camera and turned it toward us, holding it up in the air over our heads. We both looked up as he pushed the button, and when he brought it back down, he showed me the very first picture of us as a couple.

We were smiling like goofy idiots, and there was no denying that we were both unbelievably happy.

"There," he said, putting his phone away. "Now I have my own pic to help with my 'poor me, why me' days."

"That's your special picture?"

"Sure. Now, whenever I get upset about anything, I only have to look at it to remember our first cuddle. And then I'll be great, because I'll remember that I have you, so nothing could ever be that bad."

"Are you for real?" I choked out past the rapidly forming lump in my throat.

"Yeah, why?"

"Because I'm still discovering how amazing you are."

Before he could say something even sweeter and make me bawl like a baby, I lunged at him, covering his mouth with so many kisses I lost count. At first they were small little pecks, but they quickly grew longer and more heated. Logan didn't seem to have any complaints, adjusting our positions smoothly so he could slide his hands down and grip me around the waist. When I flicked the tip of my tongue against his lips he growled low in his

chest before opening wider to me, eventually lowering his hands even more to squeeze and rub my ass while our tongues swirled around each other.

"God...*Eden*," he groaned, talking between the kisses he was trailing down my neck. "It's not enough. I can't get close enough to you." I felt his hand slide down further from my ass to the back of my thigh, tugging and pulling until he had lifted my leg up over his hip. My inner thigh was then pressed right over the growing bulge in his jeans, causing him to buck his hips and hiss loudly between his teeth.

I kissed him even deeper, reaching up to grip his hair at the back of his head, which he seemed to enjoy by the noises he was making. Holding him to me tightly, I started rolling backward slowly, hoping that he would take the hint and follow.

Not only did Logan follow, but he began to lead.

He rolled over on top of me, sliding his knee between my legs to part them before settling the rest of his weight on me. Loving the feel of him there, I instinctively wrapped my legs around his waist, moving myself against him.

"Oh, God!" he gasped, burying his head in my neck as he ground his hips into me, rubbing his swollen erection back and forth.

"Logan," I breathed against his skin. "You feel so good, baby." He groaned again when I called him baby, and I couldn't resist slipping my

hands around him to cup his ass, pulling him into me roughly.

Many of the noises he made after that were incoherent, but no less sexy. Before long I felt his hand sliding up my shirt, pushing the material out of the way. I helped him pull it over my head, tossing it in the general vicinity of my clothes hamper. When he was left staring at my bra in wonderment, I yanked one of the cups down to expose my breast. His eyes went wide at the sight of my hardened nipple, and he wasted no time latching onto it like a starving child.

There was nothing like the feeling of being surrounded by him, of him thrusting against me while he sucked and licked my tightened flesh.

If he was blowing my mind this easily now, how the hell was I going to live through actually having sex with him?

"You're so *hard*," I moaned into his ear before licking the outer shell.

"For you...only for you." He lined himself up more directly and began rocking his hips into mine more forcefully. "Eden... I want you so bad," he panted, sweat forming on his brow. "I can't tell you...how much I think about it...about finally being inside you."

"Oh, God!" I groaned.

That was it, goddamn it!

I needed more of him, right that second. Dry humping wasn't enough.

I needed to taste him. I needed it like oxygen.

Grabbing his shoulders, I pushed and shoved until he was off me far enough that I could roll him over onto his back. Without any preamble I straddled his lap, grinding against him a few more times while kissing him senseless. He moaned and gripped my hips, guiding my movements with some sort of latent sex demon powers.

"Yes," he hissed. "I can't wait to have you riding me for real."

"Why?" I moaned. I couldn't help asking; he was turning me on so much with the way he was talking. He was starting to loosen up, and it was driving me crazy.

"Because I am dying to look between us and watch you moving up and down on me," he grunted, bucking his hips again as his thoughts pushed him closer to the edge.

If I didn't get his pants down soon he was going to make a mess.

I somehow pulled away from the delicious friction, sliding farther back on his thighs so that I could get at the button on his jeans.

"What are you doing?" he asked, the look of shock on his face almost comical. "I didn't mean that we had to do that now... I just wanted to tell you what I was thinking."

"I want to *show* you what I'm thinking," I purred, pulling his zipper down. I tugged at his jeans until they were down to his knees.

Black boxer briefs. Mmmm.

And there was an enormous tent situation going on without the jeans to hold him down.

"Can I?" I asked, reaching for the elastic band. He gulped loudly, and instead of speaking he nodded quickly.

I pulled his underwear down over his hips, unable to hide my groan at the sight of him springing free.

So hard.

So beautiful.

"I want you to just lie back and enjoy this," I instructed, reaching out and gripping him around the base. He shuddered at the contact, and I could see the moment he realized what was about to happen.

"Oh, God, Eden, are you going to—holy *fuck*!" His question was cut off by the sensation of my slick, wet tongue sliding up the length of his shaft. When I reached the broad tip, I circled it a few times before slowly taking him into my mouth.

"Oh my God oh my God," he whimpered, but he never took his eyes off me while I devoured him. The look on his face was a perfect mixture of shock, pleasure, and amazement—it was an arousing combination.

I took as much of him into my mouth as I could, loving the taste of him.

I swirled my tongue around him as I began bobbing my head up and down,

slowly at first, but quickly building up speed.

"Eden, I can't...oh, God, that's too much!" I could feel his thighs beginning to shake, so I squeezed them with my hands to let him know it was okay to just enjoy it. He watched me intently as I picked up my pace, and before long he was reaching out to touch my face gently. His thumbs started brushing over the skin around my swollen lips as he watched himself disappearing between them. "That's the sexiest thing I've ever seen," he moaned.

I picked up the pace, squeezing him harder with my mouth as I moved. His shaking had become almost violent, and his moans had turned into desperate pleas for release.

"Baby...please...I'm gonna—oh *fuck*, I'm coming!" He threw his head back and practically howled in pleasure, spurting hot bursts of fluid down the back of my throat. I swallowed everything he gave me, still lapping him up as he began to soften.

When I was sure he was finished, I tucked him back inside his boxer briefs and crawled up to rest my head on his shoulder again.

"Thank you for letting me do that," I said, kissing his neck.

"You're thanking *me*?" he laughed. "Shouldn't I be thanking *you*? And like...kissing your feet? Erecting statues in your honor?"

"You already erected something in my honor today, and that was *more* than enough," I giggled.

"Very funny," he smirked, before his tone became serious. "What can I do for you, baby?" He gulped loudly before asking, "Do you want me to do that to you?"

Oh, God, was this guy for real?

"You...uh...you would do that?" For all of my prowess only minutes ago, I instantly felt like the inexperienced one.

"Of course. Why do you sound so shocked?"

"Well... I've always heard that most teenage guys won't do that, so I never expected it."

"No one has ever done it for you before?" he asked, concern showing on his face.

"God, don't make it sound like I've been with a ton of people. There was just one before you, and he thought the idea of it was gross."

"Hey, come here." He pulled me closer, kissing me gently. "I wasn't trying to offend you. I have no idea who you were with before you moved here, and honestly, it's not my business. I figured you were experienced, but I don't really want too many gory details. What happened in the past is the past. I don't care about anything before you and me, because that's all it's going to be from now on."

"That sounds good to me," I smiled.

"Will you let me try that with you? I'd really like to. I don't think it sounds gross; I think it's sexy."

I glanced over at the clock and saw that it was almost five p.m. "We can try it sometime, but not today."

"Why not? Don't you trust me?"

"Of course I do. It's just that my dad will be getting home soon, so I should probably get you out of here."

"But what about you? You just totally rocked my world, and I don't get to give you any payback at all? If you are half as turned on as I was, you've got to be in pain right now."

How right he was. I was swollen and throbbing and my body was begging for release.

But it wasn't worth getting caught.

"It'll have to wait," I said, getting up and crossing the room, looking for a shirt to throw on so that I could go downstairs and start dinner.

"Wow, I feel really selfish right now," he said sadly, standing to pull up his jeans. "I never meant for this to be one-sided like that."

"Hey, don't get bummed. I want you to leave here feeling happy about what we did, not depressed. I'll be fine, I promise."

"I don't think it's possible for me to feel depressed after what you gave me today. I just wish I could return the favor."

"Soon, I promise."

"All right...but if you need me, let me know. Just think of me as your dedicated student. Whatever you want to call it, as long as it ends with me making you feel good," he ended with a wink.

Goddamn him and his sexy winks.

"I'll remember that," I laughed. "Now you really do have to go, or dinner tomorrow is going to get pretty awkward."

"Okay," he sighed. "Come here." He wrapped his arms around me in another wonderfully tight hug. As he pulled away, he leaned down to whisper in my ear. "Thank you for making me the luckiest guy in the whole world." He kissed me quickly on the lips, and before I could say anything in return he was already running down the stairs to make a speedy getaway before my dad came home.

I flopped back down on the bed, feeling the same strange sensation jumping and rolling around in the pit of my stomach.

Fuck.

I was totally in love.

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# Chapter 18

Dinner was rough, to say the least.

I didn't have time to take care of myself after Logan left, so I spent the entire night as a swollen mess. Just when I would start to calm down, my mind would flash to the image of Logan watching me as I sucked him off, and then I would get excited all over again. The entire time I was cooking dinner, his erotic words played back on a loop in my head. It was all I could think about.

Being with him was making it impossible to keep my mind out of the gutter. Then I had to sit at the table next to my dad while we ate and pretend I wasn't a quivering mass of desperate teenage hormones.

On top of that, I spent most of the meal trying to think of a good way to break the news about Logan and his impending dinner visit the following night.

"Anything new going on at school?" my dad asked as he read over his paper, making our normal, pointless small talk. It was plain to see that he hadn't expected a real answer when I gave him one.

"Actually, yeah. Remember that guy I went out with on Saturday?"

"Doug Black's boy?" he confirmed, his newspaper suddenly forgotten.

"Right—Logan. Well, he and I have decided to…be exclusive." I was trying to avoid the *B* word, hoping to ease the blow, but Dad went straight for it.

"So you have a *boyfriend* now, is that what you're telling me?" He set down his fork and unbuttoned his top collar button, like the mere idea of a steady boyfriend was suffocating him.

"Yeah, Dad. That's what I'm telling you."

"God, Eden," he sighed, dropping his head in his hands. "You're just so young."

"Young? Dad, I'm eighteen! We both are!"

"Don't I know it," he grumbled.

"You knew I had a boyfriend when we lived in Lombard. Why are you wigging out about this now?"

"I'm not wigging out. It's just that...well, honey, I couldn't stand to see you get hurt again. Your mother had to talk me out of going over to that little shit's house and kicking his teeth in. I get a little overprotective when it comes to you; I'm your father, sue me."

"I understand, but you can't hide me from the world forever."

"Says who?"

"Dad, come on! I really want you and Mom to get to know Logan and like him as much as I do."

"Why do you even care what we think? Don't most kids these days just do whatever the hell they damn well please?"

"Sure, most of them do. If you put your foot down, I can't say that I wouldn't just date him anyway...but that's not what I want."

"Why not?" He looked up at me across the table, and in that moment he looked way older than his years.

"Because." I paused, swallowing my nervousness. "Logan is special. I know it's early yet, but I have the feeling that he's not going anywhere for a while, so it would be a lot easier if you guys accepted it now."

"Fine," he huffed. "When do we meet this knight in shining armor?"

"He's coming to dinner tomorrow night after Mom gets home. I'd like you to be nice to him."

"What did you think I'll do, shoot him?"

"I never know with you," I joked, standing up to clear our plates. As I went to pick his up, he grabbed my wrist to stop me.

"I'm sorry if I came off too harsh there, sweetie. I just had a major wakeup call last time and it's left me a little bit gun-shy when it comes to you and boys."

"Well, that makes two of us, Dad. But if *I* can let go and move on, I think you should, too." He thought for a moment and nodded, quickly going back

to reading his paper . I took that as a clear sign that he needed more time to absorb the news.

As I cleaned up the kitchen, I couldn't help but be thankful for our awkward dinner conversation. If it nothing else, at least it got my mind out of the gutter for five minutes.

Of course, that only served to make me think of Logan again.

I tried to distract myself by watching TV with Dad, but I could only handle so many hours of the NCIS marathon he was watching on the USA Network. Whenever a commercials came on he would switch it over to ESPN for the scores, so I was pretty well testosteroned out by eight thirty.

"I think I'm gonna call it a night," I said, stretching as I stood.

"So early?"

"Yeah, I've still got a little homework to finish, and then I'll probably just read a book until I fall asleep."

"Okay, hon. Good night."

"'Night, Dad."

I finished my assignments pretty quickly, but with no thanks to Logan.

No matter what I was reading, I couldn't keep myself from getting distracted. I kept hearing his sexy voice panting in my ear, over and over again.

"Eden... I want you so bad..."

"I can't wait to have you riding me for real..."

"Baby...please...I'm gonna—oh fuck, I'm coming!..."

God dammit! How the hell was I supposed to think straight with him haunting me like that?

I made a trip to the bathroom before bed, and as I made my way back to my room I heard my dad's voice carrying up the stairs.

"Maggie, the new boy is already official."

Ahh. It must have been time for his nightly check in with my mom.

"She's having him over for dinner tomorrow, so be prepared... I don't know—Logan, I think. He sounds like a pretty good kid. She seems way more excited about this one." He was quiet for a bit longer as he listened. "I know, Maggie, and that's what she said, too. Our little girl's growing up so damn fast." His voice sounded so sad, so defeated.

I chose that moment to tiptoe back into my room, feeling a lump forming in my throat.

I grabbed my phone and fired off a quick text message to Logan.

So we're definitely official. The parentals know and dinner is a go.

Less than a minute later he replied.

That's great! Can't wait to meet them. Thanks for having me over today.

*No, thank you for coming. (No pun intended)* ;-)

Oh ha ha, very funny. Seriously, though, was it okay?

Baby, it was way more than okay. I haven't been able to get you out of my mind all night.

I know the feeling. I've had the doofiest grin on my face ever since I came home.

Just talking to him about it was getting me hot again. I knew that I should probably steer the conversation in a cleaner direction, but the constant pulsing between my legs had other plans.

Did you enjoy it?

Are you kidding me? I've been hard all night, replaying it over and over in my mind.

Oh, God. Didn't he know what his talking like that did to me? ...Maybe he didn't. Well, two could play that game.

Stop! You don't know how turned on I've been & hearing about you getting hard only makes it worse.

*Oh, God. Really? Are you wet for me right now?* 

Yes! I'm dying here. I keep hearing your sexy voice saying those naughty things in my ear and it's driving me crazy!

Damn. Now I'm hard again.

Christ, the boy was killing me without even trying. I wanted so badly to reach down and take care of things, but I didn't want our discussion to stop. It would take me forever to text with one hand, not to mention that it would probably kill the mood, too.

If only we could keep talking while I...oh, God. Could I do that? Riley had never been anywhere near me taking care of myself; he wouldn't have been interested. He was always so prissy about things; I just figured it would be yet another thing that grossed him out. Actually, he was prissy about anything that didn't directly involve him getting off.

Logan, on the other hand...

Something told me that Logan would love it.

Maybe he would get so turned on hearing me that he would join in, too.

Oh, God. Just imagining hearing his pants and moans through the phone made my stomach do somersaults.

Before I had a chance to stop myself, I sent off another text.

*Is it too late for me to call you?* 

No, go ahead. I have the phone on vibrate, so it shouldn't wake up my parents.

I peeked out into the hall before locking my door, checking to make sure Dad had finally gone to bed. I didn't want to risk him walking by and hearing me moan.

I climbed into bed and turned out the light, wanting to surround myself with nothing but Logan. As soon as I was settled, I picked up the phone and dialed his number.

He answered on the first ring. "Hey, you."

"Hey," I replied, much more breathily than I'd intended.

"I'm glad you called. I was hoping to talk to you again tonight."

"Any reason?"

"Just can't get you out of my head. Like I mentioned earlier."

"Yeah, you mentioned a *few* things earlier. I just had to call to see if that last one was true."

"What one?" he asked, playing innocent, but I could hear his voice hitch as he spoke.

"I want to know if you're really hard for me right now."

"I told you I was."

"No, you texted it. Can you say it?" He was quiet for a moment, so I kept going. "I need your sexy voice. I need *you*."

"You need me, baby?" His voice had dropped down to a breathy whisper.

"Tell me what you need."

"I need to hear you," I practically whined, my free hand roaming over my tightening nipple. "I need you to make this hurting stop."

"I really wish I was there with you right now."

"What would you do if you were?"

"I'd cuddle with you again."

"That's all?"

"Well, we'd have to be naked. I'm dying to feel you pressed against me without anything between us."

"Mmm...that sounds nice," I moaned, slipping my hand between my thighs. "What would you do after that?"

"You really want to know?"

"Yessss," I hissed, sinking two fingers between my folds and circling lightly around my swollen clitoris.

"Well... I've always wanted to, but especially after today I *really* want to..."

"What?"

His voice dropped lower, his breathing becoming choppier. "I want to go down on you."

"Oh, God," I moaned, swirling my fingers faster. "You really want to?"

"Fuck yes," he grunted. "It's all I can think about. I want to make you come so hard."

I couldn't control my groan at his words. Hearing his delicious voice say such wicked things was making me insane. I panted loudly into the phone as I worked my slick, fevered flesh.

"Are you—oh my God, Eden, are you *touching* yourself?" He sounded frantic.

"Logan...I need you," I whimpered.

"God, baby, don't say that. I'm gonna get arrested for breaking down your door with a raging boner."

"Are you hard for me now?"

"Of *course*! I have been since you told me you were wet. Now it's getting downright painful."

"Will you touch it?"

"Now? You...you want to hear me?"

"God yes," I gasped into the phone. "I'm so turned on I could pass out right now. Just the thought of you stroking it is about to make me come."

I heard rustling in the background, which I assumed was him freeing himself from his underwear. "Do you want me, Eden?"

"So much...want to feel you...inside me." I was so close. Just knowing that he was joining in with me was shoving me toward the edge.

"Fuck!" he gritted through his teeth. "Are you wet for me, baby?"

"My fingers are drenched. I'm so close." For a moment the only thing I could hear was his ragged breathing. "What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking that I need to fuck you. Hard. And as often as possible."

"Oh, *yesssss....*" I was just about done for. I could tell from the way his panting was picking up and the sounds of motion in the background that he was getting close, too. He started whimpering and talking faster, his voice completely desperate.

"I've wanted you for so long... I need you... I love everything about you so much—I'm going to die if I don't feel you soon."

"I feel the same way about you!" I cried, my body beginning to shudder.

"Oh, God, I'm gonna come..."

"Tell me that you're mine, Eden," he moaned. "I need to hear you say it."

"Yours, Logan!" I wailed, exploding around my fingers and seeing stars behind my eyes. "All yours!"

"Fuck!" He made a deep guttural sound, and I could just picture the thick spurts of liquid hitting his stomach.

We both lay there for a moment, our panting and gasping the only sounds. When I finally had the energy to speak, it was a breathless "Wow."

"Exactly," he chuckled.

"Imagine what it will be like when we do it for real."

"Believe me, I already do—too much."

"I doubt it's more than I do, Logan. And there's no such thing as too much."

We talked about mundane things for a few more minutes, both of our bodies too exhausted for anything else. When I let out a loud yawn, he followed it up with one of his own.

"I suppose I should let you get to sleep," I said, my eyes feeling heavy.

"Thank you for sharing that with me."

"No, thank *you*. That was so sexy. Any time you want to call me up and do that, I'm game."

"I'll remember that," I laughed. "Good night, baby." *I love you*.

"Good night, my beautiful girl. I'll see you in the morning."

"I can't wait." *I love you*.

"Bye," he whispered.

"Bye." I love you.

I hit the button to end the call and placed it on the bedside table. Rolling onto my side, I stared at my phone with a huge smile on my face. As I drifted off to sleep, only one thought kept repeating in my mind.

I love you.

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## **Chapter 19**

The next day after school, I had Logan drive me to the grocery store so I could pick up ingredients for dinner. I still had a few things at home that I could have made, but since it was my first time cooking for Logan, I really wanted to make him spaghetti and garlic bread. It was my favorite thing to cook and I wanted to share that with him.

Plus, Dad loved it. I didn't think it would hurt to butter him up a little bit and make sure he stayed in a good mood over dinner.

As we walked around the store with our grocery cart, slowly adding more items to buy, I couldn't help but notice how *official* we looked. Anyone who didn't know us might even mistake us for a young married couple.

Instead of making me cringe, the thought made those damn butterflies come back.

"I think that's all I need for dinner," I said, looking down into the cart.

"Would you be terribly offended if I just bought a pie for dessert?"

"You're kidding me, right?" Logan laughed.

"What? I'd rather make my own dessert, but I don't have a lot of time on a weekday."

"You're already going through so much trouble for me. Why would I mind a store-bought pie? You could slap a Twix bar down on the table and call it dessert and I'd be just fine."

I could feel my cheeks heating as I looked up at him in embarrassment. "I guess I just wanted to impress you with my cooking," I said shyly.

He chuckled lightly and put his arm around my waist, pulling me into to his side. "Eden, I don't think I could handle much more of you impressing me." He leaned closer and whispered, "Yesterday just about did me in." I laughed and shoved at him, starting to walk away when he stopped me. "No, really—I don't need any more convincing of what a perfect girlfriend you are."

"I'm not perfect," I said, rolling my eyes at him. "Not by a long shot."

"But you're perfect for *me*," he said softly, bending over to kiss me gently on the lips.

"All right," I gasped as he pulled away, breathless for so many reasons.

"We need to get the hell out of here before I pass out and you need to call the paramedics."

"If you pass out, I can always just give you mouth to mouth," he smirked.

"That is *so* not helping right now!"

I ran over to the refrigerated section and grabbed a French Silk pie for dessert, ignoring the fluttering in my heart as we made our way to the checkout counter. We argued briefly over who would pay for the food until I finally caved and let him buy the pie, which he claimed would make him feel like he was actually contributing to dinner instead of just showing up to eat.

As soon as we got back to my house I started browning the meat for the sauce and boiling a huge pot of water for the noodles.

"Is there something I can do to help?" Logan asked as I was preheating the oven for the garlic bread.

"Well, is there anything you're good at in the kitchen?" I didn't mean it to be as suggestive as it sounded, but with the way our minds worked around each other lately he was bound to take it that way.

"I don't know. You haven't let me find that out yet," he purred, backing me up against the counter. "But I'd be happy to figure it out any time you like." He leaned over and kissed the base of my neck, sending shivers all the way down my spine.

"Don't start something we can't finish. I'll end up burning dinner and Dad will be cranky. Then Mom will come home to no food and a cranky husband."

"Okay, I'll be good," he sighed, thinking for a moment before adding, "My mom always makes me cut up the vegetables for different things she makes."

"Then I'll have you start the salad, how does that sound?"

"Lead the way," he smiled.

Since I had limited counter space while I was cooking, I sat him down at the kitchen table with a cutting board and a knife.

"Here, work on this cucumber and green pepper, and when that's done
I'll have you cut up a tomato. When you're done with each one you can
throw them in this big bowl, and we'll mix in the lettuce at the end."

"Sure thing, boss lady," he said, saluting me and throwing me a wink. I laughed and gave him my own one-finger salute before returning to my sauce.

We worked together like that for a while, talking comfortably about school and our friends. We both agreed that it might be fun to have a couple's night soon so we could all hang out, and Logan suggested Devon's basement.

"You know, he's got that awesome rec room. We could watch a movie or play some games."

"That sounds fun, but don't you think they'd want to go out? Like into the Cities or something?"

"Well, I'm sure they would, but Devon hardly ever has any cash, and I know it embarrasses him whenever Zoe pays."

"So not only can he not get a car or a job, but he doesn't get an allowance, either?"

"Exactly," he frowned. "His parents will buy him just about anything he asks for, which is how he got that awesome rec room to begin with and the home gym we use when we work out, but they don't like to let him out of their sight if they can help it."

"Man, what is their deal?" I asked, stopping my stirring to take a quick taste.

"I don't know," Logan sighed, slicing up a ripe tomato. "I think they have this crazy idea that if they are way overprotective, then there's no way he can ever get hurt."

"Uh, have they *seen* him? I mean, he *is* their son. The boy is massive! What could ever hurt him?"

"Well...non-Hodgkin's lymphoma."

I blinked a few times, allowing what he'd said to sink in completely.

"Devon has *cancer*?!" I dropped my spoon on the counter and sat down next to him at the table.

"He *did*...but not anymore."

I reached out and grabbed his hand. "What happened?"

I watched as Logan thought back, and I could practically see his eyes clouding over with the pain of the memory.

"It was near the end of fifth grade, so we must have been around eleven years old. I remember one day after gym class, Devon started having trouble breathing and was wheezing badly, but everyone just thought that he had asthma. So, the doctor gave him an inhaler and told him to take it easy. Then he started losing weight like crazy and not wanting to eat anything. When they finally found out what it was, his parents felt horrible for not catching it sooner."

"There's no way they could have known."

"I know, but they've always blamed themselves. Anyway, he had to have surgery and chemo. He was all bald and puffy and pasty that summer, too tired to do anything."

"God, that's so hard to picture," I said, envisioning the brawny young man that I knew now.

"Tell me about it." He was quiet for a moment before looking up at me.

"I can't tell you what that was like, thinking that my best friend could die any day. There were days I hated him for it, for scaring me like that. I still feel guilty about it."

"I can imagine," I whispered, reaching up and stroking his cheek. "But they were able to get it all?" "Yeah, thank God. He's made a full recovery. At first he was so frail and weak, but the moment he found out that he was going to make it, it was like someone just flipped a switch. He started forcing himself to build up his strength, exercising and lifting weights. It's like he thought that the stronger he got, the less chance he had of ever being weak like that again. He was practically obsessed until he started dating Zoe. She's calmed him down a lot."

"I'm glad."

"So anyway, all of that has made his parents extremely overprotective. They've spent the last seven years completely paranoid that something is going to happen to their little boy, while all he wants to do is forget that it ever happened. Jeez, you should have heard the fights they had about him starting football!" Logan rolled his eyes. "I think they would have covered him in bubble wrap if they could."

"I had no idea about any of this. Amy and Zoe haven't said a word."

"Devon doesn't like to talk about it. *Ever*. We avoid the subject so much that they probably haven't even thought to mention it."

"Well, I won't ever bring it up." I squeezed his hand again. "Thank you for telling me."

"Of course," he said, his voice thick and dry from the painful memories.

"Now that I can finally talk to you," he smiled slowly, "I feel like I could

tell you anything."

"Same here," I whispered. Well, I felt like I could tell him *almost* anything. There were still the three little words that kept circling through my mind whenever I was with him. The ones I was terrified to say out loud.

I love you.

I leaned over and kissed him softly, letting my body say what my voice would not.

I love you. I love you. I love you.

\* \* \*

"Wow, something smells good," my dad said as he escorted my mother through the door almost an hour later. As he hung up their jackets, Mom noticed us setting the table.

"Hello there," she said with a warm smile. Holding out her hand, she approached us. "You must be Logan."

He set down the silverware he was holding and turned to her nervously, taking her hand. "Yes, ma'am—Mrs. Foster."

"Maggie will be fine, Logan," she chuckled. "And you can call my husband Eric."

Dad chose that moment to enter the room, so I took the opportunity to jump in. "Dad, this is Logan Black. Logan, this is my dad, if you hadn't already figured that out."

"It's very nice to meet you, sir—uh, Eric."

"Same here," he smiled, shaking Logan's hand firmly. When he let go, he turned to face me. "So Eden, how long 'til dinner's on? I was gonna run your mother's luggage upstairs and change my clothes."

"I was just getting ready to start plating, so hurry up."

"Back in a flash." He hurried up the stairs to their room as Mom crossed the kitchen to get a drink, leaving me to assess how traumatized Logan was.

"You doin' okay?" I whispered.

"So far," he sighed. "I didn't realize he would be so big."

"What do you mean?"

"He just seems really...imposing."

"I think you're actually taller by an inch or two. He had to look up at you."

"That can't be right."

"I swear," I laughed.

"Then why did I feel so tiny next to him?"

"Because you're nervous," I whispered. I saw my mother hovering near the edge of the kitchen so I changed the subject. "Logan, would you do me a favor and take this salad out to the dining room for me?"

"Sure," he replied, happy to have something to do.

I went to Mom and gave her a hug. "How was your trip?" I asked, kissing her on the cheek as I pulled away.

"Oh, more of the same, sweetie." She peered over my shoulder at Logan through the doorway. "He's *cute*," she said in a dramatic stage whisper. "I love those glasses. And according to your father, he's also *special*?" She raised her eyebrow at me. I peeked toward Logan and nodded quickly in reply before he came back into the room. She would no doubt be expecting more details later.

Just then my dad returned and we all took our seats around the dining room table. I began dishing out noodles and sauce and asked Mom to pass the garlic bread around.

"This looks great, Eden," my dad said as I handed him his plate.

"Sure does, honey," my mom added. "So Logan, Eric tells me your father and his father used to work together?"

"That's right," he answered, helping himself to some of the salad as they talked about his father's practice. She grilled him more than I did on our first date, but she seemed to like what she heard.

"This is all wonderful," Logan said after a few minutes, smiling at me.

"Thank you," I blushed. "But I can't take credit for the salad. That looks like some expert chopping there, Logan."

"Well, I considered making it my career, but chopping for hire just isn't as lucrative as I'd hoped. So now it's only a hobby," he said sadly, causing me to burst into laughter.

"Yes, I'm sure you'll be greatly missed in the salad industry," I snorted.

"My God," Dad sighed, "He's just as big of a smart-ass as you are, isn't he?"

"Of course! Why do you think I like him so much?"

Both our faces went up in flames, but Dad just shook his head and laughed, leaning over his plate to take a bite. We were all quiet while we ate, enjoying our dinner.

Thank God the food wasn't horrible. I was worried that I might have put in too much garlic or not enough salt, but it seemed okay.

"This is really delicious!" Logan moaned, slurping up a noodle. I watched as he flicked his tongue out of the corner of his mouth to catch a drop of sauce.

I shook myself out of my lustful daze and smiled shyly. "Thank you."

"He's right, Eden. I think this is your best spaghetti yet." Wow. High praise from Dad. After a few more minutes of eating, he turned his attention toward our guest. "So tell me, Logan, have you decided where you're going to school next year?"

"Nothing official yet, sir—I mean, Eric. There have been a few places I've looked into, but I'll probably end up going to the University of Chicago. Going away to school sounds nice, but I don't really want to be too far away. If there's ever an emergency, I'd like to be able to just jump in the car and come home, rather than needing a plane ticket. Three hours is far enough."

"That makes sense," Dad nodded. "That's the same reason Eden was considering the very same school. Of course, that was before we moved, so I don't know if she's changed her mind. She was even closer to it then. But my sister Emma still lives there, so she'd have family right next door."

"Really?" Logan shot me a questioning glance. I simply smiled and nodded, not wanting to interrupt the conversation.

Dad continued with his questions, not even noticing our exchange. "Where were some of the other schools you considered?"

"There was a school down in Florida that I looked into."

"Florida? Why so far?"

"Well, we have family there and we go there once or twice a year, so I figured that it wouldn't feel quite so far away since I'm familiar with the area."

"Hmm," my dad grunted around a large bite of garlic bread, nodding that he understood. "Do you follow any sports?" he asked after he'd finished swallowing. Mom and I shot a worried look at each other across the table. Dad had reached the big question.

"Not closely," Logan replied with a loud gulp. "I keep my eye on the score whenever Chicago is playing, but that's about it."

"Well, at least your priorities are straight," he nodded. He didn't care that Logan wasn't crazy about sports, as long as he wasn't rooting for the wrong team.

The conversation continued at a comfortable pace and I was extremely proud of both my parents for making Logan feel welcome. When we were finished with our pie, they excused themselves, heading upstairs to finish unpacking Mom's luggage and "rest for a while." I didn't know who they thought they were fooling.

Logan offered to help me clear the table, and as we rinsed off the dishes he took that opportunity to talk to me in private.

"How do you think that went?" he whispered.

"Pretty good, I think. They seem to like you."

When we were finished, he glanced at the clock and sighed. "I suppose I'd better get going."

"You can't stay?"

"I still have some homework to finish, and I just know my mother is dying for a report on how tonight went."

"Okay," I smiled. "I'll walk you out." We grabbed our coats and headed toward the door. "I'm going to walk Logan to his car, Dad," I called out as I saw him walking down the stairs, trying to tuck his shirt back in quickly.

"Leaving so soon?" he asked.

"Yeah, I have some homework to finish. Thank you for having me, sir. It was nice to meet you."

"Same here, Logan," Dad said, stopping at the bottom of the stairs. "I'm sure I'll see you around again soon."

Logan glanced at me and smiled before looking back at Dad. "I'm sure you will, sir."

I followed him out to his car, looking back at the house to make sure that we weren't being watched. "Thank you for this, Logan. I feel so much better now that you know each other."

"I do, too. It's like it's more official or something. Is that crazy?"

"No, not at all. That's exactly what I was thinking."

He opened up his car door and turned around to look at me. "Now you just have to meet *my* parents."

"Sunday, right?"

"That's right," he smiled. "Still not backing out?"

"No way. If you can face my parents, I can face yours."

He laughed, leaning down to kiss me softly. "Can I call you later?" he whispered against my lips.

"Of course," I smiled. "I like hearing your voice before I go to sleep."

"Me, too. I just wish you were lying there next to me instead of on the phone. I like having you as close to me as possible for as long as I can."

"I feel the same way." *And I love you*.

"I'm sorry, but I really should get going. The faster I get my work done, the faster I can call you."

"Then what are you waiting for? Get the hell out of here." I shoved him into his car, making him laugh again. He stopped me from backing away, pulling me to him for another searing kiss.

"Good-bye for now, beautiful girl."

"Bye. I'll talk to you soon."

And I love you so much it hurts!

I watched as he pulled out of the drive, waving to him before he drove away. I walked slowly back into the house, wondering how the hell I was going to keep from blurting out how I felt when it was obviously much too early for such heavy words. I didn't want to drive him away and I didn't want to make him feel like he had to say it back.

When I got back inside, I hung up my coat and headed for the stairs. I intended to pick up a book to calm my nerves, but Dad intercepted me.

"Heading upstairs?"

"Yeah," I replied, turning around to face him. "Thought I might read or something. Is Mom already asleep?"

"Yep. She was pretty worn out after her flight." I knew that wasn't *all* she was worn out from and it probably should have grossed me out, but I liked that my parents were still affectionate with each other after so many years and not afraid to show it.

"Thanks for tonight, Dad. I really appreciate it."

"No problem. He's a good kid." I was about to turn back around when he spoke again. "He's the one, isn't he?"

The room was dead silent for a heartbeat. "I think so...but it's still early," I answered, feeling my face get hot. I was startled at his question. "How can you tell?"

"Because he looks at you like you hung the moon, and you look at him the exact same way." He grew quiet for a moment before adding, "Your mother still looks at me that way. It's the best feeling in the world."

I smiled at the reminder of how much they still loved each other.

"I should get to bed. 'Night, Dad."

"'Night, kiddo."

I climbed a few steps before he called up to me one more time. "Does he know yet?"

I stopped dead in my tracks, feeling my heart drop into my stomach. "No," I said shakily.

"Why not?"

"Because it's still too early. I don't want to send him packing."

"Well, just because something happened fast doesn't mean it didn't happen. I was a goner the first time I saw your mother, and I was about your age, too." He let that sink in before continuing. "Don't keep that boy waiting too long. Chances are he feels exactly the same and is terrified to let you know."

"Thanks, Dad. I'll keep that in mind."

I headed upstairs feeling stranger than ever, having just received love advice from my father, who only yesterday had been terrified at the mere thought of me dating anyone.

Parents were weird sometimes.

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## **Chapter 20**

The rest of the week flew by with tons of flirting and stolen kisses. We didn't have much alone time since Mom was home in the afternoons and we didn't want to go to his place until I'd met his parents, but Logan still came in for a while when he could. We would do homework together or watch TV with Mom for a bit before he had to go home for dinner.

It was becoming downright comfortable.

There were times when I felt like we had known each other forever. We could talk on the phone for hours without realizing it, and always had more to say. It would blow my mind every time I had to remind myself that we had only started really talking less than a week ago.

Logan was quickly becoming the best friend I'd ever had.

But that didn't change the fact that I constantly wanted to rip his clothes off and attack him.

Our next opportunity to be alone didn't present itself until Saturday night. We'd managed to arrange a movie night at Devon's house like Logan suggested, and all three couples got together to argue over what movies we wanted to watch and cuddle in the dark.

I don't know why we argued—the movie we put in was essentially ignored. We talked and laughed over it and paid way more attention to our

significant others.

It started out innocently enough. Unlike Amy and Zoe, I actually *tried* to watch the movie, cuddled up next to Logan on the couch—until he took my hand in the dark. It was a simple, sweet gesture that made me feel all warm and cozy inside. Before long he began stroking the tips of his fingers inside my palm in slow, lazy circles.

I don't know what it was about that touch, but it sent flames straight through me. I felt like he was touching all of my most intimate places at once, and he was only holding my hand. With each drag of his skin against my own, a violent shiver would run down my spine, settling between my legs and making me throb.

"Uh, sorry, guys, but we need to get going," I blurted out, sitting up suddenly.

"But why?" Amy whined. "The movie's not even over yet!"

"I lost track of the time...and I promised my parents that I wouldn't be out too late." I glanced over at Logan, who was looking at me with concern. As far as he knew, I still had over two hours before I needed to be home.

"Dude, that sucks," Owen mumbled around a mouthful of Cheetos.

Devon didn't have anything to add, since he'd already fallen asleep with his head in Zoe's lap. But Zoe smiled at me knowingly, running her fingers through his hair. "Eden, you never said anything about leaving so—"

"Give her a break, Amy," Zoe interrupted, shooting her a look.

Amy blinked a few times before looking back at me, then over at Logan. "Oh, uh, yeah. Sure. When you gotta go, you gotta go, I guess."

"Thanks for understanding. Sorry to bail so early." I stood up, happy that Logan was at my side in an instant. We made our way to the stairs, and when we were halfway up I heard Amy's voice following after me.

"You better call me tomorrow!"

"Uh huh," I said noncommittally. I knew she would be fishing for details and I was making no promises.

We slipped quietly out the side door by the garage, and just as Logan started to ask me if something was wrong I shoved him up against the side of the house and covered his lips with my own. He responded quickly, letting out that irresistible whimper and wrapping his large hands around my waist to pull me even tighter against him.

I kissed him until I was lightheaded, sliding my tongue over and around his, loving the way he tasted. Our bodies squeezed together more firmly, rubbing back and forth until I could feel his hardness growing against my stomach.

I broke away from him with a loud gasp. "Take me somewhere!"

"Oh, God...where?" he panted, kissing and nipping at the base of my neck.

"Anywhere we can be alone... I've missed you so much this week. I need to touch you."

Logan thought for a moment. "I think I know a place," he said quickly, grabbing my arm and dragging me to the car.

We drove for a while, heading outside of town. I had no idea where we were going, but as long as we were alone together I couldn't care less. After about ten minutes he pulled off the main highway, traveling slowly down a few back roads until he reached what looked like a small clearing in the trees.

"Wow, what is this place?" I asked, looking out the window.

"Devon and I found it when we were little. We were in Cub Scouts together, and we used to go hiking all the time." He paused and looked at me. "Before he got sick, that is. After that, we never really made the time for it. I remembered it was here one day a few years ago and started coming out here by myself sometimes. It's a great place to get away from the world for a while."

"I can imagine. It's not that far from the highway, but it feels like we're in the middle of nowhere."

"You should see this place in the spring," he smiled. "The field fills up with all these wildflowers."

"It sounds beautiful," I sighed. I was hit with a fuzzy memory, so vague that it could have been mistaken for a dream. "Wait a minute," I said, looking around and picturing wildflowers everywhere. "I think I've been here before...only it was warmer."

"Really? When was that?"

I closed my eyes and thought harder, conjuring up the image of my aunt Lily with an enormous baby belly. She was waddling around slowly and spreading a blanket on the ground for a picnic. I could remember her laughing at something; I think I was trying to do cartwheels for her. I had brought her an armful of wildflowers and we'd sat together while she taught me how to weave the stems together to make a necklace. I could remember putting my little, chubby fingers on her swollen belly and feeling a baby kick for the first time.

"Eden, why don't you give this necklace to Uncle Ethan?" she'd asked me as she gathered up some of the trash on the blanket.

I'd run it over to him excitedly, hopping up and down next to his portable easel until he put down his paintbrush and smiled at me brightly. I remember thinking that he had pretty eyes; they were a light jade-green that

I'd never seen before. It wasn't until later that I realized mine were the same color.

"Hey there, princess! What have you got there?"

"It's a present for you," I'd said proudly. "We made it!"

"Well, then you better put it on me," he'd said with a laugh, bending down. When he'd pulled back with his new makeshift lei in place, he'd glanced over at his wife before smiling again. "Did Aunt Lily tell you that this is our special hiding place?" When I shook my head he'd continued. "Yep, I used to bring her here a lot. But I think it's been at least a good seven months since we've been here. Isn't that about right, Lil?" he called out to her. She never answered him, though. She had only blushed.

"I think I was about five," I answered Logan. "My uncle used to paint here. They brought me with them once."

"And here I thought I was bringing you to my secret place. Turns out you found it first." He leaned over and kissed me sweetly, making my lips tingle as he pulled away.

"What made you think to bring me out here?" I asked.

"Well, you said you wanted to be alone. This was the first place that came to mind."

"So...now that you have me out here, what do you intend to do with me?" I said with a smirk.

"I have absolutely no idea," he laughed, kissing me again. After a moment he pulled back. "Oh, wait!" Before I knew it, he had jumped out and popped the trunk, disappearing behind the back of the car. I heard some rustling around, then the loud *slam* of the trunk closing. The next thing I knew, he was opening my door and holding out a folded blanket. "Want to watch the stars with me?"

"Won't it be cold?"

"Yeah, but I thought we could keep each other warm." The smile he gave me was the most amazing mixture of innocence and seduction.

"Sounds good to me," I laughed, reaching out to take his offered hand.

We walked a small distance from the car before he spread the blanket down on the ground. Stretching out next to each other, we looked up at the night sky for a while in silence.

"Eden," he finally sighed, turning to face me. "I can't tell you how happy I am with you. I know we've only been together for a week, but it's been the best week of my life."

"I feel the same way. It's like I've known you forever." After another minute of silence went by, I scooted closer until we were pressed against each other. "I'm a little chilly," I said with a smile. "Think you can warm me up?"

"I can sure as hell try," he growled, rolling us both over until he had me pinned beneath him.

The weight of him on top of me felt amazing. So amazing, in fact, that I couldn't help letting out a deep moan and wrapping my legs around his waist. We kissed deeply, picking up where we'd left off by the garage.

"Eden!" he gasped between kisses. "Oh, God, Eden, I want you so much!" He pushed and rubbed himself against me as we moved, making me dizzy with need.

"Oh...oh yes," I panted, feeling his hands roaming over my body until he shoved my shirt out of the way to kiss and bite my nipples through the lace of my bra.

"I *need*, Eden," he groaned, slipping his hands into the waist of my jeans and unbuttoning them. "I need to make you feel good. Let me make you come."

I didn't say anything; I couldn't. I was too choked up by all the emotions rocketing through me at once. I was so in love with this boy that it hurt, and I wanted him so badly at the moment that I couldn't see straight. So I simply nodded and lifted my hips, allowing him to pull my jeans down my legs.

"All the way off?" I finally squeaked out when he started yanking at my shoes.

"Yes," he grunted. "I want to see you. I don't want anything in the way." He propped himself up on his side next to me, watching with wonder as his fingers slipped inside my slick folds. "Fuck!" He clenched his eyes shut for a second, taking a few deep breaths. "You're so wet for me," he gritted through his teeth.

He kissed me again, sliding his tongue into my mouth at the same time he slid two long fingers inside me. I moaned loudly, unable to stop myself from grinding into his hand.

"Does that feel good?" he whispered against my lips, pumping his fingers harder a few times before sitting up to watch more closely. I felt him slide them back out slowly as he watched, only to use those same fingers to spread me wide open. "Oh, God," he groaned, hunching over me until his ragged breath was in my ear. "Your pussy is so beautiful, baby."

"Really?"

"Fuck yes!" He panted a few times, his head buried in my neck as he continued to stroke my flesh slowly. "Can I...can I kiss you there?"

"You mean now? *Here*?" I had been so close, my body beginning to shake, but his request shoved me back from the edge.

"Please, Eden, you promised me that I could...and I need to taste you so badly!"

"Okay," I said timidly, trying to hide my embarrassment. The smile that broke out on his face was enormous. As he repositioned himself down between my legs, I couldn't help but give him one last reminder. "I've never done this before, so don't ask me if you're doing it right. I have no idea."

"Relax... I just want to make you feel good," he soothed. I watched as he spread me wide again, leaning forward to give me an experience I'd never had. The closer he got, the harder it was to keep my panicked thoughts from racing.

*Oh, God, did I shave today?* 

What if he thinks it stinks?

What if he thinks it tastes disgusting?

What if he hates it so much that he's too traumatized to ever go near a vagina again?

Every silly worry I could think of flew right out the window at the first stroke of his tongue on my wet flesh.

"Holy shit!" I cried out and bucked my hips, causing him to stop for a moment.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked, a worried tone in his voice.

"No!" I gasped. "God, Logan...keep going!"

He groaned loudly and buried his face between my legs, lapping at me with long, broad strokes until I thought I might pass out from the pleasure. He took his time exploring different things, seeing how I responded.

"Close...so close!"

Logan growled against me, sending the most delicious vibrations through my body, then redoubled his efforts until I was a shaking, screaming mess. The orgasm that tore through me was more intense than anything I had ever felt before, and it seemed to go on forever. When it was finally done, Logan collapsed against my stomach, peppering my belly with lazy kisses.

I was gasping and panting, trying to catch my breath as I ran my fingers through his hair. "Oh my God, Logan... That was—that was so—holy shit!"

"I did okay?" he asked shyly, looking up at me for reassurance.

"That was *so* much more than *okay*. That was unbelievable! How did you know what to do?" I knew he was a natural, but this was insane.

He blushed and looked away. "I've, uh...seen my fair share of porn, I guess."

"Well, you're a quick study," I giggled. As we laid there together in the dark, I knew I had to ask. "Was that okay for you? I mean...did you mind doing that?"

"Are you kidding me? That was so hot!" He kissed my stomach a few more times before looking up at me with fire in his eyes. "You taste so good, baby. You were driving me crazy with all that screaming." He smiled sheepishly. "I almost came. I'm still so hard it hurts."

"Oh! Well, come here then," I said, pulling him up and shoving him over until he was lying on his back.

"No, Eden you don't have to—"

"Like hell I don't," I interrupted. "There's no way I can see you this turned on and not help out." Actually, just the thought of him being so hard for me had me getting hot all over again. I straddled his lap, still naked from the waist down as I unzipped his jeans and bit back a whimper when his erection sprang free.

"Oh, God, Eden," he moaned, gripping onto my bare hips almost painfully. "I can't take seeing you like that—on top of me with your pants off. It's too much."

"Why? Don't you want me like this?"

"Shit...you don't know how much I've fantasized about you riding me. I can't wait until you think we're ready."

At that very moment, something clicked inside me.

The look on his face was so honest, so accepting. He was laying himself bare before me, owning his need, yet still perfectly fine with letting me set

the pace.

I wanted him.

Now.

I'd wanted to wait for the perfect time—when it felt like we'd known each other long enough—but there was no time more perfect than right now, while he was here with me. We had the rest of our lives to learn each other, but tonight was when we would start.

"Do you have a condom?" I whispered.

Logan's eyes grew as big as saucers before he started scrambling for the jeans that were shoved down around his hips. "Pocket," he grunted, shifting and moving until he produced a small foil packet with trembling fingers.

I took it from him, looking him in the eye as I went to tear it open. "Is this okay now?" I asked, giving him one last chance to back out if he wasn't ready.

"Oh, God." He gulped loudly, then nodded his head for me to continue.

I ripped open the foil and placed the slippery circle of latex around the tip of his erection, slowly unrolling it down his length.

"Why are we doing this now?" Logan asked, his voice shaking as I rose above him to place him at my entrance. His eyes were trained between my legs, just waiting for me to move. "I thought you wanted to wait."

"I wanted to wait for the right time...and I've never needed you more than I do now. What could be more right than that?"

"I can't believe this is really happening," he gasped, watching as I started to sink down on him slowly. I threw my head back as I took him in, feeling his girth stretching me as I moved.

It was glorious.

"Logan," I moaned. When he was in all the way to the hilt I sat still for a moment, trying to adjust to the feeling of him inside me. I hadn't done anything in months and there was certainly a lot more to get used to than there had been with Riley.

"JesusfuckingChrist!" he shouted, digging his fingers into my hips. "It's so...God, Eden, I never knew—so tight—so *good*."

I leaned over and kissed him gently, trying to calm him down, but the shift in angles caused us both to moan and hum. "Move with me," I whispered, rocking into him. I slid back on his length a bit, only to sink down again more firmly.

"Oh, God!" he grunted, bucking his hips sharply in return. "I'm not going to last very long. It's too much."

"I'm not worried about that... Just enjoy it, baby."

"But I want you to come, too."

"Touch me," I moaned, leaning back and bringing his hand between us to where we were joined. He didn't need to be told what to do after that, slipping his thumb against me to rub in tight circles as I started to grind against him harder. "Yessss," I hissed. It had never been so good for me and we weren't even done yet.

"Oh fuck!" He sounded almost scared the closer he got, as if he were afraid that his impending orgasm might very well kill him. "I'm so deep inside you." He began pumping his hips faster underneath me, rubbing me just the right way as he moved.

I felt the tremors starting in my legs before they began to spread through my entire body. "*Logan*," I whimpered. "I'm so close."

"God, baby...yes! Come for me, please!"

Hearing him begging me like that was the sexiest thing I had ever heard. I quickly went toppling over the edge, and I eagerly took him right over with me, milking him dry.

"Oh, God, I can feel you!" he cried, pounding into me almost painfully as we both found our release. It was my turn to collapse on his chest, letting him hold me there in the moonlight before the stickiness between our bodies reminded us that we needed to move and clean up.

Neither of us spoke above a whisper after that until when we returned to the car, afraid to ruin the magic that we'd felt under the stars. "Eden, that was...amazing doesn't begin to describe it." His voice was so soft and reverent, it almost made me cry. "Thank you."

"No, Logan." I stopped him, leaning over to kiss him sweetly. "Thank *you* for saving that for me. I'm so happy that you thought I was worth sharing it with."

"You're more than worth it," he smiled, pulling back to kiss my hand.

"You're my beautiful girl. I want you for as long as you'll have me."

I didn't say a word for fear of crying, so I kissed him again and laid my head on his shoulder as he drove me home, the words I really wanted to say playing over and over again in my mind.

*How does* forever *sound?* 

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## **Chapter 21**

On Sunday afternoon, I returned home from the grocery store to find that not only had I forgotten my cellphone at home on the kitchen counter, but that I had also missed five calls from Amy.

Groaning loudly, I put away the biscuit dough and butter I bought to make monkey bread, then stomped upstairs to face my doom.

"Where the hell have you been?" she answered on the first ring. "I've been calling you all day!"

"I was only gone for an hour, Amy."

"Oh. Well it *felt* like all day."

"What do you want?" I was only stalling. I knew damn well what she wanted.

"Spill it, girl."

I sighed loudly, sitting on the edge of my bed. "I already told you. My lips are sealed."

"Oh come *on*!" she whined. "I don't expect a blow-by-blow, but give me something to work with, here! I *know* you two did something."

"So what if we did? What does it matter to you?" It came out harsher than I'd intended, and I could practically hear her flinch over the phone.

"I'm sorry, I just... I'm just so happy for you guys, and I'm dying to know if you're working out as well as we all hoped you would." Her voice was so tiny that I instantly felt like an asshole for snapping at her.

"Amy, I'm sorry if I sounded harsh. It's just that I still don't feel comfortable sharing too much personal stuff. I'm not a prude, I just don't want to betray Logan's trust. Let us have our privacy for now, okay? I'm sure that before long we'll both be talking openly with you guys, but I need to know what's safe to talk about and what isn't."

"I understand. I guess I'm just curious if we picked the right guy for your list, you know? I can't wait to jump up and down and say 'I told you so."

"Well, I can definitely confirm that one. You told me so. Logan's right for me. In fact, he's just fucking perfect." I felt the heat rising in my face at my admission, but I had to talk to someone about how I was feeling.

"Yay! Told you so!" I could tell from the stomping sounds in the background that she was literally jumping up and down.

"Are you about done?"

"For now, I guess," she laughed. "So are you telling me that you're falling for him?"

"Amy, I don't know what to do. I'm falling so hard for him that I can't even believe it myself."

"Why do you make it sound like a bad thing? Isn't that the best possible outcome?"

"Yeah, *eventually*. But this fast? Won't that scare him away? Every time I'm with him I have to fight to keep from telling him."

"Eden," she sighed. "I understand your concern, but you have to think about this. Logan's not afraid of commitment. And from the looks of things, he's just as crazy about you as you are about him. I'm sure he would be thrilled to hear how you feel."

"My dad said that he's probably too nervous to admit that he feels the same way."

"Wow...your *dad* said that?" She was quiet for a moment while she thought. "I gotta say, I think he's right on this one. You're the experienced one here. Logan is following your lead and playing the rest by ear. That boy has probably been in love with you for months, but he doesn't want you to think he's only saying it because you're his first...well, his first *everything*."

"I think that's part of the problem. I'm his first. Emphasis on the *first*. That's going to lead to seconds and thirds, and so on."

"You don't think he could cheat on you?"

"No, nothing like that. I trust him. But I'm not naïve enough to think that two kids who hook up in high school have any chance of staying together in this day and age."

"True, the odds aren't the best, but things are different here. It's a small town. People marry their high school sweethearts and have families and settle down."

"And then they resent them for the rest of their lives for getting in the way of their dreams."

"Wow, aren't we a negative Nancy today?" Amy jabbed. "If you go into something expecting the worst, that's all you're ever going to get."

"I'm not expecting the worst, I'm trying to be practical. It doesn't make sense for me to love him so soon. And I do, Amy," I choked back a sob. "I love him so much it hurts!"

"Then tell him, Eden. Give him the chance to surprise you."

"I'm scared," I whispered. "I don't want to lose him. Just the thought of being without him terrifies me."

"Tell him that, too."

"You make it sound so simple."

"Because it is. He's not the kind of guy you play games with or try to outsmart. He isn't looking to hit it and quit it. Everything that you're feeling, he's feeling, too...for the very first time. He's probably really overwhelmed by it all. Cut him some slack."

"You're right," I sighed. "I need to just suck it up and tell him."

"Exactly."

"I should probably get going. I still have a few things to do before he picks me up for dinner with his parents."

"Ooh, is that tonight?"

"Yeah, and I was already nervous about it. Now I need to think about telling him I love him, too," I groaned.

"Come on, Eden. You have balls of steel and you know it. There's nothing you can't do if you put your mind to it."

"Thanks for the pep talk," I laughed. "And thanks for listening, Amy."

"Anytime."

We said our good-byes and I let her go, heading back downstairs to think about things while I baked my monkey bread. I was going to take it over to Logan's house for dinner, but I had to make two batches because I knew that if Dad smelled all of that melted cinnamon and there was none left here to eat, he would be *extremely* grouchy.

I was just taking my second batch of bread out of the oven when my phone ringing behind me on the counter startled me.

I chuckled at the new ringtone I'd selected, "Whatta Man" by Salt N' Pepa, knowing when I chose it that it fit Logan perfectly.

"Hey, baby," I smiled into the phone. No matter how nervous the idea of telling him how I felt made me, it didn't change the fact that talking to Logan made my heart sing.

"Hey, yourself," he purred. Okay, maybe he said it normally, but his voice was so sexy and velvety to me that it sounded like a purr. "That was some email you sent me today," he laughed.

"Oh, did you like that? Yeah, I thought you might appreciate it after last night." When I woke up that morning I had emailed him the link to the video for "I Just Had Sex" by The Lonely Island with nothing but the message, "Feel like singing this today?" It was a goofy and silly song, but I really wanted to make him laugh and let him know that it was okay to talk about it and be lighthearted.

"Yeah, it was great. Except you made me hum that damn thing all day."

"I'm sure your good mood had nothing to do with it."

"Well, you might have a point there. I *have* had a smile plastered on my face all day."

"I hope I had something to do with that," I teased.

"You had everything to do with that," he growled in return.

"What time are you picking me up?"

"That's why I was calling. Is six thirty okay? That will give us time to get back to my house and make the introductions before dinner at seven."

"That's fine. I should let you go, though, or I won't have time to get cleaned up."

"All right, but don't go overboard. We're not doing anything fancy."

"I know, I just want to look my best."

"Okay...but you always look perfect to me."

"God, stop saying those things or we'll never get off the phone and I'll be late!"

"I'll let you go for now, but I'll be there soon."

"Can't wait!"

"Bye, sweetheart."

"Bye," I whispered. He ended the call, and I felt his absence tugging at my heartstrings. My body craved contact with him so badly that it even hurt to stop talking on the phone.

God, I really had it bad.

\* \* \*

Later that night, as we pulled into Logan's driveway, I was hit with a sudden wave of anxiety. When he saw my face, he turned off the car and grabbed my hand.

"Hey, what's going on in there? Tell me what's wrong."

"I'm sorry, I don't know what's got into me. I feel like I should have dressed better, or brought something more high class. How could you let me

bring *monkey bread*?" I knew I sounded like a panicked idiot, but that's exactly how I was starting to feel. I really wanted his parents to like me and it felt like everything was riding on this first impression.

"Eden, it's just my mom and dad. They're not snobs. And I know for a fact that my dad *loves* monkey bread." He smiled at me, immediately calming my nerves.

"I'm sorry I wigged out," I whispered after I'd calmed down a bit. "I guess I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop, you know? There's no way you could be this perfect."

"I'm not. I have a crippling fear of talking to beautiful girls who get paired up with me in zoology." He shot me a wink, and I giggled.

"You're talking to me now," I smiled.

"True, but if you weren't so patient with me, we might never have happened."

"That's a scary thought."

"Tell me about it. I thank my lucky stars every night that I have you in my life." He leaned over and kissed me gently, making my heart leap.

"Well, I'm just glad that you didn't puke on me, because I don't know if I could have gotten over that so quickly."

"Oh, God," he groaned, turning beet red. "You heard about that?" "Before the party."

"And you *still* let me kiss you? Wow, you're braver than I thought," he chuckled.

"I had faith in you," I said quietly, kissing him again.

"I'm happy to hear it," he hummed against my lips. "So please, just have faith in my family. They're going to love you just as much as—uh...as if you were their own." His words faltered a bit and he got a frightened look in his eye, but it was gone before I could mention it. I just chalked it up to jitters from bringing a girlfriend home for the first time, which made me feel like an inconsiderate ass for not thinking of *his* feelings before I lost it over my own.

I told myself to get a grip. They couldn't be all bad, or Logan wouldn't be so sweet and thoughtful.

Hoping to reassure him, I smiled brightly and let him walk me to the front door. Once we were inside, he took my coat and gave me a quick tour of the main floor before leading me upstairs to the next level, which housed the kitchen and dining room.

The house was immaculate, to say the least, but decorated with so much warmth and love that I immediately felt comfortable. I scanned over the family photos on the wall as we walked up the stairs. There were so many happy moments captured in time. I realized Logan easily could have

thought I was strange to cherish one old, ratty picture when he had so many to choose from. It was yet another reason I knew he was special.

He just got me.

When I had almost reached the landing I stopped and turned back quickly, a small photo catching my eye.

"Oh my God," I chuckled. "That's the spelling bee, isn't it?"

"Yeah," he grumbled. "I hate that picture."

A tiny, nine-year-old Logan stared back at me, holding up a huge trophy with the biggest smile on his face. The little suit he wore was even more adorable than I had pictured, and his smile made me wonder how every girl in his class hadn't fallen all over him even at that age.

"Aw, how can you hate it?" I cooed. "You were so cute!"

"You wouldn't be saying that if they'd taken the picture five minutes later."

"I get it," I sighed. "It's a bad reminder. But now you have to stop hating it, because it's about the most precious thing I've ever seen."

"I'll tolerate it, how about that?"

"Deal."

We both laughed as we rounded the corner, and I had to bite back another gasp at the most professional looking kitchen I'd ever seen. A beautiful woman with shoulder-length, chestnut hair was pulling a large pan

out of the oven, and when her brilliant gray eyes looked up to meet mine over the countertop, I had absolutely no doubt who she was.

"Oh! You startled me," she said, holding her hand over her chest as she ran around the counter to get a better look at me. "I didn't hear you two come in!"

"Sorry about that," Logan apologized. He wrapped his arm around my shoulders and pulled me into his side. "Mom, may I introduce—"

"Wait!" she interrupted. "Where's your father?"

"Uh...his study, I guess."

"Douglas!" she yelled. "I'm so sorry, dear," she said, patting me on the forearm. "I know he wouldn't want to miss this. *Douglas*!" she shouted, running to the doorway. I heard the sound of a masculine voice, but I couldn't tell what it said. "No, *not* five more minutes! Logan's back, so get your ass out here, mister!"

I heard more clearly, "Well, why didn't you say so?" just as a handsome middle-aged man stepped into the room. He looked like an older, blonder, blue-eyed Logan. I glanced quickly between father and son and couldn't help thinking that if Logan aged anything like his parents had, he was only going to get hotter.

How was that even *possible*?

"All right, sweetheart," his mother said, dragging his father over to stand next to her in front of us. "Please continue."

"As I was *saying*," he laughed, squeezing me to him more tightly. "Mom, Dad... I'd like you to meet Eden. Eden, these are my parents: Douglas and Nora."

"It's nice to finally meet you, Dr. Black, Mrs. Black." I held out my hand nervously for them to shake.

"None of that *doctor* business." His dad waved off the statement like a bug in his face. "Please, call me Douglas. No need to call me doctor unless you're having a medical emergency."

"Same goes for me," his mother added. "Call me Nora."

"Okay," I smiled, already feeling welcome. "Thank you so much for inviting me. Your home is so lovely."

"Why, thank you. What have you got there?" Nora asked, nodding at the large foil-covered plate I was holding.

"Oh, well... I wanted to make something to bring...you know, for dinner...as a thank you." I stumbled over my words, starting to feel silly again for what I'd chosen to make, until Logan jumped in and rescued me.

"Eden made monkey bread, Dad!"

Douglas got a sort of glazed, dreamy look in his eye for a moment before he turned to Logan and said, "You have my permission to marry her, son." We all laughed as Nora took the plate from me. "Why don't you come into the kitchen with me while they set the table, Eden, and we'll find some place to put this until later? It isn't safe out here near *him*." I followed her into the other room, watching as she uncovered the dish and took a closer look at it. "Oh my, this is just beautiful! I don't think we've had any decent monkey bread in years. I've never had the patience to make it—the few times I've tried have all ended badly."

"I'm sure it wasn't that bad," I smiled.

"No, it's true! The last time, we needed the fire extinguisher." I couldn't help laughing as she described an incident in which all of the cinnamon glaze had boiled over the edge of the Bundt pan onto the bottom of the oven, quickly catching on fire. As I calmed down from my fit of giggles, I noticed she was staring at me closely. "You're such a beautiful girl," Nora said wistfully.

"Thank you."

"I can see why Logan is so taken with you."

"Well I'm...quite taken with him, too," I replied, unable to stop my blush.

"Yes, I can see that, as well." She sighed loudly before leaning back against the counter and crossing her arms. "Listen, Eden..."

Oh, God, here it comes. She's going to tell me that she knows I touched her precious little baby last night; that I'm a dirty slut who never should have come here.

"I just wanted to thank you for everything you've done for Logan."

"Excuse me?" I knew she couldn't be thanking me for sleeping with her son, so I figured that I better stop freaking out and pay attention.

"I know that he can be pretty awkward around girls—especially girls he likes—but he's been so different this past week, like he's coming out of his shell. I know that wouldn't have happened without your help." She reached up and wiped a tear from the corner of her eye. "I'm just happy that someone finally realizes how special my son is."

Touched by her honesty, I gave her some of mine. "Believe me, I do. I find more things to like about him every day."

"Good," she nodded, collecting herself. "That's good. Well, I guess we should get this food out there before they start whining. Care to help me carry in a few dishes?"

"Of course." I grabbed a large salad bowl and a basket of breadsticks and followed Nora into the dining room.

"I hope you don't mind lasagna," she said as she set the large casserole pan on the table. "I figured since you made spaghetti for Logan last week that Italian was a safe choice." "Yes, I love it, thank you." I found myself quickly hoping that tonight would go much better than the *last* time I'd eaten lasagna and thrown it up all over Riley's driveway.

"Is there any Italian in your family, Eden?" Douglas asked as we all dished up our meal.

"Dad!" Logan jumped in protectively. "What difference does it make?"

"No difference at all. I just wondered since she seems to like cooking Italian food."

"Yes, actually," I answered, "On my mother's side. Her mother's parents were from Sicily."

"Oh really? That's interesting."

"Well, I don't know about interesting. I never knew them, and the rest of me is just good old-fashioned North American mutt—a little bit of everything."

"I like that," Douglas nodded, chewing on his food thoughtfully.

Once our conversation started flowing, I realized it was very similar to dinner with my parents. They asked about my college plans and seemed genuinely happy that I might be attending the same school as Logan in the fall. I gave them some background info on me, trying to leave out anything that might be *too* embarrassing.

"And you two have science together?" Douglas asked before shoveling in his third helping of monkey bread.

"Zoology, Dad," Logan corrected him.

"Ah, that's right! Lab partners," he said with a wink, causing Logan to cough and blush. "I remember your first day at school, Eden, now that I think about it."

"Dad," Logan groaned.

"This one came home all moon-eyed and jabbering about his new lab partner, 'the prettiest girl I've ever seen' I think he said."

"Kill me now," Logan mumbled beside me.

I reached over underneath the table and squeezed his thigh lightly to let him know that he didn't need to feel embarrassed. "I think that's sweet," I said, smiling over at my adorable boyfriend.

"Me, too," sighed Nora.

After dinner I helped clear the table, but Nora shooed us out of the kitchen when she started loading up the dishwasher. "Go show her around, Logan. I'm sure there are more interesting things for our guest to do than help me clean."

"Okay. Thanks, Mom." He smiled brightly and took my hand, leading me up yet another flight of stairs. We walked down a dark hallway until we came to a closed door at the very end. "Where are we?" I asked, feeling like I needed to whisper in the dark.

Logan opened the door and flicked on the light switch before turning back to look down at me. When our eyes met, I noticed a new fire in his gaze that hadn't been there during dinner.

"My room."

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## **Chapter 22**

"This is your *bedroom*?" I spun around slowly, unable to process the luxury surrounding me.

"Yeah," he answered with a shrug, closing the door behind us.

"It's so...wow."

"I told you, it looks like a catalog ad, doesn't it? Totally sterile."

"No, it's beautiful." I looked around at the elegant decorations and the tasteful throw pillows on his leather couch. He had a *leather couch* in his room. "I think it's all so lovely...but I agree that I don't see much of you in here. Where are the posters and all the video game strategy guides?"

"Well, I've never really been a huge fan of posters, but..." Logan smiled widely and walked over to the oak bookshelf, pointing to the perfectly organized and alphabetized how-to guides.

"God, you're a neat freak, aren't you?" I laughed.

"No. Well, maybe a little bit." He blushed, and I couldn't resist walking over and hugging him tightly.

"Hey, that's nothing to be embarrassed about, as long as you don't expect me to be the same way."

"Never!" he scoffed. "I have no interest in dating someone who's a carbon copy of me. I love all our differences... I love learning all your little

quirks." He leaned down and pecked me on the cheek. "I also love that you don't mind that I have some, too."

"Mind? I love it! I was starting to think that there was no way you could be real—you were too perfect. Believe it or not, having a few flaws makes you even sexier to me."

"Oh *really*?" he drawled out, finishing with a suggestive wiggle of his eyebrows. I felt his hands slide down my back until he was cupping my ass, pulling me up against him.

"Really," I whispered, pulling him down for a searing kiss. Logan wasted no time seeking entrance with the tip of his tongue, and before I knew it I was lightheaded from how sensual the kiss had become.

"Wait a minute," I gasped, stumbling against him as I pulled away, needing a moment to collect myself before I threw him down and had my way with him while his parents were downstairs.

"Is something wrong?" he panted.

"I just can't believe how good you're getting at that."

"Oh," he said with a smile. "That's good, though, right?"

"Yeah, except when your parents are downstairs! What if your mom busts in on us?"

"Eden, she wouldn't do that," he laughed. "She's always respected my privacy."

"Yeah, but that was before you were alone in your room with your girlfriend."

"I'm not saying she won't try to check in on us, but she'll be more subtle than that."

"Even so, maybe we shouldn't jump into anything." I pulled away reluctantly and began to walk around his room, looking for anything to distract me from his delicious lips. After a few minutes I turned back to him and pouted. "How am I supposed to get inside your head when you don't have anything personal in here?"

"Oh, well if personal is what you want, let me welcome you to my inner sanctum." He grabbed my hand and took me over to a large computer desk in the corner. I watched as he pulled out the padded office chair and sat down, then swiveled it around and smiled up at me. "Come on," he said, patting his lap.

I sat down on his thigh, squealing as he spun us back around to face the desk. Logan wrapped an arm around my waist to anchor me to him while he fired up his laptop.

"Why aren't you using that computer?" I asked, pointing to the intimidating desktop with blinking lights and gizmos plugged into it.

"That's really just for gaming and some of my graphic design projects.

The hard drive is so full of programs that I don't really like to waste any

space on frivolous stuff."

"So you have an extra computer just for fun?"

"Yeah, but that's not really uncommon for computer geeks like me. Some guys have three or four monitors going at once with every little extra thing you could imagine...along with two or three laptops."

"That sounds a little excessive."

"I guess it can be, but sometimes it's necessary depending on what you like to do with them."

"So what do you like to do with yours?"

"Well, I like to use my laptop for storing all of my pictures and video files. I also use it for screwing around on the internet. By the way, why aren't you on Facebook?"

"Ugh, you, too?" I groaned. "People have been asking me that for years, but I just can't get into the idea."

"What bothers you about it?"

"I guess the thought of so many people spying on what I'm doing just weirds me out. Plus, ever since I saw *The Social Network*, I just want to punch Mark Zuckerberg in the junk. If I join now, it's like he wins."

"Ha! I never thought of it like that," he laughed. "But even his exgirlfriend who hated him joined by the end of the movie."

"Yeah, and that shows what a sell out she was. Here's this total asshole who shits on you so bad that you can't bear to be in the same room with him ever again, and yet you have no problem joining his website because it's what everyone else is doing? Pfft, *sell out*."

"Wow, you've really given this a lot of thought."

"Fucking Zuckerberg," I grumbled.

"Well, if you can put aside the megalomaniac who designed it, Facebook can be lots of fun. As for the privacy stuff, it all depends on what you put into it. If you post every personal thing that ever happened to you, then you are kind of inviting the world into your life. But if you just think about what you put out there and set up your preferences right, there are rarely any problems."

I crossed my arms over my chest and arched an eyebrow. "You're not going to drop it, are you?"

He looked up at me over his sexy glasses with the biggest pair of puppy dog eyes I had ever seen. "I was just so excited to change my status to *in a relationship*, but it feels one-sided if I can't share it with you. Every time I'm on there I keep finding things I want to tag you in, but then I remember that I can't." He went in for the kill after that, sticking out his perfect bottom lip in a pout that would put any toddler to shame.

How was I supposed to defend myself against that?

"How many times has that look gotten you what you wanted?" I asked.

"I've lost count." He winked quickly before sticking his lip out even farther and batting his long lashes.

"All right, fine!" I huffed, throwing my hands up in frustration. "Next time you come over you can help me set up an account, okay?"

"Really?" He broke into a widest grin. When I nodded my confirmation, he let out a triumphant whoop and squeezed me tightly. "It's a date, baby."

"All right, all right, you've won," I sighed dramatically. "The least you can do is show me how it works. Give me a mini Facebook tour."

"Okay, but I should really send out a quick email first."

"To who?"

"Mark Zuckerberg—I need to let him know he just won."

"You little shit!" I laughed, slapping him on the arm. "Don't push it, mister. I haven't officially joined yet."

"All right, I'll be good," he chuckled, opening up his laptop. When I noticed his desktop picture my heart jumped into my throat.

"Oh my God, it's us!" He'd uploaded the picture he took of us on my bed and made it his background image.

"Well, yeah," he said quietly, the tips of his ears turning pink. "Now every time I turn on my computer it makes me smile."

I couldn't say anything after that, so I just leaned down and kissed him softly.

When we came back up for air he pulled up his Facebook page and showed me around, teaching me how to navigate through the site easily. I had to hand it to him—Logan actually managed to get me interested.

After about ten minutes of letting me goof around and type out messages to our friends from his account, I heard a loud stomping on the stairs.

"That'll be Mom," Logan sighed.

"But she's so loud. I thought you said she'd be subtle."

"I said she'd be subtle about checking up on us. That's her way of announcing that she's coming. She doesn't want to actually *catch* us doing anything, she just wants to keep us from going too far."

"Ah... I guess that makes sense."

A moment later, a light tap sounded at the door. "Logan?" Her muffled voice called out.

"It's open." He swiveled the chair around to face her, but wouldn't let me move off his lap to another chair.

"Hey, kids," she said, glancing around the room. "Are you guys okay up here? Did you need anything to drink?"

"No, we're good," he replied, and I could hear him biting back a chuckle.

"Whatcha doin'?" Her eyes landed on us in the chair before moving on again quickly.

"I was just showing Eden around Facebook a bit. I think I've got her convinced to join."

"Oh, really?" Her face lit up. "That's wonderful! You'll have to friend me when you do."

"Uh...okay," I said slowly, feeling like I was in *The Twilight Zone*.

"Well, I'll let you get back to it, then." She smiled at us before backing out of the room, pulling the door with her. I saw her stop and think for a moment, glancing at the door and then back at us, before she shrugged and closed it the rest of the way.

"That should buy us at least another thirty minutes, if not longer," Logan laughed.

"I can't believe she didn't leave the door open."

"It was close there for a minute, but I think she's trying to show me that she trusts me."

"And you intend on abusing that trust, don't you?"

"Duh," he said with a smirk before pulling my head down to his for another passionate kiss. When I pulled away, I blurted out the one thing that I couldn't stop thinking.

"Your mom's on Facebook?"

"Yeah. She's totally addicted to *Trivia Crack*."

"She seems pretty cool. They both do, actually."

"I'm glad you like them. I was hoping you would all get along."

"Me, too." I kissed him again before turning back to his computer. "So, what else do you have on this thing?"

"I have a ton of pictures that I've scanned and uploaded. Here, let me show you a few from when we were all younger." He started flipping through photos, pulling them from a bunch of different and perfectly organized files. Each folder had a title, like *Sixth Grade Field Trip* or *Cub Scouts*. There were some of him and Devon in their uniforms receiving badges, and a few later ones that showed Logan sitting next to a very pale, very bald little Devon.

"That's when he was sick," he whispered.

"He was lucky to have you there for him." It was so easy to see the brotherly love that they shared, even at such a young age.

"He was my best friend. Where else would I have been?" The fact that he said it so matter-of-factly, as if there had never been any other option in his mind, just proved what a loving person he was.

"A lot of kids might have bailed over something so scary and intense."

He simply shrugged and looked back at the computer, as if that had never been an option. He wasn't one of those kids and that was that.

We continued looking through folders for a while until I noticed that there was a certain folder he kept avoiding.

"What's that one?" I asked, already forming my suspicions. "The one marked *Homework*."

"Homework, obviously," he said with a nervous hitch in his voice.

"I call bullshit," I said after a minute of staring him down. "You labeled all your other folders way better than that. If that was really homework, you would have a folder for each class."

He turned beet red, knowing he was busted.

"You might as well just admit that it's porn before I tickle you until you pee yourself." When he continued to resist me I made good on my promise, attacking his sides with my fingertips.

"Stop!" he laughed. "God, I give up! Just stop!"

I relented, looking down at him expectantly. "Well?"

"Well what?"

"Let me see."

"No way!"

"Come on... I want to see what you like." I leaned closer and whispered against his lips, "Show me what turns you on." I flicked the tip of my tongue over his mouth before pulling away.

"God," he grunted. "Anything you do turns me on."

"Good, but you know that's not what I'm talking about. You said last night that you've watched a lot. I want to see some of the things that taught you so well."

He gulped loudly and slowly nodded, opening up the file to reveal literally *hundreds* of pictures and video clips.

"Wow!" I gasped, leaning over closer to get a better look at some of the tiny thumbnails. "What are some of your favorites?"

"Uh... I like this one a lot." He went straight to a specific file and double clicked to open it up. It was a still photo of a naked, busty brunette with her head thrown back in what looked like ecstasy as a man buried his face between her legs. She was grabbing his hair and pulling him farther into her, totally owning her lusty need.

"That's... kind of hot," I whispered.

"You're not offended?"

"No, not at all. This is actually kind of sensual...artistic, even. Maybe it's because it's in black and white, or maybe it's because she isn't some plastic looking Barbie doll. She looks like a real woman. Her boobs even look real. Spectacular, but real."

Logan blinked at me a few times, dumbfounded.

"What?" I finally asked, feeling awkward under his scrutiny.

"I can't believe that you just listed off every single thing I love about that picture."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I can't stand watching those cookie cutter bleach blondes with boobs so huge, they look like they'll rip through their skin. Everything about them looks so fake. I've never understood the appeal."

"Show me more," I said, smiling wickedly.

He clicked through a few more, every single one of them depicting a beautiful woman receiving oral.

"I'm starting to detect a theme here," I chuckled, feeling very warm at the memory of him doing that exact thing to me the night before.

"I've always been fascinated by it," he said with a blush. "It just looks so raw...so passionate."

"Is that all you have? More of the same?"

"No, these are just some of my favorites."

"Show me a few others, then." I couldn't believe how eager I was.

Logan sharing this dirty side of himself was driving me crazy.

"Here's a clip I like," he said, pressing play and turning the sound way down. It was a top-down view of a man getting a blow job, as if the guy on the receiving end was holding the camera. It was fairly amateur in quality,

but that probably made it easier to picture yourself as the lucky guy in question.

We both watched in silence while the young woman bobbed and slurped up and down his length, the only sound in the room our ragged breathing. I shifted around on his lap a bit to get more comfortable, spreading my legs open until they dangled over the sides of his thighs. I leaned back against his chest to rest my head on his shoulder as we watched, and there was no mistaking the prominent bulge digging into my lower back.

"I watched this a lot after you did that to me last week," he said with a gravelly voice. I could feel the hot bursts of air against my neck as he spoke.

"Did you like it?" I couldn't help asking.

"I fucking *loved* it," he grunted, shifting his hips against me. "Now every time I watch this clip I feel the heat of your mouth on me, the wetness of your tongue." He started trailing his fingers up and down my arms, sending tingles running through my entire body.

"I loved doing that to you," I admitted. "You were so sexy, and you tasted so good."

"Fuck," he gritted through his teeth, squeezing his eyes shut for a moment as he breathed roughly through his nose. "I keep thinking about

how you tasted, too," he whispered, flicking his tongue against the side of my neck. "I want to do that again and again."

"I just might let you," I purred, arching my back when I felt his large hands close over my breasts. "Show me another one," I whined as the current clip ended. He let go of my breasts\ only long enough to click play and then he was right back to cupping me, squeezing more firmly as the video started.

This one was the first to show actual sex, and it was another top-down view of a man kneeling between a woman's legs while she lay on the bed looking up at him. The man had zoomed in on the initial penetration, but after that panned up to capture his beautiful partner's loving gaze. This didn't look like a cheesy porn; it looked like a personal tape made by a couple in love.

The camera eventually panned down again to film him sliding in and out of her body, her moisture causing him to glisten in the light as he moved.

"I finally know what that feels like," Logan growled in my ear, sliding one of his hands down to cup me between my legs. It was almost embarrassing how badly I was throbbing for him. "How it feels to be inside you...how tight your body squeezes me."

"Oh, God," I whimpered. He started rubbing his hand over me slowly, rocking his hips into my backside.

He continued with his verbal assault on my senses. "I want you again so bad it hurts. I want you like this video...looking down at you like that. Would you like that?"

I couldn't talk, only squeak and nod. We both watched as the man pulled out and flipped her over onto her hands and knees, repositioning himself to enter her from behind.

"God... I want you like *that*, too," Logan moaned. "I want to see you like that in front of me...looking back at me over your shoulder." I whimpered again more loudly, and before I knew it both of his hands were unbuttoning my jeans. "She better stay the hell downstairs for a while," he muttered to himself as he slipped a hand inside my underwear.

I had to bite my lip to keep from crying out when he sank his fingers into my wetness. He grunted again and paused for a moment, then started swirling and stroking my flesh like he'd been doing it for years and knew just where I needed to feel him most. Both of our eyes were glued to his monitor, watching as the man began pounding into the woman more roughly. I noticed that as his tempo increased, so did Logan's. He started applying more pressure, making it feel so much more intense. His other hand gripped my breast again, squeezing almost to the point of pain—but it felt so good.

"So wet...so fucking wet," he muttered, his breathing choppy. Before I knew what I was doing, I had slipped my hands behind me, between our bodies. It was awkward and cramped, but if I moved just the right way I could reach the button on his jeans. Once I popped it open, I shoved my hand inside, finding him hot and pulsing for me.

"Oh...yes!" he groaned, bucking his hips.

It was too awkward of a position for me to do much more than grip him, but grip him I did. He thrust up into my hand while rubbing me furiously, neither of our eyes straying from the sight on his screen.

"That's me," he panted. "That's me inside you, fucking you so hard. Do you like that, baby?"

"Yes...God, yes!"

I could feel the tremors starting in my legs, signaling the approach of a powerful orgasm. From the way Logan was shaking underneath me, he wasn't far off, either. We watched as the man thrust a few more times, pulling out to pump his seed all over his lover's backside. The sight made me snap, something about the primal nature of it sending me over the edge violently.

I buried my face in his neck as best I could and tried to swallow my screams as I exploded around his fingers. Hearing me was too much for

Logan, and soon he was grunting through his own release, spurting hot fluid up my forearm.

Luckily I got the worst of it, our clothing miraculously spared from the fallout. When we were both recovered enough to process a logical thought, he grabbed a box of tissues and handed it to me.

"Here...sorry about that."

"Don't be. I thought it was hot as hell." I stood up and wiped off my arm, leaning over to kiss him soundly on the lips. "Do you have somewhere I could wash up?"

"Yeah, I have a bathroom through there," he said, nodding at a door on the opposite side of the room.

"Thanks."

I tidied up and washed away the incriminating evidence. When I came back out, I was surprised to find that Logan was talking to his mother, who must have come in about two seconds after I went into the bathroom.

Holy shit, that was close!

"Oh, there you are, Eden!" she smiled. "I was just reminding Logan that it's a school night, and he should probably get you home pretty soon. I'd hate to make your parents think that sort of thing didn't matter to us."

"We were just about to leave, Mom," Logan jumped in, noticing my deer-in-headlights look.

"Uh...yeah," I agreed, finally getting over my shock at seeing Nora there. "We should get going. Thank you so much again for having me over. It was a lovely dinner."

"No, thank you for coming, dear." She smiled warmly and opened her arms, wrapping me in a hug. "I hope you'll be back again soon."

"I'd like that a lot."

We stopped and said good-bye to Douglas on the way out, and he thanked me again for the monkey bread as he dished up yet another serving. Once we were in the safety of Logan's car we both let out huge sighs of relief and thanked our lucky stars that we hadn't been caught a few minutes earlier.

When we pulled up to my house I noticed that my mom and dad weren't back from their own date, which meant that we had a few more minutes of privacy.

As I looked over at my beautiful, sweet, tenderhearted boyfriend, I felt an enormous surge of emotion well up inside my chest.

Oh, God—this was it.

"Logan? Uh...we need to talk."

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# **Chapter 23**

Logan's eyes grew huge behind his lenses. "Is something wrong?" he asked, gulping loudly. "You were so quiet on the ride over, and now you're acting funny."

"I'm not trying to act funny," I said quietly, hating the way my stomach was doing somersaults. "There's just...something I need to tell you, and I don't think I can put it off any longer."

"What is it?" he asked stiffly, shifting his gaze to stare straight out the window. At first I thought he was looking at the rain that had begun to fall, but as I watched him I realized he wasn't focused on anything. "Eden?" he croaked, still not looking at me. "Please, just say it."

I knew I was making him nervous, but every time I tried to open my mouth the words were choked off by fear. "I'm afraid to," I finally managed, my voice nothing more than a whisper.

The silence between us was intensified by a loud boom of thunder outside, followed by the echoing din of a sudden downpour.

"You've made up your mind; you might as well just get it over with."
His voice sounded off, not angry as much as defeated.

I was ruining it. I felt so overwhelmed with emotion and the need to tell him how I felt, but my own crippling nerves were in the way. I was so

scared that it might make things awkward between us that I had spoiled the moment.

I knew I had to suck it up and do something—*anything*. Taking a deep breath, I squeezed my eyes shut tightly and forced myself to put it out there.

"I love you!" I blurted out loudly before jumping out of the car, making a mad dash through the rain toward my house. I heard his car door slamming only seconds later.

"Eden!" he shouted over the storm. "Wait!" Before I could turn around all the way, he was there, grabbing me and pulling me to him. "You love me? That's what you were trying to tell me? I thought you were going to dump me!"

"I'm sorry!" I cried, tears of embarrassment streaming down my face, mixing with the rain. "I didn't want to tell you like that. I got scared and I panicked and when I realized what you were thinking I just sort of spit it out."

Logan sighed and hugged me to him, both of us getting soaked in the middle of my front lawn. "Why the hell were you scared to tell me that?" he asked.

"Because!" I wailed, burying my face into his chest as it all came tumbling out. "It's too soon! I shouldn't love you this much already, I shouldn't *need* you like this, but I do! I need you so much that it hurts—it

hurts me. I can't even stand saying good-bye to you on the phone, it's like a giant hole is ripping open in my chest. That can't possibly be normal, right?"

"Who says?"

"Huh?" I blinked up at him, trying to focus on his eyes through his rainspattered glasses.

"Who says that's not normal for us? Maybe we're just intense like that—why does that make it wrong?"

"It doesn't *feel* wrong," I sobbed. "It feels perfect. That's why I was so afraid to tell you. I didn't want to scare you off and ruin things, or make you think you had to say it back if you aren't ready."

"If I wasn't *ready*?" he laughed. "Eden, I've been head over heels in love with you from the moment I laid eyes on you! It only gets stronger each day that we're together. I've been *dying* to tell you!"

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"Would you have believed me if I did? I'm the shy virgin who'd never even kissed a girl before. I figured you would blame my inexperience and blow me off if I said it first." He leaned down and covered my mouth with his own, our wet lips sliding against each other. "You don't know how hard it was to keep from saying it last night," he said, pulling back only far

enough to whisper against my lips, "after sharing something so beautiful with you."

"Me, too," I gasped, kissing him once more.

"Then tell me now," he said gruffly, sliding his hand up through my wet hair to anchor me in place. "Say it again."

"I love you, Logan," I sobbed even louder, only this time, it was with happy tears. "I love you so much it hurts! I don't ever want to be without you."

He claimed my lips hungrily, warming me up from the inside out. His kiss was possessive and predatory and full of need, and when he pulled back to look me in the eye, I saw nothing but sincerity in his gaze. "I love you, too, Eden. I don't care if you believe this or not, but I intend to love you for the rest of my life. I know I'm new to this and I know it's way too early to say this kind of stuff, but I can only tell you what's in my heart."

"Oh my God." I slumped against him, feeling as if my legs might give out at any moment. "You always take my breath away."

"Good. I hope I always do, because I'm not going anywhere." He smiled and kissed me again, sinking every ounce of emotion from the night into it. My lips were singing and my head was spinning and I don't think either of us felt the cold from the rain anymore.

I wanted to lose myself in everything he was saying and doing, but the pessimistic idiot inside my head had to get in one more question. "Logan," I panted, trying to catch my breath. "I believe you feel that way *now*, but how do you know that someone better won't come along? You haven't gone to college yet."

He chuckled, shaking his head. "I knew you would go there. Do you think that someone better will come along for *you*?"

"Well...no."

"Why?"

"Because you're it for me. You're all I want."

"Then why don't I get to say the same thing? I feel the exact same way about you."

"But you don't have anyone to compare me with. You haven't played the field at all."

"So it's a strike against me because I got lucky on the first try? Besides, it's not like you're a seasoned dating veteran or anything."

"I know, but what if you start to resent the fact that you've only been with one girl? What if I'm not enough for you?"

"Eden," he sighed, holding my face in his hands. "I love you, but sometimes you say the craziest shit. On what planet would you not be enough for me? I feel like I hit the million-dollar jackpot the very first time I played. Why would I keep trying to get something better? There *is* no better. I'm not stupid—I know how to cherish the treasure I've been given." He smiled and kissed my forehead before squeezing me tightly. "Besides, I should *thank* you for helping me avoid dating. I've never wanted that. All the guessing and head games and drama, it's never been attractive to me. I think people who romanticize that stuff are full of shit, because every time they break up it's all crying and whining and even more drama before they start all over again on the next one. I can't stand wasting time on lost causes."

"So you don't think I'm a lost cause?" I giggled, kissing the side of his neck and nipping it lightly.

"Never. You're my treasure, beautiful girl."

I pulled him down to meet my lips, feeling lighter than I had in months. I didn't care anymore if we were young and the odds were against us. Nothing that made me feel so alive and full of joy could be wrong, and I would fight to the death to keep it. It thrilled me to no end to hear that Logan and I were on the same page.

Our kiss turned more heated from the heightened emotions flowing through us. Logan let out that delicious whimper as our tongues slipped and tangled together, and by the time we parted, I felt dizzy with need. The rain continued to beat down on us as we stared at each other, both of us panting loudly.

"I love you, Eden," he said after a beat, his voice strained. "And I want you so badly right now that it's killing me. I want to be able to tell you how much I love you while I'm actually making love to you."

"I want that, too." I was surprised that I could sound so normal when it felt like my heart was going to explode. "But...my parents."

"I know," he sighed. "They'll be home soon. Why don't you go inside and dry off before I do something really stupid. We *will* continue this tomorrow." The last bit came out with a growl and it took all my strength not to mount him on my lawn in the rain.

"All right," I nodded, kissing him quickly. "Thank you for such an amazing night."

"Thank you for loving me," he whispered.

"Always, Logan." I stared into his beautiful eyes as I pledged myself.
"I'll love you always."

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# **Chapter 24**

I heard my parents coming home about twenty minutes later while I was drying off from my shower. By the time I dried my hair and was ready for bed, they were already coming up the stairs to their room. I opened my door to catch them on the landing.

"Hey," I said, startling them both.

"Oh, you're still up," my mom said, smiling warmly as my dad kissed her on the cheek and winked at me before heading into their room.

"Yeah, I'm heading to bed now. I was wondering if I could talk to you for a minute."

"Of course, sweetie. Eric, I'll be there in a minute," she called to my father before following me into my room and closing the door behind her. "What's up? How did the big dinner go?"

"Great. The Blacks were so welcoming and sweet. They seemed to really like me."

"Well, they'd be crazy not to, honey." She sat down next to me on the edge of my bed.

"Thanks." I debated for a moment about whether or not I should tell her what happened earlier, before I finally went for it. "I'm sure Dad told you about our discussion after Logan left the other night."

"About him being *the one*?" she said with a bright smile. "Of course he told me. I see it, too, but I didn't want to make you any more uncomfortable than I'm sure you already were, so I was hoping we'd talk about it when you were ready. Your father's not always as subtle," she said with a laugh.

"Well, I, uh...I told Logan. Dad was right—he was just waiting for me to tell him first."

"That's wonderful!" she gushed, hugging me tightly. "Oh, Eden... This is such an exciting time in your life. You deserve some happiness."

"You don't think we're too young?" I asked nervously. "That was my biggest concern."

"Sweetheart, just enjoy your youth," she said, stroking my hair when I rested my head on her shoulder again. "Yes, you're young. That doesn't make the love any less real. Now, if you were running away tonight to elope, I might have some concerns, but there is nothing wrong with finding the right partner early on. You have plenty of time to work everything else out. You still have college to get through before real life gets in the way, you know."

"You met Dad in college, right?"

"I did, and boy did he throw off my plans!" she laughed.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I was a freshman and excited about being away from home for the first time. I thought I would play the field and date tons of guys. I was ready for my wild partying days to start," she said with a wink. "But then I met your father at the first party I went to before classes even started." She sighed at the memory. "I had no intention of falling in love until I was much older. But one look at him, and that was it. We were inseparable after that and we got married about thirty seconds after graduating."

"And you never had any problems?"

"All couples have problems, Eden. We don't always agree and we fight like cats and dogs sometimes. But that's a big part of being married; learning how to deal with disagreements and respecting each other enough to listen and work it out. I think that's why the divorce rate is so damn high these days—people have no idea how to have a good fight anymore. Everyone thinks it's supposed to be rainbows and sunshine every single day and that any kind of fighting means they must be unhappy."

"I never thought of it like that."

"It's true," she continued. "Marriage is a partnership, and partnerships take work. If you're not willing to work then you're not ready to be married. Some people don't figure that out until they're much older, while others catch on pretty quickly." She smiled at me knowingly. "I have a feeling that you're going to fall into the latter category."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, you're very intelligent and mature more every day. I'd like to think that I had something to do with that. And it doesn't hurt that you're a Foster."

"Huh?" I said around a loud laugh.

"Come on, I'm sure you've heard your Grandma Barbara go on and on about the family's good luck with love. It's silly, but she thinks that once we find 'the one,' we give our hearts completely and never look back. We may date here and there before that, but once it's for real, we know it."

I thought about that for a moment before a memory struck me. "Wait, but wasn't Uncle Ethan practically married to someone else before Aunt Lily? How does that work?" It was rarely talked about but the reminder was right there in any of his old press clippings; pictures of Ethan and his glamorous manager girlfriend who, after nearly ten years, had run off with all his money and a younger artist.

"Yes, well," she coughed uncomfortably. "That was different. Your uncle admitted later that he never should have stayed with her for so long."

"Then why did he?"

"Well, that's a *very* long story, and not mine to share, but let's just say that the sum of it is that he never believed in 'the one.' He never thought it

would happen to him so he stayed with who he thought made sense at the time."

"And then he met Aunt Lily?"

"And then he met Aunt Lily," my mother said with a nod, smiling fondly at the memory. "Why don't you get some sleep? It's been a long, emotional day."

You could say that again.

"All right. Thanks, Mom." We hugged again and she waited while I got under the covers.

Leaning over next to me, she turned out my bedside lamp and whispered in the dark. "You're still taking your pills, though, right?

"Mom!" I gasped, not expecting the comment.

"Hey, just doing my job," she chuckled, backing out the door. "I love you, sweetie. Get some sleep." She closed the door behind her and I rolled over onto my side, feeling my face flame in the dark.

So much for keeping my sex life a secret.

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# **Chapter 25**

The next morning there was a knock on the door promptly at seven fifteen. Since I was still finishing my cereal in the kitchen, Mom answered it for me.

"Oh, hello there, Logan."

"Good morning, Mrs.—uh, Maggie."

"Eden's just finishing up her breakfast. Why don't you come in?"

"Thank you."

I heard footsteps coming into the room and when I looked up at him I nearly spit out my food. He looked so beautiful it twisted my heart in my chest. Logan stood before me wearing a light gray cardigan over a white button-up shirt and jeans. It wasn't so much the clothes that were killing me, although he looked sophisticated as hell, but more the look on his face.

He was positively glowing.

His gray eyes shone brightly behind his glasses as he smiled at me, his hair sticking up in its usual disarray. I felt myself starting to blush the moment I looked at him, remembering all of our admissions the night before.

"Good morning," he smiled warmly.

"Hi," I gushed as soon as I had swallowed my mouthful of cereal.

"Sorry, I'm almost done. I ran later than I expected."

"No problem, take your time." He walked over and hopped up on the counter opposite me, watching over me like a painfully beautiful guardian angel.

I shoveled the last few bites of food in my mouth and dumped out my milk in the sink. Not the most ladylike, I'm sure, but give me a break. I just wanted to get the hell out of that house and away from my mom so that I could grab Logan and kiss him and tell him I loved him over and over again.

"All ready," I said, grabbing my book bag.

"Okay," he smiled again, jumping off the counter and brushing off his jeans.

God, if I could only bottle that smile; I would be a multi-millionaire.

We both said good-bye to Mom and headed outside to Logan's car. Once we closed the doors I noticed Logan glancing back toward the house, making sure we weren't being watched. Before I knew what was happening, I was yanked halfway over the center console and kissed within an inch of sanity. His lips were strong and forceful, coaxing mine to open for him so that our tongues could get reacquainted. By the time he pulled away, I was gasping for air and more than a bit overheated.

"I've been waiting to do that since I left here last night," he panted against my mouth.

"Me too...yeah...a lot." So I wasn't the most eloquent speaker when addlebrained.

"I love you, my beautiful girl," he whispered, and I swear he was glowing even more than before.

"I love you, too." We did nothing but stare into each other's eyes for a moment, completely lost in the new world we'd created for ourselves. When I finally realized that time wasn't standing still, I reminded him that we needed to get to school.

"I know," he sighed, straightening up in his seat and starting the car. "To be honest, though, sitting through class is the last thing I want to do right now. I could care less about studying history and calculus today."

"Did you have something else in mind?" I asked suggestively as we made our way to the school.

He glanced at me sideways while he drove, growling low in his chest. "I'd rather be someplace private...studying your body and all the ways I can make it sing for me."

"Holy..." I took a deep breath to calm myself. "Great, now I'm totally useless for school, too."

"Sorry, baby," he chuckled. "At least we're in this together."

"Yeah, right," I grumbled, making him laugh even harder.

Somehow we both managed to make it through the day, even with two tests and a pop quiz between us. Logan certainly wasn't making it any easier on me, either. He kept shooting heated glances at me over lunch, and then during zoology he slid his trusty notebook over to me while I was trying to make myself pay attention to the lecture.

*Is your mom going to be home after school?* 

I shook my head in response, then reached over and added my own note.

Shopping with my grandma.

Logan's eyebrows shot up to his hairline before he regrouped and started writing again.

You promised I could help you start up a Facebook page.

I looked up at him, noticing that his eyes were dark with suggestion.

Then you should probably come over so we can get started on that.

Just what I was thinking.

We didn't say or write any more after that because the teacher started asking questions about the lecture, but I knew damn well we were both thinking about it. From that point on I couldn't stop staring at the clock, willing it to move faster.

By the time I was finally done with my last class I practically sprinted through the parking lot to Logan's car. He was somehow already waiting for me, leaning back against the car with his arms crossed, looking like the personification of sex.

"Have a nice day in school, dear?" he asked with a smirk.

"Shut up and get in the car," I laughed, bumping him out of the way with my hip so I could get in.

"Ooh, I love it when you're forceful," he teased, walking around to his side of the car.

We drove in silence back to my house, but the tension between us was so thick I could feel it charging the air around us with electricity. There were furtive glances and lingering touches, and every single movement seemed to hint at so much more to come.

The silence lasted until I closed my front door and locked it. We took one look at each other and that was it. Both of our bags dropped to the floor at the same time, and the next thing I knew I was jumping, wrapping my legs around his waist as he caught me and pinned me to the door, devouring my mouth. We were panting and moaning, our hands looking for anywhere and everywhere to touch.

"Upstairs!" I gasped. He whimpered and nodded, reaching down to grip my ass. He turned us around and made his way up the stairs, kissing and laughing with me the entire way. It was clumsy and slow, but he didn't seem to have the slightest inclination of putting me down until my bedroom was in sight.

When we were finally through the door, he kicked it closed behind him, kneeling on the edge of my bed and following me down when I toppled onto the mattress. I pulled him to me hungrily, wrapping my legs around him again and shoving my hands into his thick hair.

"Eden," he groaned. "I need you." He kissed and licked at my neck, following it up with small nibbles that lit my body on fire. "I need to feel you. Please let me make love to you."

"Yes...God yes!" I panted.

"Naked," he grunted, sliding his hands up to squeeze my breasts, flicking his thumbs over my nipples until they were straining against the fabric. "I need to feel you naked underneath me."

Logan rose to his knees as I sat up and pushed his sweater off his shoulders. While he was preoccupied with pulling his arms out of the sleeves, I started in on the buttons of his shirt.

"Did I tell you how delicious you look today?" I purred, kissing each new piece of exposed flesh as it was revealed.

"Really?" he squeaked when I circled my tongue around his nipple.

"Mm...so sexy. My little college professor."

"Huh?"

*Oops! Did I say that out loud?* 

"It's...sort of a glasses thing," I said with a blush. "I keep having this fantasy about you being a naughty professor, letting me earn a little...extra credit. I guess your outfit today just added to that."

I watched as his eyes fluttered, almost rolling back into his head before he groaned again. "You're *killing* me here, you know that, right?"

"Why?"

"Because now all I can think about is bending you over a desk and spanking you."

I bit his other nipple before leaning back to look up at him. "Now we have the same fantasy."

"Fuck!" He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment and when he opened them again they were blazing. "Oh, we are *definitely* revisiting this topic again." He looked down at me and shook his head. "Why the hell aren't you naked yet? Forget my clothes!"

He shrugged out of his shirt and pants and tossed them in the corner before pulling at the hem of my T-shirt and yanking it over my head. I reached back to unhook my bra while he unzipped my jeans and started pulling them down over my hips, taking my underwear with them. When I was completely naked he stood up and looked down at me, his eyes traveling the entire length of my body.

"My God...you're exquisite."

He quickly shed the rest of his clothes and climbed onto the bed. It was hard not to stare at his gorgeous erection—it bobbed whenever he moved—but I was trying not to be rude.

All right, I totally stared.

We both sighed as he covered my body with his own, finally pressed against each other with nothing in the way.

"I love you so much, Eden." He smiled down at me sweetly before kissing my lips with the softest pressure imaginable. "Let me love you everywhere."

I merely nodded, too overcome with emotion to speak. He started kissing his way down my body, paying close attention to my swollen nipples, licking and sucking each one until they were almost sore...but it felt amazing. When he had himself settled between my thighs, he pushed them open wide, groaning loudly as he used his fingers to spread me apart.

"Oh my God, baby...there's so much I couldn't see before when it was dark outside. You're so beautiful...so wet." He watched his fingers slide inside me as he spoke, two long, slender digits, stroking me deep. "Do you like that?" he asked when I moaned and bucked my hips.

"You know I do," I panted.

"I know what else you like, too." Without a moment's hesitation he buried his face between my legs, lapping at my wet folds while he pumped his fingers inside me. I propped myself up on my elbows so that I could look down at him, and seeing him like that was enough to send me straight over the edge. He didn't look like he was doing me a favor or suffering through it—he looked like he was in ecstasy.

"Oh, God!" I cried out, the tremors in my legs impossible to control. I grabbed the back of his head and held him to me while I ground myself against him, screaming out my release. He groaned loudly against me, sending vibrations through my body that triggered another orgasm.

When he rose up to look at me I could only manage to squeak out one word: "Now!" I grabbed and pulled at his arms, desperate to feel him on top of me again. Even though I had just experienced two spectacular orgasms, my body only felt more hollow than before, throbbing and aching to feel him inside me.

While he climbed back up onto his knees, I reached over to my bedside table and grabbed a condom from the drawer. I held it up to him and he shook his head, gesturing for me to do it.

"I can't concentrate on that right now," he gasped. "I'm so turned on I can't think straight. I didn't even remember needing one."

Honestly, I barely did, either. I almost ignored it altogether since I was on the pill, but I had promised him that we would always be cautious. The last thing we needed this early on was an accident.

Before I rolled the condom on I rose up and kissed his swollen tip, pulling away with a flick of my tongue.

"Christ, Eden!" he gasped. "Do you want me to come already?"

"Sorry," I giggled. "I couldn't resist. It's just so...perfect." I finished rolling the condom on and lay back on the bed. "Please, Logan," I whimpered. "I need you."

"God, baby...you don't know how long I've imagined this...you looking up at me like that." He grabbed himself and lined us up, staring down

between us as he rubbed the tip up and down my swollen folds. "*Fuck*, that's gorgeous," he grunted, slipping just inside me. He continued to watch as he slid in further, sinking all the way to the hilt.

I couldn't handle him being so far away from me for something that felt so intimate, so I pulled on his arms until he was covering me. "I need to feel you everywhere."

He smiled down at me as he slowly withdrew, thrusting back inside me more deeply. "Oh…oh, God…" The look on his face was almost pained. He actually looked scared that it felt so good. "It's so *intense*!"

I wrapped my arms around his back and hugged him to me, letting him know that we were experiencing it together. He buried his face in my neck, kissing me everywhere he could reach as he continued to thrust inside me.

"Yes... Oh, Logan, that feels so good," I moaned, rising up to meet him thrust for thrust.

"Oh, God, say my name again," he growled, speeding up his rhythm.

"Logan."

"Again!"

"Logan!"

"Yes, baby... God, you feel amazing!" He raised his head back far enough to look down at me. "I love you, Eden... I love you so much!"

"I love you, too." I reached up and pulled him back down so that I could kiss him, pouring every ounce of passion and love I was feeling into the kiss. I slid my hands down until I was gripping his ass, pulling him into me more roughly. I was the closest to euphoria I'd ever been, and suddenly I couldn't stop babbling. "I love you, Logan... I love everything about you... I love how you make me feel... oh, God, I love the way you're moving!"

"Yes!" He started rocking into me with more force, his movements becoming slightly erratic as my headboard began slamming into the wall. I wrapped my legs around his waist and held on for dear life, completely incoherent with the pleasure that rocketed through my body.

It was obvious that he was close, and let me just say that if I had ever thought any of his sounds were sexy before, they were nothing compared to how he sounded when he came. Sure, I had heard him come before, but there was something different about it when he was in control. It was more visceral...more intense...and sexy as hell. After a few final thrusts, Logan threw his head back and cried out his release. "*Eden*!"

Logan collapsed on top of me, rolling us sideways until he had pulled me over to lie on his chest. We were perfectly still for a while, taking the time to catch our breath as he stroked my hair.

"That was... God, everything I want to say sounds so sappy," he groaned.

"Hey, this is a perfect time for sappy," I said, kissing his chest.

"Okay, well... I had no idea that there was an actual feeling that could be as powerful as the love I feel for you, but that was it. There at the end... I felt like my heart was going to explode."

"I felt it, too," I whispered. "It was like all my love for you boiled up and over, and it was shooting out of every pore at once."

"Why do you think that is?" he asked. "I mean, the other night was amazing, but it wasn't like this."

"Probably for a few reasons," I said. "We were rushing, it was outside, and it was freezing—it's no wonder this was better. But I think what really made the difference is that we aren't holding back anymore."

"Who would have thought that saying a few words to each other could make such a big difference?"

"Well, maybe it doesn't for everyone. Who knows? I just know I love you."

Logan grabbed my chin and pulled me up for a sweet, tender kiss. "I love you, too. That's all that matters, beautiful girl."

"Forever," I whispered.

"Forever," he nodded, following it up with that glowing smile.

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# **Chapter 26**

"I wonder who invented the term *spooning*?" Logan mumbled into the back of my neck before he kissed it and pulled me even closer against him.

"Beats me," I sighed, relaxing into the warmth of his body. "They can call it whatever they want for all I care, as long as you keep snuggling with me like this."

"No problem," he chuckled.

We had cuddled together for a while before dozing a little bit. As amazing as our sex had been earlier, I was startled to realize that waking up in Logan's arms was almost better. I had never felt so cherished or special at that moment and I only hoped that he felt half as good as I did.

Seeking out more of his warmth, I backed my bottom up against him and was startled to feel him sliding, hard and ready, between the backs of my thighs.

"Oh! Well, hello there," I giggled.

"Sorry," he said with a hint of embarrassment in his voice. "I can't help it. Lying here next to you like this... It's got a mind of its own."

I reached down and slipped him between my folds, rubbing my wetness along his length. "Who's complaining?"

"Oh...God, Eden...that feels so good." We slid together a few times, the tip brushing back and forth over my now-swollen bundle of nerves.

"Yes...yes it does," I gasped, flexing my hips in time with his. "Do me a favor—reach back there into that drawer."

"You got it." He rolled away long enough to grab another condom and put it on. "There. Now, where were we?"

"I think we were right about...there," I sighed, pulling him between my legs again. After a few fumbled attempts we were able to line him up at my entrance. Logan pushed forward, entering me slowly from behind, forcing himself a little bit deeper with each thrust of his hips. I raised my leg up and over his, helping him go further.

"Tight," he grunted. "So fucking *tight*!"

Our movements were a little jerky and stunted in that position, but I had to agree that the tightness it caused was amazing. I could feel *everything*.

"Roll over for me, baby," he panted in my ear. "I need to move more." He pushed at my shoulder until I was lying flat on my stomach, my head turned to the side so that I could look back at him. "Yes...oh, God." His movements inside me became more fluid, with long, deep strokes that drove me mad. Before long, I felt him sliding his hands under my stomach and lifting me. "Get up on your knees for me."

Who was this guy? Was this actually the same boy who less than two weeks ago was so shy he could barely kiss me? Now he sounded so sexy and confident that I found myself up on my knees before I knew what I was doing, commanded by the power of his voice.

"Christ, you have no idea how good you look like that," he groaned. I felt him stroke his hands down my spine almost reverently before settling them on my hips, tilting them up even further before sliding deep inside me again.

I threw my head back and cried out at the sensation, and when he stopped to ask if I was all right I looked over my shoulder at him. "Don't stop now!"

He let out a loud growl, his expression turning feral as he began thrusting harder. His movements became rougher until he was pounding into me, his hips slapping against my ass. How did I not know this could feel so good?

"God, yes!" I cried, moving in time with him.

Logan reached his hand around me, slipping his long fingers between my folds until he was rubbing me. "I want to make you come, Eden. I want to feel you squeezing me."

"Oh...just keep doing that...I'm so close!" The combination of his deep strokes, his words, and the way he was touching me was sending me right

over the edge. I felt my legs starting to tremble beneath me and I wondered in the back of my mind if they would be able to hold me up through this.

"Oh, God, I can feel you," he moaned. "That's it, baby...let it go. I want to hear you. *Fuck*, I love you so much!" His thrusting became more erratic as I screamed his name, falling into a million pieces around him as he quickly followed.

"Holy shit!" I panted when I had finally caught my breath.

"No kidding," Logan laughed, flopping down next to me on the bed.

"Jesus...it just keeps getting better."

"I think you mean that *you* keep getting better," I said, tickling his sides before kissing his chest.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means you're a natural at this! I can't even believe that you just started doing this stuff. My God, Logan, you're so insanely sexy. The way you talk...and *move*!"

"So you're saying you're a fan?" he said with a smile.

"Oh, I'm the president of the fan club, baby."

"Well, that's a coincidence, since I'm your biggest fan, too."

I leaned over and kissed him on the tip of his nose. "I don't know about you, but I'm starving. Can I make you something to eat?"

"I don't want to impose."

"Who's imposing? I'm asking you. Besides, I'm not thinking of anything major, maybe just a grilled cheese or something. How does that sound?"

"With tomato soup?" he asked, his eyes lighting up.

"I think I might have some."

"That sounds great," he said, his stomach growling loudly in agreement.

After we dressed I made my way down to the kitchen while Logan used the bathroom. I was heating up the soup and halfway through grilling my first sandwich when he came downstairs, my laptop in tow.

"Why do you have that?" I asked as he set it on the kitchen table and fired it up. He looked up at me and smiled like a little boy trying to get his way, not saying a word. "What?" I finally asked after flipping the sandwich over.

"You promised."

"Promised what?" I thought for a moment before it finally dawned on me. "Oh man, are you serious?"

"You *promised*, Eden."

"You're still going to make me do it? I shouldn't be held responsible for that promise; you used your powers of adorableness on me."

"My powers of adorableness?" he laughed, causing the cutest dimples to appear on his cheeks.

"Yes! You're doing it right now!"

"Well, is it working?"

"Yes, *dammit*," I grumbled. "Pull up the damn site," I sighed, plating up our snack and serving it. By the time I grabbed two sodas out of the fridge and sat down, he had already brought up the Facebook homepage and angled the laptop between us so that we could both see the screen. "Just let me eat first so I don't lose my appetite."

"Oh, don't be so dramatic," he laughed, dunking the corner of his grilled cheese into the steaming bowl of soup before taking a large bite. "Mmm, this is delicious."

"Thank you," I smiled, before directing my attention to the screen with a sneer. "Ugh, fucking *Zuckerberg*."

"Don't worry," Logan whispered. "He'll never know, I promise."

"All right then, let's get this over with."

For the next hour Logan proceeded to help me set up my account and preferences, making such a big deal out of selecting "in a relationship" for my status that I couldn't help but lose the chip on my shoulder. It was glaringly obvious that he only wanted me on there so he could spend more time online with his girlfriend, and I decided that I might as well suck it up for his sake. Once everything was up and running, he gave me another quick run-through, and the next thing I knew, I was an official Facebooker.

"So what do you want to post first?" he asked excitedly.

"Uh...let me think about it for a bit."

"Eden, it's just Facebook. It doesn't need to be anything monumental."

"Well, why not? If it's my very first post, why shouldn't it mean something?"

"I guess you have a point," he sighed when he realized he needed to head home, clearly frustrated that he wasn't going to get to watch me do it. "Well...I suppose I'll have to check it again later tonight."

"Don't pout," I teased as I walked him to the door. "I just want to post something really important that I don't mind the whole world reading. Give me a little bit to think it over."

"All right. I'll check it again after I get home." He smiled at me before leaning down to kiss me sweetly. "Thanks for letting me twist your arm. I think you'll really enjoy it after you're on for a while."

"We'll see," I said, not holding my breath. "Talk to you later?"

"Yeah, I'll give you a call after I spend some time with my family."

"No rush, just call whenever you get some free time. Thanks for hanging out...and everything else."

His smile grew even wider. "Thank *you*," he said, wiggling his eyebrows.

I watched him until he pulled out of the drive, waving good-bye before I closed the door. As soon as he was gone, I walked straight over to the

computer and typed in my status. I'd never had any doubt what I wanted to

write, I only wanted it to be a surprise for him when he got home.

I'm head over heels in love with Logan Black, and

the fact that I let him talk me into joining Facebook

should prove it.

I went about my business tidying up the kitchen and finishing my

homework. It wasn't until later that night when I was back upstairs and

getting ready for bed that I logged back in to my new Facebook account. I

couldn't fight the huge smile on my face when I saw what was waiting for

me.

Logan Black likes this.

Then below that:

I love you, too, baby. I'm honored that was your

first post.

I also noticed that about half the senior class had already sent me friend requests, but I didn't pay any attention to those. I'd worry about that tomorrow...tonight was about Logan.

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## **Chapter 27**

Over the next few weeks, we developed a routine. Logan would come home with me after school and keep me company for a few hours. It wasn't always sexual; there were days when we would do nothing but cuddle on the couch and get sucked into watching endless marathons on The Food Network.

Then there were times that were *extremely* sexual, like the week when my mom went out of town again and Logan was determined to christen every surface in my house he could find.

The kitchen table was my favorite.

On the days when my parents were home, Logan would often have dinner with us. My mom loved having him over. I had worried about him wearing out his welcome with my dad, but he seemed to really enjoy having a guy around to talk to. Logan wasn't huge into sports like my dad was, but he was always up for some conversation. Sometimes they would talk about sports medicine and Logan would ask Dad about what it was like in that line of work, while other times Dad would ask about different design projects Logan had going and actually seemed interested in the answers he was given.

I hated to say it because I knew it sounded tacky as hell, but we were becoming a family. Logan had wormed his way into our lives and our hearts, and I don't think any of us would know what to do if he left.

It was the same way for his parents as well. They would have me over on the weekends and I would spend hours in the kitchen helping Nora prepare dinner, then hours up in Logan's bedroom away from prying eyes. We'd mapped out Nora's "surprise" inspections down to a tee, so we always knew when it was time to tidy up and be presentable. The fact that she was so predictable never failed to make me laugh; it was clear that she didn't want to fully condone us doing anything inappropriate, but she didn't want to actually catch us at it, either. I think she was hoping that it would scare us into behaving, but it never worked.

We made time for our friends when we could outside of school, hanging out at Devon's for movie and game nights at least once or twice a month. We also went to his post-game parties once in a while, but when it came time to playing the Single Game, we would both look at each other and know it was our cue to leave. Logan and I had no interest in that game anymore. It had served its purpose, and we had better things to do now than watch a bunch of other people make out.

I'd even gotten more used to using Facebook, which pleased Logan to no end. I regularly shared cute photos of the two of us. It also turned out to be

a great way to keep in touch with my Aunt Emma back in Chicago.

Unfortunately, she wasn't the only one from my hometown who found me online.

"Riley sent me a friend request last night," I whispered to Amy in study hall.

"He didn't!"

"It really shocked me. I haven't even thought about him in a long time."

Just seeing his profile picture had made my stomach jolt slightly from nausea.

"Did you decline it?" she asked.

"I haven't done anything yet. I was so stunned, I just logged out. I should just decline it, right?"

"Are you kidding me? I wouldn't dream of passing up such a great opportunity."

"What are you talking about?"

"Think about it: if he's searching you out, he's no doubt trying to snoop around and see what you're up to now. Why not let him see exactly what he's missing and how blissfully happy you are?"

"Really?" It sounded iffy to me. "I don't really want any contact with him. And I don't want to see any of his stupid status updates."

"That's easy," Amy replied quickly. "What you do is accept the request and then unfollow him, so you won't see him in your feed. It will let his nosy ass see that you're way better off without him and that Logan makes you happier than he ever could. My bet is that he won't bother you for long, and if he does, you can just unfriend him."

I thought of Riley seeing the large smile on my face that had never been there when I was with him. As little as he mattered to me now, I couldn't deny that the thought of him seeing proof that I was completely over him felt really good. Why not let him see that his betrayal had become nothing but a little smudge in my memory?

I pulled out my phone and pushed the accept button before I could change my mind. "Done."

Suck on all of my happiness, douchebag.

\* \* \*

It only took two days before the first private message arrived.

Hey girl how r u? Miss u.

Barf. Ignoring someone never felt so good.

A few days later he sent another one.

#### What? U still mad? So who's the dorky new guy?

After that I had to count to ten so I wouldn't lose control and throw my phone across the room. I opened up the message again and clicked the options, quickly selecting "turn off chat for Riley." I had no interest in any kind of conversation with him, especially if he was going to insult Logan right out of the gate.

I hoped that would be the end of it, but I couldn't help wondering if Amy's advice had been the right way to go.

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# **Chapter 28**

Christmas eventually rolled around. After separate dinners with our families, Logan met me at my parents' and managed to make me bawl my eyes out. Not maliciously, of course—they were tears of joy—but I still cried like a baby.

"What's this?" I asked as he handed me a gift-wrapped package.

"Your present," he smiled.

"I thought we were *making* our presents," I said, immediately regretting the homemade packet of sexy coupons I'd stayed up late gluing glitter to.

"We are. Go on, open it." I tore into the lovely paper and opened the box to reveal a large wooden frame. As I turned it over, Logan stood at my shoulder and spoke quietly. "Now, I had to buy the frame, but I made what's inside it."

I stood there staring down at my favorite childhood photo, beautifully restored and blown up to an  $8 \times 10$ -inch glossy print with the word "family" printed on the mat board in Logan's elegant script. One minute my parents were smiling up at me as my younger self pigged out on chocolate cake, and the next thing I knew I was bursting into tears.

It was the sweetest thing anyone had ever done for me.

"Don't you like it?" he asked, a worried tone in his voice.

"How—how did you?"

"I stole it off your corkboard a few weeks ago when you were in the bathroom. I smuggled it back here and scanned it into my computer, then used some of my photo software to sharpen it up. I figured this way you could still pin the original to your wall, but now you'll always have a copy to stay safe."

I set it down on the edge of his bed and threw myself into his arms. "I can't believe you are so thoughtful!" I wailed. "What did I do to deserve you? How did I get so lucky?" I held him tightly until my crying fit subsided, allowing him to rock me back and forth a bit as we stood.

"Sweetheart, how many times do I have to tell you? *I'm* the lucky one." He leaned down and kissed me gently. "I've never felt more blessed than I do right now."

What was I supposed to say to that? Between bawling and feeling like my heart was about to explode, it wasn't my most articulate of moments.

"Love—you—so—much," I fought out through a barrage of sniffles. "I—coupons!" I blurted out, shoving my gift at him.

While I pulled myself together, Logan flipped through my booklet, laughing at the creativity of some of the rewards and raising his eyebrow suggestively at others. "*Any* position?" he squeaked.

"Mmhm," I nodded, wiping my nose with a tissue.

"Imagine the possibilities," he chuckled, grabbing me and kissing me.

"Do you hate it?"

"Of course not! I love it! I can tell how much time you put into making this for me, Eden. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't mind cashing in on this one right now," he smirked, pulling a coupon out of the booklet and handing it to me.

"A massage?" I scoffed. "That's the one you're picking first?"

"I didn't say what I wanted massaged, now did I?"

"Why, Mr. Black," I teased, batting my eyelashes demurely, "I do believe you're trying to corrupt me."

Logan reached around my back and pulled me up against him, taking me with him as he fell back on the bed, causing me to screech in laughter. "Now don't be silly, Miss Foster. You taught me everything I know."

"I sure did."

\* \* \*

"Hey, I know it's not until next week, but how would you like to celebrate Valentine's Day a little early?" Logan whispered to me in zoology one afternoon during an extremely boring science film.

"Why? What did you have in mind?"

He looked around us quickly before leaning in closer. "Well, I just found out that my parents are going out of town for the weekend. I usually spend most of my time over at Devon's whenever they're gone, but do you think you could find a way to stay over one night?"

### Cha-ching!

"Hmm...I guess I could see if Amy would cover for me." I totally knew she would, but I didn't want to seem like I had been hoping and praying for this opportunity for months.

From the answering smile he gave me, I don't think I was fooling him one bit. "It would be really great if she could. I mean, I cover for Owen all the time. I don't think he's even *been* in my house, now that I think about it, and his parents think he spends the night at least once a month."

"I'll see what I can do," I said while looking straight ahead, pretending to watch the movie while I was actually fantasizing about all the possibilities.

I practically skipped down the hall after class to find Amy at her locker talking with Zoe. They both looked up at my glowing face and stopped mid-sentence, eager to see what I had to say.

"Friday night!" I squealed, almost jumping up and down from the excitement.

"Yes!" Amy cheered, giving me a high five.

"'Bout damn time," Zoe laughed, patting me on the shoulder in congratulations.

They both knew how desperate I was to have an overnight with Logan. He and I had become more open lately about the fact that we were indeed having sex, which hadn't been a shocker to anyone who hung around us. We were still fairly private when it came to sharing details and probably always would be, but we both admitted that we needed a little girl/guy talk once in a while with our friends.

"So are they only gone Friday night?" Amy asked, immediately all business.

"No, the whole weekend, but I think Friday would be the safer night to stay of the two, so we don't have to rush to get me out of there on Saturday morning."

"Good thinking," she nodded in approval. She tilted her head to the side and tapped her chin with her finger as she thought. "Let's see...I have to go to the basketball game, but I can pick you up before that and you can tell your parents that you're going with me, then home with me after."

"I guess that would work."

"Trust her," Zoe laughed. "This girl is a mastermind at covering up her naughty behavior."

"Hey!" Amy scoffed at her. "I seem to remember lending *you* my expertise more than a few times."

"Yes, yes," Zoe sighed, rolling her eyes. "All hail the Great and Powerful Oz."

"That's more like it." Amy turned to me. "Aren't you on your way to gym class?"

"Ugh, don't remind me," I groaned. "I dread it all day."

"Come on, I'm heading that way," Zoe said as she grabbed her books.

"I'll walk with you. Talk to you later, Amy."

"Yeah, see you guys after class." She grabbed her textbook and closed her locker, walking away in the opposite direction.

Zoe and I chatted as we walked down the stairs toward the gym until it was time for her to veer off to her health class. I made my way into the locker room to change and was immediately reminded of why I hated the class so much.

"Can you believe how fucking hot Logan is looking these days?" Skank One, or Holly Mathers as most people called her, asked on the other side of the lockers.

"I *know*, right?" Skank Two, or Ashley Sanders, replied obnoxiously. "There's just no way that Eden's hittin' that right. She looks so frigid. I love how they think they're *so* in love just because they discovered sex. Man,

what I wouldn't give for an hour alone with him to show him how it's really done!"

Usually I could keep my cool when they started that shit by imagining Skank One and Skank Two in little red jumpsuits with their blue hair standing straight up, bouncing around after the Cat in the Hat, but I had finally had enough. Slamming my locker loudly, I marched around the corner, staring them both down with fire in my eyes.

They stared back at me like two skanky deer in headlights. I had always assumed that they shit talked to piss me off on purpose, but apparently they'd never learned that sound traveled.

"Actually, sweetheart, he needs *way* more than an hour. My man likes to take his time, and he sure as hell doesn't need any schooling from *you*." I stomped off to the gymnasium and managed to channel all my anger into the dodgeballs I spent the next hour chucking across the room. Poor Mike Davis's head may have paid the price a few times, but I felt much better when I was able to put my clothes back on and leave.

Skank One and Skank Two stayed the hell out of my way when we were back in the locker room, but the last ounce of my injured pride reared her ugly head when we walked outside and I saw Logan leaning against the wall waiting for me. I brushed past the both of them and walked straight up

to him, shoving him back into the wall roughly and kissing him senseless before he could even speak.

"Oof!" was all he got out before he was moaning in my mouth, gripping me around the waist and pulling me up against him tightly. I slipped my tongue between his lips possessively, owning his mouth as I continued to work out the last of my aggression.

"Oh my God!" Skank One or Two gasped behind me. I couldn't really tell which one it was, but at that point I didn't care. "Get a room!"

That's right, skanks. He's mine, and only I can give him what he wants! Wow... Apparently I had a possessive streak, too.

As I pulled away, I slowly released his lips one at a time, sucking on the bottom one a beat longer than necessary before finally letting him go.

"What the hell was that?" Logan panted once he could actually speak.

"I guess it was me marking my territory," I said with a blush. "Are they gone?" I whispered, not wanting to look behind me.

"Who, Skank One and Skank Two? Yeah, they left a while ago." When Logan had first heard my nicknames for the girls he had laughed for a good five minutes, and they had stuck ever since. "Now what was that about?"

I told him what happened, feeling more embarrassed by the second as I remembered how I acted. "I'm really sorry, baby. That was so immature of me."

"Hey, don't apologize. You're only human, and sometimes people can only take so much before they snap."

"Really? You're not mad?"

"Hell no! Not if it ends up with you kissing me like that!" he laughed, hugging me tightly. "Plus...it was kind of hot, seeing you all worked up like that." He grabbed my hand and started walking out to the parking lot. After a few minutes he looked down at me. "Just tell me that you don't actually feel threatened by those two. A little jealousy can be sexy at times, but don't lose touch with reality."

"That's why I feel so silly—I actually don't feel threatened by them. I *know* you wouldn't give them a second thought. I guess I was just...pissed at their audacity, if that makes any sense."

"It makes more sense than you know," he chuckled as he unlocked the car.

"What do you mean?" I asked as I climbed inside.

He placed his elbow on the door and leaned in closer to look at me. "I mean that every time some other guy even *glances* at you I want to rip him a new one, and I can never seem to make that feeling stop. I don't understand it, because I love you and trust you. I know that what we have is just as important to you as it is to me, and you would never risk it. But does that make me any less bothered when some asshole checks you out? Hell

no. I get this total caveman urge to scream in his face that you're mine, and how dare he even *think* about it."

"Get in the car," I growled.

"What's wrong?"

"What's wrong is the fact that I can't jump you right here in broad daylight in front of the entire school, so I need you to take me home...right now."

"You got it." He slammed the door shut and ran around to jump in. He didn't say another word, but when he started up the car he looked at me with so much heat that I nearly broke out into a sweat.

As he screeched out of the parking lot and tore off toward my house, I realized that we both had some pent up aggression to work out...and I was *really* looking forward to it.

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## **Chapter 29**

"That was *so* good," I groaned, patting my full stomach as I gestured to the now-empty pizza box. I wiped my mouth with a napkin and tossed it down on my paper plate. "Thanks for the delicious dinner, baby."

Logan smiled at me from across his parents' dining room table. "I'm glad you liked it. I know it wasn't exactly a gourmet meal, but I never said I could cook."

"Hey, I'm up for delivery whenever you want to order it," I laughed. I looked down at the mismatched scented candle jars scattered on the table between us and smiled, knowing that he must have run around the house before I got here, looking for any way to romance up the place. With the overhead light turned off, the glow they created was actually really pretty. "I like the candles. It's the fanciest pizza dinner I've ever had."

"Stupid, huh?" Although the room was dim, I could still see his blush forming.

"No way, I love it. You're so thoughtful."

I was so excited to finally be here, alone with Logan overnight. Once we had all the details arranged, Friday night couldn't arrive fast enough. I don't think I remembered one thing I had learned earlier at school—I was too eager for what would happen later to pay any damn attention.

"Listen Eden," Logan said after a moment of silence, running his hands through his hair nervously. "I've got something I want to ask you."

"So ask me." I smiled at him warmly. To my surprise, he got up and walked around the table, pulling up a chair until he was sitting down right next to me. When he reached out and took my hand in his I felt my stomach drop, suddenly not so sure I wanted to hear what he was going to say. I had a feeling it was either going to be something bad, or something I totally wasn't ready for.

"Eden...these months with you have been the happiest of my entire life. Sometimes I try to think back on what it was like before you and I just... can't. It's like my mind can't comprehend the thought of you not around."

"I feel the exact same way about you," I sighed. As apprehensive as he was making me feel, I could tell that it wouldn't be something bad. His words conjured up images of the two of us together forever—getting married, having children, growing old with each other. They were thoughts that I hadn't expected to have for a very long time, but when I pictured his face, it all made sense.

I knew then that no matter what he was about to ask me or how little I was prepared for it, I would be able to answer him with my whole heart.

"I'm so happy to hear you say that." He took a deep breath and squeezed my hand more firmly. "Eden, will you please go to the prom with me?" What?

"The prom? *That's* what you were so nervous about?" For some reason, I felt the strangest mixture of relief and sadness. I had no idea what to make of that, so I shook it off and decided to think about it another time.

"Well, yeah. You never want to go to any of the other school dances. You always say they're stupid and you can't dance, but I really want to take you this time. I want to get dressed up in an overpriced, uncomfortable tux and parade you around on my arm for the entire world to see. Please, Eden? Please, don't say no."

I leaned forward and kissed him softly, resting my forehead against his as I pulled away. "You do realize that Amy is going to demand to take me shopping every spare minute I have until we find the perfect dress, right?"

"I know."

"I *hate* dress shopping." Seriously, it was right up there next to seeing my dad in his underwear on the list of things I'd like to never do again.

"Come on," he pouted, batting those obscenely long lashes at me. "Isn't that a small price to pay for making my dreams come true?"

"Wow, you're really laying it on thick this time. This is going to be worse than Facebook, isn't it?"

Logan didn't say a word in reply; he simply stuck his bottom lip out farther, throwing in a quiver for good measure.

"Oh, God, not the lip," I groaned. "All right," I sighed loudly. "I'll go to prom with you."

"Really?" His eyes shot wide open in surprise before he grabbed me and pulled me onto his lap, showering me with kisses. "Thank you so much, baby! I'll make sure you enjoy it, I promise."

"As long as you'll be there looking sexy, I don't think that will be a problem," I said as I wrapped my arms around his neck. "Keeping my hands off you until we're alone might be, though."

"It's a risk I'm willing to take," he said with a smirk.

I kissed him quickly and stood up. "Well, it's only fair that I clean up. You did go to all the trouble of ordering," I teased.

"Sounds fair to me," he laughed, pulling out his phone and scrolling through it as I gathered the dirty items and carried them to the trash. When I sat back down and looked at Logan, I noticed his face had gone completely pale.

"What's wrong?" The sudden change in his appearance scared me.

"Who's Riley Thompson?" he asked.

"Why?" I had an immediate sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach.

"Because he just tagged you in about fifteen different pics on Facebook. Who the hell *is* this guy?" I could hear in his voice that he was getting upset.

"Of *course* he did!" I spit out in anger, stomping over to look at his phone. "Show me."

"You obviously know this guy," Logan said as I grabbed his phone and started scrolling through the pictures. "Who is he and why does he have all these pics of you?"

"He's my sleazeball, piece-of-shit ex!" I snapped, looking at the random images of the two of us. Some of them were from school while others were from different parties we'd been to. None of them were *too* bad, thank God, but I didn't appreciate him flashing me in a bikini all over the internet.

"Have you been *talking* to him?" he asked, an accusatory tone entering his voice.

"No!" I gasped. "He sent me a friend request a while back and I honestly forgot all about it. He tried to message me once or twice but I just ignored them."

"Then why would he think it's okay to post these pictures of you?"

"Because he's an *asshole*!" I yelled, getting angrier the more I looked at the pictures and listened to Logan's jealous questions. "That's what he does! When he doesn't get his way, he finds some way to hurt me."

"Why didn't you tell me he tried to contact you?"

"Because that's how little I think about him now! He's *nothing*! I forgot about him the second I ignored his messages. I didn't even consider telling

you because I thought it was a non-issue—I wasn't *hiding* it from you!" I couldn't help it, I was yelling louder and louder with each new accusation.

"Well I think you should have told me!" he yelled back, clearly getting agitated. "Why the hell did you even accept his friend request?"

"Because Amy said I should let him see how over him I am and how happy we are." I could hear how stupid it sounded as the words left my mouth.

"Oh, that's brilliant. *Amy* said! If you think so little of him then why do you give a shit about what he thinks?" He had a good point, but I didn't tell him that—he pissed me off too much by what he said next. "This is bullshit! I hate that he posted those pics of you!"

"And you think I don't?" I screamed. "Those aren't *your* ugly, vile memories splashed all over the internet, they're *mine*! Do you think I want any kind of a reminder of my time with him? And do you really think that I'm supposed to stop and soothe your ego when *I'm* the one who feels violated?! You wanna know what *I* hate? The fact that instead of asking if I'm okay, you're accusing me of something completely ridiculous!"

I stomped off, heading upstairs to his bedroom where I'd left my things. Halfway up the stairs I stopped and turned around to look at him still sitting in his chair, dumbfounded. "And another thing," I yelled. "None of this would have happened if you hadn't made me join fucking *Facebook*! That

asshole had no way to even get ahold of me before that! He's the whole reason I changed my phone number!"

When I reached his bedroom, I slammed the door and grabbed my overnight bag, tossing the few things I'd already removed back inside. Deep down I knew I was being too dramatic and sensitive, but I wasn't used to Logan acting distrustful and accusing me—something inside of me had exploded. Still rifling through the bag, I came across the new lingerie I'd packed for the weekend that I'd hoped to surprise him with. All my expectations and excitement about our sleepover ruined in an instant, I crawled on the bed and curled up in a ball, bursting into sobs.

Before long a timid knock sounded at the door. "Eden?"

"What?" I croaked, my voice rough.

"Are you done yelling now?"

"Are you done being a jealous shit now?" I cried, the words interrupted by a loud hiccup.

"Come here," he said, crawling onto the bed next to me and pulling me against his body. I struggled at first, but gave up quickly, admitting to myself that I really just wanted to be in Logan's arms. We didn't talk for a while, the only sounds in the room my sniffles as he stroked my hair. "I'm sorry I made you cry," he finally whispered.

"I'm sorry I got so emotional," I returned, relaxing under his gentle caress.

"So...our first fight."

"Yeah," I said, sniffing loudly. "I don't think I handled it well."

"Are you kidding?" he chuckled. "You had way more ammo than I did. I was just being pissy."

"Did you really think I was sneaking around behind your back? It hurts so much to think you don't trust me."

"Of course I trust you," he said, pulling me closer. "I just got so jealous seeing you with another guy. It didn't even matter that the pics were from last year. I saw them and just felt angry. I hated seeing you happy with someone else. I got mad and I took it out on you, and now that I think about it the worst part is that I let that asshole win. I have no doubt that's just the reaction he wanted your new boyfriend to have."

"You're probably right. He's petty like that."

"Well, I'm sorry for that." He pulled back a bit to look me in the eye.

"That doesn't change the fact that it really hurt me to find out he's been trying to contact you."

"But-"

"Let me finish, please," he said calmly. "I understand what you said. You didn't think it was important. It still felt like a punch in the gut. I'd rather

you tell me that kind of thing so that it's not such a shock later. If I had known going in, those pics might not have affected me so badly."

"Fair point," I said with a sniffle.

"I'm not gonna lie, though," he added. "I don't know if that would have helped. I know I said I didn't care that you had a past, but it's a lot easier to mean it when I don't have to see proof."

I knew what he meant. I couldn't even stomach the thought of him hanging all over another girl, let alone the idea of seeing him kiss her like I had been kissing Riley in some of those pics. They were nothing but little pecks, but I hated that Logan had to see them.

"I'm sorry I ruined our night."

"You didn't ruin anything," he said quickly. "We just had a fight. I'm sure it's the first of many to come. What's important is how we handle them."

I kissed him gently and smiled. "You're right."

"You know," he smiled playfully, reaching up to unfasten my shirt buttons. "I've always heard that make-up sex can be amazing."

"Oh, have you?"

It was.

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## **Chapter 30**

The best part of staying overnight with Logan was the morning after.

Even with our sexy make-up session the night before, nothing compared to waking up in his arms. His chest was the warmest pillow and he held me close as we slept, cuddling me tight as if I were a favorite teddy bear.

I had never felt so loved and cherished as I did upon waking and I never wanted it to end, but unfortunately my bladder had different plans. Trying not to wake Logan, I begrudgingly slid out of bed and tiptoed to the bathroom, relieving myself quickly and hoping that the flush would be quiet. *Damn you, morning pee!* 

After washing up and sneaking back into bed, I was glad to find that Logan hadn't stirred at all. Smiling to myself, I couldn't help wondering if our previous night's exertions had taken a toll on him. Even after the first round, he'd managed to go two more times before we finally collapsed on his bed in a sex coma. There had even been a surprise appearance from Professor Black, which thrilled me to no end.

He'd whispered between each time how he just couldn't stop; that he couldn't get enough of me and he didn't want to waste any of our time alone together. I swear it was as if he had been studying a manual entitled

The Sexiest Things You Could Ever Say to Your Woman. There was no denying that my boyfriend was a sexual wunderkind.

It also didn't hurt that I was head over heels in love with him, either.

There were times, like this very moment, when it physically pained me to look at him. He was so beautiful and amazing that I couldn't help feeling panicked once in a while, wondering how the hell I got so lucky and how long we would be able to make it last. It scared the shit out of me when I realized that I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do with my life, other than be with Logan. I felt like I was going through the motions that were expected of me, like graduating high school and going to college. I wasn't attached to any of it. I hadn't found my passion in life yet—except for Logan.

He was the one thing I was certain of.

Was that kind of attachment healthy at my age? I didn't know, and I really didn't care. All I knew was what I felt in my heart, and my heart wanted Logan forever.

As if his subconscious somehow knew the exact moment I needed reassurance, Logan's eyes slowly opened and he smiled at me sleepily, pulling me against him even tighter. I sank into his warm embrace, immediately feeling better. He needed me as much as I needed him.

Proving the point, he slid his hand down my leg and grabbed the back of my knee, hitching it up over his hip as he slowly rolled over, placing himself between my thighs. His gaze was slightly unfocused as he looked down at me without his glasses, but there was so much love in it that I wanted to cry. He leaned down and kissed me without regard for our morning breath, sweetly at first, but quickly turning possessive and needy.

I felt him hard and ready, rubbing against me as his hips moved back and forth while we kissed. I spread my legs wider in acceptance and without one word between us, he slid deeply inside me. Our eyes met as we both gasped, realizing that this was the first time we hadn't bothered with a condom. The feeling was so different, so much more intimate.

"I probably shouldn't have done that," he whispered, thrusting again slowly. "This could get addictive."

The only sounds in the room after that were soft moans and sighs as we made slow, lazy love for what felt like the entire morning, but was probably much shorter than that. We built up a beautiful rhythm, rocking into each other gently as we kissed and touched each other everywhere.

It wasn't until after our bodies had finally given up and shattered around each other that anything was said.

"I love you so much," Logan sighed, collapsing on top of me and laying his head on my chest as we both fought to catch our breath. I stroked my fingers through his silken hair and smiled, both from his lovely words and from the ticklish sensation of his lips kissing the skin between my breasts.

"I love you, too."

We cuddled together there for almost another hour, whispering and giggling and doing our best to avoid the fact that it was getting late.

"I should really get going soon," I said eventually, sighing loudly.

"I don't want you to go," he pouted, looking like someone had kicked his puppy.

"Baby, we really shouldn't push it much longer. I never stay over at Amy's very late, and I still need to clean up."

"I know, it's just that...I wish this was our house and we lived here together. I feel spoiled after having you to myself all night. I don't want this to end."

"I don't, either," I said, sitting up and moving to the edge of the bed. "I don't think my poor body could take much more, though," I teased. "I'm already going to have a hard enough time trying to walk normally in front of my parents."

"Sorry about that," Logan replied with a smirk. "I don't just mean the sex, though. I like this closeness between us. I like you being the first thing I see when I open my eyes in the morning. I want more of *this*," he said, gesturing between the two of us.

"I do, too," I whispered, leaning over to kiss the tip of his nose before standing up and heading toward the bathroom. "It was only the first sleepover," I called out to him as I turned on the shower. "I'm sure there will be more in the future." I pulled the curtain closed and began washing my face. Not a minute later it opened again and Logan stepped inside.

"Mind if I join you?"

"Really?" I squeaked, rinsing the soap off my face.

"I've always wanted to shower with you." He looked bashful admitting it, and the sight reminded me of the shy, unassuming boy he had once been.

"Okay, but can you keep that thing under control?" I asked, pointing to his already hardening member. "I wasn't joking about not being able to walk."

"I can try," he laughed, "but I make no promises."

Logan took the soap and started lathering up my body, paying extra attention to my breasts. He was very thorough, and before I knew it I was covered in suds and his large, slippery hands were absolutely *everywhere*. He washed and rinsed my hair, and I couldn't resist doing the same for him.

The next thing I knew, his erection was slipping and sliding against my stomach as we made out under the hot spray. "Oh, fuck it," I groaned, knocking over the shampoo bottle and propping myself up on the ledge it

had been sitting on. Pulling him to me, I wrapped my legs around his waist and guided him to my entrance.

"Are you sure?" he panted in my ear. "I don't want to hurt you."

"I need you, Logan. I'll worry about walking later."

"Oh, thank *God*. I need you, too." He pushed himself inside me, all the way in one thrust. He paused long enough to make sure that my answering moan was from pleasure and not pain, then proceeded to screw me senseless. That time was not slow or lazy, but the exact opposite. Something between us had grown frantic, as if we were trying to devour every drop of each other before our time together had to end.

We moved and slid together quickly, increasing our tempo by the second. Before long I felt Logan's hand slipping between our bodies and he ran his thumb over my clit in tight circles, summoning another powerful orgasm from my body until one just as violent was ripped from his own. He thrust a few more times for good measure, groaning into my neck before he licked at the trickling water there.

"I *need* this, Eden," he said again, pulling back to look at me with water streaming down his face. "I need more time like this with you...time where we can do whatever we want without worrying about someone walking in on us. Time where we can sit around eating breakfast naked if we feel like

it, or spend all day doing nothing but cuddling in bed. I want to fall asleep in your arms every night and see your beautiful face every morning."

"That sounds so perfect," I sighed. "I want that, too, Logan, but we have to be patient. There are still a few months left before graduation, and then we have to figure out what to do about school. Even if we both get in, I have no idea where our dorms are going to be or when we'll be able to arrange alone time together. If our roommates turn out to be assholes we might be out of luck for a while."

"Let me handle that."

"What does that mean? How are you going to handle it?"

"Just trust me, Eden. There's something I'm working on, and it's probably going to take me a while, but believe me when I say that we are going to make it work." I had no idea what the hell he was going on about, but the determined look in his eye told me not to doubt him.

We dried each other off and got dressed and then I treated Logan to some of my homemade French toast.

"You didn't have to cook for me, baby," he mumbled around another mouthful of food. "I would have taken you to the diner. Mmm, damn this is good."

"I know, but I wanted to. I like cooking for you. Actually, I just like cooking. I like that face people make when they think something I made is

really delicious. It makes me feel...I don't know, special or something."

"You *are* special," he said before slurping down another bite. "And this breakfast is amazing."

"Thank you." I kissed his cheek with a loud smack before grabbing his plate to clean up. He followed me into the kitchen and helped me with the dishes, drying as I washed. When we were all done I knew that I couldn't put it off any longer—it was time for me to go home.

I considered having Amy pick me up, but figured it was late enough in the morning that it really wouldn't matter, so I had Logan drop me off at my house. I leaned over and gave him a kiss, loving the way he held on to me a beat too long, as if he couldn't bring himself to let me go.

"Thank you for a lovely night," I said.

"Thank you for staying," he smiled. He waited until I was swinging the door shut before calling out, "Oh, and don't forget about prom!"

*Crap*. Oh well, I'm sure there were worse things I could be forced to suffer.

"Was that Logan dropping you off?" my father asked as I closed the door, a slight hint of suspicion in his tone.

"Yeah, he took me to breakfast. Amy had to go do something with her family."

"Hmm. Well, that's convenient."

"Wasn't it?" I asked with a smile, refusing to rise to the bait.

"*Eric*," my mother said in a warning tone from the dining room, where she had her laptop set up and had clearly been writing over breakfast.

"Maggie, I'm just pointing out to our daughter here how odd it seems that she left with Amy and then showed up with a very satisfied looking Logan—not to mention the fact that she's walking funny."

"Eric!" my mom gasped. She had always operated under the "don't ask" rule as long as I assured her I was staying safe. My dad had been oblivious before the whole Riley fiasco, but apparently he was much more observant now. I had a suspicion that he didn't *really* want to know, though. He just wanted me to know that he wasn't stupid.

We stared each other down in silence, both of us daring the other to take it further. After almost a minute of our stalemate I finally threw up my hands and sighed.

"Dad, be honest. Do you *really* want to go down this avenue right now?"

He blinked a few times and slowly shook his head. "No. As a matter of fact, I think it would be in our best interest to forget this morning ever happened."

"Deal."

I grabbed my overnight bag and limped up the stairs, wondering how long it took a bruised cooter to heal.

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# **Chapter 31**

The next few months were...interesting.

The moment Amy heard that I had accepted Logan's prom invitation, she decided to reveal that she was actually Satan in disguise. At least, that's the only explanation I could think of for the endless hours of shopping and browsing that Zoe and I were subjected to. She brought printouts from various websites to school and made us study them over lunch. She had lengthy debates—with herself—over which styles fit each of us best, then expected us to support her decisions. Whenever she would catch either of us snacking on a candy bar, she would unceremoniously rip it out of our hands and yell about empty calories and the effects of bloating while wearing a formal gown.

Seriously, that last part pissed me off. Bitch, I need my Snickers during Shark Week! ("Shark Week" is what I'd not-so-lovingly called my dreaded period for years.)

Poor Logan apparently agreed after I snapped at him on a particularly cranky day, because he showed up at my house later that night with pockets full of smuggled treats, then massaged my lower back when I complained about cramps.

That boy just *got* me.

He also earned himself a thank-you blow job while he was at it, which I secretly suspected was his goal from the beginning. Whatever—I had my chocolate.

I knew Amy had to be stopped when she began to enter my subconscious. I had fielded so many of her questions about my non-existent opinions during the day that I was starting to hear them in my sleep.

"Heels or flats?"

"Curly or straight?"

"Strapless or the cutest little bolero jacket you've ever seen?"

"Thigh highs or control top?"

"Diamonds or pearls?"

"Amy, that's enough!" I barked one afternoon, finally cracking after "Short and flirty or long and dramatic?"

"What's wrong?" she asked obliviously, her eyes wide at my outburst.

"C'mon, you gotta give us a break with all the questions."

"Thank *God*!" Zoe said in a loud exhale from the other side of the lunch table before looking at me. "I'm so happy you spoke first. I was about to throw something at her."

Amy whipped her head around and shot her a wounded look. "Et tu, Brute?"

"Oh, don't be so dramatic," Zoe huffed. "Listen, I like fashion and formals as much as the next girl—and way more than Eden here—but even *I'm* at my wit's end with this."

"But—but this is important!" Amy sputtered. "It's our *senior* prom!"

"I appreciate that," I broke in. "I really do, but *you* need to appreciate that I don't have anywhere near the budget you're talking about for this shit. My parents aren't poor, but this is insane. You've been showing us expensive designer labels. This is *prom*, not the Oscars! I'm sorry that I haven't been very supportive or enthusiastic, but it's really hard to get excited about any of this stuff when you know damn well I'll never wear any of it again."

She blinked a few times, taken aback. "I never meant to make you uncomfortable, Eden. Why didn't you speak up sooner?"

"Because there's no stopping you when you get on a roll."

"She's got you there, babe," Owen mumbled over her shoulder. Devon grunted around his sandwich and nodded his agreement.

When I saw her bottom lip start to quiver I jumped in, hoping to avoid a meltdown. "Hey, I still need your help. There's no way I could dress myself for something like this. I just need you to tone it down a little bit, okay? Stop with all the harping and questions."

"I agree," Zoe nodded. "Besides, I know something that you're even better at than deciding between designer labels, and that's bargain hunting. I bet Eden could use a few pointers."

"Ooh!" I knew her hurt feelings were gone when her eyes lit up like Christmas lights. "That's true! I can help you find some of this stuff at a fraction of the cost. And what was I thinking? I have tons of formal dresses in my closet from holiday dinners with my dad's firm. We should see if you like any of those before wasting money on something you'll only wear once."

"Thanks, Amy." I smiled and patted her on the shoulder, happy to have her off on another tangent. "That sounds great, just promise that you'll take it easier on us."

"All right," she sighed. "I can't promise not to lose my shit once in a while, but I'll do my best to reel it in before it gets out of hand."

"That's all I ask."

I realized that Logan had been very quiet through our whole exchange, but when I tried to get his attention I noticed he was having trouble looking me in the eye. When he finally did meet my gaze I smiled at him, but the smile he gave me in return was flat and strained.

"What's wrong?" I mouthed. His only reply was to shake his head and wave me off like nothing was bothering him, which was obviously bullshit.

I shot him another look and arched my eyebrow at him, letting him know that I wasn't that easily fooled and we would be discussing it later.

He acted distant all through zoology, the only acknowledgment I got was a hastily scribbled *we'll talk about it later* in my notebook.

"I wish you would just talk to me," I whispered as we pulled into my driveway after school. "You're scaring me."

"Eden," he sighed, shoving his hands through his hair. "I feel like a really big asshole right now, and I'm having trouble dealing with it."

"I don't understand. How are you an asshole?"

"Because!" he snapped, immediately looking apologetic. I could practically see him counting to ten before he spoke again, much more calmly. "I had no idea you felt that way about prom. Here I've been excited and happy about taking you out in style and the whole time you've been worrying about being able to afford any of it. I thought you were at least having a little fun planning that stuff with Amy, then today I find out that you've been feeling left out because you can't get any of the things she was showing you."

"It's not as bad as you make it sound," I said, trying to appease him. "I was mostly looking for a reason to tell her that she was being ridiculous with all of her questions. Plus, no teenage girl should be looking at the shit she was showing us, regardless of her budget. I was trying to bring her back

down to Earth and remind her that it's not our *Super Sweet 16* party. We can't all just point and say 'I'll have that one.'"

"But don't you see? I *can* do that. That's why I feel like a dick. I've always thought I was better than that, and I could hang out with anyone because money didn't matter, but it matters a lot to the person who doesn't have any."

"Well, yeah, but it's not like I'm exactly poor, here. Amy was just being unrealistic. Hey, you're not some rich snob or anything, Logan. You've never looked down your nose at anyone in your life. You were raised better than that."

"That doesn't change the fact that I didn't even consider how much this might set you back. I just assumed everything would be great and perfect because we were going to prom together."

I reached across the car and smoothed back his hair, bringing my hand down under his chin to force him to look at me. "I don't think that makes you a dick, sweetheart. I think that just makes you a guy."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"All boys do that. They have no idea what it takes for a girl to get ready for prom. Every little thing that has to be bought, all the planning, all the prep work…it's a giant pain in the ass. Every guy thinks it's a piece of cake

because they can just stroll into a tux shop and point at a rental and they're good to go."

"I don't think..." He grew quiet as a bright blush spread across his cheeks. "Okay, maybe I assumed it was simpler, but that doesn't change the fact that I'm putting all this hardship on you. It doesn't feel right."

"I'm no worse off than most girls my age. There are parents who spend *years* dreading all the planning and money this takes." I leaned closer and kissed him softly, hoping to cheer him up. When I pulled away, I noticed a serious look on his face.

"Let me pay for your dress," he whispered.

"Absolutely not."

"But *why*?" he asked with a childish whine. "I want you to enjoy this, not spend the entire time worrying about paying for it."

"Because I don't want to feel like a charity case when that's just not true. I'm sure I can find something more realistic now that the fashionista has agreed to back off. Besides, she said that she has a ton of dresses. I might find one of hers that I like."

"How is me buying you a dress charity, but her giving you one not?"

"Because I'd only be borrowing it. I'm not looking for any handouts, thank you very much."

"But baby, I really want to do this for you. Can't it just be a gift? What's wrong with me giving you a gift?"

"No. I think you're very sweet for offering, but that would make me uncomfortable right now. I also think that might make my parents feel awkward."

"Why?"

"Think of it from their point of view. You have the rest of your life to give me presents and provide for me if that's something you want to do, but right now that's *their* job. I think they may get a little bit offended if they found out you paid for my prom dress. I'm also pretty sure my mom has been going crazy waiting for Amy to back off so she can take me shopping herself."

"God, I never considered that, either," he groaned. "I'm such a shit!"

"No. Like I said, you're just a guy. Why don't we go inside?"

"I suppose," he grumbled, finally unbuckling his seat belt.

"Hey, I know something that might cheer you up."

"What?" His pout was almost comical, but I did my best not to laugh so I wouldn't offend him.

"My mom's still out of town for a book signing until Sunday and my dad took a flight out this afternoon to surprise her. The house is all mine until tomorrow night."

Logan stopped in his tracks halfway to my front door, grabbing his phone without even looking at me. I watched as he hit the speed dial. "Yeah, Mom? I'm gonna stay the night at Devon's, okay? I don't know, sometime tomorrow afternoon. Yeah, I'll be by later to grab some clothes. I'm gonna have dinner with Eden first. Okay, I will. Thanks." He hung up the phone and looked down at me with a smirk. "Mom says hi."

"Do you think she actually bought that?" I asked as I unlocked the front door.

"Probably not, but you know her. She'd rather believe the lie than worry about calling me on it."

"Dad's starting to feel that way, too," I laughed, remembering our ill-fated run in.

Grabbing me around the waist, he leaned down to kiss my neck. "Hey, how about we get an early start on our overnight?"

"What did you have in mind?"

"I was thinking...it's been way too long since we had naked pancakes."

"We did naked pancakes last week!"

"Like I said, way too long," he chuckled.

I sighed loudly, rolling my eyes at him. "I'll go mix the batter."

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## **Chapter 32**

"Oh my God, that was amazing!" I gasped, falling back onto the blanket that Logan had laid out on the ground.

"Yeah, you weren't too bad yourself," he chuckled, shooting me a wink.

"I was talking about *me*," I deadpanned. "You were okay, I guess."

"Okay?" Logan scoffed. "I made you come multiple times under a beautiful night sky full of stars, in our own private meadow. Not only is that romantic as hell, but that's *talent*, baby girl."

"I suppose," I sighed, pretending to be bored with the whole subject. "At least you let me change out of that uncomfortable gown before dragging me out here to the middle of nowhere, so I'll give you props for that."

"Believe me, it wasn't easy," he said with a wicked smile. "From the moment I picked you up tonight, all I wanted to do was get under that dress. I fantasized about flipping the skirt up twenty different ways while we were dancing."

"I can sympathize. I felt the same way looking at you in that tux. Most delicious penguin I've ever seen."

Our prom had gone surprisingly well.

Amy actually had a dress that I really liked and by some magical intervention, it fit me perfectly. I was a few inches taller than her, which

made the already too short dress stop well above my knee, but it was a beautiful midnight-blue silk chiffon material that I knew would look good next to my gorgeous boyfriend's beautiful gray eyes.

My dad had tried to act hurt that he didn't get to buy me a dress, but he changed his tune quickly when I mentioned that the particular dress I was borrowing probably cost over six hundred dollars when Amy got it the previous summer. After that, he simply smiled and forked over some cash for me to buy jewelry and shoes, which my mom insisted on helping me choose.

We all got ready at Amy's house, assisting each other with hair and makeup and last minute adjustments. Amy had wanted to book us appointments at a salon in the Quad Cities, but Zoe shot her down immediately. Turns out that I wasn't the only one who was strapped for cash by the end of our many shopping excursions. Also, it so happened that Zoe loved to style hair. By the time we were all done, we looked like we had shelled out a ton of money for a professional stylist.

Amy's mother had special ordered her a dress from some New York designer. It was lavender taffeta and crinkled like money when she walked, which I thought was more than appropriate considering the outlandish cost. She looked like a movie star and was absolutely glowing, however, so I'm willing to bet that her parents thought it was worth it.

Zoe, on the other hand, didn't spend a fraction of that cost on her own dress, yet still managed to look like a Grecian sex goddess. She was all curves and legs and sensuality in floor-length emerald-green satin, leaving no doubt in anyone's mind as to who would be crowned prom queen. I could tell that she had even styled her long blonde hair so that it was "tiara friendly," but she would never admit that to anyone in a million years.

Our dates picked us up at the same time, even though we were all riding separately, so Mrs. Andrews could get a ton of group pictures of us looking fancy before we left for the night. We had talked about getting a limo and riding together, but since we all wanted our own private date time before we got to the dance, we voted to drive ourselves. Devon's father even loaned him his Mercedes for the night, which was a really big deal considering their overprotective nature.

Logan was so stunning in his tuxedo that he took my breath away, and when he presented me with a wrist corsage with one single pale pink-and-white orchid, I had to wipe a few tears from my eyes. It was one of the loveliest things I'd ever seen, and I was touched that he'd put so much thought into our evening.

We waved our good-byes and took off toward the Quad Cities for dinner, making a brief stop at my house on our way out of town so that our parents could see us all spiffed up. Logan's parents had come over to save us an

extra trip, which meant that the four of them all took turns getting pictures with us and we had a mini-photoshoot. After that, my parents took turns hugging me so tightly that I couldn't breathe.

"What gives?" I asked my dad when it was his turn. "You're so emotional tonight."

"I can't help it, honey," he answered slowly, sounding a little choked up.

"You're just so grown up now. I'm losing my little girl."

"Jeez, it's only *prom*, Dad." I rolled my eyes at his silliness, but inside I was secretly getting weepy.

He shot Logan a funny look before clearing his throat uncomfortably. "Uh...I know. You gotta give your old man a little break once in a while, though. This is a lot to take in."

"Once again, it's just me in a pretty dress and some makeup. I know it doesn't happen often, but you don't have to act like it's the end of the world."

I gave him another hug before we left, chuckling to myself at his awkward behavior. I noticed that Logan shook his hand a little longer than normal as I walked to the car, their heads bent together in discussion.

"What was all that about?" I asked when he finally joined me in the car.

"I was just promising him that I plan on taking very good care of you."

"Ooh, is that so?" I purred, leaning over to nip at his earlobe. "I know a way you could take care of me right now."

"Eden, behave," he growled, shooting me a heated glance. "It's already taking everything I have to keep from pulling over somewhere and ravishing you. You look so beautiful I can hardly stand it."

"So what's the problem?"

"The problem is that we have dinner reservations in less than an hour, and we need to get going, baby. I want to make this night special."

"Oh, all right, Mr. Sensible," I huffed, crossing my arms with a fake pout. I'd only been half serious, anyway. There was no way I was about to mess up my hair or makeup—Zoe would skin me alive.

I expected that we would eat at a casual place, but I was pleasantly surprised when Logan took me to an elegant French restaurant in Rock Island called Le Figaro, where I had the most luscious meal I'd ever eaten. I found myself wanting to sneak into the kitchen and beg them to tell me how they made the Chateaubriand melt in my mouth, but I figured that it might be a bit offtrack for our romantic evening together.

Maybe next time, because I was *definitely* eating there again.

When we made it to the hotel that was hosting our dance, prom was already in full swing. Owen was parading Amy around on his arm like the perfect gentleman, stopping to talk at nearly every table so he could show

off his beautiful date. Devon and Zoe requested every sexually suggestive song they knew and spent almost an hour grinding and slithering together on the dance floor. It would have been gross if they hadn't looked so damn good doing it.

Logan was the perfect date, as if I'd ever expected otherwise. He was sweet and attentive, excited to get out and dance with me, but also totally fine with just sitting and talking for a while. He clearly didn't feel the need to be "on" all night, like Devon and Owen obviously did; he seemed perfectly content with just having me near him. There were a few moments when he seemed preoccupied and nervous about something, but whenever I asked about it he would simply smile and kiss me, making me forget my question.

When the dance was over we made our way back to Amy's house to change out of our formal outfits and grab our overnight bags. Devon's parents had authorized a post-prom party for all of us, but rather than inviting the whole damn class like he usually did, he kept it to the six of us. We all planned on taking advantage of the fact that his parents slept like the dead. We watched movies and played some music for a while, and when the coast was clear Logan brought me my jacket and escorted me out the side of the house for a silent getaway.

Which brought us to our meadow.

We had returned a few times since Logan's infamous deflowering, and it always held a special place in our hearts. It was even better since the weather had turned warmer, and we couldn't have asked for a better night for our outdoor shenanigans. I worried it would start pouring rain on us the second we stepped out of the car, but so far we had been lucky.

"You look so beautiful like that," he whispered in the darkness. "Like a woodland fairy...or a nymph. Yes, I like that better. My little nymph." I was completely naked except for my wrist corsage, which I couldn't bear to part with although I had changed out of my dress hours earlier. I also couldn't bring myself to wash off my makeup or take my hair down yet, which a sane person might say was proof positive that I had actually *liked* dressing up.

"Well, if I'm your nymph, does that make you my satyr?" I teased.

"Mmm, yes, definitely," he smirked. "Why don't you come play my flute?"

"That's not a flute," I laughed as he pulled my hand toward his reawakened groin.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "I bet if you put your lips on it, it would make beautiful music."

"That's not music, baby. That's just you moaning."

"Oh. Well, damn. It was worth a shot."

We cuddled together for a while, laughing and kissing as if we were the only two people left in the world. Looking up at the vast sky above us, it was easy to imagine.

I had almost drifted off to sleep in his arms when I felt Logan shaking me lightly. "Eden...baby, wake up."

"Do we need to leave already?" I mumbled against his warm chest before yawning loudly. "I thought we had most of the night."

"No, that's not it. I need to talk to you about something."

"Okay."

"Here, let's sit up." He gave me his hand and helped me sit up to face him. It was then that I finally noticed the panicked look on his face.

"Should I be worried, Logan? Is this something bad?"

"No, it's good." He gulped loudly. "At least, I *hope* it's good. I've wanted to talk to you about this all night, but it never felt like the right time. Now I think I've just been putting it off out of nerves."

"So talk."

"Okay..." he paused to take a deep breath. "You know I love you. More than anything else in the world, right? You honestly believe that?"

"Yes," I answered with no hesitation. "I feel the exact same about you. Why?"

"I just want to make sure you keep that in mind." He smiled nervously and took my hands in his. "Now, I know I'm young. We both are. I also know that every single person in the world is going to tell us that the odds are stacked against us and we have our whole lives ahead of us. I know that you're my first serious girlfriend and we haven't even been together for a full year. I know every reason that anyone could ever throw at us to wait, but it doesn't make a damn bit of difference when I think about what I want."

"What *do* you want, Logan?" I whispered, my voice stuck in my throat. I had no idea what he was talking about, but he was making me worry with his serious tone.

"What I want is for you to be my wife, for the rest of our lives."

"What?" I gasped, watching as he reached behind him under the edge of the blanket and pulled out a little velvet box. He slowly opened it, revealing a beautiful diamond solitaire in a platinum setting.

"Marry me, Eden. I know it sounds insane, but I just don't work without you. I don't even want to try."

"But...what about college? Where would we live? There's no way either of us could handle a full-time job and keep our grades up."

"We wouldn't have to. Listen, I haven't gone into this lightly. I've tried to look at it from every angle, and my parents are willing to help us out as

long as we stay in school."

"Help us, how?" I asked, still staring at the diamond ring, as if it might be a mirage if I looked away.

"They own a condo in Chicago, not very far from the school. They've had it for years, and it sits there empty most of the year. They've agreed to let us live there while we go to school. We wouldn't owe any rent because it's already paid for, and we would actually save everyone a lot of money by avoiding all the extra room and board fees."

"They're actually *okay* with this?" I couldn't wrap my head around it.

"They are now. It took a while; I've been working on them for weeks. They're still not thrilled with the idea of us marrying so young, but they know I'm dead serious about it, and I won't change my mind. I guess they figure that at least with their help, we might have a decent chance of staying in school."

"How did you convince them?" I asked in a daze, unable to believe I was really having this conversation—it felt so surreal.

"The same way I convinced your parents."

"They know already?!"

"Of course. You didn't think I would ask for your hand in marriage without asking their permission first, did you? I wanted to make sure that they were on board before I popped the question."

"That's why Dad was acting so weird earlier, isn't it?"

"Yeah," he nodded. "I thought he was going to slip up and ruin the surprise for a second there."

"So what did you say to them? How did you manage to get them on your side?"

"Well, it's not that they're on my side as much as they believe I've thought this through carefully. I went to them and explained what I wanted and my parents' offer of the condo. I told them we both wanted to live together and that I would much rather do it with you as my wife. I said that whether we got married now or four years from now when college is over, I still have every intention of it happening, so I didn't see any reason why we should wait. I have no interest in dorm parties and joining a fraternity or meeting new girls. I told them that I was only interested in two things: graduating college and starting my life with you, and I want to do both as soon as possible."

"And what did they say?" Somehow I choked the words out around my tears.

"Believe it or not, they were actually easier to convince than my parents. I don't think they were very *happy* about it because we haven't even started college yet, but they allowed me to state my case. When I was finished, your mom cried a little but said not to worry because they were happy tears;

she actually helped me pick out the ring. Your dad told me that he wasn't really that surprised; he said that he knew we would end up together the first time he met me. He said that he was proud of me for putting so much thought into it, and that he respected the fact that I came to him first. He didn't say it, but I think he's happy that I want to get married before we live together. I know it's old-fashioned, but I love you and want to spend the rest of my life with you. Why should I wait to make you mine forever?"

He reached out and set the ring box in the palm of my hand.

"This is really happening, isn't it?" I was blown away by everything he'd just shared with me.

"It is if you'll have me. Will you have me, Eden? Will you make all of my dreams come true and marry me?"

"But...we're *naked*!"

"What?" he asked, shaking with laughter.

"I can't believe you just said the most beautiful things I've ever heard and we're both sitting here buck naked!" I leaned forward and slapped his arm. "What kind of an engagement story is that to tell people?"

"You don't have to mention the naked part," he said with a smile.

"Besides, this way you'll always remember it." He scooted closer and kissed me sweetly on the lips. "Does this mean you're saying yes?"

"I don't know...why don't we see if the ring fits first?"

"You live to be a pain in my ass, don't you?" he chuckled as he pulled the ring out of the box and slipped it over my third finger. Of course it was a perfect fit—just like Logan.

"I sure do. I'm going to be a pain in your ass for the rest of your life."

"Is that a yes?" His eyes had grown as big as saucers and he was holding his breath.

I nodded quickly, wiping at my tears. "Yes, Logan. You're the only life that I ever want to know."

He let out a loud whoop and threw his arms around me, tackling me down to the ground. We covered each other with kisses that quickly turned passionate, and when I opened my eyes again he was looking down at me as he placed himself at my entrance.

"I can't tell you how happy you've made me," he panted between kisses.

"But I *can* show you the benefit of naked engagements." With that, he slid deep inside me and proceeded to prove his point.

Very, *very* well.

## OceanofPDF.com

# Chapter 33

What's worse than having Amy plan your prom?

Having Amy plan your wedding.

I wasn't stupid; I knew it was going to be a pain in the ass, but I also knew that nobody else in the world could throw together a function as fast as Amy Andrews. Whenever my aunt Emma made it into town on the weekends they would team up and their wondrous powers would unite.

It was kind of scary.

We only wanted a small get-together at my grandparents' house, since they had an enormous backyard. We didn't want to go crazy, but I had absolutely no idea where to start and we wanted to have it in August before we went away to school. Therefore, I enlisted the help of Satan once again, making her swear on a smoking bible that she wouldn't let things get so crazy this time. Silly me.

I had to give her credit—she was much more mindful of price this time, although Douglas and Nora sat down with my parents and me before we started planning and explained that they would be happy to cover any expense that we couldn't handle. They told us they wanted to pay for the whole thing, knowing how hard it might be to arrange some last minute

details, but that Logan had insisted that they must not leave my parents out and consult with them first.

Once the entire thing was greenlit, I brought in Amy and Zoe—Amy to plan and Zoe to keep Amy in line. Of course, I'd had to spend nearly an hour swearing up and down that I wasn't pregnant when I told them.

"Bullshit, Eden," Zoe had barked over our food at the diner, shaking her head at me. "No *way* you aren't knocked up."

"Keep your voice down!" I said, looking around our table quickly.

"Just admit it, Eden," Amy whispered. "We want to be there for you, but we can't plan this properly if we don't know what to expect. I can't have you in a skin tight dress if you're going to have a five-month bump by August."

"Guys, I'm serious! We're always careful."

"Oh, come on!" Zoe groaned. "The only two reasons a girl gets married at eighteen are because she's saving herself for marriage and her boyfriend's sick of waiting, or she's got a bun in the oven. Now, I know for a fact you're not a blushing bride, so you might as well just tell us when you're due."

"It's really not like that. Logan just knows what he wants and doesn't want to wait. He had to convince us all, *including* me, but I can't imagine not being with him forever. The more it sinks in, the more excited I am to

start my life with him. *However*..." I stressed, looking back and forth at them. "I'm not ready to have kids yet. I'd like to be out of college first."

"Thank God," Zoe sighed. "That's the smartest thing you've said since we sat down."

"I think it's all romantic," Amy said with a dreamy look in her eye. "Now that we know it isn't because you *have* to, this wedding sounds like a fairy tale!"

"Well, I'm happy to hear you're on board, but I don't want to be walking down the aisle at Disneyland, okay? I just want a small, tasteful ceremony for family and close friends."

"No, no, no, I wouldn't dream of it," she said excitedly, waving her hands around in the air. "Oh my God, we have so much to do! We should discuss colors first—no, wait! Your dress! No—the cake!"

Zoe simply shook her head and arched her eyebrow at me, silently asking if I realized what I had just unleashed upon the world.

Somehow we made it through without too many scratches, although I was sorry to realize that some important moments fell by the wayside as a consequence. I barely remembered graduation; it was just another day among all the crazy wedding plans, except I wore a stupid cap and gown and listened to some boring speeches. I felt bad when I looked back on it,

knowing that it should have been a bigger deal and in any other life in which I wasn't planning to get married, it would have been.

Devon still had an ultimate graduation party at his house, however, with just about the entire class crammed in his basement and spilling into his back lawn. He and Owen sat Amy down and made her promise to leave all planning books and bridal magazines at home for one night, or else they wouldn't allow her to come. When she huffed and tried to pout, Owen actually put his foot down and told her that he wouldn't be taking her anywhere anymore if she couldn't give them at least one night to just have fun and be young.

I loved that damn stoner.

Logan and I enjoyed the party, playing games and chatting with friends late into the night. We decided to make ourselves scarce when they started playing the Single Game again, choosing instead to slip away unseen into the closet that had been the scene of our very own seven minutes in heaven.

"I can't believe I finally have you back here," he whispered against my ear in the dark. He seemed to want to recreate our first encounter, because the first thing he'd done after locking the door was turn out the light.

"We hang out in this basement all the time. If you wanted to get me back in here so badly, why did you wait until now?"

"It's usually just the six of us. That makes it a lot harder to sneak away."

"You want to be naughty at a party again, don't you?" I giggled.

"Yeah," he confirmed, his voice growing husky. He backed me up against the wall of shelves, pinning me against it with his hard body. "Only this time, I know what I'm doing—and I have *no* intention of coming in my pants in thirty seconds."

"Oh, really?" I panted against his hot mouth.

He slid his hands down underneath my skirt and grabbed my ass, lifting me up to perch me on the shelf. My legs wrapped around him automatically, where they were meant to be. I felt his hand reaching between us, cupping me against my underwear.

"Believe me," he growled, "the only one coming in thirty seconds around here is you." With that, his fingers slipped under the material and began stroking my wet flesh, knowing exactly where and how to touch me.

"Oh, shit!" I cried out, burying my face against his neck.

"Quiet, baby," he whispered, unable to hide the smirk in his voice. "You don't want everyone to hear, do you?" I dug my teeth into his collarbone after the first tremor shot through me. "Better keep it down, or else everyone will know what a dirty girl you really are." I started shaking more violently, feeling his touch so deep. I bit down harder, eliciting another delicious growl from him. "That's it, baby. Come for me."

I was there before he even said the words, shattering into a thousand pieces and doing my best to keep from screaming. The next thing I knew, Logan was unzipping his jeans and pulling my panties to the side, groaning deeply as he pushed inside me.

"Oh, God," he gasped. "I shouldn't have said I'd last longer than thirty seconds...you feel fucking *amazing*." He ended his sentence with a deep thrust, pushing me harder into the shelves. It hurt where the wood dug into my back, but the pain was *oh-so* worth it.

"Don't stop!" I panted, wrapping my arms around his neck and pulling him closer for a fiery kiss. We moved against each other, grinding together furiously in our tight, enclosed space. His hands dug into my ass roughly as he pulled me harder against him, and I could feel every thrust and drag of him inside me.

Neither one of us lasted very long, Logan only managing to hang on until he felt my body beginning to squeeze him. We both rode out our releases with awkward fumblings and muffled curses, clinging to each other in the dark. When we finally caught our breath he slowly lowered me to the ground, helping to steady me as I stood on wobbly legs.

I took a few steps and winced at the squishy feeling between my legs. Logan chuckled sheepishly and ran his hands through his hair. "Sorry, baby; I should have brought a towel or something for you to clean up with. I guess I didn't think that far ahead."

"No biggie," I sighed. "Now that I think about it, I kinda like the thought of walking around like this and nobody knowing but you."

Okay, I intended to go straight to the bathroom and take care of things, but the *notion* was still sexy.

"Jesus, baby," he exhaled loudly. "How the hell do you keep finding ways to drive me insane? Now I have to think about that all night until I can have you again."

"That was the idea," I said with a wicked smile.

Logan hugged me tightly and laughed. "Eden... I can't believe that I get to keep you forever. In less than three months we'll belong to each other for the rest of our lives."

"We already *do* belong to each other, this will just make it official."

"I can't wait," he whispered, leaning down to kiss me sweetly. "Right about now, official sounds pretty damn good."

\* \* \*

On a warm Saturday afternoon in the middle of August, that's exactly what we became.

Amy actually outdid herself, managing to make me feel like a fairy princess while looking elegant and tasteful at the same time. My dress was beautiful and simple, just like the ceremony. The flowers and decorations inside my grandparents' house were understated but breathtaking, and the backyard was a better setting for the reception than I could ever have imagined.

Logan stood at the end of our makeshift aisle with Devon and Owen by his side, looking so beautiful in his dark suit that I wanted to cry. Zoe and Amy led the way as I walked to him, and as Dad gave him my hand I noticed that I wasn't the only one with tears welling in my eyes.

We said our short vows in front of a small gathering. My mother and my aunts wept happy tears through the whole thing and my uncles took turns comforting my dad and promising to help him kick Logan's ass if he ever even *imagined* hurting me.

When the officiant pronounced us man and wife and told Logan to kiss the bride, his eyes lit up brighter than the sun. His lips were gentle, sweet, and strong as they claimed me as his wife. I felt lightheaded and on the verge of tears again, but they were the happiest tears I'd ever shed.

It all seemed like a blur as we laughed and danced and sang in the backyard and ate our catered food. Devon gave a groan-worthy toast that surprised us all when it turned heartfelt. He explained how Logan was

always there for him when he needed it most and thanked Logan for the opportunity to reverse the roles for a change. Zoe actually cried at that, kissing Devon soundly when he returned to his chair. Owen was amazingly sober for most of the night, slipping the best of his stash to Amy because he claimed that she needed "major calming down" and he wanted to stay straight to keep an eye on her. It made her an uncharacteristically mellow girl for the duration of the wedding, sparing us all from her hyperventilating and panic attacks that usually came during one of her planned events.

Dad drank a bit too much and promised to let Mom drive him home, but not before hugging me tightly and whispering in my ear that I would always be his baby girl.

As the evening wrapped up, Logan and I said our good-byes to all of our loved ones before making our way to the airport and our honeymoon in Hawaii that my grandparents had given us as a gift. I would never forget how Logan held my hand as our plane began to lift off. He squeezed it tightly until I looked up at him, and when his beautiful gray eyes met mine through those damn sexy glasses, it was like he was staring deep into my soul.

"Ready for the rest of our lives, Mrs. Black?" he whispered.

I smiled at him brightly, raising our joined hands to my lips and kissing the back of his fingers. "More ready than you could possibly imagine."

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# **Epilogue**

#### Six years later...

"Jenna, are you back from your break yet? I need to get going!" I huffed, wiping the sweat off my brow with the back of my arm before squeezing more frosting onto the cake I was decorating. When I glanced down at my hand, I saw a long streak of chocolate frosting running up my sleeve, which could only mean one thing. Turning to look at my reflection in the shiny surface of the freezer door behind me, I could make out a huge smear of dark fudge right across my forehead. "Son of a bitch!" I grumbled to myself. "That's just great. *Jenna*!"

"Sorry, Eden!" the perky strawberry blonde called out as she ran in the back door and headed to the time clock. "I was grabbing a quick cigarette in the alley. Guess I didn't hear you."

"I thought you quit that shit," I said as I wiped at my face with a clean towel.

"I did," she said with a smile, pointing to a spot of frosting that I'd missed. "Now I only have one when I'm really stressed out, or after really good sex."

"It hasn't been that stressful in here today; just a little busy."

"I know." She smiled wickedly. "My new boyfriend took me to lunch."

"Ewwww!" I cried out. "TMI! Go wash your hands!"

"Yes, boss," she replied, blinking her lashes innocently at me. "You know," she called over her shoulder as she scrubbed her hands at the sink, "I'd hate to point out all the times you've been late for *your* shift and showed up covered with hickeys, Eden."

"What? I have no idea what you're talking about!" We looked at each other for a moment before breaking into a fit of loud giggles. It wasn't until we both calmed down that I spoke again. "Listen, normally I wouldn't care at all, I just *really* don't want to be late tonight." I finished decorating the cake as I spoke, piping on the letters in a bright-blue buttercream.

"Oh, God!" she gasped. "I *totally* forgot about your big night!" She stood next to me and looked down at the cake. "Wow, he's going to love it." "Think so?"

"Of course! It's gorgeous, for one, and I'll bet it's yellow and fudge marble, isn't it?" When I nodded she laughed again. "I knew it! Why wouldn't he love it? You're giving him all of his favorite things in one cake."

"You don't think the wording is too cheesy?" I asked, biting my lip nervously.

"We *are* talking about the same guy, right?" Jenna teased. "There's no such thing as too cheesy or too sweet or too romantic when it comes to him.

You have nothing to worry about, he's going to love it."

"You're right," I sighed. "Thanks, hon."

"No problem." The phone rang loudly, interrupting our conversation.

"I'll grab that. You go get cleaned up and box up that cake so you can get out of here."

"Thanks again," I said, untying my apron strings. She waved me off as she picked up the phone.

"Thank you for calling Eden's Edibles, this is Jenna speaking. How can I help you?" As I listened to her take an order for an assortment of gourmet cupcakes, I couldn't help but wonder what I would do without her.

Jenna was my assistant manager and the only person I trusted to bake my recipes when I wasn't working. We met in school while I was studying culinary arts and baking at The Art Institute of Chicago and had always kept in touch. When she learned that I was opening my own bakery, she quit her job as a line cook at a local restaurant and joined me full time at my request, even going so far as to move to the Quad Cities.

It was a decision that neither of us had ever regretted.

I had been on a roll of making good decisions, actually. I'd only lasted about three months at University of Chicago before admitting that I was miserable. As much as I loved going to the same school as Logan, it wasn't enough to convince me that I wasn't wasting my time. I had absolutely no

idea what I wanted to do with my life and I felt like I was throwing my family's money away on classes that I had no interest in. The only fun I ever seemed to have was when Devon, Zoe, Amy, and Owen would come over to our place for dinner on the weekends. I would spend all day copying recipes from food TV shows and making crazy desserts, and they would all rave over the results.

It was Logan who finally sat me down one night in our bedroom and suggested that I look into culinary schools in the area. He explained that it was obvious my true joy was cooking and baking and he thought I would be cheating myself if I didn't explore it more fully. I wasn't sure which direction I wanted to move in at first, whether I wanted to be a chef or a baker, so when I transferred schools I started out by taking beginner's classes in both areas. It didn't take long for me to gravitate to the baking side, loving the thrill of coming up with pastries, cakes, and pies that earned me high praise in my classes.

It wasn't easy. There were many nights when our kitchen at home was covered in flour and sugar and Logan would find me curled up in a heap, crying on the floor. On nights like that he would scoop me up and carry me into the bedroom, doing his very best to cheer me up and distract me for a bit. He always stood by me no matter how neurotic I became over each new project and I could always count on him to be an honest taste tester.

I was excited to repay his favor when I noticed that The Art Institute also had a Graphic Design program. Neither of us had thought to check out a more specialized school when we were looking around and it turned out to be perfect for both of our needs. Not only was it great to be at the same school again, but Logan was able to excel in his field in no time without so many other subjects to worry about.

Just like our life together, once we knew what we wanted, there was no stopping us from achieving our goals.

By the time I earned my degree, there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to open my own bakery. I had been worried about getting a loan for the business, until we went home for a visit and mentioned my plans to my in-laws. As soon as Douglas heard what I wanted to do, he immediately offered to be a silent partner. His only request was that I make and sell monkey bread.

That was how, when we opened Eden's Edibles six months later in Moline, *Doug's Favorite* became a permanent staple on the menu. I tweaked the recipe a bit to make it my own and offered it in whole loaves or single servings, which never failed to sell out. I also featured a variety of cupcakes, pies, and pastries that I rotated seasonally, as well as the occasional special-order cake.

Douglas actually turned into a not-so-silent partner, spreading the word about my business to all of his colleagues in the Quad Cities. My mother quickly followed suit and mentioned my bakery at any function she attended around the country, and before I knew it I was catering large events and making wedding and birthday cakes for the children of the most respected doctors, lawyers, and authors around. I had referrals from every direction—Amy had even become a successful party planner and always dropped my name when a cake or dessert was needed.

"All right, Jenna, I'm heading out," I called to her as I grabbed the signature pink box that held my cake. "Charlotte and Stacy are watching the counter, so let them know if you need anything."

"Okay, have a great night!" she said excitedly as she pulled a fresh pan of cookies out of the oven. "I expect some details tomorrow!"

"I bet you do, *perv*!" I laughed, pushing the door open with my hip to the storefront. As I walked behind the counter toward the front door, I overheard my part-timer Charlotte helping a customer.

"Do you have any idea who did the adorable logo for this place?" The woman asked her as she picked up her box of pastries, pointing to the picture on the box. "I have a niece who is starting up her own business, but she can't find anything she likes."

Charlotte looked like a deer in headlights. "Uhh...well..." I had told her before, but she was new and still absorbing everything.

"Absolutely!" I jumped in with a smile. "I've got his card right here, and if you tell her to mention this place he'll give her a discount." I grabbed a *Black Designs* card from its holder by the register and handed it to the woman.

"Oh, that's wonderful!" she sighed. "My niece will be so happy."

"I'm sure she will," I nodded. "He's the best."

I waved good-bye to the two girls up front and continued on my way out the door toward the Volkswagen parked outside. With us both owning our own businesses, a second car had become a necessity, and since there was no way my old car was going to hold up, Logan had convinced me to get a Volkswagen, too. I hated to admit it, but I really loved the thing.

I drove home, another swell of nerves rising inside me as I glanced at the cake box in the seat next to mine.

"He's going to love it," I whispered to myself. "He's going to love it."

We now lived in a small house in Moline, not far from my bakery, but we still made it out to Aledo all the time to visit our families. I pulled the car into my space in the attached garage and made my way to the door, cake in tow.

"Babe?" I called out as I entered the kitchen.

"Back here!" I heard him yell from the dining room. I quickly hid the cake in the fridge, setting my purse down on the counter before heading down the hall. As I came closer, I noticed a warm glow lighting the room. When I turned the corner, I found my adorable husband standing behind the candlelit table, arms held open.

"Happy Anniversary, baby," he said with a huge smile.

"Oh my God, did you make dinner?" I had planned to make us something once I got home, but the table was already set with a lovely meal for two.

"No," Logan blushed. "I'm good, but I'm not *that* good. I didn't want you to have to cook, and I figured you'd be too tired to go out after working all day, so I picked up takeout for us."

"Awwww, that's so *sweet*!" I rounded the table and gave him a huge hug, loving the tender kiss he planted on me when I pulled away. The man still had the ability to make my body sing with the slightest effort. "What a nice surprise."

We sat down and had a wonderful dinner, telling each other about our day as we ate. I mentioned the woman I'd given his card to, and he thanked me for another potential customer. Somehow, as risky as starting a business could be, we were both thriving.

"I can't believe it's already been *six* years," he mused, leaning across the table to kiss me again.

"I know, it's gone by so fast."

"The best six years of my life, sweetheart. I'm so happy we've been in this together. I wouldn't have wanted it any other way."

"Me neither. Um...I made us dessert," I said as I started to clear the plates. "Don't get up, though. I'll bring it in."

"Great! It wouldn't happen to be a delicious cake, would it? Or maybe a new pie?" His wide smile made a warm glow spread through my chest. Logan never seemed to lose any excitement over my treats, even though he'd needed Devon to help him shed more than a few unwanted pounds from them over the years.

I had, too, actually. Just thinking about it made me groan. Devon had turned into a hard-ass personal trainer at one of the local gyms, and I kept him in supply of free cupcakes and cookies while he kept me from going up a dress size.

Well, until now. There wasn't much he'd be able to do about it for a little while.

I quickly loaded the dishes into the dishwasher and grabbed the cake out of the fridge. As I took it out of the box I fought back one last burst of nerves, telling myself that I was being silly. Taking one last deep breath, I made my way back down the hall.

"Here we go," I said with a smile as I entered the dining room.

"It is a cake!" he said excitedly. "Is it marble? I bet it's marble, isn't it?"

"You're so damn adorable," I laughed as I walked around the table toward him. "I wanted to make you your favorite... I wanted today to be full of happy memories."

"How could it not be?" He smiled as he reached out and wrapped his arm around my waist. "I have my gorgeous wife with me on my favorite day of the year, serving me my favorite cake in the world. How could it get any better?"

"Well, we'll see," I sighed. "Here you go."

I set the cake down in front of him, waiting for his response. He stared at it, silent.

"Logan?"

"Eden? What—what does this mean?" he squeaked out.

"Don't you know?"

"Are you telling me what I think you're telling me?" His eyes had grown huge, and I noticed that his breathing had picked up. He was either two seconds away from freaking out or doing cartwheels. It scared me that I wasn't sure which.

I glanced down at the cake in question. *Happy Anniversary, Daddy!* was written across the top in bold frosting.

Unable to speak, I simply grabbed his hand and placed it over my abdomen, nodding slowly as I blinked back tears.

"Is it okay?" I finally whispered. "I know it's earlier than we expected."

"Are you *kidding* me?" he yelled, causing me to flinch. "*Okay*? It's *amazing*!" He jumped up and wrapped his arms around me, spinning me around until I was dizzy. "Holy shit, Eden! We're going to be *parents*!" The look on his face was almost comical, as if the notion of a baby was great, but the thought of actually being responsible for it was another matter.

I knew exactly how he felt.

"So, you're happy, baby?" I asked, unable to keep the insecure tone out of my voice.

"Hey, how can you ask me that?" he said soothingly, lifting my chin up until my lips met his. "Sure, I'm shocked, and overwhelmed," he chuckled, "but I'm ecstatic! I've dreamt of this moment with you since I had you naked in our meadow on prom night."

"Ah, yes," I smiled. "Our naked engagement."

"Mmhmm," he nodded, kissing me again. "Care to turn this into a naked anniversary?"

"Logan, all of our anniversaries are naked anniversaries."

"True...but this would be a naked baby announcement. That's a whole new milestone to celebrate."

"You know, every occasion we have doesn't have to be a naked occasion," I laughed.

"That's where I disagree. *All* occasions are better when they're naked." He swept me up in his arms and walked down the hall to our bedroom.

"Why don't you find a way to convince me, then?" I dared him.

And convince me he did. A few times, as a matter of fact.

The cake was finally eaten, and made a better midnight snack than a dessert.

"I love you, Logan," I whispered into his chest as we drifted off to sleep with heavy bellies and light hearts.

"I love you, too, Eden. I'll love you forever."

I smiled against his warm skin as I drifted off to sleep, loving the way he already held my stomach protectively.

"Forever."

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### **About the Author**

Amanda Black was born and raised in the Midwest, where she still lives with her husband and spoiled-rotten dogs. She earned a bachelor's degree in Studio Art before deciding that she actually needed to pay some bills, which is when she took a position as an ophthalmic technician.

For the past few years she's been a closet romance writer in her spare time and would love nothing more than to make it a full-time career. When she's not writing her next steamy love scene, her interests include reading, sketching, and annihilating her friends and family in movie trivia.

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