

A close-up, romantic shot of a man and a woman about to kiss. The man is on the left, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The woman is on the right, her face close to his, looking down. They are both wearing dark clothing. The background is a blurred, high-angle view of a city skyline at night, with many lights from buildings and streets. The overall mood is intimate and romantic.

***What Happened in Vegas
Didn't Stay in
In Vegas***

Meadow Murphy

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**By
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*****Violence and Adult Content*****

~1~

Chanel

I follow my real estate agent, Aria, into the lobby of the first loft she wants to show. She's in her mid-thirties like me, and she has really big, curly brown hair with the most beautiful blue eyes hidden behind tacky, black-framed glasses that look like they are stolen from Elvis's closet. Her lacking sense of style is compensated by her bubbly personality and her savvy bargaining skills. Her reputation, precedes her, and I make a note to myself to thank Nick for hooking me up with her. I am confident she'll find me a deal, an affordable loft or condo close to the hospital I've been hired to work in.

The lobby is all windows; with a slate floor. Aria and I echo as we walk in our heels, clicking and clacking, like hooves of a horse. I pray we hit carpet before anyone catches sight of us. Aria leads me to an elevator at the end of the front lobby and presses eight after we step on. The doors open and thankfully the hallway is carpeted. It's not your average Berber but designer rugs imported either from Portugal or Italy. Aria and I don't discuss what is affordable to me but judging by the look of the lobby and the hallway of the eighth floor, this isn't.

I take a couple of long strides to catch up with her, she's walking briskly in front of me. "Are you sure I can afford this?" I ask.

"No worries! Just remember, it's less than two miles from the hospital where you're going to be doing your Residency." She points out. You can save money just by biking to work. I take a deep breath and stop behind her as we reach our destination, number 812.

Aria punches the code into the lockbox securing the grey double doors. The entrance is grandiose, I try containing my enthusiasm aware Aria works off commission. The lock clicks open and the doors swing wide. The scent of home baked cookies strikes me, great sales tactic. Aria steps aside so I can pass her.

I'm awestruck. The ceiling has punched waffle and crown moulding lining the borders. The rooms are neutral and free from furnishings. The floors boast Siberian tiger wood, which I've only ever seen in magazines. The back wall is crafted of glass overlooking Toronto, its exquisite. I smile at Aria. She nods her head, allowing me free rein to roam around. "Take your time and look around. I'll answer any questions you have once you've seen the place."

Aria stays in the front room giving me space while I looked around. I like that I don't feel pressure with her. She lacks the aggression other real estate people possess, a definite mark in her favour.

I return to her.

"So, what do you think?" She asks.

"Do you have anything comparable for me to see?"

She lifts her Elvis glasses placing them on top of her head. "I don't think so. Look at the gorgeous view of the Toronto skyline and consider the proximity to your hospital! I have it on good authority that the gorgeous owner is willing to decrease the cost of rent, if a tenant is found quickly."

"Gorgeous owner?"

"Gorgeous."

"How gorgeous?"

"Gorgeous, gorgeous."

"Your gorgeous and my gorgeous might be entirely different."

"Unlikely."

"How unlikely?"

"Very unlikely!"

Her eyes glow as we banter with one another. "There is one more thing you should know before you give me your answer."

"That would be?"

"I will be your neighbour, I live next door. I think you should know before you make your decision. So, do you want to look at the next place I've got lined up?"

"It's not necessary," I smile.

"This in your high end..," she warns.

"But it's two minutes from the hospital, like you said. I'll take it!"

Aria's eyes sparkle and she grabs her glasses from on top of her head, "You are saying, 'yes' to the loft? You're taking it?"

"Yes!"

We hug each other tight squealing with delight. I can smell her very strong fragrance as her big curls fly into my face tickling my neck. I liked that I'm going to have her as a friend here in my new place, it's less intimidating.

Aria releases me. "We'll resolve the details once the lease is complete and I get in touch with Chase."

"Chase?"

"He's the owner. Are you ready to go back to your car?"

"Please." The entire way back to the office we chat idly about the loft and it's surrounding vicinities. I'm excited, can't wait to move in.

When we arrive back to Aria's office, I hop into Snowball and take off to my dingy apartment. Snowball is my white 2014 Mercedes I treated myself to when I became a resident. She's on *lease*, costing me a pretty penny but she's stunning. There is no way I'll giving her up, even if I'm in debt the rest of my life.

The new loft is a huge step up from the place I'm currently living in. My bachelor pad is close to University of Toronto, and resembles Jerry's in Seinfeld. The entire place is visible when you first come in the front door with the exclusion of the common bathroom. On the left is a tiny inlet of a kitchen, directly in front is my forty-two inch plasma with an ugly grey sectional sofa that's at least fifteen years old and came with the apartment, and to the right is my bedroom and cramped three-piece bathroom. The landlord said when I leave I can take the sectional, I didn't know if he was being nice or if I was doing him a favour removing it for him.

My answering machine flashes red. I play the messages as I undress for my shower. Nick's voice booms throughout my living room. "Hey, Coco, did Aria find you a place? Call me!" He knows I hate when he calls me Coco. My name is Chanel but he refuses to use it. If he wasn't so damned metrosexual he never would have come up with the name. Nick is like an annoying brother you can't get rid of,

but I definitely owe him for setting me up with Aria. Note to self, I have to be nicer to him! (Like that's ever going to happen!) The second message is a female voice I never heard before, she sounds irate. I rewind the tape and listen to it again, "Henry, the baby is your's, you were full of shit when you said you were snipped, I'll see you in court!" I can't help but laugh as I step into the shower and let the warm water engulf me.

~2~

Aria

I don't hear back from Chase until midweek. The lease is ready for her to sign Friday afternoon. I hope she still wants it. The monthly rate is her high end, but the deal killer if there is one is the cost of parking! Chase wants loads of money she doesn't have to park "Snowball." We banter, bicker, and then I beg and plead, but he doesn't budge. He says if she doesn't pay for it, someone else will. I will leave it up to her to decide. I have no choice.

Chanel answers her phone on the third ring, she's high pitched and loud, so I assume it's a bad time. "Did I get you at a bad time?" I ask opening up the conversation.

"Aria?"

"The one and only!"

"It's never a bad time to call me. Any news?" She asks.

"Headlines, baby, headlines! Can we meet?"

There is a slight pause before Chanel answers, "Sure, where and when?"

"We can meet at my office or a small pub down the street from where you'll be living. Its up to you. If you chose the pub, bring someone to witness the signatures," I advise.

"Can I call you back, Aria?" Chanel asks.

"Sure." I said and we hang up.

She calls back a few minutes later and says we'll meet at the pub, her friend Nick's coming. I tell her about the pub close to the loft called the Paddock, known for the friendly atmosphere the place provides. Johnny the current owner knows me well, he's frequently giving me drinks on the house. I never leave the Paddock in a less than inebriated state.

Our meet time is seven giving me plenty of time to rehearse. I'm hoping Chanel has a few drinks to soften the blow. I hop in the shower and dress to the nines in my best outfit. It's a knockoff Kavita Bhartia dress I found in a thrift store a few blocks from Holts. I look like a goddess from India minus the culture and skin colour.

I shoot a quick email to Chase in case he comes. If he shows up, then the onus of persuasion falls on him. It doesn't hurt that he's Drop. Dead. Gorgeous. I would give my left breast just to get that fine man to notice me. The things I would do for him! It makes me wet just thinking about it!

It doesn't take long to find Chanel, she's a bittersweet catch for me. I like her the second I meet her. She's friendly, smart, and witty. The thought of living next door to her and having girl nights in, is enticing. Finding a tenant for Chase has had its pros and cons. I won't see him anymore, but I have a girlfriend instead.

I opened my MacBook Air and quickly punch out an email to Chase:

To: Chase

Cc:

From: Aria

Subject: Meeting

Hi, Chase,

I am meeting your new tenant at the Paddock for seven for drinks and lease signing. You are more than welcome to drop by and meet her if you want. I'm sure you are very busy! If you can't make it, we can meet at my office Monday for you to sign.

Yours truly,

Aria

I bold yours truly and then think better of it and change it back. I know I'm never going to have a chance with Chase once he lays eyes on Chanel's gloriously long legs, huge boobs, and her flawless, porcelain complexion. Her eyes are the most unique brown I had ever seen, and she has these perfectly pouty cherry lips that looks like they already have lipstick on them, even when they don't. Her hair, well, that's her best damn feature. She has wavy layers with tons of seemingly natural highlights. There is absolutely no way anyone can be that blessed with her colour naturally, it has to be from a bottle. I make a mental note to find out where she goes for her colour jobs. As I think, bittersweet.

I don't wait for Chase to reply. I turned off my Mac and pull out my phone to text Chanel:

Aria: On my way; will be at the Paddock in ten minutes.

I put the phone on vibrate and throw it into the knockoff Gucci bag I brought to match my "Kavita Bhartia" dress. I put my makeup on dark because the lighting in the Paddock is very dim. I don't stop touching up my makeup until I'm completely satisfied with the look I've created, and then I spritz Oscar on myself for two long seconds a squirt. I leave a whisper of fragrance everywhere I go, it's my trademark. Nothing is better than a lasting impression!

I arrive at the Paddock before anyone else and chose a secluded table so we won't be interrupted frequently by passersby. I lay the lease on the table and pull my phone out of my purse to play Candy Crush Saga while I wait. I've been stuck on level ninety-two for weeks now and no matter what special candies I collect, I can't pass this stage in the allowed number of moves. It's frustrating to say the least.

Chanel doesn't show until midway through my fourth life. I briskly switch off the game and put my phone on vibrate throwing it back in my purse before smiling and standing up to hug her. Oh my God, the clothes she's wearing today make her last two outfits look like she was Mother Theresa. The only way I can describe tonight's fashion statement in fewer words or much less would be: outrageously smutty. To think, she's a resident becoming a doctor! I can only imagine how she's become "head" of her class. I like her, so I try not to make assumptions.

Nick trails closely behind Chanel like there's an imaginary leash from Chanel's hand to his neck. He's dressed superbly, which makes me question his sexuality. He wears a dark suit that appears tailored especially for him, shoes imported from Italy, and his blue eyes, olive complexion, and his short spiky hair makes him appealing to both sexes. Gay, heterosexual, definitely metrosexual, he's eye candy to anyone who see's him and has any modicum of taste! After I let go of Chanel, Nick and I air kiss before we take our seats.

~3~

Chanel

We get to the Paddock ten minutes late. Nick keeps me waiting as usual. I don't know what he does to get ready, but he takes longer than most women.

It's a mild winter night; big snowflakes fall slowly from the sky, it's absolutely beautiful. I open the door to the bar and my senses are accosted by an odour of perfume that fills the air. It's far too strong, toxic even. I wanted to go back outside just to free myself from the obnoxious scent, but I catch sight of Aria doing something with her phone and stop myself from stepping back and instead propel forward. The closer I get to her, the stronger the scent becomes. I know she's the culprit. I can predict a searing headache in my immediate future.

She stands to give me a hug and I see the hem of her dress kiss the floor. The sequins and design appear to be Indian: it's stunning. She also has rid herself of those horrible Elvis-inspired glasses she wore to our last meeting.

The waitress hustles over to take our orders. Aria and I opt for the house wine. Nick orders a Cosmo, which is typical. Aria hands me the lease. "Sorry I couldn't get this to you sooner. I had a hard time tweaking the details with Chase. I know it's on the high side of what you were willing to pay, but don't forget the proximity to the hospital."

I grin at her. "I'm so happy!"

I notice Aria starts biting her lip, so I stop myself from opening the package and look at her. "Is there something you need to tell me?"

She hesitates. "It's about Snowball's parking spot."

I finish pulling out the lease from the envelope and start scanning it. "There is a parking spot for her, right?"

Nick rolls his eyes. "It's a car for god sakes!"

Frustrated, I turn to Nick. "It might be to you, but not to me. You started it by calling your car Jezebel."

Nick rolls his eyes like always does and says, "Whatever! I called her that when she breaks down on me, it's out of anger."

I turn back to Aria. "Go on," I encourage. Aria smiles but appears to lack the confidence I gave her credit for. She continues, "There is a home for Snowball, but it carries a steep charge."

Okay, when Aria says the word home, I become nervous. How much extra is this going to cost me? I study her waiting for her response. She digs through her handbag and pulls out her phone. It's flashing a blue light, she presses buttons and looks back up at me. "I was hoping Chase would come and discuss it with you, but it appears he hasn't received my message yet."

"How much, Aria?" I ask with an edgy voice. I cross my arms in front of my chest and brace myself for what she has to say.

"35K" My arms drop, flabbergasted.

Nick's eyes pop from his head. "Holy hell!"

"You can't be serious!" I sputter.

"Deadly! I did everything in my power to get him to drop or lower the fee for you but nothing's worked. He says if you don't want the parking spot he'll sell it to somebody else. If it makes you feel any better, that price includes tax and it can be spread out into of forty-eight equal payments." She uses her phone to calculate the numbers while I sit dumbfounded. "It works out to just a little under seven hundred and thirty dollars a month, but you will own that spot and be able to sell it after it's been paid for. The loft including Snowball's new home will run you \$3K a month, after four years it will drop off and then the loft will only cost approximately \$2270 a month not taking into account any rent increases over the four years, which of course there will be."

"Do all the spots cost that kind of money?"

"Unfortunately they do." With that, I notice a man walking towards us. Aria follows my eyes passed her to the mystery man, who happens to stop right behind her chair.

~4~

He wears a black three piece suit and Tanino Crisci shoes. I never would have known they are designer shoes if it weren't for Nick's profoundly rude reaction to Chase entering the bar. He stares Chase down as he approaches our table. I have no choice but nudge Nick to stop. Nick looks at me defensively raising his brow mouthing, "What?"

I whispered back, "Stop staring. You're really embarrassing!"

Nick's awestruck, "He's wearing Tanino Crisci shoes!"

"Oh, that explains it!" I hiss having no idea what Tanino Crisci shoes are. "Wipe your drool!" I order irritated.

He shoots back in defense, "They are only the most expensive Italian shoes ever made. They don't make them anymore. The man is wearing gold on his feet."

Aria, unaware of our exchange, starts introductions. "Chase, this is Chanel and Nick. Chanel is going to be renting your loft, and Nick is her friend and our witness. Chanel and Nick, this is Chase." She looks up at him smiling flirtatiously. "I glad you could make it." Under her breath I could swear I hear her mumble something about the parking spot.

Chase looks over at me and takes my hand kissing it lightly. "The pleasure is all mine." His dark eyes are unreadable. His formality unnerving, and I'm not sure I'm going to like him. He makes me jittery. His short dark hair is styled on purpose to be shaggy, and the look suits his face perfectly. I chuckle to myself thinking this guy is the only one I've met that could possibly outdo Nick in the class and style department. I didn't think I would ever see the day.

Chase's eyes meet mine. "Do I amuse you?"

"Hardly," I'm struck by his egocentrism. I'm not going to let on that he could well be God's gift to womankind. If he's anything like Nick who acts like he knows he's God's gift, the world might implode. Really, there just isn't enough room for both of them. "You haven't had enough time to be able to amuse me, since you just got here." I smile curtly.

Nick pulls out a chair for Chase. "Please, join us. What'll you have?"

"I'll just have a Carlsberg," Chase says.

Nick leaves the table to order the beer. Chase reaches for the lease in front of me. He studies me. "Have you had a chance to review the lease?"

I looked at him. "I have."

"Are you happy with it?" He asks.

"The price of the parking spot is exorbitant for my budget. I was just about to mention this to Aria; I'm going to have to pass."

Chase's thick fingers start scratching his five o'clock shadow before he leafs through the lease presumably looking for that particular section. He pulls a pen from his pocket and scratches out something and then scribbles something else. He signs his section and then after Nick places Chase's beer in front of him, Chase slides the lease to him for signing. "Surely your friend Chanel won't need more time to consider after I've changed the price."

Nick smirks, signs in his spot, and then slides it to me.

I looked at the lease and note he's scratched out \$35,000 and written complimentary. I sign the rental agreement. Aria gathers the lease and puts it away. Her face is flushed, her commission obviously affected.

"Well, I guess that's it then! Welcome, neighbour!" She gives me a friendly hug and Nick and Chase clink glasses, Cosmopolitan to beer.

We finish our drinks and casual conversation before I call it an early night. I look at everyone and politely say, "Thank you for coming. I'm going to call it an evening. I start my Residency tomorrow."

Nick's eyes light up. "I forgot, Coco, I'll grab you when I go have a fag. Try not to kill anyone your first week!"

I roll my eyes at Nick's brazen comment. "Promise, unless you're the patient!"

Chase's eyebrows furrowed. "Oh, where's your Residency?"

"Toronto General. I'm following a cardiologist."

"Impressive," he comments. "Why did you choose the General?"

I smile at Nick before answering Chase's question. "Some dickwad who drinks cosmos told me it's one of the best cardiac centres in the world."

Chase grins from ear to ear at Nick. "Dickwad happens to be correct. What does dickwad do?" Chase totally knows we are talking about Nick and he's playful, his inquisitive demeanour is sort of cute.

"I'm a Respiriology resident at the General."

"You smoke fags? Not the best of role models, I see," Chase proffers.

"I'll quit when I passed my residency. I plan on moving up the ranks to becoming CEO." Nick's tone is dead serious.

"Is that so?" Chase raises his eyebrows and studies Nick's expression. "I wish you luck."

"Thanks." Nick returns Chase's smile and they shake hands. Cosmo and beer apparently go well together.

The next morning, I allot myself an hour to get ready, excluding travel time. I take an extra-long shower and opt for my tight black pants with two inch heels. I chose a light blue blouse covered by my prized white coat. I look at myself with pride and pull my hair up into a high ponytail.

My smile won't go away. I apply light makeup on my pale complexion and accentuate my lips with this gorgeous rose colour I recently bought. With a final once over, I head out to Snowball. The day has finally come where I can wear my lab coat with pride, my goal ever since I bought Snowball. Snowball wouldn't be a possibility if I hadn't earned that white coat needed to pay her off.

The morning is bitterly cold. My cell phone reads minus fifteen degrees. The 680 News channel says with the wind chill, it feels like negative thirty. I reach the hospital at 8:00 a.m. for 8:30. The underground parking lot is huge and I circle it five times looking for a spot where Snowball will be safe. I like to leave her next to a wall so there was fifty percent less chance of door dings, but when I can't find the optimal space, I settle on parking her in between some of her own kind. I sandwich her in between a Mercedes and a BMW, convincing myself that it's a larger spot than all the rest. I'm hoping their owners are as conscientious as I am, and I'm not coming back to scratches or dents.

I get out of Snowball and hit her key fob to lock her doors. The underground isn't heated, so I feel cold immediately. I pick stairs over elevator and smell the strong stench of urine as I ascend to the main floor. Immediately I start second guessing my choices of Residency at this hospital over the dismal underground

parking conditions. I leave the stairs and find myself in the main lobby of the hospital.

My first stop is the hospital coffee shop before going to Personnel. I spot a Tim Horton's. I join the line behind three other people. Just the smell of coffee settles my nerves. I'm served promptly, allowing me fifteen minutes to savour my coffee before hitting the Personnel department.

Ainsley, the HR girl, planned my day for me, mundane can't begin to describe it. She tells me it will begin with introductions to staff I'll be working with, and then computer training followed up by a formal introduction to the hospital CEO.

Dr. Hart, is going to be working closely with me, but he's too busy in the cath lab (its like an operation room) to bother with formal introductions on my first day. I meet streams of people, whose names escape me, and I learn a computer system that I'm already familiar with, but it irks me that he can't spare ten minutes of his valuable time to be introduced to me since I will be working by his side for several weeks, if not months.

When it comes time to meet up with the CEO of the hospital, I ask to use the loo so I can freshen up for my final meeting of the day. The General has a great reputation, and as a student, I know I want to end up working here after I complete my residentsip. I never met a CEO before and it's a bit intimidating. What if he or she asks me a really hard question that I can't answer? I run a comb through my long, brown hair and reapply fresh lipstick and a spritz of perfume before returning to Ainsley.

Ainsley spent the entire day with me, so I'm beginning to feel comfortable with her. She's five-two if she was lucky, with a bob haircut and big, brown eyes hidden behind her black-rimmed glasses. She keeps cracking jokes that aren't funny and then she won't stop and wait for a reaction. She has this look of expectation in her eyes that makes you want to laugh just to appease her.

Ainsley pulls out her phone from her pocket and glances at the time. "Ready?"

Exaggerating, I take a deep breath. I shake my shoulders, roll my head, and wiggle my fingers, like an athlete before competition. "Ready!" By now, I know I can joke with Ainsley but deep down in the pit of my stomach, I feel that uncomfortable nervous sensation of butterflies.

She leads me through a dimly lit indoor tunnel to a flashy administrative building immediately next to the hospital. I'm in uncharted territory, the shark tank, if you will. A grandiose, well-designed building so completely separate from the hospital, you immediately felt dissociated once you walked inside.

The building is decorated elegantly for the EXECUTIVES, people with big titles, making big decisions affecting thousands of lives, while earning obscene amounts of money. What it comes down to for them, what they base their decisions on, is always how it will affect the budget. It's never about the doctors, nurses, or staff, and most importantly, never about the patient, although the big shots will have you believe otherwise. I hate them.

We reach the CEO's secretary who recognizes Ainsley immediately. "He's expecting you. You may go in."

We walk past her and Ainsley pulls open the door and steps aside so I can enter first. For a fraction of a second I noticed the beautifully furnished office just before my gaze slams into Chase. I gasp.

~5~

The damage is done. I can only control what happens next. Ainsley snaps her head in my direction at the sound of my gasp. I'm glad she's able to contain her composure after my knee-jerk reaction to seeing HIM. She eyes me with curiosity but knows better than to ask.

She, in her most professional demeanour, introduces me formally to Chase and excuses herself from the office after thanking me for the day we had together and wishing me good luck in my new role.

More than a little freaked out that she's leaving me alone with him, I grow angry with the realization that he never once bothered to inform me of his position at the hospital last night. Frozen to my spot, I wait for him to say something. He bows his head and points towards the vacant black leather chair placed in front of his desk and curtly says, "Please."

I take the seat offered and cross my arms and legs, remaining silent. He sits opposite me, elbows planted on his desk, fingers steepled. He's thinking, I can tell.

Chase has the biggest title, the biggest effect on those around him, makes the most money of all who work here. His dark, brooding eyes peer into mine. The atmosphere is like the calm before the impending attack, I look directly into the most deadly eyes of the Great White himself.

Ready for this challenge I stated, "You should have mentioned your position last night."

"You never asked." Chase's tone is low and challenging.

"You didn't think it was important to mention, after you knew I accepted a residency position here?" I glare at him.

"It's hardly a wise move, you wouldn't have rented from me if you knew." His eyes never leaving mine.

"No, you are right, I wouldn't have. You should have found someone else," I scold.

"I want you," he fires back at me. This sends chills up my spine. I'm stunned with suspicion that he might like me.

Our conversation hit a pause. I don't want to ask him why he wants me as a tenant; I fear my suspicion will be confirmed. He raises and starts pacing. My intimidation increases.

I glance down at his shoes. He's wearing a different pair of gold. He has more than one pair. I get mad at my loss of concentration. I stop looking at him and readjust myself, change position and wait for him to say more.

He continues. "What I do during the day has nothing to do with you renting my loft."

"Bullshit," I spit. "It's a conflict of interest, you manipulated me."

"You're overreacting," he belittles.

I hate that he accuses me of overreacting and I don't want to be in his office anymore.

"Hardly, have a good day, Chase!" I snarl. I'm angry at myself, because I let him know he got to me. I stand to leave.

"You too, Chanel." His voice remains calm, unaffected.

Without direction from him, I walk briskly to the door. He follows me. I don't see him do this, but I feel him close behind. His spicy cologne is distracting. I swoon for a fraction of a second, as though caught in an imaginary wave. I fight the sexual attraction I feel and leave his office closing the door behind me.

Enigmatic and powerful, he is never to be underestimated.



When Snowball and I get home I text Nick:

Chanel: Code grey!

I know when he gets this message he will come right over, so I jump in the shower to rid myself of all the hospital microorganisms that somehow manage to find their way on my body while I'm there. I bought a new shower head that hits my tense muscles in all the right spots. I could have stayed in there for ages, but I know if I don't get ready soon, Nick will try joining me in the shower declaring a code purple from sex deprivation, he always claims sperm build up turns his balls a funny shade of purple.

Our friendship went past normal limits on several occasions. Nick and I refer to sex between us as 'Physiotherapy.' Afterwards, we always swear we will never do it again. When either one of us undergoes extended bouts of what we diagnose as 'Anorxia' our definition: undernourishment of sexual needs: accompanied by excessive amounts of special medicine 'alcohol,' it's a dangerous combination. Physiotherapy with Nick is a great way for releasing pent up sexual energy.

Dressed in my worn, flannel, pyjama's, I find Nick already waiting for me on my sofa. He's dressed for comfort in a black Nike track outfit and socks. He has his own key to my apartment, which I encourage him to use. He has two Vodka coolers poured and two veal sandwiches topped with a spicy tomato sauce waiting for me. He's listening to an old episode of Friends and doing something on his phone when I walk in. He looks up at me and turns off the television so I can have his undivided attention.

I sit next to him and start divulging immediately, "Did you know who we met last night at the Paddock?" I quiz.

Nick half smiles, half snickers, "Yes... I was there, remember."

“Cork the sarcasm, save it for a boyfriend,” I say sarcastically. I shake my head mildly irritated with him, “No, seriously. Do you know who Chase is? Haven’t you ever seen him before?”

“Well,” he pauses. “I guess he looks a little familiar. Who is he?” Nick bites into his sandwich.

“He’s **‘just’** the CEO of the General.”

Nick looks awestruck, “Why didn’t he mention it to us when you told him where you are going to work?”

“Exactly! Why didn’t he?”

“How did you find out? What happened?” I’ve got Nick’s attention now.

“I was orienting with Ainsley today from HR and she brought me in to meet the CEO. She introduced me to him and then left us alone. I stood there like an idiot in his office, completely in shock. I asked him why he didn’t disclose his position at the hospital when we met at the bar, and he said it was because he wanted me to sign the lease. I told him, he can’t be my landlord and my boss. It’s just, it’s just wrong, I stammer. I left his office in a huff.”

“So what are you going to do?” Nick asks.

I roll my eyes taking a huge sip of my cooler, “If I had any idea, I wouldn’t be calling a code! What should I do?” I ask perplexed.

Just then, the buzzard to my door goes off. Nick looks at me, “Are you expecting anyone?”

“No.” I glance at what I’m wearing and then back up to him, “Does it look like I am! I can’t answer the door dressed like this. You, get it!” I order.

Nick picks up the phone and greets the caller and then listens to the other end. His eyes grow large as he looks at me, “Come on up.” He hangs up the phone, “You’ll never guess.”

“Who?” My voice was ingrained with impatience.

“Chase is downstairs.”

“No way!” I get up from the couch and start running quietly to my room. Nick has to be kidding but I’m not taking any chances. What if he isn’t kidding? Chase had to have looked at my personal file at work to know where I live!

Nick gets up from the couch, “What are you doing?” He asks me.

"I'm hiding; he can't see me looking like this. I don't even know what to say to him!"

There's a knock at my door. I have just enough time to find a comfortable hiding spot where I hear what's going on and not make too much noise.

The door opens. Nick greets Chase, "Good to see you again, and to what do I owe the honour? Please, come in." I hear a few footsteps anxiously waiting to hear why he's here.

"Thanks, I was hoping I could have a minute with Chanel? She does live here, doesn't she?"

"She does," he confirms. "Coco is a little indisposed right now." Nick uses my damned nickname. He makes it sound like more than just friends between us. I wonder if it's intentional.

Chase obviously catches on to the term of endearment, he has to know more, "I'm sorry, did I catch both of you at a bad time?" The insinuation is evident, and Nick confirms it, "You did, but that's okay, I can have her call you in the morning if you'd like? Is there a good time to reach you?" What kind of game is Nick playing at? He clearly doesn't like Chase as much as he appeared to at the bar.

"That will be fine, she can call me anytime tomorrow afternoon. I'll see myself out, Nick." The door opens and shuts, Chase is gone.

I wait a minute before coming out, "What was that?" I demand.

Nick rolls his eyes, "What was what?"

I mimic Nick perfectly, "Coco is a little indisposed right now."

"I don't like the way he manipulated you, I wanted to give him something to chew on." Nick takes another bite of his sandwich. I suddenly lose my appetite. "Then he has the nerve to turn up here uninvited. Whatever he had to say to you could have waited until he saw you at work."

"You shouldn't have done that Nick."

"Sorry, he pissed me off."

"So what do I do now?"

"Ask Aria if you can get out of your lease, it's easier than finding a new job."

"What if I can't?"

"Then you'll have to learn to live with it, at home and at work."

~7~

I join Nick on the couch when the coast is clear but I'm still pissed at the way he handled Chase. In Nick's opinion, my code grey has been temporarily averted and now its time to take care of his Code Purple. The occurrences of code purples are becoming increasingly more frequent. He places his arm around me on the sofa and he has this enamoured look in his eyes that he insists all the girls swoon over. I tell him, I'm not one of them but he refuses to believe me.

He starts moving my hair over to one side as he begins kissing my neck. I tilt my head increasing his access, while I pick his phone up and start dialling Aria's number. She answers on the second ring, "Hello?"

"Aria? It's Chanel. I just ran into a problem and I'm wondering if I can run a question by you."

"Sure Chanel, what is it?" She asks.

I pause a second but try to sound casual in the hopes that it influences her answer in my best interest, "Any possibility of backing out of the lease and finding a new place"

"Oh I'm not sure Chanel, I have to talk to Chase because you already signed. Is there a problem?"

I don't want her to start asking questions while Nick is getting 'heated' so I cut the call short, "It's nothing, I'll tell you the next time I see you."

"Are you sure Chanel?" She asks concerned.

"Yes, I'm sure, it'll be fine."

We hang up with each other and I turn my attention back to Nick, "I'm shit out of luck," Nick.

His soft lips cover mine and his warm tongue finds its way into my mouth. I submit to his skilled advances and kiss him back.

He eagerly removes my pyjama top lifting it over my head and then he takes my breast into his mouth and begin sucking it savagely. His licking mimics an animal's victory kill, lapping up its prey, "I'm sorry to hear that," he says in a

breathy tone as he takes the other breast into his mouth. If he didn't have my attention before, he sure as hell has it now.

"Do you want me to blow you tonight?" I ask, figuring out his pleasure.

"No," he said huskily. "I just want to take you raw. I'm going to make that pussy of your's bleed." He rips my underwear off and without another second to spare he penetrates me forcefully, fucking me selfishly. His pleasure right now is the only pleasure that matters. Sex on demand is sweet, with Nick.

His punishing thrusts last until I can barely take any more and then he orders me to, "Come."

I come around him and then he pulls out marking me like an animal spraying his territory, coming all over my abdomen.

"You can't fuck a girlfriend like that!" Nick says appreciatively as he kisses me one more time before I head back to my shower.

"Next time use a condom, Dickwad" I order from the bathroom.

When we made the rules, we mutually decided, the person who calls the code calls the shots.

Aria

After that unusual call I got from Chanel yesterday evening, I'm not surprised to hear back from her this morning. She sounds desperate about wanting to meet up with me at a coffee shop near her old apartment. I'm caught off guard when we both hung up and my phone rings immediately after. Obviously, I carry on with the call thinking it's her, never figuring in my wildest dreams that Chase will be on the other end. Human curiosity gets the better of me and I start probing, as does he.

I heard a mumble into my receiver and ask, "Chase is that you?"

"Yes, Aria, were you just talking to Chanel?"

"Actually I was, she wants to meet with me at a coffee shop close to her apartment. Do you know what that's about?" I fish.

"How would I know what it's about when I haven't met with her yet?" He inquires.

"Well, last night she called me asking if there's any way she can get out of her new lease."

"She what!" In his apparent aggravation he becomes silent for a second,

"Yesterday she found out my position at the General. Chanel was shocked. You didn't tell her what I do at any of the meetings you had with her?"

He's blaming me, and I'm not having this, "It never came up. Why didn't you mention it at the Paddock when she told you what her new job was?"

"I didn't think she would sign the lease if she knew," he clipped.

"So, I could have found somebody else." I would have loved the extra time with Chase and maybe I would get the full commission!

"I didn't want anybody else." So much for that I think!

"So what should I say when I see her?"

"Explain her options after you inform her that she can't break the lease. Tell her she's committed for one year. If she wants out of her lease, she's responsible to find me a new tenant or she can move out and continue to pay the rent but the onus is on her."

“She isn’t going to be happy. I hope that’s not why she wants to meet with me today.”

“You can bet it is.”

Other than the insight, Chase isn’t much help. We exchange pleasantries before hanging up.

The morning isn’t as cold as it has been these previous days. The snow is getting slushy and the clouds are more grey than white. When I arrive at the coffee shop, Chanel is already there.

It’s a cozy coffee shop with dim lighting and puffy leather chairs. They have computers you can rent to surf the web, it’s more like an internet cafe. I dress to the nines as I always do for work and Chanel is dressed like she rolled out of bed wearing a man’s black tracksuit. She obviously takes little pride in her appearance when she isn’t on duty at the hospital. I’m sure she’s a hard worker and it doesn’t matter to her what she wears in her off time. Who am I to judge?

Chanel raises from her chair and gives me a big hug. If my sniffer is working correctly, she smells like Old Spice Deodorant for Men. It’s sort of hard to tell because what I’m wearing overpowers what she’s wearing. I ask her if she wants anything and she politely refuses, so I excuse myself to order a coffee before sitting down with her.

I place my coffee on the little round walnut coloured veneer table, and before I can even take a seat, she immediately asks me about the lease. “Aria, there is definitely no way of getting out of the lease?”

I play dumb, figuring it will work better for me, “Is there a problem?”

Chanel takes a sip of her coffee and pulls her chair in closer to the table. Her tone of voice drops as she tries to explain, “I just found out that Chase is CEO to the hospital. It’s hardly appropriate for him to be my landlord too.”

“I reviewed the lease for you last night, and the only way you can get out of it is by finding him a new tenant for the remainder of your lease or moving and just paying the rent.” I look at Chanel who appears crestfallen and her eyes darken with frustration.

“I have one idea, and if it doesn’t work, then I will have to live with it.”

“What’s that?” I ask.

Chanel pulls her phone out of her purse and starts typing on the screen. Then she turns it in my direction to allow me to see her idea. It’s a text:

Channel: Nick, do you want to live in the new loft for one year and I’ll take your condo?

I smile at Chanel thinking her idea is brilliant, yet I knew Chase won’t like it. We hear a chirp and Chanel holds the phone so we can read his response together. Nick texts back:

Nick: Suck my dick for a year and I’ll think about it! NO!

Chanel rolls her eyes out of embarrassment over Nick’s hilarious comment. I ask if I can text him back for her and she says sure, so I take her phone and write:

Chanel: This is from Aria, (from the Paddock) I’ll suck your dick and you can stay in your own apartment.

Chanel reads what I write and starts laughing. Nothing shocks her. I know we are going to be great neighbours. That is the last time; Chanel ever entertained the idea of leaving her new loft.

~9~

Chanel

Today I'm orienting with Dr. Bradley Hart. He's 39 and he's already been appointed Chief of Cardiology for the General. He evidently is exceptional at what he does to obtain such a prestigious position with the hospital at such an early age. He also is an Interventionist which means he's trained to do special high risk procedures such as angioplasties and valvuloplasties.

It's a privilege to be trained by him, so I make sure to get to the Cardiac floor before he does; I want to make a good first impression. I struggled this morning with my hair which didn't want to cooperate with me but eventually I pulled it back into a decent looking bun. I used my Oscar body spray, and put on a very light layer of makeup on so I don't look pale under the florescent lights that the hospital. Finally, I dress business casual with one inch heels and the piece de resistance: my white Jacket and burgundy stethoscope.

The nursing station at quarter to eight in the morning is buzzing. The night nurses are finishing their shift and giving report to the day nurses. Charge nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and personal support workers, are planning out their day, while other departments are calling, asking for patients to be sent down in wheelchairs and stretchers for tests such as x-rays, and echo cardiograms.

I think I spot Bradley right away because he is the only other person wearing a white jacket in the station. He isn't facing me, but even if he is, I won't recognize him because I had never met him before. I catch the eye of a young nurse and glanced at the doctor asking secretively, "Is that Dr. Hart?" She nods yes and then I approach him cautiously making sure I'm not interrupting him.

After a few seconds I'm able to snatch his attention. He looks up at me and I'm floored at what I see. This can't be happening, "Chase?"

He looks at me smiling like it happens everyday, "You must have met my brother who looks like me. I am Dr. Bradley Hart, and you are?"

"Chanel, your new resident," I say relieved.

"It's a pleasure to meet you." He takes my hand and gently shakes it. "Chase and I are identical twins, but that's where our similarities end."

I can't get over it. He has the same shaggy dark hair cut a little shorter than Chase's, dark brooding eyes exactly like Chase's, and perfect features with a squared off jawline and perfect nose. I think I swoon again like I did with Chase, caught in a second wave. I have to grab onto the desk to steady myself. Obviously when God made God's gift, he was proud of himself and duplicated it.

I spend the entire day working with Bradley examining his patients and discussing courses of treatment that will or won't benefit them. We read up on the patient, see them, and when we get back to the nursing station we have a clearer picture of what needs to be done to him or her. Then we discuss everything thoroughly. The more we discuss, the more I become aware that intelligence seeps from his pores.

I must have asked a hundred questions and when I'm not asking them, nurses are constantly approaching him with concerns over their mutual patients. He appears so kind isn't bothered over the countless interruptions and by me prattling on with more questions.

Bradley is diligent, composed, and gifted, not to mention intelligent, gorgeous, and most importantly divorced. The brother without the golden shoes seems more delicious than the other. I leave the hospital on my second day with a spring in my step.

~10~

The next two weeks fly by. Aria calls my cell and leaves a message saying I can swing by her place anytime that evening to pick the key up. Nick promises to help with the move, so I text him when I get the key.

Chanel: I have the key Hercules!

Nick: It's about time u start acknowledging my strength Woman! I do wish u find someone else to help u with u'r move.

Chanel: Why?

Nick: Your neighbour Aria scares me! She meets me once and then texts me about giving me a blow job! Disgusting!

Chanel: Oh come on Nick, u met u'r match! She's the 1st person I ever met that's as comical as u r!

Nick: Whatever!

Nick is knocking at my door within an hour of texting me. Seriously, the man has no life, but I love him, and compared to him I'm a complete social hermit. He shows up in a blue dress shirt and jeans, ready for work. A girl can't ask for a better friend then him. I'm tempted to call a code purple on him, but we have too much to do tonight.

We pick up the U-Haul and bring over the big stuff first, doing a couple of trips with the truck. Then, we pack Jezebel (Nick's car) and Snowball up and drive them to my new loft. By the time we're done we are exhausted.

I strip myself bare while Nick sits quietly on my grey sofa, "Shower?" I ask.

He smiles with his eyes, "Please." I slowly undress him, I want him naked. He kisses me deeply. I grab the back of his hair and pulled him in closer to me, deeper, for a much more penetrating kiss. He groans in my mouth and he rubs against me showing his arousal. My body tingles all over with desire for him.

I finish lowering his shirt and let it drop to the floor. He helps me take off his tight fitting jeans and then I curl my fingers in his briefs dropping them to the ground where his jeans already lay.

He fists his fingers in my hair near the nape of my neck and then he kisses me one more time. This time I groan into his mouth. "Its time for me to please you after all the help you've given me," I whisper. I slide down Nick's body like I'm lowering myself down a pole, until my lips find their way onto his dick. I hold him firmly as I take him deep into my mouth, sucking hard, and doing soft sweet motions on his crown. I can tell by the way he grabs my hair and his soft moans that he likes what I'm doing.

He warns me by calling out my name but instead of letting him release outside of me, I make sure he isn't moving anywhere, and I drink his cum willingly, welcoming his warm fluids into my mouth and swallowing every last drop. This moment is about him, no code, no expectations, just me loving Nick for who he is.

We shower together. I wash him and he washes me. I offer for him to stay the night and he takes me up on it. We wrap up our shower and then headed off to bed where we fell asleep in each other's arms.

We really have to stop doing this. Nick and I aren't dating anyone else right now, so whenever one of us is lonely we just hook up. We don't have the normal reasonable expectations that most couples have for one another so we never fight, and for the most part we usually enjoy each other's company. When either of us got involved with a new person, we stop being together, essentially, but the new person in our lives always ends up having too big a pair of shoes to fill.

I've been working with Bradley for three weeks when it happens. We are having a busy morning, and what makes it different from most is Mrs. Wilson starts turning sour in the early morning, and by ten minutes after eleven the nurses are calling a code blue on her. Her body becomes lifeless. Everyone runs to the room, there are three nurses, two of them from the Coronary Care Unit, a respiratory therapist, myself, and Bradley.

The nurses have Mrs. Wilson on her bed and place the board from the crash cart under her so they can begin compressions on a hard surface right away. A nurse begins doing the compressions while another one records everything that's happening. Electrodes are placed on Mrs. Wilson's chest so they could monitor her heart with the monitor. Bradley determines her heart rhythm and then chooses a course of treatment, hopefully it helps bring her back to life.

The respiratory therapist puts a breathing tube down her throat ensuring her airway. A second intravenous is introduced into her veins to run an i.v. bolus on her. The bolus will increase her blood pressure, we hope. She is shocked three times with electricity. The first two times the machine on the crash cart is set for 200 and then in a last ditch effort we increase to 360 hoping her heart will stop and then restart back into a life sustaining rhythm, pumping blood on its own again.

Compressions resume after each jolt, and although we worked on Mrs. Wilson for forty-five minutes, she succumbs to her morbidities and co-morbidities resulting in a lifeless body. We call her time of death.

The nurses called her family during the code, and they start arriving after she's passed. They tidy up the room and lifeless body so they can pay their last respects. Bradley looks at me, "I'll tell the spouse, you go into the back room and start charting. We'll grab lunch together outside of the hospital to review what happened."

I'm really upset, she's the first person to die this way since I started. I nod my head, and turn back slowly to walk away. I liked Mrs. Wilson. She'd been here on this hospital visit twelve days and we thought she was improving. Bradley was planning to discharge her Monday after her new pacemaker was checked.

I chose a computer in a corner of the nursing station where I think nobody will go and I silently weep. The monitor is blurry, and I reach for Kleenex. I wipe my eyes trying to stop crying before anyone see's me but more tears come.

Bradley finishes telling Mrs. Wilson's spouse because he finds me and pulls a chair up beside me. He spins my chair so I'm facing him and I find my legs between his. I'm so embarrassed that he see's me crying, I apologize thinking how unprofessional I am, "I'm so sorry."

"Don't be," he reassures.

He looks at me and takes my hand in his, to console me, "Let me take you out of here for lunch." He doesn't let go the entire way to his truck. For some reason, I'm not feeling as sad anymore. God's gift to man is holding my hand, I know it's only for comfort but it makes me feel a little bit better.

~11~

Bradley leads me to his large Black Hummer that's sitting in the Doctor's parking lot. The ruggedness of the vehicle suits the man who drives it. It's mild outside and the cloudless sky boasts a larger than life sun. It's the first winter day that feels milder than the rest and shows the first signs of spring. It makes me sad to think that Mr. Wilson will spend the day grieving over his wife.

Bradley opens the door for me and helps me step up into his fancy truck which is full of black leather and fine wood grains. It has that new car scent mixed with the smell of him which is an intoxicating concoction.

Referring to his truck, he looks at me almost apologetically and shrugs, "Got it in the divorce settlement."

I glance at him, "I can't imagine anyone divorcing you, you're so nice." He takes his place in the driver's side and starts up the truck with a low rumble. There is a second of silence before he responds to my comment, "Tell that to my bitch ex-wife, she blames me for everything. I made her run to my brother's open arms." He growls.

"She slept with Chase?" I'm shocked. Who does that to their own brother, except someone like Chase, obviously I had him pegged correctly.

"More than once," he adds.

"Are they still together?"

"No Chase slept with her and then discarded her. She would have taken me to the cleaners in divorce court if my lawyer hadn't beat her to it. I'm sorry but I'm still a tiny bit resentful."

"Who are you more mad at Chase or your ex?" I question.

"I'm upset with all three, don't forget the lawyer who screwed me out of all my money."

It's a good thing Bradley feels comfortable enough to confide in me. I imagine him in my arms, I want to run my hands through his shaggy hair and get lost in those dark eyes of his, comforting him.

"I know a good Bistro that's close to the hospital, where we can talk," he says in a low voice. We sit in silence the rest of the way until he parks. The entire time we drive I imagine what it would feel like to have his hands and those lips all over my body. I hear him say my name interrupting my sensual thoughts. Imagining him anywhere near me just makes me shiver.

The Bistro serves organic everything and fresh bread. We stand in line to get our food and then chose our table after. There are no servers to interrupt us; I see why Bradley chose this place. The restaurant is busy and the buzz of chatter along with the noise of porcelain to metal ensures our privacy for the discussion we are about to have.

"What went wrong?" I ask.

His dark eyes appear lost in thought, "She could have infarcted or we could have missed something completely different like an aneurysm. Only way of knowing is with an autopsy." He redirects the conversation to me, "Do you want to discuss what bothers you most about her death?"

I've experienced patient deaths before but reflecting back on it now, I think one reason that makes her death stand out from the others, "I think it bothers me because she was going to be discharged. I was blindsided."

His brooding eyes looks to mine, "It bothers me too," he confesses. "I just had to get out of the hospital and escape it."

"So you feel the same?"

"I do." His hand brushes against mine accidentally as he reaches for the salt and then he says something that makes my heart flip flop, "Maybe we can escape it together."

"I'd like that," I simper.

His dark eyes look longingly into mine for a fraction of a second before he casts them down, but the silence between us lasts longer and for a brief second I think maybe he regrets flirting with me.

He strokes his chin reflecting, "A death like this happened once before to another patient of mine, and it bothered me in much of the same way. That patient's nurse called me to notify me of the death."

“The nurse noticed my shocked reaction. I started going over everything in my mind wondering what I did wrong, and this nurse interrupted my thoughts and said to me, ‘You didn’t do anything wrong, you have to remember that you are not God, it was just that patients turn to die.’ That made me stop and think, and deep down I knew she was right. Doctors aren’t God. We do our best and sometimes, it’s just that person’s time to go.”

“How did you tell Mr. Wilson without letting it show that his wife’s death bothered you?”

“I couldn’t. A tear gave me away.”

Okay, he’s admitting that he wasn’t strong which is so sexy. My insides turn to a warm jelly.

His hand rests on the table and I cover it with mine, “Thanks, it feels better to know it’s okay to cry, and that you feel the same.” *There is nothing more attractive to me in this moment than this strong man whose not afraid to cry.*

We finish our lunch and head back to the hospital. Our relationship with one another is never the same after that day, its better.

We are far more cordial to one another since we had that lunch. We go to the cafeteria and or sometimes the doctor’s lounge and sprawl out on the couches placing our feet up on an aged table that’s probably older than both of us, staring at the television but not really watching it. We don’t talk sometimes, just share each other’s companionable silence. He’s a whole different kind of friend, then Nick.

~12~

Our time together gets increasingly comfortable and Bradley and I start confiding in each other. I sit next to him while he tells me stories about what his 'bitch ex-wife' does, and I actively listened to him or even poke fun at his stories making him laugh.

He says he likes the way I'm able to make light of his most miserable tales that his 'bitch ex-wife' has purposefully put him through. When we were alone one day in the doctor's lounge, I faced him on the couch and asked, "Why are you really so hostile? Don't say it's the money she's trying to get from you, because I don't think it is." He pauses for a second and crosses his arms. He doesn't answer me or look at me; he just continues to stare at the television.

I think my question crosses a fine line or offends him because he's quiet for sometime before answering under his breath, "I was in love with her."

"You talk in past tense, so you're not anymore?"

"Not anymore." When he says it, he looks away and I suspect it isn't completely the truth. I think he has residual feelings.

"Then why hold onto the anger? What good is it doing you?" I question.

"It makes me avoid relationships like a plaque. I don't want to get hurt again. If you leave a wound uncovered, there's no bandaids that need to be torn off fast or slow.

"That makes sense, coming from a weak person, but you don't strike me as weak." I say intuitively.

"I prefer to consider myself smart," he argues.

"What about yourself? Is there a special somebody in your life?" I don't know how to answer him. I think he's going to judge me, but I say, "No. I'm not dating anyone. Just haven't found the right guy yet."

He looks at me suspiciously, "I find that rather hard to believe, you're very beautiful."

I run my fingers through my hair self-consciously and look into his very serious eyes, he has a six o'clock shadow that makes him look more rugged and

sexier than usual, "Why thank you for the compliment Dr. Hart but unfortunately it's true," I said playfully. "I do have a friend that I go to when I'm lonely, a fuck buddy if you will, and when he's lonely he comes to me. It's a mutual agreement we have. Sad to say, I don't think either one of us has had a date in over a year. I think I'm less inclined to get involved with anyone because I know he's there for me whenever I need him, so I'm not so quick to settle on anyone less than perfect. I guess you could say he's my way of avoiding the 'sore' in the first place."

He frowns, "You devalue yourself letting him use you like that."

"He's not using me at all, because I use him just as much. I have no qualms with my friend Nick. He's can't let me down because we place no expectations on each other. He can't hurt me because I'm not in love with him, and he's a really good listener."

"You deserve more," he tries persuading me.

"What do I deserve?" I hope he says me but he doesn't.

I never considered what I do with Nick as something that is devaluing. I shouldn't have told him about Nick, I didn't think he would judge or care. I get off the couch, grabbing an elastic and tying my hair back for the remainder of my shift. I want to erase the look of disappointment in his eyes; take it away, along with all his pain that his bitch ex-wife caused. I just don't know how.

I'm halfway through the door when I feel his hand grab my wrist and spin me around. He pulls me back into the room to face him. His brooding eyes searched mine; the room is filled with a tension I can't describe. "This conversation isn't finished," He scowls. His body comes close to mine and his bold hands don't let go. Frozen to my spot I wish he'll kiss me. I find myself attracted to him. His finger strokes my cheek and he begins to lower his head towards mine, then as if catching himself becoming inappropriate, he stops suddenly and steps back before saying, "We better get back before they start paging us." I need a second to recompose myself; I went into cardiac arrest.

~13~

Today is an exciting day in my residents'hip because it's the first day I enter the Cath Lab as more than just an observer. Bradley hands me a pair of surgical scrubs and says, "You're going to have to change into these."

"Right here, right now?" I quietly flirt with him so the UCA (Unit Clerk) can't hear what I'm saying to him. I'm bold with him since our last serious discussion and he doesn't seem to be shying away or mind it.

"No, Maggie, the UCA will show you where to go and be quick about it, we have a long list of people to get through today."

"What are we doing today? Valvuloplasties? Angioplasties? Angiograms?" I ask eagerly.

"Angiograms to begin with, now go," he shoo's me away.

"I love it when your bossy," I wink at him and then turn to the desk where Maggie is smirking at my flirtatious ways.

She winks at me and whispers, "You have to be careful, he's got a bitch ex-wife you need to fear for!"

I shrugg nonchalantly, "Ex, is the key word!"

Maggie points to the door behind me, "Change room is behind you." I turn around and head through the door. The room is small and full of lockers, most with no locks on them. There is a bin for dirty linen and a small bathroom. I slip out of my clothes and placed them in an empty locker. The pants have a pull string so one pair fits all. I pull the string as tight as they go but they're still somewhat loose. I don the top and headed back out to Maggie and Bradley.

"Do they fit okay?" He asks.

"The top does, but the pants are loose, I'm afraid they're going to fall off me."

"I'm not, I won't turn away either." He teases. Dr. Hart is flirting back. How delicious! I lift the shirt to show him the slack in the waist. I know there is nothing he can do for me because they are the smallest size, of the one size fits all.

He takes me into one control room looking out into two different Cath labs. He points to one of the labs and says, "That's where we'll be working today." The control room has a desk with a microphone and a telephone facing each Cath lab,

so two cardiologists can work on different patients at the same time. The other Cath lab isn't being used currently so the lights are off and we have the control room to ourselves. Later, I find out this is really unusual and usually both rooms are being used at the same time.

The nurses are already prepping our first case. Bradley hands me a long heavy metal vest for protection from radiation, and he puts one on himself. He looks so hot in his surgical scrubs. I almost begin drooling with desire, but I force myself to stop.

We join the nurses and Bradley begins showing me how to freeze the sight close to the arm before making the incision, then he inserts a long guide wire up into the patient's artery, and when he has the wire in the exact position he wants, he flushes dye through so we can get a good look at the patient's arteries determining if there are any occlusions and by how much. We then finish the procedure and the nurses take that patient away.

Bradley takes me back to the control room where we review the images in greater detail, discussing the patient's condition and determining the best course of action. Finally we dictate notes on that patient and fill in a diagram of the patient's heart explaining on the diagram where the occlusions are if any, before moving on to the next patient.

Bradley and I do this repeatedly until the end of the day. With each procedure, he involves me a little more, so by the end I'm almost able to do the entire procedure on my own. I'm elated with my progress and tired at the same time.

We go in our separate directions to change and then meet back at Maggie's desk to walk to the parking lot together. He gently takes my hand in his and we stroll leisurely to Snowball. When we get to her, I introduced them, "Snowball meet Bradley, Bradley Snowball."

"Pleased to meet you Snowball," he plays along. I like this doctor more and more, especially watching him do angiograms all day. There is something really sexy about a focused, intelligent man, operating big machinery, with people's lives in his hands.

I want to be the person on that table that's getting all his attention and not for an angiogram. I'm reduced to a drooling, hot mess. The only way to describe him

was Alpha Sexy Male. You just know to say yes sir and do whatever he wants, with comfort knowing he will go to the ends of the earth to protect you; it's obvious by watching his interactions with his patients. He's so caring and compassionate.

We hear the double beep of someone unlocking their car door in the close vicinity of Snowball. We automatically turn to face where we hear the sound coming from and find Chase walking in our direction. Bradley instinctively drops my hand at the sight of his brother. His brother being CEO and both of us working for him, he acts quickly, and wisely.

Chase nods, "Chanel, Bradley." Then he looks directly at me, "Chanel, can I have a minute alone with you?" I glanced at Bradley and then nodd okay to Chase.

"It's okay Chanel; I'll see you tomorrow, goodnight." He heads for his car without looking back. All of a sudden the air around us becomes thick and tense. I can't anticipate what Chase has to say to me. His presence impacts his immediate surroundings.

"Aria mentioned you want out of the lease. Is that true?"

Okay, I want to disappear, "Oh, she said that, did she? Maybe, but that was ages ago."

He casually steps closer to me and I can smell his musky sent. Chase's black suit is flawless although he has worn it all day and his eyes make my knees go all Jell-O. He asks, "So you don't feel that way anymore?" I'm nervous so I picture him naked only wearing underwear but that doesn't work, because I'm suddenly feeling very hot, everywhere.

He probably has the perfect body, his face and hands are a telltale indicator that he's a creature to die for. My breathing becomes shallow and rapid; I'm losing control . I tell myself, 'stick to the brother, they're identical and I like him, stick to the brother.' Even that doesn't work.

"Oh heavens no, I don't feel that way anymore. I've settled nicely." A nervous laugh escapes me. I take a step backward; I'm pressing up against snowball with nowhere to go.

"Good to hear that." I turn to open my door when suddenly I feel him rub against my behind, "Do you need help with your door?" I think he's hard, I'm not

sure. To know for sure he would have to do it one more time. 'Stop it Chanel,' I yelled at myself.

"No, No, I'm fine," I stammer.

I turned back to face him and well, that is a big mistake, we are even closer now and I can feel him through his pants pressing against me. Oh Yes! He is hard. Holy shit! A bolt of excitement runs through my veins, there's such a spark with his touch, I wish for more from him, but being the beacon of professionalism, Mr. CEO steps back when I would rather have him shove me into my car and take me, fill me with his dick and pound me in some mind blowing sex. I know I'm not thinking straight. I don't like him, but my body, my sex drive, my vagina, just loves this man, I want to eat him up for dinner.

I drive home all shaken up. I'm tempted to text Nick a code purple, and then I change my mind to a code grey. I have no idea what to do but I know I want Chase between my legs and that is insane. I reflect on my conversation with Bradley when he accused me of 'devaluing myself'. It continues to weigh heavily on me and then I decide against calling a code completely. I call Aria instead.

~14~

Our girl's night in is planned for eight o'clock. Aria resists me inviting Nick complaining, "It's supposed to be girl's!"

I argue, "He's as close to one as you can get, without being one! He also brings a male perspective to the table which enables us to understand men better." We both know the real reason why she doesn't want him over, he will see her in her sweat suit, I win the argument though because she finally agrees to have him come.

Nick's twelve hour shift ends at seven thirty, so he texts me back saying he needs forty-five minutes to shower and change before coming over, which really means an hour and a half in Nick language. I tap on her door at exactly eight o'clock.

I want alone time with her before Nick shows up anyway. She answers the door immediately. Her hair is still wet from her shower and hangs in really cute ringlets around her face. Her porcelain skin and blue eyes were striking and she has on a beautiful reddish brown lipstick that just makes you want to kiss her perfect supple lips. She looks like she is in her late teens, it's the most beautiful I've ever seen her.

She opens the door for me, acting all giddy and giving me a huge hug before cordially inviting me in. Her loft looks exactly like mine with different living and bedroom furnishings. Her living room boasts of white leather Natuzzi couches, whereas I still support my grey sectional that is fifteen+ years old. She has fancy mirrored end tables with black shaded lamps with crystals dangling from them. Her television is enormous and by the looks of it she has surround sound. Her bedroom has grey Ikea furnishings with the most expensive looking mattress and box set I've ever seen and the walls are painted Mauve which surprisingly fits into our code purple theme. After seeing Aria's room, I so have to paint my bedroom purple too!

I call out, "Aria?"

"In here," her voice is coming from the kitchen, "make yourself at home, do you want a drink?"

"Sure, what do you have?"

"Tassimo everything, Diet Coke, beer, wine."

"Wine please."

"Good choice, somebody just gave me a bottle of Marcassin Estate Chardonnay, from the Sonoma Coast. I googled the price, it's worth a pretty penny, given to me of course by a very happy client!"

"Real estate client I hope?"

"I don't have any other kind, silly!" Aria grins at me.

"How unfortunate for you," I tease her.

Aria hands me my wine and turns on the gas fireplace in the corner of the room, I haven't noticed it until now. Then she sits next to me.

"Give me the juice!" I order.

"I gave you wine, you want juice now too?" I can tell Aria has no clue what I mean.

"Juice, is my other word for scoop..."

"What are you talking about?"

"Nick. Are you interested in him?" Aria flushes, "I only ever met him the one time." Her shyness is endearing.

"Do you think he's cute?" I hope she says yes, because I really think they might make a cute couple, it would probably keep Nick away from men!

"Totally, is he single?"

"He sure is. That's why I wanted you to invite him tonight, so you can get to know him."

Aria crosses her legs and starts playing with one of her now damp curls before taking a sip of her almost filled too high glass of wine. "Let's just say for talk sake, he is interested in me, would it bother you? Would you mind if I start seeing your best friend? Would it be weird?"

"Not at all, Nick and I have been friends for as long as I can remember. He's more like a brother. I will love it if the two of you hit it off."

"Chanel, I don't even know why we're talking about it, he probably doesn't even like me."

"You don't know that," I tell her. Like on cue, there is a tap on the door. The tap isn't your typical tap, he taps out a rhythm of a song until you answer the door or the melody finishes whichever comes first.

Nick breezes into the room like he owns the place. He has this unexplainable energy about him, everything just seems more alive when he gets there. Aria asks Nick what he wants to drink and he chooses wine too. He squeezes between us on the couch rather than choosing a seat by himself, and looks to the left and right saying, "Girls."

He turns to me, "Kill anyone at work yet?" He was such a prick at times! I didn't have much of a comeback for him.

I think the wine is slowing down my thought processes, "Bradley Hart is too good of a teacher to let that happen."

"The THROB is teaching you? How did you swing that?" Aria just sits back on the couch and listens to us prattle on, it has to be boring for her.

"THROB?"

"You know, as in heart throb. Every female cardiac nurse in the hospital thinks he's beautiful. Whenever the nursing station is busy, they give up their computers, their chairs, their pens, even their stethoscopes for him, anything he wants, just to get him to notice them. He's totally not into them. He hasn't dated anyone since his divorce. It's sickening. Frankly, I think he's overrated."

"You're jealous is more like it."

"Whatever. I have it going on too, you know," he arrogantly runs his fingers through his hair.

"You do, do you? Who's got a big head now?" I accuse.

He looks down at his groin and then smirks at Aria, "Don't listen to her, the only big head I have is hidden in my pants," he whispers jokingly to her, "I'll show you later," he says to her just loud enough for me to hear.

"Throb might be interested in somebody." I smirk at Nick.

"You?" He says sarcastically, pointing at me and laughing, "Unlikely! Have you seen his ex-wife? She is blond, absolutely breathtaking! No offence but you can't hold a candle to her."

I feel defensive, “He held my hand in the parking lot at the hospital today, until we bumped into his brother.”

“You bumped into Chase? CEO Chase?”

“The one and only.”

“What did Throb do with your hand?”

“He dropped it like it was made of acid,” I grumble.

“Didn’t want his brother Chase the big CEO to see obviously.”

“I guess,” I shrug.

Aria finds an opening to speak, “Chase has a brother?”

Nick looks at her, “Twin.”

Aria smiles, “Really?”

Nick rolled his eyes, “Oh God, not you too?”

Aria casts her gaze down and shakes her head, “No, no.”

Nick focuses back on me and asks, “So then what happened?”

I take another sip of my wine, my glass is half full, “Chase wanted to have a word with me so Bradley left.

Nick looks at me perplexed, “Why would Chase want to talk to you? No offence!”

“None taken dickwad, he’s my landlord, remember?”

Nick flushes, “Oh ya, what did he say?”

I shrug, “He just wanted to know if I still want out of my lease. I told him no. That was ages ago and I’m happy now.” I look at Aria, and finish what I have to say, “When I went to go open my car door, he accidentally rubbed up against my ass.”

Nick breaks in, “No guy does that by accident, and it was on purpose.”

I turn to Nick, “That’s what I was going to ask your opinion about, do you think he was trying to make a pass at me?”

Aria takes centre stage, “I don’t know what Nick thinks, but I definitely do.”

Nick nods in agreement before Aria continues, “What are you going to do now, you have two gorgeous men after you?”

Nick takes a deep breath and then slips, “It’s a matter of opinion.”

My eyes open more, "I don't know, I guess nothing. I don't like Chase. He seems to be holding all the cards, way too much power if you ask me."

"And Bradley? What about him?" Aria questions.

"He's my teacher, hardly appropriate for me to enter into a relationship with him."

Nick comments, "Leaves you single Coco! Nothing new for you!"

I glare at Nick before turning to Aria, "Did I ever tell you how annoying brothers can be?"

Aria giggles and helps turn our attention away from each other by putting on Netflix. We chose a chick flick knowing Nick won't complain. I finish my wine and place all my attention onto the movie. When it is done, I notice the time and decide to leave. Nick gets up and leaves when I do.

When I go back to my loft, I change into my pyjamas and go straight to bed, knowing I have to get up early.

The incessant banging of the headboard next door keeps me up several hours after I went to bed. Obviously, Nick didn't go home after all.

~15~

The next day is rough. I'm overtired thanks to Aria's Ikea bed. If she had invested in a more solid frame like the mattress and box spring, I would probably be well rested. Bradley and I spend the entire day minus food and toilet breaks in the cath lab doing angiogram after angiogram. I seem to be getting more comfortable with them.

It's a treat seeing Bradley the entire day in sexy green surgical scrubs. The surgical top he's wearing today is a V-neck accentuating his tan skin and broad boulder like shoulders. Unfortunately his scrub top is covered by a heavy led apron which he wears during all the procedures. The pants, one size fits most hangs loosely on his hips and I had a feeling he wears them like that intentionally, just to get attention. He sure has mine.

We're halfway through the last angiogram when Bradley notices I'm looking tired. He looks up at me and says, "You can take off early if you want, I've got this."

I know it is only going to be a few more minutes and then I can at least watch him strip off his led vest, "I really don't mind staying."

"If you're sure," his dark eyes smile at me, "you look tired."

"I am," I confess.

We stay quiet while he finishes the last person and closes her up; leaving the patient in the able hands of the same nurses we've worked with all day. The nurses take the patient with them, leaving Bradley and myself alone.

This time with him is very uncomfortable and different in comparison to the several other times we've been alone in the past. There is a feeling of anticipation that courses through my veins making my stomach do flip flops while my heart flutters at the same time. I don't even know if the feelings I'm having are in any way mutual. He only held my hand, and criticized my relationship with Nick, which I regret telling him about.

The silence in the room gets loud as I stare him down with raw insatiable sexual desire while he removes his led apron. I take mine off after he's done removing his and I feel his stare penetrate me and follow my every move. It is hot.

If Nick is right and he hasn't been with anyone since his wife, I wonder what he's going to be like. Right now it feels like he could fuck me without touching me, this man is a God.

We go into the control room and review the procedure we just finished on the computer, analyzing the patient's condition. His tone is low and racy; he is so knowledgeable about all his patients when he dictates his final notes on the phone. He glances at me, "Are you ready to go?"

"Sure," I said breathlessly.

We stand to leave and he allows me to go first. His thick fingers guide the small of my back as we leave the room. His touch wakes every nerve fibre in my body. I sense myself ache for him. He closes the light and for a second we are alone in the dark. He grabs my wrist like he always seems to do and I turn back to face him, but I only see a dark silhouette of his face, and he says to me, "It's taking everything in me to be professional with you."

I tell him, "Don't be." There, I'd give him the go ahead. He can do something, anything now. I'm willing him to do anything. I can't see him but I feel him close. We knew it's mutual now. I imagine him grabbing me hard by the hips and thrusting his piece into me while kissing me passionately but I say and I do nothing. I wait for his move. He makes none. I'm frustrated now.

All code purples pale in comparison to this one. I want this man so bad I can taste it. I refuse to throw myself at his feet but I need to know what's stopping him. Maybe we can correct it. I can't leave without knowing. I have to ask, "What's stopping you?"

He turns the light on, like water being dumped onto the remnants of a fire his lascivious look transforms into one of discouragement. "Nick," he seethes.

~16~

I look forward to my time off. I plan, to do nothing other than grocery shop; I intend to live in the loft like a total recluse. I won't: open a door for anyone, answer a phone no matter who it was, and wear anything other than my pyjamas.

I turn off my alarm, it's only seven o'clock. I stay in bed for an extra hour before starting to get fidgety and I have to get up. Coffee is first on my agenda, after that the rest of the day is spent cleaning and watching old Bachelor reruns on my personal video recorder.

I chose day two to grocery shop, so I can spend the last day recovering from day two's excursion. It's a fine plan. My hours are quickly becoming more normal, on day two; I don't wake until eight o'clock, but skip the extra hour of just lying in bed. I have coffee and dress respectably in a pair of jeans that I proudly wore fifteen years ago and still fit me today, and a grey blouse, and my sneakers.

The weather is warm coat friendly with a slight chance of snow, but I decide to take my chances and nix the idea of a boots. I pick a grey jacket to match my blouse and head for Snowball. I apologize to her for making her work today, but I absolutely need groceries for the rest of the week. I'm not your average grocery shopper. I never go to the same store repeatedly, and I don't follow sales. I go wherever my mood takes me and today its suburbia Oakville to a store called Whole Foods, which sells organic everything.

Snowball is happy when we get to the parking lot of Whole Foods. She is surrounded by cars just like her. There are no worries about anyone scratching or denting her here, I will never tell her this, but she isn't necessarily the prettiest car in this parking lot. I park her where only one other car can park next to her and head into the store.

I grab a small shopping cart, (there were no large ones because it is assumed that nobody can afford to do a full grocery shop at this store), the prices are exorbitant. I stroll down aisle after aisle, taking my time. I never expect to hear anyone calling out my name until I find myself standing in the same aisle as Bradley. I'm flabbergasted he's here!

Bradley's shaggy brown hair is freshly cut and still shaggy. I can picture running my fingers through his sexy hair. He's wearing a black dress shirt with the top two buttons undone, faded jeans, and cowboy boots. I swore to myself I wasn't going to drool over him because that would put me in the same class with the rest of female staff at the General, but I am. He's oblivious to the attention he receives for his good looks, which is enchanting.

"Bradley," I say in my calmest voice. "Strange meeting you here."

"Likewise, I thought you live in a loft close to the hospital?"

"I do, but the nurses keep going on about this grocery store, I had to check it out for myself. Do you live close?"

He smiles and rolls his car keys around his finger, "Just around the corner."

I notice he doesn't have a shopping cart and isn't carrying any bags, "Are you shopping?"

"They don't have what I came for, until now," he grins. The pick up line makes me weak in the knees. I grasp my shopping cart for support fully aware it has wheels and won't provide me with support. "How much longer will you be until you're done?" He asks.

I look at him smugly, "It sounds like you're flirting with me, and that's not very professional now is it Bradley?"

He takes a step closer to me and now he's in my space, I'm short of breath. "Fuck professionalism, it's overrated."

"Oh dear," I tease. "I'm really not that kind of girl."

"We have to talk Chanel."

"Do we?" I tease.

"We do." Shop later, follow me in snowball, you can park her at my house.

"Sounds like a plan." Groceries can wait. I jump into Snowball and pull up to his Hummer, which I hadn't noticed, was in the parking lot when I came, but I also hadn't been looking for it. It takes us a few minutes to get to his place.

We pulled up to a newer styled house stucco and pot lights galore with a three car garage. Bradley pulls up to a garage door, and I pull up beside him at another garage door, both open simultaneously. We park together like we had been doing it

for years. When I get out of the car I lock Snowball and then speak to Hummer, "Don't get any fresh ideas!"

We enter the house from inside the garage. It takes us right into a hallway off the kitchen. The kitchen was beautiful. The cabinets are antique white, smartly designed at staggered heights. Corner cabinets, glass cabinets, and all the bells and whistles you could think of. There is a valance with under cabinet lighting, an Island with breakfast stools and top of the line fridge and stove with a matching range. This is my dream kitchen.

He invites me into the living room which is black leather everything and shag carpet everywhere. He then asks, "Can I get you something to drink?"

I hesitate; it so early so I chose accordingly, "Water?"

He disappears into the kitchen and comes out with two bottles of water. He motions his hand toward the couch suggesting I sit. I gladly take a load off.

Bradley's leather jacket comes off. Now I see him in his shirt with two buttons open and I just want to tear the shirt off his back. He's wearing sexy pants and he's taken off his cowboy boots for comfort and now he's in his black socks.

I can smell his fragrance from a cushion away, I'm guessing it's Versace. I want to bury my nose wherever he sprayed the fragrance, and in other places too. Then I remembered what I look like and come back to reality snapping myself out of my mini fantasy.

He starts the conversation first (so Alpha Male, Yum)! "When you told me about your relationship with Nick, I was surprised, and I needed time to digest it. I've liked you from the moment I met you. (Oh Alpha Male likes me!) If I start seeing you, will you give him up?"

"What do you mean, 'give him up?' Stop codes, or everything?" I needed to know exactly what he's asking me to do. Bradley winces when I ask. Clearly our friendship bothers him a great deal.

"Both, stop everything. I don't want you to be sexually active with him anymore. It's not an unreasonable request if we start dating."

"I can stop the sex but I can't stop the codes. I've been his friend for ages; he's been there for me whenever I need him. I won't let his friendship go, not for you or

anyone else. If you want to be with me you're going to have to accept him as part of my life."

"I like that you're loyal, just not to him."

"I'm not ready to give that loyalty up on a whim of a relationship that I don't even know whether it will work or not."

With unmistakable resentment he suggests, "Go to Nick and finish it with him if you want to be with me."

Bradley has no idea that Nick and I are lifelines to one another. Our visit doesn't go the way I wanted it to so disappointing.

~17~

I throw my car into park when I get to Nicks condo. My hands are shaking; I hardly know how I got there in one piece. I let myself in with his key and look for him. Damn! He isn't there. I dig through my purse spilling its contents onto the couch looking for my cell. When I find it I text Nick:

Chanel: CODE BLUE

I collapse onto his bed, losing sense of time. I startle when I hear his key in the door. I hear his brisk footsteps as he searches for me and opens the door, then the bed dips, he's next to me now and his arms wrap around me from behind.

His body cocoons me. Concerned he whispers, "I always feared a code blue, what happened?" I turn and look at him, drowning with sadness and vulnerability over what I'm about to do, does he notice? My energy remains depleted as every part of my body feels heavy. Tears slide down my cheeks, "Bradley doesn't want us to remain intimate anymore."

He wipes my tears and then his lips cover mine. "Why are you letting him dictate what you do Coco? Do you have feelings for him?"

"I think so."

"He wants me to finish with you completely. I told him you're my friend. The most I will ever do for him is stop having sex with you."

That's when I see the first sign of a tear in Nick's eyes. I've never seen him cry before. He starts removing my blouse from behind. I help him and then he pulled his own shirt over his head. He continues to undress me as I do him. We lay naked, my back to his front, and I weep silently for him. Our codes mean as much to me as they do him.

I turn to face him and he wipes my tears. His lips cover mine again, but this time for much longer. His blue eyes are crystal clear from the tears that threaten to drop from his eyes.

We both knew these codes would have to end, but we never expected it to be this hard. Our feelings were invasive, lying in the uncharted depths of our souls.

Our familiarity with each other is so evident as Nick's tongue plunges into my mouth, his fingers stroke my pink folds lovingly, then he begins skillfully kneading me until I'm rubbing against him showing my consent and desire for him to fill my empty abyss.

I feel so close to him I cry tears of love. He stops to raise himself on one elbow, and his eyes begin to savour the sight of me. I did the same starting at his muscular legs gliding my eyes to his defined stomach, up his butterfly chest to his broad and beautiful shoulders.

He lowers himself back down, but this time he takes my breast into his mouth moaning my name, 'Coco' and then his tears begin falling freely as he slowly penetrates me with a finality I'm not ready for. I watch his tears drop onto me as he continues thrusting inside me slowly, and steadily.

This time is different from all the rest. His palm touches my cheek, as his thrusts became more rapid, but in no way rushed. We release in unison, before he collapses on top of me.

Nick and I break every rule we've ever made to each other, because this time feelings are involved. It hurts more now than I ever thought it would. I notice the pillow is wet as I become conscious of my own tears. I take his face in both my palms and reassure him, "I will never stop loving, or being there for you, but I need to see where this goes with Bradley, Nick."

He strokes my cheek and confesses to me, "I'm sorry I broke our rules, but I always dreamt of showing you how much I love you. You're incredible Coco. Bradley will be lucky to have you if that's what you want." We both realize how lucky we are to have each other too, and as long as we remain friends, I think we will be okay. Nick continues, "I will always be there for you and love you unconditionally." We sleep in each other's arms and the rest of the day, he took care of my every need. No codes were called.

~18~

I force myself to go to work when all I want is to lay in Nick's bed and feel sorry for myself. The weather reflects my mood; it's cloudy, damp, and dreary. I take extra-long in the shower and then help myself to an old pair of Nick's scrubs. Nick's sound asleep when I leave, so I kiss his cheek lightly and tip toe out of his room to go to Snowball. She takes me straight to the hospital and I stop at Tim Horton's to have a coffee before going to the Cardiac floor to find Bradley.

When I get there Bradley is in the nurse's station waiting for me. Concern is plastered all over his face. I take a seat next to him and he mumbles under his breath, "Are you okay? Where did you go?" He continues to look at his patient's chart while talking, not wanting to draw attention to us in front of staff.

I chose honesty, "I'm not okay, but here is neither the time nor the place." He tries to look into my eyes, but I drop my head down, and he lifts my chin so I had no choice but look at him, "Let me take you to lunch."

"I don't want to go out." My voice crumbles and I sounded like I'm falling apart.

"Then let's talk in the lounge at lunch."

"Okay," I agree knowing he's not going to stop until I cave. Once that's settled, we focus on our patient's.

Noon comes too quickly and Bradley leads me to a very private lounge I never knew existed. "Do you want something to eat or drink?" he asks.

"No thanks. You go ahead though." I'm not really that hungry losing my appetite to nerves. I sit on the couch while he paces the stretch of the lounge.

Bradley looks at me and runs his thick fingers through his still sexy hair, "I'm not hungry, you didn't call me, I was worried."

"I was in good hands," I clip knowing it's going to make him so jealous.

"Nicks?" He snaps back.

"Yes," I admit.

His voice sounds firm, "Did you do make love to him?"

"Your question is inappropriate. You told me to go to him; we have no commitment between us."

"You slept with him when I told you to end it," he comes to his own conclusions.

"I told him the intimacy in our relationship needs to end, so I can see what you and I have. He understands that and said he's going to back off."

I place my hands on the nape of my neck and roll my head back and around stretching it closing my eyes for a second before looking back up at him, "You need to give me time."

"Time for what, I've waited long enough," he gripes.

"Impatient are we, Dr. Bradley?" I flirt, in a last ditch effort to lighten the mood.

He ignores my advances and iron walls his heart, "By the way, I forgot to ask you, do you want to join the committee for the Cardiac Fundraising?"

"I have to check my calendar; I might be booked that day."

"Did someone else ask you?" Obviously he thinks Nick is taking me.

"No, you're the first.

"Give me your cell," he orders.

"You're so bossy!" I comment, handing it to him.

"Call me when you know that you can go with me." He sits down on the couch close to me, he's in my space now as he programs his number and address into my phone. I get goose bumps just by his proximity. I know anything with him has to be good; the anticipation alone excites me.

~19~

We take longer than normal lunch, before seeing the rest of our patients and doing some emergency cases in the Cath lab. I do all the work, while Bradley stands close and watches. I used to feel intimidated, but now I just get stimulated when he's near me.

We don't usually talk too much in front of patients because most of them are awake during the procedure, but our guards were down with this one because he was sedated and Bradley asks, "Did you sleep at Nick's last night, or did you go home?"

I glanced back at him slightly irritated that he is going on about it and answer, "Nicks. Can we talk about this later?"

"In his bed?" he continues.

"No, the bathtub, of course in his bed." I know I'm irritating him but a large part of me wants to see what he will do.

"Do you have clothes at his place?"

"No."

"Those scrubs you're wearing today, they're his?"

"Yes," I hiss.

I close the patient and signal to the nurse who is looking in our direction, that he's done. The nurse and her coworker come and take him away. I strip off my led apron and go into control room, Bradley follows close behind, and we were alone. He sits next to me while I review the procedure and stays quiet while I dictate. I know he's angry, but that doesn't excuse his unprofessional behaviour, "That conversation could have waited." I storm off to the change room. I take off the surgical scrubs and throw on my borrowed scrubs from Nick.

I change quickly, because I want to get out before him. I'm almost clear of him when I remember leaving my stethoscope on a table in the Cath lab. It's quiet now, and the lights were are out. I see it lying there. I walk across the dark and quiet room towards it when I feel his hand grab my wrist. How I wish he'd stop doing that.

He spins me around so I face him and says, "I don't want you wearing his clothes."

I know I'm in trouble, *Alpha male is angry!* He grabs the neck of my scrub top and tears it off me like it's made of tissue. "Take off your pants he orders, but he doesn't wait for me to do it. He reaches for the string and pulls it himself making them fall to the ground. Shocked, I stand frozen to my spot, naked.

He gasps when he see's I'm not wearing underwear. I have no idea what he's going to do next. He's smoking hot. My breaths become shorter and my nipples harden to this unexpected chill of nudity. "All I want is for you to give yourself to me, only me. Can you do that?" He asks sexually frustrated. "Take me," I breathe.

He closes the distance between us. His dark needy eyes glare at me hungrily. His face is unkempt, his stubble much longer than usual, he probably hasn't shaved since before I've been to his house. *He's barbarically hot!*

His hands fist the back of my hair and his eyes search mine waiting for a sign. I quickly give it to him by yanking the string to his pants so they too fell to the ground. I wedge my fingers into the waist of his underwear and slid them down until gravity takes over. I looked at his cock and gasp. He's massive, and ready. Standing at attention he takes my breath away.

His lips wash up on mine making contact and covering them. His lusciously wet tongue frolicks with mine, his teeth nipping my bottom lip. He makes me all tingly with excitement. We wanted to eat each other up. I finally get the chance to run my fingers through his soft shaggy brown hair and I yank it really hard, making him gasp with shock. He fists my hair even harder than before and continues thrusting his tongue into my mouth roughly now, clearly mimicking how he wants to fuck me. He backs me against the closest wall and his body crushes against mine.

His muscles to my breasts, his piece to my abyss, our pent up desire unleashed. His lips leave mine only to taste me elsewhere. His smooth wet tongue glides up the side of my neck until it reaches my ear. I feel his breath in my ear as he sucks my lobe and begins biting it.

I'm dying to be thrashed. He takes my breast in his mouth and tugs at it slowly letting it escape his mouth until he only has my hard nipple which remains between his sharp white teeth, and then he nips at it cruelly.

He looks up at me and then takes my entire breast in his mouth all over again. He sucks it until I'm beside myself whimpering in excitement and at the same time plagued with incessant fear that his sharp teeth might nip again. Then when I don't think I can take it anymore he does the same to the other one.

I want to make this unbearable for him the way he has for me. I bend my knees and let my back slide down the wall until my face is even with his hips and I take his weapon into my mouth and I suck on it hard, really hard.

I focus on the tip with exaggerated strokes of my tongue and then deep throated him until I can't possibly get another millimetre of him into me. That's when he pleads with me to stop. I notice his eyes are half closed and his breathing has changed, its shallow and rapid. It takes everything in him not to come. I back off by standing up and letting him recompose himself.

His eyes remained half closed when his fingers reach between my legs. I've been waiting for so long to feel his skilled fingers knead me. He starts slowly and then speeds up swirling softly and then grabbing me, his fingers are utterly magical. "You're wet," he comments. "Really wet. Can Nick do this to you?" Then he lifts me in the air, wrapping my legs around his waist, his dick finally replaces his fingers and he thrashes me hard, filling me. The unexpected force of him doing it makes me cry out with excitement. He's fierce. Each thrust gets harder and faster. "Answer," he orders.

"No, he can't! Only you can," and then I scream out Bradley's name as I come around him. He pushes my hips down as he forces himself even deeper into me and I can feel his warm fluid fill me. His husky voice whispers in my ear, "I've always wanted to fuck you here."

~20~

My Outlook inbox at the hospital has my first message about the Cardiac fundraiser.

To: Hart,J, Hart B, St. Clare C, Ward N, Flanders J, Wilson S, Ryder T, Kennedy M

CC:

Subject: Cardiac Fundraiser Dance

As you know, our fundraiser is soon approaching! Thank you for volunteering your time on this committee. The first meeting will be held in the Doctor's Committee Room in the Executive building, Tuesday, April 15 at Noon!

Thanks, Maggie!

I check the date on the hospital phone because I swear it's the fifteenth today, sure enough it is! OMG talk about no notice! I spend the morning flying solo. I see patients who come to our cardiology floor from the emergency department that hasn't been seen by a cardiologist yet, its fun, liberating.

I text Nick in between patients:

Chanel: R u @ the Hospital?

Nick: Yes u?

Chanel: Yes, check u'r outlook, 1st committee meeting today in 1 hr

Nick: Skipping it.

Chanel: U better not! U r the 1 who talked me into joining:-(Come get me in 45 min or I'll get all code black on U

Nick: Take me Hostage? (I might like that!) I thought we weren't doing anymore codes?

Chanel: Just no more purples Dickwad!

Nick: How come Bradley isn't taking u? Maybe he's the DICKWAD!

Chanel: Not sure where he is.

Nick: OK C u in 45, I'll go 2 u'r station.

Chanel: Good! TTYL.

Nick, always true to his word, shows up fifteen minutes early, "Tim Horton's, before the meeting?"

I warn him while grabbing my wallet from my white coat where I'm sitting,. "Okay we'll be late then,"

"Who gives a shit if we're a few minutes late?" Nick comments coolly.

"You're such a rebel!" I joke.

"Whatever," he says under his breath. "You know the truth."

We walk to Tim's. As I suspect, the lineup is significant. "Should we wait?"

Nick nods, "Hell yes."

"Have you asked Aria yet?"

"Why do you automatically assume I'm going to ask Aria to this? We've only met twice."

I grin at him, "I heard the headboard."

Nick flushes as we take a step closer to the registers, "I left when you did!"

"Bullshit. You were there two hours!"

"Jealous?" He mocks.

"Not at all, you should have a nice girlfriend," I say sincerely. I look at my cell. It's five after, so we're already late and we still have two people before us.

"Is Bradley taking you?" He questions with animosity sarcastically.

"Of course, now who's jealous?" I smile!

We reach the meeting room at thirteen minutes after. We are carrying our unopened coffee's and still smiling when we glance around the room to find six sets of eyes focusing on us. We quietly and quickly take the two remaining seats at the medium length rectangular table with Chase sitting at one end and his brother Bradley at the other.

Chase speaks first, "Glad the two of you could make it, Chanel and," he pauses pretending to look down at his sheet for Nick's name. I know Chase remembers him from the Paddock and my old apartment. He's making a point.

Bradley fills in the gap. "NICK," his voice fills with hostility and his expression darkens. Chase's eyes shoot up at his brother. He appears surprised by the animosity. It's incredible how the tone of one word paints a full picture. Chase already knows that Nick and I have something going on and now he's learning that Bradley doesn't like Nick for some reason...

Nick whispered in my ear, "Talk about jealous!"

Nick's eyebrows shoot up to Bradley then Chase. It's hard to tell who Nick's referring to. The twins are both acting weird.

I looked over at Nick giving him a warning glare, "Red" I hiss in a whisper to him.

"Do I sense hostility?" Chase asks coming off oblivious to what's going on.

I addressed Chase, "Sorry for the tardiness. It won't happen again."

Chase studies me and then Nick before resuming, "I've assigned tasks to everyone except for you and Nick. Chanel, would you like to do hiring or decorate the room?"

I looked at Nick and it was a no brainer knowing his Girly Flare, "Hiring," I volunteer.

Chase addresses Nick, "You will work with Bradley and Chanel you will be working with me."

Chase glares at Nick and Bradley before acting like the cat that caught the bird, "Chanel, I will enjoy the honour of working with you in making all the necessary arrangements. Nick and Bradley, I assume you will both do your best to act professional and tolerate each other for this important event?"

"That won't be a problem," Nick assures Chase.

Bradley stands, "I'm being paged." He glares at his brother and then nods to me before storming from the room, letting the heavy door fall loudly behind him. *I'm going to have to do damage control with Bradley after the meeting adjourns.*

~21~

We're dismissed shortly after Bradley excused himself. I look for him in the nursing station, the Cath lab, our usual lounge, Tim's, and finally the smaller lounge.

He's in the last place I look, the private lounge. He's sitting on the couch brooding. His stethoscope and jacket are carelessly tossed on the seat next to him and he appears to be nursing a coffee from Tim's.

"Do you want to talk?" I offer.

He's lost in his own thoughts, "Your friend is a real piece of work," he complains.

"How did you guess Nick's my friend with benefits?"

"You came in with him, I sensed the chemistry. I hate even the look of him Chanel."

"Tell me what you really think. Can you try to tolerate him so we don't have those ugly scenes anymore? You know how gossip flies in hospitals." Snatching the cup of coffee from his hand I take a sip of it.

"Your ex-fuck buddy? I think you're asking too much from me."

"This is hard for him too, please? He's nixed our sexual excursions so you and I can have a chance at a relationship. That's a lot for him to do. I'm in demand," I said jokingly, desperately trying to lighten the mood.

"I will do civil." He offers.

I'm pleased, "It's a start."

He grabs my hand causing me to lose my balance. I drop awkwardly onto the couch next to him. His face is soft from shaving and his lips cover mine as he embraces me, "I need to be with you again," he mumbles between kisses. He pulls the blouse loose that I tucked nicely into my skirt and slides his hand up my top, pinching my nipple hard. I moan into his mouth as his tongue dances with mine. His mouth is warm and inviting and he tastes like sweet coffee.

I pulled away for a second and ask, "Do you want to come to my loft after work? I'd love it if you stay over."

“You won’t be able to get me off you,” he threatens.

My tongue lunges deep into his mouth, and then I pulled it out and nip hard on his lower lip making him groan before answering, “I never want you off me.” We kiss for a few more minutes until our conscience gets the better of us and we go back to work.

We finish work later than normal because the meeting at noon set us back. Bradley left his Hummer in the hospital parking lot and drove us home in Snowball. I don’t know if he understood the significance of me letting him drive my car. It was huge, implying our relationship is life altering. Nick’s never had the honours!

Bradley’s presence this morning was greatly missed by me. As we leave the hospital, I notice his fancy dress pants and how clean shaven he is today, but I don’t ask why, not yet anyway. When we get to the loft he hands me the keys. I pushed his hand away gesturing for him to open the door. He entered the loft first.

I looked at him, “Drink?”

“Please.” I grab two beers. I twist the cap off one and hand it to him, and then my own. Looking at my sectional now, I really feel embarrassed owning it. He sits down and taps the cushion next to him. I respond immediately sitting next to him, and then I succumb to my curiosity, “I missed you this morning, where were you?” He plays with a lock of my hair sending chills up my spine, “You did, did you?” His voice was deep and playful.

I place my hand on the leg closest to me, “Where were you?”

His eyes go all broody on me. His lips melt mine, he’s so smoking hot, but I know this was his way of evading the question. I’m not having it. I pull away, “Where were you?” I repeat.

“Divorce court, its final.”

He moves in to kiss me but I place my hand between us preventing it, “Pardon me?” Its good news, and I want him to repeat it, he ditched his bitch ex-wife.

He repeats quietly, “I was in court. My divorce with Maggie has been finalized.”

Alarm bells go off in my head; I hold onto the couch because my head starts spinning. "Who? Not the girl in the Cath lab?"

"I thought you knew," he's surprised.

"How would I know? You never mentioned her name to me. You were so pleasant to her when you introduced us in the Cath Lab. You should have told me when we went out for lunch or even after you introduced us. Why am I finding out now? Oh my God, I feel like such an idiot!"

"You're not an idiot."

"You are so friendly with her!"

"Not as friendly as you are with Nick," he rubs in. "We're professional with each other."

"Does she know about us?" I ask.

"No."

"Why not, embarrassed? I'm not as pretty or maybe I'm just not good enough for you."

"I didn't want it to affect the divorce."

"Your divorce was almost finished, what's the real reason?"

"That is the real reason."

"Do you still sleep with her?" I ask wondering if they get together casually when they aren't seeing anyone else the way Nick and I do.

"No, we don't do what you and Nick do." He bites back.

I ignore his comment and I have this urge to tell him to go fuck himself because I'm trying to prevent this from escalating further, "Do you still love her?"

"No, I don't," he answers confidently.

I stopped and try to take it all in. Then I talked out loud, not really to him, "I don't think I can handle seeing her all the time. It's too weird."

"Likewise with you and Nick, I was furious when you told me you slept with him the other day. You come to the fundraiser meeting with him all happy and smiles, you don't think that's going to bother me? I wanted to smash his face in. At least I don't like Maggie. I can't even remember the last time I slept with her."

"Maggie is worse because you were in love with her. That's something I never had with Nick. I love him but not the way you love her. Does that kind of love ever

go away? Let me answer that, no, it doesn't. You should have told me about her when we first met, or better yet, when you introduced us. You could have said something like, 'this is Maggie my soon to be ex-wife.'

"I never would have let this happen if I had known!" I said pointing to me and him.

"Mag, don't say that!" He pleads.

I gasp striking his face hard, slapping him with everything I have. I storm past him and he grabs my arm, I'm really fucking tired of him doing this, I try shaking my arm free but his grip is too tight.

He's blurry through my tears, "I need my phone, give me my phone," I sob. I start pulling away and reaching for my purse with my free hand. He allows me just enough movement to grab my purse and I rifle through it with my free hand finding my phone. I started punching in a text message to Nick:

Chanel: CODE BLUE

Bradley snatches the phone from me and texts:

Chanel: CANCEL CODE BLUE

He throws the phone out of my reach. His eyes are full of emotion and his free hand wipes tears from my eyes, "I don't want him saving you anymore, don't you understand? No more code blues with Nick. I want to be the one you run to: no more Nick or Maggie, its just you and me."

"You haven't been with me two minutes and you've already upset me," I whimper.

His eyes transform to puppy-dog, "I'm sorry, but it goes both ways. I told you to finish with Nick not have sex one more time. That's what you did, didn't you, you had sex one more time! You love him!"

"That's inconceivable," I almost laugh in his face.

"You fucking him isn't. When I told you to go their tell me you didn't." I can't bear to confess.

"Answer!" he seethes.

“Yes, I’m so sorry, he made love to me. It was our last time. You told me to go there.”

“Stay the fuck with him then, we’re finished!” He storms out of the loft slamming the door behind him.

~22~

Everything in me tells me not to text Nick, but he has to know Bradley knows.

Chanel: CODE BLUE

Nick: Again? Do you want me to call you or go to your loft?

Chanel: Paddocks

Nick: When?

Chanel: ASAP

Nick: Give me 30

Chanel: Okay

I have a few minutes to spare so I change into Nick's black tracksuit for comfort and clean the makeup off my face. I throw on a light coat and walk briskly to the bar leaving Snowball behind. Deep in thought, I don't notice Nick parking Jezebel until he's getting out of her. He spots me and comments, "Don't you look rough!" He cloaks his arm around my shoulders and leads me into the bar like we're a couple, "Let's get you a drink."

He pulls my chair out for me and guesses, "Cosmo?"

"No, Martini."

He goes to the bar and orders our drinks before coming back to the table with his clairvoyant observation, "That's your breakup drink Coco. He looks into my eyes which transport him to the pits of my soul. Then he smiles at me, "Fuck off! You didn't!" He breaks out into full blown gails of laughter that borders on hysterics, "I'm so sorry Coco, you already broke up with the THROB?" He didn't stop, he can't stop, he's laughing so hard.

I feel pathetic, unable to blame him, I elaborated more, "No, I didn't, HE did."

Instantly he regains control of his laughter, his carefree expression goes dark, replaced with anger, "So he fucked you, you two fucked right and then he left you at the wayside?"

"Not exactly."

"You better explain quickly before I leave here to go beat the shit out of him," he warns.

I looked up at the bar, "She's coming with our drinks, just a second." The waitress places his Cosmo down on a doily and then does the same for my Martini before she leaves us alone. I take a long sip before starting into my story, "I invited him to sleep over tonight. We started talking and I asked why he wasn't at work this morning. He kept evading the question until finally he admitted to being in court finalizing his divorce with, 'Maggie.'"

Nick looked confused, "That's good isn't it?" I took another long sip of my martini, "No, it's not. He never told me that he was married to Maggie from the Cath lab."

"I thought you knew Coco, no offence but you can't hold a candle to her," he jokes.

"You're such a prick! She's not THAT beautiful!" I glare at Nick, "How come you never mentioned SHE is his ex-wife?"

Nick shrugs, "I thought you knew. Everybody knows."

"Well, I guess I'm the only one who didn't. I told him that when he introduced us, he should have introduced her to me as his ex-wife."

"I'm not going on his side, but that doesn't seem like a big deal, and it still doesn't explain to me why HE broke up with you."

"I said I wasn't sure if I could handle seeing her all the time knowing that she was his ex-wife. He said that I wasn't being fair to him because I was expecting him to be okay with our friendship and the fact that we slept together recently."

"You told him we slept together?"

I smiled, "No, I told him you made love to me."

"What did you say?"

"He told me he wanted to smash your face," I answered meekly.

"Fuck Chanel, I don't want to fight him! What else did you say?"

"I told him that I was never in love with you the way he was with Maggie."

“Ouch!” Nick yelps. “You’re getting rough with my ego. You’re in love with me, you just don’t know it,” he winks. “You don’t know when to stop. What did he say then?”

“He told me to go back to you and slammed the door leaving me alone in the loft, after I even let him drive Snowball!”

“Fuck off! You didn’t! I haven’t even driven her! What does THROB have that I don’t have? You’re with him two-seconds and you let him drive her.”

“It’s not all about you Nick.”

We finished our drinks and step outside when Nick says, “I’ll take you home. I have to get my scrubs from your place anyway.”

I gulp, “About them.”

He opens his car door for me, “Yes?”

“I don’t have them anymore.”

He starts the car and as Jezebel roars to life, he scowls at me, “What did you do to them Coco? They are my favourite ones.”

I pause, “Bradley knew they were yours and tore them off me like tissue paper in the Cath Lab. He was so good.”

“Too much information, I never do that shit to your stuff Coco!”

“That’s because you don’t wear my stuff, Nick”

“A good thing for you that I don’t. I would outshine you in your own clothes!” I tease.

“Ha, ha.”

We go to the loft and he cloaks his arm around me again, and then says, “By the way, I have a code grey to discuss with you, I was just about to text you when you texted me first.”

“Oh, well come on in then. We can have another drink and talk.”

He follows me up to the loft and lets us in with his key. I grab two drinks from the fridge and opened them, handing one to him. I notice Bradley’s drink along with my own still on the cocktail table. I should have cleaned them up before I left; it’s disappointing being here with Nick rather than Bradley. I dread being alone after Nick leaves. It feels weird asking him to stay while he’s seeing Aria who lives next door.

He sits on my sectional with his arm on the pillow, waiting for me to sit next to him. I snuggle into him as he starts talking, "Have you and Aria ever discussed sex?"

I pause for a second, "I can't say that we have. Is there a problem? Don't tell me you can't get it up? Did she make a comment about your size? I've just learned to live with it." I kid.

"Ha, ha, very droll."

"I get the impression she wants me to go all CODE WHITE on her."

"What do you mean Code White Nick?"

"You know," he said turning all red. "Whips, spankings, butt plugs."

"Oh, I can see Aria liking that. She strikes me as the type. I wouldn't push Bradley away if he tried."

"Can I try it on you first Coco?" I don't take him serious.

"Sorry Nick, I will probably laugh and I'm not in the mood right now, I'm still upset over Bradley. Girls like that stuff though, kinky ones anyway. You have to be serious if you decide to dominate. Tell her what to do, order her around, but don't hurt her. I like Aria." We turn on the television and stay cozy with each other for a few more minutes. He wants to leave, but I whimper and cling to him. He doesn't try again, he knows I need him and he stays with me.

~23~

Nick leaves early the next morning because he still has to go home to get dressed for work. As tempting as it is for me to call in, I force myself to remain professional and drag myself in. I forgo makeup and my business casual attire in exchange for an old pair of scrubs and my white coat.

When I got to the nurses station, Bradley is already there, he sees me come in, I'm sure of it. My heart pounds in my chest when I spot him. There is no exchange, he doesn't even nod or say hello. He looks hot; it's murderous to see him. If he takes off his white jacket and changes his tie, he can go straight to a ballroom after work. This was way harder than I ever expect it to be, very upsetting to say the least.

I go onto the computer next to him. His cologne enters my personal space enticing me into wanting to touch him and kiss him. Sitting next to him is making me long for him. I fail at all personal attempts to holding onto my anger that I felt during our last fight. He hands me my list of patients but says nothing. I take it from him without achieving eye contact.

I try give the patients on my list my undivided attention but it takes everything in me to stop myself from thinking about him. Oh my God, can this day get any harder? I completely understand now, why it's not a good idea to date someone at your work. It's when the relationship ends that it turns from a good thing to a very bad thing.

Lunchtime comes and I didn't know what to do with myself. I always have lunch with him, now I find myself alone, feeling lost. I trudged to Tim's but when it's my turn in line I have no appetite and only ordered a tea. I sit alone.

The second half of my day is no better than the first. I get a page at 2:30 p.m. from a number I don't recognize. I call it, "Hello? This is Chanel, returning your page."

There is a delay and a click noise. It sounds like I'm being taken off speaker, and if I'm correct I hear a male voice in the background. At the time, I think nothing of it, but when I reflect on it later, I realize the significance. "Oh, hi

Chanel, it's Ainsley. Can you come to my office when you have a minute?"

Ainsley the Personnel woman that oriented me hasn't called or reached out for me since day one, literally.

"Sure, I'll be right there." I can feel my heart beating rapidly as I wonder what she can possibly want. The walk to her office feels like it's taking forever. It doesn't matter how kind Ainsley was to me during orientation, I can't help feeling intimidated by her authority over me now.

I have no idea what this is going to be about, but I have my suspicions. I tap on the solid wood door to her office not even sure if she hears me until she invites me in.

She stands as I enter, "Chanel, how nice to see you again." She shakes my hand, "Sit, please."

I sit down and stay quiet letting her lead the conversation. I didn't want to delay her from telling me why she called me in.

"I called you in Chanel, because we've decided to have you work with Dr. Morden rather than Dr. Hart for the rest of your residency." My level of concentration on what she's saying changes after that and even though we talked and I answer her, I can't tell you a damn thing that was said in that meeting because I'm devastated. Why did Bradley do this? If he can work close to Maggie, why can't he work close to me? I want to confront him, but I know if I do that I will probably start crying.

"Chanel, Chanel," is what I hear that snaps me out of my thoughts. Ainsley looks worried, "Are you okay? Did I say something to bother you?"

My mind returns to the here and now, "Ainsley, I do have something I would like to discuss with you. I am in the midst of a personal crisis and since I am now changing doctors, would it be possible to take a week off for a personal leave of absence?"

"Can you tell me a little more about why you need the week?"

"I'd rather not."

"I'll have to run it by Chase." Ainsley started digging through her desk drawer until she pulled out a legal sized piece of paper and handed it to me, "Fill this out

and submit it back to me. I will run your request by Chase; in the meantime, if it gets approved I'll notify you on your outlook later this evening."

She gave me a clipboard to write on and as I began filling out the form, she called Chase's secretary and asked if she could see him. He took her in immediately, leaving me alone in her office. I finished the form and then my mind started wandering off wondering what made Bradley do this. When she got back she said, "He wants to see you."

"Chase? Now?"

"Yes, he's waiting. You can leave the form with me. He will tell you directly if your leave of absence will be approved or not. I won't have to send you a message this evening. Do you remember where his office is?"

"I do, thank you."

I tread to his office a bundle of nerves. The door is ajar, and the secretary sitting in front spots me and informs me, "He's waiting for you."

I slowly push the heavy door open and he's looking at me, "Have a seat," he orders. I sit in the seat and I feel so small and powerless. He is wearing a three piece suit and shiny shoes, and looks like a million dollars. It's weird looking at Bradley's twin, when he's not talking to me anymore, it hurts.

He gets up from his desk and begins pacing, "I take it Ainsley informed you that you will be working with Dr. Morden rather than my brother, Dr. Hart."

My eyes cast down when I answer him, "She did."

"I take it you're okay with the change?" I can feel his stare penetrate me.

"Can you tell me the rationale behind your decision?"

"Why do you presume it was my decision, I suggest you approach Dr. Hart for your answers. I approve the seven day leave you're requesting, and look forward to working with you on the fundraiser when you get back. Your leave will begin tomorrow, but feel free to take the rest of today off." I'm stunned with Bradley for initiating this.

"Thank you Dr. Hart."

"You're welcome. You may go now," he dismisses me. When I get to the door he calls out, "Chanel?"

I stopped and turn back, "Yes, Dr. Hart?"

He walks up to me and now he's standing in my space. I can smell his cologne, I sense his raw power, his black edgy eyes, "If my brother did something to upset you, I apologize for him, and I insist you call me Chase."

"Thank you Chase." I see myself out. It's a side to the Great White, I never imagined he has. Maybe, hate is too strong a word for him.

~24~

I quickly go to the nursing station to collect my bag, trying as hard not to be seen. It will be a miracle if I can avoid everyone. From a distance, I glance into the nursing station to see if I can see Bradley. The coast is clear. I walk in casually not to draw too much attention to myself, open the drawer that holds my purse and then I bee line it out of there. Success!

I take the most direct route to Snowball. Pick elevator over stairs, keeping my eyes down and my pace quick hoping nobody initiates a conversation with me on my way out. When I reach Snowball I sigh deeply, glad I made it out to the sanctuary of my car, in one piece.

Snowball and I drive slowly; the streets are busy with the rush of people working nine to five. I park her and stroll up to my loft. I open the front door and decide the first thing I have to do is clean. I scrub vigorously. I go on a rampage throwing everything out that I haven't worn in at least six months. When I tire, I stop.

In the corner of the living room, I spot my Mac Book Air lying undisturbed on the table. On impulse I open it and google last minute trips. Expedia has prepackaged vacations to Vegas for four nights and five days starting for as low as \$599.99. The first flight out is the redeye leaving Toronto at eleven tonight. I book it thinking *why the fuck not!* Nobody is going to miss me.

I grab my suitcase and pack, shorts, bathing suit, e-reader, sun tan lotion, anything and everything I can think of that I need while I'm gone. I grab my cellphone and call the provider getting a special rate for long distance while I'm away so I won't pay outrageous roaming fees.

Finally, I texted Aria:

Chanel: Hi Aria,

Aria: Hi Chanel!!! How R U?

Chanel: I'm okay.

Aria: Good I was worried. I thought I heard U arguing the other day with some1, but I figured it might have been U'R TV.

Chanel: No worries I'm okay. I am going away 4 a short trip.

Aria: Oh! That's nice!

Chanel: U don't mind keeping an eye on the loft while I'm gone do U? I can drop the key by just B4 I leave 4 the airport.

Aria: No problem. Where R U going?

I didn't want any surprises so I evade her question.

Chanel: Down South

Aria: Cool, come over anytime with u'r key. I'll make sure everything is safe.

Chanel: Thx

I make myself dinner with everything that can spoil in the fridge, luckily its almost bare so I have nothing to worry about. Scrambled eggs, bacon, and a huge glass of milk (a third of a gallon) are my dinner. I turn on my TV. pvr to watch this year's Bachelor 'Jose' wine and dine some post pubescent totally into themselves girls, while I sit alone miserable on my ugly, should have been thrown it out years ago grey sectional, feeling sorry for myself.

I call a cab to pick me up from the loft an hour before I need it. I run across the street to the bank machine to withdraw money I can't afford to spend for cab fare and spending money. It's a gorgeous night, there isn't too much traffic and you don't need a sweater. I check on Snowball making sure her alarm is on and her doors are locked. I pick up my luggage and drop the key to Aria's. I'm done.

It doesn't take long for the cab to show up in front of the loft. I grab my luggage, and head for the door. Traffic is light so we arrive in plenty of time at the airport. Six hours later I'm checking into the Bellagio in Las Vegas.

~25~

The Bellagio has an elegant lobby full of flowers. The receptionist takes care of me immediately handing me the key to my room and advising me on how to find it.

My room is painted white with a large grey patterned accent wall behind the king sized poster bed. The seating area in my room has a sofa and love seat. I pull the drapes back to find I have a view of the city which is bordered by mountains, it's stunning.

I open the desk and find a bible and a small magazine highlighting the amenities of the hotel. I unpack my suitcase and make myself comfortable on the king bed deciding to start my journey in Las Vegas with a much needed nap, followed by room service.

I glance at the amenities book, while I eat my breakfast. Spa/Salon catches my attention. I can't remember the last time I did something for myself like a makeover or facial treatment. They offer me their last appointment of the day. It gives me just enough time to worship the sun for a couple of hours and go for a swim which is exactly what I do.

The large pool is heart shaped with a light blue liner. It looks inviting. The tables and chairs are strategically placed by the bar. The hot sun beats down on my fair skin, so I lather on my suntan oil before exposing my skin to the gorgeous rays of the sun.

In Toronto, we're lucky to have three or four months of sunny weather, I can't imagine having it all year round like they do here! My anonymity here is another feature about this place. Nobody knows me and I like it that way. I lay by the pool in my bathing SUIT with my sunglasses on, because there was no way I'm putting on a BIKINI with the small but obvious roll of FAT I've accumulated as a student.

The entire time I lay by the pool I languish over Bradley. I relive our entire history which doesn't take long. I reflect on the time that Mrs. Wilson coded and how supportive he was, bumping into him at Whole Foods, our breaks, and Rocking it in the Cath lab. I wonder if he ever did it with Maggie there. I

remember the horrible way he ended things with me. Finally, I find myself wondering if I too achieved the title of his bitch ex-girlfriend.

I leave the pool angry at myself for letting him hurt me and go back to my room to change for my salon appointment. I decide on the works, asking the stylist to make me into a new person, someone I've never seen before. I confide to her saying I'm not crazy about the one who stares back at me in the mirror.

Ivana complies brandishing her scissors and chops off a good six or seven inches of hair like it's nothing. In mere seconds she's done away with my dated layered look for an extremely blunt haircut. It's a shocking change, but exactly what I asked for. My layers lay scattered in a pile on the white linoleum floor, and I can barely recognize the new girl in the mirror with the same broken heart.

Ivana starts with the most luxurious back rub I ever felt, "You'll get used to the hair, give it time," she encourages.

"Will I get used to the broken heart too?" She doesn't touch that one. She stands in silence and continues to massage me.

Then she brings me to a little secluded area where she works on finishing my manicure and pedicure. She does a great job; I end up leaving her a generous tip and head back to my room.

My phone is sitting on the desk in the room and I notice it flashing. I press the button to see two texts. The first is from Aria saying everything is fine and asking me if I made it there safely. The second one was from Nick,

Nick: CODE WHITE

It's not a good time for him to need me!

Chanel: Do you want me to call you? We can't meet.

I get a kick out of writing the text, because he'll have a fit if he finds out where I am. I didn't even tell him I was leaving.

Nick: Why can't we meet @ the loft? I'm driving there right now.

Chanel: Can't, can I call u?

Nick: I don't want to talk about this over the phone.

Chanel: Only you Nick, I'm at the Bellagio in Las Vegas.

Nick: Fuck Off! You're not!

I take a selfie holding the amenities booklet belonging to the hotel, forgetting for a second my new makeover.

Nick: OMG u chopped your hair off! You look fantab! Long overdue! You were hideous before, absolutely hideous!

Chanel: Thanks Dickwad.

Nick: Prick asked me where you were.

Chanel: You mean Throb?

Nick: He's graduated. I thought he was testing me.

Chanel: What did you say?

Nick: In my bed.

Chanel: You didn't!

Nick: No, said I didn't know.

Chanel: What do u want to do about u'r code white?

Nick: We'll do the CODE WHITE at the Bellagio!

Chanel: You can't be serious; I came here to get away.

Nick: You know the rules. U can't fail me on a code. I'll be there when I get there. What's your room number?

Chanel: 1015, I'll leave a key for you in case I'm out.

Nick: Okay! I'm calling into the hospital sick, I only have to miss 2 or 3 shifts & then I have a stretch off anyway.

Chanel: Nice 1.

Nick: C u later Coco!

I chose to have a quiet dinner alone in the room and an early night. I know when Nick gets here; my trip will change from rest and relaxation to wild and crazy in a heartbeat.

~26~

I hear the door knob and know immediately its Nick. I jump off the bed and run into his arms to embrace him. It feels so good, until I notice he stinks. I back away and inform him. "You need a shower."

He agrees with me, "I know." He points to the door and I nod confirming it's the bathroom.

I ordered food and wait for him to come out. He returns with a shower robe on, and I assume nothing underneath, "Are you hungry?"

"Starving."

"Great, I ordered food."

I sit on the sofa and Nick sits next to me. He's smiling, and fingering my hair, "I love the hair Coco, much sexier! I want to grab a fist full of your hair and without letting you move I want to fuck you from behind."

I laugh, "Seriously Nick, what was the Code White all about?"

He faces me on the couch and keeps playing with my hair, "I really miss you, Coco. I need to kiss you."

I smile at him and stroke his arm. It feels great to have him here. "You need to tell me about your code white," I say playfully.

He never takes his eyes off me when he tells me his side of the story, "I was with Aria last night. I think it was the third or fourth time I've been with her. We went to the Paddock for drinks and dinner and then back to her place to watch a movie. You remember when we talked, and you said she looked like maybe she was into S&M? Honestly, I wanted to make her happy, you know I'm not into that. So I started out by ordering her around telling her to suck my cock. She listens and sucks for a while, but then she wanted to stop before I had a chance to come. I told her she was a bad girl and I started spanking her. So the next thing you know, she starts calling out, 'Stop it, stop it.' I think she's role playing and I spank her harder. She starts squirming in my arms and she slaps me really hard in the face, and then I

see her eyes are bloodshot and she's been crying so I stop. After all that, I find out that she isn't into it after all. Then she tells me she never wants to see me again!"

By the time Nick is two-thirds of the way into his story, I'm laughing so hysterically that my face is turning bright red and tears are forming in the corners of my eyes, and I can tell I've peed myself. Nick looks at me with such a serious look on his face and says, "It's not funny." I started laughing even harder. Now, I'm buckled over because I'm laughing so hard my back hurts. I try to regain composure but every time I get close, I kept picturing Nick slapping Aria's bottom and start laughing all over again. I can tell Nick is getting angry at me, so I force myself to calm down.

With a feather light touch, Nick's fingers caress the back of my neck. He pulls my face to his for that kiss he's been longing for. I have nothing to lose because Bradley threw me away with yesterday's trash. I decide not to fight and gave into Nick's desires, whatever he needs. I separate my lips ever so slightly giving him that open invitation he's waiting for and then his mouth covers mine.

He lifts me off the couch and says, "Let's go to bed. I need to hold you tonight." He carries me to bed and then lowers me down carefully. His gentleness takes my breath away. He undresses me. I know he needs me to start taking him seriously so that's what I do. We lay on our sides with my back to his front as he cocoons me because that's what we do. Our bodies are properly aligned and our breathing merges into one sound, one harmony.

I doze off while Nick holds me; I open my eyes seeing the top of Nick's spiky hair in between my legs and his silky tongue gliding expertly along the lips of my pussy. His lips are wet with my juices. The tickle of his tongue is swirling around my clit waking me up. I've never woken up to anything like this before and I spread my legs wider giving him easier access. His finger starts playing with my clit while his tongue plunges deeply into me. I feel his hot breath on my pussy, and it gives me cold shivers. I just want his beautiful tongue to go deeper and do more magic.

Now I'm begging for him, "Nick, Please give it to me." Involuntarily I start panting. I never thought I would see the day when I would be begging for sex from NICK!

I want to lick his lips so I grab his soft hair really hard and pulled his face away from my legs and then I lick the juices from his lips and he likes that and says, "You're fucking sexy, and if you ever pull my hair like that again, I'm going to smack your ass really hard."

He goes back to work licking me and pleasing me, I'm so close to coming; it amazes me that I'm able to hold back.

I want to see Nick mad so I yank his hair really fucking hard, we both look at my hands and see remnants of his hairs between my fingers, his eyes turn carnal on me and then he flips my body over like I weigh nothing and he slaps my ass with all his strength repeatedly with his heavy hand, I scream with each hit. Now my ass is burning, but I like it. I want him to do it again, this time I didn't do anything, he knows.

He grabs me by the waist and lifts my ass into the air and then he shoves his entire face back into my pussy licking it wildly. My hands are clutching the sheets and I'm getting weak from keeping my body in that position that he wants me to be in so he can continue eating me. Then it stops for a second and I'm not sure what he's doing. I turn to look at him and then my body bounds forward out of control, his dick is ramming into my pussy with brute force completely catching me off guard. I scream again. He stabilizes me with one arm and gags me with his other hand so he can continue punishing me for pulling out his hair with this brutal sex.

I want to give him a hard time, show him that he can't control me, so I bite his hand hard and he fucks me harder grabbing my nipples and pinching them between his fingers callously not giving a shit whether he hurts me or not, and I liked this, I begin screaming his name into the palm of his hand and I start coming uncontrollably.

He pulls out and exhausted I collapse onto the bed, but he orders me to suck it, so I take his throbbing penis into my mouth as he fists my hair with his hand and I taste our sex on his dick. I lick him wildly taking all I can get of him in my mouth and then he orders me to, "Swallow everything." His juices flow down my throat and I drink it hungrily.

"Are you okay?" He asks when we've settled down.
I lay my head on his chest and tell him, "Aria doesn't know what she's missing."

He looks at me and strokes my cheek, “Either does Bradley.”

~27~

We lay in bed snuggling for at least an hour before one of us decides to get up and shower. Nick beats me to it. I close my eyes listening to the noises he makes in the bathroom and pretend it's Bradley. I wonder what it would be like if he was here instead of Nick. When the water shuts off my daydream ends and I step into the bathroom naked to take my shower.

His eyes scan the entire length of my body and in a husky voice he asks, "Have dinner with me tonight, we need to talk." He's bare chested and only wearing a towel around his waist. I hadn't noticed how muscular his back was until I watch him blow drying his hair. He's hot.

"Sure, where and when."

"The Prime Steakhouse, my treat. I'll make reservations and text you."

"Sure," I agree.

I step into the luxurious multi-jet shower enclosed completely in glass. Except for a tiny bit of condensation, Nick has a perfect view of me showering and I can see I have his undivided attention. He puts everything he's using down, and doesn't move. He likes the visual, and when I step out he's kind enough to wrap a long towel around my naked body.

"Don't sulk over Bradley. Have fun today and forget about him."

I finger Nick's spikes, "I can't forget about him. He's right for being angry."

"I still don't like him. He's arrogant." Nick complains.

"You don't have to like him, you're not the one dating him. Do you think he'll get back with me?" I ask his male opinion.

Nick looks frustrated, "He would be stupid not to? He did ask about you when I was standing in line at Tim's. I hate it when you talk about Prick!"

"You mean Throb," I correct.

"No Chanel," and Nick gives me this look he always gives when he thinks he knows better, "he's graduated, remember?"

Nick dresses quickly and then grabs his wallet and phone, he starts out the door, "I'll text you what time to meet for dinner, so have your phone with you."

Nick's acting moody, I have no clue why talking about Bradley bothers him so much when I've had other boyfriends. Nick's acts like Bradley is a threat to him, Whenever I talk about Bradley now, Nick gets all menstrual on me.

I dress for the pool making sure my phone is on and the volume is turned up. My phone was previously off so when I restart it, it's flashing new messages. I wait for it to load and then check my answering machine before leaving the room. I typed the code into my phone to hear my messages. There are three:

1: Nick, "Coco, I bumped into Bradley at Tim's and he asked where you were. Where are you?"

2: Bradley: "It's Bradley, give me a call." *(His voice is deep, sexy, and sweet all at the same time!) I'm not sure what I will say and if I should call him from here or wait until I get back to Toronto. I have to talk to Nick about it. (If he will let me.)*

3: Aria: "Hi Chanel, its Aria. I just wanted to give you a heads up; it didn't work out between Nick and me. We totally have to get together when you get back and have a girl talk!" *(I can't wait to hear her side of the story. I just hope I can keep myself together and not laugh.)*

The pool is deserted today because for Nevada people the weather was cold, only 82 degrees. I take the same lawn chair I laid in yesterday and do my ritual of oil and sunglasses. I close my eyes and think of Bradley. I torment myself over the big question, should I call him or shouldn't I? I decide to call. I'm scared about what he's going to say, but I decided to get it over with.

I look for my contacts icon on my phone but it's too bright to make out the names, so I move to the shade. I scan my contacts and find Bradley's name and dial.

My heart is pounding; vile goes up my throat from nerves. If he picks up I know I'm going to be tempted to hang up, but I'll fight the urge. I scold myself for thinking that way; I'm thirty-five and way too old to crank call.

One ring. I told myself to breath, this is going to be okay. I started mimicking Lamaze. Two rings. I panic, what if it goes to voicemail, I haven't figured out what I'm going to do with that scenario, I'll say something retarded and have no way of

deleting it, and then I'll have to face him a couple of days later feeling totally embarrassed over what I said. Three rings, Omg voicemail is next and then I hear a click noise, I stop breathing wondering if he picked up the phone? Does he have call display? Did he pick it up and then hang it up because he doesn't want to talk to me? Then I realize, a recording is coming on, I take a deep breath and decide against leaving a message. Now I have to speak to him, so I call the hospital.

I dial the hospital number from heart. Locating answers and I request to speak to Dr. Hart, the cardiologist not the CEO. The lady asks me who I am. I tell her it's Dr. St. Claire. She asks me to hold, and says she's going to page him for me. She comes back on the line and says, "Here he is."

There's a second pause. I'm so nervous, "Bradley?"

"Chanel? Where are you?"

"Hi Bradley, I tried your house," I explain my reasoning for calling him at the hospital. I ignore his question and wait for him to take over the conversation. "I'm glad you called here. We need to talk, can I see you?" Alpha male wants to see me. I feel like there's a glimmer of hope!

"Sure, I'd love to but I'm not home."

Does he notice me missing from the hospital? Has Chase spoken with him about me asking for a leave of absence?

"Where are you?" He asks.

"I needed to get away. I'll be back soon. Can it wait or do you want to talk now?" If its hospital related he'll want to speak to me now, so I narrow it down.

"It will have to wait." Its personal!

Now, I know he wants to do this face to face, so it's serious, but what can be worse than breaking up with me or him going to his brother and making it so I never work with him again. Shit, even the thought of what he did gets me into a bad mood.

"I'll call you when I land?" I say informing him that I've travelled to get a way. I don't want him knowing where I've gone, just that I've left. He needs to know switching me to another cardiologist really hurt my feelings.

"Please call, and Chanel." His voice sounds so hot when he whispers my name into the receiver.

“Yes, Bradley”

“Thanks for calling back.” There’s a pause where neither of us hangs up and I listen to him breath. In a low voice he orders me to, “Hang up first.”

I like hearing him, even if it was just breathing, “No you,” I challenge.

“I’m going to discipline you when I see you,” he threatens. It’s getting me hot.

“Discipline me how?” I whisper, wanting details.

It sounds like he’s going to say something else and then he changes his mind, “I’m getting another page, I have to go.”

We both said good-bye.

I resume my worship of the sun, but now, I’m happier. I have something to look forward to when I go home. I figured if we stayed on the phone any longer and he was anywhere else but at the hospital, we probably would have resorted to phone sex to tide us over. I can’t call him back later, because it’s too weird talking to Bradley right in front of Nick, which reminds me, I wonder if he’s made the reservations yet.

I text Nick:

Chanel: Did u make the reservations yet?

Nick: I did, they r 4 6:30.

Chanel: That’s great. I’m just going to pick up a sandwich 4 lunch. Do u want me 2 get u 1 & leave it in the room 4 u?

Nick: No thxs, I had a buffet at Circus Circus, I’m good until I c u.

I return to the room at 5:30 after I treated myself to a new dress from a little boutique in Caesars Palace. I choose a red evening gown and the most gorgeous 4 inch patent leather Gucci pumps I’ve ever seen in my life, and for \$700 I’m going to wear them any chance I can get. Snowball will be so proud! By the time I finish dressing, I take my own breath away.

I go down to the restaurant and Nick is waiting for me out front. He’s wearing a black suit I saw him in once before, and he had his haircut very short. His olive skin has a glow to it and he looks amazing. We air kiss each other. He stands in front of the restaurant spinning his finger encouraging me to do a twirl so he can

get a better look at me. I do as he requests and his eyes zone in on the shoes immediately, "Red patent leather Gucci's? You must have borrowed them!"

"Bought."

"All these years you struck me as a Payless girl!" I think I see tears in his eyes, but I must be imagining it.

He kisses me on the lips and cloaks his arm around me leading me into the restaurant. The restaurant is decorated with Tiffany blue decor, and chocolate brown velvet chairs with gold ringed handles on the back of them. The tables have the cutest white glass lamps with a Tiffany blue ring and little frilly gems dangling from each of them on the table, its fancy.

Nick pulls my chair out and then his own. A waiter comes to take our order for drinks, and shortly after a different waiter brings our dinner menus. I study the menu and order what made them famous, their Prime Rib. Nick chooses the same and begins our dinner conversation, "All jokes aside, you look gorgeous Coco."

"You too Nick. I love the cut. I think it's the shortest you've ever worn it. Aria left a message on my machine by the way. I think she wants to tell me what happened between the two of you."

"You can't be serious," he rolls his eyes in distaste.

"I am. I think if you give me a chance, I might be able to help you smooth things over with her."

He doesn't answer; I think he's thinking about it, "I'm not sure I want them smoothed over." His comment surprises me. I thought he was getting a huge weak spot for Aria.

"I called Bradley from the pool," I blurt.

He looks repulsed, "Oh no! Please don't tell me that things are back on with Prick?"

"I think there's a good chance, he wants to talk."

"Does he know where you are and with who?" He's got his cat that ate the mouse looking grin on his face, the same one Chase had when he told everyone I would be working with him on the fundraiser.

“No, he doesn’t know where and with whom. If you don’t have a death wish you won’t tell him. I don’t care if he knows I’m in Las Vegas, I just don’t want him to know you’re here.”

He lowers his voice to a whisper, “What’s it worth to you? I might send him some pictures of me spanking your ass and you sucking my dick.”

“Ha ha, very comical.”

His smug look turns sad, “If you reconcile, does that mean everything between us is finished again?”

“It sure does. You shouldn’t even have to ask.”

“You never should have told him about our relationship Coco. I was about to confess my undying love to you tonight, and you’ve just ruined it,” he grins at me but I know he’s dead serious. He turns it into a joke because that’s all he can do. His eyes darken.

“Oh Nick, you know we’re just really good friends.”

His serious expression never falters, “No I don’t. It’s more than that and you know it.”

We waited for our bill in silence. I ask him to kiss me, and his soft lips cover mine. His arms enclose me, and I melt into them. He kisses me slow again, this time I opened for him allowing his sweet tongue to play with mine. It makes me tingle with need for him.

“Let’s have one more night together, please,” I run my fingers through his hair flashing back to when I yanked it really hard and he went all apeshit on me. He was so savage and fierce the last time he took me, so not Nick. Just thinking of it makes me pulse with desire for him; I just have to press the right buttons. I know I have to control myself, if I can manage to persuade him to stay; I have to support his need for intimacy. Who am I kidding? I need it just as bad.

~28~

I take his hand and bring him to the bed where I gesture for him to sit and I slowly undo the buttons to his shirt. I bring the shirt down past his shoulders and leave it there. Then I kneel before him admiring his butterfly chest with his dark nipples. I let the tips of my fingers explore his chest before taking his nipple into my mouth and sucking it.

I glide my tongue across his muscular chest to the other nipple, and I sucked on it longer than the other one. They are hard like little rocks when I'm done with them. Then I nip them ferociously showing him how badly I wanted him. He gasps and I look up to make sure he's okay. His eyes are needy and dark he curses me sexily, "Nobody has ever satisfied me the way you do. I will never be fulfilled without you Coco, I'll die of Anorsexia."

"Then I'll have to give you some physio tonight, won't I?"
I undo his black leather belt and remove it from his waist before handing it to him. He takes the belt and wraps it around his hand striking the night table hard making a cracking sound, I gasped in surprise. He warns me a serious warning and his voice was edgy, "If you give me the belt, I'm not afraid to use it on you. I'm going to punish you for going back to that fucking arrogant prick." His animosity is palpable.

"Bring it on," I challenge.

"Take your clothes off, now." He orders me. I stand before him and drop my dress to the ground. I don't remove my underwear, I'm not wearing any. I bend over and unstrap my Gucci patent leather shoes and step out of them.

He instructs me to, "Face the bed," so I turned my back to him and I feel his hands touch my shoulders and then he throws me roughly down onto the bed. Before I know what's happening the belt cracks hard against my ass and I scream. He cracks it again but this time I stifle my scream shoving the comforter in my mouth, tears come rushing from my eyes, it hurts so much, unbearable. He whips me one more time and the crack of the belt is louder, and this one hurts more than the other two. My ass is burning and I'm sobbing now from the pain.

When I know he's finished I roll onto my back. I can only imagine how much he hurt inside to physically whip me like that. He takes his pants off and he lowers his full body weight on top of me and I lose my breath. His lips take mine hostage and his tongue plunges into my mouth filling me now with salt kisses. He confides to me between his crazy sexy kisses, "I don't feel better. I hate that you're going back to him. My heart and body ache for you."

I stop to answer, "Then make love to me again, but Nick I'm sorry, but I'm serious you have to get your head wrapped around this, I want him." I let myself kiss him with the compassion and intensity I'm feeling, our faces are messy with oral secretions and tears and it feels like our mouths are having sex with each other. This can't be anymore intimate.

Both his hands are fisted tight in my hair and I run my nails along his scalp when I feel his really hard dick take flight into my soaking wet pussy filling me completely. His movements are deliberate, skilled, and slow. He's making love to me for the second time and this time there is no denying what we're doing, while we do it. We both feel it, we both chose to live it, and for a few brief moments we are soaring over clouds. This is breaking every rule, every promise we've ever made to each other, and neither of us give a damn.

~29~

My last day and Nick's second last day fly by. Nick wears the tackiest orange shorts and a wife beater shirt and I don't dress any better than him, I wear jeans and an 'I went to Las Vegas, and all I bought was this lousy T-shirt' that I picked up at the hotel on my first day here.

Nick wears his Jesus sandals with socks which are such a fashion faux pas I think I'm going to die of embarrassment being seen with him, but he says, "Whatever happens in Vegas stays in Vegas!"

I roll my eyes at his cliché, "Fashionista turns fashion rebel! You just don't want to show off your hairy feet."

"Coco, I'd rather have hairy feet than a hairy ass!" He says looking down at my ass as he says it.

I'm aghast at his remark, "It's not! You must be thinking about Bill or Ted, Dickwad!"

We spend the entire morning strolling hand in hand down the strip. I try the entire time to convince myself that Nick's comment about my ass is just a joke but when I get back to Toronto I'm going to find out if they do electrolysis on ass hair. We can't have asked for better weather on my last day. There isn't a cloud in the sky and there's a hint of wind making the air slightly cooler than yesterday and not as dry.

We stop in large gift shops that sell all kinds of memorabilia. I spot something that is perfect for Nick so when he isn't looking I get the sales girl to take it out of the glass cabinet and I pay for it. The present I chose for him is symbolic for everything our friendship stands for. Then the rest of the time I looked for something to bring back for Aria and Bradley. I decided to buy Aria a pair of earrings with dice on them and Bradley a bracelet. I find Nick waiting for me outside the store ready to continue our walk along the strip.

The sidewalks are always busy in Vegas and this morning is no exception. I suggest we go into a Casino but Nick declines telling me, "With the amount of

money I lost in the last couple of days, I'm happy if I never saw another one armed bandit ever again."

I smiled at him and say, "You have to start chasing more tail and less cock then!"

He grabs me, and spins me around making me face him, "Let me start with your's!"

Pulling away from him playfully I comment, "I wish I didn't have to leave tonight!"

"Me too," he agrees.

We live out our wild child fetishes by stopping at two Casinos. The first is the roller coaster on New York, New York and then we finish it off with the drop ride at the Circus Circus, before completing our day with a swim in the pool that I literally spent the majority of my time in. We cap off the evening with a soak in our room's hot tub, and then we shower together washing the bubbles off each other's backs.

Nick orders room service while I start getting ready to leave, then he lays on the bed with his hands behind his head watching me as I pack my suitcase. When the food comes I scurry over to the table all excited to slip the box I bought Nick onto his dish. I lay the table out and we take our places at it.

Nick removes his lid to his food and sees the box on his dish, "What's this?"

"Open it and look," I encourage.

He picks up the box and opens the lid, inside is a chain with a gold nugget charm. He doesn't move for a second as his eyes gaze into mine.

I wanted to explain, "Read the note!"

Nick:
You're one of a kind.
My rock,
A true gold nugget."
Love Coco

Nick thanks me and gives it to me to place around his neck. I put it on slowly because I like standing close to him, it makes me feel all warm and fuzzy. Then he says, "I have a keepsake for you too. Don't let Prick catch you with it!"

"What is it?"

He hands me a box and I open it. It's a dog tag necklace with a picture of us on the roller coaster, huge smiles on our faces and Nick doesn't have a hair out of place! It's the best picture of us I've ever seen. My eyes fill at the sentiment.

We finish our dinner and then Nick comes down to the lobby with me so we can say our good-byes before I step into the first cab we see. He kisses me. Its mind blowing. I turn to him waving good-bye out the back window. He waves back looking forlorn.

I texted Bradley from the cab:

Chanel: I'm coming home.

It takes some time for my phone to chirp with a response, but I know he's a busy man.

Bradley: Glad to hear it. I want to see you. When will you get back?

Chanel: 6:00 a.m. your time.

Bradley: Can I pick you up from the airport?

Chanel: Sure.

I board the plane tired from the day we had in Vegas. We were outside for so long and did so much walking, I'm drained. The anticipation of seeing Bradley is the only thing that keeps me going.

I take the dog tag out of my purse and reflect on the fun time we had in Vegas. I'm glad Nick turned up. If he hadn't come, I probably would have spent the entire time sulking about Bradley breaking up with me and having to go back to the hospital without him teaching me.

It's crazy how much Nick takes my mind off Bradley. I'm not sure if that is good or not, maybe he isn't right for me. I have to spend more time forging through

my feelings to figure it all out. I can't wait to see what he has to say to me. When I finish looking at the pendant I tuck it away in a small pocket of my purse. I close my eyes and let myself drift into a peaceful sleep.

The flight lands at Pearson on time. I grab my overhead bag, feeling tired but excited to see Bradley. I trudge off the plane in the slow line ahead of me. Bradley is a sight for my tired, sore eyes. His face is scruffy, appearing to have gone days without shaving. It seems as though whenever we aren't getting along he stops shaving. His hair is shaggy and he looks really sexy wearing his surgical scrubs waiting for me in a crowd of people. I forget how much he takes my breath away, until I see him.

We don't hug, but he offers to carry my bag and we walk to the Hummer. I feel shy from not dressing well before getting on the plane, and in desperate need of a shower. He on the other hand smells fresh and looks handsome. I pull myself up into the passenger seat. Bradley throws my bag into the back before getting in on his side. The Hummer idles sounding like it runs on diesel and he pulls out into the airport traffic.

His eyes keep glancing over at me and then he comments, "You cut your hair." I forgot he hasn't seen me since the makeover and I find myself praying he likes it. Damn why did I cut it off! I inwardly curse myself and my stupid whims. "I want to take you back to my place so I can spend time with you after off work."

"I'd rather go home if you don't mind. I want to get a good rest, unpack and take a shower."

He takes my hand, "Anything you want." He pulls into Tim Horton's drive thru and looks over at me waiting for me to tell him what I want.

I starved and order, "A coffee, turkey sandwich, breakfast sandwich, hash brown, and juice." He orders a coffee and the total comes to fifteen dollars. He looks at me with wide eyes and I explained to him, "I have nothing at the loft!" He parks in the lot and we nurse our coffee's looking at each other in silence.

"Why did you go to Las Vegas?" He asked.

The interrogation is beginning. Luckily I know he usually starts work for eight so I won't have to go through more than an hour or so of being grilled, "You have to ask?"

"Were you alone?"

I'm too tired to answer all these questions, "No, there were about two million other people there."

He doesn't like my sarcasm so he gets more direct, "Did you go with Nick?"

I put my coffee down and answer his question honestly, "No, I went alone." I just fail to add that Nick followed me there.

I pick my coffee back up and say, "Why all the questions, did you miss me?"

Bradley doesn't answer. He starts playing with the stubble on his face and he appears deep in thought. I look at the facial hair and the hair from his chest poking out his surgical scrubs and I starting to get horny, but I refuse to let it show because he can't go near me, not until my ass is healed and I have a shower.

"You didn't answer why you went to Las Vegas, alone."

I countered, "You haven't told me whether you like my hair or not."

"I'm upset with you for ditching me and going all the way to Chase with it," I seethe.

"You should have had more cut off," he snaps back spitefully.

The comment is a huge blow to my self-esteem. I feel my eyes well up so I quickly look out the window.

I turn back to him when I gather more control over my emotions, "Does Chase know that we had something going on between us?"

Bradley glares at me, "He thinks you are with Nick, Chase made a crack about Nick telling him you were indisposed when he visited you at the loft. I show up asking to put you with a different doctor and then he suspects you and I are together too."

"The CEO of the hospital knows all this about me?"

"The CEO happens to be my brother Chanel, and he's worried about you."

"Why?"

"When you asked for your Leave, he said you looked very upset."

"I was. You chose to stop working with me."

"You slept with Nick, and expect me to work with you after that? I had change who you work with. I didn't mean for all this to come out."

"When is your leave over?" He asks.

"The day after tomorrow," I scrutinized him cautiously, "Where do we go from here?"

"I don't know Chanel," his eyes look despondent. "I'll take you home."

We drive in silence and then he parks in visitors which is empty and walk me up to my loft carrying my bag. When we get to the door I pull out my keys and drop them into his hand to open the door for me.

He faces me, the spark between us undeniable, but I wonder is there anything else between us? I have this urge to run my fingers through his sexy bristle and I caved to it. My hands touched his face and I closed my eyes, stepping closer to him, "Kiss me," he orders.

He doesn't wait for me because it doesn't matter what I do, he wants a kiss and he's taking one. He closes the gap between us and then his lips brush against mine, he begin kissing me aggressively thrusting his tongue into my mouth while his bristle scratches my face wildly. His kisses show me what his pride won't express, he really missed me.

My insides begin to melt as his kiss makes my clit throb for him. I will do anything just to have him touch it, but it isn't a good time so I push him away. He pulls me roughly back to him and increases his grip of me, "I wasn't done." He finishes kissing me, I'm barely able to breath, and then he releases me. He promises to come after work.

He orders me, "Down on your knees." He pulls his dick out of his pants without bothering to take them off and commands me to suck on his already hard penis, it's turning purple with need and throbbing. I turn my head away from it making him mad. He grabs my hair close to the scalped and yanks my head to his cock, "Suck it, now!"

I opened my mouth for him and he shoves his dick in hard and starts thrusting it in and out of my mouth. I can barely breath. I grab his balls and clench my fingers tightly around them making him gasp in pain.

He grabs me again by the wrist like he always does and hauls me to my room. "You are such a bad girl Chanel," he chastises. "Others may have let you get away with it in the past, but you will respect me. Get back on your knees." I'm getting what I want from him so I submit lowering myself back to my knees. He holds his dick to my lips and in a low and commanding voice he says, "Now suck."

I take him into my mouth and I let his warm cock fill me. I suck hard pulling it in and out of my mouth until his breathing changes and his eyes close and he's relaxing into it. He encourages me, "That's it." He starts moaning and his hands are now grabbing loose strands of hair.

He pulls out and his dick is red, swollen, and hard. He tells me to lie down on the bed and roughly unzips my jeans and tugs them and my underwear down in one sweeping motion. His two thick fingers rub my clit with a rough circular motion making me moan and then his fingers dive into my wet pussy for lubrication. He slides them out and rubs them over my bum. He flips me without warning and thrusts his dick into my ass. I pray he doesn't see the welts that must still be visible from Nick. I'm frozen with fear.

He fills me quickly and brutally, the pressure overbearing and uncomfortable that I can't help but scream. He grabs a fistful of my hair really tightly and says, "You are mine now," and then he starts thrusting his dick into my ass making me groan while his fingers let go of that fistful of hair and he starts playing with my clit. The pain is now becoming pleasurable and the friction starts exciting me.

His rhythm is flawless and his speed increases. I start calling out as the pleasure is more than I can bare, I'm on the brink of losing it. He warns me, "I'm going to come." I release myself as his fingers continued to rub me. His thrusts more powerful and deliberate. I can feel his warm cum spraying my back after I collapsed completely on my bed.

He goes to the bathroom and comes back with a warm towel. He wipes my back down and then encourages me to lie on my back. I think we are going to cuddle. He stands before the bed and starts stroking himself while I watch. Then he drops to his knees and takes me into his mouth licking my clit and the lips of my pussy until I start panting with excitement again.

He slides two thick fingers in and starts playing with it while he keeps tonguing my clit. His other hand never leaving his own dick. He's masturbating with these quick movements and in seconds he's ready all over again and this time he takes me without heed and he fucks me hard. I feel like I'm going to split open, I scream BRADLEY and his thrusts become even more vigorous. "Come, he orders," but I'm not close.

I tell him, "You're not fucking me hard enough." He starts fucking me harder and then my body starts making uncontrollable jerking movements as he begins pumping his fluids into me.

We collapsed in each other's arms and that's when he tells me, "Chanel, I love you. That's why I stay with you even after knowing you've been with him. I don't want to be with anyone but you, can you handle that? I want us to be exclusive, that's all I've ever wanted."

I'm spent but I like the lion in him, now I'm starting to love the lion in him, "I can handle it." I tell him.

He asks to stay over but I tell him I have to work tomorrow, so he kissed me affectionately before leaving for the night.

~30~

Dr. Shelly Morden waits for me on the floor. We met before so I recognize her immediately and she stands to introduce herself, "Good morning Chanel, I look forward to working with you."

Shelly takes her white coat off and cloaks it on the back of her chair leaving her computer open, "Come with me," she encourages. It's early morning and the nursing station is busy, but she stakes her claim to that computer by leaving it signed on with her jacket hanging from the chair. I quietly follow her directly to Tim Horton's where she insists on buying me a breakfast sandwich and a coffee on our first day together.

We eat our sandwiches briskly at a small table inside Tim Horton's bringing our coffee's back up to the floor with us. She informs me that Bradley is on call and we will be doing angiograms so I expect it to be a busy day for us. We haven't got back to the station for more than two minutes when her pager already goes off for an emergency angioplasty. She pulls the pager from her pants pocket and presses a button to silence it. She rolls her eyes, "It's the Coronary Care Unit, they are expecting a forty-one year old from Brampton Civic with an acute MI, finish your coffee and meet me when you are done."

She doesn't argue, she signs off her computer, grabs her lab coat and is already heading out of the nursing station before I can swallow the sip of coffee I have in my mouth. Shelly seems very quick on her feet, and I get the impression she's going to keep me very busy and that's what I need. I only down two-thirds of my coffee before I join her in the Cath lab.

I glance up at the clock and then over to Shelly remembering my appointment with Chase, "Dr. Morden."

Shelly interrupts, "Please, call me Shelly."

I stand corrected, "Shelly, I have an appointment with Dr. Chase Hart in five minutes if that's okay? I'll be back soon."

"No worries Chanel, take your time. I'm going to be sending the patient to Cardiac Short Stay when I'm done and then I'll meet you back on the floor."

I walk briskly to the shark tank. When I arrive there, his secretary is nowhere to be found. His door is ajar and I peek in. He's there but doesn't look up, so I have a chance to study him unnoticed, he enthralled me.

He's dressed in a dark suit and his hair is cut very short all over except on the top. I imagine running my fingers through the short hair on the back of his head. He looks different today. I see him in a different light. He is clean shaven unlike his brother and exudes a confidence I had never seen in anyone before. He wears refined reading glasses that compliment his facial features. He is my definition of dignified. He looks deeply engrossed in whatever he is looking at when his voice startles me, "Come in Chanel." Oh. My. God. He knew I was there the entire time.

I step into his office, "I don't want to disturb you." He motions for the chair and I take it graciously, "How do you like Dr. Morden?"

"Great. I think she's just what I need. She's intelligent, fast paced. I think I'll learn a lot from her."

He takes his glasses off and looks at me, "She'll be good to learn from because of her EPS background. When you finish your residency you can decide if you want to be an interventionist or an electro physiologist!" He puts the arm of his glasses in his mouth and sucks on it. I'm lost for a second finding myself staring at his lips. 'Snap out of it,' my inner voice reprimands.

Chase hands me a piece of paper and listed on it is five different caterers names, "Chanel, I want you to call these caterers and set up a time we can sample food for our fundraiser. Try to have them come here so we don't have to waste our time going to five different places. We'll pick the one we like most and then you can choose the menu for the fundraiser. I've booked the venue. It will be at Eglinton Grand in the Main Ballroom."

He starts doing something on his MacBook Pro and then turns it around on his desk so I can see, "This is the Ballroom I booked."

I study the picture and gasp quietly, it's beautiful.

He turns the computer back to face him, "I will give you budget maximums for decorations and food. You must stay within the guidelines I set out for you." I smile at him, "It'll going to be like planning a wedding without the pressure."

Chase continues, "Have the caterers come Friday afternoon around five. If they want the job they will show up. I will advertise the fundraiser to staff moreover in the paper. Staff will get a discount of fifty dollars per person so we prefer more of the general public to attend. Do you have any questions?"

His eyes bore into mine it almost feels uncomfortable, "No." I want to thank him for the leave of absence he granted me but think better of it.

The room is quiet, "You look well rested and tanned. Did you go somewhere when you were on leave?" He places his glasses on the desk next to his computer and stands to escort me from his office.

His hand touches my elbow as he guides me to the door, "I did, I went to Las Vegas." His cologne makes my senses go on high alert as he smells as good as he looks. I want to close my eyes and focus on the feel of his touch as he gently holds my arm. I didn't want to leave his office but have no excuse to prolong the stay. Why am I so attracted to him?

I have to act cool, I'm dating his brother. They are twins so I guess it's understandable I'm lured to both. That is what the little voice in my head was says to persuade my self-conscience. It has to be perfectly normal. Where the fuck was Nick when I need him! Chase snaps me out of my thoughts, "Well it looks like Las Vegas agreed with you. You look wonderful."

The two brothers have very different personalities; I try reassuring myself that I chose the nicer of the two but I have doubts. Chase is just a hard ass cold executive who doesn't care about the patients, but the more time I spend with him, the more I realize my animosity is misplaced.

~31~

I text Bradley between cases.

Chanel: Can I come over tonight?

Bradley: Sure.

I finish working with Shelly and go home to shower and get my things before going to Bradley's. I don't have to work tomorrow so I think it will be fun to spend the entire night with him. I don't bother eating, I just grab my vintage Coach purse that I picked up from an antique store and shoved my favourite movie in it; hoping Bradley will let us watch it, "Crazy, Stupid, Love." I stick a bag of microwavable popcorn and a water bottle in my purse as well in case he doesn't have anything good at his place.

It's a beautiful summer night and I pulled up to Bradley's and park in his driveway. I can hear the summer noises of creepy crawlers as I head for his door. I ring his bell impatiently looking at the brick on his house to see if I can spot a spider. I'm relieved when he answers the door and lets me in before I find what I'm looking for. I have this habit of freaking myself out when it comes to bugs. I'm terrified of them.

He surprises me, he's dressed in dress pants and a nice white ironed shirt and his facial hair is completely gone. His hair is shaggy sexy with the fresh smell of body wash filling the air around him. He smells edible and if I didn't know where I am, I would swear I was at Chases by accident. I give him a hug stepping onto my toes just to reach my arms around his neck. My burly monster boyfriend looks more like his CEO brother. I'm not sure if this was a good thing or not. He drops his head down and plants a kiss on my lips before I ask, "Is Bradley home?" pretending I just kissed Chase.

"Very funny! Have you eaten yet?" he asks.

"I haven't, I showered and came right over."

"That's great," he says. "I'll make us pizza; did you have anything in mind for tonight?"

I smile coyly at him, "I brought a movie!"

He rolls his eyes, "Please tell me there's no hospital scenes and no Bette Middler!"

"None of the above!" I pull the movie from my purse and he groans an insufferable hate Chick Flick's groan if I've ever heard one. "Have you seen it?"

He grins looking alarmingly handsome, "Can't say that I've had the misfortune!"

"We'll change that!" I say snidely.

He starts preheating his oven and I rummage through his way too large fridge. My own lack of reserve shocks me. He looks at me sideways and then asks, "What are you looking for?"

I continue looking into the fridge, "A drink of choice, seriously you have nothing! I expect you to have at least something if you want me to sleep over at your house. I'm just laying down the law now."

"Oh! You are, are you? I have another refrigerator downstairs. The light is at the top of the stairs. See if it meets your standards." So I go downstairs expecting to see barely anything, but the fridge is stocked to capacity. It's a mini pop machine/liquor store all wrapped in one. I grab a bottle of Merlot near the fridge and go back upstairs to join him again.

He looks at my hands with hesitation, "Tell me you didn't find that in the fridge? I'm not into red vinegar."

"Next to, not in, where's your bottle opener?" He points to a drawer and I open it. When I conquer the bottle, which I feel is the most important part of the meal; I set out the dinner table next. His kitchen is organized logically. He seems to be anal about facing labels out, and remaining orderly. If it was my kitchen I wouldn't have changed a thing.

We work on the salad as a team. He digs the veggies out of the fridge while I wash and we chopped together. I toss while he gets the salad plates from the cabinet. Its like we have been doing this for ages. We keep it informal and eat at the breakfast bar.

He drinks his wine and then he asks, "How do you like working with Shelly?"

My mouth is full with a fresh forkful of lettuce that I didn't think to cut up before putting it in my gob so it takes a second to answer, "It's fine, she keeps me really busy, which is what I need."

When we finish our dinner, Bradley takes me to a room I've never seen before. It's simple, it has four of the most luxurious recliners I've ever seen with a hundred and ten inch projector screen. The downfall of the recliners is there's no way of cuddling with each other. I pick a middle recliner and Bradley helps me open it by showing me where the lever is. He hands me a cooler and my own popcorn and blanket. I'm set. He chooses a seat next to me and he has his own cooler and popcorn and blanket. We do hold hands though.

The room smells like a theatre, and the couch prevents any unforeseen expectations. When the movie is over, we undress for bed and curl up naked in each other's arms. It feels right being in his arms. Nick is all wrong about him. I wonder how his flight is, I haven't heard from him and I can't call him, not from here anyway.

Waking up to the sun streaming into Bradley's bedroom wasn't half bad until I realized the bed was empty. I'm half tempted to page him and get his ass back here but I don't have the nerve. How he manages to get up and get dressed without waking me is baffling. I'm a light sleeper in my heaviest of sleeps, and somehow he managed to get ready for work and go without waking me. The man deserves a medal.

I pick up the clean change of clothes I brought over last night and place them in his en suite for the shower I'm planning to take. I turn the faucet on waiting for the water to get warm and go into the kitchen, hallway, and living room, to see if he might have left me a note, nota. When I get back to the en suite the water is perfect so I undress and step into a luxuriously warm shower.

I take my time in his shower looking at his collection of scented body washes, I refrain from using them thinking, and how weird would it be if he's with me and I smell like him, it will kind of be like he's being intimate with himself, almost a form of masturbating.

When I'm sure I used up the majority of his hot water, I dress and towel dry my hair before going in search of something easy to make in his unfamiliar kitchen. I settled on eggs, bacon, and toast with strawberry jam. I decide I'm going to wait for him to come home from work and have a lazy day in my grizzly's den (My new nickname for Bradley's house).

I decide to text him at work, which is something I never usually do, but I'm getting bored mid-morning so I cave.

Chanel: You left without even a note?

Bradley: Woke up late, Maggie called me in for a case.

Chanel: U should have told her U had a bed guest.

Bradley: Droll. I left a key to my house on your keychain. If you leave, can you lock up?

Chanel: Sure.

Bradley: Sorry, busy, I have to go back to work, ttyl.

Chanel: ttyl.

~32~

Friday's a busy day, I find it hard to focus on my work with the excitement of the upcoming taste testing that I'm doing with Chase. I arrive at his office punctually at exactly five and Chase's secretary is packing up for the day. Four out of five caterers agreed to come tonight with beef dishes of their choice.

The secretary meets my eyes for a second and says, "He's been expecting you, go on in."

"Thank you," I say passing her in the open door. I step in and she pokes her head in behind me, I'm off now Dr. Hart. The answering service is on so you won't be interrupted."

Chase gives her his million dollar smile, "Thanks Mrs. Webster. Have a good weekend."

Chase points to the chair and asks, "Can I offer you a drink?"

As much as I would like to have an alcoholic beverage, I think better of it because I'm expected to work until 7:30 p.m., "Diet coke, or water if you have it."

He walks over to his mini fridge and pulls out a can, "Is Diet Pepsi okay?"

"Sure," I smile.

He closes his office door while we wait for his waiting room to collect with the four caterers, "So Chanel, how was your leave? Did you get some rest?"

"I did, thanks for asking." I don't volunteer more information to him than what he asks. It seems as though Bradley was very skilled at divulging too much personal information about me to his brother.

"Did you travel? You look tanned."

"I spent four days in Las Vegas."

"By yourself?"

"Yes, it was quite nice."

"Glad to hear it. I like what you've done to your hair, Its looks exquisite on you."

"Your brother's opinion differs greatly from yours. Thanks for the compliment. It took some getting used to it but I quite like it now."

Chase takes a drink of his whisky and places it down on his desk making a clink noise when the ice hits the side of the glass, "Forgive me for being nosy but may I ask what his comment to you was?"

"He said I should have had more cut off, but we were in the midst of a disagreement at the time, so I tried not to take it too personally."

"It obviously bothered you Chanel. Pay no notice to my brother, it's stunning."

Chase looks at me before standing from his seat, "If you'll excuse me for a second, I'd like to see if the caterers are in the waiting room yet."

"Sure," I say as he gets up to check. When he opens the door the chatter of the caterers silences as each one notices him at different times.

Chase speaks to them outside his office but I can hear everything he says. His voice is deep, authoritative, and downright sexy, "Welcome, please come into my office and place your sample dishes next to your business cards on the table I've provided. Chanel and I will go over each dish carefully, and the caterer we decide to go with for the Cardiac Fundraiser will be notified by Wednesday of this week. We would like to thank all of you for coming and we appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedules to come here this evening.

The caterers do as they are instructed and after making sure their dish looks exactly the way they want it, they leave shaking Chase's hand on the way out.

We find ourselves alone with four beautiful dishes waiting to be feasted on. He grins at me, "Okay, so how do you want to do this?"

I'm not sure where Chase is going with this so I let him lead, "What are you thinking?"

Chase looks youthfully handsome when he suggests, "We try each dish, don't say a word or make a sound to each other, and then we write down the caterers name that made our favourite dish. Hopefully we pick the same one."

"Do you have any utensils? Are we allowed to use those?" I ask playfully.

He opens the side drawer to his monster desk and pulls out two plastic forks and knives for the occasion. We roll our chairs to the table and he hands me my utensils. We sit facing each other and start with the same dish. I cut a piece of beef covered in gravy and put it in my mouth. He does the same. I close my eyes as the beef and salty gravy melt in my mouth, delicious! It had to be the best I'd ever

tasted. I moan forgetting myself and Chase has this confounded look on his face, “No words or sounds, remember?” He reminds me. “Now, I already know you like this dish.”

I giggled, “I’m sorry, I forgot myself.”

Chase looks all serious, “That’s okay just don’t do it again. Are you ready to try dish number two?”

“Yes, Ready.” I straighten up in my chair and roll to the second dish. I’m mindful of my reactions now. I take a sip of my Pepsi and then cut a piece of beef from dish number two. I savoured the flavour of the second dish, its better than the first! I can’t believe it. I didn’t think anything could ever taste better than the first.

“Chanel!” Chases voice startles me.

“What?” I don’t think I did anything. What are his pants getting tied up in a knot over now?

“You’re eyes went big. You aren’t supposed to react,” he chastises me.

“So what does that mean? Do you know why they went big?”

He looks at me, contemplating how he’s going to answer, “Actually, no, I don’t know what that means. We only have two more dishes, try to refrain from reactions until we discuss them.”

“Okay.” I say, and I don’t say or do anything else. I’m on my best behaviour.

When we are on the fourth dish I reach for Chase’s face and wipe a drop of gravy from his chin. He stares into my eyes. “Gravy,” I mutter. We both write on a piece of paper who we want to cater the event and then look at each other’s choice. We both picked the second dish, it’s a no brainer.

Chase goes to his fridge and pours himself another whisky, “You finish the second plate and I’ll have the first. I’ll take the one that made you moan,” he says jokingly.

His comment made me self-conscious as I notice he’s watching me eat the food on my dish. I decide not to let myself feel intimidated or self-conscious by him so I start closing my eyes and moaning with every bite. If I didn’t already have his full attention, I do now. I think he even stops eating his food. I then pat my face with a make-do napkin, thank him, and see myself out. He’s left speechless.

~33~

Nick

It sucks being back to work after spending four way too short days in sunny Las Vegas. It's always the same shit different day here in the hospital. The weather isn't good either, its cooler here than in Vegas and always cloudy.

I fly solo today figuratively speaking, Dr. Thicke is sick with something he probably caught from one of his patients. That means if I'm having troubles or needed help I have to go to the Throb who's covering for him. My hatred for Throb intensified since Vegas, he has no idea what kind of catch he made.

My biggest mistake is choosing internal medicine as a specialty. I'm always in emergency and on respiratory floors, exposed to the worst and most infectious cases. I might as well have specialized in infectious diseases, I'm around them enough. I should have kept my hands clean the way Coco did and chosen Cardiology or better yet, Dermatology.

I've been meaning to call Coco since I got back to see if she spoken to Aria yet. Coco is always good at doing damage control. I pulled my phone out of my white coat and text her:

Nick: Hi Coco?

Chanel: U'r back?

Nick: Unfortunately.

Chanel: I know, it was fun.

Nick: Did U C Aria yet, damage control?

Chanel: Not yet, 2 busy 2. I'll text her C if we can get together 2night.

Nick: Thx. My social life depends on it!

I look up from my phone and see Chase walking towards me in the hall. He nods his head in my direction and says, "Nick."

I slide my phone back into my pocket and acknowledge his greeting, "Hi Chase."

He stops in my path and asks, "Have you seen my brother?"

“I can’t say that I have, but I know he’s on call. He’s covering for Dr. Thicke whose sick today. I’ll tell him you’re looking for him.”

“Thanks Nick, good tan!” I didn’t think anything of the encounter.

A few minutes later my phone vibrates and I grab it from my pocket to look, it’s a text from Coco.

Chanel: Meeting with Aria 2night 2 do damage control. I will keep U posted.

CHANEL

Aria said she would meet me at the Paddock for seven, Bradley said he would meet us when he finishes his on-call. I don't invite Nick until I knew how it's going with Aria.

When I get home from work I head straight for the shower. I must have been in there a long time, because the water is starting to make my skin crinkle. I dry off and dress provocatively wearing my shortest skirt and a simple camisole. I'm not in the mood for heels so I wear sandals that match my outfit. I walk to the Paddock and find myself the first to arrive.

Aria comes dressed in a red silk kimono that stops at her knees and red patent leather shoes. She is such an odd bird; I can totally see why Nick likes her. She isn't afraid of being different, she embraces it. I give her a huge hug and notice she toned down her perfume. It is subtle and flowery, quite lovely!

"I love your Kimono dress and your perfume," I gush.
Aria smiles back at me, "Thanks! Oh my God! You cut your hair!"

Okay now she wins the award for making me feel the most self-conscious I've been since I did it, "I did!"

"It's so different, I love it! Did Bradley tell you to cut it?"
Now I wish I spent more time on it tonight before going out, "No, just did it on a whim! When he saw me he said I should have gone shorter with it."

She hesitates, "Oh, I quite agree, chin length would have been perfect on you! It looks fabulous though. You looked like a floozy from the eighties before!"

I feel embarrassed and grab an elastic from my bag and pull my hair back in a ponytail. I can't believe she said that but I guess it is good to know the truth. Well, with two people telling me to go shorter maybe for the Cardiac Fundraiser I will get it styled shorter. I have nothing to lose that won't grow back.

"How was Vegas? I can't believe you went there alone! What in the world did you do there?"

I lament, "It was great. I spent most of my time by the pool. I just needed to get away."

"From what?"

"You don't want to know! Let's just say that when Bradley was training me he failed to tell me that his ex-wife worked in the Cath lab."

She looks shocked, "Fuck off! You've got to be kidding! Kind of important thing to miss. You had no idea?"

I raise my shoulders, "None. Nick knew but he never told me because he thought I already knew."

"Speaking of Nick, I wanted to tell you before you left, we aren't seeing each other anymore. Did he tell you?"

I think she's gaging my expression, "Yes, he did. I'm sorry to hear that Aria, what happened?"

The waitress comes to take our order so we order two Cosmos and wait for her to leave. "He came to my loft one night and everything was going well until we started getting intimate. He starts going all S&M on me. He spanks me, and demeans me. I have no idea where this comes from. I never told him I like doing that stuff, and if he's into it, he better find someone else to do THAT to! It was horrible Chanel!"

She looks upset even telling me, her face is all red and her eyes are welling up with tears, "Oh, Aria this is my entire fault!" I confess.

She looks at me completely confused, "Your fault! How so?"

I feel really embarrassed, "Nick and I were discussing your relationship and I suggested he get all S&M on you. I thought you would like it!"

The waitress comes back with our drinks and places them down on our table. Aria doesn't look up; she grabs her drink removes the straw and takes a huge gulp of it, "Whatever gave you that impression?"

"I don't know, Nick's just worried he wasn't doing it for you so I suggested some kinky stuff. He told me about it after; he says he feels really bad. He thought you were role playing until he saw you crying, then he realized you weren't enjoying yourself but it was too late. He said he tried explaining to you but you broke up with him and told him to leave. Give him another chance. He's not into it. He just thought you were!"

She looks happier with my explanation, "I'd love to give him another chance if he wants to be with me. I tried calling and leaving a message, but he never

returned my call. I didn't think he wanted to have anything more to do with me after that, you know, when he realized I was crying."

"Aria, he felt like a bag of shit after. He's never going to do that again, he promised me that. He's waiting for me to text him whether you forgive him or not."

Aria glowed, "Go ahead, text the poor guy already!"

I pull my phone from my purse and text Nick just as I see Bradley walk into the Paddock.

Chanel: Come meet me & Aria @ the Paddock. UR 4given.

Nick: U rock! I'll b there soon.

Bradley is dressed in scrubs from work and has a six o'clock shadow. He hasn't bothered to change before meeting us here. My burley doctor is being a rebel fashionista! I find myself very attracted to him. He bends over to kiss me and then greets Aria, "Hello Aria, how are you doing? Can I interest you ladies in a fresh drink?"

Aria is glowing, "Thanks Bradley, I would love one! Chanel how about you? Chanel?"

"Sure!"

He grins at me, "Can I interest you in spending the night at my place?"
Now I'm glowing, "Now you're talking!"

Bradley brings our drinks to the table, and takes a chair between myself and Aria. I relax my hand on his thigh, "How was work?" I engage.

He takes a drink of what appears to be a martini with an olive, "Not bad, nothing out of the blue except for an eighteen year old fishing with her boyfriend. He casts the line while she's standing behind him and the hook flies directly into her eye socket. She's in surgery now, it doesn't look good for her. The boyfriend is devastated, his skin was white, pale as a ghost. He couldn't speak from shock. Last I heard the surgeon was having troubles, it was lodged into the bone."

Aria's enthralled by his story, I haven't seen anything like that but I feel instantly sorry for the poor girl. You never expect to get an injury like that merely

by fishing. It seems like such a safe sport. I look at Bradley, "Are you working tomorrow?"

He runs his fingers through his hair before reaching for his drink, "Yes, I'm on call again. This time for myself and not Dr. Thicke. Are you working?"

"I am Dr. Morden is going to teach me how to insert a pacemaker."

"Did you meet with my brother today?"

I couldn't help smiling, "I did, we picked the caterer for the Fundraiser. It was fun."

"Free food is always fun, speaking of which, I'm starving. If you've already eaten, I might as well order food from here." He waves a waitress down and orders Souvlaki.

Nick enters the Paddock ten minutes after the waitress took Bradley's order. He walks directly to the bar to order his drink before joining us at the table. I start digging through my purse for the two boxes that I keep forgetting are in my purse. I give the first box to Bradley and the second to Aria before I explain, "I just picked you up something small to let you know I was thinking about you in Vegas."

They open their boxes with excitement, Aria pulls her new 10K hoop earrings from her box and gasps with aw, "They're great! Thank you!" She wraps her arms around me and gives me a big kiss on the cheek, "You totally shouldn't have!" Nick takes a seat next to Aria and they lock lips immediately like sex starved teenagers. When they finish sucking face he looks at me with gratitude, "Thanks Chanel."

Bradley opens his box and in it he finds a 14K ID bracelet which I had engraved, 'THROBBING 4U, Chanel.' He hands it to me to put on his wrist and then he shows me his gratitude by kissing me.

I would buy him a hundred more if I got kisses like that every time. I feel Nick's eyes on us. I get the impression he's having troubles seeing me with Bradley or being in the same room with him. I can sense animosity coming from him and I don't know why.

We finish our kiss and Nick starts talking to Bradley, "What did you do with the fishing case Bradley? Did the surgeon come?"

"He did, he took her to the operating room to try to save her eye. I sedated the boyfriend. Last I heard from the surgeon it wasn't good, the hook is lodged in the bone."

"That is too bad, the poor girl. I wanted to give her more attention but there was too much going on. Thanks for helping me out. Did your brother find you? I forgot to tell you he was looking for you."

"No problem. You were doing well on your own. When was Chase looking for me?"

"Just before the girl came into emergency. It totally slipped my mind. I got so busy."

Bradley glances at me and reaches in his pocket for his phone, "I'm just going to call him back, I'll only be a minute."

"Sure, take your time." I encourage.

Nick is focused on Aria, "Let's go talk, alone." He wants to make things right. I'm happy for them. Maybe he cares about her more than he realizes, "Thanks' Coco." Aria looks at me and gives me another hug, but this one is a good-bye hug. Her enthusiasm is contagious as she doesn't bother answering him, she just grabs her purse and the two of them start heading out the door, his arm on her shoulders.

Bradley comes back to the table, "Where did they go?"

I smile at him knowingly, "They went to 'talk.'"

"So we're alone?"

"We are. What did your brother have to say?"

"Nothing that can't wait until tomorrow, where's my food?"

"I think it's on the warmer, be patient she'll come." The waitress came shortly after and left a huge dish of souvlaki with buttered potatoes and Greek salad. I watch as he starts digging into his food hungrily. He appears starved, "When's the last time you ate?"

"I forgot to," he admits, his eyes look troubled and I ask, "Is something bothering you?"

He hesitates before saying, "The nugget around Nick's neck was he in Vegas with you?"

My heart skips a beat, "No, I gifted it to him."

“Why didn’t you give him his gift when you gave us ours? Is it a coincidence that he has a tan? You have a choice: either you tell me the truth, or I will have Chase check his attendance?”

There’s no escape, I’m caught in a lie. “He followed me there,” I confess too late.

He runs his fingers through his hair, I can tell by his expression that he’s furious, “Do you see who he left with?”

He puts his cutlery down on his empty dish with a loud clang. He wipes his hands and face with the napkin and then he takes a sip of his drink and studies me. His brooding eyes looked at me contemplating his next action. He kisses me demanding. His tongue forces entry into my mouth and I bring my fingers up to his face running them through his unshaved shadow. His mouth is cold and tastes of Martini.

“You tell me you are okay with being exclusive, and you betray me with lies.”

“You’re the only one I want to be with,” I plead.

“You’ve proven you will go back again and again.”

“HE followed ME to Las Vegas, he was there for me when you decided you didn’t want to work or see me anymore.”

“Did you fuck him there? Don’t answer, I already know.” Then he’s struck with a realization, “Those marks on your ass, they’re from him aren’t they? You let him hit you!”

I don’t get a chance to answer, I didn’t know how to, “Does Aria know you were with Nick? Will the two of you cheat on her too?”

“They were broken up when he was in Vegas, neither of us cheated.”

“So then it’s all okay? This shouldn’t bother me, is that what you are trying to put across?”

“No, I’m not saying that.”

“Did you break Nick and Aria up? Was it your doings? You treat me like I’m some stupid fuck you can lie to. Damn it Chanel, you had a chance to tell me when you got back from Las Vegas. We were working things out, but instead you lied to my face.”

"I didn't want the fact that he followed me to Las Vegas to get in the way of us getting back together. I missed you."

"Your lies keep getting in the way of us getting back together, nothing else. I don't give a damn what you do anymore because I don't trust you."

"Don't say that Bradley, please," I beg.

"Maybe I'll call Maggie and fuck her. You were so upset to find out she's my ex-wife but at least I don't go running back to her every time it suits me." He stands up and throws his napkin down on the table. He fishes a few twenties out of his wallet and tosses them on the table. "Come on, I'll drive you home

~34~

He parks a block away from the Paddock. It's the first time I wish I live really far away from the bar. He opens the door to let me into the Hummer and then gets in on his side. The truck starts with that diesel sound it always makes, and I notice he isn't quick to put the Hummer into drive.

I can't look at him I'm so remorseful for allowing myself to be with Nick again, I just stare straight ahead. I know I shouldn't keep running back to Nick every time I have a problem, but ultimately Bradley has finished it off with me and that really hurts.

He pulls into the Visitor's parking at the loft and turns the Hummer off. We sit in silence for some time not looking at each other. He's pinching the bridge of his nose and I can see the shiny path a tear has made sliding down his cheek. I knew that as long as he doesn't drive away, I have a slight chance that it wouldn't be completely over between us.

He gets out of the Hummer and waits for me. We walk to the elevator and he comes to my floor. I develop the courage to look him in the eyes and that's when I see him for what he is, wounded. His pupils were fixed and dilated and I'm the cause, the bullet lodges in his heart. I want to dislodge it, fix my wrongs and the only way I can is if I walk away from him with no struggle or fight.

There are no words left to exchange. His soft lips cover mine and he seals me. When our seal is broken he pulls away, and the words bleed from his lips, "I loved you." He kisses me one more time and squeezes me so tightly I lose my breath, then he turns away and leaves my loft. This time is different from the last, the damage is too extensive, and we go to our separate corners to lick our wounds. We are broken, and I'm devastated because it isn't until now that I know for sure, I love him too.

~35~

Shelly and I are in the middle of doing rounds when the page goes off at 10:00 a.m. We aren't sure who the page is for because it sounds like it's coming from both of our pockets. We reach for our pagers at the same time, realizing both of us are being paged to the Emergency department. I call the extension showing up on my pager, "Chanel St. Clare. and Dr. Shelly Morden returning your page." I listen waiting to hear what we were being paged for. It's unusual that we both get paged in unison when neither of us are on call.

An unfamiliar voice on the other end comes on, "Resident Nick Ward has been involved in an MVA [Motor Vehicle Accident]. EMS reports the patient is critical. ETA is three minutes. Dr. Hart told me to page both of you."

"We'll be right there!" I hang up the phone and repeat exactly what she says to me, "Resident Nick Ward has been involved in a motor vehicle accident and he's critical. They are bringing him in three minutes. Shelly he's my best friend! If something happens to him I'll die." I drop everything and run. I can hear her footsteps following me in close pursuit.

We arrive at to the Emergency doors and wait for the ambulance to show. It's cloudy and raining. My body is running on adrenaline and my thoughts are coming fast and furious, I wonder if the weather was a factor in Nick's accident. He's a really good driver.

The ambulance pulls up and the cab doors open with both driver and passenger jumping out to open the back doors so the patient can be brought into the General. This is too surreal for me. How come it is so different when you don't know the person? My heart is pounding through my chest and all I can feel is fear.

The first attendant jumps inside and the second attendant starts pulling the patient out. I'm not close enough and can't see who it was. Dr. Morden and I are standing there waiting, I called out is that Nick Ward? The first ambulance attendant nods yes. When the stretcher is completely out the wheels drop down.

I suck much needed air into my lungs, not even noticing I'm holding my breath. Salty tears sting my eyes once the attendant confirms it's him. Oh my God,

I think my legs are going to give out from under me. I start feeling dizzy and my first feeling is a wave of nausea.

He's buckled down on the stretcher with an intravenous bag of normal saline infusing into his right arm and 100% non-rebreather mask covering his face. He looks horrible.

The driver starts giving report to me but Bradley appears from nowhere. I'm shocked and upset, I have no idea how long he's been standing next to me. Everything is moving fast, but in slow motion. I know it doesn't make sense but that's how I feel.

Bradley tells the attendant, "I'm taking this case." He turns to me and says, "You're too close, you're not to work on him. I will do everything I can for him, I promise." That's it; I'm a powerless observer, tears spring from my eyes.

The attendant speaks as he pushes the stretcher, "Thirty-five year old male driving alone in a vehicle on the 401, his car was witnessed to have driven down an embankment approximately ten feet deep at full speed. No other cars were involved. Witnesses say he didn't appear to be cut off. Police are still investigating the scene. There's nothing left of the car. The car was so mangled, the Jaws of Life had to be used to cut him out. Airbags deployed."

"Vital signs at the scene were heart rate 145 beats per minute, blood pressure 72/45, respirations 6, O2 saturation 80 and dropping. We put a hundred percent non-rebreather on him, gave him a bolus of 500 ml of normal saline."

The attendants and two nurses transferred Nick onto a hospital stretcher. Bradley, and Shelly who were going to be the ones attending to him.

Bradley looks at Shel and mutters under his breath but I hear, "He looks like he's going to code." He speaks orders calmly to the nurses, "Place him on a heart monitor, insert another intravenous into him 18 gage, bolus another liter of normal saline wide open, have x-ray come down and do a stat one-view of his chest and then intubate him. Bring him to C.T. for a full body without contrast looking for any bleeds. Page me when he's back. Any questions?"

"No, Doctor," One of the nurses say.

"I'll go down with him to C.T, in case something happens down there." Shelly volunteers. One nurse starts putting a second intravenous in Nick's arm while the

other one places a heart monitor on his chest. He's sinus tachy with a heart rate of 150 beats per minute. When the nurse is finished inserting the intravenous in his arm she hangs another bag of normal saline to bring his blood pressure up.

We started walking quickly to the C.T. scan area. There are several people waiting in front of Nick but due to his acuity, he's taken first. It's the first chance I get to see him up close. The ambu-bag covers his nose and mouth and one of the nurses is squeezing oxygen into him with it. The rest of his face is all pale and bruises are starting to appear.

He looks like he's going into shock. His hemoglobin must be low, and I suspect he's bleeding internally. I know I'll feel better once they find the bleed. The stress I feel is unbelievable.

The C.T. scan takes several minutes but it feels like hours. I'm glad that Shelly is with us. She pages a colleague and asks him to cover for her while she's with me and Nick. It doesn't matter to anyone if I'm not working but it does if Shelly isn't. Looking at Shelly or Bradley no one would suspect how scared they are, but that's because we were trained in hiding our fear.

The nurses wait for us when we get back. We are in sync. The respiratory therapist arrives because he needs to secure Nick's airway, once the airway is secured, the second nurse pages Bradley. Bradley comes back and calls the radiologist for a verbal report of his C.T. scan results and chest x-ray.

Bradley doesn't have to say anything to us. We know what's happening by his side of the conversation. He hangs up the phone immediately and calls locating to page the general surgeon on call stat. He hangs up and calls the operating room confirming the use of one.

The surgeon called on another line and the unit clerk picks up immediately, we hear Bradley's side of the conversation, "We have a 35 year old medical resident who was involved in an MVA. He's intubated in critical condition. He has two bleeds, a small one in his head and a larger one in his abdominal cavity. The Operating room is booked. I'll have the nurses bring him down to you stat. Dr. Morden will be there in case he codes while you work on him. Thanks Bill."

Shel and I followed his stretcher to the Operating Room. That's when Shelly finally has a second to turn to me and say, "I want you to wait outside for this part.

I need to not worry about you when I'm inside there. Sorry Chanel. I'll page you the second we're finished."

I try to say okay but instead a sob escapes me unexpectedly. I started to cry again my emotions overcome me. I lose my composure and control. I turn away from Shelly, as she has no time to spare, she follows Nick into the O.R.

I head for the exit needing air. When I get through the doors outside I sit on the closest covered bench. It's wet from the rain but I didn't care. That's when I really break down. It isn't that obvious though because I tried not to make any noises and the rain hides my tears. I begin to cry really hard. I'm so scared Nick is going to die. People start looking at me.

I start searching my pockets for my phone, when I find it I call Aria. She picks up on the second ring, "Aria, its Nick" and that's when my voice starts breaking, "He's been in a car accident, you have to come to the hospital when you can. Drive safe. Call me when you get here." It is hard just sitting there waiting. We hang up and I find myself motionless on the bench staring through whatever is in my line of vision.

I get the page two hours later. Aria still hasn't shown up yet. I go back to Emergency to find out he's not there. I call the extension on the pager and Shelly answers, "Hi Chanel, he's out of surgery. Bill found a bleed in his abdomen, he had to remove his spleen. He is more stable now. I ordered a second C.T. scan for his head tomorrow."

"We suspect he had a cardiac event while driving, his rhythms keep changing from tachy brady syndrome to first and second degree blocks. He needs a pacemaker or AICD. "

"Bradley admits him and they settle him in the Intensive Care Unit. You should be able to see him in the next few minutes or so. Does he have anyone to sign consent? I have to go back to work now. I'm sorry about your friend Chanel. I hope he's going to be okay."

"Thanks' Shelly, His parents live in the Ukraine, I guess I will be his substitute decision maker." I squeak.

Aria just walks in looking all disheveled, she gives me a hug and speaks into my hair, "What happened? Where is he?"

“They’re taking good care of him. Dr. Morden thinks it’s his heart. I just know there were no other cars involved. He had a C.T. scan and they operated on him: fixing a bleed in his stomach and then removing his spleen. He’s going to need another operation soon to insert an AICD into him for his heart. They transferred him to I.C.U. I’m so scared Aria.”

I take her hand and lead her to the Intensive Care Unit. We introduce ourselves to the nurses’ station asking what room Nick is in. An attractive blond nurse comes up to us and introduces herself, “Hi, I’m Bridgette, Nick’s nurse. How are you related to Nick?”

“I’m his best friend and I guess the closest thing he has to a substitute decision maker. His parents live in the Ukraine; he has no brothers or sisters. This is Aria his girlfriend. Either one can sign the consent form for his AICD.” She smiled warmly at us, but I saw the pity in her eyes, “That would be great, you can sign it.”

Aria turns to me, “What’s an AICD?”

I explained it to Aria, “It’s an Automatic Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator, It will act like a pacemaker regulating his heart rate and it has a secondary function giving a shock if the heart goes into a lethal rhythm.”

Bridgette grabs his chart and gives me the paper to sign. “He’s in room 9,” she directs.

The ICU has a one to one patient:nurse ratio. Each room has a small work station outside it for the nurse to do her charting. Room 9 has a sliding door with a white curtain. The curtain is drawn, so you can’t see him until you go into his room. He looks so vulnerable. He is on a ventilator, which makes loud rhythmic noises for every inspiration and expiration his body is supposed to be making on its own.

He’s getting a unit of blood and he has five electrodes on his chest that is hooked up to a heart monitor. The ventilator breaks the silence of the room and the rhythm of Nick’s heart beeps. His face is becoming more bruised and swollen and as Aria walks up to his bed she gasps at the sight of him. The room appears sterile and like any other Intensive Care room. He has two chairs by the bedside, I plant

myself in one of them and stare at Nick. Aria takes the chair closer to him and holds the hand with the pulse oximeter attached to it.

I feel like I'm intruding by being here, so I suggest we alternate taking turns to stay with him around the clock, Aria days, me nights. We are both scared to be alone with him in case anything happens, but he needs us. The other scary feeling is leaving his room with the possibility of never seeing him alive again. We both want to be there in case there was an emergency, but Aria now has more right than I do for being there. He's dating her. There is no way I can go back to work, when all I do is think of Nick. So I go home to get some rest before it's my turn.

~36~

I'm in a Geri-chair that pulls out so you can sleep on it. It isn't the most comfortable, but it's all the Unit has. I glance over at Nick and see his eyes open. I get really excited and jump from the chair almost tripping as I do it. I run into the nurse's station only being slowed down by the temperamental sliding glass door separating us from the nursing station, "He's awake!" I shout. The nurses come running in and smile. Everyone is happy. His most responsible nurse, the one with the long blond hair named Bridgette says, "I'll call the doctor and tell him the good news!" My eyes flutter open and I realize I've been dreaming, I start crying.

I raise from my bed and take a quick shower. I can't get to the hospital fast enough. I throw a bagel in the toaster, butter it, and go. I don't care about food; I just need my best friend back. I wanted to know if there is any news. My dream gets my hopes up because I think it's a premonition.

Aria is sleeping next to Nick on the bed. The blood is gone and he has 2/3 and 1/3 with 40 MMOL of potassium hanging in its place. They give these fluids to people who aren't eating much and have a low potassium. He remains on the ventilator and heart monitor. It doesn't appear like anything much changed, but sometimes that's a good thing. Looking at them makes me feel lonely as I reflect back to Bradley's very recent departure from my personal life. If anything like this happens to me, I will have no one. The sad thing is I put myself in this position. Focusing on Nick is preventing me from feeling sorry for myself.

I tap on Aria's shoulder, "Go home sweetheart, get some rest. I'll see you in the morning."

"Thanks Chanel, for everything. If anything happens or if you need me to bring anything in at all, just call or text me. I don't care if I'm sleeping or not."
"Sure Aria," I reassure. She kisses him on the forehead and then leaves.

Seeing them together makes me happy for Nick to have someone who loves him the way she does. It makes me sick to my stomach thinking I almost ruined it for them. It's obvious that everyone will be better off without me. Nick can

concentrate all of his affections on Aria, Bradley could heal from the pain I caused, and Aria will never find out what Nick and I shared together.

I take my spot on the Geri-chair. Shelly tells me Nick is stable enough to get the AICD implant. He's just about there. I bring my phone but kept it turned off. I only put it on when I leave to go to the bathroom to check my messages, there are usually none.

When I get back to the Unit I perch myself in my Geri-chair and I resume my intensive studies for my final exam which is coming up in a couple of days just before the Fundraiser.

Just after midnight Nick's heart monitor starts alarming. I glance up quickly to find him in sustained ventricular tachycardia. I panic running out of Nick's room to the nursing station and screaming, "Someone call a code!" A nurse at the nurses' station dials 5555 and says into the receiver, "We have a code blue, in room 9 of ICU." A second later it's announced over the entire hospital P.A. system.

Bradley comes bursting into the Intensive Care Unit, followed by the respiratory therapist who comes to every code. The nurses grab the crash cart and his chart for the doctor and run into his room. I see the other nurse roll Nick's lifeless body over as Bridgette places the board from the crash cart under his back. They take his gown off and she jumps on the bed straddling his hips and begins chest compressions while the other nurse works on placing the three electrodes from the heart monitor's crash cart onto Nick's bare chest. Once they were hooked up, two defibrillator pads are also placed on his chest. Nick is still in Ventricular Tachycardia. Bradley calmly orders the nurse, "Shock him with 100 joules." Bridgette sets the machine to 100 joules and looks at everyone, "All clear." Bradley nods and she continues with the first shock.

Nick remains in the same rhythm. Bradley orders, "Continue compressions." After sixty-seconds Bradley orders, "Shock him with 200 joules." Bridgette repeats the same steps; she sets the machine to 200 joules and looks at everyone to make sure they aren't touching him, "All clear." Bradley nods again and she continues with the second shock. He pops back into Sinus Rhythm which is a normal rhythm most people are in, Brigitte's face lights up with a smile and I burst into tears with relief.

Bradley orders Bridgette to administer 5 mg of Metoprolol push while I rush into the nursing station to call Aria back to the hospital. It's hard to speak to her when I haven't regained my composure yet. I want to thank Bradley but I feel uncomfortable and he looks busy charting. I have an impression that he doesn't want me to come up to him so I keep my distance.

Aria arrives on the Unit within twenty minutes of my call. Her face is all red and it looks like she's been crying. Bradley approaches her, "Aria, Nick's heart went into a lethal rhythm called sustained Ventricular Tachycardia and we called a code on him."

"He was given two shocks and chest compressions before we managed to stabilize him. I plan to have Shelly take him to the O.R. tomorrow for the AICD. The operation will take approximately two hours. We will watch him very carefully while he's under anesthetic. Then we will try extubating him. When he is stable he will be started on a beta blocker called Metoprolol that will hopefully prevent him from going into that heart rhythm again. You can go see him now."

Aria reaches up and gives Bradley a hug, "Thank you so much, Dr. Hart." She joins Nick in room 9. The relief comes flooding out of me in a huge rush of tears as I join them at Nick's bedside so I can process that he's going to be okay. I feel such a huge bond to Aria for going through this with her and for the care and concern she shows Nick during this time. He's lucky to have her and we are both lucky to have him.

Several hours pass before I force myself to leave his bedside so that I could can study for the most important exam in my life, "Aria, I'm going to leave you for a while."

Her eyes were fill with tears, "Sure Chanel. I'll see you whenever you're ready to come back." I grab the book I'm studying from and my purse and leave the Unit. I can feel Bradley's eyes on me.

For the next several days my focus is on studying for the final and job searching. I had two shifts left with Shelly and my rotation is over. My shifts are a welcome interruption from my routine of studying by Nick's bedside and sleeping at the loft.

Nick doesn't code anymore, he's stabilized. The day after he coded they implanted the AICD. They extubated him shortly after, without incident. It's nice to see him off the ventilator. His heart monitor stays on him for an additional twenty-four hours after the implant is inserted to make sure it's working okay.

Aria and I are changing shifts when she notices his eyes flutter open. She punches me startling me and points at Nick, "Look, he's awake!" We both rush to his side and his eyes flutter closed again. Aria runs to the nursing station and calls out, "Someone call the doctor, he opened his eyes!"

She comes back to his bedside and grabs his hand. I take the other one and we wait patiently until he reopens his eyes again. He tries to speak but his mouth is dry and his throat sore, "It's okay Nick, don't speak." He's surrounded by the two people who love him most. I'm elated that I saw him wake up. I feel like everything is going to be okay now. I hug Aria and say, "I think he's going to be okay. I better go study. I'll come back tomorrow after my exam."

Aria is glowing, "Good luck Chanel, knock em dead!"

Nick will have a chance to write the exam once he recovers. We can both move on with our lives.

The rest of the night and part of the morning I spend studying for the most important exam of my life. Now that I know Nick is okay, I'm able to regain my concentration.

I stop by the loft to pick up my mail and then the Paddock for a very solitary dinner after my final exam. Our normal waitress comes to take my order and asks, "Is anyone joining you tonight?" I shake my head no and order Bradley's dish.

The waitress brings my souvlaki over, I start opening my mail. I score an interview at a teaching hospital in Grimsby. I have nobody to share the news with, not now anyway.

A large part of me wishes Bradley will walk through that door and sweep me off my feet. I long for him but I know I don't stand a chance of getting him back because I lost his trust. Without that, there is nothing. I never felt more alone. I have to make changes, get away from everything. I finish my meal and text Aria telling her I can't come by tonight. I tell her I'm tired.

~37~

I haven't seen anyone for three days but I've been busy. The fundraiser is tomorrow and my interview at the teaching hospital is today. I dress in my nicest business casual clothes and drive Snowball to the hospital in Grimsby. My appointment with Personnel is for 10:00 a.m.

I'm being interviewed by a panel of doctors on the board. They bring me into a boardroom and ask me to sit opposite the Chief of Cardiology. To his right is the Chief of Internal Medicine, and the CEO, not too intimidating. I need a Depends undergarment for this interview after I find out the positions they hold. Suddenly I want, no I needed this job almost as much as I needed to breath.

I focus on their questions, and give my best possible answers. Patient advocating and safety are always at the forefront of all my answers. If there is a question I don't know the answer to, I said who I would consult to ascertain an answer.

The interview lasts four hours. We have a fifteen minute break each hour on the hour. I'm hired on the spot. I'm exhilarated for the first time since Nick opened his eyes. I can't get to the hospital to tell him fast enough.

~38~

I arrive at the hospital and head straight for room 9. I poke my head through the sliding door and see Nick and Aria in their usual spots, only this time Nick is awake now. He notices me first, "Coco!"

"Dickwad!" I run to him, giving him a big hug.

Aria glances up at me, "Hi Chanel! Good to see you!"

I smile back at her, "Thanks."

Aria grabs her purse, "I'm just going to run to the bathroom while you are here Chanel and grab a bite to eat while you visit if that's okay?"

"Sure Aria, take your time, Nick can fill you in later."

"I look forward to it," she says. Then she's gone.

I leave the sliding door open but close the drape for privacy from the nurses station.

"Nick, do you remember what happened in the car accident?"

"Nothing."

"Aria told me the two of you took shifts at my bedside, thank you for supporting her."

"Hey, she supported me too. I missed my best friend." I take his hand. "Bradley is the one who saved your life when you coded! You had emergency abdominal surgery, and AICD inserted. We almost lost you."

"I know Aria got me up to speed. I spoke with Dr. Thicke to plan the rest of my shifts so I can be eligible to write the final Exam. Did you write your exam and finish your last shifts with Shelly?"

"I did. It will take about six weeks to find out my results."

He squeezes my hand, "You passed, Coco. I'm sure of it."

You should see yourself Nick! Your hair is in desperate need of a cut, you look like you just came out of a bush! Wouldn't you let Aria shave you?

"Fuck no! I want to live! I didn't go through all of this so she can kill me!"

"I can't believe Aria is allowing herself to be seen with you looking like this."

"You know it Coco, the second I get out of here I'm getting the works done at one of the best salons, and then I'm going to ask her to marry me."

“Fuck off Dickwad! Are you serious? You’re in love?” My eyes well up with happy tears for him.

“There’s something about her, I never want to be separated from her.” I squeeze his hand tight with approval.

“I’ll keep your secret until you ask her. Bradley and I aren’t together anymore. He knows you followed me to Las Vegas, he knows everything. I can’t say that I blame him for leaving me, I deserve it.”

“I’m sorry Coco. Please tell me he’s not going to tell Aria?”

“No worries. It’s me he’s mad at. I’m the one who was with you. I made my bed.”

“You’re good in it too!”

I sit on the edge of the bed to tell him the rest, “I’m leaving Nick. I secured a job in a teaching hospital in Grimsby. The interview was two hours and gruelling, Chief of Cardiology and Chief of Staff plus the CEO asked me intense questions. I was hired on the spot! I’m really happy about it.”

Nick looks despondent, “You’re leaving? Don’t leave Coco! It’s not cool.”

“It’s not cool if I stay Nick. You have Aria, and it’s too hard to see Bradley all the time. I’ve got nobody Nick. He’s never going to take me back. I need a fresh start.”

“Are you in love with Bradley?”

“You bet Nick. That’s why I have to leave.”

“I’m being de-escalated to Cardiology tomorrow. I might get out in a couple of days Chanel. I’m going to miss the Fundraiser event though.”

“Can I take your drink tickets? I’ll need them if I’m going stag!” I get up, “I better go Nick. I have a lot of planning to do. Have Aria call me, we need to start looking.” I give him a friendly kiss on the lips and start heading for the glass sliding door, I look back at him and reassure him, “We will keep in touch, don’t worry.”

“Don’t worry about the Throb, he’ll lighten up. We’ve bonded since he saved me! Nobody can stay mad at you for long Coco. I’ll work on him.”

I leave surprised to see Bradley in the nursing station. It’s the first time I’ve seen him since he saved Nick. He looks down just as I step out of Nick’s room. I hope he hasn’t heard anything. Even if he did, it doesn’t matter anymore. He is lost

to me; there's no hope of reconciliation. It made me sad just seeing him there and confirming to me that the sooner I leave the better.

He glances up at me and I stop. There's an uncomfortable silence between us. Nerves overwhelm me. I lean up against the high counter and rest my chin on my hands and quietly said, "Thank you Bradley, for everything."

Bradley's thick fingers stroke the stubble on his face, "Chanel. I wasn't going to let him die no matter how angry I am."

~39~

I leave my appearance to the professionals for this occasion. If I have it my way, I rather be sitting at home wearing track pants and feeling sorry for myself with a litre of Ben and Jerry's and a good movie.

Shelly referred me to this stylist whose a miracle worker with magical scissors. I splurge and book an appointment with him, before meeting with a personal shopper at Holts to pick a dress for the occasion. I spare no expense, because if I'm going to leave, it might as well be with a big bang.

The salon is located in an elite area of Toronto. It boasts of private booths, marble floors and a central chandelier. They treat me like royalty offering me a beverage of choice. Roberto my stylist, looks Hispanic with olive skin and jet black hair. He has it greased back into a low ponytail that goes past his shoulders in length.

He's wearing a white shirt with three buttons undone and tons of chest hairs for as far as the eye can see. His pants are white and skin tight. He appears to be wearing a stripper style thong underneath. I can hardly imagine what he wears at home if he wears this in public. It's too difficult to figure out which side of the fence he plays on.

Roberto runs his fingers through my hair and says, "You're the spitting image of the famous performer Gennifer Goodwin. I have to take it super short. You're hiding your beauty any other way."

When I see him reach for the razor I shudder, "Go nuts," I encourage. I don't know who Gennifer Goodwin is, so I don't know what I'm in for.

Next is Holt's. I have an appointment for two o'clock. I have just enough time to grab a quick bite before I meet up with Veronica. She's a sweet black lady with the kindest demeanor of anyone I've ever met. She tells me that she's retired; this job is a passion of hers that she chooses to do in her spare time. She shows me to a private room and offers me a cup of coffee and a small sandwich while she fetches the rack of clothes she thinks will suit me.

It takes forty-nine minutes and six dresses until she finds the perfect one. I'm going in an ocean blue silk sleeveless dress that kisses my knees. She finds matching pumps and a small handbag by Chanel, and I'm ready to go. I love my reflection and I wonder if the fashionista Nick himself will approve. I check my phone and see if I hurry, I will have enough time to see him before the fundraiser starts.

I go to room 9 and find Nick alone sleeping. I enter armed with a 10 ml syringe of normal saline that I'm going to squirt in his face to wake him up. It's the kind of evil stuff we pulled on each other in med school. I stand at the foot of his bed and aim carefully. His eyes flutter so I make a noise and when I see his eyes open, without hesitation, I push it fast and hard and got him square in the forehead. He yells at me, "Coco!" and I just start laughing.

He wipes his face and asks me to turn around. I do a full turn, "Do you approve?" His opinion really matters to me because he knows his stuff. If he approves then that means I look great.

"Man, do I ever! You look fantastic!" I beam with excitement.

"Thank you! I wish you can come. I hate going to functions like this alone."

"Shelly will be there. Don't worry. You'll fit right in."

"Did you propose to Aria yet?"

"No, not yet, tonight. I want a few people to be there. The people that helped us get together."

"That's so sweet. I have to go now, or I'll be late. I'll see you later." I go to his bedside to give him a kiss on the forehead.

"Bye, Coco. See you later."

I drive to the ballroom. When I get there cocktails have already started in a smaller room branching off the great ballroom. The first person I notice is Shelly. She comes running over to me as fast as she can in her four inch pumps hugging me and planting a kiss on my cheek, "I'm so happy you came!"

"Thanks Shelly. I'm glad you're here too. Let's go to the bar, I can use a drink!"

Shelly touches my hair, "I love it! Did you like Roberto? Did he treat you well?"

"He did thanks. I wasn't expecting to leave looking like this!"

"You never leave looking anything less than stunning when you go to him."

We got to the bar and I order a Cosmo. Shelly leaves her empty glass on the counter and asks for the same as what I order. While she waits for her drink, I begin scanning the room for Bradley and moments later our eyes lock. He isn't alone. He has his arm around his bitch ex-wife Maggie. My face flushes hot with sudden disappointment. I knew it was going to be hard to see him, but I had never expected him to bring a date, especially Maggie of all people.

I excuse myself to run to the bathroom. When I get there I splash cold water on my face and then I start touching up my makeup. I can't let him see how much his presence affects me. I try to swallow even though I feel this large ball in my throat and know I will never be ready for this, I force myself to leave the sanctuary of the ladies lavatory.

I find Shelly and force myself to focus on her and avoid eye contact with Bradley, "Sorry about that. It's hard to see Bradley with Maggie after we were together."

Shelly places a reassuring hand on my shoulder, "What happened between you two?"

I lower my voice, "Stupid little arguments that turned big. It's completely over with us and I'm predominantly the one at fault. We were only together for about a month."

"Rumor around the hospital is that you had an affair with Nick."

I take a deep breath in, "Wow, not too far from the truth. I can't get over what a rumour mill the hospital is."

Shelly smiles, "You have to keep your private life as far away from the hospital as possible if you don't want anybody talking about you. How is Nick by the way?"

"He's doing much better, thanks to Bradley."

"You know Coco I would never take sides, but I think it's great that Bradley saved Nick. He gave Nick a lot of attention to make sure he pulled through."

"I noticed."

"So you can't fix things with Bradley, say sorry?"

“His pride is hurt, plus he has a date. He doesn’t look like he’s hurting now.”

She looks at Bradley and my eyes follow hers. His arm is around Maggie. Maggie looks bitchstakingly beautiful in a red dress with red pumps that shows a large part of her chest without completely revealing her breasts. She dresses provocatively, sacrificing class. It’s obvious that she’s doing anything in her power to get her ex-husband back. I can hardly stand it.

Bradley shaved and cut his hair razor short except for the top that was shaggy but on the short side even for him. He can easily be mistaken for his brother dressed in black tie formal wear. He cleans up really well, but I like the burly Bradley a little more than the cleaned up version. It suits his personality.

It’s nearing seven, and upon entry into the ballroom there is a guest list with an assigned table number. I find my name on the list and turn to Shelly, “9. She smiles back at me, “Me too.” I’m glad get to sit together. I wondered who else will be at our table and think how ironic it is to be assigned Nick’s ICU number.

Each table seats eight and there are beautiful floral centrepieces at each of them. The chairs have elegant white covers on them with a bow wrapped around each one. Each dish has a place card on it with a person’s name. Shelly is seated on one side of me and Chase on the other.

Shelly and I sit down and people gaze as others are still looking for their seats. I notice Bradley and Maggie holding hands and heading towards our table but suddenly there is a God because they stop at table eight and take their seats. I take a deep breath in, knowing I was holding it bracing myself for the very real possibility that I would have had to endure an entire evening facing them together.

A firm hand touches my shoulder which distracts me from my idle jealousy fest that seems to consume me. I looked up to see black eyes smiling down at me, it is the other brother. Tonight the twins look identical. Their hair is cut exactly the same. They’re both clean shaved. They’re both wearing black tuxes. Its even hard for me to tell them apart. It’s just the common sense of Chase’s place card and his disposition that helps me to know.

His touch gives me goosebumps. Chase greets everyone at the table before pulling his chair out to sit next to me. He says, “You are absolutely ravishing!” I

squirm in my chair as his flattery causes a stir in me. I sigh with relief that whatever happens between Bradley and I doesn't change the way Chase treats me.

Chase glances at his brother and whispers to me, "Tell me he didn't bring her to make you jealous?"

"He didn't bring her here to make me jealous." I smile at him knowing how dry my joke is. "What Bradley does is none of my business, he ended it with me."

We keep the rest of the conversation light while we enjoy the food. My comfort level begins to increase as long as I don't focus my attention on the next table.

We sit together and consume six or seven courses before Shelly asks Chase if she can see him alone for a minute. Meanwhile the caterers are clearing the dance floor, and the lighting is being dimmed and slow music starts playing. I sit alone with the chairs on either side of me vacant for quite some time before Shelly and Chase return.

Shelly sits down next to me and Chase walks passed our table and heads to the podium. The lights are focused on Chase and the music stops, capturing the attention of all who are there.

"For those of you, who don't know me, my name is Dr. Chase Hart and I am CEO of the General. I have invited a guest speaker to talk about the plans we have for the Cardiac floor and where the money that we have raised will be spent. Please help me in welcoming Resident Nick Hart."

They applaud and to my surprise I see Aria dressed in an elegant antique white lace dress wheeling Nick who is dressed in a tuxedo to the podium. Nick has his haircut and his face shaved and he doesn't look like the bushman I saw in room 9 only hours ago. This explained Chase and Shelly's sudden disappearance. Chase returns to the table quickly and suddenly I feel his hand on mine. "I couldn't have the fundraiser without your best friend here," he squeezes my hand.

Tears of happiness fill my eyes as I look into Chase's. Losing myself, I throw my arms around his neck, "You don't know what this means to me having him here thank you so much."

Nick's confident voice comes on over the microphone, "Coco please pay attention!" A spotlight lands on me and Chase. I quickly move away from him and

look up. If I could kill him with a look, it would have been immediate. The spotlight goes back to him, "I would like to thank you all briefly for your very generous donations and I am happy to announce that they will be put towards the much needed improvements to the EPS lab at the General."

"I have been chosen today to announce this new venture as I have recently been the recipient of an AICD when my heart went into sustained ventricular tachycardia while I was driving on a busy highway. Dr. Bradley Hart and the amazing doctors at this hospital saved my life and I can't imagine the funds going towards a worthier cause."

Nick locks his wheelchair in place and starts moving the foot rests up so he can stand up holding onto the podium for support. Rather than stand though, he lowers himself to one knee. The guests hush, and Nick continues, "Next to me is Aria who stayed at my bedside the entire time I was being cared for by some of the best cardiologists known to medicine. I am madly in love with you Aria, will you do me the immense honour of being my wife?"

The ballroom remains silent in anticipation for Aria's response; she drops to her knees in joy repeating the word yes several times over as the guests break out into applause.

I'm overjoyed for them and run to the podium to be the first to congratulate them. Aria gets up first and then helps Nick up. When he's safely back in the wheelchair I give him a huge hug and then Aria. Aria says in my ear, "Did you know he was going to do this? Will you be my Maiden of Honor?"

I grin, "No, and yes I would be honoured!"

She puts her arm around my shoulders and looks at Nick, "My Maid of Honour!"

Nick looks up from his chair, "That's great Coco, I can never imagine getting married without you being there. I'm so grateful for the support you gave Aria while I was in hospital, speaking of which we better get back before Bridgette skin's my hide!"

His comment brings back painfully delightful memories of Vegas, "You so deserve to have your hide skinned, Dickwad!" I lean over and kiss him on the

cheek before Aria starts wheeling him from the ballroom. I'm floating ecstatic with happiness for them. The lights dim and the music restarts.

I turn to return to my table and I see Shelly and Chase chatting away until I get close. Their conversation stops, and I know it's about me, "Did I interrupt something?"

"In fact you did," said Chase. "Shelly's been telling me how much of an amazing student you are. She's asking me if I'm going to make you an offer."

"Oh," I smile at them. "There's no need."

Chase becomes serious in a flash, "There's every need."

I take my chair in between them, "I have been hired at Grimsby General. I've already secured employment."

Chase has the same habit as his brother and runs his fingers through his hair when he's displeased, "You didn't give me a chance to make an offer. We took you under our wing. You should at least give us the courtesy of considering our offer before you make a final decision. Whatever Grimsby's offered you I'll match it and give you more. Just say what you want from us to keep you."

I feel tears welling up in my eyes, "I have to get away from Bradley. I need a fresh start, and you can't give me that."

Chase says with authority, "Shelly if you'll excuse us, I'm going to talk to her alone, on the dance floor." He grabs my hand and leads me out where only two other couples are dancing at the time. I feel Bradley's eyes on me as we walk passed his table. I see Maggie from the corner of my eye do something to Bradley that makes him wince.

Chase starts dancing close to me, very close. He whispers in my ear, "I'm sorry that my brother hurt you, you chose the wrong one. I've wanted you from the first day you set foot in my office." A chill goes up my spine. He's admitting that he likes me! He's going all in knowing that I'm leaving. He probably figures if he's going to get anywhere with me he better act fast.

"I'm sorry but I can't say that I felt the same way about you when we first met. My first impression of you was that you were cold and callous, I didn't think you cared about the patients as much as the bottom line of your balance sheet. It made you unappealing in my book."

His grip on my tightens and his voice hardens, "That's not fair. I have to stay ahead of the game. It takes money to run this hospital so we can provide good care for the patients and I'm good at getting that money. That's why I'm in the CEO position. With me at the helm, this hospital has grown and prospered, am I still cold, callous, and unappealing?"

When he says it like that it sounds harsh. I can't believe I have the nerve to tell him this, it's probably because I feel like I have nothing to lose. "No, I quite like you," I whisper seductively in his ear, "I feel the same electricity you do, I won't deny it. I can only imagine how hot you would be with me, setting my body on fire. I'm sure you can fill my needs, but I already hurt your brother once and the last thing I want to do is hurt him again whether it's with you or anyone else. I hope you understand and respect me for that."

"I respect you Chanel more than you know. I also want you to know, that if you ever want to come back to the General, there will always be a spot for you."

"Thanks Chase. I'm going to say good-bye to Shelly now and go home. I will give you my notice for the loft after Aria finds me a new place to live closer to Grimsby General."

"Stay as long as you like."

I stop dancing and hug him. It feels like we crossed a barrier and we're truly friends now.

I walk back to the table and tell Shelly, "I'm going to leave now and call it an early night." Chase sits down in my seat next to her. I lean down and give her a kiss on both cheeks before leaving the ballroom.

I head for the bathroom on my way out. I'm shaking at the thought of Chase being into me, I never would've known. He's so hot, and it's a combination of his looks AND personality that make him that way. He's just not in my league. He can get anyone.

I leave the bathroom and there's Bradley, alone, staring at me. I freeze when I see him, I feel winded. I curse myself for not leaving more quickly. He says, "I want to talk to you." He takes my arm the same way he always does and pulls me into a dark and quiet room that looks like a closet without any coats.

My heart is pounding through my chest; funny thing is the voltage of electricity cursing through my veins is amplified. His effect on me is increasing, so we're in the dark closet together and I can't see his face and we can't talk loud because neither of us want to be found. He starts grilling me. I'm not expecting this. He's ignored me the entire evening until now.

"Are you happy for Nick?"

"Very."

"Is it true you're leaving the General?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because of you." He feels really close to me now.

"Are you back together with Bitch Ex-Wife?" I hear him move, I don't see him but I can feel the heat from his body, his breathing has changed too. It sounds of want. I'm aroused and we've done nothing. How does he do that to me?

"Not YET," he answers. Yet, that means it's pending. He wants to hurt me. My tears feel as though they are composed of acid, they well and scold my eyes. I close my lids to force them out and fight the pain off but it doesn't work. "My brother wants you doesn't he?" He asks.

Retaliation is bittersweet, "Yes." I try finding his face, I feel into the darkness. OH, found it. My vengeance is over and now I find myself throbbing for him. He touches my cheek now and feels my tears. Fuck, I didn't want that to happen. Then his fingers touch my bare nape. He glides them upwards until he manages to find hairs long enough to grab and he forces my head to almost face the ceiling. His lips close down on mine and his tongue forces entry into my mouth and fireworks are starting as I suffer this insatiable desire for him.

Bradley's kisses are demanding, and relentless. He cradles the back of my head and places it in a more comfortable position for me and then he pushes me up against a wall, I have no idea it's there. So now his body is pressing hard against mine and he is so fucking hard it hurts but it makes me want him more.

I want to tear his pants off and beg him to fuck me but I reserve myself remembering that he wants his Bitch Ex-Wife and that probably won't change. I never think a three letter word can hold so much meaning, or have such an effect

on me. It's like a bomb detonating in the closet. I push his chest away from me to create a space and say, "I have to go." I knew he won't follow me out of the closet right away because he's still hard. When I get out, I run to Snowball and hurry home. Obviously, I wasn't over him, YET.

~40~

Snowball gets me home quickly and I go right up to the loft and close my door. I strip naked and jump in the shower. I scrub the paint off my face and cleanse myself.

I have to develop a stronger backbone. I can't let myself get hurt so easily. Bradley and I are broken up so the fact that he might get back together with anyone or have a girlfriend shouldn't make me cry so easily. After I prune up, I reluctantly step out of the shower and dry myself off before putting on my housecoat.

An alcoholic beverage from the fridge is my next destination. I quickly pass through the living room to get to the kitchen. I step back thinking I've seen a shadow, there's a silhouette in my living room and I gasp, I'm not alone. I flick on the light and see Bradley, "I'm sorry I didn't mean to startle you."

"How did you get in?" I ask as I continue to the kitchen knowing I'm not in danger.

He remains seated on my ugly grey sectional which I decide for sure I'm not bringing with me, "I stole the master key from my brother's penthouse," explaining how he broke in.

"I'm making myself a screwdriver, 2:1. Do you want one?"

"Two shots vodka, one shot orange juice?"

"Is there any other way?"

"Sure, I'll have one," He sounds nicer; his voice calm and mellow, I wonder why such a big change.

I don't want to talk about Maggie but my curiosity gets the better of me, "Where's Bitch Ex-Wife? Did you leave her at the fundraiser?"

"No, she's not impressed though. I drove her home telling her I had business that I had to take care of."

"I'm your business? You just implied it's a matter of time before you get back together with her."

I hand him his drink and receive his confession, "I said it to hurt you out of anger."

"It did just that, worked like a charm." I take a seat far away from him on the sectional.

"Come closer," he orders. Drawn like a magnet, I move onto the pillow next to him. He's staring at me. I need to lose my inhibitions so I take a really big drink of the screwdriver and it burns going all the way down.

He places his drink down and runs his fingers through my hair. "Nick tells me you're in love with me. Is that right?"

This was the second time in one night I want to kill him but I know it's with good intentions. I say nothing and close my eyes focusing on his broad hand running through my hair. It feels so good. "Nick has to start leaving his nose out of things," I complain.

"He's no longer our obstacle," Bradley comments. "I love your hair, you're features are too beautiful to hide behind a mass of hair." His compliment is distracting but well overdue.

I wonder if Bradley thinks we have any more obstacles, but I already know the answer. The final obstacle between us is my move to Grimsby General. "I don't want you to leave the General, Chanel."

"I need a new start Bradley, where nobody knows my business and where there are no bitch ex-wives. I want my personal life to remain anonymous." He guides my head to his and his lips cover mine. His kisses are soft and cold from his drink. His stubble is already starting to grow in so it scratches my face but I don't mind because I'm used to it with him, this was Bradley my burly man.

He stops kissing me and looks into my eyes, "So, do you want to get back together with me?"

What a loaded question! His 360 throws me for a loop. He cradles my head with his large hand and the scent of his musky cologne turns my insides to mush. The come hither hot to trot way he looks at me still dressed in his black tie gear is making me unable to think straight. Before I disintegrate in lust I have to stick to my guns, "You ended it Bradley and I've found a fresh start. One evening can't change all this."

His lips find mine. My mind shuts off analysis mode and I succumb to the lust I feel for him. He pulls me on top of him.

His kisses are unrelenting but soft and sensuous. I lose myself in the feel and smell of him. He pulls his head back from mine and strokes my hair away from my face, "Do you know how much it took for me to put all my feelings of anger and resentment aside and save a man I know you love more than me?"

I run my fingers through his soft short waves, "My indebtedness to you has no limits, but it's the foundation of our relationship that concerns. When we're together everything is so erogenous, I can't think straight. My behaviour around you changes and I'm incognizant of it. What we have, what I feel for you, it scares me."

"Chanel, just say 'I love you' damn it!"

"It's not that simple, and I'm not sure I do." I complain.

"Say it," he orders.

"I love you."

His sad eyes close and his lips cover mine, "I love you too."

I put my hands on his cheeks apologize to him, "I'm so sorry." His lips continue to cover mine. They are smouldering kisses, unhurried and driven by passion. He opens his mouth for me and my tongue begins caressing his. I slide my tongue along his white teeth and across his lips before sinking my teeth into his lips and tugging at them softly, playfully.

I drop my hands from his cheeks and begin to undoing his tie. I open his dress shirt slowly, button by button before lowering myself to the floor so I can kneel and kiss his beautiful chest. I kiss his nipple and swirl my tongue around it. I blow on it ever so lightly and then nip at it. I continue to tease it with my fingers while I do the same to his other nipple. They are rigid and he's already hard for me when I glance down at his covered erection.

I continue pinching his nipples as my lips cover his broad chest slowly going down his abdomen to his abs of steel. His glorious six pack has so many curves and hills that my tongue glides on and on as my desire to satisfy him takes precedence over my own wanton needs.

I opened his trousers slowly increasing his anticipation like a Christmas gift and pull his cock loose from his shorts. I kiss the very tip of it and slide it down my cheek. He likes that. His eyes close and I can see the tip get wet instantly.

I lick the drop of stimulation off and then touch his dick to my other cheek. Then I glide it down my throat before I bring it back up again. He's memorized by my adoration of his cock and he admits, "You're so beautiful." I shower it with kisses starting at the tip and then going all the way down to the base. I stroke my tongue from the shaft to the tip and then I take him in my mouth sucking deep and hard.

I'm getting so hot and needy that I have to play with myself while I have him in my mouth. He groans when he notices I'm masturbating, "Let me do that," he begs.

Creating suction I slowly let his dick come out of my mouth and I reassure him, "Later." I take him back into my mouth again holding his cock with one hand while I play with myself with the other. I'm on the brink of orgasm so I need to work harder to get him where I am, but I don't know he's already there until his warm fluids unexpectedly fill my mouth. I drink it willingly and then focus on my own orgasm. He watches me as I swirl my fingers around my clit and moan as I reached my own climax.

His cock is all wet and swollen when I'm done, but I still needed more. One orgasm isn't enough for me, not with this man. It's as though he's reading my thoughts when he whispers, "It's my turn." His deep throaty voice weakens any resolve, a moan escapes me, just the anticipation alone. "Go to your room," he orders like he's speaking to a child. It's hot. I do what I'm told and I stand in front of the bed waiting for him to follow me and tell me what to do next.

Bradley comes into the room and his presence FILLES it. He owns my body and soul right now, maybe forever. Societal rules didn't exist here, we are alone, together.

We are primal with each other, when we are together everything is stripped naked to our most innate needs. He circles me like I'm his prey. I cast my eyes down because that's what you do when an alpha male is circling its prey.

He touches my chin bringing my eyes to his so they lock onto him. They are carnal with want. I know I'm in trouble because my body instinctively wants to go into flight mode.

His eyes resemble a wild animal and I'm expecting him to be ferocious. He tells me, "You will be mine." He tugs off the belt from my housecoat so it opens, pushing it off my shoulders so it falls to the floor around my feet. He put's his mouth on my shoulders and kisses them.

He uses my belt to tie my wrists together really tight. He stays standing behind me and begins kissing the nape of my neck running his tongue just below my hairline. His lips cover my earlobe and he sucks on it and nibbles before he snaps his teeth down on it.

I gasp loudly because it hurts and then he orders me to, "Lie down on your back." I get all excited and climb to the pillow on the bed but it's awkward because my hands are tied. I put my arms above my head and I'm at his mercy. I wait. He undresses and then joins me on the bed.

His lips resume kissing and suckling my neck and earlobe. His hot breath makes my whole body shiver with excitement. The little hairs on the back of my neck and arms are standing on end. My nipples harden without his touch. He likes that, and pinches them hard. I groan. I want to run my fingers through his hair so bad I beg him to untie me!

He takes both nipples between his fingers and pinches really hard, "No." I squeal in pain. His lips and tongue try soothing my sore nipples. His licks are big and long and my entire breast moves with the force of them. He licks loudly before taking my entire breast in his mouth. He pulled at it like he's trying to tear it from my body. I moan out loud oh the effect he has on me, Oh.My.God. He re-pinches the other nipple really hard and his mouth frees my breast to bring comfort to the other one. He licks that one too like a wild animal before taking it entirely into his mouth. Tears of pain are threatening to come to my eyes.

He releases my breast and his focus on my body changes, I'm relieved. My breasts survived his attack. My biggest fear lies in anticipation for what he's going to do to my ass.

His lips kiss my stomach before heading to my clit. He orders me, "Don't come, no matter what you do." He strokes my needy clit with his tongue. I can only imagine how wet I must be for him. "You taste so good," he coos. His tongue dives deep into my folds only leaving to tease my clit with small short licks. I want to

squeeze my legs closed with excitement but I feel his strong hands force my legs further apart for him.

I'm vulnerable to him on so many different levels. He senses that I'm close to coming, so he stops everything and stares at me, chastising me with only his eyes. I smile back at him with embarrassment, "I can't help it, you're so good!"

He fists my labia into his hands and says, "Nobody penetrates this but me, do you understand? Even if you are in fucking Grimsby!"

"Yes," I say breathlessly.

"Louder!"

"YES!"

He starts kneading me with his fingers, expertly, gentle, small strokes, touching me in all the right places. He's much better than me at getting me off. My vagina is turning into Niagara Falls it's so wet for him. His lips cover mine and my anticipation heightens. I'm moaning into his mouth, panting even, losing control and trying so hard not to come again. He looks at me like, 'you can't be serious' expression, and I'm almost embarrassed.

He catches me up to speed with his intent, "I'm going to fuck you harder than you've ever been fucked in your life and then when I'm ready to come you are going to flip over on your stomach and I'm going to fuck your ass just as hard.

Petrified of him shoving his huge dick into my tight ass, I try to forget about that part. He plunges his throbbing dick into my pussy and thrashes it like the wild animal he is, hard, fast, and furious. I scream and breathe at the same time. My voice is going hoarse from strain. My pussy is ravaged with his desire and strength and then I get that dreaded sign to turn over and I brace myself lifting my ass in the air doggy style. He quickly frees my arms so I can put them against the headboard to brace myself.

Two of his fingers force their way into my pussy for lubrication before briskly wiping them on my ass, and then his cock fills me brutally forcing my entire body forward into the headboard. I have no more voice left. His fingers play with my clit while his dick keeps lodging itself in my ass. My body starts convulsing with orgasm and then he spanks my butt really hard, my skin reddens and turns warm

instantly. He does it again making sure he hits both sides and he says to me, "Nobody but me ever penetrates this, do you understand? You are mine!"

"Yes," I say.

"Louder," He orders.

"YES!" I barely have a voice but he can tell I'm straining to use it. He thrusts into my ass a couple more times and then relief floods me as I feel the warm spray of his cum all over my back marking me. I'm receptive to it because maybe I'm falling in love with him. We fall asleep.

I'm wake up to find his thick fingers on my soft folds kneading me. I'm already fully aroused when I realize what he's doing. I pretend to sleep so I can concentrate on the pleasurable he's providing me. My body starts losing itself in orgasm and when it's done he rolls on top of me lazily and takes me slowly. Now this is nice, almost relaxing. He rides me leisurely and I feel my mind separate from my body as I watch him make love to me. He doesn't warn me or pull out because I feel his warm release inside of me.

He rolls off me and holds me in his arms. I look at him, "You're trying to get me pregnant aren't you?" I ask.

"Desperate times, call for desperate measures, insurance you are going to remain mine," he smiles mischievously.

~41~

Aria texts me telling me she's waiting for me downstairs. She picks me up from the loft in her new red Beamer. She's dressed in a white dress suit that is elegant enough for even Kim Kardashian to wear. I have no idea how her taste went from really bad to really good in such a short period of time, Nick must be rubbing off on her.

When I get in her car the rock on her finger hits the sunlight in such a way I'm blinded. The only brilliance that outshines it is the smile on her face anytime I mention the word Nick or fiancé. She's beaming.

"Hello Bridesmaid!" She almost sings in happiness as I sink into the leather seats, the new car smell is intoxicating.

"Hello Bride to be! Are you ready to help me find a new place near Grimsby?"

Aria responds, "I've got some incredible places lined up! I'm really going to miss you as a neighbour, are you sure you want to move? You can commute."

"Positive. I'm ready to start fresh, in a place where nobody knows me."

I buckle my seatbelt and Aria starts the car, "How did the rest of the fundraiser go? Did you have fun?"

"It was okay, until the end. It got bad before it got good."

"How so?"

"Well, I was just about to leave while the going was good, did I tell you that Chase made a pass at me?"

"Holy Shit! Don't tell me you turned that God down?"

"He so totally is, but first let me tell you about Bradley, twin grizzly God. He cornered me just as I was leaving the fundraiser and pulled me into a closet. We were really close and it was so hot. We started whispering and he asked me if Chase made a pass at me."

"So what did you say," Aria gets excited.

"I said he did and that made him mad. So I asked him if he was back together with his ex-wife and he said not YET, but come on, when you say that you are implying you will in the future. So I got upset and took off."

"So how did it get good?"

I smiled at Aria, "I left the fundraiser and went home. When I got there I took a shower a mulled over what was said in the closet. When I stepped out guess who was sitting on my ugly grey sectional."

"Who," she looks over at me with anticipation in her eyes.

"Bradley!"

"Fuck off! How did he get in?"

"He broke into his brother's penthouse."

Aria shook her head, "That man wants you in a bad way. So what did you do were you scared?"

"Oh Aria, he fucked the bejesus out of me! Then he washed me like I was a frail China doll. He stayed the night and then I woke up to his fingers in my pussy."

"Oh my how sexy is that! I don't know if I should be hearing this. We have ten minutes to be at our friggin first appointment by the way. Okay, so go on, what happened next?"

"So he makes gentile love to me this time and he comes inside!"

"Please tell me you're on birth control."

"He broke up with me Aria! I wasn't using any form of birth control."

"You should have still been on it! Unless you WANT to get pregnant," Aria's all mother hennish in my face.

"Can I finish the story?" I ask impatiently.

"Yes go on!"

"So, I say to him, 'You're trying to make me preggars,' and he admits it. He said, 'Desperate times call for desperate measures.'"

"So what are you going to do if you are pregnant?"

"Well, of course I will keep it, but I doubt one time with Bradley will make me!" I slough it off.

We arrived at a townhouse in Grimsby a block away from the hospital. The outside is nothing to write home about. The inside is less impressive than the

outside. Aria can tell by my reaction I'm not feeling it so we get back into her beamer and try place number two.

She drives me to a five year old bungalow half a mile from the hospital. It's made of grey stones and the roof is black, it's quite sharp. Inside there are three bedrooms a kitchen and living room. The ceiling is at least ten feet high giving the illusion that the place is much bigger than it is. The basement is huge and unfinished. The backyard has a pool. It has Chanel written all over it. "Aria, you have to get this place for me! I'm in love with it!"

"I'll get my office to put an offer in for you, how much do you want to offer? They are asking four hundred and fifty."

"Tell your office to put in for four hundred and twenty-five but tell them I will go as high as full asking price."

Aria pulls her phone out and calls her office before we decide to head back and have lunch in the loft.

When we arrive back in the car she asks me about Chase, "What happened at the fundraiser with Chase, you never said."

"Chase told me I went for the wrong brother, and I should have gone for him. I told Chase that whether I'm with Bradley or not, I can never date Chase, it wouldn't be fair to Bradley. Chase was okay with it. It's so hard to do the right thing when you have the most devilishly handsome CEO staring down at you. I told him why I originally was more into Bradley than him."

Aria giggles, "If I wasn't with Nick, I'd probably love to take them both on!" Then she pauses for a second and adds, "I like clean cut a little more so I think I prefer Chase. His name is so silly!"

Aria invites me into her loft and starts making lunch us.

"How's Nick feeling, did they transferred him to Cardiology yet?" I ask.

"Early this morning! They needed his bed in the Unit so they downgraded him. He's doing well. He had his second C.T. scan and the bleeding in his brain stopped. It's smaller now. He should be out any day."

"That's good news! I'm so happy for you."

We sit at Aria's breakfast bar and eat our lunch in companionable silence until I start pestering her, "Call your office, did the seller say yes?"

“Cool it Coco, we aren’t going to hear anything this early. I’ll text you the second I find out.”

Aria has to go back to work in the afternoon. I keep my phone nearby and checked it every ten-seconds until I see the blue flashing light. The next four hours are excruciating. I hear back from her via text:

Aria: It’s yours for 425!

Chanel: Thanks!

Aria: When is the closing date?

Chanel: End of THIS month!

I wait for another hour before I try catching Chase at his penthouse. I knock on his door and surprisingly he answers. He’s dressed in his suit but his tie is lopsided and I assume he’s just taken it off when he heard the door, “I just got in, can I interest you in a glass of red wine?”

“That would be lovely.”

He leads me into his kitchen and pulls a chair out for me, “Please have a seat.” He starts getting the wine from a cabinet, “To what do I owe the honor?”

I smile sheepishly, “I think you know.”

He groans his guess, “You’re giving me notice that you’re leaving the hospital?”

“That too,” I confirm.

“You are breaking the lease on the loft? What’s the hurry, what the hell did my brother do?”

“Bradley hasn’t done anything, in fact I don’t think he wants me to move either. I want a new start where nobody knows me and I can make better first and lasting impressions.”

“The ones you’ve made here are fine! You’re being hasty. Like I said, you just chose the wrong brother.” His smiles at his joke which was alarmingly cute.

“I can’t hold the loft for you until you change your mind but I can always give you your job back.”

I take a sip of my wine, it has a dry earthy taste to it, "I won't forget your offer. I do think I'm starting to realize I chose the wrong damn brother." The comment pleases him.

"Don't worry, your loss is Shelly's gain," he clips. "I asked her out at the fundraiser. She doesn't hold a candle to you but how long can I wait for something I know I can never have?"

"How charming are you?" I say sarcastically. He grins at my comment. We finish our wine and then I hand him two envelopes. He shakes my hand while he wishes me luck as kisses both my cheeks in bidding good-bye.

~42~

The next morning my cell vibrates against the hard kitchen counter making a loud grumble noise. I check my phone and find a text from Aria:

Aria: I'm going 2 C Nick, do U want 2 come? I thought it would B fun 2 go shopping after.

Chanel: Would love 2.

Aria: 30/60/90?

Chanel: I need 30 to put a face on!

I change from casual clothes to a tighter fitting pair of jeans and a sweater that accentuates my curves. I look down quite proudly at myself, I have quite a pair. They are so sensitive lately; Bradley's little pinches are taking their toll. I style my hair like I just walked out of the salon and sprayed Coco Mademoiselle on. I didn't buy it for the name as one might think; I bought it for the bottle. I always chose the prettiest bottles when I pick my fragrances. Coco Noir looks too much like cologne made for man so I went with the prettier of the two.

I'm out of the door and knocking on Aria's right at the thirty minute mark. I stand in her doorway watching her finish the last of her makeup. She hustles trying to find her keys, grab her purse, and make sure she has everything she needs.

I start taking my keys out of my pocket when Aria says, "I'll drive, I'm not over the novelty of my new car yet. I'm giving my old car to Nick so we can save money for the wedding."

Aria and I never had a chance to discuss the wedding yet so I start one up, "Did you guys set a date?"

Aria rolls her eyes at me, "I want to book the Old Mill because that's where mom and dad got married. I called yesterday and the earliest date available is two years from now, or I can take a cancellation with a ten percent discount for two and a half months from now."

“So what are you going to do?” I asked thinking I would probably chose the earlier date if it was me.

“I have until noon today to decide so that’s why I’m going to see Nick”

She starts going on about how she pictures her wedding day to be. I’m only half listening to her because I’m imagining my next encounter with Bradley and how I’m going to break it to him that I’m actually moving and changing jobs.

We go to The General and ask the nursing station where Nick is relocated. They tell us he’s in room 264. I knew exactly where it is so I lead Aria to it.

We arrive in Nick’s room to find he’s not there. I peek back out and down the hallway and he’s ambulating slowly away from us holding his blue gown closed with one hand covering his bum and a towel in the other. He’s wearing his Jesus sandals, the same ones I told him never to wear them because he has hairy feet which I think is too weird and should go covered.

I pop my head back into his room to tell Aria, “I see him, he’s on his way to take a shower, do you want to go to Tim’s to kill time before he gets out?”

She straightens the bed like, appearing nervous. “Sure,” she finishes. We started walking down the hallway the same direction we came from. I’m keeping an eye out for Bradley, I hope out paths cross today. He doesn’t know I’m at the hospital visiting Nick today.

We lineup at Tim’s and I feel a touch of disappointment when I don’t see him. Aria nods to the front of the line and whispers in my ear, “Which one is that? Is that Bradley or Chase with Maggie?” I look in the same direction and my heart sinks when I see Bradley standing next to Maggie like a normal couple. My worst fear starts becoming a reality before I’ve even switched hospitals and I’m so upset, I can feel my face heat up, it’s on fire.

“Bradley,” I hiss.

The server calls out, “Can I help the next person in line?”

Bradley and Maggie start walking to the server, which means they are going to see us. I can’t escape, nowhere to go. I look deliberately at Maggie before making eye contact with him. It’s my way of subtly showing him, this isn’t okay for me.

Maggie is oblivious to the entire interchange but Bradley isn't and he stays back maintaining confrontational eye contact with me. The tension was palpable and people start noticing Bradley and me staring at each other.

Aria looks mildly confused with the entire interchange and when he's out of hearing range she asks, "Was she his ex?"

"The one and only," I whisper back.

"So why are they not acting like it?"

"I can't tell you," I said quietly to her, I'm so hurt.

Thank heavens a different server calls our turn. We ordered two coffees' that are done quickly and we walked past them as they continue to wait for their own food. Bradley looks as though he's going to grab my wrist, but I'm not having it. I make sure the second his hand advances towards mine I'm far away from him. I can barely keep the tears at bay.

Back at the ward, I try putting the prior incident behind me and focus on Nick and Aria. Nick's back in his room towel drying his hair. He's wearing his blue hospital gown with no hospital attachments such as intravenous, heart monitors, or breathing devices. He starts gelling it so it's perfectly placed in his usual style.

I give him a hug and sit in the chair by his bed. Aria is on the other side. They suck face, and it's grossly cute. Finally they remembered I'm in the room with them before they stopped. Nick looks at me, "Did you give Chase notice?"

He's wearing his nugget, it shines on his neck and think how much I need my rock right now, but I don't want to distract him from Aria because she needs him too and they have serious planning to do. "I gave him two letters; I broke the lease and told him I'm leaving The General."

Nick's eyebrows raise and he starts absently playing with his spiky hair,

"How did he react?"

"He's okay with it. He tried talking me out of it but gave up when he realized how much I need to do this. He said I'll always have a job at The General if I want to come back. He told me I chose the wrong brother, I should have chosen him."

He smiles at me, "What I should really be asking is how did Throb take it?"

"I thought he wasn't taking it well but judging by this morning, maybe I'm wrong. I think the feelings are more one sided then I realize."

Nick's eyes darken, "How did Throb he manage to fuck it up now? I told him you're in love with him by the way."

"Yes, thanks for that Dickwad. Aria and I saw him at Tim's with his bitch ex-wife."

Aria leans over towards Nick and gushes, "She's really pretty!"

Her comment upsets me more; Nick pays little attention to her knowing she's disturbing me, "Aria! You're so insensitive," he calls her on it.

She looks at me apologetically, "I'm sorry." She turns back to Nick, "She really is though!"

"Coco, you're making too big a deal of it. Throb was just standing in line with her to get some food from Tim's, not rekindling or remarrying her, speaking of which." Nick turns to Aria, "Did you get a date at The Old Mill?"

"About that," She starts digging through her purse for her phone. "They can't book us until two years from now or they have one cancelation that we can consider but they need an answer by noon. It's for two and a half months from now." Aria and I sit quietly while Nick deliberates.

He glances at me, "What do you think Coco?"

"I wanted nothing to do with this decision," I shrug. I don't want to tell him, but all of his actions seem to be a reaction to his accident rather than well thought out. If I say two years than they will probably get upset, and if I said two and a half months they will be pressured Nick into making a rash decision again.

Nick returns his gaze to Aria, "I don't want to wait any longer than ten weeks, let's do it!" Aria squeals with delight and claps her hands together before she punches the Old Mill's phone number into her cell.

Aria talks animatedly getting up and standing by the window for better reception. Nick studies my face and asks, "What's wrong?"

I speak quietly, "I just hate getting these mixed signals from Bradley. He says he wants me, he even admits trying to get me pregnant and then I see him with Maggie again."

Nick's jaw drops, "Throb tried to get you pregnant? He admits it?"

"Yes," I shake my head, "He said, 'Desperate times call for desperate measures.'"

Nick points to me and whispers, "You're fucking pregnant! I can tell!" I squint my eyes at him and cross my arms whispering in a seething voice, "Nick, you are unfuckingbelievable! I'm not even late Dickass, you've just surpassed Dickwad!"

He nods his chin to his chest and mouths, "Your tits look bigger." I take a couple of deep breaths and then we hear the hang up noise Aria's phone makes when she hangs up and then she says rather dramatically, "Done! In ten short weeks I will be Mrs. Aria Ward! Oh.My.God! Chanel we have to start getting ready! I'll come get you Nick when you're discharged. Chanel lets go, so much to do!"

We said our good-byes and leave. *Nick and Aria are getting married in ten short weeks. I'm starting a new life, and apparently my tits look larger! Who needs breast augmentation when Bradley can maul them to the point of becoming swollen?*

~43~

We leave the hospital without further incident. It's sunny out but starting to get cold. We sit in the car while Aria starts googling places. She start rhyming off things she needs to do and that's when I jump in, "Aria, let's stay organized. We need to go back to your place or mine and make a list of the things we need to do before the wedding."

She's gleaming, "Sounds like a plan." She pulls the beamer into her spot and we take the lift to the eighth floor. I suggest my place because my hunger pangs are getting the best of me and if I didn't get food fast I was going to start feeling woozy.

I open the door to let us in and kick off my shoes to get comfortable. I head straight for the kitchen where I start digging through cabinets trying to figure out what I'm going to make for us, "Do you want anything specific Aria?"

Aria stays behind in the living room looking for a piece of paper and pen she can use to write her list on. "Make whatever you've got, I'm not picky." I find leftover chicken breasts I baked yesterday and throw them together on a salad. I grab two bottles of water and now I'm ready to help Aria with her list.

Aria and I brainstorm.

~To Do~

Invites

Tuxedo and Dress

Bridesmaid Dress and Groom

Caterer

Flowers and bouquet

Salon appointment

Cake

Honeymoon

Rings

Old, new, borrowed, blue

Limo

Seating plan.

I think if we miss anything we'll figure it out as we go along. A part of me envies Aria for getting engaged and marrying so quickly, it is super romantic.

The next day proves to be a very busy one. Nick calls saying that he's being discharged. We have forty-five minutes to pick him up from the hospital, drop him off at home and be at the dress shop for our first attempt at finding a dress. I don't think it's going to happen.

Nick receives his paperwork, so he's ready when we pick him up. We drop him off at Aria's loft like discarded luggage and heavy foot it to the first dress appointment. We make it, on time! I reward Snowball by stroking her bonnet before we leave her to go into the store. I luckily find first class parking right in front of the dress shop.

The dress shop is so personal. The display window has two dummy's, a bride in a traditional wedding gown, and groom in a tuxedo. I pause to look at the display, the chest of the groom moves startling me. I quietly gasp realizing that they were live mannequins. I chuckle and bring it to Aria's attention, "Look live mannequins!"

Aria scolds me, "We don't have time for that!" It dawns on me, is having a wedding only ten weeks from now going to turn her into a bridezilla? I hope I won't have to remind Aria that I'm going through a major change too, and I need time for myself to pack. I accept the scolding as nerves and open the door to the dress shop allowing her entry first before following closely behind.

A really badly overweight Portuguese woman by the name of Maria greets us at the door and tells us that she is our designated personal shopper for today. Aria takes her hand and tells Maria, "I'm the bride, and this is Chanel my bridesmaid."

Maria shakes our hands and says it's a pleasure to meet us. She eyes Aria up and down for size and asks her, "What were you thinking of wearing Aria? What do you like?"

Aria gazes at her own reflection in the mirror, "I always imagine looking like a princess, you know, like Lady Diana? I want a long dress that has a train of at least four feet, a tight sequinned body, a flared skirt but not tacky, and a veil with a princess tiara that will make any toddler envious. I want to look like an absolute princess.

Maria rubs her hands together and disappears into the back. She returns with a rack full of dresses for Aria to try on. We are going to be here a long time! I feel my phone vibrate so I check it find a text from Bradley:

Bradley: What are you doing?

Chanel: Dress shopping.

Bradley: Meet me for dinner at the Paddock.

Chanel: Sounds like an order.

Bradley: It's not.

Chanel: To bad, I like it when you're bossy!

Bradley: 6:30

Chanel: We'll be there.

Bradley: Alone!

Chanel: I can't just leave Aria after shopping with her all day. It's rude!

Bradley: Be rude.

Two stores and three hours later, we finish shopping for a dress that Aria loves. She ends up with a three foot long train and the tiara of her dreams. I love it too but I know the price tag is going to shock Nick. He's debt conscious and borders on cheap, I'm sure he's going to suffer countless sleepless nights over the

extra money he spends on pleasing Aria. She has no idea what a nickel pincher he is.

There's no time to drop Aria off before meeting Bradley, I have to bring her. We walk into the Paddock ten minutes late and Bradley is already seated at a table for two, oops! I try to explain, "There was no time!" He flashes me a look with his dark eyes; he's not pleased.

I give him a look and shrug my shoulders when Aria isn't looking. He's wearing a black suit and grey tie; he stands up to kiss me and then suggests getting a larger table. He looks super-hot tonight.

"Did you find a dress?" He asks Aria.

"I did!" She gushes.

"I have to run to the ladies bathroom. I'll be right back," I announce.

Aria turns to me, "Again? That's the third time in two hours!"

I furrow my brows, "You're counting?"

She takes her serviette and shakes it loose before placing it on her lap, "It's hard not to notice!"

When I get back from the ladies room it's all eyes on me. I feel a huge bit self-conscious. Bradley scans my eyes with his and says, "Aria here suspects you're pregnant." I'm so taken aback by his off the cuff comment I didn't even react.

I sit down and looked at her, "Maybe I just drank too much this morning." Honestly, between her and Nick, this talk of pregnancy: you would think they have too much going on in their lives, they wouldn't have time to come up with outrageously crazy ideas that. I tune Aria out and focus on Bradley, "Aria found a bungalow close to the hospital for me. My offer has been accepted. I'll be moving at the end of the month."

Bradley's expression is pure organic irritation, "That was quick, did you consider our relationship or at least showing me the place first before putting an offer in." A small amount of guilt washes over me at the realization that I never involved him in the process but I defend myself, "We've been so hot and cold lately, I thought the decision was strictly mine to make."

Aria appears uncomfortable as the tension escalates between us. She starts pulling out her chair, "I have to go check on Nick, I've been away for quite some

time. I'll catch you guys later." She grabs her purse and hustles out of the Paddock like it's on fire. I can't go after her because I know better than to further offend my alpha male.

The waitress comes by to take our order, not a good time. Bradley's glare at me is so punishing, it's obvious she's noticed. "I'm sorry. What do you want me to do?" I whined.

He rubs his stubble, his dark eyes are pensive, "I want you to reconsider, retract your offer and live with me in Oakville."

"I need time to think," I love it; absolutely one hundred percent love it when he tells me what to do.

His eyes begin to soften as his tone remains firm, "Don't take too long, I might revoke the offer!" He's looking mighty handsome to me.

I start running my fingers up his short sideburns and down the back of his scalp where his hair is the shortest, it seems to sooth him, "You're forcing me to be impetuous."

He scrutinizes me, "Just follow your heart."

I wanted to lighten the mood, "Where? To San Francisco?" My albeit dry humour doesn't go over well. Whenever I'm around Bradley I only follow my libido, MO Jo, juices.

I'm just about to say yes when I get a vibration in my pocket. I pull my phone out and it's a text from Nick:

Nick: Coco, R U fighting with Throb? Aria told me she left the 2 of U.

Chanel: Can't text now, busy

Nick: Answer

Chanel: No, not now. He's going to get mad, TTYL.

Nick: Aria won't tell me, how much was the dress?

Chanel: 9K

Nick: WTF! Why didn't U stop her?

Chanel: Not my business, go easy on her.

Nick: Code RED

I glanced up at Bradley; he's looking at me impatiently:

Chanel: Bradley asked me to move in with him.

Nick: Say No!

Chanel: Why? You were all 4 us the other day. What's changed?

Nick: It's too early!

Chanel: You've known Aria 4 5min and U asked her to marry U. Why shouldn't I marry him?

Nick: I need to speak to Aria; I can't worry about U right now. Tell him U will think about it.

He's waiting, "What was so urgent that you can't wait until after dinner to text?"

"The text was from Nick, Aria wouldn't tell him the cost of the wedding dress, so he asked me. He's seeing red right now. She went way over budget" I was feeling rebellious and impetuous so I went with it, "My answer to you Bradley is yes. I will move in with you."

He throws some money on the table and he grabs my wrist the way he always does, and then leaving Snowball in the lurch he drags me like the cave dweller he is and opens the door to the Hummer almost but pushing me inside. He floors it the entire way home, luckily there isn't a cop to be found, and makes it to his house in record time.

He let me in his house, which will be our house and his lips find mine in the dark. I can't see anything of his face except a shine coming from his black eyes. His lips are wet and demanding, showing their hunger for me. He kisses me while he's backing me into his bedroom. The back of my legs hit his bed and then I'm gently lowered down onto it.

His kisses slow and I sense his bodyweight suspended above mine in the darkness. He bites my bottom lip and ends the kiss long enough to murmur, "I love you."

I got the most amazing chill up my spine when he said it. My insides are doing a happy dance as I melt into his strong protective arms. He lowers his weight

on me and I lose my breath. His lips find their way back to mine, and we are kissing again.

He slides his hand under my shirt and pinches my nipple making me scream. He pauses sounding very resolute, "That shouldn't have hurt. We need to test you, I think Aria is right. I've contemplated the possibilities while we were driving, and if you are pregnant it can be either of ours, mine or Nicks." It's horrifying to hear this coming from his lips. What Nick and I did seems to haunt me endlessly.

He orders me to remove my jeans. I do as I'm told completely lost in my own thoughts not only about the possibility of being pregnant but of being pregnant with Nick's child and at this point it was just unconceivable, horrifying.

Bradley is talking me down as he fills me reassuring me that it's going to be okay, "Aria is probably wrong about you being pregnant and if she isn't we'll deal with it then." I close my eyes to the world around me and force myself to concentrate on the feeling of him taking me and the back and forth friction of his thick cock filling me. Without warning his pace quickens and he begins thrusting into me with more force before filling me with his hot cum. He's so smooth and adept to satisfying all my needs. He stays inside of me for quite some time before rolling off.

His lips find mine again and he kisses me incessantly. When our lips can't kiss anymore he excuses himself to shower. He comes back into the room naked. He doesn't say anything. I watch him pull clothes from his dresser and he put them on. Wordlessly he leaves.

I take a short shower and then help myself to his pyjamas. He is back in less than twenty minutes. He tosses the test onto the bed, "Do your thing, he orders." I go into the bathroom and read the instructions. I void on the stick and leave it in the bathroom. "How long do we wait?" He asks when he sees me return.

"Ten minutes, it's on the bathroom counter. I can't bear to look." I croak. I feel sick with nerves. He leaves me in the bedroom and goes to the kitchen to fix a drink for himself. He must be nervous too. It's the slowest ten minutes of my life. Time's up, he enters the bathroom, looks at the test, his expression stone cold. I have no idea judging by his reaction what the result is until he leaves the bathroom passing me, and doesn't stop or say anything. The front door opens and slams shut,

he's gone again. My legs are weak, barely able to hold my weight, I know the result before I see it, without a shadow of a doubt I'm pregnant.

He doesn't come back for some time. When he does, he crawls into bed and wraps his arms around me but he doesn't speak. He can't.

~44~

I spend the night at Bradley's and then I go back to the loft because I need time to think. I know the baby I'm carrying inside of me can be from either one but I suspect it's Nicks even though it's preferable to be Bradley's. I'm keeping it, it doesn't matter who the baby belongs to in my opinion.

Aria has no idea that Nick and I were ever together. I can't imagine how she'd feel if she ever finds out. It's definitely best for all concerned that this baby is Bradley's. I'm resolute in all my decisions. I whip my cellphone out with confidence and text Bradley.

Chanel: Are you sure you still want me to live with you, it's not too late to back out.

Bradley: This is too serious for texts Godamnit!

I call him, "Bradley, Are you sure you want to live with me?"

There's a pause, and I can hear him breathe into the phone, "More sure."

"I'm keeping this baby, and I don't want to tell anyone I'm pregnant for a while," I warn.

"Our baby," he corrects.

I hesitate, "Will you love it even if you know it might not be yours."

Without hesitation he answers, "Yes, because it's yours." That was exactly what I needed to hear.

I cry when I say this, "So no matter what, this is your baby."

Bradley's voice is warm and somewhat victorious when he repeats back to me, "No matter what."

~45~

Nick urges me to meet him to conspire against Aria about curbing her spending habits towards the wedding. He doesn't need to call me; I already know he wants an intervention by me. I'm tempted to tell him to suck it up, but I think I actively observe his heightened state of panic, and it amuses me.

Orientation to the new hospital starts in less than a week and my spare time is being filled with complete nonsense. I'd rather pack than listen to Nick bitch about how Aria is squandering their money he hasn't earned yet. This is Nick's issue, not mine. I have other more serious issues on my plate.

I'm strategic about my meeting with Nick. I pick a time that isn't too early so he doesn't see my morning sickness. I wear baggy clothing so he doesn't notice my swollen breasts. I make sure to eat soda crackers and pee before I meet with him. I pick the meeting place, Starbucks.

Nick is there before me and his chest is broad even though he was laid up in hospital for so many weeks. The top of his shirt is left unbuttoned and he wears jeans that hang low on his waist. He doesn't have a hair out of place and his cologne is getting every molecule in my body reacting. It's the best he's ever looked.

He stands up when I reach the table and hugs me longer than a friend is supposed to. It is the first time we are alone since Las Vegas, and I am unusually excited about this. He kisses me and I don't pull away. I want it to last. I notice he isn't rushing the kiss either. When we sit down I glance around making sure nobody is looking.

There are two cups on our table. He slides one to me, "I got you a chai latte."

"Thanks Dickwad!" I take the lid off so it cools sooner. "I miss spending time with you."

He sips his coffee, "Me too Coco." We just sit together for quite some time people watching and not really speaking, "Tell me you aren't moving in with Throb?" he asks.

I can't figure out why he cares so ask, "Why does it bother you?"

He runs his fingers through his perfect hair and his tone is distressed, "It's just wrong. You guys are off more than you are on. I would be doing our friendship an injustice if I didn't share my misgivings with you about your relationship with him."

I look at Nick calmly and hold his hand weaving my fingers through his, "When you tell me not to, I do the opposite. I reflected back on why I was so defiant and I think it's because I resent how much you rush things with Aria. You shouldn't have a say on what I do with my life. If you are going to marry her it's time we free ourselves from each other."

"That's never going to happen Coco," he says while he picks up his nugget from around his neck and puts it in his mouth pulling the chain away from his neck.

"We didn't just come here to talk about me and Bradley did we?"

Nick looks at me with dead serious eyes, "You'll tell me if you're pregnant won't you?"

"Yes," I lie. Telling him might ruin his relationship with Aria and mine with Bradley. I know Nick can't find out until after he's married.

I regret selecting such a public place to meet. I change the subject and confess things to him I almost lost the chance to do, "I was so scared when you were in the hospital Nick. I don't know what I would have ever have done if Bradley hadn't saved you. I think I would have wanted to die if I had to live without you. You are more than my rock; you are my life support, my life line." I start crying in the middle of Starbucks, the humility of it all!

His hand touches my chin and his lips sweep mine with the lightness of a feather. It seems like he's going to stop at that but he can't, he doesn't. Rather than let go of me his fingers bring me in for a second kiss with a passion and urgency that only a near death experience can cause.

His kiss carries me to heaven filling me with serenity. Cool air surrounds me and I'm lost in the clouds. It's evident that nothing can touch us. One kiss manages to shake up my personally sculpted reality.

The words come from my lips but I'm not them. My heart and brain are two different entities and my soul is watching Nick as my brain breaks the news that

we can't kiss like this anymore, my heart is still recovering from the shocking warmth that comes from his kisses which gets my blood warm and pumping. His kisses breathe life into my body that before merely just existed.

I think he feels the same because he pulls away like he's shocked, electrocuted. I get up swiftly and start leaving, he grabs my hand and for a second it feels like Bradley's. Guilt comes crashing down on me like ocean waves. Blinded by tears I grab my purse and stumble out of Starbucks bumping into a few people on the way. This is harder than I ever imagined.

If there was doubt before there sure isn't now. I know I'm with the wrong man, and there is nothing I can do but bury it in my subconscious.

Nick follows me from Starbucks and calls out "Coco, wait!" I get to Snowball's door and frantically try digging my keys out of my pockets but I must have put them in my purse. It gives Nick time to catch up to me.

He presses me up against my car rubbing against me with total disregard that we are in public, and then he cups my face with both his hands because I have nowhere to go and he presses his warm lips against mine firmly.

My heart takes over and I kiss him back with a desperation I never knew I had and my brain begins pulling my body away from him trying to tear me from his arms. I see my hand like I have no control over it and go to slap his face as I scurry into Snowball and lock the doors.

I look out the window to find Nick in tears. The site of him causes me to feel this crushing pain in my chest. Air is stolen from me as my blood turns cold. The pain radiates to my jaw and down my arm as I reach for the steering wheel. I'm hit with a sudden urge to vomit so I cover my mouth with my other hand. I feel all hot and sweaty like I'm about to lose consciousness. With a heavy foot and a broken heart I bare down on the accelerator.

~46~

I keep my distance from Nick and Aria while focusing on my own changes. When Bradley and I are not working, we are driving back and forth from the loft to his house delivering my belongings. When the big items were left, we called a moving company and had the remainder of my stuff put into a storage facility located just on the border of Oakville and Burlington. My grey sectional may it rest in peace was left outside in front of the building for the garbage man to pick it up Monday morning.

Bradley spoils me while I'm moving in. He carries all the boxes, unpacking most of them. He cooks when I'm not feeling well and is gentle in our bed. I miss the wild intimate moments we had but I guess it was a small price to pay while I'm incubating this child, which can possibly be his.

It's Friday evening, the last day of the month when Bradley escorts me to his brother's penthouse to drop off the keys to the loft. Chase answers the door and invites us in. He tells us to make ourselves comfortable and asks us what we want to drink. He disappears into the kitchen to get the refreshments.

Bradley takes my hand and leads me into the dark living room. He turns the light on and everyone shouts, "Surprise!" I'm shocked to see Nick, Aria, Dr. Thicke, Dr. Morden and some of the nurses we work with all here. Shelly speaks first, "We want to congratulate you on your new job and wish you well Chanel!"

I look instantly at Bradley wondering if he knew about this. He shrugs looking at me, "I'm as surprised as you are!" Everyone comes up to me and hugs me. I'm floored that they did this for me. People are asking me about my new job. Then someone ask if I heard back about my exam results and I said I haven't. Chase reenters the room at that point and pulls an envelope from his inside pocket and says, "You have now."

I'm too nervous to open it and I can't believe I have to do it in front of so many people so I look to Chase and say, "You open it!" He slowly tears it open, it's so painful to watch. "Come on Chase, you're killing me!" I yelp.

He pulls the letter from its envelope and reads it smiling. He looks up at me pointedly and says, "Sorry Doctor I didn't know you were in a hurry!" Everyone in

the room claps and cheers for me and starts hugging me as tears of joy spring from my eyes. Damn pregnancy hormones! They make you look like a sappy emotional wreck even at the best of times!

Chase being Mr. CEO, and host extraordinaire, balled into one, hires a server to make and pass around the rest of the cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. Bradley comes over to me while Aria is standing close by and asks, "Drink?"

"Juice please," I say.

He hands me an orange juice and Aria comments, "No alcohol? I think we need to go to the loo!" She grabs my wrist and drags me eagerly to Chase's two piece bathroom, "You're pregnant, I just know it! It's going to come out some time! Your body will betray you when your belly grows! Tell me the truth you are, aren't you?" She talks animatedly, the entire penthouse can probably hear her. I shush her frantically.

"Yes," I whisper.

"Why the big secret?" She stops for a second. I can see a light bulb turn on behind her eyes, "Has it been twelve weeks yet?"

"No, less," I say.

"Oh, that explains it, for a minute I thought you might have had an affair with Chase! Does Bradley know you're preggars?"

She's the second last person I wanted to know, "Of course he knows."

She looks at me slyly, "It is Bradley's right?"

"Of course it's Bradley's" I admonish. "I'm not having an affair! What do you take me for?"

She smiles at me putting her hands in the air like she was surrendering, "I have the utmost respect for you Chanel, just both of the brothers are so hot! I think any red blooded female would do both brothers if they could!"

I want to end the conversation so I start opening the door, "They're going to miss us, we better go back," I suggest. I step out first and my eyes land on Nick's. He's standing close to the bathroom, too close.

I try to remain casual as I search out Bradley. When I see him I go straight over to where he's standing. I whisper, "Aria knows I'm pregnant." He goes into damage control mode without me having to say another word. If it doesn't appear

like we are hiding something then he won't become suspicious if he hasn't already. Bradley takes a pen from his pocket and clinks it against his glass, "Everyone, Chanel and I have another little announcement to make. We were going to wait but since you are all here, now is as good a time as any, Chanel and I are having a baby!"

Chase is the first one over to congratulate us. Everyone comes over to shake Bradley's hand and give me a hug, except for Nick. His face loses its blood as he turns white. He walks over to Bradley almost solemnly and shakes his hand to congratulate him while he comes to me and hugs me mechanically like he's going through the motions. Aria's oblivious to Nick's reactions, Bradley and I aren't. There isn't much he can do.

The euphoria of becoming a doctor is only slightly tarnished by Aria's outburst in the bathroom and Nick's reaction in the living room. I worked too damn hard for so many years to accomplish that honour; nothing is going to ruin it for me. I stand proudly at Bradley's side as I bask in the afterglow of becoming a medical practitioner!

~47~

The wedding is upon us, it's the first frost of the season and there's a chill in the air that could be felt right down into our bones. Aria and I are chauffeur driven compliments of Chase to the salon that Shelly referred me to several months ago. We have our hair, makeup, and nails, done leaving there resembling Glamor Barbie's.

The limousine brings us back to Aria's loft where we do our final preparations and dress for the wedding. I bring tea sandwiches to snack on while we prepare.

Aria is in a fit to be tied state almost bordering on panic trying to make sure that nothing is forgotten. We go down to the front doors of the loft where the limousine waits for us. The driver comes out and assists us into the car. It's difficult managing the dress making sure it doesn't touch the ground as she gets in.

I give Aria a five dollar bill which is blue, and tell her I want it back after the wedding. That is something borrowed and something blue. She only needs something old and something new. I gift a locket in the shape of a heart with an old photo of her and Nick in it. She is ready.

The limo driver pulls into a drop off area so we won't be seen entering the Old Mill. We are escorted into a holding room until all the guests are present and the wedding is about to begin. I wear a satin red sleeveless dress with a white faux fur around my neck and my red Gucci pumps from Las Vegas.

There is a tap at the door and Bradley pokes his head in, "Ten more minutes' girls!" He leaves instantly and then I hear my phone vibrate in evening handbag. I take it out and there is a text from Nick. He must have typed it when Bradley gave us the ten minute warning.

Nick: Meet me in the back of the building where the limo dropped you off now!

I delete the text and shut my phone off. I look at Aria, "I have to talk to Bradley, and I'll be right back!" I scurry from the room where we are, to find Nick. He's pacing outside until he see's me and freezes. His eyes take me in from head to

toe. I walk up to him and ask nonchalantly trying to hide my apprehension, "Is everything all right?"

"No!" he seethes, "It's not! I waited for you to say or do the right thing and you haven't. You've gone ahead and passed this baby off as yours and Bradley's and you were going to let me marry Aria. When were you going to involve me? When were you going to give me a chance to have a say?"

"It could be Bradley's," I argue.

"It might not be, right, Coco? Say it! The baby can be mine."

"The baby can be yours," I repeat.

"I never took you for a bitch until now," he rages.

"I was trying to save you and Aria, me and Bradley," I argue.

He looks at me with fire in his eyes, his hand touches my chest and then his own, his voice softened, "At the expense of you and me?"

A sob escapes my lips as his hand grabs the nape of my neck and his mouth covers mine. My eyes flutter open during the kiss and I see Bradley's silhouette witnessing the passion between us. Nick holds my face an inch from his and he gazes into my eyes, "We could have worked this out, but you chose to scheme with Bradley."

Nick calls out to Bradley, "I need to speak to Aria. Get her now!" Nick looks at me with disgust and says, "I abhor what you've done. You were my best friend." Bradley disappears only to reappear a few minutes later with Aria.

Bradley leads me away by grabbing my wrist the way he always does and informs me quietly what he thinks is going to happen next, "Nick is going to tell her what you guys have done."

We watch from a distance as Nick does just that. He's talking to Aria, and then she starts pummeling his chest with her arms screaming, "Why didn't you tell me! Why! You had all this time while you knew she was pregnant that you could have said something!"

Nick steps back from her and walks away. Aria collapses down to her knees crying into her hands. Aria's angelic weeping can be heard everywhere. Nick treads through the long grass of the field towards the parking lot. I glance up at

Bradley and then towards Nick. My heart controls my actions as I tear my wrist from Bradley's grip and I run like hell to catch up with Nick.

He hears me closing in on him from behind and turns with his arms spread open to catch me, I'm carrying my shoes in my hand and when we kiss my Gucci's are dangling behind his neck. In between kisses I manage to tell him, "You're the one I can't live without, your kisses are my cloud 9, and you've become my life support, the one I want to be with."

Nick's hand touches my cheek and he says, "I've been waiting for you to say that. I knew I loved you when we were in Las Vegas. I almost told you when we had dinner at the Bellagio, but you told me you were going back to him. I had no choice but keep it bottled, figuring I'd never get the chance to tell you just how much I love you too Coco."