



  
SHACKED  
UP *Love*

**KISSED** *by my*  
**ROOMMATE**

**EMBER DAVIS**

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Kissed By My Roommate (Shacked Up Love Series) by Ember Davis

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Contains explicit love scenes and adult language. The suggested reading audience is 18 years or older.

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For anyone who wonders if the asshole can be redeemed.

I think it's possible.

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# CHAPTER 1

## ZOEY

If he doesn't stop, I'm going to kill him. I'm going to rip the covers off me, stomp down the stairs and then out to his little shed of noise pollution. I'm not sure what I'll do when I get down there considering Juniper is so much bigger than me, but I'll figure out a way to get him to stop.

The racket.

It's constant. It's discordant. It makes me want to crawl out of my skin. Maybe it would give me some sort of relief.

Because there is no way for me to sleep like this.

It's the third day in a row.

I need to be able to stay up all night for work, but I can't sleep during the day. Not with the music of Juniper creating art. I wish it wasn't amazing. I wish it didn't speak to part of my soul. It would be so much easier to go down there and yell at him if his art was complete shit.

It's not though. He's so fucking talented. It makes it much harder to hate him for the noise he makes, even if I do need to get some sleep.

Silence reverberates from his workshop shed, but the remnants of the banging and the sound of the welder are always there, an impression on the very air around us. I take a deep breath and let it out slowly, trying to get control of my heartrate and my anger.

It's quiet. I should take this opportunity and fall asleep. Is that clanging real or is it all in my head? I leap out of bed and tiptoe to the window to see Juniper standing outside the shed while drinking down a bottle of water without taking a breath. His Adam's apple bobs, sweat pouring off his body.

*Holy shit.*

It's sexy as hell.

It reminds me of the day I first came here to see about the room Juniper advertised. My old roommate was moving out to live with her boyfriend and there was no way I was going to be able to afford the apartment alone. To top it off, I couldn't even get the lease signed over into my name since I couldn't afford the deposit.

I had no time at all to find a place to live since she sprang the news on me last minute and had already broken the lease for the end of the month. The situation gave me days to find a place to live. I don't know why I looked through the local ads in the newspaper first, but I did. I figured there wouldn't be any options there and most people would be putting rentals online.

When I came across the one for a room in a house, I had a feeling it was the right place. It was like something wormed its way inside my head and no matter how many times I looked away from it, my eyes kept going right back. I couldn't ignore the pull, the need to find out more. I stopped hesitating and set up an appointment to see the place.

When I arrived and knocked on the door there wasn't an answer at first. I knocked again. I told myself I would wait five minutes and then try again. Who hasn't been caught going to the bathroom at just the wrong fucking time, making your heart sink and leaving you stuck in a *what the hell* kind of moment?

When I knocked again, it took only a few seconds for the door to be pulled open with enough force that I was a little concerned about the hinges. I was not prepared for the sight which greeted me on the other side of the door. I was eye level with some big as hell pecs covered in well-defined muscles and glistening with sweat. Not only sweat, but there was also a good layer of grit and grime there.

Oh, and no shirt.

It was...well, let's just say I was a little concerned about drooling. I may have even tried to wipe the corner of my mouth to double



check. I was damn glad I didn't find any there. How embarrassed I would have been if there had been.

I'm not sure what I expected to find, honestly. I knew Juniper was a man the moment he answered the phone and we set up a time for me to see the house. He sounded gruff on the phone, but you can't always judge a book by its voice. Or whatever.

When I'm working as an overnight emergency dispatcher, I don't exactly sound like myself. I sound way more soothing and upbeat than I normally am, but I realize I'm talking to people, for the most part, as they're experiencing something traumatic. They need me to stay in control and keep it together. They don't need whatever is going on in my life to touch them, so I leave it at the door.

The longer I've lived with Juniper, the harder it's been to do. It's a problem.

I didn't think of any of that when I met the man, and he gave me a tour of the house. I think I was in some sort of arousal fog for most of the tour, watching his muscles bunch and pull with every movement. When he walked in front of me, my eyes immediately went to his ass every time. I'm still not sure how I didn't reach out and give it a squeeze.

He has one of those asses you could bounce a quarter off. Squeeze worthy. Delectable. It's the first male ass I've thought such things about.

I groan and roll onto my side, trying to get comfortable because thinking about Juniper's ass is not going to help me fall asleep. Then there are his thighs which are like tree trunks. He must not miss a leg day.

The day I met him, there wasn't a smirk on his face, which you would expect, when he looked over his shoulder and found me ogling him. There was a demand and a finality in his tone, "I'm not included in the rent, Sweetheart."

I blinked up at him, embarrassment filling me and heating my cheeks. I would have been more than happy for a hole to open and

swallow me whole, but sinkholes never seem to pop up when I need them. So unfortunate.

I should have fled right then, but I found my feet following him. My sass chose that moment to come back full force instead of leaving me gaping and befuddled. I snarked at him, “Are you sure? You could probably charge a lot more if you were.”

Juniper’s eyes widened and then he laughed. I swear, it was his laugh which did me in and is the only thing I can point to as the reason I didn’t heed the warning signs and decided to move in with him. He’s the first man I’ve ever lived with. While our bedrooms are far enough away from each other to make me feel comfortable, I can’t deny I wish we were closer.

Like I wish our naked bodies were plastered against each other closer.

At least, my vagina wants it very much. She’s on board for me going full hussy, stripping down and walking into his room to tempt him. My brain has a whole different argument. My brain thinks it’s the worst idea ever.

I’m torn, to say the least.

Even though Juniper seemed hesitant about me moving in, for whatever reason, I’ve been here two weeks now.

He was very open about the fact he works during the day and showed me his workshop. He said it could get loud. I thought he was just overselling it. You know? Make it sound bad, but it wouldn’t really be as bad as he made it sound.

I was wrong.

It’s so much fucking worse.

I’m not sure if it’s the clanging, the sound of welding or the occasional grunt which makes it untenable for me. I shouldn’t even be able to hear his grunts considering the distance since I don’t open my window. But I hear every single one of them and they might as well be massaging my clit with the way they turn me on.

Even though its quiet now, my eyes are wide fucking open. I rub my hands over my face and squeeze my eyes shut, hoping against hope that sleep takes me like a fucking rich princess being kidnapped. I practice deep breathing. I count sheep.

None of it works.

I rip the sheets off my body, not caring about slipping my robe on as I go stomping out of my room. Apparently, before she moved out to be with the man who swept her off her feet, who happens to be the drummer for the rock band Suburban Outcasts, it was the room where Juniper's sister, Iris, lived. It has a homey feel to it, though the walls could do with a little updating. I get the feeling the wallpaper hasn't been changed in quite some time.

Sometimes when I stare at the wall, I think about ripping it down little piece by little piece, but I stop myself. I don't plan to live here forever. It's a place I needed because of the situation my old roommate put me in. Living here is not a permanent state of being.

Hell, I've only ever been in Juniper's room once and it was by mistake. Well, not really. I did walk there of my own free will, knowing where I was going, but it was completely innocent. Somehow one of his t-shirts was still in the dryer when I put a load in, and it got tangled up in my stuff. I just went to his room to leave it there for him.

I even power walked to the bed, set it down and then turned around quickly enough that I barely got a look at anything.

Not like I want to look at anything. I don't. Nothing of Juniper's at least. Nope. Not a thing.

It did smell really fucking good in there, but that's not the point. It's a little detail. One which doesn't even matter.

Nope, not at all.

I stomp down the stairs, figuring Juniper is still out in his workshop even though he's gone quiet. It's not uncommon. He's probably waxing poetic about the next step in turning metal into art.

Why does he have to be so fucking sexy?

This morning when I got home from work, I found him in the kitchen in only a pair of plaid pajama pants. No fucking shirt. His muscles rippled as he took a drink from his glass of orange juice. He keeps his blonde hair short, but it was still ruffled from sleep.

He looked so fucking sexy.

My mouth went dry and my brain short circuited as I looked at him. He turned toward me slowly, his green eyes, the color of moss, taking me in. I swear I felt his eyes on me as if he was touching me. It was heady as hell.

Since I was tired, it was so much harder for me to keep up my normal defenses, but I still scowled at him. He's the reason I can't sleep when I need to sleep. He's the one who has invaded my dreams. He's the one who has made it so I can't be comfortable in the place I'm living.

Because I want to jump him and climb him like a tree.

Does he have to be so damn sexy? Like a taunt and a tease and torture all rolled up into one.

I bet his arms would feel so strong around me. I've seen the art he makes; I have no doubt he would be good with his hands. He could mold me into something amazing and I wouldn't mind.

I'd probably, to my embarrassment, thank him for it.

The problem is that I'm not looking for some hook-up. Been there, done that and I'm looking for something more. The next man I'm with is going to be the last man.

I made a vow to myself, even though I have no idea where it came from. I think it was after my last one-night stand over a year ago. I woke up in a place I didn't know, next to a man I didn't want to see in the light, and I had an epiphany, complete with a lightbulb turning on over my head cartoon style.

I was done continuing to chase something I knew would be unfulfilling. It's been a year full of using my B.O.B., which isn't the

same, but it's been better in so many other ways. I'm not worried about putting on airs or impressing someone.

I'm looking for something real and Juniper has heartbreak written all over him. It's in his scowl.

I let out a scream when I walk into the kitchen to find Juniper standing at the sink, the white wifebeater he has on covered in metal fragments, sweat and dirt. He whirls around, his arms up as if he's ready to defend me from some threat. Little does he know the only threat I have is from the 6'3" man standing in his own kitchen.



## CHAPTER 2

### *JUNIPER*

Zoey. Christ. Of course it's her. I don't know how I didn't feel her approaching, I normally do. It's like an extrasensory sense which is totally and completely attuned to her. It's fucking distracting.

I've been trying to take it out on my art, but it's not working. It hasn't been working. I need it to.

Looking at Zoey is like being hit with one of my sculptures as it crumbles because I haven't welded it properly. It's dangerous as fuck and brutal as hell. Every single time I look into her eyes.

For a second, every time I meet her blue colored gaze, it takes me right back to the moment I opened the door to my house to meet a potential roommate and experienced a moment of beautiful chaos. I wasn't expecting her. I wasn't prepared for being slapped across the face with the rightness embodied in another person.

I don't think anything could have prepared me for Zoey.

Because in a single moment, I knew she was mine. I felt it with the same certainty as when I look at a piece of metal and know it's meant for other things than whatever life it had lived as an object. I was going to make it into more and I was sure as hell not going to let my woman slip through my fingers.

I had been pissed at myself for not specifying I was looking for a guy to take the spare bedroom the moment I set up a time with Zoey for her to come by. Her voice was like velvet over the phone, which is what I think kept me a little dazed and confused as I paced the floor waiting for her to arrive to check out the space.

I had no idea she was going to change my life. I had no idea I was going to fall.

My elation was short lived because then everything I said to Iris, the way I tried to temper the way she fell for Gavin, the famous

fucking hot-shot drummer, came rushing back to me. He fell for her in a moment, from the way he tells it. She wasn't far behind him.

I always thought it was horse shit. Iris was never exactly the responsible one. She didn't need to be. I was responsible enough for us both. I took my job as a protector, as her big brother, like it was my fucking calling.

Maybe it was for a while. If her finding her husband and starting her life wasn't enough to show me I had a different purpose, meeting Zoey definitely was. She twisted me around and gave me something completely different to be focused on.

Her.

Something inside me snapped into place when I saw Zoey. I got the same feeling I do whenever I stepped back from a piece and know it was done. I would know I did everything to bring it to life, to give it a purpose, to let it be seen. Zoey mentally knocked me on my ass and before I knew what was happening, she was planning to move in immediately.

I knew I wanted her close, but it scared the fuck out of me as well. How was I going to keep my hands off her?

I wasn't sure and, even after she's been here a little while, it's something I fight against all the time. I want to touch her.

I can almost feel the way her pulse would jump under my palm as I run it up her neck, unhindered by hair and bared to me because of her short hair. I hadn't really thought about a woman's hair until I saw hers. I didn't have fantasies of grabbing it and tugging, it would be an impossibility anyway.

No, I imagined holding her by the nape of her neck, pulling her to me. I could almost taste her on my lips from running them up and down her neck. It's an enticing piece of real estate on her body, but it's every single inch of her which had me enthralled from the moment I met her.

My need for her has only deepened as I've gotten to know her in bits and pieces. She won't let me have more of her than that and I'm



not sure why. I'm determined to break down her walls.

Even though the way she's glaring at me should send me running. She's fierce as hell. I think that's why I call her 'Sweetheart'. She hides behind a shell, an armor, because she's protecting the kindest heart. I can feel it; it beats for me.

I love the way her eyes dilate when I call her my little nickname for her. I'm not sure if she realizes it, but it's in interest and desire. I'm pretty sure she's been lying to herself, thinking it's in irritation.

I lean back against the kitchen counter, my eyebrows pulling together. "You're the one who snuck up on me, so why are you the one screaming?"

It comes out gruffer than I want it to. I don't mean to be short with her. I want to let out the warmth I feel for her, but it's not easy to do.

It's never been easy for me to show my emotions. It's one of the reasons I sought out a roommate beyond the benefits of the rent they pay. It didn't take me long to realize I missed Iris in the house. It felt too big without her here. It felt like I was losing touch with people and isolating myself too much.

I had gotten used to living with Iris and I couldn't take the quiet anymore. Even when I was out back and banging on metal. It was suffocating me and there were times when it felt like I couldn't think because of all the quiet.

The quiet and the loneliness.

Seeking out a roommate brought me Zoey. I had to consider fate for the first time in my life. Every day I send a little thank you to whatever may be overseeing things because I'm grateful for my woman coming in my life.

Even when it seems like she can't stand me. I know what's underneath the annoyance and frustration she displays. Underneath it all is a fiery hot passion which burns for me.

Zoey crosses her arms across her chest, drawing my eye to her tits. They're topped by hard nipples which are obvious as fuck in the

thin tank top she's wearing with some damn little sleep shorts. The expanse of her legs should not be on display for me right now.

A man only has so much control.

She rolls her eyes, "I don't really see how your question is relevant."

She's come to rest catty corner from me, leaning against the other counter and I haven't missed the way her eyes have taken in my shoulders and my dirty wifebeater. I'm more than happy for my girl to check me out. I love it when she does.

It makes my heart pound. It makes me want to get her all sweaty only to clean her up again. I know I shouldn't touch her. Not yet anyway.

I do get closer, crowding her by resting my hands on the counter on either side of her hips. Her eyes widen as she looks up at me. That's not what does me in. No.

It's when she starts to pant, her perfectly pink lips pouting, that my control almost fucking snaps. It would be so easy to give her what she clearly wants by pressing my lips against hers. I know she'd melt against me and thinking about it makes my cock throb.

I echo her, "You don't see how my question is relevant?"

She swallows hard and lets out a breathy sigh, "Yeah?"

I smirk down at her, wishing it was her reaching for me. I'm not usually one for the woman to make the first move, but in this case, I need to make sure Zoey really wants this. I need to know it's about me, about us, and something she simply can't refuse or ignore.

"This is my house and my kitchen, Zoey." I almost face palm myself because I know I sound like an asshole, but it's like I can't stop it at this point. "Why would it be surprising to find me here?"

"I thought you were working," her voice is small and all I want to do is wrap her up in my arms. I look into her eyes and watch an ember catch there, igniting her fury. "Actually," her chin juts out and if her ire wasn't directed at me, I would find her sexy as fuck, "I know

you were working because I was trying to sleep, and I couldn't because of the fucking racket.”

I take it back, even with her rage directed at me, she's sexy as fuck. Her eyes are narrowed and there might as well be steam coming out of her ears. No one should be as sexy as Zoey is. No one should make my blood boil and my cock thicken like she does.

Even like this, when she's not soft or pliant, I can feel her move through my veins like a drug I can't get rid of. I'm addicted to her. She isn't ready to give into the attraction between us. It's clear in the way her body is stiff and her breathing shallow. But I know it's there and that's enough for me. For now.

I lean just a little bit more into her and take a deep breath, needing her soft vanilla scent to fill my lungs. Vanilla and something spicy like clove or something. I don't know, but it's my favorite fucking smell in the whole wide world.

I wonder if her pussy tastes as good as she smells.

I don't care how long it takes, but I'm going to find out one day. I realize I'm going to have to get past her defenses first. I see the way she shields herself from me and it's not acceptable.

I want all of her.

I want her open to me.

I want her to let me in so I can burrow into her soul. I'll never let her go once she lets me in.

Maybe that's what keeps her at a distance from me. Maybe she's scared. Maybe she's been hurt before.

The last possibility has my fists and jaw clenching. When her eyes widen just a fraction more, I force myself to take a deep breath and relax. It's not her fault she's been hurt before and it's not her fault that the possibility has me wanting to ask her for names so I can go and wipe them from the face of the Earth.

Anyone who was stupid enough to hurt this woman, even with the way she bristles and tries to protect herself, doesn't deserve the life

they're leading. My eyes slide closed for a moment as I try and get myself under control.

"I'm sorry," my voice doesn't come out nearly as contrite as I was going for, but I hope she can hear the truth in my words. "I should have been quieter." I force myself to take a step back and watch as she takes a shuddering breath. "I know you have to sleep, Sweetheart."

Her blue eyes soften slightly at my endearment, and it makes my heart pound in my chest. "You need to work too," the words come out just above a whisper, but the fact she's allowed herself to give me any consideration makes them loud in the quiet around us.

I wish I could lock her in the house. Hell, I wish I could lock her in my room. I wish I could lock her away and give her the life she deserves, but I also know how independent she is. She isn't one who would take kindly to being told what to do or for her freedom to be taken from her, especially considering how much she values her job.

It's an important one so I can't fault her for it, but I hate how she's out at night at the call center. Even if she is doing good and necessary work. I pace most of the night until exhaustion takes me under. The thought of her being out in the world under the cover of darkness without me there at her back to protect her haunts me.

I haven't gotten a good night sleep since she came to live here. I don't think I'll sleep well again until she's in my arms.

"I wish I could do my work at night while you're at work, Zoey."

She scoffs, "Your neighbors would hate you for that."

I can't help but give her a small smile as I casually shrug one shoulder. "Worth it."

Zoey blinks at me and then chuckles while she shakes her head in admonishment. She lifts one of her hands as if she's going to touch me. I still with the hope that she does, feeling her touch me may send me over the edge, but I desperately crave it. When her hand drops, air rushes from my lungs as I try to hide the

disappointment I'm feeling, but it's probably right there on my face for her to see.

"It's okay, Juniper." My cock throbs when she says my name and it takes all my willpower not to press her back against the counter with my body so she can feel just what she does to me. "You have to work too, and I know it."

I cup her cheek, letting myself take this one small liberty even though I know I shouldn't. "I have some welding to do, but I won't hammer anything else today."

"I don't want to be the reason you don't get the pieces completed you need for your show," she gnaws on her lip, a plea in her words and her eyes.

I let my hand drop from her, knowing I need to take things slow with my woman, even though everything in me screams not to. My instincts tell me to kiss her and never stop.

But if she's not ready and she pushes me away, it would kill me.

I take a step back. Then another. Then a third for good measure. I need some distance.

I almost take back my promise not to hammer anymore because the pent up need inside of me desperately needs an outlet. I take my Zoey in again, including the dark circles under her eyes, and I hold my tongue. What I need will never be more important than what she needs.

Right now, my girl needs sleep. If being quiet is all she needs from me, then so be it.

"Thank you," she whispers before she slips out of the kitchen again.

I listen to the way her feet softly pad up the stairs as I force myself not to follow her. I desperately want to, but I can't. Not yet.

I don't know when the right time will be, but I can only hope I know it when it happens because I don't know how much longer I can wait. But I will because I want her to know she's everything to me.

If only I could be softer for her.



## CHAPTER 3

### ZOEY

I've been looking forward to my off weekend for a while and now it's here. Juniper was true to his word the other day and he didn't hammer anything else, letting me get the sleep I desperately needed. I don't know if he did it just to be nice and considerate, but I get the feeling there's more to it.

There's always something in the mossy green depths of his eyes when he looks at me, something I desperately want to uncover and explore, like a trail in the woods which hasn't been used in a long time. I get the feeling the path leads me somewhere magical, but at the same time, what pitfalls would I find on the way? Is it dangerous? Am I safe?

I wish I knew the answers to those questions because my body burns for Juniper. My heart beats faster when he's around and sometimes it feels like I can't take in a full breath. I know there's something between us but I'm not sure if it's just physical or if it's something more.

When I step out of my bedroom, thankful I was able to get some sleep today, the bathroom door opens at the same time. Juniper comes sauntering out, a towel slung low around his waist. He doesn't see me at first as he uses another towel to dry his hair with his head down.

I watch as a droplet of water rolls down his neck, over his collarbone and down his chest. I should not be imagining licking the water from his skin, but I am. I so fucking am.

He always smells woody and fresh, but right now, with the steam billowing from the bathroom and so much of his skin on display it feels like I'm drowning in his comforting smell. I know the moment he spots me because his body freezes and his fingers tighten around where he's tucked the sides of his towel together.



Is he considering dropping it?

I should not be as into that idea as I am. If karma is looking to balance the scales of my life right now, she'd ensure Juniper's towel is on the floor in the next two seconds. Call it a wardrobe malfunction. Call it intention.

I don't care.

I just want to see if everything I've been imagining is true.

It must be. It would be such a shame if he wasn't proportionate. Such a fucking shame.

Juniper is a big man. He makes me feel little and dainty which is a difficult thing to do at 5'7". I've had guys tell me I'm too tall for them, that they prefer women who are shorter and more diminutive.

It never went far with those guys, obviously, but I can't say I don't understand either. Why would you want some sort of Amazonian woman when there are so many more options out there? It's not like men imagine climbing me like a tree. Not in the same way I fantasize about Juniper.

He's the first man I've entertained such a thought. He could take me wrapping my limbs around him and shimmying up. The same can not be said for a lot of the men I've come across before. There was simply no way they could support me.

This man, though? He's different.

"You okay, Zoey?" Juniper's voice is as gruff as ever, but there's something softer underneath it, a purr almost.

I tear my eyes away from the water droplet, now lost in the soft absorbency of the towel around his waist. It wasn't the longest journey on record or anything, but it looked like a damn satisfying one. I've never wanted to be water more than I do right now.

His eyes are boring into mine when I meet them. Are they begging me for something? I must be imagining things because I'm not sure if this hulking man even likes me.

He crowds me, sure, but it could just be an intimidation tactic. I swear he didn't want to live with a woman, I was convinced of it when I set up a time to come and see the house. He certainly wasn't warm when he opened the door, but on the phone he was downright arctic.

I was desperate enough not to care. I needed a place to stay and if I didn't get my shit together then I would have been homeless. That's not an option when I need to sleep most of the day to work my night shift.

Juniper's deep chuckle is abrasive against my mind but gentle against my skin; it's a strange combination which makes me feel strung out. I'm a second away from launching myself at him, damn the consequences. I can feel it—my body readies for the movement, my muscles coiling, ready to spring into action.

I croak out, "What?"

I think he asked me something, but I'm not sure. I try and hold back the need to touch him, the need to feel him pressed up against me, but it's difficult. I want it so badly and my pussy aches with the desire flowing through me. It's all making me feel a little lightheaded.

Before I get the chance to move, Juniper closes the distance between us, his body looming over me. I take a step back even though it's the last thing I want to do. I'm not sure why I do it; instinct I suppose.

He takes another step and I find myself retreating again. The corner of Juniper's mouth quirks up into a smirk and I let out a soft gasp, hoping it's not loud enough for him to hear. It is, of course, and I know because his smirk turns into a full-blown grin.

His green eyes roam over my face until my back hits the wall and a moan slips from my lips. I have a front row seat to his pupils dilating. It's hot as fuck. I swear he smells more potent than he did a moment ago. Is it simply his proximity or is it something else?

"Zoey," he whispers my name with something akin to reverence, which can't be right.

Juniper is a man of destruction. He might make art, but the path to the end, the path to art and beauty, is through violence and power. He molds materials which require his full force to be exerted upon them. He takes something strong and turns it into something else. All through his will and his strength.

Reverence can't be something which comes easy to this man.

He feels so much bigger than me right now. I find myself shrinking into myself and watch as his eyes harden.

"No," he barks out and a shiver works its way up my spine.

*Holy shit.*

Juniper's eyes slide closed, and I find myself holding my breath. His voice is softer, "Don't shy away from me, Sweetheart." When his eyes open slowly, he finds a little more distance between us to close. I brace my hands on the wall behind us, needing it to ground me before I wrap my arms around this man like an octopus and never let him go. "I'll never hurt you."

He says it with such conviction, and I get the feeling he's not only talking about physically hurting me which never crossed my mind.

He's a good man, it's clear the moment you meet him, but he's a little detached from the world and he's fierce as hell. I've learned a little bit about him and it's clear how much he loves his sister and what she means to him.

There are moments when he looks at me and all I can see is a lost man drowning in a sea of not knowing what to do next.

It's a feeling I can relate to. It's one I feel down to my soul. There are so many things I want to be sure about, like the way my roommate and landlord makes me feel, but doubts are vicious and can dig their claws in without warning.

"You can't promise that," the words slip from my lips like honeyed poison. I hate them, but it doesn't make them less true.

What I hate even more is the disappointment and the rejection shining in Juniper's eyes. I've hurt him and I feel my heart crumple

inside of me, a piece of paper which can be destroyed in so many ways, but still smoothed out, though never the same.

“Yes, I can,” he grits through his teeth, finality in his tone.

I want to shake my head. I want to dissuade him from his promise. I want to rail at him to stop myself from grieving the lies I’ve been telling myself from the moment I met the man...but I can’t.

I simply can’t.

Juniper leans forward and kisses my forehead. He’s invaded my space plenty of times, but he’s never put his lips on my skin, and I find it causes my every cell to erupt with awareness. I almost reach for him. I almost latch on.

Before I can catch up to what’s happening, Juniper steps back. “You’re off tonight, right?”

I’m mildly surprised he knows my schedule since it’s not like I posted it to the fridge. There’s a note of suspicion in my voice, “Yeah?”

“Good.” He gives one decisive nod. “Come out tonight with me.”

“With you?” My eyebrows come together, and I run my palm over the top of my head. When I had long hair, I used to run my fingers through it, but when I cut it all off, it felt like I shed an artifice I no longer needed. “You want me to go out where with you?”

A slow smile grows on Juniper’s face. “We’re going to Friday Night Beer Night with the family.”

“Whose family?” I’m all suspicion now. “Your sister?”

Juniper shrugs one shoulder casually and puts a little more distance between us, leaning against the far wall of the hallway. As much as I do wish he was closer, I’m not upset about the view either.

Damn, a man should not be so packed with muscle. I know he got it from working, from beating metal into submission and not letting up until he masters it. My thighs clamp together, but it’s not helpful in the least.

To his credit, Juniper's gaze doesn't waver. He simply looks at me, watching me, waiting for me and my answer even though him asking me to go out sounded a little more like a demand than a question. I guess it's just the kind of guy he is.

Surprisingly, I don't mind.

I should.

Okay, maybe I do a little.

"My sister will be there," he cryptically replies.

I snark, "Are you purposefully being about as helpful as a fortune cookie?"

Juniper barks out a laugh and smiles at me as if he thinks I'm the most adorable thing. I melt just a little bit more for him. At this rate, I won't be able to go out because I won't be corporeal.

"When Iris met her husband, she got a big group of friends as well. It's a package deal kind of thing." He stretches his arm up and scratches the back of his neck causing his muscles to pull and my mouth to go dry. "It's a whole thing. They brought me into the fold even though I was kind of a dick in the beginning."

"You?" I scoff. "You were a dick in the beginning?" It seems I'm getting my bearings again or maybe I'm just becoming desensitized to all his skin on display. Which is kind of a shame. I bat my eyelashes innocently, "That's so hard to believe."

As Juniper grins at me, the covered in barbs exterior he often wears has melted away and I'm left with only the man underneath. A man I'm insanely attracted to. A man who has a fierce heart and artist's hands.

"Whatever, Sweetheart," the tone of his voice makes it sound a little more like 'smartass' than 'sweetheart', but I'm okay with it. This time. He winks at me. "You better get ready. We leave in about an hour."

I scrunch up my face and look down at the pajamas I'm still wearing. "What should I wear?"

Juniper's eyes travel down my body and then back up, the perusal slow and sensuous. "You can wear whatever you want, Zo. You'll be the most gorgeous woman in the place no matter what, but it's nothing fancy, just a bar."

My heart flutters at his compliment which is when I realize I've basically agreed to go before I was even sure I wanted to. I narrow my eyes at Juniper, about to protest, but before I can get any words out, he's striding down away and into his room. When the door closes with a finality, I know I won't be getting out of going out tonight.

Well, I guess I should get ready to meet his family.

Because that's not weird at all.



## CHAPTER 4

### *JUNIPER*

I'm nervous as hell as I drive Zoey to The Mile High. It's a big fucking deal for her to be coming with me to meet the family. Iris is going to freak out, but it'll be in a good way. I know it. She won't even hold the shit I gave her when she fell in love with Gavin against me, even though she should.

I watch Zoey out of the corner of my eye when I can, taking in the way she looks nervous as well. Maybe I should warn her, but meeting these people is kind of something you just have to do. There's no preparing for something like this.

I mean what would I even say?

*Prepare to be mauled by a bunch of people who will want to love you? Don't mind them if they get in appropriate with the touching and the affection? They apparently know how to show it in ways I don't understand?*

Yeah, maybe not.

"So," Zoey clears her throat and glances over at me, causing my eyes to shift straight ahead. I don't know why; it's a silly reaction. "Is your sister the only family which will be there?"

I wince, "Kind of." She lets out a huff of annoyance and I barely stop myself from chuckling. I don't think it would go over well. "The group of friends I mentioned, they're more like a family. It might not be blood which ties them together, but they're still a family. The art show I'm having," I add sheepishly, "it's at the art gallery a group of them own which is attached to a photo studio and a tattoo shop."

Zoey gasps, "Banks Ink.?"

I'm a little surprised, which is evident in my voice, "You know it?"



“Duh,” I might not be looking at her, but I can feel her eye roll from here. “Of course, I know it. Beckett Banks is wicked with a tattoo machine. He used to work at a shop where a friend of mine works.”

“Really?” I’m a little taken aback. “Vibrant Ink?”

Now it’s her turn to sound incredulous, “You know it?”

I bark out a laugh and nod slowly, “Iris keeps me up to date no matter how often I’m around the family. I heard about the owner’s son being dropped on his doorstep. The nanny he ended up falling for is the sister to one of the artists at Banks.”

She laughs, the rich sound soothing my soul. “Monroe told me about it, but she didn’t go into much detail.”

I glance her way and smirk. “I’m sure if you want the drama and the details, the girls will be more than willing to fill you in.”

“The girls?” She echoes me, but there’s something in her voice which has me looking her way. She’s staring out the window, watching Denver pass us by, with a sadness rolling off her.

I can’t help it, I reach over and let my hand rest on her thigh, giving her a squeeze when I do. She sighs and covers my hand with hers. Here I thought she was going to push me away for a moment. Zoey accepting comfort from me, even if it’s only a little bit, has my cock standing at full attention and taking notice.

It’s a problem I’m constantly having around her.

I’m surprisingly okay with it.

I make my voice as gentle as possible, but it still comes out like a barked command, “What’s wrong?”

Zoey shakes her head, but she doesn’t turn and look at me. I’d give almost anything for her blue eyes to be on me right now. I need it. She’s so fucking expressive when I look into her eyes. She can’t hide anything from me there.

“Nothing,” she lets out a forlorn sigh and then sits up a little straighter, her thumb idly passing back and forth along my hand. “I

just don't have much luck with female friends."

"What about Monroe?" Again, I go for soothing, but it comes out more demanding.

Fucking hell, I'm going to drive this woman away before I get the chance to tell her how I really feel.

And wouldn't that be a fucking travesty?

"We've been friends for a while, but she's not like a lot of other women. She works in an all-male environment, except for her. She's used to being around guys. I think it's probably why we get along so well."

I make a humming sound in the back of my throat, not buying it for a minute, but knowing full well she's not going to believe it until she meets Amelia and the girls. If anyone can set her straight about having female friends, it's them. They're so much more than friends; they're sisters of a sort.

They're family.

I know they'll accept Zoey without question. Well, maybe a few questions, but not bad ones. Not ones which make her feel small. Only questions because they're curious about the newest member of their family.

Whether to accept her won't ever be the question. She's with me so she's included. It's all they need to know.

I've seen it happen a few times now, not counting Iris since I had my head up my ass for that experience. I know it can and will happen.

When we park, I'm out of the car and to Zoey's side before she can get the door open. Her blue eyes are big and round as she blinks up at me. I don't stop myself from reaching in and grabbing her hand to help her out of the car. I don't let go of her hand either.

I'm not sure I could even if I wanted to.

I want to touch her. I want to hold her. I want to be as close to her as I can.

She's so damn gorgeous. If I don't stake my claim immediately, some asshole is going to try and get close to her. That simply won't do. There's no way I would allow it to happen. Not today, not tomorrow, not ever.

Nope.

I tuck her into my side as best I can as we head into The Mile High. I should have warned her more, but we're here now. Too late for all that.

The moment we're inside, I spot the family right away. They're kind of hard to miss, honestly. Zoey's eyes are widening as she takes in where I'm looking, and the number of people crowded around a few high-top tables.

There's a nervousness in her tone when she looks up at me, "We're not meeting that giant group, are we?" I don't answer at first, lost in the swirling blue of her eyes. When I don't answer she groans, "Of course we are."

I lean into her and kiss her temple, needing to give her some comfort. It's not enough. I could kiss her from here until eternity and I'd be more than happy to do it. I don't think she'd be opposed either.

Tonight. Before we go to sleep, I'm going to kiss her. I'm going to take from her. I'll give her everything in me in return. I know she can handle it.

She was made for me.

"They're going to love you," I breathe against her temple and then steal a kiss against the top of her head, the short hair there tickling my lips and making them tingle, as if they weren't already just from touching her.

That's when I hear my name being called and I look over at the group to see Iris, her hair up in a messy bun and the rainbow dyed in the underside of her hair twisted up through the blonde strands. I find

myself smiling, truly smiling and my sister's wave falters for a second because of it.

Just like when I saw Zoey for the first time, the moment strikes the middle of my chest. She's surprised at me smiling. It's fucked up if I let myself think about it for too long.

I always felt so weighed down by life, the only peace I could find was in taking care of Iris. Worrying about her and taking care of her was something I took on proudly. Growing up our parents worked a lot and making sure Iris was taken care of fell on me. I was happy to do it. They loved us and did their best, but there were times when the only things I had in my life were Iris and my art.

I'm doing pretty good making my art into something and I know this family is a big reason for that. When I did my first show at Banks Art. I was shocked at the response I got from my sculptures; it was far more than what I ever thought would happen. The exposure I got there has helped me find some success, including some commissioned pieces. Now a second show is looming and I'm not ready.

I will be, but I've been slowed down because my new work has a distinctly feminine form. All because of Zoey. If I didn't know I was head over heels for this spitfire of a woman when I met her, the moment my art started to emulate her I would have known.

It's like her touch is everywhere. Except on my dick, but that will come soon enough.

Zoey looks nervous as fuck, so I hold up a finger to my sister even though it looks like she's about to jump out of her skin as she looks between the two of us. Instead of leading my girl over to the family, I steer her to the bar. When I see Kevin behind the bar, I give him a small wave.

He grins at me and gives me a chin lift, making his way over. He's part of the family too. He's a good guy and he always makes sure to take care of us. I'm sure it has something to do with finding his soulmate at one of SO's Halloween parties after he met her at a

costume shop. If it weren't for the party, he'd probably be a miserable fuck right now.

"Hey, man," Kevin greets me brightly and smiles at Zoey, curiosity in his gaze. It's not normal for me to be here with a woman so I'm not surprised at his reaction. "What can I get you?"

"I'm going to have a beer." I look at my woman and tilt my head to the side slightly, dropping my voice, "What about you, Sweetheart?"

Zoey glances over her shoulder at my family who seem to take up all the room in the bar. I get it. Being around the family can be overwhelming.

She forces a smile and looks at Kevin. "I'll have a beer too. Whatever you have on tap." She shrugs one shoulder, sounding casual, "I'm not picky."

Be still my fucking heart.

Kevin grins at me while he pours our beers. I might not normally be one for small talk, most of my communication coming across just fine between silence and brooding, but with the family I do put in some effort.

"How's Remi doing?"

Kevin's smile turns up a few fucking notches. "She's great, thanks for asking." He looks at Zoey again and I know the time of him being quietly curious is over. "Who is your lady friend?"

Zoey lifts her hands in an awkward wave. "I'm Zoey, but I'm not his lady friend, I'm his roommate."

Kevin's eyebrows shoot up and he gives me a look of understanding. He shakes his head as he puts our beers on the bar, and I go to grab my wallet. "This one's on the house. Congratulations."

"Congratulations?" Zoey sounds confused as fuck and it's damn adorable.

"Yeah," Kevin chuckles, "on finding each other."

“We’re just roommates,” she speaks slowly as if talking to someone not too quick on the uptake.

“Sure,” Kevin placates her. He nods toward the family. “You should listen to some of the stories from the family and then come back here for another beer.” He winks at her. “It’ll be on the house too because I think you’ll be singing a different tune.”

I place my hand on Zoey’s lower back when she grabs her glass and I follow suit. “Okay,” my tone is a little sharp, “I think you’ve sufficiently freaked her out. I thought you were supposed to listen and not talk or something. Maybe be welcoming.”

Zoey smacks my chest and I look down at her in wonder. Her eyes are big and round like she can’t believe she just did that. Kevin’s laugh is loud and boisterous.

“What was that for?”

Zoey gnaws on her bottom lip as if she’s unsure how to answer before she straightens her spine. She hisses, “Be nice.”

Kevin’s words are filled with amusement, “Zoey, you’re going to fit right in.”

I scowl at him, and he raises up his hands in surrender. Even though she tries to hide it, I still see the secret little smirk my girl has on her face. If he amuses her, considering I know he’s a happy as fuck man with the other half of his soul and Zoey is mine, I’ll allow it.

“Come on,” I lead her away from the bar and over to the family where I’m finding quite a few expectant faces taking in our approach. I’m not surprised. I kiss her temple again and whisper, “Relax.”

To my surprise, she does.

We don’t even get to the table before Iris breaks away and waddles toward us. She’s ready to pop with my first niece any day now. Gavin is following close behind her. He might be a famous fucking rock star and covered in tattoos which most people would find intimidating, but he’s a softie for my sister.

Now that I know how it feels to have your heart beating within the body of another, I get it. I meet his gaze and give him a nod of respect; one I hadn't allowed myself to completely feel until right this moment. Gavin's steps falter, but then he's back to being on his wife like a shadow.

He murmurs to her, "You promised you'd take it easy, little Rainbow."

Iris huffs and rolls her eyes as she comes to a stop in front of us. She looks at Gavin and smiles as if his concern is adorable and not completely founded. "I *am* taking it easy. I can walk a few feet and greet my brother and his," Iris trails off as she turns and looks at me expectantly.

"Roommate," Zoey blurts out.

I clench my jaw so I don't kiss her right here and prove to her I'm much more than a roommate. Gavin has a knowing smirk on his face and Iris nods slowly.

"I didn't know that's what the kids are calling it these days," Iris says innocently.

Zoey blushes, but she laughs and shakes her head. I take over and make quick introductions. It takes all of two seconds before Iris is pulling my girl away from me and leading her back to the table. Amelia, who is married to Beckett Banks and the official-unofficial matriarch of the family, meets my eyes and flashes me a brilliant smile.

I can tell Gavin wants to follow his wife, but I stop him with a hand on his shoulder. When he turns to me slowly, I see the questions in his eyes.

"I get it now." I shake my head and look at Zoey, feeling a lightness I've never felt before in my entire existence when I see her smiling at something Amelia and Andrea, the manager of the Banks businesses, is saying. I look back at Gavin. "I'm sorry I was a dick when you met Iris and I tried to get between you two. I know I

apologized before and I meant it, but I didn't really understand the depth of my disrespect to both of you."

Gavin's smile is so big he looks a little deranged. "It's all good man." He nods toward Zoey, and I look to find Walsh and Troy eyeing her as their wife, Ellie, rolls her eyes between them. I just know they're going to try and give her shit. "Better go help your girl."

Iris is practically jumping on the balls of her feet in excitement. My tone is teasing when I retort, "Same to you."

Gavin lets out a groan before he starts to move toward her. I'm hot on his heels because I might be excited about Zoey meeting everyone, but I'll be damned if she's going to tell everyone we're just roommates. Hell no.

I'm staking my claim. She's mine.





## CHAPTER 5

### ZOEY

I don't think I've ever felt more overwhelmed and comfortable at the same time. These people are amazing, and I can practically feel how they've opened their arms and hearts to me. I should find it strange, but it feels oddly right and perfect.

I'm usually a little wary of people and what their ulterior motives are, but I don't find myself asking those same questions with these people. It's clear they don't want anything from me other than getting to know me. It's refreshing as fuck.

They're all so nice too. Troy is funny as hell, but I can feel how irritated Juniper is becoming every time Troy makes me laugh. I've met so many people and I probably won't remember all their names. Well, except for the guys in the rock band Suburban Outcasts. I already knew their names and having a beer with them is kind of strange and really fucking cool.

Iris is glowing and looks like she's about to pop at any moment. Her husband, Gavin, dotes on her. It's adorable as hell and makes me a little jealous. I can't help but think about how Juniper would act if I was pregnant.

Walsh leans around Troy and grins at me. "Do you have any tattoos, Zoey?"

Juniper growls, "You're not tattooing my girl, don't even fucking think about it." He points to Olivia, who is grinning with a knowing glint in her eye. "If anyone at Banks is going to tattoo her, it's going to be Liv."

I wave my hand dismissively which causes Juniper to tighten his hold on my waist. It was so comfortable I had forgotten he was touching me there, honestly. Which should strike me as strange but seems pretty much on par with us.

“I do have a tattoo and while I know how kick ass you all are, I’m good with my artist.” I shrug one shoulder and smirk. “She’s a friend of mine.”

Troy narrows his eyes at me and cocks his head to the side. “There’s more to the story.”

Olivia, who looks like a pixie with her lavender hair, snaps her fingers. “Monroe. I bet you get tattooed at Vibrant by Monroe.”

My mouth drops open and I blink at her. “How the hell did you know that?”

Olivia gives me jazz hands. “I’m just good like that.”

I find myself laughing. I’ve done that a lot tonight. So many people with smiles on their faces and welcoming arms. As awesome as it’s been, I’m kind of tired. I didn’t sleep a full day today and I can feel it catching up with me.

When I look up into Juniper’s eyes, I find his green depths studying me with concern written on his brow. He doesn’t look around, keeping our gazes locked as he rumbles, “Zoey’s had enough for the night. We’re going to head home.”

I want to scoff. I want to tell him he doesn’t know me, and he can’t make decisions for me, but the truth is I do want to go home.

Home.

I’m not sure when his place, along with the room I’m renting became home, but it did. I was pissed at my old roommate for putting me in the position of finding another place to live, but right now I’m grateful.

It’s a whirlwind of goodbyes and hugs and promises of being in touch before we’re heading out the door. Surprisingly, I believe the promises. These are clearly the type of people who are close and stay close, putting in the work to make sure they’re aware of what’s going on with each other.

I groan, slightly exasperated, “Are you part sheep dog or something?”

“What?” Juniper chuckles, amusement in his words, “Why would you ask that?”

“Because you’re herding me pretty fucking effectively right where you want me,” I tease him.

The next thing I know I’m being pressed up against the side of Juniper’s truck, his big arms caging me in. My eyes are big and round as I look up at him to find him close. Very fucking close. His woody smell envelopes me. Even though around the edges is the scent of the bar, it’s not horrible. I can still smell him underneath it all and he makes my mouth water.

“You’re not quite right where I want you, Sweetheart,” his words drip with promises of passion and pleasure.

“Where then?” The question is a breathy whisper, and it makes Juniper grin at me.

He doesn’t answer in words, and I’ve never been more thankful for action being the name of the game more than this moment. As Juniper’s lips descend on mine, everything in my body is focused on the press of him against me. When he pries my lips open with his own for his tongue to explore my mouth, I don’t resist. I melt against him as his body pins me against the side of his truck, not letting me fall or falter.

He holds me steady, and I can feel the evidence of his arousal against my body. He is definitely large and in charge, if you catch my drift. I moan into his mouth as one of his hands grips the side of my neck, holding me in place and molding me to be exactly what he wants, what he needs.

He might be gruff and too fucking loud to allow me to sleep sometimes, but this kiss makes up for a lot. I’ve been kissed before, but nothing like this. This is an experience. I don’t know if I need to actually get his cock inside of me if he keeps kissing me like this.

When he shifts his hips and his cock presses harder against my hip, I know I’m full of it. It would be more accurate to consider if I’m going to survive if he doesn’t slide himself deep inside me. I need it.

My body is yearning for it, creating a chasm of need inside of me and I know there's only one thing which can fill it.

Him.

"Juniper," I moan against his lips.

"Yeah, Sweetheart," he pulls back just far enough to rasp the words, "you've figured it out. I want you in my bed, in my life. Permanently."

"I'm your roommate," I whimper.

It's a weak argument and I know it, but it's also the truth. Isn't this the same as sitting where you eat or something? Dipping the pen in the company ink? It should feel like a bad idea. Even though my body is revolting at the idea of not being in Juniper's bed.

"Zoey," he cups my face in his large hands. It's dark enough out here that it's difficult to make him out, but I think I'd be able to see him no matter what kind of light we're in. "You're so much more than my roommate." He kisses my lips softly, a promise there, "You're mine."

Before I can protest, even though I'm not sure where to start, Juniper opens the door to his truck and picks me up by my hips to put me in the passenger seat before buckling me in. It's quiet as we start to drive, but with each passing moment the tension increases between us. I'm pretty sure when we can get our hands on each other again, it's going to be explosive.

"Your family is nice," I whisper the words and feel the truth of them inside of me. It was overwhelming at first, but I was able to find a way to relax around everyone. "I don't remember the last time I've had so much fun."

Juniper's hand lands on my thigh and he gives a squeeze. "They really liked you." A touch of embarrassment seeps into his tone, "I hope it wasn't too much for you."

I rub my palm along the top of my head, feeling the short hair there. "They weren't. It was nice. I can see they all love each other

very much.” As I think back on the night, I laugh lightly. “It was kind of strange to meet rock stars and to see one of them follow around your sister as if he’s human bubble wrap.”

“If he hadn’t done it, I would have. She’s about to pop,” he defends himself.

Iris is amazing. She’s super sweet and I could see how much love she has for her brother. When she pulled me away from him, she leaned into me and whispered, “I don’t know what you’re doing to Juni, but keep doing it.”

I didn’t understand what she was talking about at first, but the longer I spent around them, the more kernels of information I got. Juniper was still stoic and downright grumpy, but I read between the lines and figured out he used to be worse. It’s hard to believe, but I’m inclined to.

When we pull up to the house, Juniper is out of the truck and around to my side as quick as lightning. I had a few beers, but he only had the one since he was driving. I wonder if this giddy feeling inside of me is because of the beer or if it’s all him.

When Juniper reaches in and pulls me out only to throw me over his shoulder before he starts stalking toward the front door of our house, I’m pretty sure it’s all him. Considering I want this just as much as he does, I go limp over his shoulder.

The low growl he lets out is all appreciation and it goes straight to my clit. Juniper doesn’t stop until he’s stomped through the house and upstairs to his room. It takes me a moment to get my bearings when he rights me.

Juniper is looking down at me with such concern and there’s a hint of vulnerability in his voice, “Are you sure you want this, Zoey? That you want me? Because once I have you, I’m never letting go.”

Juniper is clearly a man of action and so it’s exactly what I give him. I strip my clothes, not bothering to be slow and sensual about it. When I bare my torso and expose the tattooed there, he licks his bottom lip as if he can’t wait to taste me.

He's standing as still as one of his sculptures and I wonder if he needs the words too. "I want this, Juniper. I want you." I cup his strong jaw in my hands and pull him down so he's a little closer to me as I rise onto my tiptoes. "I'm just not sure how long I can offer you."

He strikes as fast as a viper, his arms wrapping around me like steel bands and yanking me against his chest. "How about forever, Sweetheart? Does that sound long enough?"

I should tell him no. I should tell him I'm not sure I can give him so much. I've been burned before. I've given my heart to a man who couldn't be trusted with it, and I have the scars to prove it.

Juniper is different. He's proven it to me, but it's hard to let go of the past and the reverberations of heartache which still exist within me. I want to believe this with everything in me. But can I?

He must sense my hesitation as he takes a step back from me and strips his clothes. As much as I want to look over his body, I find I can't. His eyes have me hooked and won't let me go.

When he pulls me against him this time, I can feel the hot, hard brand of his cock pressed against my body. His lips hover above mine, "It's okay. I'll prove to you I'm not going anywhere, and our future is together. Just give me a chance."

I take a deep breath and leap as much as I can right now. "I can do that."

His lips are on me even as the words echo around us, giving us permission to give into this thing which has been pulsing and growing between us. When he nudges me backward toward his bed I go willingly. He uses his strength to his advantage, lifting me up and placing me gently on the bed, following me down and covering my body with his.

He's so much larger than me, broad and protective. He makes me feel small, but also safe. My legs part and wrap around his hips, wanting us to be closer.

“Please,” I moan, “I need you inside me right now, Juniper. I can’t wait any longer. I’m covered and I’m clean.”

Juniper grunts and something flashes in his eyes at my words, and I know it’s possession, it’s the thought of any other man touching me. How the hell do I know that?

“You can’t wait any longer?” He grits out the words which match the tension I can feel in his body. “I’ve wanted you since the moment I opened the door. I went from unsure if I wanted a female roommate to falling over myself to make sure you stayed.” He kisses my lips softly before kissing along my jaw and down my neck. “I don’t want you to ever leave. This is your home.”

His words are swirling around me, but it’s hard to concentrate when he reaches my breast and sucks one of my nipples into his mouth. I arch my back, wanting more, needing all of him. I should have gotten a better look at his cock, but his eyes wouldn’t let me. He feels very blessed as his length slides between my pussy lips.

The easy glide between us is further proof of how wet I am. I’m aching for him. I need him to fuck me hard.

“I’ll give you what you need. I’ll relieve your ache,” he groans against my skin before his lips travel across my body to suck my other nipple into his mouth.

I blink, trying to get my brain back up to speed because everything is starting to blur into a haze of pleasure. Not like I’m complaining. It feels too damn good to be complaining about anything.

“I said that out loud?”

Juniper pops off my tit, his eyes darker and looking at me with so much fucking intent I shudder and rock my hips, needing more friction. “You did,” Juniper’s voice is deep and dark. He shakes his head slowly and lines up the blunt end of his cock against my entrance. “I’ll always give you what you need.”

My lips part and then he steals my breath away by shoving his fat cock inside of me in one thrust. I gasp and then groan at the way



he's stretching my pussy. There's a burn, but what is no longer there is the ache which originated from denying myself everything this hulking artist has to offer me.

He starts moving slowly, his hips moving in a rhythm I find tantalizingly hypnotic. As his movements speed up and gain intensity, I start moving with him. When my nails dig into his shoulders, he lets out a groan that makes my clit buzz.

"Fuck, Zoey," he growls. "I'm not going to last, your pussy is too tight, too fucking perfect." His eyes drill into mine, making me almost believe I really am his. "Touch your clit for me."

His words have me moaning and arching my back. I find my hand sliding down my torso without even realizing it. His moss-colored eyes track the movement, and he lifts slightly from the bed, so he doesn't miss a single moment. He continues to fuck me, a light sheen of sweat covering his skin and showing me how much strength he's exerting.

The moment I graze my clit, I go off like a fucking rocket. Juniper's lips crash against mine, swallowing every one of my sounds. He pumps into me, fucking me harder with each stroke. I want it all. I beg for it with my whimpers and moans.

He must understand because he gives me exactly what I need. Something whispers through my mind that he always will. I push the thought aside because it's not important right now.

"Gonna come, Zo," Juniper growls. "Gonna fill you up."

My limbs tighten around him as he fills me with his cock. I'm already thinking about the next time. I want him to take me from behind so I can feel his big hands gripping my hips. As my pussy squeezes his length, I know I'm going to come again when he does. My clit is sensitive, but I continue to circle it with my finger.

"Please," I whimper.

Juniper lets out a long, low moan as he pushes his cock as deep as it can and lets go. Every spurt of cum matches the beating of our

hearts. We bask together in the afterglow as we come down from the high.

Even as exhaustion starts to pull me under, I want to hold onto this feeling. This closeness. Juniper is so much more than what I thought when I first met him. He's more than an artist and a brother.

I slip off to sleep, finding bliss in beautiful satisfaction. He might have been my roommate, but then he kissed me. It unlocked the reality staring me in the face. He's the guy for me and I was brought to his doorstep for a reason.

I hope it's real in the morning light.



## CHAPTER 6

### *JUNIPER*

The weight shifting in bed and Zoey's ass wiggling against my morning wood is what alerts me to her attempt to escape. I'm not going to let it happen. Not when she could try and avoid me or misinterpret what happened last night. I'm not going to allow it.

I was serious last night when I told her that once I'm inside her it's over. If she thought it was all hot air and I wouldn't keep my word, she's going to be in for a rude awakening. I haven't said it, but I'm in love with the girl and I won't be letting her go.

My heart wouldn't allow it and I'm pretty sure my body would revolt if I tried.

Everything which was up in the air in my life before, the questions and the uncertainty, came into beautiful focus the moment I saw her and it's something I intend to hold onto for the rest of my life. I need a purpose in my life and she's it for me.

I'm going to help make all her dreams come true. The only payment I want in return is her love and her life. We'll give each other everything.

She tries to wiggle out of my hold again, but I don't let her. My hand glides up her body to cup her tit, my thumb sliding over her nipple. Her body responds to mine immediately which has my dick throbbing against her ass, begging me to slide into her wet heat.

I never knew heaven before I slid inside my woman's body. I know it now and I plan to devote myself to worshiping her for the rest of my life.

"Where are you trying to go, Sweetheart?" My voice is heavy with sleep and coarse as hell, making her freeze in my hold.

"Um," she holds the sound out as if she's buying herself some time, "I figured I should go back to my bed?"

She poses it as a question and not a statement and I nuzzle my face into her neck in response, thankful, again, I don't have a whole mess of hair to contend with and can get to her skin so easily. My woman having short hair has its advantages. And it makes her look like a fucking badass.

“Are you working tonight?”

She's going to learn very quickly that her question is utterly ridiculous. If I have my way, which I have every intention to, my Zoey isn't going to be sleeping anywhere other than in this bed from now on. If she needs me to prove how serious I am then I'm prepared to do that.

I'll do anything for her.

“No, this is my weekend off, but I'll have to get some sleep today.” She lets out a sigh. “I can't totally flip over my sleeping schedule when I'm not working, though it's tempting. It makes it too hard to go back to work.”

I cuddle up against her, curling my body around hers and hoping it makes her feel safe and comforted instead of trapped. The way she relaxes against me tells me everything I need to know. It has my entire body buzzing with need and possession.

“Good.” I kiss her neck and nip at her earlobe causing her to suck in a sharp breath. I can't help but smile at how damn cute she is and the way a blush works its way up her neck. I give her breast a squeeze, reminding her exactly the way I'm touching her body. “Maybe you'd like to hang out with me while I work. When you need to take a nap or something, I can stop. I don't want to keep you up if you need to sleep, Sweetheart.”

Zoey rolls in my arms and I lighten my hold just enough to allow her to do so even though I hate letting of her even a little. I hate not having the weight of her breast in my hand, but it is overshadowed by being able to look into her blue eyes and having both of her round globes pressed against my chest. Her eyes search mine. I'm not sure what she's looking for, but I have a pretty good idea.

Her voice is tentative, “You don’t want me to go back to my room?”

“Never,” the word comes out as a snarl which has her eyes widening. I shake my head as my hand glides up her spine and grabs the nape of her neck. There’s a challenge in my tone, “Did you think I was going to let you do some fucked up walk of shame in your own home?”

Zoey blinks at me and squeaks out, “My home?”

I find myself grinning at her; she’s so fucking cute. I nod slowly, my words measured, “Yes, Zo. This is your home. It was the moment I opened the door and you walked over the threshold. This is where you belong. I don’t know how I held off for so long letting you sleep in the other room, but it’s ending today. This is your room, your bed.”

“That’s a really big step, Juniper,” she casts her eyes downward; I hate it.

I grip her chin between my thumb and forefinger, bringing her eyes back up to mine. There’s no malice in my words, but they are firm, “No, it’s not. It’s not a big step, Zoey, because it’s the right step. I knew it the moment I met you. I would have had you sleeping right here next to me the first night if I thought I could get away with it.”

She teases me, “Is there anything you don’t think you can get away with?”

I smirk at her and then roll us so she’s straddling me, my hard cock trapped between us. She might not be ready to say all the sweet words and believe my own, but she can’t deny how much her body wants me. I can feel how wet she is as my shaft splits the lips of her pussy. She’s coating me in her arousal, making me groan as I grip her hips.

“Stop denying what we both know is true,” I growl out the words, needing her to feel how fucking serious I am about this. About us.

I grip her hip with one hand, directing her high enough as I grip the base of my dick with my other hand and angle myself upward.

Her blue eyes darken when she feels the crown against her entrance and starts to sink down onto me.

Letting go of my cock, I grip both of her hips and slam her down my length, both of us moaning, the sound melding and creating something all our own. We work together, my hips pumping upward as she rides me and my hands on her hips helping her set the pace. I want to give control over to her in some ways, but I'm unable to do so completely. I need her to know the passion which burns between us is too big to contain; it's too big to go slow.

Our bodies take over as our eyes remain locked. I see her doubts flit there, but when my thumb presses against her clit, I chase them away. I plan to do it over and over again until the only thing left for her to feel is love.

I love this woman. I have from the moment I met her, and it's only deepened with every moment I've been able to steal from her. She is beautiful and captivating, but she's so much more too.

"Zoey," I groan her name as our movements become faster and more forceful, as we chase our release. "Fucking hell. You're perfect."

There's a flush to her cheeks and I'm not sure if it's from my words or the pure fucking carnal passion she's feeling. I sit up and suck one of her nipples into my mouth, one of her hands going to my head and holding me in place as I tease her flesh with my tongue.

I groan against her skin, unable to feel anything other than her and the bliss she creates in my soul. Her back arches, but I don't let up on my assault. I want my touch to consume her. I want the need I've only felt with this woman to chase everything else away for both of us.

She's so selfless. I've seen the haunting shadows in her eyes when she's come off a shift. Sometimes there is a lightness there and I know she's helped people feel safe, but then there are the other times. The times when I can see the pain she's carrying around because she wasn't able to help someone the way she wanted to.

I never thought about the burden on the people who answer the phone when you're at your worst—when an emergency is forcing you to call 911. It never occurred to me they took on the pain of the people they were trying to help.

Now, faced with the woman I love living under that burden, I can see it and appreciate it. She carries the weight of it all and the guilt when things don't turn out well. It's all a numbers game, statistics and triage, but those are still real people who need real help.

I might not be able to do anything about her calls, but I can help her when she's home. I can take some of the burden and give her happiness in return. She'll never wonder where she stands or if she has support. I'm there for her.

For the rest of my life.

Always.

Her pussy starts to clamp down around my length as she moans my name and I know she's close. I'm going to follow her right over the edge. Because she demands nothing less.

When I nip at her nipple, the slight sting of pain as her nails dig into my scalp as I send the same zing through her is what sends us both tumbling over the edge.

Our panting breaths and the final slap of skin against skin as our bodies lock up and she comes on my cock, my cum filling up her willing and waiting channel, reverberate around the room. The evidence of the passion between us echoes around us as we collapse back onto the bed, her ear pressed against my pounding heart.

I can't help but touch her, my hands roaming over her back. My hands are calloused, years of working hard with metal isn't something I can hide. Her skin is so smooth and I almost regret marring the silkiness with the roughness of my own.

The way she shivers above me tells me she doesn't mind and likes it.



I find myself smiling as she burrows deeper against me.

“I like waking up this way,” her voice is soft and innocent, sated in a way which makes me want to pound my chest and shout it out for the world to hear.

“You’ll wake up this way every day for the rest of our lives if it’s what you want, Sweetheart.”

Zoey shifts slightly, her eyes coming up to meet mine and I know she’s looking for the lie. She’s looking for the chink in my armor, but I know she won’t find it. I mean every single word and even if it takes a lifetime, I’m going to prove it to her.

I kiss her forehead and then cup her cheeks bringing her face up to mine so I can kiss her lips gently. She sighs against my mouth, and I feel a little more of her walls crumbling. It won’t take long before they’re down and she’s defenseless.

She doesn’t have to worry; I would never take advantage of her vulnerable state. I’ll be her wall, her shield, her everything.

“How about a shower and then we can go out to the workshop for a little while before we nap,” I suggest gently.

I want her to see my art, I want her there while I’m creating. She’s the muse I never knew I needed, but it’s clear as day now with her in my arms. I was waiting for her to wake something up inside of me and, now that she has, I never want to go back to the way it was before.

I was stoic, my own means of protecting myself. I was closed off, afraid to let anyone in and unsure of what they needed from me.

Not with Zoey. I want to be an open book. I want her to trust me.

The moment my lips met hers, I knew how deeply true it was and how it would change my life. It’s a change I welcome because having her in my arms is worth everything to me. It’s more than she could ever imagine.

I’m never letting go.



## CHAPTER 7

### ZOEY

It's been a week since the night I went out with Juniper to meet his family, and everything changed for me. When I woke up the next morning, it took me a moment to figure out I wasn't in my bed. As I realized I was still in Juniper's bed and very naked, I wanted to run even though I felt so sure the night before.

Hell, I tried to run. I tried to wiggle free of him, but he wasn't having it.

I wasn't sure what to make of it. Even though it had been a while since I had a random hook-up, I still remembered the feeling of wanting to get out before things got awkward. There wasn't a reason to put pressure on something that wasn't meant to be.

It was different with Juniper. As I tried to wiggle free, I could feel my heart breaking. I wasn't sure if he wanted me to stay or go and the uncertainty of it all made my muscles twitch with the need to put some distance between us.

Juniper wasn't having it though and I'm grateful as hell he didn't let me go.

He held me close and reassured me that what we experienced together was real. I hated doubting what happened between us, but fear is so damn powerful sometimes. Even though I knew it was fear holding me back, it wasn't until Juniper cut those chains around me that I could put it behind me.

In the last week everything has changed. I haven't gone back to my room to sleep. Even when I'm sleeping during the day because of work, I sleep in Juniper's bed. Our bed? It's strange, but I also know how right it feels and how true it is.

There's a bonus with sleeping in our room. His bedroom is on the front side of the house, and I'm not assaulted by the sounds coming

from his workshop in the same way. I giggle inside whenever I think of how I don't think of it as his work shed anymore.

How can I when I spent most of the day last week watching him work? Not only was it inspiring, but it was sexy as hell.

Watching him pound metal into submission had my pussy flooding and making a mess of my panties. I couldn't tear my eyes away from him as he worked. I'm pretty sure I tracked each drop of sweat as it slid down his torso, the exertion of his work a physical thing which pulsed around me and shot my arousal higher and higher.

It was difficult, but I managed to tear my eyes away from him working long enough to take in some of the pieces he'd been working on. I couldn't help but notice the lines of his sculpture all had a very feminine curve to them. My heart fluttered with the hope he was inspired by me, but I squashed it.

At least until I found myself caged in against one of the tables, Juniper's large frame looming over me with a smirk on his face. His voice was a low growl, "What are you thinking about so hard, Sweetheart?"

I bit my lip, unsure how I should answer him. He was demanding with his eyes only the truth. I should have known I wouldn't have been able to give him anything less.

"I was just noticing how womanly some of your sculptures are." I cocked my head to the side, studying him, curiosity in my tone, "Have they always been that way?"

I'd looked up his last show online not long after I had moved in and they seemed much more masculine to me, but maybe I wasn't looking at them at the right angle. I found myself unable to breathe as I waited for his answer, needing to know. I wanted to be his inspiration, even though it was irrational.

Juniper shook his head slowly, "Nope," he popped the p. "My art has changed a little recently."

I squashed the flare of excitement in my chest because I didn't want to get ahead of myself. I breathed out, "Oh?"

“Mmhm,” he hummed and then kissed me. The kiss started out gentle, but it quickly took on a needy feel to it as he deepened it and explored my mouth with his tongue. We were panting when we broke apart. “It seems you’ve found your way into more than my heart, Zoey. You’ve found a way into my art too.”

My fucking heart soared.

It wasn’t a declaration of love, but I could feel the real emotion he felt in every word. It was pretty close. The fact he was putting himself and his emotions out there for me to see, for me to judge, for me to reciprocate or squash, was heady. It wasn’t a weight on my shoulders; I found it comforting instead.

I pulled him back to me, not caring even a little that he was sweaty and dirty. I relished it. He told me I inspired him. He was changing right in front of my eyes, but I also knew some things are just who Juniper is.

He’s still slow to smile. He’s still serious and observant. For the most part.

His walls crumble when he’s inside of me or when he sees me for the first time as a new day dawns. When he hands me a cup of coffee and I make a sound of appreciation because he knows just the way I like it.

Those are the moments when I can see behind his exterior to the man behind it all. The man who needs someone to take care of. The man who doesn’t do anything half-way.

I’ve been chomping at the bit to get home to him after my shift today. It was a tough one. I can’t even remember the number of people I talked to with tears in their voices as they experienced fear, pain and hopelessness.

It’s nights like I had last night when I wonder if this truly is my calling in life. I want to help people, have always been driven by it, but it’s a heavy burden as well.

I don’t resent those who need my help, not at all. I resent the situations they find themselves in which put them in the position to

call for help. I know how hard it is to ask for help, but when you're desperate and you're not trained, sometimes the only option is to reach out to someone like me. I make sure they get the help they need, but then it's out of my hands.

When I consider another career path, I think of the people who need my help, the ones who have been soothed by me and my reassurances. I'm not sure if I could turn my back on them.

The moment I walk through the door, I head straight to the kitchen, knowing I'll find Juniper there. His mossy green eyes come up, meet mine and soften. He doesn't hesitate, he stands up and strides to me, gently tugging my purse off my shoulder and placing it on the kitchen island.

Then before I can say a word, before a single tear can fall, before I can break, I'm in his arms. He hugs me to his chest, his large hands soothing up and down my back and making me sink into him. He takes my pain without a single word. I can feel it leeching out of me to be absorbed by him.

I know I shouldn't let him. I know it's not right, but I don't think he would listen if I said as much. So, I let him have it.

When his hand wraps around the nape of my neck, his thumb presses against my tense muscles and I feel them unlock in a way my body has been begging for since the moment the first hard call came in tonight.

Juniper's voice is gentle and coaxing, "Rough night?"

I bury my face deeper into his chest and nod. My words are muffled against him, but I know he hears me; he always hears me, "Yeah. So many people having the worst moments of their life. I don't know if I helped them or not. We get the call, we dispatch and then it's out of our hands." My voice cracks, "It makes me feel so fucking helpless sometimes."

Juniper's strong hands are on me, covering me, soothing me. "You're so brave and strong, Sweetheart. I can't imagine some of the horrible things you've gotten calls about."

I pull back and look up at him, tears welling up in my eyes. Usually, I can compartmentalize between my life and my job, but tonight got me. Maybe the shell around my heart isn't as thick as it once was because Juniper's cracked it.

I should be angry at him, but I can't find it in me to pull that emotion forward.

"A ten-year-old called in a few hours ago because they found their dad not breathing on the couch when they got up to go to the bathroom." I let out a sob as tears start to fall, dripping down my cheeks, so much pain and heartache falling from me. Juniper cups my cheeks and wipes away my tears with his thumbs. "I probably shouldn't even tell you that, but it just hurt so much. I can't imagine the pain he's in. He's just a little boy." I close my eyes, "The whole night seemed to be one tragedy after another."

Juniper kisses my forehead and then my nose, my cheeks, my eyes. I melt against him and let him soothe me, let him make me feel something other than pain.

"So strong," he murmurs.

I shake my head fiercely, my words broken, "I don't feel strong."

"You are," there's conviction in his tone and I know he won't be swayed to believe anything different.

Am I strong? Or am I just me? I have no idea. Does it even matter?

I'm there for people when they're experiencing something they never want to experience. I help to keep them calm and ensure help is on the way. I don't know if it's strength which allows me to do it, but maybe it is.

Maybe I can believe him.

If I can believe him about this, maybe I can let go of my fears when it comes to committing to him as well.

"I don't like to see you hurting, Zo," there's pain lacing through his words and it cuts me right to my soul.

I blink up at him to find his moss green eyes filled with concern, but there's also a determination there. I know it's there because he wants to slay my demons. He wants to defend me and keep me safe. The problem is I take this burden and pain on and have done so willingly.

He has no idea how to fight against that. But I know he wants to. Somehow, it's enough.

I melt into his body and wrap my arms around him. "I know you don't, Juni," I whisper the words against his lips when they're only a breath apart. "You can't protect me from everything, and I do love my job. Some days are tougher than others.

He nods, a solemn look on his face. "I want to take away your pain," he confesses on a whisper. "Will you let me?"

His eyes are pleading with me now and I find myself nodding. I want him to take away my pain as well. I know he can. He makes me feel joy and love when we're together.

He picks me up and my legs wrap around his waist. When his large hands cup my ass, his strong fingers, the ones he uses to make beautiful art which he swears I inspire, knead my flesh. I moan as our lips crash together like magnets no longer able to fight the pull.

Why would we want to? We may have started out as roommates, but we both knew it was so much more. It took me a little longer than him to know and admit the truth. He was solid in his resolve, in his knowledge.

With the first kiss I gave myself over to him. I'm so damn glad I did. Even if he makes one hell of a racket sometimes.

"I love you," I moan the words against his lips and his steps stutter for a moment before his body freezes.

He rips his mouth from mine and stares down at me with an intensity which has me squirming against his hard body. He searches my face, but I'm not sure what he's looking for. If he's checking to see if I'm sincere, I know what he'll find.



The truth.

Only the truth.

It's the only thing either of us will accept in this relationship.

His handsome face turns down in a scowl and fear spikes in my heart. "You weren't supposed to say it first," he grumbles at me, his eyebrows pulled together.

"I wasn't?"

He shakes his head fiercely. "No," he barks out before he starts moving again. "I was going to say it first, but I was just waiting to make sure you were ready to hear it."

I find myself smiling at this man, my man. My roommate, but so much more.

Maybe I should thank my old roommate because without her flaking I would have never found this man. I can't imagine my life without him now. I don't want to.

"I'm ready to hear it," I whisper.

Juniper's scowl lifts and he smirks at me right before he lowers me onto our bed. He kisses me hard, stealing my breath. Every kiss we share feels like the first one all over again. It's passion and need and forever rolled up into one moment, one singular breath shared between us.

"I love you, Zoey," he grits out the words. "I'm going to show you just how much for the rest of our lives."

A smile spreads across my face, the first one I've been able to feel all the way to my soul for hours. His words chase away the last of my horrible shift. His words make me feel like the strong woman he always says I am. His words unlock the deepest parts of me, the parts I know will always belong to this man.

He kisses me again and the rest of the world falls away. Their tragedies can't touch me here. Nothing other than this man's hands can touch me here.

He doesn't stop touching me until we're panting and spent. I fall asleep no longer thinking about the tragedies I had to help people through. Instead, I'm thinking of a future I never thought I'd find.

He's there in every single one of my fantasies and I wouldn't have it any other way.

The last thing I hear as I'm swept up into the darkness, knowing I'm safe and loved, is Juniper's low voice, "Love you, Sweetheart."



## EPILOGUE

### ***ONE MONTH LATER*** ***JUNIPER***

I should be nervous about my show, but it's not what has my guts twisted up in knots. Not even close. I don't give a fuck about the show, not compared to what I'm really worried about.

I can't help but smile when I think back over the last month. It's been a whirlwind, but I wouldn't change a single thing about it. I'm in love and my woman loves me.

If that's not enough, the day after the grand declarations, Iris went into labor. When I got to meet my niece, Sophie, for the first time, I had one of those Grinch moments. My heart definitely grew at least three sizes. I love Iris and have been amazed by her many times but meeting the little life she brought into the world was something I could not have prepared myself for.

Sophie is so small. Or I'm just so big. Maybe it doesn't matter, but I sure as fuck feel like a giant when I'm holding her.

She's so precious. The fact that she's surrounded by so much love, the love of our family, makes me feel secure in a way I wasn't expecting. I know, no matter what she experiences in her life, she will never doubt she is loved. She has so many people at her back already.

I know it'll only grow as she grows, and the family continues to do so as well.

Even though I wanted to go down to the hospital the moment I found out Iris was in labor, I didn't want to go without Zoey who was sleeping. I was so fucking grateful she had the night off because I needed her there at my side. I needed her calm; I needed her love.

When Zoey woke up and I told her Iris was in labor she screeched, "Why the hell didn't you wake me up, Juniper Berry

Bush?”

I balked at her and then spoke slowly, “Berry Bush? You know that’s not my middle or last name, right?”

She waved her hand dismissively, “Yates was not going to have the same oomph to it.”

I grabbed her by the hips and hauled her against my chest. “I’ll give you oomph,” I warned her.

Zoey smirked up at me, her blue eyes sparkling. “We need to get down to the hospital, so you’ll have to put a pin in that, big guy.”

As much as I wanted to prove her wrong, to show her we had plenty of time, I was also buzzing with the need to be there just in case Iris needed me.

Looking back, I could have taken the time because Iris didn’t need me. She gave birth like a fucking champ. I’m so proud of her and the woman she’s grown into.

There was a time when she was a hot mess and I really had my doubts, but Gavin has brought out the best in her and helped her to find her footing in this world. I couldn’t be happier for either of them. Now, they have so much more because of the little life they created.

I find myself looking at Zoey and wondering if we’ll have the same kind of blessing in our life. I hope we do, but if she’s not ready then it’s okay too.

I can wait.

I’ll wait forever because as long as I have her at my side, then I’m good.

I look over at her now, talking to some of the women in the family with my art gallery opening in full swing around me. I don’t care about any of it. I only care about her.

She throws her head back and laughs, the sound going straight to my heart and making me smile. I look back over at Gavin and Cole,

the lead singer for SO, to find them giving me knowing smirks. I roll my eyes and resist the need to punch them both in the face.

Cole teases me, “When are you going to make an honest woman out of Zoey?”

I glance away quickly, and Gavin lets out a low whistle before he leans a little closer, dropping his voice, “You’re doing it tonight, aren’t you?”

I give him one firm nod of my head and they get looks on their faces like it’s their birthday and all the wishes came true.

I shake my head and grumble, “I’m going to do it now before you guys can spill the beans.”

Cole flips me off and scoffs. “We would never, it’s Troy you have to watch out for.”

Because he has a fucking sixth sense about these things, Troy pops up next to me and I barely stop myself from jumping a foot off the floor. “Watch out for me for what?”

I glare at him, but he only chuckles in response. He winks at me before looking around the room. “Andrea said you’ve had quite a few sales tonight, Juniper.” He claps me on the back, “Congratulations, man.”

Gavin murmurs, “That’s not the only congratulations you’ll be giving by the end of the night.”

I glare at him and Troy’s eyes glance between the three of us. I can see the wheels turning in his mind, but I don’t stick around to find out if he figures it out or not. Too many people now already know. I don’t want the element of surprise to be taken from me, even though I know none of them would ruin it on purpose.

I stride across the gallery right to my woman. I give Margot, Amelia and Chloe an apologetic smile, but still pull my girl a few steps away from them. I’m pretty sure I catch a knowing glance between them, but I ignore it.

Zoey's eyebrows knit together in confusion as she smooths a hand over my shoulder. She lit up when she saw me in a suit for the night and she looks smoking fucking hot in her dress. She's the most beautiful woman in the room and I made sure to tell her as much the moment we arrived.

Concern fills my woman's voice, "Are you okay, Juni?" She looks around, "Are things selling?"

I shrug, my voice low and raspy, "I don't care about that." Her lips part and I know she's going to say something, but I don't give her the chance. Instead, I seal my lips to hers and kiss her. It feels just as good as it did the first time. I murmur against her lips, "I only care about you, Zo."

She sighs and melts into me. Her blue eyes are bright and shining when she pulls back and looks up at me. "I love you and I'm so damn proud of you." She sweeps her arm out to indicate the gallery. "This is amazing. Your art is amazing." There's so much emotion in her voice, "You're amazing."

I shake my head and kiss her forehead before I drop down to one knee. I wasn't sure how I was going to do this, but this feels right. I know the ring is perfect because I had Holden design it. I saw him earlier and he smiled at me like the cat who ate the cream, even though he didn't know if I was planning on asking Zoey to be my wife tonight or not.

Zoey gasps and her eyes fill with unshed tears, "Juniper."

I smile up at her and pull the ring out of my pocket, holding it up between us, but she doesn't look at it. Her eyes are locked with mine, studying me, soaking in the moment. "You're the amazing one, Zoey. You walked through my door thinking we were going to only be roommates, but I knew the truth the moment I saw you. You were always meant to be mine and I'll make sure you know it for the rest of our lives."

"I am yours," she whispers.

I chuckle. “I know, so,” I take a big breath, “lets make it official. Will you marry me?”

“Of course,” she breathes out.

I slip the ring on her finger, but before I can stand and pull her against me to kiss her, she’s on my lap with her lips pressed against mine. I don’t hesitate to kiss her with everything in me. I get lost in her, the same way I always do.

It takes a moment, but the cheering around us filters through the haze I always find myself in when it comes to my woman. It’s almost deafening, but I wouldn’t expect anything less when it comes to this family.

It might be the night of my gallery show, but we have so much more important things to celebrate now.

Zoey’s going to be my wife. It’s fitting since she’s already my everything. I smile against her lips.

“I love you, Sweetheart.”

“I love you, Roommate.”

We laugh together, the joy around us building and making the moment so much sweeter. I might not have understood what my sister went through when she fell in love with Gavin. My fear of her getting hurt turned me into an asshole. I get it now.

Because the same thing happened to me. I wouldn’t have it any other way.

**Want more Juniper and Zoey?**  
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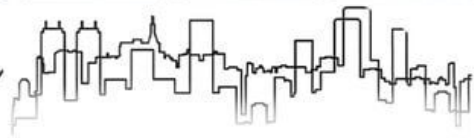


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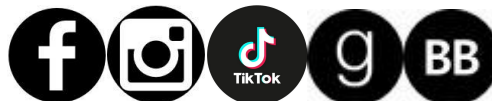


Ember Davis loves alpha heroes with a range of emotions, but a strong sense of how to take care of their women. She loves her heroines from all walks of life, just like her heroes, and she wants them to be real and relatable. Her heroines tend to be sassy, opinionated and smart.

Ember is a stay at home mom of two who recently refound her love of books and all things romance and is so glad that she did. She's always been creative but writing and creating stories that she would love to read satisfies dreams she had as a little girl. She loves butterflies, the color purple and enjoying time with her family.

Pssst...it's totally a pen name, but everything above is 100% true.

If you enjoyed this book, or even if you didn't, I'd really appreciate you leaving a review and/or a star rating on Amazon! This is a whole new world for me so any feedback you're open to giving, I'd love to have.



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