



out of
Control

a novel by
desiree wilder

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By Desiree Wilder

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Dedication

*This book is dedicated to all the men
who know how the woman in his life
takes her coffee.*

Table of Contents

[*Chapter 1*](#)

[*Chapter 2*](#)

[*Chapter 3*](#)

[*Chapter 4*](#)

[*Chapter 5*](#)

[*Chapter 6*](#)

[*Chapter 7*](#)

[*Chapter 8*](#)

[*Chapter 9*](#)

[*Chapter 10*](#)

[*Chapter 11*](#)

[*Chapter 12*](#)

[*Chapter 13*](#)

[*Chapter 14*](#)

[*Chapter 15*](#)

Chapter 1

Gia

“Hi, my name is Gia Elizabeth Anderson Stone and I am broken inside. I recently learned that I love to watch the sun come up and have multiple orgasms on desktops.” It just came out.

Ethan smiled like I'd never seen him smile before and our eyes locked. He reached for me and I went to him. He

held me tightly. It was pure and rich, unlike anything I'd ever felt before.

He pulled back and took my hands. "Thank you, Gia, for giving that to me. And when you're ready, I want to know why you say you're broken inside." He must've seen me panic for a second. "When you're ready, I said." He squeezed my hands and I nodded.

"Would you like to join our friends? We have a couple more concerts tonight," I asked him.

"I would love that, Gia, but there's something I want to talk to you about first. Do you want a beer?" I nodded. I was really thirsty after the walk over. *What did Ethan want to talk to me about?*

“Can we sit outside?” I asked, wanting to smoke.

“Of course,” he answered as he grabbed two beers and a cigarette.

We sat. “What’s up?”

“Gia, there’s something I think you should know. Since I want you to open up to me, I have to be completely open and honest with you to gain your trust. When I said I’d been waiting for you for a long time, I really meant *you*, not just someone like you.”

“What do you mean? I don’t understand what you’re saying.” I was confused.

“The first time I laid eyes on you was about ten years ago at the campground c-store. I’ve watched you come in and out

of this place a few times each summer, every summer. I've wanted to meet you, to come face to face with you, ever since." He looked guilty as he said it, like there was a crime against wanting to meet someone.

"Um, okay," I said, "that's really weird, but flattering, I think." I wasn't sure what to make of it, but it shed some light on his behavior, wanting to know so much about me last night after just meeting me. I needed to think about it for a minute and I told him so. I leaned back in my chair and lit a Marlboro. I tried to imagine myself doing it, seeing someone over and over and wanting to meet them. There was no harm in it. And I guessed it was kind of sweet. I looked at Ethan. I

could tell there was something more. *Shit, this could get ugly. At least we're outside so I could try to make a run for it if it's really creepy. Of course, with these boots on, I won't be able to go very fast. Let's hear it.* “Is there something else, Ethan?”

“I saw your breasts—before today, I mean.” He looked even more guilty and apologetic than before.

“You saw my breasts? What the hell are you talking about? When?”

“Last year. I was watching the video surveillance, as I did during a lot of the concerts, and as I scanned the crowd, I saw you. I'd already seen you come through the gate and was pleasantly surprised that you weren't with that

same guy. Anyway, I stopped the camera on you and saw that you weren't wearing a wedding ring anymore—not that I was happy you'd divorced or anything—but I was going to make sure I bumped into you. Then, well, you lifted your shirt. I'm not gonna lie, I watched it several times.” This time he had a guilty smile.

“Well, well, well,” I said, shaking my head. “Looks like I've got a little peeping tom on my hands. I don't know if I should turn you in or just spank you myself!” I was really laughing. I didn't know why, exactly. I mean the guy had been spying on me for ten years. Isn't that like stalking or something? But he remembered me from the first time he saw me, he knew I was married, he

wanted to meet me, he witnessed me show my boobs, and here he was, admitting all this to me. Maybe I was crazy, he was surely crazy, but it was comical to me at the moment.

“So tell me, peeper, aside from my tits, which are apparently worthy of playback, why did you want to meet me?” I had to know.

“The first time I saw you, you were coming out of the little convenience store at the campground. You held the door open for an older gentleman and gave him a beaming smile. Then, as you almost skipped across the parking lot, you stopped and chatted with a woman walking her dog. The whole time you were petting the dog and laughing. Not

only were you physically the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen, but you lit me up, and I knew you were just as beautiful on the inside. I thought to myself, 'I'd love to meet a woman like that someday.' Every time I saw you, you were the same and you lit up everyone around you. I finally knew what people meant when they said that someone had made them want to be a better person, because that's exactly what you did to me." He seemed totally sincere.

Whoa! That was a lot to process. I remembered that day he first saw me. I actually remembered talking to the woman and the dog. It was a Saint Bernard, my favorite. I never saw myself

like Ethan saw me. *Who was this man?* This was all very strange and a little overwhelming. I leaned back in my chair again. I didn't want to, but I had to ask. "Is there anything else I should know?" I was praying that he'd say no.

"Just one more thing." *Of course there was, because a man who felt this way about me had to be completely insane.* Let's have it, I was ready, so I looked at him. "I don't just *work* here, it's my place." *Holy shit!*

"This is *your* place?" I was twirling my finger in the air, as if to say *all of this?* He nodded.

"I'm not rich or even close to it, though." He looked worried.

"I thought you were a bar back when I

first met you and agreed to go on a date with you after having talked to you for a whole ten minutes. So do you really think I care how much money you have?" I was laughing; he looked relieved. Money had never been my thing. As long as I had enough after my bills were paid to have some fun, I was good.

I reached over and took his hand. "Thank you for being honest with me. I know you're crazy now, but I still want to go watch a concert with you." I smiled at him.

"Crazy for you," he said and smiled back. "Let's go. You owe me a date!"

Chapter 2

Ethan must've known my feet were hurting when he suggested we take the cart. He was so considerate. I was going to have to think of a way to thank him later.

Ethan pulled up to the bottom of the stairs that led up to the VIP viewing area and let me off while he parked around the corner.

As I was watching him walk back, Jason came up behind me, grabbed me, and kissed my cheek. “Hey, gorgeous!” He was obviously having a great time and smelled like he may have spilled a drink or two on himself.

“Hey, Jason.” I still remembered the way he ditched me last night for someone he was “kind of with.”

“You look sexy as hell! How about that dance you promised me?” He winked at me and held out his hand. I looked over my shoulder. Ethan was witnessing everything.

“I’d love to, Jason, but I’m kind of with someone tonight. Maybe another time.” I turned and walked toward Ethan. He just smiled and held out his

hand. I took it and up the stairs we went. When I looked back, Jason was standing there with this, ‘what the fuck just happened’ look on his face. I got the feeling he didn’t get turned down too often.

“Friend of yours?” Ethan asked. I could swear I heard a little jealousy in his voice.

“Sort of. He works in the same building and we’ve run into each other up here before.” I wasn’t going to add that I’d given him an unforgettable blow-job and then backed out when it came down to having intercourse.

When we got to the top, Dana saw us and came running over. “Hey, sweetie! Hey, Ethan! I’m so glad you two are here

together.” She was beaming. She led us back to our friends.

Ethan took my arm. “Gia, I want you to meet my friends. This is Marcus, he runs the campground.”

Oh, Marcus, the *Penthouse Forum* story kid. I shook his hand. “Nice to meet you,” he and I said simultaneously. He was young, blond, built, and seemed a little shy.

“And this is Vince. He’s the entertainment manager here.” We shook hands.

“Gia, it’s a pleasure,” Vince said. He was about my age. Tall, dark, handsome, mysterious looking, had a strong handshake, and looked me right in the eye. Kind of gave me the creeps.

“Can I buy the girl with the most beautiful eyes I’ve ever seen a beer?” Ethan whispered in my ear. It gave me goose bumps.

“The drinks up here are free, big spender, but I’d love one.” He smiled and headed to the bar with his buddies.

Dana and the other girls came over to me. We were between bands, so now was a good time to chat.

“Gia, how are you doing? Still feeling okay?” motherly Jo asked, referring to the drugging from Rick in the VIP bar.

“Yes, I’m on top of the world, actually,” I said as I gave them what they wanted.

“That’s awesome, Gia! He’s so fucking hot!” Brittany said, looking a

little jealous. If she'd only known what had just happened in that office behind her she'd really be green. As I recalled how naughty it felt having Ethan between my legs, I had to shift my stance and swallow hard. *Fuck, that was amazing.*

Dana was just standing there, smiling. "Someone looks a little smitten," I said to her.

"Trey is really great, you guys. I'm serious, I'm totally into him." She looked like she was dreaming. I'd never seen her this way and I'd known her for a lot of years.

"And let me guess, you're hoping later he'll be totally *into* you!" We all knew it was true.

The guys got back with our drinks and

we had a toast. “To new friends, good music, and wherever that may lead us tonight!” Marcus said. *I guess he wasn't as shy as I thought.*

“Cheers!” We all raised our drinks.

We heard the announcer and turned our attention to the stage. Ethan was right behind me and had his arms around me, it felt really nice. I could feel his package against my backside and that felt really nice, too. “I'll grab you a stool,” he said and took off before I could say anything.

When he brought it back, I patted the seat. He smiled, sat, and slapped his thighs like he did in the Chevy last night. *Yes!* I spread his legs and hopped up between them. My skirt was too short to

be up on his legs without giving everyone else a show, but this was comfy. He had his arms around me again and his head was on my shoulder. We were both watching the stage but I was having a hard time concentrating on anything but his breath on my neck. I turned my head and kissed him softly. We kept our eyes open. It felt breathtakingly sweet. I thought about what he'd said this morning, 'We just need to take it slow and easy,' *this must be what that felt like. This must be what he wanted and needed.* I didn't see it giving me an orgasm or anything, but it made for good foreplay.

I looked over at the girls. Dana and Trey were dancing slower than the beat

of the music, like they were in their own little world. He was talking to her and she was gazing at him and smiling. Brittany and Marcus were dancing to the beat—pretty good, too—they were both laughing. Vince and Jo were sitting on bar stools and it looked like they were having a conversation that was way too serious for a rock concert. But their body language was good; she was leaning in to hear better and he looked very relaxed.

The next song started and it was one of my favorites, so I jumped up to dance. Dana, Jo, and Brittany joined me and the guys headed for the bathroom and the bar. We were having a great time! We were in our element.

Ethan

The guys and I headed to the bar. “How’s it going with Dana?” I asked Trey.

“Seriously, she’s very cool, not to mention a total knockout,” Trey said kind of quietly, like maybe he was trying to protect his reputation. “We’ve pretty much decided she’s staying at my place tonight. She’s an animal, I can tell.” He looked pumped about that. I had to laugh.

“Good luck, buddy,” I told him. “Don’t get all tore up, you’ve got to work tomorrow.”

“How about you guys—having fun

with the girls?” I asked Vince and Marcus.

Marcus just shook his head up and down emphatically while he was chewing something he had grabbed from the bar snacks.

Vince said he was relaxing for the first time in weeks and I was glad for that. He worked really hard for me and this place.

“Your girl—Gia, is it?” I nodded at Vince. “She looks like fun.” I didn’t like that comment and wasn’t sure what he’d meant by it.

“Yes, she has a great sense of humor.” I wanted to pretend that was what he’d meant.

Shelley was working the VIP bar.

“Must be a special occasion or something. I don’t know if I’ve ever seen you come up here, watch a concert, and have a beer.”

“I never have, but there’s a first time for everything.” I was kinda short with her after finding out she’d been cheating on her boyfriend with me.

“Maybe I could come over later,” she said. “Bob and I broke up.”

“I’m on a date right now, Shelley, so I’ll just take the beers,” I said, irritated that she was trying to get laid while she was working. We were done and I wanted her to know it.

“You’re on a *date*?” She sounded shocked. “You told me you didn’t date.” She put the beer up on the bar.

“I didn’t until now.” I took the beer. She wasn’t lying. It was what I’d told her and every other girl I’d been with in the last ten years. I wanted them to know what they were getting into. I didn’t have the time or the money to date. I was lonely. I wanted companionship more than anything, but most of the time, it was just sex.

When we got back, the girls were still going strong, so we sat back and relaxed. As I watched Gia I thought of all the times over the years I’d watched her. All the times I’d wished I was the one standing next to her. Then when those boots were over my shoulders and up against my face as I was giving her what she needed... *I sure as hell didn’t*

mind doing it, in fact I loved every second of it. It felt really good to be in that spot, watching Hotness dance and laugh and have fun, knowing that we still had tomorrow to get to know each other better. I decided I was going to ask her to stay with me tonight. I'd love to hold her, kiss her, watch her sleep, and wake up next to her in the morning.

The band finished up and Trey and Dana took off immediately.

“Gia.” I still loved saying her name. “I'd love it if you'd stay with me tonight. No expectations, just stay with me,” I whispered in her ear, knowing how much she liked that.

“I think I'd love that, too,” she whispered back, then nibbled my

earlobe softly. That was the second time she gave me the sweet softness tonight and it left me wanting more. It was unlike her usual aggressiveness. I liked her both ways, but the soft and sweet turned me on fast.

Chapter 3

Gia

We gave Jo, Brittany, Vince, and Marcus a ride on the cart back to the gate. They were deciding whether to take the shuttle back to the motorhome or party at Vince's. Ethan and I headed to his place.

My butterflies were fluttering as I thought about what might happen when

we got there. I didn't even know what I wanted to happen. My mind was in a different place than it had been before Ethan found out how many licks it took to get to the center of a Gia pop. I was more relaxed, more open to him. That scared me a little, but it was a nice feeling and one I wasn't used to.

“Are you hungry?” Ethan asked as he opened the door to his place.

“Yes, actually. And thirsty, too. Can I grab a bottle of water?” I asked him as I unzipped my boots. “Ahhh,” I sighed when I pulled them off.

“I got it,” he said. He grabbed two out of the fridge and then watched me.

He smiled. “Ya know, you'd be just as sexy in comfortable shoes as you are

in heels.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” I said as I took my water from him and gave him a quick kiss. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Now what do you want to eat?”

“Do you have any pizza?” I asked, knowing his fridge was full of healthy stuff, so I was pretty sure he didn’t.

“Sure. I keep some in the freezer for when the guys come over. But is that what you really want? I could make you something better.”

“Something better, or something healthier?” I teased him. “Because there really isn’t anything better than pizza. Unless, of course, the pizza you have is made of tofu or something. It isn’t, is it?”

I was hoping it wasn't.

“No, it's not made of tofu. It's totally greasy and bad for you.” He was smiling and I loved it.

“Perfect!” I smiled back and watched him take the pizza out of the freezer. He was an amazing guy. I wondered why he was single. I was just about to ask him when his phone rang.

“It's one of my staff. We usually go over some things at the end of the night. I'm sorry. It'll only take five or ten minutes,” he said apologetically.

“Absolutely,” I said. “Do you mind if I jump in your shower?”

“Absolutely not,” he said smiling. “Go for it.”

As I got undressed, I could feel

Ethan's hands, just like he had undressed me the last time I'd showered here. He was so sensual and sexy about it and I just wanted him to fuck my brains out. I was surprised he was still interested in me after all that.

I stepped into the shower. It felt so warm and relaxing. I stuck my head under the sprayer and stood there, letting it wash over me. I took Ethan's shampoo and scrubbed my hair. I had put so many products in it that morning that it felt almost crunchy. Then I lathered the rest of my body. When I reached between my legs I hesitated, like I didn't want to wash away whatever Ethan may have left there. I knew that was silly—I'd have the memory forever—so after a

slight pause, I lathered and rinsed.

Ethan

My phone rang, it was Rose. She wanted to go over the numbers for the night, I assumed. I told Gia I'd only be a bit and she asked if she could shower.

“Go for it.” In my mind all I could see was her in all her beauty standing in front of me, water running down her perfect body, fire in her eyes, wanting me to take her to the edge. That was the best shower I'd ever had. *Oh, I almost forgot about Rose.*

“Rose, hi—sorry about that, you

caught me in the middle of something.” I was glad she couldn’t see me blushing.

“Oh, sorry, Ethan. This won’t take long,” she said. “The tills were outstanding tonight, very few overages and shortages. The girls were all upbeat and seemed happy with their tips. Shelley was in a mood, though. Asked if I’d seen you. You may want to touch base with her and make sure she’s all right.” I knew what that was about already. “Anyway, record breaking numbers, just as we’d expected. I’ll have the paperwork for you tomorrow evening and we can go over the whole weekend.”

“Thank you, Rose. Go to bed now, we have all week to go over the numbers.”

She was always in a rush to get things done, so efficient. “You’re still the number one woman in my life,” I told her, and suddenly Gia popped into my head.

“Someday I hope to be number two, honey,” Rose said, like she was reading my mind or something. She’d never said that before, but I knew her and Don had always hoped I’d find someone. They were such a big part of my life, closer than any of my real family.

“I know, maybe someday,” I said. “Good night, Rose.” I hung up.

I checked the pizza, grabbed a couple more waters, and then I heard a knock at the door. I opened it and Shelley was standing there, drunk as a skunk.

“Hey, lover,” she slurred, “can I come in?” She stumbled over the threshold, pushing past me.

“Now’s not a good time, Shelley. I’m still on my date.” It felt so good to say that, knowing that Gia was here with me, and not just for sex.

She looked surprised. “Oh, well, isn’t that nice!” She pushed her hands against my chest. She looked pretty upset.

“Do you have a t-shirt I could wear?” I heard Gia ask and looked toward the bathroom. There she was with a towel wrapped around her and she stopped when she saw us. Her smile turned to confusion.

Shelley was crying now. “What does *she* have that I don’t? What makes *her* so

dateable?” she screamed at me, but she glared at Gia.

I would've loved to give Shelley a list of everything that Gia had that she didn't, but she didn't have that kind of patience or time. I didn't want Gia to witness any more of this.

“Gia, in the second drawer,” I told her carefully so she'd know everything was all right.

I turned to Shelley. “I'm sorry about you and Bob. You're obviously upset and drunk. You need to go back to your place and get some sleep. We can talk when you're sober, if you want to.” I knew she'd take me up on that offer, unfortunately. I'd have to decide what to do about this later. She was one of my

best bartenders, I hated to lose her over something that was partially my fault, but she was crossing the line.

I called Gwen to come and get her. Gia headed back to the bathroom and Shelley never took her eyes off her. “Stop looking at her—she has nothing to do with this,” I told her.

I walked Shelley out to wait for Gwen. “Shelley, you need to stop this—now. You and I have been over since last summer, you know that. I’ve met someone and I want to try to build something real with her. You need to back off.” Gwen pulled up and Shelley stumbled to her car.

That could be a problem, I thought as they drove off.

I walked back in and locked the door. The pizza was done, so I sliced it and headed to the bathroom.

I knocked on the door softly so I didn't startle her. "Gia."

When she opened it and I saw her, she took my breath away. There was Hotness, in my t-shirt. It said, "The Lock" across her breasts, and it hung down about mid-thigh. Her hair was damp, her freshly scrubbed face was glowing, and her bare feet were looking sexy as hell. I wondered if she was wearing panties, because I could tell she didn't have a bra on.

"I'm so sorry about that, Gia. If you want me to, I'll tell you about it while we eat. By the way, you look a million

times better in that shirt than I ever have.” She gave me a sexy smile and I could tell she wasn’t too concerned about Shelley.

I pulled her to me and ran my fingers through her hair as I kissed her softly. She smelled like my soap, and as I let my fingers come around to her neck, she felt warm and soft. I was turned on, big-time. I pulled back. I had to have those eyes.

Her stomach growled and it caught me off guard. “Sorry,” she said. “Maybe we should eat.”

Laughing, I took her hand and led her to the kitchen. She grabbed a slice of pizza and hopped up onto the counter where I had set her when I was making

her breakfast. I caught a glimpse of her panties as my t-shirt lifted slightly. She took a big bite. “Mmmm.”

Yeah, that's exactly what I was thinking, but not about the pizza. “Greasy enough for ya?” I asked as I grabbed a slice and hopped up on the counter across from her.

“Oh, yeah,” she said, swinging her bare, sexy legs.

She tipped her head back and held the slice above her mouth. The cheese dangled from the corner of the slice, and as she lowered it down into her mouth, I fidgeted. She chewed slowly with her eyes closed, savoring it. Her lips parted, allowing her tongue to lick the sauce from them. Pizza had just become my

favorite food. *I could do this every meal, every day and never tire of it.*

“Tell me about Shelley,” Gia said as we were finishing our last pieces.

“Okay. She’s worked here for five years. We hooked up one morning after we’d pulled an all-nighter trying to get the cash registers programmed and ready for opening weekend. We were both lonely. We’d been spending a lot of time together working and we got along great, giving each other a hard time—flirting, I guess I’d say. It just happened, and then it happened again, and pretty soon she was calling once a week or so asking if she could come over. I’d say yes or no, depending on what I was doing. She’d go back to the city at the end of the

season and we'd talk maybe two or three times during the winter. Then she'd come back the next summer." I paused and took a drink of my water, hoping she'd be satisfied with that, but I could tell she was waiting for more, so I continued.

"While we were working together, before we'd slept together, I told her that I didn't have time for a relationship but it would be nice to have company every once in a while. She said she felt the same way and there was an understanding between us. There were a few times during those summers that she mentioned 'going out' somewhere. I told her that I didn't 'date' because I didn't have the time to do it right and I didn't

want the drama of it all while I was trying to get this place running like it does now. Then last year, I found out she had a boyfriend back in the city and that she was cheating on him with me. I don't believe in that and didn't want any part of it, so I told her not to call me anymore.”

“That must be Bob?”

“Yes. When I went to get drinks at the VIP area, Shelley was working. She suggested maybe she could come over later and that her and Bob broke up. She must've felt hurt when I said I was on a 'date,' and then she showed up here drunk, as you saw.” I finished my water.

“Friends with benefits, but she obviously wanted more,” Gia said.

“I guess so.” I’d always wanted someone I could really talk to, and at that moment Gia felt like that someone. She even seemed to have empathy for Shelley, as I did, but Gia didn’t even know her, and from what she’d seen, I was surprised by it.

“Thanks for the pizza,” Gia said, lightening the mood a little. “What’s for dessert?” She winked at me.

“Tofu brownies.” I winked back. *I’ll never tire of flirting with her.*

She hopped off the counter, turned off the light, took my hands, and led me to my bed. *What’s she up to?* I remembered how things turned out the last time. I was nervously wondering but I didn’t say anything.

She reached for my shirt and lifted it up. I put my arms up and leaned toward her. She slowly pulled it off and dropped it on the floor. I really liked how nice and easy she was moving. She was so much different than the last time we were here.

Gia

I looked at his bare chest and abs and took a deep breath. Then I unbuttoned and unzipped his pants and pushed them down, exposing his amazing body in boxer briefs. I wondered if he wore underwear, now I knew. I'd never seen a

body like his. It was so perfectly athletic and defined.

I wanted to give him something he wanted. So I pulled back the covers, crawled into his bed and patted the sheet beside me. He crawled in and I pulled the fresh smelling comforter up around us and then I nuzzled into him, putting my head on his chest. He put his arms around me and I told him something that surprised even me.

“I’m broken inside—I can’t have a baby.” I held as still as could be. I didn’t want to look at his face. There was silence. He was completely still, also. I could feel his heart beating against my face.

“Lex, that’s my ex-husband, wanted a

family more than anything in the world. Over the years we tried everything we could to have a baby. I got pregnant three times but miscarried all of them. It was too much for Lex. He couldn't bear living a life without children, and since I had already lost three of them, he didn't want me to lose anymore. We stopped having sex. We talked about adoption and surrogacy and all the other options but it was too late. We had grown apart, and every time Lex looked at me, I knew he was disappointed." I felt the tears run down my face onto Ethan's chest.

Ethan pulled me up to the pillow so we were facing each other. He wiped the tears from my eyes. "I'm so sorry, Gia. That must've been very hard for

you to go through. I can't imagine how it felt for you and how lonely you must've been. Your husband obviously put his wants and needs above yours and that was unfair to you. Please don't feel like you're broken inside because you weren't able to fill a void in someone else's life. Maybe it was he who wasn't meant to have your children because he can't love unconditionally." Then he slowly kissed my eyes and my face where the tears had run down. He held me close and I felt some of the pain leave my body as I exhaled. There was something so gentle about the way he talked to me and touched me—it made me relax into him.

"Thank you, Ethan," I whispered.

“Thank you, Gia,” he whispered back.

Chapter 4

Ethan

We laid there looking into each other's eyes. I was holding Gia's hand, stroking it with my fingers, wondering how anyone could hurt her like Lex did. Her eyes were teary now, sad. I wanted to take all her pain and disappointment away. She deserved someone who could love her unconditionally.

I traced her face with my finger, gliding it over her brows and down her

soft glowing cheeks, across her chin and then up to her lips, lingering on them and memorizing their exact shape. I ran it under her chin and down the front of her neck. I opened my hand and cupped the side of her neck as I locked eyes with her. I ran my fingers through her damp hair and she arched slightly as they grazed lightly down the middle of her back. She smiled. *She must be ticklish.*

My hand traveled across her side and stopped to softly stroke her hip bone before finding its way to her flat, firm stomach. I caressed it gently back and forth as I confirmed how absolutely perfect it was, not at all broken. Her eyes looked hungry. As I worked my way up to her breast, I felt myself

growing hard.

I massaged her breast and carefully played with her nipple between my fingers. She reached over and ran her hand up my arm and behind my neck, pulling me to her lips. Our mouths opened—we kissed long and slow, sending heat through my body and filling me with a sense of connection I hadn't felt in a long time, if ever. I wanted to make love to her and I wanted to make her feel unbroken.

I rolled to my back and gently pulled her on top of me. I reached under her shirt again to those perfect breasts. They were soft and filled up my hands plentifully. Her nipples grew even larger as they pressed against my palm. Gia

pulled her shirt off slowly, dropping it beside the bed. *Good girl, slow and easy.* My eyes had to pull away from hers so I could take in her beautiful body in the moonlight. Her skin glowed and I could faintly detect the scent of my soap on her. I watched as I ran my hands from her neck to her chest and down to her thighs, which were straddling me. I placed my hands on the sides of her waist and squeezed as I moved her slightly over my growing erection. She responded to the sensation by leaning her head back and giving me a sexy moan. I took a deep breath as she arched her back and her breasts heaved in front of me. I touched her everywhere I could reach. She was exquisite, all of her.

I sat up and met her mouth with mine as I placed my hands flat against her back. As her tongue tried to chase mine, I caught it and sucked on it. She opened her eyes and smiled. *She liked that.* I moved my hips up and down. I could feel her wetness on my cock. I moaned in her mouth. I felt like a teenager about to lose his virginity. Gia made everything feel new—I had to concentrate to keep my excitement in check. I kissed her neck, sucking softly. She tasted sweet and her hair tickled my nose as I worked my way around her ear. She ran her hands through my hair and twirled pieces through her fingers, then pulled on them firmly. It felt relaxing as she twirled, so I closed my

eyes and felt goose bumps run down my neck and arms. Each time she pulled it surprised me, even though I knew it was coming. It sent shivers down my spine. I felt such a connection with her, an emotional connection not just a physical one, and that made me want her so much more. I suckled her breasts and nipples which were slightly salty now after being pressed up against my body as we turned each other's heat up. She still had her hands in my hair, guiding me and pulling me closer when she especially liked a particular spot, I appreciated that I didn't have to guess what she liked and what she loved. I moaned as she pulled on my hair so hard that I bent my head back and gave her full access to suck

and nibble on my neck. Every time her tongue traveled across my skin, my shoulders hunched and I shivered. I put my hands in her thick, soft hair and pulled slightly. Her breathing quickened. She grabbed my face and kissed me hard, her hips rocked stronger, she wanted to go fast.

“Don’t go there, Gia. Stay with me, slow and easy,” I whispered, knowing it was hard for her to believe a man could want her so passionately. But I did, more than she could ever know.

She took a deep breath and kissed me again, softer; her fingers relaxed in my hair. I moved toward her, laying her down under me. She ran her hands up and down my back as we kissed, which

made me arch and push slightly against her. She massaged up to my hairline and along the back of my neck. It felt so loving—I wondered briefly if she touched Lex that way. I pretended I was the only one, ever. She softly ran them around my ears and along the sides of my face. Her fingertips were soft but strong, and when her nails grazed me I took a deep breath in and moaned as I exhaled. I was under her spell. She pulled away from me but kept her hands on my face as she gazed into my eyes for a moment. Her eyes told me all I needed to know so I moved down and pulled her panties off. When I slipped them over her long, silky legs and feet, I had to kiss them. I started at her feet and moved

slowly up both legs, kissing softly at first but then nibbling and sucking as she tried to control her hips from thrusting. She tasted and smelled amazing and it was getting difficult to keep it slow.

I got a condom and put it on. I caught Gia watching me, but this time I knew why she didn't have experience with them. I kissed her softly. I wanted to say, 'it's okay, beautiful. This is completely about you and me, passion and trust, nothing else.' But I didn't, she'd know soon enough.

I carefully moved between her legs, reached down between them, and put my finger inside her. "Mmm," I said softly as it slid in and I felt how warm and wet she was. She slid her hand down her

body and when she put it around my cock I felt electric tingles shoot all the way down to my feet. I slid my finger into her again and she squeezed and pulled on my cock at the same time. I had to be inside her now. She felt overly ready and relaxed. *Good, because I won't risk hurting her again.* I looked into Gia's eyes as I pressed against her—any sign of pain and I would stop. She tipped her head back and arched her back. I moved into her slowly... she felt amazing. She looked at me and smiled.

I pulled back and moved forward again, slow and easy. I kept a steady rhythm, and when Gia arched her back, I'd hit her spot if I went all the way in—perfect. I reached over and got a pillow

and slid it under her sexy ass and continued my rhythm, purposely hitting her spot every other time. I wanted to make her experience last as long as I could. I knew she was getting close. Watching her was sending me over the edge. She was so wet, yet tight, and her breasts were heaving up and down as she arched and moaned. I slid my hand up her stomach to her nipple and squeezed, slowly but firmly.

I pushed all the way forward until I hit the spot and held it tight while I rocked slightly side to side. She threw her head back and I could feel her coming. She was pulsating all around me. I couldn't stop. I put my hands on her hips and moved my hips back and forth twice—

that was all I needed. “Jesus, Gia,” I said without meaning to and I came like it was my first time. It was utopia.

I kissed her softly and went to the bathroom to flush the condom. I was beyond satisfied. I’d always wanted to make love to someone like that, nothing but pure passion and desire. I knew right then and there that Gia was the only woman who had ever made me feel that. I hoped she had felt it, too. It was undeniable.

When I came out of the bathroom she was exactly as I’d left her and that made me smile. She was exhausted. I picked her up and put her on her pillow and crawled in next to her. I put my arms around her and she opened her eyes for a

moment and smiled at me. I was wrong before, *this* was utopia.

Chapter 5

Gia

When I woke up I knew exactly where I was before I even opened my eyes. I could smell the comforter and felt warm, strong arms around my naked body. I smiled.

“Good morning, beautiful,” he said. I smiled even bigger.

“Good morning,” I whispered. I

opened my eyes to see Ethan. “Are you watching me sleep?”

“Yes, you look beautiful but you snore like a freight train,” he said, smiling.

“You’re not a very good liar,” I told him.

“No, really, you look beautiful.” He thought he was so funny.

“Ha, ha, very funny,” I said sarcastically. “Are you always like this in the morning?”

“Like what?” His eyes got big and he tickled me a little.

We looked into each other’s eyes. I gave him a peck on the lips and got up, I had to pee. I grabbed my panties and his shirt off the floor. He watched as I put them on.

Holy hell! I looked in the mirror. ‘Look what the cat dragged in’ came to mind. I grabbed my hair, twisted it and tied it up, pinched my cheeks, and used my finger as a toothbrush to somewhat freshen my mouth.

When I walked back out, I saw Ethan making coffee. *Yes! Healthy Ethan does have coffee!* I watched him. He had a pair of basketball shorts on that hung just right on his hip bones. *Damn, that’s hot!* I thought about what he did to me last night and how he introduced my body to things it had never felt or even knew existed. I opened up and put my trust in

him and he proved how erotic slow and easy could be. I was amazed at what I'd shared with him in the short time I'd known him. He was really something.

“I want you to know you were right about slow and easy, it's unbelievable, and so are you.” I wrapped my arms around him from behind and leaned my head against his back.

“I love when a woman tells me I was right about something!” he teased. “But seriously, I loved making you feel it, watching you feel it, and then the ultimate, feeling you feel it.” He turned and faced me. “I want you to know that I'd fantasized about an encounter like that just as you'd fantasized about a wild encounter, and *you* made my fantasy a

reality last night.” He kissed me.

“I didn’t know it could be like that,” I whispered, like it was a secret. “No one has ever made me feel the way you did.” I was still whispering but I didn’t know why. “No one has ever taken the time to do what you did. I think you know my body better in two days than anyone else ever has, including me.” Oh, that’s why I was whispering. That was kind of embarrassing to admit. But it was true.

“I’m the luckiest man in the world, then. Thank you for opening up to me and letting me be the one to take you there, Gia.” He held my face in his hands and looked into my eyes, making sure I knew he really meant what he said.

Ethan’s phone rang—it was Trey. I

poured myself a cup of coffee and sat at the table while he talked. It sounded like they had a meeting. *That'll give me time to shower and get ready for the concerts.* I couldn't wait to talk to the other girls to see how their night had been. *I'll bet they weren't as good as mine!* I had a naughty grin on my face. I wondered if Ethan saw my eyes roll back into my head when I came so hard it almost hurt. *I definitely want to do that again, soon!*

“Gia,” Ethan interrupted my erotic daydream, “I really should go to the meeting this morning since I missed yesterday's, but you're more than welcome to hang out here if you want.”

“Actually, I'd like to spend some time

with the girls, so I'll just have you take me back to the campground."

"Then we're gonna spend the day together, right?" He sounded hopeful.

"It's a date," I said, smiling, thinking that would really piss Shelley off.

"It's a date!" he said with a wink. *He has no idea how damn cute he is.*

"Can I wear your shirt back? I'll give it back before we leave." The thought of going home made me sad. I hadn't considered having to say good-bye to Ethan yet.

"You can keep it. Like I said, it looks so much better on you." He looked kind of sad at the thought of me leaving, too. But I didn't want it to ruin our time together so I wasn't going to dwell on it

now.

“Thank you. Do you want to keep my panties or something as a trade?” I said with a naughty grin.

“Hell yes!” He grabbed me, pretending like he was going to rip them off me.

We wrestled around playfully, laughing like kids. Then it turned into kissing and I knew if we didn't get out of there soon, we were going to end up back in bed. *Or maybe right here on the kitchen table!*

“We better get going,” I said, giving him sad puppy dog eyes.

“I know. I feel the same way.”

I went and rounded up my clothes, put my skirt on, and hid my panties under his

pillow. I carried my boots because I was feeling more like a kid than a sexy vixen right now. We got in the truck and he took me back to the motorhome.

“See ya soon,” I said and gave him a big wet kiss.

“I can’t wait.” He wiped his mouth and laughed.

I ran up to the motorhome, bare feet, short skirt, no panties, and Ethan’s shirt. Life was good!

Chapter 6

When I went into the motorhome I didn't see anyone right away, but then Vince walked out of the back room that Jo and Brittany shared.

“Oh, hey,” I said, looking around for Jo.

“Hellooo, Gia,” he said in a way that made me feel uncomfortable. “Don't you look all hot and bothered this morning?”

He was looking me up and down like a dog in heat.

“Where’s Jo?” I asked, trying to hide the nervousness in my voice.

“She’s sleeping. Why? Are you scared to be alone with me?” He laughed.

“No, should I be?” My heart was beating fast. In my head I was going through all the things I’d heard about self-defense and protecting yourself from someone much bigger than you.

He laughed again. “No, I’m very gentle, like a gentle giant.” He stepped forward so he was as close as he could be without actually touching me.

“I think you should go now,” I said. As I turned to open the door, he grabbed

my arm.

“I know you spent the night with Ethan last night, but that’s okay. He and I have shared women before. I certainly don’t mind his sloppy seconds.” Then he grabbed my ass! “No panties? Fuck, that’s hot!”

“If you touch me again, you’ll be sorry!” I said. Now I was pissed. *Who the hell did he think he was?*

He could tell I wasn’t into his freaky shit so he stopped smiling. “Gia, I’m sorry. I was getting a vibe from you last night when Ethan introduced us. Most of the women who come up here for the weekend that act and dress like you do are usually up for a good time. No harm done, but you shouldn’t put out those

kinds of signals if you don't want to play." He was stern, like he was scolding me. He started putting his shoes on.

"I—I'm sorry," I said. *What?* It just came out. Vince made me feel guilty like I did something to provoke this. *Did I?* I tried to think back to when I met him.

"Don't worry. I won't say anything to Ethan." He left.

What the fuck just happened?!

I remembered Vince giving me a weird feeling when I met him. *Did I flirt with him or look at him suggestively while I was dancing or something? No, I was completely into Ethan all night, so Vince had to have mistakenly assumed something. What did he mean*

by 'He and I have shared women before'? Do they hook up with different women every week-end and pass them around like candy?

All of a sudden I felt betrayed. Was I just another notch on Ethan's bedpost? Did he seduce women like me all the time, making them think they were really special? No, he told me about the first time he saw me and I remembered that day. He told me about some of the other times he'd seen me, they were real. He gave me what I wanted this weekend—he gained my trust and I gave him a part of me which was very personal and private.

I sat down and tried to remember everything. I tried to make sense of it all.

I decided I needed to tell Ethan. He needed to know what Vince said and did to me. It didn't matter what Ethan's intentions with me were. He should know how his employees treat people.

“Hey, Gia! How was your night?” Jo came out of the back room. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong. How was your night?” I didn’t know if I should tell her the guy she’d just spent the night with was a fucking asshole.

“It was fantastic!” She plopped down next to me. “Vince was a lot of fun, and Gia, he gave me an orgasm! That doesn’t happen very often. I feel like a new woman!” She was really thrilled. There was no way I was going to take that

away from her. There was no point in telling her, unless...

“Are you going to see him again?” I asked, praying she would say no.

“I doubt it,” she shrugged. “It was just a fun night with an orgasmic ending. I don’t have the time for a long distance relationship, plus Vince isn’t really the kind of guy I’d pick for a serious boyfriend.”

Thank goodness!

“Gia, I hate to brag, but I think I rocked his world with some of my moves last night, too.” She was smiling. *Yeah, I definitely won’t be telling her about my run in with Vince.* I had to let her have her happy ending.

“I’ll bet you did,” I told her. “He was

going out when I came in and he looked pretty happy.” It was a lie, but he did laugh a few times.

We heard voices outside, the door swung open and Brittany stumbled in. She was laughing and practically fell down on the couch between Jo and me.

“You’re still drunk!” Jo said, laughing.

“Yeah, I’m drunk. Marcus and I have been up all night. He’s a riot!” Brittany said. “I’m gonna have to pass on the concerts today. I need to sleep. Have fun!” And with that she made her way back to her and Jo’s room.

“So, tell me about Ethan!” Jo said excitedly.

“He’s really something,” I told her. “I

got exactly what I wanted this weekend and more.” I smiled as I thought of our sexual encounters.

“Wow! From the look on your face I’m not the only one who had the big O. That’s awesome, Gia! I know how much you needed to live a little.” She gave me a hug. She knew more than anyone what I’d gone through with Lex. Since she lived next door, she was around every day. I told Dana everything, but Jo actually witnessed a lot of it and she could almost feel my pain because she was so close.

“Is Ethan meeting us today?” she asked.

“Yes. He had a meeting this morning. Hey, Trey was going to that meeting, too.

Any word from Dana?”

We both grabbed our phones. Neither of us had any messages, so I texted her.

R u still alive?

Jo got up and put some coffee on. *Good, Ethan may be a master at a lot of things, but making coffee isn't one of them.* I smiled just thinking about him. But then Vince's stupid comments clouded me. I didn't know what to believe. My phone beeped.

And kickin'! Dana texted back.

My phone rang, it was Dana. “Alive *and kickin'*, that's pretty good,” I said.

“I know, right?” she said and she

sounded quite pleased. “Trey went to a meeting. I wanted to stay in bed so he said he’d be back in an hour. I think I’ll just shower here and meet you at the concert. How’d your night go?”

“It was really great. We’ll have a lot to talk about later. Text me when you head over and we’ll meet you.”

“Okay. Is Ethan coming?” She sounded hopeful.

“Yes, and Jo, but Brittany just came in. She and Marcus stayed up partying all night so she said she was skipping the concerts and went to bed.”

She started laughing. “That doesn’t surprise me. Good for her! She found someone who could keep up with her for one night! I’ll talk to you soon, sweetie!”

We hung up.

I told Jo the plan and she asked if I wanted Bailey's in my coffee.

"Sure, why not?" I said. "I think I'll sit outside and drink it while you shower, but I'm gonna walk over to the c-store and get some cigarettes first."

"Okay, see ya in a bit." She took her coffee into the bathroom.

I put some shorts on and headed to the c-store. It was only a half a block from our spot, which was handy. When I got there I decided I'd buy a tank top to wear today. Ethan would like it. It said "I" and then it had one of those little red hearts, "to Rock at The Lock." Now that I knew the owner, it seemed only natural for me to buy one.

While I was on my way to the cashier, I noticed an article on the wall with Ethan's picture on it. I walked over to it.

“Ethan Lockwood, owner and operator of Wood Campground and The Lock proves that hard work and determination pays off as he reveals his summer line-up. Concerts include some of the most popular must-see bands and sell-out crowds are expected.” I kept reading, it told how Ethan's grandpa started Wood Campground and this little c-store thirty-some years ago and how Ethan bought it back and turned it into what it was today. It also talked about the hard times and how no one thought it would ever make money, but Ethan was expected to make a hefty profit this year.

Good for him. I felt really proud of him. Then I read something that Ethan said in an interview, “I owe a lot of gratitude to my entertainment manager, Vince Delgotti. Without him we wouldn’t have been able to book some of these big names. He knows the in’s and out’s of that aspect of the business better than anyone I know.”

I slowly walked up to the cashier and paid for my tank top, Marlboros, and gum, then headed back to the motorhome in a daze.

I went in and put an extra shot in my coffee and then found a place in the sun to sit and think. I lit a cigarette and leaned my head back to feel the heat on my face. I thought about the facts and

came to a couple of obvious conclusions.

First, I came up here on a mission. I had a total blast, the best sex I'd ever had, and learned some things about myself. Mission accomplished plus some.

Second, I met a great guy. He gave me what I wanted and I gave him what he wanted and it was perfect. Bonus.

This, all around me, was Ethan's life. He lived it every day and had for almost twenty years. *Who was I to come up here and take all that he had so willingly given to me and then disrupt his flow by telling him that his friend made a pass at me? Really, that would be ridiculous!*

I felt better. I was going to head in and shower, forget about Vince, and enjoy the rest of the weekend with my friends, old and new.

As I was about to go in the camper, Ethan pulled up. “Hi, beautiful.”

I walked over to the truck. “Hi, yourself.”

“I just finished at the meeting and went to call you to make a plan and realized that we still hadn’t exchanged numbers.” He held up his phone.

I took it from him and handed him mine. I put my number in under “Hotness” just because I liked it when he’d called me that a few times.

“I haven’t showered yet, either, so maybe like an hour or so?” I asked him.

“I have to wait a whole hour to see you again?” He was smiling.

I didn't want to wait an hour to see him, either. “Yes, or maybe forty-five minutes.” I smiled back.

“I'll be back to get you. Have you eaten?” He asked.

I shook my head no and held up my coffee cup.

“I'd like to have lunch with you when I come get you. Do you mind if we miss the first half hour or so of the opening concert?” *He was so considerate. There was no way that he knew what Vince was really like.*

“I love how you always think of my needs and consider my feelings, thank you. And yes, that would be really nice.”

I had to say it. I knew I'd regret not telling him how great he was when I was all alone back in the city.

“I love how you notice when I do those things. You're welcome, Gia. You need to get used to someone treating you the way you deserve to be treated and then *expect* it, don't settle for anything less. I'll see you in...” he looked at his watch, “forty-two minutes.” He winked at me and drove off.

I better hurry. I had a date with an amazing guy and nothing was going to take away from what could be the last hours I had with him. I needed to make the most of it and I knew that it could be really, really fantastic.

It felt so good to be in the shower. I

could almost feel Ethan's fingers on my skin. *Who would've known someone could make me feel that way?* Not me. I would've never believed it if I hadn't experienced it firsthand. He was one-of-a-kind and I wasn't going to let anything stop me from making sure he knew that before I left today. Not even Vince. I put that completely out of my mind.

I was going for a different look today. I put my makeup on but with a fresher, more natural look than I had the last two days. I blow-dried my hair and then pulled it back into a neat, sexy pony-tail, making sure to leave a couple wisps around my face and down my back. I decided to wear my new jean shorts and the tank top I bought this morning. I was

also taking Ethan's advice and dressing in comfortable shoes today, so I grabbed my flip-flops.

"Wow, you look hot," Jo said as I came out of the little bathroom.

"Thanks, so do you!" I told her and she did. She was wearing shorts and a tank also. But her hair and makeup were rocked out more than mine. She looked different, but in a good way. *Must've been the orgasm.*

"How about a drink? We've got ten minutes before Ethan gets here," she said.

"Sounds good, I think I'll just have wine." I took out some glasses. "How about you?"

"Wine sounds great," she said. I

poured two glasses.

“To one hell of a weekend,” Jo said and we clinked glasses.

“Amen, sista,” I added.

We grabbed what we wanted to take with us and checked on Brittany, then we went outside to drink our wine and wait for Ethan.

I lit a cigarette and called Dana. We made a plan to meet at the gate shortly. I told her Ethan and I were going to have lunch but we'd meet them first. I didn't want Jo to feel like a third wheel. Plus, she was excited about the opening band and I knew she wouldn't want to miss any of it.

Chapter 7

Ethan

As I watched Gia go into the motorhome, it struck me how great we were together. I slept better than ever last night, and waking up with her in my arms this morning was a dream come true. I'd love the chance to make all of Gia's dreams come true and give her everything she'd been missing all those

years with that selfish coward, Lex. *Wouldn't it be obvious for us to keep seeing each other after she went back to the city today?* She was everything I'd always wanted and more. I already knew that after spending only two days with her. *How does she feel about me, other than physically or sexually? I have to find out and I have to try to set up another date with her before she leaves.*

I headed to the morning meeting. Everyone was really pumped up about the weekend we were having. All in all, no big problems, just a few minor kinks that needed to be worked out before next weekend. I was really proud of these people. I had the best staff I could've

possibly had and I knew it.

“Before everyone heads out and breaks more records today, I’d just like to take a moment to say a few words.” I wanted to make sure everyone knew how I felt. “First of all, each and every person in this room has been a part of making this not only the biggest and best opening weekend The Lock has ever had, but also the smoothest running, and that says an awful lot. I appreciate all of you and I know you’ve all worked your asses off. Thank you so much. I hope we can keep this team together all season long.” Everyone cheered. I wasn’t expecting that, it was very humbling. *What a great bunch of people.*

Trey and I stood at the door and

watched everyone take off. They seemed eager to get working for the day.

“Good speech, boss.” He patted me on the back. I always knew when Trey was giving me a hard time because that’s when he’d call me ‘boss.’

“Thanks, shithead.”

Here comes trouble.

“Ethan, could I talk to you for a minute?” It was Shelley.

“I’ll see you in a little bit,” Trey said and took off. I didn’t even get a chance to ask him how things were with Dana.

“Sure,” I said but I really didn’t want to. It was taking away from my time with Gia.

“I’m really sorry about the scene I made at your place last night. I was

jealous that you were on a date with someone. I guess I felt like you'd always be there for me and when you were with someone else, it hurt." She teared up a little and I felt bad for her.

"Shelley, we had a lot of fun together at one time. But we had both agreed that we weren't looking for anything more. The fact is, you were cheating on someone else with me and I don't play games like that. Now, you and Bob broke up so you want to crawl back into my bed and that's not going to happen. It doesn't matter if I'm alone forever more or I'm in a relationship with someone, because it's never going to happen. I'm sorry that you feel hurt, I never meant to hurt you."

“I know. You’d never intentionally hurt anyone. I was really drunk and I’m sorry about that, too. I know the rules, it won’t happen again. Truce?” She held out her hand.

“Truce,” I said, and gave her a hug instead. She was still a friend of mine and a valuable employee. “I’m still here for you for work-related stuff. I know you have Gwen and the other girls to help you with your recent break-up. If you need some time off, talk to Rose. I’m sure she can arrange it.”

“Thanks, Ethan. I’m going to be fine,” she said with a forced smile. She gave me a little wave and headed for the door.

I was glad that was over.

Now I needed to make a plan with Gia. As I grabbed my phone I realized I didn't even have her number yet. It made me panic for a second. I was already feeling nervous about Gia heading back to the city with a new openness. I was sure there were guys dying to have a chance with her and I didn't want her to give them the opportunity she had given me. I wanted to spend as much time with her as I could before she left.

I jumped in the truck and headed for the campground.

When I pulled up I saw her outside. "Hi, beautiful." My heart skipped a beat when she headed toward me.

"Hi, yourself."

I told her why I was there and we

handed each other our phones. I noticed she didn't have very many contacts and that surprised me. I put my number in under 'Your biggest fan.'

We made a plan for me to pick her up in forty-five minutes. I couldn't wait!

When I got home, I didn't waste any time. I jumped in the shower, shaved, and got dressed in fifteen minutes. I needed to set something up for our lunch date. I wanted it to be special. I didn't know what she liked to eat besides pizza. I couldn't get any flowers fast enough. *What could I do?* Then I had an idea.

I called Wanda at the sub shop and ordered some salads and sandwiches. "Could you put everything we need to

eat them in the bag? It's for a picnic."

Then I called Don. "Is there somewhere around the campground that I could cut some of the flowers without messing up what you've made look so beautiful?" He was happy to tell me a spot, knowing they were for a girl.

I put some ice and drinks in a small cooler, leaving room for the food, and drove over to the sub shop. I came back home, grabbed the blanket out of the truck, and strapped it all on my motorcycle. I knew we'd probably give the other girls a ride, so I hopped back in the truck and headed over to the campground. I passed the main entrance and drove around back and cut some flowers where Don told me. They were

beautiful and sweet smelling, just like Gia.

I headed over to lot sixty-nine to pick up an amazing woman for what I knew would be an amazing date. I felt like a kid again.

Chapter 8

Gia

I saw Ethan's truck coming down the little road and my butterflies were fluttering.

He pulled up. When he got out I could see he was carrying flowers. *He's so sweet, I really could get used to this.*

He gave me a kiss and handed me the flowers. "They're not as beautiful as you

are, but then again, nothing is.” Right in front of Jo!

“Oh, that’s so sweet!” Jo said.

“Yes, it is,” I said, looking at Ethan.

“Thank you so much.” I gave him a kiss.

Jo came over and took them from me,

“I’ll run in and put them in water.”

“Thanks, Jo.”

“You look amazing, Gia. I love the tank, thanks for the support.” He smiled.

“If you want things from here, please just tell me. I don’t want to take your money.”

“Don’t be silly. I’m sleeping with the owner. I have to buy a shirt at least!” We laughed. “Do you want something to drink before we go?” I asked Ethan.

“No, thanks. I’ll wait for lunch.” He

was anxious to go, I could tell. *What was he up to?*

“Okay, I think we’re ready.” I took my glass to the motorhome and handed it to Jo. “Ready?” I asked her.

“Ready!” she said and we got in the truck.

I loved sitting by Ethan, really close. I even put my hand on his leg and leaned up against him. He seemed to like it. He and Jo were making small talk and I was glad Vince’s name never got brought up.

We got to the gate and met Trey and Dana. They looked like they’d been together for years, holding hands and talking. They were very cute. I was about to follow them in but then Ethan said we’d see them later.

“Where are we having lunch?” I asked him, assuming we were eating at one of the places near the arena.

“You’ll see.” He took my hand.

When we got over to his place, I saw a motorcycle with a cooler and blanket strapped to it. I got really nervous. I’d never ridden on one. Lex thought they were very dangerous.

“You look scared,” Ethan said as he led me over to the bike.

“I am,” I said. “But I trust you.” I had to go with it. He planned this for us.

“I’d never put you in danger, Gia.” He kissed me. I knew that was true.

We got on and I loved the feeling of his body between my legs. I wrapped my arms around him tightly. *I can do this.*

When he started it I could feel the engine vibrating and I liked that, too. We took off and it wasn't long before I knew exactly where we were headed. This time we drove all the way to the tree, taking the bike beyond where the dirt road ended.

“How was that?” Ethan asked when he turned the bike off.

“I liked it!” I said and gave him a kiss.

“Good. Are you ready to eat?” He unloaded the bike. Again I got the feeling he was feeling anxious.

“Yes.” I took the blanket and laid it out. Then I kicked off my flip flops, sat, and looked out over the edge. It was just as awesome during the day as it was at

night. The concert was getting ready to start and the place was packed.

Ethan joined me on the blanket and opened the cooler. He had subs and salads, perfect. He asked what I wanted to drink. He had water, beer, soda, and some wine coolers.

“Just water, please,” I told him. “Thank you, Ethan. This is really something. You planned this in forty-five minutes?” I was impressed.

“Forty-two, actually.” He raised his eyebrow like, ‘pretty good, huh.’

I got on my hands and knees and crawled over to him, very slowly, eyes locked to his. I climbed onto his lap and wrapped my legs around his waist. “You’re very sexy today,” I told him.

“Gia, I want to keep seeing you after you go home.” It took me by surprise and he even looked a little surprised that he’d said it, but I was happy he had.

“I was going to wait until after we ate to talk about it, but I just have to know. I have to know how you feel about me so far and if you’d be willing to let me take you out again.” He looked nervous. *That must’ve been why he’d been anxious!*

I felt like I’d just won something huge. I put my hands on his face and kissed him softly. “I would love to see you again, Ethan. And as far as how I feel about you, well, I think you know when you look into my eyes how I feel.” I kissed him softly again. Now I didn’t want to leave today. I wanted more time

with Ethan.

“Gia, meeting you and sharing this weekend with you has been the best thing that has ever happened to me, and I’m being totally honest when I say that. When I look at you, I see something that completes me, something that I’ve always wanted in my life.” We just stared at each other for a while. The feeling was mutual. I gave him a big hug.

“Let’s eat!” I said and hopped up off his lap. “You didn’t put tofu on mine, did you?” I loved teasing him about his healthy eating. I ate pretty healthy too, even though I loved pizza, but I didn’t want to tell him that because then I couldn’t tease him about it.

“Yes, eat it. It’s good for you,” he

said, teasing me back.

As we ate, Ethan pointed out all kinds of stuff we could see from up here. He told me about his grandpa starting the campground when he was a kid. About him and his buddies buying it back after his dad sold it and how he had to turn around and buy them out when they decided to quit. He said The Lock was a dream of his for a long time and now he finally had it the way he'd always wanted it. He even talked about his mom and dad a little bit. I could tell he didn't have the closest relationship with his dad, but I didn't ask him about it.

"You should be really proud of yourself, Ethan. I'm proud of you. You've overcome a lot to be where you

are now.” It was true. He was no quitter, that was for sure.

“Thanks, Gia.” He smiled. “Now I just need someone to share it with.” He kissed me.

I laid down and looked up at the sky. It was a beautiful day. Ethan laid beside me and held my hand.

“It seems like I’ve been doing all the talking today,” he said. “Tell me about your family.”

Ethan

I turned toward her and propped up on my elbow so I could watch her talk. She

had a more natural look today, less makeup and her hair was in a pony-tail. I liked it. She had shorts on and one of my tank tops that said 'I ♥ to Rock at The Lock.' It hugged her breasts and I knew if people saw her wearing it today I'd probably sell out. After a bit of hesitation she started to talk and I gave her my full attention.

“I have a younger sister, Lilly. She has two kids and a wonderful husband, Pete. I'm really close to them, we talk almost every day. They live about five minutes from me. I'm also very close to my parents, they're the best. They've always been super supportive of us girls, no matter what crazy things we think we want to do. They're both

retired. My dad, Ron, was a seventh grade math teacher, and my mom, Ruth, was a bookkeeper for a construction company. They both worked really hard to give us a great home life.” She turned her head and looked at me. I was taking in every word and wanted her to keep going. I loved learning about her and I wanted to know everything. She looked back up and continued.

“I work at Palmer, Hogan & Evans law firm as an assistant for Mr. Evans. He’s a fantastic boss. He’s very easy going and I enjoy what I do there. I live in a small but charming apartment above a salon that Mr. Evans’ wife owns. She’s an awesome lady. Her name’s Bridget and she insisted I move in there

after Lex and I divorced.” She looked at me again. “Are you bored yet?” she asked.

Ha! Fat chance. “No, not at all, I want to know everything about you. And I love listening to you and watching you talk. Please keep going.” I was very content.

“Okay, um, for the ten years I was married to Lex we lived in a nice house on Brent Street, over by the Lakeside Mall. He’s a realtor. The last two years we were married he set up a lot of open houses and showings in the evenings, so we didn’t see each other much. One time we went an entire week without saying one word to each other. I moved out and filed for divorce two weeks later. We

split everything. Neither of us cared about material things too much so it was very civil. He's remarried already and his new wife has two kids, so I'm sure he's on top of the world." I felt jealousy, sadness, and even some anger as I listened. Lex was a real piece of work! I understood Gia even more now. Her husband of ten years abandoned her even before they split up, but he wasn't even man enough to file for divorce or move out so she could get on with her life. I wondered what attracted her to him in the first place.

"Do you still love him?" I don't know why I asked her this—I think it was the jealousy.

"Sure, I mean I was with him for

thirteen years total, so I love him in a way that I care about his well-being and want him to be happy.” I thought that was very forgiving of her, considering how he’d treated her. “I can’t remember being *in love* with Lex, although I’m sure I was at some point. It’s just hard to remember that far back, before all the trouble conceiving and such.” I squeezed her hand and kissed her cheek. I felt very close to her at that moment. She’d shared a lot with me and I could tell it was hard for her to re-live some of those memories. I was going to do everything I could to make sure she never felt that way again.

“Okay, I’m done talking about myself for a while,” she said. “We’ve learned a

lot about each other today, haven't we?" She turned and looked at me again.

"Yes, we have. And I've loved every minute of it—thank you." I kissed her softly. "When can I take you out again? Since you work days, how about tomorrow night for dinner?" I had to get something set up and I didn't want to wait until next weekend to see her again.

Gia

He is so stuck on this! "We aren't even done with this date yet and you want to plan the next one?" I pulled myself up and straddled him. I took his

arms and pinned them back onto the ground beside his head. “Now who’s the one going fast? Stay with me, Ethan, slow and easy, remember?” I was teasing him. I let go of his arms and tickled his sides.

“Oh, you want to get tickled, do ya?” With that he had me flipped over and under him in like two seconds flat. I was laughing and trying to wrestle back but I couldn’t move. He pinned my arms down. “I’m sorry, what were you saying? I think you were teasing me.”

“Okay, I give up. How about breakfast tomorrow?” I said. *That’ll really confuse him.*

“Sure, whatever you want. What time do you want me there?” He didn’t even

hesitate.

“You’re willing to drive two hours to take me to breakfast in the morning?” I asked.

“Of course. What time do you have to be to work? Eight?” He was totally serious. He would actually do this if it was what I wanted.

“Kiss me,” I told him. He let go of my arms and pulled me up. Then he sat and pulled me onto his lap. He kissed me. It was long and passionate and it turned me on. I never knew a man like him could even exist.

“I was thinking breakfast at your place tomorrow. I have the day off.” I couldn’t let him suffer any longer.

“Are you serious? You’re going to

stay with me tonight?” He was so excited.

“Yes, if you’ll give me a ride back to the city tomorrow.”

He hugged me. “Like you even have to ask!”

We had a serious make-out session and I could tell Ethan had relaxed considerably after I told him I could stay the night. I was looking forward to it, too. I wasn’t ready to head back to the city and back to the real Gia yet.

“Should we head to the concert? I think it’s the second one already. We’ve been up here a while,” I said.

Ethan looked at his watch. “Yes, we missed the entire first show. I had so much more fun up here with you than I

would've down there, anyway. I mean, I love the concerts and all, but I've spent the last nineteen years down there and it's been really nice being away from that for a while."

"Should we just skip the concerts today? I'm good if you are," I asked him. I couldn't imagine spending as much time down there as Ethan had and I was happy to have meant enough to him to be up here having a picnic. I loved the concerts, too, but spending quiet time with Ethan was trumping that in a big way.

He gave me a huge smile. That answered that question. "Do you want to go to my place? Or we could stay up here, or go for a ride, or whatever you

want.” He was excited.

“I don’t want to go for a motorcycle ride. Even though I liked it, I’m not ready to hit the open road just yet. As far as staying here or going to your place, I’m open to either.”

“What am I going to do with you for the next twenty-four hours? How many hours of sleep do you need?” He had a naughty smile on his face.

“Let’s go back to your place.”

Chapter 9

When we got back to Ethan's, I helped him put our picnic stuff away. We flirted and touched each other and kissed every chance we got. I felt like a teenager. I texted Dana and told her we were skipping the concerts and I was staying with Ethan tonight but I'd meet them after the concert to say good-bye and get my stuff. She was happy for me and it

sounded like they were having a great time.

“So, what do you want to do now?” Ethan walked up and put his arms around me.

I put my arms around him, gazed up at his gorgeous face, and smiled. I wanted him. I took his hand and led him to his dining room table. I'd been thinking of this ever since this morning. I pushed him down so he was sitting on the table and I stood in front of him. My heart was racing as I locked eyes with him, took ahold of the bottom of my tank top, slowly pulled it over my head, and tossed it at him. He caught it, smelled it, and smiled. He was so sexy. My face got hot as I decided to really go for it and

fulfill a silly fantasy of mine.

I unbuttoned my shorts and turned around so my ass was right in front of him. I was surprised by my lack of inhibition as I leaned over, pulled them down, and took them off. I stayed in that position as I tossed them to him from between my legs. He laughed as he caught them. Then he held them up to his nose and I watched his chest expand as he took an exaggerated whiff. I giggled as he caught my eye and raised his brow. I contained myself enough to stand up and continue my comedic striptease. With my back still to him, I reached around and unhooked my bra, took it off, and twirled it around on my finger before letting it fly, but it went way off

course and we both snickered as he reached for it anyway. I had one arm across my breasts when I turned around to face him. His expression was serious now as he looked up and down my body. I noticed he had to swallow hard. I took a deep breath and used my free hand to pull my damp panties down and toss them to him. He caught them and immediately stuck them in his pocket. He put his hands up like he didn't know what happened to them. I giggled.

I walked toward him. He reached out and pulled my arm from my breasts and then he gasped like he'd never seen them before. I laughed at his unexpected reaction. My breasts bounced up and down and my nipples responded by

growing hard in front of him. He smiled and watched with big eyes before he grabbed me and pulled me to him. I knew all this fun was about to get *fun* when I saw the hunger in his eyes. He put his hands on my ass and his mouth over my nipple. I watched him as he licked, sucked, and bit them softly. His tongue was warm, and as it flicked my nipple, I felt tingling between my legs. I squeezed them together, trying to satisfy the wanting there. His lips were soft when he kissed my breasts but when he nibbled on them, his stubble grazed teasingly. I reached down and pulled his shirt off. I put it up to my nose and then I licked my lips slowly and sighed before I tossed it across the room. He rolled his

eyes and I smiled. I liked how we were still keeping it light even though there were some serious hormones raging. I pulled him up and turned him so I sat on the table and he was standing in front of me. I unbuttoned and unzipped him, but before I pulled them down I looked up at him and winked. He looked excitedly nervous and I liked that. I yanked down fast and hard and gasped like he had when he'd seen my breasts. All this playfulness was allowing me to relax and try new things. I felt free, naughty, and sexy as hell.

I put my hands on his ass and pulled him toward me. I looked up at him as I ran my tongue from the base of his cock all the way to the tip. I stopped,

swallowed, and repeated, just like I was licking a lollypop. He was smooth, soft, and tasted fresh and clean, like the scent of his clothes. I brought my right hand back in and took hold of his cock firmly. I swirled the tip with my tongue, watching as his expression went from anticipation to relief. He moistened his lips and put his hands in my hair. I was very thorough and made sure to lick every inch as I worked him with my hand. I heard him gasp as I took his head in my mouth and sucked while I kept a steady rhythm going up and down. I couldn't take him all the way in because he was quite large, but I took him in as far as I could over and over. His hips moved forward and back as he moaned

and pushed his fingertips into my scalp. I released his cock and cupped his boys as I turned my head and took his middle finger in my mouth. I sucked on it just like I had been sucking on his cock. I ran my teeth over the end of it as I squeezed his boys gently. He was going crazy. He backed away, pulled me up to him, and kissed me passionately.

He grabbed my ass again but this time he lifted me up, so I wrapped my legs around him. His chest and arms were bulging as he carried me. I let my tits rub up against him and kissed the side of his neck. He walked me over to the kitchen counter, which was higher than the table, and set me on it. It was cool against my bare skin but it heightened my senses for

what was to come. “Gia, I have to taste you.” I got butterflies as soon as my name left Ethan’s lips. He went down on me as I leaned back on the countertop. I moaned and lifted my hips to feel him harder against me. He licked me sweetly, softly, it was making me crazy. I arched my back and put my hands in his hair. I squeezed my thighs against his face for a second and then put my heels on his shoulders. I couldn’t stay still. He was on my spot now, going at it like I wanted him to. I was quickly getting to the ‘fuck me now’ place.

He stopped and I sat up. We found each other’s lips and started kissing animalistically, it was fucking hot. I tasted myself on his lips, they were

sweet and salty and I bit the bottom one and pulled on it. He moaned and opened his eyes to see me watching his reaction. We were both in the ‘fuck me now’ place. He pulled me off the counter, and as he was about to enter me he said, “Shit! Gia, I have to get a condom.” I waited as he went to his night stand and got one, ripped it open, and put it on as he hurried back to me.

He pulled me off the counter and slowly lowered me onto him. He slid into me. We both moaned at the feeling of relief. I wrapped my legs around him and clasped my feet so I had some stability to move up and down as he guided me with his hands on my hips. I felt so full with his cock inside me and I

was so wet and ready that he was gliding easily in and out even though it was a tight fit. “You feel amazing,” I whispered to him.

Ethan looked into my eyes and I started going faster. He was trying to stay in control. I wanted him to lose it. I was losing it. I didn't even know my own name. I wanted him to fuck me, hard. “It's okay, Ethan, you want to and I want to. You feel so good and it's okay.” I barely got the last word out before he had my back up against the wall and was thrusting in and out quicker and harder. I grabbed his hair and pulled his mouth to mine. As I found his tongue, I moaned and he moaned back. We realized we were going at it too hard to kiss so I

went for his neck and up to his ear. I stuck my tongue in it and knew I was very close. I moaned and said, “I’m gonna come, come with me, Ethan.”

We both moaned. I felt it as we let go, and with it went our insecurities and inhibitions, and we became like one at that moment. It was fucking amazing.

Ethan walked over and set me back on the counter and we collapsed against each other. We were both sweating and panting. When he caught his breath he looked at me and kissed my lips tenderly. “Wow,” was all he said and he pulled me off the counter and went into the bathroom to flush the condom.

I couldn’t wipe the smile from my face as I started to collect my clothes

from all over the room, then I remembered my panties were in Ethan's pocket. It reminded me that I had hidden my other pair under his pillow. I put my shorts back on without any and took the ones from under his pillow and hid them in his dresser since I was staying here tonight. My knees were weak from the sexercise and I was a little sore between my legs.

Ethan came out of the bathroom and kissed me before he got dressed. "That was incredible, Gia. I guess fast and hard can be passionate too, as long as you're with the right person." He was right.

Chapter 10

I went to the bathroom and freshened up and then we decided to sit outside and have a beer and a cigarette. I felt very relaxed and Ethan seemed to be also. We talked some more about ourselves and our lives and I realized how much you could learn about someone in a short amount of time when you didn't have any distractions. I was

glad to have another day to enjoy before returning to the city and the real Gia. I didn't want to think about that now. I pushed it aside as I did with everything I didn't want to deal with. I was really good at living in the moment and not worrying about the stuff that would still be there later. And The Lock had always been that for me, an escape from real life.

The last concert was about to end, so I texted Dana and told her we'd meet them outside the gate and take them back to the motorhome.

Trey and Dana sat on the tailgate and

Jo jumped in the front with Ethan and I. Jo was telling us about the concerts and it sounded like she'd really enjoyed them. When we pulled up to the motorhome, my heart started racing. There was an officer waiting for us. A flood of bad memories filled me as I wondered what he was doing there and then I panicked even more when I remembered we'd left Brittany inside alone.

“Oh, Gia, I forgot to tell you that a detective wants to talk to you about the incident with Rick last night. That's probably him,” Ethan said, like it was no big deal.

I started shaking. “Why does he need to talk to me? What does he want to

know?” My voice cracked.

Ethan looked stunned by my reaction. “Gia, it’s okay. Just answer his questions so they can take care of Rick. You don’t have anything to worry about, you didn’t do anything wrong.” He held my hand and stroked it with his finger.

“I think I’m going to be sick.” I looked around the truck for something to vomit in.

“Ethan, could you give us a minute?” Jo asked him as she took my hand from Ethan and held it. I leaned toward her.

“Sure,” Ethan said, looking worried and confused. He touched my shoulder, then got out of the truck and started talking to the officer.

“Gia,” Jo started. “It’s okay. Like

Ethan said, you didn't do anything wrong. I know you're nervous and I know you're thinking about things that have happened in the past. Don't do this to yourself. You're okay now, all that is behind you." She put her face down in front of mine and made me look at her instead of staring into my hands. "Gia, I'm here for you. You're my best friend and I love you. Dana is here too, so it's fine."

Suddenly I just wanted to go home. I didn't want to stay here with Ethan and pretend that I was a fun-loving girl anymore. I had to get back to reality. I had to get back to my apartment. I wanted to curl up on my couch in a little ball and watch reruns and be safe. "I

want to go home,” I told Jo.

“Gia, don’t decide anything right now. You need to talk to the officer first. You’ll feel better, and then if you still want to go home, you can, of course. Gia, I’ve known you for a long time and I’ve watched you go through hell, but I think Ethan could really help you move on from some of that shit. I’ve never seen you as alive as you’ve been this weekend. Consider him before you decide, please.” I knew she was right. I hadn’t been with someone like him, ever. But I didn’t deserve him and he’d know that soon enough. I’d get out before he saw the real Gia and then I’d stay perfect in his mind forever. But I had to get out of the truck and talk to the

officer first.

When I moved to get out I felt the soreness between my legs. It gave me butterflies as I remembered how it got that way. I wished I could be that Gia all the time. I wished I could tell Ethan everything and he'd still look at me the way he did now. *But that's not possible, no one could do that.*

I did what I had become so good at doing and I pushed it all down deep inside and put on a brave face for the officer.

“Miss Stone.” He reached out to shake my hand. “I’m Detective Reynolds. I have a couple of questions for you about the incident that happened here yesterday.”

I shook his hand and nodded.

Ethan touched me on the shoulder. He looked worried about me. I forced a smile and he walked over to the motorhome where our friends were gathered.

Detective Reynolds was very nice. He wrote in his little notebook as I told him what had happened at the VIP bar. He asked me a couple of easy questions and that was it! I was really relieved, and Jo was right, I felt much better, although I still thought about the safety net of my little apartment. I didn't know if I could stay with Ethan knowing that Dana and Jo were further than a phone call away. I wanted to stay with him, but I was apprehensive now.

As soon as Detective Reynolds started walking to his car, Ethan rushed over to me. He put his arms around me and held me. He knew that something about having to talk to the officer had upset me, but he didn't ask me anything, he just held me. It felt so good. And I knew if I stayed he wouldn't push me to tell him anything I wasn't ready to. I fought back tears. I didn't want a scene so I pushed everything down deep and decided I could be fun-loving Gia for one more day. I smiled and looked up at Ethan. When I looked into his eyes it made it really easy to forget about the bad stuff.

Ethan

I felt so bad about not having warned Gia that the detective wanted to talk to her before she left, but I didn't think it was a big deal. It was obvious though that for some reason it *was* a big deal to her.

“Ethan, could you give us a minute?” Jo asked me.

“Sure.” I reached up and put my hand on Gia's shoulder and she immediately looked down at her hands. It reminded me of the way she'd looked when I brought her back here after our first night together and she wouldn't talk to or look at me. I was confused. I didn't know

what was going on. I got out of the truck even though I didn't want to and walked over to the detective.

“Ethan Lockwood,” I said to him and gave him a handshake.

“Hi, Mr. Lockwood. Detective Reynolds. I was hoping to ask Miss Stone some questions about last night.”

I wanted to tell him no. I wanted to protect Gia from whatever it was that scared her so, but I knew she had to talk to him sooner or later if we wanted to prosecute Rick. “Of course. But Miss Stone is a little nervous talking about it. She's embarrassed by the whole thing and I know she just wants to get it behind her. Could you respect that and be sensitive with your questioning?”

“Of course, Mr. Lockwood.” He seemed to get it.

Gia and Jo got out of the truck. The detective introduced himself and Gia shook his hand. I touched her shoulder and she gave me a forced smile. I walked over to the others but kept my eyes on Gia. *One sign of distress and I'm going to rescue her.* I could hear Dana and Jo whispering and wondered what Jo and Gia had talked about in the truck. Then Jo came over to me.

“Ethan, I've never seen Gia as happy and carefree as she's been this weekend. I can tell that you care for her and that's why I'm telling you this. Gia's had some really traumatic times in her life and she has trouble dealing with them at times.” I

wanted to run to her and hold her. “There are things that happened during her marriage that she doesn’t talk about.”

“Other than the problems having a baby and the miscarriages and the fact that she was married to a selfish jerk who didn’t deserve her?” I asked Jo.

She looked at me, shocked. “Holy shit, she told you all that?” Then she smiled. “I’m surprised she opened up to you that much in such a short time.” Then her face turned serious again. “Yes, there’s more to it than that. Lex did a real number on her. She has issues that she hasn’t dealt with and I’m not going to betray her trust by telling you about them, but you need to be patient with her and let her open up to you in her own

time or you'll scare her off. The fact that she's told you so much already is unbelievable, she must really trust you." That made me feel good.

It looked like they were finishing up, but before I headed over there, Jo said, "Oh, and Ethan, she's thinking about coming back to the city with us today." My heart sank. I went to her and held her. I didn't want her to say anything she wasn't ready to. I just wanted her to stay with me like we'd planned. After a minute she looked into my eyes and smiled. My heart started beating again.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Do you still feel like staying with me tonight?"

“Yes.”

“Do you know that I’ll take care of you and if you ever wanted to go home, for any reason, I’d take you?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” I hugged her tight and kissed the top of her head.

I put Gia’s stuff in the truck while she said good-bye, and then we waited for Trey to say good-bye to Dana. I was so thankful Gia was going to stay. I wanted to know what had made her so upset, but I wasn’t going to push her for information. I hoped that she’d open up to me in her own time, like Dana said. She seemed to be feeling better now as she was talking with Jo and Brittany. I still had to wonder though, what

‘traumatic things’ was Jo talking about? I was starting to dislike Lex more and more. I was going to make her forget all about those years with him. I was going to make her feel loved and wanted and needed. I fantasized about what it would be like to be with her every day. I would take care of her financially, emotionally, and sexually. She’d never have to worry about anything, ever. And I would be the luckiest man alive.

“What do you two have planned for the night?” Trey asked us as we left the campground.

“I don’t think we’ve planned anything

yet. What about you?" I asked him.

"I'm gonna get a nap and something to eat and then maybe play some poker with the guys later," Trey said. That's what we usually did at the end of the weekend, but tonight I wanted some quiet time with Gia.

"If you have stuff you want to do, it's okay. I'm used to entertaining myself, really," Gia said. It made me feel bad for her.

"Are you kidding? No way!" I said. "I don't plan on letting you out of my sight for the next twenty-four hours at least, and I'm looking forward to it."

"I don't blame you, man. If Dana would've stayed, I'd be the same way," Trey said.

Gia put her hand on my thigh and squeezed as she gave me a little smile.

When we got back to my place, Trey took off for his place next door. I carried Gia's stuff in and asked her if she was hungry.

She looked at her phone. "Not really, maybe in like an hour or so. Don't go to any trouble. Shit, my dad called. He's probably worried that I didn't answer."

I walked over to her and took her face in my hands. "Call your dad right away. And never, ever think you are 'trouble' to me." I kissed her.

She smiled and dialed. "Hi, Dad. Sorry I missed your call—we must've been packing up the camper or something. Yeah, we all had a really

good time.” She winked at me. Listening to her reminded me of that second time I saw her and overheard her talking to her dad. I could tell they were close by the way he worried about her and checked up on her even though she was a grown woman. I wondered how he and her mom reacted to Lex and how they felt about the way he treated her. “No, I’m not on my way home. I’m gonna stay another night since I don’t have to work tomorrow. I’ll call you when I get home. Tell Mom hi. Love you too, Dad.” She hung up. I liked the way she said she loved him before she hung up. I haven’t told my dad that in a long, long time.

“I’m glad he didn’t ask a bunch of questions about why I’m staying but I’m

sure he'll ask all about it tomorrow. He probably assumes all of us girls are staying, which is best or he'd worry all night."

"I really like your dad," I told her.

"You don't even know him."

"I know that he keeps an eye on you, worries about you, and loves you."

"Yeah, he does that." She smiled.

"What do you want to do? Do you want to watch a movie or something?"

"I want to cook us some dinner and just be with you. Do you want to put on some music?" I asked.

"Sure, I'd love to have some music."

She walked over to my stereo and started going through my CDs. I started cooking and it was all very cozy. We

talked back and forth about music and songs and bands. A lot of my CDs were signed by the bands, so she'd ask me what so and so was like when I'd met them and I'd tell her stories about partying with some of them and what assholes some of them were. She loaded up the CD changer and hit the random button and joined me in the kitchen.

“Who would you most want to see in concert?” I asked her.

“AC/DC!” she said without hesitation. I'd have to keep that in mind.

“Do you want a glass of wine?”

“Yes, please.” I grabbed two glasses and a bottle. She hopped up on the counter which had become ‘her spot’ in my mind and I handed her a glass.

“To us,” I said as I held up mine.

“To us,” she said and clinked my glass.

We sipped but kept our eyes locked on each other.

“Oh, I love this song,” she said as Tesla started “What You Give.”

“Me too.” I picked her up off the counter. “Dance with me.”

We danced around the kitchen and made out. Every time we kissed it was as good as the first time. This was how I wanted every day to be. Dancing around the kitchen with Gia while making dinner, knowing I would get to hold her at the end of the night while she slept beside me. When the song ended, I picked her up, set her back on the

counter, and handed her wine back to her.

I continued cooking and would pop stuff into Gia's mouth every once in a while. We talked about music and food and our friends. I felt completely content.

"You're the sexiest, sweetest man I've ever met," Gia said. It filled me up even more.

I walked over and kissed her. "If that's true then we have to set up our next date!" I was very excited.

"I can't believe you!" she said, laughing. "You're a madman about this setting up the next date thing." She rolled her eyes at me. She was right. *What was wrong with me?* It was like I was

addicted to her, and even though I had her right here with me, I was worried about being away from her.

“Sorry. We can wait until tomorrow and make a plan,” I told her and went back to my cooking.

“Come here.” Gia looked sorry. I went to her, of course, and she wrapped those legs around me and kissed me softly. “You don’t have to worry about that, Ethan. I like to live in the moment. I don’t make a lot of future plans, so don’t take it personally. Just live in the moment with me whenever we’re together.”

“Okay, I can do that for you.” I would do anything for her. Then I lifted her up and off the counter. “Let’s eat.”

We sat at the table, talking and laughing while we ate. We drank more wine and listened to the music while we cleaned up the dishes. We went outside and had a cigarette and I wanted time to stand still. I didn't want to go back to being here alone with only memories and fantasies about Hotness. But I was going to try not to think about that because I had to live in the moment as I told her I would.

Chapter 11

Gia

When we came back into the house Ethan got a phone call, so I got comfy on the couch. I grabbed two pillows off his bed and put one on each end. I laid down and stared up at the ceiling. I was feeling relaxed from the food and the wine. I thought about everything that had happened since I left work on Friday. It

had been a roller coaster ride. I liked the fact that it had brought me right here, right now and I was curious how it would play out. I was still a bit sore from the fucking Ethan had given me earlier but I smiled every time I felt it. I fantasized about what it would be like to be here with him all the time. We'd have unbelievable sex day after day. There would be lots of touching, kissing, and thoughtful gestures day after day. *What a life that would be. If I never went back to the city then would I get to be fun-loving Gia all the time? Or would I turn back into the real Gia after the newness wore off?*

“Do you want some more wine, Gia?”
Ethan asked from the kitchen.

“Are you trying to get me drunk?” I asked him, grinning to myself.

“I don’t know, should I be?” Now he was looking down at me from the back of the couch, smiling.

“I don’t know,” I said shaking my head. “I get pretty horny when I get drunk.”

“You mean, hornier than you usually are?” He held up his hand, which was already holding a bottle of wine. “I gotta see this.” He filled my glass all the way to the rim.

I laughed as I sat up and took a swallow to keep it from spilling.

He sat across from me so we were facing each other leaning on the pillows. He put my feet in his lap. “Thanks for the

pillow.”

“You’re welcome. Thanks for the hospitality, dinner, wine, orgasms, you know—everything.” I laughed and winked at him.

He winked back and then turned serious. “You’re welcome, Gia. I love having you here and I wish you could stay longer. I’d give you as much food, drink, and orgasms as you wanted.” He smiled at that last part. It gave me butterflies.

“I’ll bet you would.” I crawled on top of him so I could give him a kiss.

Ethan

She tasted and smelled amazing and I was disappointed when she sat back in her spot. “How’d you get so good at that, anyway?” she asked.

“At what?” I said, hoping she wasn’t going where I thought she might be.

“Giving orgasms.” Yep, she was going there.

I had to laugh. I asked her if she really wanted to talk about past sexual relationships, because even though I’d been wondering about hers, I sure didn’t want to tell her about mine.

“Why not?” she said. “It won’t take me long. Here, I’ll go first.” Cool, I thought, and then I’ll know how far to go and what we’re talking about exactly. “I

lost my virginity to a boy I went to senior prom with.” *Okay, that sounds about right.* “Then I had sex with Lex for thirteen years, and here I am. Done. Now you go.”

I almost choked. *That was it? She'd only had sex with two people in her whole life? Now I was supposed to tell her that I didn't know how many partners I'd had and couldn't remember their names even if I wanted to, which I didn't. It wasn't something I was proud of. Here goes.* “I lost my virginity when I was a junior in high school with my girlfriend, Sara, who I'd been dating for six months.” *That didn't sound too bad. At least I knew her name and had been with her for a reasonable*

amount of time. “I’ve had sex with a lot of women since then. Done.” *Okay, that was easy.*

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable,” she said. “I was just curious how you know so much about my body and how to make me feel the way you do.” I could see why she was asking and I felt better that she didn’t want numbers, names, or details.

“I was in a relationship with an older woman when I was in my twenties. It lasted for about a year and she taught me a lot about how to please a woman. Other than that, the women I’ve slept with haven’t been personal relationships and I certainly haven’t touched them the way that I’ve touched you.” That was

true and I realized how sad it was as I'd said it. The fact that I hadn't had a personal relationship with a woman for all those years yet I had sex with a lot of them didn't make me feel very good about myself.

"I feel very lucky then," Gia said as she sat up and took my hand. It made me feel better but not near as good as what she said next. "Ethan, I don't care about the other women and I get the feeling you've been just as lonely as I have. Just because we weren't alone, it didn't mean we weren't lonely, right?" *Yes, she was exactly right.* "Look how long I was married to Lex, how many times I had sex with him." I didn't like the thought of that. "But it was passionless."

That made me feel even worse for her. “Just like you with the other women. We’ve both been living it, just in different ways.” *God, she was right.* We both realized it and we smiled at each other.

“You’re right, Gia. I had it in my head all those years seeing you up here, full of life and shining like the brightest star, that you were happily married to your best friend and all the other stuff us single people associate with being married. I would’ve never guessed you were going through difficulties or feeling lonely.”

“This place has always been an escape for me from my real life,” she said. “When I came here I’d forget about

all the stuff going on at home and with Lex. I'd turn into the Gia who was alive and fun-loving, especially when I came with my girlfriends and Lex stayed home. I never cheated on him or anything, I wasn't looking for that. I was just looking for some down time from reality." That made me really happy. I was giving her a place where she could be herself and have some fun.

"What about now?" I asked her. "Now that the stuff with Lex is over, I mean. How do you feel about coming up here now? Are you still escaping from something?" I had to know.

"Um, I don't know," she said. *Oh no, don't close up on me now, Hotness.*

I leaned toward her. "Gia, I would

never judge you. I can't imagine what you've been through and I don't want to push you away by asking you to tell me, so I'm not going to. I need you to know, however, that you can tell me anything. I'll be understanding and honest with you. Please don't hold back because you're afraid. I never want you to be afraid when you're with me. I want *this* to be your new real life." *There, I said it. And I meant it.*

She was looking down at her hands and I heard her barely say, "Someday."

My heart skipped. "Someday what?" I said very quietly, hoping she would answer.

She was looking into my eyes now. "I would love for this to be my reality,

someday.” She quickly wiped a tear from her cheek.

My heart filled up. I whispered again, “I would love that too, Gia.” I pulled her to me and held her as she laid her head against my chest. I wanted to protect her and shield her from anything and everything that could possibly hurt her. She’d been through enough and it was time for her to live. I wanted to be the one to live with her. I wanted to watch the sun go down with her. I wanted to remember this day forever.

“Are you tired?” I asked.

“Just relaxing. Your heartbeat is very soothing. Why, what did you have in mind?”

“Do you want to go for a walk?”

“Sure.”

Gia

Ethan took me backstage and I was like a kid running around checking everything out. I'd always wanted to know what it was like behind the scenes. Ethan was getting a kick out of watching me, especially when I picked up the microphone and pretended I was announcing one of my favorites.

“Give it up for the amazingly talented, ultra sexy, blow your mind rocker, *Pat Benatar!*” I yelled and then made noise like the crowd cheering as I jumped up a

couple steps and onto the stage and started belting out “All Fired Up.”

“Livin’ with my eyes closed, goin’ day to day, I never knew the difference, I never cared either way, lookin’ for a reason, searchin’ for a sign, reachin’ out with both hands, gotta feel the kick inside.” And as I said ‘kick inside,’ I kicked, of course.

Ethan was cracking up but clapping and cheering at the same time.

I just kept going. *“Now I believe there comes a time, when everything just falls in line, we live and learn from our mistakes, the deepest cuts are healed by faith.”* And I kept repeating just like she does as I strutted toward him and gave him a little lap dance.

I jumped up and got serious as I finished and then took a bow. He gave me a standing ovation, which I thought was very generous being as I knew my singing sucked.

“Thank you! Good night!” I said as I jumped back down the steps and put the microphone back.

“Pat would be proud,” Ethan said, still laughing. He grabbed me and hugged me tightly. “You never cease to amaze me, Gia. I love how you make me laugh.”

“Just wait until you see me do “Shadows of the Night,” you’ll want to hire me immediately!” I acted like I was gonna grab the microphone again. “No, I think I’ll make you wait for that one.”

“I’m gonna hold you to that!” He grabbed my hand. “C’mon, we have more to see before it gets dark.”

We walked and talked for about an hour before we reached the bottom of the VIP platform.

“Wanna race?” I said as I started running up the steps.

“You got a head start!” Ethan hollered but I knew he let me win.

I didn’t care, I threw my hands up in the air and jumped up and down anyway. It felt so nice to be able to be silly and carefree around him, and he ate it up like crazy.

He grabbed us a couple of stools but when he sat on his I opted for his lap instead. He seemed to like that. He had

his arms around me as we watched the sun go down. It was even more beautiful than the other morning when we had watched it come up together. This time it had more meaning. We knew each other better and there were some real feelings involved. Well, I had some anyway, and although it felt really nice, it scared the hell out of me at the same time.

“Thank you, Ethan. That was really beautiful.” I stepped off the stool and turned around to face him.

“You’re welcome, Gia,” he said, then we made out for like ten minutes.

We headed back to his place, holding hands, flirting, and laughing. When we got there an elderly couple was just walking up to Ethan’s door. They saw us

and they both lit up with smiles. I smiled back at them and Ethan introduced us. It was Rose his accountant, and her husband Don, who also worked for Ethan.

“Now I know why you wanted to put off the meeting until tomorrow night,” Rose said. He almost blushed.

“If you have things to do, Ethan...” I started but Rose interrupted me.

“No, dear, it’s nothing that can’t wait. I just had to give Ethan a hard time.” She and Don were both still smiling at Ethan. I think they were happy I was there and that felt nice. I could tell they cared a great deal about him. They were looking at him the way parents look at their children when they’re proud of them.

“Well, we won’t keep you kids,” Don said. “We were just checking some things out and thought we’d say hi to you on our way by.”

“Do you want to come in for tea or wine or something?” Ethan asked them.

“No, but thank you, dear. We’ll see you tomorrow. Nice to meet you, Gia,” Rose said.

“Hope to see you again real soon,” Don said to me and they both shook my hand again.

“Nice to meet you both. Have a good night,” I told them and they walked off, holding hands. How sweet!

Ethan told me about them and how they’d known his gramps so long ago. He said they treated him like the son

they'd never had and I could see that just from the short time they were here. I really liked them and the way they cared for Ethan.

I dug through my bag and took out Ethan's shirt and my toothbrush then went to the bathroom to get ready for bed. While I was brushing my teeth I noticed Ethan in the doorway behind me, watching me. He had his arms crossed and was leaning against the door frame. I smiled at him in the mirror and he smiled back, but it was sort of a sad smile.

"I don't want this night to end," he

said.

I rinsed out my mouth and went to him. “Live in the moment with me, remember?” I put my arms around his waist and looked up into his eyes. “How can we fully enjoy tonight if we’re worrying about tomorrow?”

“You’re right, sorry.” He kissed me softly. I wanted him again but I was still sore and I didn’t know if it would be a good idea. The kissing became more intense and I was getting wet and wanting.

“Ethan,” I whispered. “I want you, but I’m a little sore.”

His eyes got big. “Gia, I’m so sorry! I hurt you earlier, didn’t I? It was too rough.” He looked devastated.

“No, Ethan, you didn’t hurt me. It wasn’t too rough. It was absolutely perfect, I promise. I hadn’t had sex in a long time and I’m just a little swollen from all the new action.” I smiled.

“Are you sure that’s it?” he asked, relieved.

“Yes, I’m positive. And I’m all for more action tonight, I just wanted you to know so you could be careful, please.” He smiled at the fact that I basically just asked him to go slow and easy with me. But then he remembered I was sore.

“How about we take a break tonight and let you feel better?” He was always so considerate.

“How about we just go slow and see what happens?” I said, knowing it would

be really hard, if not impossible, to be next to him in bed and not want him inside me.

“You’re insatiable,” he said smiling. And I knew he’d cave and give me whatever I wanted when we got into bed.

“When it comes to you, yes, I always want more.” I kissed him. “I’ll be in your bed, waiting for you.” And I went to bed.

I was waiting for him. I could hear him running the water and brushing his teeth. I was so relaxed and comfy. I fell asleep and something horrible happened.

I felt something between my legs and I woke up and pulled back the fresh smelling comforter. There was blood

all over Ethan's bed where I was laying! I started crying. Oh my god, I was having terrible stomach cramps and I knew I was having another miscarriage! I didn't want Ethan to see this, what was I going to do? I couldn't get up, the pain was excruciating and I had failed at carrying a baby yet again. I didn't want to live. I didn't want Ethan to see me this way! I somehow managed to stand up and I heard him coming out of the bathroom. There was blood running down my legs and all over his t-shirt I was wearing. I looked around frantically, looking for something, anything to end all of this. I saw a pair of scissors on the dresser and I lunged for them. "Oh my god,

Gia.” I heard Ethan yell. I grabbed the scissors and heard him again, “Gia!”

I opened my eyes and Ethan was shaking me. He looked scared. “Gia, you’re having a nightmare. It’s okay, you’re safe.” He tried to take me in his arms but I was crying and trying to push him away. He overpowered me and got his arms around me and held me while I woke up completely and realized I’d had one of my recurring nightmares. Only this time Ethan was in it. I was shaking and crying but I relaxed my body into his and let him hold me.

He had one arm wrapped tightly around me and was stroking my hair with the other. He kissed the top of my head and I could feel warmth and safety.

I stopped crying and the shaking finally went away. I could feel Ethan's heartbeat again and it gave me a peaceful feeling.

"I know you probably don't, but I have to put it out there. I'm here if you want to talk about it," he said softly. I felt really close to him and I had to give him something.

"I have a lot of nightmares about having miscarriages," I told him. "This one was really intense because it was right here and you were going to see me. I was bleeding on your bed and on your shirt."

He tightened his arms around me. "My sweet Gia." It warmed me even more. "I'm going to tell you something that I

want you to think about carefully. Every word I say is the honest truth and is coming from my heart.” He had my full attention and I was listening carefully.

“You are the most amazing woman I’ve ever met. The more time I spend with you and the more I learn about you, the more amazing I know you are. I’m not Lex and I’d never treat you the way he did. I want to know everything about you, the good, the bad, and even what you think is the ugly. I’d never push you to tell me something that you aren’t ready to because I know that would scare you away, and that’s the last thing I want. The fact that you’ve lost three babies is heartbreaking. But what’s even more heartbreaking is that you’re letting

the guilt and the rejection that Lex put on you keep you from living the life you deserve.”

He was still holding me tight and I knew that he meant every word he'd said. I made a decision right then that I'd been considering for a while. It was time to talk to someone about everything that had happened.

“Thank you for that, Ethan. You're pretty amazing yourself. I'm going to get some help and maybe that someday will come when I can tell you the good, the bad, and even the ugly.” I had to follow through this time. I had to get my life back.

Chapter 12

Ethan

I was still holding Gia tightly when I woke up. I slept lightly all night just in case she awoke and needed me. She had her head on my chest just as she had when she'd fallen back to sleep after her nightmare. I knew we were making progress. She'd opened up to me more and more with each passing hour we'd

spent together. I wished she could stay longer so I could convince her to give her whole self to me and then I'd prove to her that I'd still feel the same way about her. She'd been treated so wrong by Lex and I wanted to see her realize that it was him who needed to be ashamed and guilty, not her.

I felt sweet lips on my chest and I thought it was a perfect way to start the day.

“Good morning,” I said. “How are you?”

“Good morning.” She sounded so sweet with her voice still full of sleep. “I'm feeling optimistic this morning. How are you?”

“Well, any morning that starts out with

you in my arms is a great morning. And hearing you say that you're optimistic makes this an even better morning!" I kissed the top of her head. "What would you like for breakfast?"

"Coffee, but not yours." She was giggling. *What?*

"What do you mean? You don't like my coffee?" I tried to sound hurt but I had to smile at her giggles.

"It tastes like it might have tofu in it." She could barely get the words out because she thought it was so funny.

"Is that right? Well, I guess I asked you to be honest with me, didn't I?" I tried to tickle her as she climbed over me and headed to the bathroom.

"I'm gonna jump in the shower." She

then stalled in the doorway and lifted her shirt off. “You can join me if you want.” I jumped out of bed and ran to the bathroom. She was laughing as she turned on the shower and put toothpaste on her brush.

“How come you didn’t have any panties on?” I teased her.

“Someone stole them,” she said like it was a mystery to be solved.

“I don’t blame them.” I smiled at her as we brushed our teeth.

She finished and got in the shower and started washing her hair. I watched her and toothpaste started running out of my mouth. *She couldn’t be sexier.*

Gia

Ethan stepped in and grabbed me immediately. He kissed me with his minty fresh mouth. I pulled his head under the sprayer and then lathered up his hair. We took turns washing and rinsing each other.

“Are you still sore?” Ethan asked me as he reached between my legs gently.

“Yeah, a little bit,” I said as he washed me with the soapy sponge. “You’re doing a good job being gentle, though.” I soaped up my hands and started washing his cock. He was getting hard in a hurry and that made me feel sexy.

We rinsed ourselves and started kissing softly. The water and leftover soap on our bodies made us slippery and it felt good to slide my breasts and nipples across his chest. He kissed them. I loved the attention he gave them and they responded by getting huge and hard. He went to my stomach and licked it softly, putting kisses all over it while he looked up at me. I felt like he was trying to make a point about how he felt about what was inside. I thought it was sweet. He took me by the hips and turned me so I was facing away from him. He kissed my lower back and nibbled on the back of my hips. It sent electric tingles through my back all the way up to my neck. I shifted my weight from side to

side as he worked his way up my back, which drove me completely crazy. By the time he got to my neck I had my hands against the wall of the shower like I was being arrested. I tilted my head back and forth, side to side as he sucked, kissed, licked, and bit me softly. I loved when he touched me on the back of my neck and having his mouth there while his hands were on my hips and his erection was rubbing against my ass was making me clench my thighs together just to feel some pressure between my legs. I turned my head around so I could have his mouth on mine and then turned my body to face his. He kissed me so tenderly I could feel his emotion, I felt completely adored at that moment and

my eyes started to fill.

He backed up and reached out of the shower to his medicine cabinet for a condom. I took a deep breath and controlled my tears. He opened it. I reached out and took it from him. I went down to my knees and attended to his perfect cock. Then I set the condom on the tip like I'd seen him do and looked up at him. He smiled and nodded. So I looked back down and unrolled it over his long, hard shaft. I looked at my work and then I looked up at him. He was still smiling so I stood up. He picked me up and I wrapped my legs around him. We did it with such ease we didn't miss a beat of the soft sensual kissing we were doing. He pulled his mouth from mine

and we locked eyes.

“Tell me if it’s at all uncomfortable and I’ll please you another way, okay?” he said.

I smiled. “Okay.” I knew I wouldn’t be disappointed either way. I reached down between my legs and spread open my slightly swollen lips so Ethan could enter me without pushing through them. He slowly entered me and I smiled big. It didn’t hurt at all, it felt beautiful and he smiled back at me. He had his hands on my ass and was easing me up and down, back and forth, and even around in circles. It felt so loving and passionate. I was getting emotional again and had to kiss him. I took his face in my hands and kissed him as tenderly as I

could, hoping he would feel what I kept feeling. He stopped moving me and pulled out of the kiss to look into my eyes. We both just stared at each other and I felt tears running down my face. It was so intense and I wanted to tell him so many things at that moment but I didn't say a word. I knew he could see it in my eyes and feel it when I touched him.

“Gia,” he whispered.

“I know, Ethan,” I interrupted. I started moving my body and kissing him again. It was so beautiful and the way I allowed myself to feel his love gave me an orgasm so intense it made me lose my grip on him as tears rolled down my face. He came right after I did. When I

looked into his eyes, they were watery, too. I wrapped my arms around him and we held each other silently. We didn't need any words—that was a big deal for me. I'd never had an emotional connection on that level during love-making. I was overwhelmed.

Ethan lifted me off then we carefully washed and rinsed again. I was surprised the water was still warm as I turned and shut it off. We stepped out and Ethan handed me a fresh towel. As we dried off we kept our eyes on each other but never said a word. We wrapped our towels around ourselves and went and got dressed. We met back in the bathroom. He shaved while I put some makeup on. Every time our eyes

met in the mirror we smiled and my butterflies would go crazy. He finished shaving and left the room. I blow-dried my hair and gathered up all my stuff to put back in my bag. When I walked back out, I saw Ethan sitting on the side of the bed looking down at his hands. I dropped my things into my bag and went to him. I sat next to him and he looked at me.

“It’s killing me that I have to leave you in the city today.”

“I know. But that’s where I live and work. We can see each other often. I’ll only be two hours away. We’ll date and keep getting to know each other better. It’ll be fun,” I told him, trying to sound like it would be an adventure. “Live in

the moment with me today, please. If you wouldn't have been living in the moment with me in there," I pointed to the bathroom, "Just think what we would've missed out on."

"You're right, Gia. But that in there was the ultimate proof about how we feel about each other. Please don't forget how that felt. It was real." His eyes were begging me to remember.

"Baby, how could I ever forget that? It was as intense as anything I've ever felt." He was looking at me with an odd but happy expression.

"You called me baby," he said quietly.

"What?" I asked, knowing that I never use that word as an endearment.

“You called me baby, Gia. And it just came naturally, you didn’t even think about it.” He was smiling and I could tell it made him feel really good. I didn’t know how to feel about it. If I really did say it, then I guessed it was okay. I’d probably never say it again but that was okay, too.

“Okay, well, can we go find some coffee?” I needed it.

“Of course. Let’s take the cart over to the c-store.” I could tell he felt better and I kissed him for living in the moment with me.

We went to the c-store and I got a

delicious cup of coffee and Ethan got a healthy drink. We stopped and said hi to Marcus and then drove through the campground. It was almost empty now but it looked beautiful. Don was mowing and several other people were cleaning the sites and getting everything ready for Friday when it would be busy again.

“What are next weekend’s concerts?” I asked. He named some bands I wasn’t real familiar with. They were newer bands than the ones I listened to and I think a little on the punk rock side.

We drove through the gate to the main arena. and Ethan was checking out this and that. *He’s really done a fantastic job with this place.* This had been a part of his life for so long and I was happy

for him that it was finally paying off. I leaned over and kissed him on the cheek and put my hand on the back of his neck. He leaned his head back and grinned. I couldn't get over how gorgeous he was and kept staring at him. I didn't even notice who we were going to talk to.

“Hey, Vince,” Ethan said and shook Vince's hand. “You remember Gia, right?” Vince looked my way. I grabbed my phone out of my pocket and excused myself like I'd just remembered a very important call I had to make. I walked far enough away to be out of earshot and lit a cigarette. I normally only smoked when I drank alcohol, but I was nervous about being around Vince. I wanted to call Dana, we hadn't talked about

anything that had happened this weekend yet, but I knew that would be a two hour conversation so I'd need to wait until I went home. I was wondering what Vince was telling Ethan. *He's such a sleazy creep.* I was rethinking my decision not to tell Ethan about him. Ethan was driving toward me so I acted like I punched something into my phone before I got on the cart.

“Everything okay?” he asked.

“Yes.” I smiled. He didn't believe me, I could tell.

We went back to his place and I finished getting my stuff packed. He was in the kitchen making something in the blender. He poured it into two cups and handed me one. I could tell it had fruit in

it so I tasted it. It was really good. Ethan didn't say anything, something was wrong.

“This is really good, thank you.”

“You're welcome,” he said as he rinsed out the blender container.

“Is something wrong, Ethan?” I asked.

“I'm sorry, Gia. It's just something Vince said. I'll be fine in a minute.” He drank his fruit smoothie.

“What did he say, Ethan?” I was nervous.

“It doesn't matter, Gia. Sometimes I just don't know how to take him, that's all.” He seemed over it and I guessed it wasn't about me since he didn't tell me about it.

Chapter 13

Ethan

As much as I hated to, I loaded Gia's things into the truck. If there was something I could do or say to get her to stay with me for even one or two more days, I wish I knew what it was. I kept thinking about Vince and what he'd said. He'd watched her walk away when she went to make her phone call.

“Hey, man,” I said to him. “Do you mind?” I didn’t like the way he was looking at her. I didn’t like it at all.

“What?” he said. “Oh, she’s like your girlfriend now?”

“Actually, yes, she is,” I told him and hoped it was true.

“Sorry. I must’ve mistaken her advances toward me the other morning. Good for you, man. She’s hot!” And he took off. *What the fuck was he talking about? When did he see Gia in the morning? What did she do that made him think she was making advances toward him?* Whenever he talked about women, it irritated the shit out of me. If he ever talks bad about Gia, he’ll wish he hadn’t.

I didn't want to upset Gia by telling her what he'd said. I didn't believe she'd done anything that would've made Vince think she was coming on to him. He was one of the best Entertainment Managers I knew, but the way he treated women made my stomach turn. It seemed like he always wanted to be in competition with me when it came to women, too. Every time he found out I slept with someone he'd go after them. It always bugged me but since I didn't have actual relationships with them, I couldn't say much.

I had to quit thinking about it. I didn't want to let Vince get in the way of living in the moment with Gia.

I hopped in next to Gia and she leaned

against me. Maybe I could pretend the truck won't start or fake a heart attack to buy more time. Maybe if I started sobbing or begging she'd feel sorry for me and stay. *Wow, I'm really reaching here.* I knew we'd shared a lot of fun and had some intense emotional connections but I was afraid she'd get back into her life in the city and forget all that we'd shared. I couldn't let that happen. I had to make sure I stayed as close to her as I could without smothering her.

I kissed her and asked a question I already knew the answer to. "Are you sure you have to go back today?"

"Yes, Ethan, I'm sure." *Well it was worth a try.*

I pulled onto the road and Gia seemed a little sad as she looked back and watched The Lock get further and further away. I was sad, too. As we drove I thought about how I'd felt on Friday when I saw Gia at the bar and knew she was going to be there all weekend. I knew I was going to meet her but I had no idea how fantastic she'd be or what a connection we'd have. She was physically, emotionally, and sexually the woman of my dreams.

I caught her staring at me. "Penny for your thoughts."

She leaned her head against my arm. "I was just thinking about how awesome you are," she said. It warmed me.

"Then why don't we just turn around

and go back to The Lock? You can stay with me. I'll take care of you." I wished so badly she'd say, 'okay,' and I'd be the happiest man in the world. But she didn't.

She laughed. "I have a job and responsibilities. Besides, you can't take care of me. I can't even take care of myself."

Didn't she realize that was why she should stay? She wouldn't have to have a job or responsibilities if she didn't want them and I could get her some help so she *could* take care of herself emotionally. And I knew I could take care of all her other needs.

"Yes, I can take care of you. If you'd let me then I could prove it to you," I

told her.

She kissed me and hugged my waist. “I have some things I need to do. I’m going to get some counseling and deal with stuff like we talked about last night.” I was happy for that.

“That’s great, Gia. But you could do that and still stay with me.” I wanted to make sure she knew she had options. “I’m having separation anxiety if you can’t tell,” I admitted.

“I know you are and it’s really sweet. It’s hard for me too, but I’m trying not to think about it until I have to.”

“Okay, I’ll lay off. I just want to make sure you know you have options and I’m here for you no matter what you need. All you have to do is call and I’ll be

there.” I squeezed her thigh and she snuggled against me.

“Now, what was your favorite part about the weekend?” I wanted to get all the information I could so I’d be able to line up some fun dates she wouldn’t be able to resist.

“Meeting you,” she said matter-of-factly.

I was hoping for some specific details, but how could I possibly be disappointed with that answer? “I’m glad about that,” I told her, “what else?”

“Hmmm...besides the unbelievable sex and orgasms?” She loved teasing me and I loved that.

“Yes, besides that.” I chuckled.

“I loved being carefree. Like I told

you, The Lock has always been my escape. This weekend was no different. As soon as us girls started heading that way I made the transformation. But now, well, now I have to make the transformation back. And I guess that would be my least favorite part.” She sounded down.

“Why can’t you be that carefree person all the time? Why do you have to make that transformation at all? I don’t understand.” I knew she had things she didn’t want to tell me but since she didn’t have Lex holding her down anymore, why couldn’t she just live?

“It’s complicated, I guess.” She changed the subject. “I loved the sunrise and the sunset. I also loved the picnic

and sitting on your countertop while you cooked for me. Oh, and the dancing and the music, that was nice. It was all really great and I'm looking forward to doing them all again with you, and more."

"I loved all those things too. I'm also looking forward to future time with you, Gia, more than you know."

We talked about the concert line-up for the summer and I was trying to get her to commit to coming every weekend but she wouldn't. I knew it was a stretch but I was trying to make as many plans with her as I could.

We pulled onto Dana's street and Gia pointed to a Camaro parked out front of a pretty decent house and told me to pull in behind it. *Shit, that must be hers.* I

thought about how hot she must look in it.

“You really are a Chevy girl, aren’t you?” I remembered the comment she made that first night we met.

“Of course. Did you think that was just a line I was using to try to get you into bed?” I laughed. “Don’t laugh. It worked, didn’t it?” She laughed. She was such a flirt.

“Can I buy you some late lunch or early dinner?” she asked.

“No. But I’d like to buy you some.”

“Nope. Either I buy or I’m not going. You just fed me for three days and drove me back to the city, so it’s definitely my turn.”

“I don’t want to take turns,” I told her.

“I want to take care of you.”

“Too bad,” she said as she hopped out of the truck. *She is stubborn!* “Follow me.” She slid her hot self into her hot car and I followed her. When we stopped at a light I watched as some guys were checking her out. She wasn’t paying any attention. She had the windows up all the way but you could still hear Def Leppard, which she had cranked up. She was in her own little world. I liked the fact she didn’t seem to care about anyone around her but it also made me feel a little sad that she seemed okay with being alone. I remembered what she’d said the other night when she thought I wanted to play cards with the guys, “I’m used to entertaining myself.” I

didn't want her to be alone anymore. I wanted her to be alive and happy.

I pulled up behind her in a little driveway next to a nice brick building that said, *Bridget's Beauty Boutique*. The neighborhood seemed very nice. It was lined with little businesses and this looked like the only building with an apartment above it. I didn't like the idea of Gia being alone here at night. I grabbed her things and met her at the door. I was happy to notice that her entrance was locked at the street and you had to ring the buzzer to gain access.

I followed her up the stairs. When we walked into her apartment I was impressed with the way it was decorated. There was every color under

the rainbow and it was inviting and cozy. “This is really cool, Gia,” I told her. I noticed its neatness then and how every item had a perfect spot and the books, CDs and movies were lined up exactly perfect and in alphabetical order. “You’re a neat freak, aren’t you?” I had to add.

“I like to keep things organized, if that’s what you mean.” She was putting some things away.

“Yes. That’s what I meant. Did you decorate?” I loved the flow of it. There were pillows everywhere and it looked like no matter where you sat you’d be hugged by comfort. I felt better about her being alone after I’d seen her place. At least it was bright and cheery.

“Yes,” she said. I thought she had a real talent for it. “Do you want some iced tea or should we just go eat?”

“You did a really nice job, Gia. I’m going to use your bathroom and then let’s just go eat.” As I went down the little hall to the bathroom, I snuck a peek at her bedroom. It had plain white walls with nothing hanging on them. A small bed with one flat pillow and a plain light colored bedspread. There was a dresser along the big wall with nothing but a little jewelry box on it. That was it. *How could she have decorated her living, kitchen, and dining areas so brilliantly yet her bedroom looked more like a prison cell than a place you would actually chose to be?*

I walked into the bathroom and it was beautiful. More colors, fluffy towels, expensive soaps, body washes, and perfumes. I didn't understand. Maybe she hadn't decorated her bedroom yet for some reason. Or maybe that's how she wanted it. That thought made me feel so sad that I dismissed it immediately and convinced myself she just hadn't gotten around to it yet.

Gia

We walked across the street to a little deli where I ate all the time. When we went in, Shane was working the counter.

“Gia! Good to see you. Your usual?” he said. I nodded. Everyone who worked here knew me by name and most of them knew what I always ate. Shane had sat with me a couple of times when I’d come in during their slow time and visited while I ate. He was real sweet.

“What’s your usual?” Ethan asked me.

“Club on whole wheat, veggie salad, and a bottle of water,” Shane answered for me. I smiled at Ethan’s expression. I didn’t know if it was because of what my usual was or the fact that Shane answered for me, but the look on his face made me giggle.

“Make that two then,” Ethan said to Shane and I swiped my card before Ethan even knew what happened.

We sat at my favorite little two top right in front of the window where you could look up and see my apartment. Ethan took both of my hands and held them while we waited for our food. He was smiling and shaking his head at me.

“What?” I asked.

“Why’d you give me such a hard time about eating healthy?”

“It’s called flirting,” I said. “It’s when you have a crush on someone and you joke around and tease them. Kind of like what I’m doing to you right now.”

“I love when you flirt with me,” he said. “It makes me feel young again. Don’t ever stop.” He leaned over the table and kissed me.

Our food came and we flirted more

while we ate. Then we walked down the street holding hands and I pointed out all the little businesses and different places I go. It was nice to share part of my little home with him. When we got back to my building and were just about to go up my stairway, I heard Bridget call my name and we turned around.

“How was your weekend, Gia?” she asked and then she saw Ethan. “Oh, hi, Ethan,” she gushed. “It’s been a while. How are you?” Ethan looked surprised to see her.

“Good, Bridget, how are you?” They shook hands. I let go of his other hand.

“Oh, I’m good. Busy, but good. I hear The Lock has some great concerts this year. My girlfriends and I are planning

on coming up. Maybe we could get some more of those VIP passes you promised me?” She never took her eyes off him. It was like I wasn’t even there. *He promised her and her friends VIP passes? I feel really stupid right now.*

“Yeah, sure,” Ethan told her.

“Thank you, Ethan! See you soon.” She rushed into her salon.

I started up the stairs and Ethan followed me. I was picturing the two of them together and it was making me sick. My phone beeped. I had a message from Mr. Evans. *That was ironic.* He said that the building would be closed again tomorrow and didn’t know about the rest of the week yet. He was hoping to have more information soon and would let me

know but asked me to send a companywide e-mail ASAP.

“Everything okay?” Ethan asked me.

“Yeah. I have some work I need to do for Mr. Evans,” I told him. “You should probably head back anyway.” I turned on my computer.

“Gia, I know you’re wondering about Bridget. It was nothing and it was a long time ago.” *Wow, is that what he’s going to say about me someday?*

“It’s none of my business, Ethan, and to tell you the truth, I don’t want to know. She’s my boss’s wife, for Christ’s sake.” I was shaking and I wanted him to leave before I started crying.

“I’m sorry, Gia,” he said. “How long will your work take you? I could leave

and come back so we could talk.”

“No. It’ll be a while and then I need to get ready for the rest of the week.” Two lies in one sentence. That was a bad sign. “Plus, I told you I don’t want to know, so why would I want to talk about it?”

“I don’t want to leave it like this,” he said. “Gia, will you please look at me?” I stopped shuffling papers around and looked up at him. “I don’t want to leave while you’re upset.”

I looked back at my desk and logged on to my computer. “I’m not upset. I just have a lot to do. It’s all good.” Three lies in one breath. I was really pushing it.

“When can I see you again?” he asked

quietly. I think he was scared to hear the answer.

“I don’t know. Call me,” I said.

“Can I take you to dinner tomorrow night?” he asked. “Please, Gia.”

“I don’t know, Ethan. Just call me. I’m sorry, but I really have to get this done for Mr. Evans.” I looked at him and I felt bad. He looked almost scared. I had to give him something. “Okay, Ethan, how about dinner on Wednesday night? Would that be all right?”

“Yes, although I’d rather see you tomorrow. But I’ll be here Wednesday at six to pick you up. Can I still call you later?” He was unbelievable.

“Yes,” I said and it made him smile a little bit.

“Good.” He took me in his arms. I hugged him back and gave him a quick kiss. It was all I had for him and it was more than I felt like giving at that moment.

“Gia, please don’t forget about what happened between us in the last few days. It was real and you felt it, too.” He kissed my cheek.

As soon as he left I quickly typed the e-mail and pushed send. Then I curled up in my little spot on my couch and thought about Ethan and Bridget. I imagined him telling her all the things he’d told me. Tears started running down my cheeks. I thought about what Vince had said about him and Ethan sharing women and I got a sick feeling. It

didn't matter that Ethan had seen me before and wanted to meet me. He wanted to fuck me just like he did all those other women and I was blinded by his charm. My door buzzer sounded and I hesitantly pulled myself up and went to it.

“Yes?” I said.

“Delivery for Gia.”

“Come up.” I buzzed him in.

I opened the door and stepped out to meet him at the top of the stairs. He was carrying the biggest bouquet of flowers I'd ever seen. I'd gotten a dozen roses once but this was four times as big and they were absolutely gorgeous.

“Thank you,” I said and went back into my apartment. I set them on my little

table and they filled it completely. I opened the card.

*Roses are red
Violets are blue
I'd never forgive myself
If I hurt you.*

I'm sorry, Ethan.

I held it to my chest and fell back onto the couch, crying. And that's where I stayed for the next two hours. I thought about the whole weekend. I tried to remember everything that happened and everything Ethan said to me. I was confused and I didn't know what to believe. I just wish I knew who he really was and how he really felt about me. My

phone rang. *Shit, it was my dad.* I was supposed to call him when I got home.

“Hi, Dad.” I talked to him for a few minutes. I told him I was real tired from the weekend but I would talk to him soon. He seemed to believe me and we hung up. I let out a sigh and fell back down on the couch. My phone rang again, it was Dana. I didn’t feel like talking to her right now so I let it go to voicemail. My phone beeped. It was a text from ‘Your biggest fan.’

I miss u

*I have a meeting,
then I'll call u.*

I miss u

It was Ethan. He was my biggest fan. I started crying again. I fell asleep and my phone ringing woke me up. It was Ethan. I let it go to voicemail. Then I turned my phone to silent mode and I curled up into my little ball and cried myself to sleep again.

Ethan

I left like she wanted me to. I headed straight down the street to the flower shop we'd walked by earlier and ordered the biggest bouquet I could and asked if they could deliver it immediately. I headed home. I felt like a horrible person. I'd hurt my sweet Gia.

She was the one person in the world that I wanted to protect and I hurt her. I tried to put myself in her shoes. How would I feel if she'd slept with Vince or something? The thought made me sick and jealous and hurt. It didn't matter that I didn't know Gia at the time. The fact that she had to see Bridget often made the situation even worse. She'd be reminded of it constantly.

I thought about it all the way home and when I finally got there I had convinced myself that I had to go back. I needed to go back to Gia and talk it out. I had to make her remember the me that she'd gotten to know, not the me that slept with her friend. But when I pulled up to the house I saw Rose and Don sitting out

front and remembered I had a meeting with Rose. *Shit!*

I decided I'd text Gia and tell her I'd call her after my meeting. I looked through my contacts and there was no Gia! *Okay, now I'm definitely heading back to the city.* But then I saw it, 'Hotness.' She put her number in under 'Hotness.' I was smiling as I texted her.

Rose was being very efficient as usual. She insisted on going over everything from the entire weekend and there was a lot. Everything went extremely well and at the end of the meeting she showed me the financials as a whole. After all the bars and the campground and ticket sales and everything was added up and everything

was paid for, I almost fell off my chair. She and Don loved my reaction.

“Are you kidding me?” I asked.

“No, Ethan. You did very well for one weekend, I’d have to say!” Rose said.

“Shit! I think that’s more than I usually make in an entire season.”

“Yes, it is!” Rose answered. She was really proud of me.

“Thank you guys for everything you’ve done for me and sticking beside me even when things got pretty rough.” I couldn’t have done it without them.

They both just smiled. “Where’s Gia?” Don asked.

“I took her back to the city. She has to work tomorrow,” I told them.

“She seems really nice, dear.” Rose

said and Don nodded.

“She’s amazing.” I smiled.

They were happy I’d met someone special and we visited for a little while longer before they left.

As soon as they did I grabbed my phone and called Hotness. It rang only once and her voicemail answered. *Shit!* I quickly convinced myself that she was really tired and went to bed. I was really tired too, so I left her a message and went to brush my teeth. As I did I thought about all the fun Gia and I had in this bathroom the last few days. I’d give anything to have her here right now brushing her teeth beside me.

When I crawled into my bed, I immediately went to Gia’s pillow and

took a deep breath. It smelled just like her. I had to sleep where she'd slept. I couldn't wait until tomorrow so I could talk to her. We had to work this out and pick up where we'd left off.

I think I woke up every hour all through the night. I couldn't rest not knowing how Gia was, if she was thinking about me, and if she was then what was she thinking? I was driving myself crazy. I wanted to see if she'd still look at me the same way and I didn't know if I could wait until Wednesday evening to find out, but I might have to depending on what she said to me tomorrow. I needed to get some sleep.

I decided when I woke up at six to get

up. I'd call Gia in half an hour. She should be up and getting ready to go to work by then. I took a shower and made something to eat. I grabbed my phone, found 'Hotness,' and called. It only rang once and I got her voicemail again. I left her another message. My stomach felt uneasy. I really needed to hear her voice and see if she was still bothered about the Bridget thing. I called the flower shop but they weren't open yet. I didn't want Gia to go to work before I got to talk to her, so I texted her. Then I just waited.

Chapter 14

Gia

When I woke up I still had the card Ethan sent with the flowers on my chest. I was feeling really depressed and was glad I didn't have to go to work. I picked up my phone, it was seven fifteen. I had a text from my biggest fan and a few voicemail messages. First message was from Dana. She knew I was home since I

had picked up my car and she wanted to chat about the weekend. Next message was from Ethan. He'd just finished his meeting and hoped I was doing okay. He missed me and couldn't wait to talk to me in the morning. Next message was from Ethan, too. It was about forty-five minutes ago.

“Good morning, beautiful,” he said. “I was hoping you'd be up and getting ready for work by now. I hope you had a good night and I'm anxious to hear your voice. Gia, I'm sorry. Please call me. Bye.” He sounded sad.

Then I read the text. It came right after the last voicemail.

Please call me

*before u go to
work. I can't
wait until tonite
to talk to u.*

He was waiting for me to call but I didn't want to right now. I was trying to figure things out. I needed some time. I didn't want to get hurt again. I couldn't deal with that on top of the other stuff I hadn't dealt with yet. I grabbed the phone book and opened the yellow pages to 'therapists.' I looked up and down the pages. My stomach felt nauseous. I didn't need to do this right now I decided. I got up and looked out the window. It looked like it was going to be a beautiful day. I walked back to

the couch and went back to sleep.

I dreamt about Ethan. It was so real. *We were making love. He looked into my eyes and he told me I was the only woman he'd ever wanted. He wanted me to move in with him and let him take care of me forever. I held back, but somehow he knew everything about me and he still wanted me. My heart was full to bursting and tears were running down my face. Then Lex walked into Ethan's house and told me to get in the car and go home. I looked at Lex, then at Ethan. I could feel my heart breaking as I grabbed my clothes and ran to the door. When I went outside, Bridget and Shelley were standing there laughing and pointing at me. I*

jumped in my car and took off as fast as I could. I was crying so hard I could hardly breathe. I turned my music up really loud...even though I was long gone, I could still hear their laughter. I pushed the gas pedal to the floor. Before I knew it, I lost control. As my car was flying off the edge of a cliff, I woke up.

I just lay there on the couch thinking of the dream. I was used to having bad dreams and it certainly wasn't one of the worst I'd had. I went to my purse and grabbed a cigarette. I never smoked in my apartment but I didn't care right now. I lit it and took a drag. It tasted fantastic. I went to the fridge and grabbed a half empty bottle of wine and an empty can

off the counter to use as an ashtray and took them back to the couch. I drank right out of the bottle and smoked three cigarettes in a row. I was starting to feel a little better.

I went back to the kitchen to see what else I had to drink. I had some tequila that Dana and I had used to make some margaritas a while back so I grabbed that. It tasted disgusting but I managed to take a couple of shots anyway. Then I laid down and tried to go back to sleep, but I was restless, so I went to the bathroom and dug through the bottom drawer and found the sleeping pills I had hidden in there. I went back to the couch and took one with a swig of the nasty tequila. I laid back down and closed my

eyes.

I thought I heard my door buzzer at one time but managed to sleep through it. The next time I woke up completely I looked at the clock and it was three p.m. I still had my phone on silent mode and didn't even bother to look to see if I had any messages. I went to the kitchen to get something to eat and when I saw the calendar on the fridge I realized today was rent day. The thought of seeing Bridget was overwhelming. I went back to the couch and took another sleeping pill and two more shots of tequila. I put my ear buds in and picked my favorite playlist. Then I sat there and smoked a cigarette before I passed out again.

Ethan

I sat there for a half an hour staring at my phone. I'd checked it three times to make sure it was working. Gia never called or texted. I knew she probably had to be at work by eight so I was watching the clock, too. Why wouldn't she at least text and say she'd call me later or something, anything? I was going crazy over this. I'd never been like this over a woman. I had to try to keep myself busy today or I was going to jump in the truck and head to the city, but I didn't want to be a stalker.

I stuck my phone in my pocket and

headed to the arena to work on some stuff. I tried to get my mind to focus on something other than Gia but it was impossible. I looked at my phone. It was seven forty-five and I knew if she had to work at eight I should be able to get through to her now so I called her. I got her voicemail again and left her another message.

“Gia, I know by now that you’re avoiding me. Please just call or text and let me know that you’re okay. I’m suffering right now thinking that you don’t want anything to do with me because of Bridget. Is that what it is? Did I do something else, Gia? Please don’t ignore me. It’s killing me.” I hung up. I know it probably sounded

desperate but that's exactly what I was.

I worked on a couple of projects and found that if I thought about all the beautiful things Gia and I had shared the last few days it made it a little easier to function. I decided to get some lunch.

As I headed home, Trey pulled up in the cart. "Hey, whatcha workin' on?"

"Oh, just a few things I noticed yesterday morning when Gia and I drove through here. What're you up to?" I asked him.

"I'm headed over to VIP to work on some stuff with Vince. Want to come along?"

"No," I told him. "I'm gonna get some lunch and then check in on Marcus. I'll see you later, though."

“Sounds good, bro.” He took off.

When I got home I called Gia. She didn't answer, of course, but I left her another message.

“The only thing getting me through the day is thinking of you.” It was all I said because I'd already left the desperate message earlier and I knew she was at work and couldn't call me back anyway. At least she knew I was thinking about her.

I ate some lunch and then headed over to the campground. I had a good visit with Marcus and helped him with a few things he needed to get done before Friday. As long as I was keeping busy I was able to keep my sanity. I went from one project to another and finally headed

home to shower and have some dinner.

As I cooked I kept glancing at the spot on the counter where Gia had sat so many times. I thought of her swinging her legs and eating pizza that night before we made love for the first time. I took my food to the table to eat. I sat where Gia had after her sexy striptease the other day before she proved to me that hard and fast could be passionate, too.

Taking a shower was torture. I stood under the water and when I closed my eyes, all I could see was Gia with soap running down her perfect body, begging me to take her where no one had ever taken her before. To want her like no one had ever wanted her before. To love her like no one had ever loved her

before. I thought I'd done all that but here I was without her. She wouldn't even talk to me. Did I do everything I could've to take her where she'd never been? To make her feel wanted more than she ever had? To show her that I loved her more than anyone else ever could? I jumped out of the shower and dried off. I ran to my dresser and grabbed some clothes. I had to go to her.

I noticed something fall out of my drawer when I grabbed a shirt. I picked it up—it was Gia's panties. Not the white lacy ones that I put in my pocket but the ones she wore the night we made love. The night she fulfilled the fantasy I'd had for ten years about her. I put them back, grabbed my shoes and my

phone, and ran out the door.

When I got out on the road I called her. “Gia, I’m so sorry I left yesterday. I shouldn’t have left while you were upset. I told you I’d take care of you and then the first time I upset you I left. I’m so sorry. I’m on my way to see you now. I can’t wait to see you.” I was sure I sounded crazy. I said everything so fast and my heart was pounding in my chest so hard I thought I might pass out but I wanted her to know that I knew I shouldn’t have left yesterday.

I was about fifteen minutes away and my phone rang. My heart leaped out of my chest as I answered it immediately, thinking it might be Gia.

“Ethan?” I wasn’t sure who it was.

“Yes,” I said.

“Ethan, is Gia with you?” It was Dana.

“No. I’m on my way to her place now, though. What’s wrong, Dana?” I could hear panic in her voice.

“Have you talked to her today?”

“No. She won’t return my calls. I haven’t talked to her since yesterday afternoon. What’s wrong, Dana?” I asked her again. Now I was in a panic.

“What do you mean she won’t return your calls? Did you guys have a fight or something?” She sounded like she might be crying.

“We had a little incident. Why, Dana? You’ve got to tell me what’s going on!” I yelled.

“No one has talked to her since yesterday. She hasn’t answered her phone or returned anyone’s calls. She knows better than to do this. I’m heading over there, too!” She hung up.

What the fuck? I stepped on the gas. What did she mean, ‘She knows better than to do this’? No one has talked to her? Did that mean she didn’t go to work? I was driving as fast as I could and I said a prayer for Gia. *Please let her be okay!* I couldn’t believe I left her yesterday!

Chapter 15

Gia

When I woke up again it was dark. I was glad the day was over. I felt like shit and was sure I looked like it too, but I didn't really care. *Shit!* I remembered Mr. Evans. I grabbed my phone and I had to scroll through several texts before I found it. It said that we wouldn't be working again tomorrow but it looked

like Thursday was a go. I went to my computer and typed the e-mail as quickly as I could. It was nine p.m. and Mr. Evans had messaged me four hours ago. *Fuck! Well, there was nothing I could do about it now.*

I checked the other messages on my phone. Dana called twice and the second time she was really pissed that I hadn't gotten back to her yet. My sister called twice and she sounded pretty worried about me. Jo called twice and the second message said she was coming over. Ethan called three times and sounded completely distraught and said he was on his way to see me. *Fuck!* That message was at seven thirty and it's a little after nine now. My first thought

was that I had to get the hell out of here. *Why couldn't everyone just leave me alone and let me be for one day? Why did everyone think they had to take care of me?* I looked around and saw why. I took the sleeping pills and ran them back into the bathroom and hid them. I put the almost empty bottle of tequila back in the cupboard and tossed the can with the butts in it in the garbage along with the empty wine bottle. I opened the window, and as I sprayed some air freshener, I heard my buzzer. I was shaking because I was in such a panicked state and I started to cry.

“Yes?” I said in the speaker.

“Open the fucking door!” It was Dana. I buzzed her in and opened my door. I

sat on my couch and started sobbing. I knew I needed some serious help. I couldn't believe what I'd done today. I knew better than to mix alcohol and pills and I wasn't even supposed to have those pills in my possession. Dana would know what to do. She could help me. I was relieved she was here. I looked up and my heart stopped. Dana, Jo, and Ethan were all standing there.

I looked back down at my hands and Ethan was next to me in a second. "Go," I told him.

"Gia, I'm here because I care about you. Let me help you." He was about to cry.

"Go, Ethan. I don't need your help." I never looked at him. I didn't want him

here. I didn't want anyone here except Dana and Jo.

“Please, Gia. Remember...” he started but I cut him off.

“Remember what?” I yelled. I stood up and looked down at him. “Remember how we fucked all weekend just like you have with, oh, I don't know, Ethan, how many other women exactly?” I was angry and hurt. I didn't have anything to lose at this point.

“Gia, it's not like that with you. You know that.” He had tears on his cheeks.

“Ethan, you don't even know me! All those years you'd supposedly seen me from a distance and wanted to get to know me, that wasn't me! That wasn't the real me, the broken, fucked-up real

me. That's right, this is the real me! Is this what you want? I've been on that couch since you left yesterday. I sat here and drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes, and took sleeping pills all day just to get through the day!" His eyes got big and I heard Jo and Dana gasp. "That's how I almost ended my life after I killed one of my babies, too! Is that ugly enough for you? How do you feel about me now, Ethan?" I was crying and shaking—he was looking right into my eyes now.

He stood up and tried to take my hands but I wouldn't let him touch me. "I love you, Gia," he said softly.

"No," I said. "Please go." I couldn't face him after he knew the truth about me.

“No,” he said. “I won’t go. Did you hear what I said?” He raised his voice this time. “Did you hear me, Gia? I love you. I know you don’t want to hear it or believe it, but it’s true. Do you know how many other women I’ve said that to? None, Gia. None.”

I sat back down on the couch and put my head in my hands. Ethan and Jo started talking quietly and I heard Dana talking to someone on her phone. I knew this was my chance to get some help. I knew the three people in this room cared about me more than I cared about myself.

Dana sat down next to me. “Sweetie, I just talked to your sister. She’d been trying to get ahold of you today too, and I promised I’d call her when we got here.

She would've met us here but Pete wasn't home from work yet and she didn't want to bring the kids. She's relieved you're all right and said to tell you she loves you very much." She was holding my hand and talking to me like I was a small child.

I just nodded. Jo sat down on the other side of me and put her arm around my shoulders. Ethan sat down on the floor in front of me. I just kept my head down because I was ashamed of my behavior and my outburst with Ethan. I thought of what he'd just told me. What he'd just said to me that he'd never said to any of the other women. He loved me. Even after I'd told him a horrible secret about myself, he loved me. It gave me

butterflies.

Ethan

I pulled up in front of Gia's and jumped out of the truck as Dana and Jo were pulling up. They ran to Gia's door. They both had been crying and I knew this was serious. I felt sick to my stomach and I wanted to bust the door down. Dana pushed the buzzer.

“Yes?” It was Gia! *Oh, thank God, she's all right!*

“Open the fucking door!” Dana said and we were buzzed in. We all ran up the stairs and I could hear Gia crying.

My heart was breaking. I was wondering what the fuck was going on! We got to the top and I saw Gia sitting on her couch. She looked up at us, shocked. She was wearing the same clothes as yesterday. Her hair looked like she'd been sleeping all day and her eyes were red and swollen. Then she looked back down at her hands as I'd seen her do so many times. I was by her side in a second.

“Go,” she said. That hurt.

“Gia, I'm here because I care about you, let me help you,” I told her as I was fighting back tears.

“Go, Ethan. I don't need your help,” she said. and I wanted her to remember what we had together and how we felt

about each other.

“Please, Gia. Remember...”

“Remember what?” She jumped up off the couch and glared at me, crying. I was stunned. “Remember how we fucked all weekend just like you have with, oh, I don’t know, Ethan, how many other women exactly?” I deserved that.

“Gia, it wasn’t like that with you. You know that,” I told her as the tears rolled down my face.

“Ethan, you don’t even know me! All those years you’d supposedly seen me from a distance and wanted to get to know me, that wasn’t even me!” But I knew it really was. “That wasn’t the real me, the broken, fucked-up real me. That’s right, this is the real me!” She

was going to open up to me now. “Is this what you want? I’ve been on that couch since you left yesterday. I sat here and drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes, and took sleeping pills all day just to get through the day!” *Oh my God, Gia! Why would you?* And then I got the answer, the truth she hadn’t wanted me to know. “That’s how I almost ended my life after I killed one of my babies, too! Is that ugly enough for you? How do you feel about me now, Ethan?” I was taking it all in. She tried to commit suicide because she thought she’d done something to hurt one of her babies, which I knew she didn’t because I’d seen her heart and it wasn’t capable of anything even close to that. It was full of

empathy and forgiveness and love. *My sweet Gia, you've opened up to me and now you'll experience what unconditional love feels like.*

Our eyes were locked as I stood up and tried to take her hands. She wouldn't let me but it was okay. I knew she didn't think she deserved to be touched lovingly. "I love you, Gia."

"No. Please go."

"No. I won't go," I told her because I'd never do that to her again. "Did you hear what I said?" I was talking louder now so I could get my point across. "Did you hear me, Gia? I love you. I know you don't want to hear it or believe it, but it's true. Do you know how many other women I've said that to? None,

Gia. None.” I should’ve said it yesterday in the shower, when I wanted to.

She sat on the couch and put her head in her hands. I had to give her a moment to let it sink in. She’d told me what she thought was an ugly secret and I still felt the same about her. I knew she’d have a hard time believing it.

Jo pulled me aside. “Ethan, I gotta hand it to you, you really came through for Gia. I can tell you truly do care and she’s never really had that in her life. Thank you for coming back, you may have just saved Gia’s life.” She hugged me.

“I want to take care of her. I want to do everything I possibly can to help her deal with her past. I want to be her

future,” I told Jo and we both turned and looked at Dana talking to Gia on the couch. Gia looked so fragile. I wanted to hold her so badly. I wanted to put her in the Chevy and take her home and spend the rest of my life giving her everything she wanted, needed, and deserved. But I knew she had a long road ahead getting the help she needed so she could accept those things.

Dana was still beside Gia and Jo sat down on the other side of her. I sat on the floor in front of her. She kept her head down, looking at her hands. *My beautiful, sweet Gia, what am I going to do with you?* I smiled. She was a hot mess and I was in love with her. I hoped that she'd love me someday too, but not

before she loved herself.

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me!

About the Author

Desiree Wilder was born in South Dakota and grew up in a small town where she thrived in school and developed a love for reading and writing. Her younger days were filled hanging out with her older brother and younger sister riding bikes, playing board games and watching General Hospital. As a teen she became less interested in learning academics and became more interested in learning how to get into mischief without getting caught.

As an adult, Desiree loves cooking, shopping, reading, concert-going, camping and spending time with her

crazy yet supportive family. She'd rather take the dirt road and crank up some eighty's rock or some good 'ol Hank Jr. than the paved fast track.

Just recently she started writing and something inside her came alive. It fulfilled her and unexpectedly took over what had become a robotic daily routine. She is a hopeless romantic and believes in love at first sight. Nowadays you can catch her doing 'research' for her next book at a concert or getting inspired for her next leading man in the romantic comedy section!

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/desiree.wilder.56

Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/DesireeWilder12>

Goodreads:

www.goodreads.com/author/show/714

Amazon Author Page:

www.amazon.com/Desiree-Wilder/e/B00EA1N2MI

Table of Contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)