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# PICK ME UP



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Evernight Publishing

[www.evernightpublishing.com](http://www.evernightpublishing.com)

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ISBN: 978-1-77130-581-5

Cover Artist: Sour Cherry Designs

Editor: Avril Ashton

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# **DEDICATION**

For you, as always.

# PICK ME UP

## *Romance on the Go*

Rebecca Brochu

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### Chapter One

Bryce let the pounding beat of the music wash over him. The chance to let loose and act his age without the crushing weight of responsibility felt good. So did the opportunity to be out of his house for something other than work. Clubbing wasn't something he got the chance to do often since he couldn't afford the cover charge, or the time off work. His lack of a social life was a constant source of irritation to his best friend, Jamie, who made a point of harassing Bryce regularly about taking time for himself.

Bryce would have loved to make Jamie happy, would have loved to be able to go out with him on Saturdays, and laugh and drink and generally have a good time, but he couldn't. Normally, he'd be jumping from one job to the next, trying his best to pick up extra hours where he could, and to sleep and eat when necessary. He did miss having fun though, missed long nights with his best friend on the weekends, and just sitting down with a beer to read a book or watch a game. So when Jamie coaxed him into coming out with him and his longtime girlfriend Maddy by offering to pay for everything, Bryce hadn't been able to turn him down.

He was under strict orders to enjoy himself, to have a good time and to not even think about the time or how much whatever drink Jamie or Maddy shoved at him cost. That kind of kindness was one of the reasons he loved Jamie so much. He knew the situation Bryce was in, knew about the money troubles he had and instead of running for greener pastures, Jamie stuck by his side and tried in his own gruff way to take care of Bryce.

So Bryce tilted his head back, closed his eyes, and let himself get lost in the writhing bodies around him as his problems melted away into the laughter and the sweat. He thought nothing of it when a long column of heat appeared at his back, but when warm, strong hands slid around his waist to grip his hips, he jumped a little.

"Maddy's going to get jealous, Jamie." Bryce laughed, only to freeze when warm lips pressed against his ear.

"I'm not Jamie," A smooth and amused voice whispered below the thrum of the music. The man's warm breath slid across the shell of Bryce's ear, making him shiver violently before he could stop himself.

Bryce twisted in the stranger's hold, and thankfully the man didn't fight his movements, he just let Bryce's hips slide and turn in his grip until they were face to face. The stranger was tall, long

limbed, and pale underneath the lights of the club, as if he'd spent too many days inside instead of out in the sun. The dress shirt he wore was finely tailored, almost too high-end for the club they were in, and it settled across his wide shoulders and tapered waist like it was made especially for him. Bryce felt self-conscious, aware that his own dirty-blond hair was disheveled from his hands, and that he was sweaty and wearing a t-shirt that was, courtesy of Maddy, a size too small.

"I, uh ... I can see that." Bryce's voice rose.

"Don't tense up. You looked so good out here that I had to join you."

Bryce's face went hot at the blatant way the man eyed him. He started to pull away, to put some distance between them, when he saw Maddy gesturing frantically over the guy's shoulder. She made outrageously exaggerated dancing motions and gave him a thumbs up. Beside her, Jamie looked one step away from breaking something out of laughter.

Bryce took a deep breath and looked back at the guy. He took in his amused expression, as though he knew exactly what had happened behind his back, and nodded.

"Alright, a dance is fine." Bryce tried to sound casual instead of flustered, but he if the smirk on the other man's face was any indication, he'd failed.

"I might not be satisfied with just one, you know." The stranger sounded amused. He was obviously flirting.

"But one might be all you get." Bryce responded automatically before he realized he might come off more rude than he intended. Ruffled and so out of his depth he didn't know what to do, Bryce stared up at the stranger. Thankfully, the guy seemed to find it funny because he tossed his head back and laughed, a dark and husky sound Bryce liked more than he wanted to admit.

"Then I guess I'd better make this one count." The man's voice held a hint of a chuckle. His hands tightened on Bryce's waist as he pulled him closer until their chests and hips brushed, and then he bent and spoke directly into Bryce's ear. "That way it'll be you who wants more."

Bryce sucked in a sharp breath, but didn't say anything as the man moved against him. After only a few seconds, Bryce was helpless to do anything but follow his partner's lead. Their dance went slower than the actual beat of the song playing, but Bryce didn't care. He forced himself to get lost in the music again, to concentrate on the body pressed against him. He pushed the embarrassment threatening to eat him alive to the back of his mind.

The man moved his hands from Bryce's hips to trail across his stomach, and then up his ribs. Finally he cupped Bryce's shoulders, and then slowly trailed his fingers down Bryce's arms until they wrapped around his wrists. Bryce let the man move him, let him draw his hands behind his back and capture his wrists in a gentle, but strong, grip. The position forced Bryce's back to arch and pressed him against his dance partner even more than before.

The feel of a hand sliding up and fisting in the back of his hair surprised a quiet moan out of Bryce, but he bit it off quickly. He tried to stay focused on the music as he met the man move for move until they were practically writhing against each other. A spark of heat ignited low in his stomach, but he did his best to suppress it, to ignore it, because it wouldn't go anywhere. He wasn't one for random hook-ups in bathrooms or one-night stands, no matter how intriguing he found someone, or how well they moved. Hell, his sexual history could be accurately classified overall as depressingly brief. He wasn't really interested in expanding it at the moment with some casual no-strings sex.

Still, he couldn't help but enjoy his dance partner. From the sure and confident way the other man moved with and against him, to the feel of the hand in his hair and the fingers wrapped around his wrists. The way it all went along to the throbbing bass of the music felt like a feast for Bryce's senses.

Time slid away from him and one dance melted into another and another, but Bryce didn't care and neither did the stranger. They stayed pressed together in their own little world, hips rolling and twisting against one another, until the persistent vibrating of the phone in the stranger's pocket forced them apart. The man cursed low and long as he pulled back and quickly checked a text message.

"I don't suppose I could convince you to come with me?" he asked, a dark brow arched high as he stared at Bryce.

Bryce couldn't help but be slightly startled by the bluntness, even though he knew he shouldn't be, so it took him a second to collect himself enough to shake his head in denial. As though he knew what Bryce would say, the man pulled out a slim leather wallet from his pocket. He plucked a business card out and handed it to Bryce.

"Call me." The words were forceful, but before Bryce could respond, the man disappeared, melting into the crowd.

Bryce stood still and stared down at the thick cream stock paper. *Felix Cranshaw, Attorney at Law* it read, followed by a long list of contact numbers in bold black text. He stared at the card, thumbnail tracing over the name, and he barely registered when Maddy and Jamie came up on either side of him.

Felix. It was a nice name, one that suited the obviously strong-willed man he'd been dancing with.

Bryce debated over throwing the card away, over flicking it to the floor to be lost beneath the crush of boots and heels. Felix was tempting, but Bryce really wasn't interested in anything so casual. He'd always been more of a relationship type of person, more comfortable with sex and intimacy if there were actual emotion backing it up. Despite that train of thought, the card managed to find its way into his pocket as he finally focused on his friends.

Even if he didn't call, even if he never saw Felix again, it would be nice to hang on to the memory of a good dance. Plus, he never knew when an attorney might come in handy.

## Chapter Two

Bryce never did call Felix, he just let the opportunity slip past him. Instead he let himself get swept back up into his life, and barely had time to breath, let alone call some stranger he'd met in a club. He tried his hardest to push thoughts of Felix out of his mind, but found them rushing back in a few weeks later when his luck finally looked as if it might change. He'd gotten a phone call that had the ability to change his life, and afterwards he'd found himself fiddling with Felix's card as he sat on the edge of his bed in shock. In the end, he still didn't pick up his phone, but he did tuck the card in the corner of his mirror to stare at it while he got dressed in the mornings.

Bryce's sudden windfall came in the form of a job. He was thrilled when he got the phone call that his impulsively placed application at Summer Hearst Academy had actually been accepted. The private school wasn't the small town school with the warm and cozy atmosphere he'd always wanted to teach in, but he couldn't afford to wait for another offer. Cut backs and budget downsizing left him without the position at the local elementary school he'd been counting on for years, and Bryce couldn't afford to move or commute to another school even if he wanted to. Besides, none of the surrounding schools had openings either.

He'd been forced to keep the jobs he'd had in college, the ones that stood between him and scurvy from one too many packets of instant noodles. Still, busing tables and tutoring through the local services didn't bring in enough money to get him by anymore, not with the bills he had now thanks to Trey. His ex-boyfriend had left him high and dry with more bills than he'd thought possible a little over a year ago, and Bryce was still playing catch up. His credit was shot, his savings were gone, his rent was overdue and his phone never stopped ringing. Day after day it was one bill collector after another calling about debts Bryce wasn't responsible for and couldn't afford to pay.

It'd gotten so bad at one point he'd been forced to choose between feeding Snarl, his three year old keeshond, and bus fare. Needless to say, he'd gotten acquainted with walking rather quickly and, luckily for him, it was something he quickly discovered he enjoyed.

A lot of hard work and time had gotten him to where he was now, just on the verge of finally being able to see the light at the end of the tunnel, so to speak. He had a long way to go to pay all the debts off, but thanks to careful planning and a lot of going without, things weren't quite as desperate as they once were.

That didn't mean Bryce didn't still fantasize about Trey shaped-oodoo dolls, but it did mean the thoughts were fewer and further between.

When Summer Hearst, the exclusive private school everyone in Whiteshawl dreamed of sending their kids to had called him with a job offer, he'd jumped on it with both feet. Their starting salary was more than Bryce ever dreamed of, and he'd damn near cried when they'd told him about their benefits package. Plus, thanks to an unexpected move by the old teacher in their English department, Bryce would finally be able to teach the subject he's always loved.

Bryce had been so excited, he'd drawn up a lesson plan to present to the headmistress, a Miss Lenzy, for approval that very afternoon, much to her pleasure. It wasn't until he'd stood outside the gates to the campus that panic had set in at the realization of just where he was going to be teaching.

After his meeting with the headmistress, he'd run through his small, carefully maintained house in a mad dash to wash and iron every shirt, tie, and pair of slacks he owned, Snarl barking and



dancing around him the entire time.

A month later, he couldn't believe he was in his first staff meeting, a week before term was due to start. Nervous and vaguely worried about sweating through his clothes, he'd still made sure he was overly prepared before he left home.

Since walking into the staff room, he'd tried his best to be almost nauseatingly pleasant. At twenty-five Bryce was obviously the youngest person there, but the older teachers all smiled at him kindly, if a bit condescendingly. Despite that, he was determined to make a good first impression so he forced himself to brush off things that would normally irritate him, to be addressed later if necessary.

Things had, thankfully, started off well. Miss Lenzy ended up being the type of stern older woman Bryce always imagined a headmistress to be, and she'd shown him around the school and staff room with brusque efficiency. After all of the introductions were made, Miss Lenzy read out the start of term announcements. Luckily, they were all routine and covered the basic information he'd already gotten as a new teacher. Afterward, Bryce was relieved to note time passed quickly as the teachers involved with sports and clubs debated over funding.

About twenty minutes before the meeting was scheduled to end, the door to the staff room opened. Miss Lenzy broke off, an irritated look on her face at the meeting being interrupted, but it had only lasted for a split second. The look was replaced by a radiant smile when she turned toward the door.

"I apologize for being late, my meeting ran over."

Bryce froze in his seat at the sound of the deep, smooth voice. His eyes widened when he recognized it. Sure enough when the man at the door moved further into the room Bryce's suspicions were instantly confirmed.

Felix.

He looked different than he had at the club, almost grim with his dark hair swept away from his face. His mouth was a thin, sharp line and creased by a frown so deep that it drew his thick, strong brows down into a sharp arch. The look made Felix's high cheekbones stand out in sharp contrast.

"It's alright, dear. We were just going over the usual start of term items, nothing really important."

Bryce would have laughed if he had the ability to breath. The entire meeting, Miss Lenzy had been adamant about him realizing how important all of the rules and regulations they were going over were

Bryce shifted slightly in his seat. The movement must have caught Felix's attention because the man's gaze snapped to him. For a moment their gazes met and held, and Bryce watched as recognition and shock washed over Felix's face for a split second before he carefully smoothed out his expression.

"I see we have a new face in the crowd this year," Felix said. His words prompted Miss Lenzy into action.

"Yes, we do. Mr. Cranshaw, I'd like you to meet our newest teacher, Bryce Huttner. Mr. Huttner this is Felix Cranshaw, a long standing member of our board of governors. His law firm also provides our establishment with expert legal representation."

The hidden meaning in the introduction came across loud and clear to Bryce. This man was to be respected.

"A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Huttner," Felix said as he moved forward into the room and closer to Bryce. He extended a hand in greeting, a slightly amused look in his eyes.

Bryce had no other choice but to return the greeting, not if he didn't want to appear rude and have the headmistress on his case before the term even started. So he forced himself to take a deep, calming breath, and to rise from his chair to meet the man half way.

"Likewise." Bryce smiled politely at Felix, grasping the offered hand. The handshake, while brief and outwardly proper and polite, was a fraction tighter than normal. Felix tapped his index finger against the inside of Bryce's wrist, and Bryce did his best to ignore the way his thumb smoothed slowly over the back of his hand before Felix finally let go.

"Now then, let's get this finished up, shall we? I know you all want to spend your last bit of free time before the term starts doing anything but listening to me drone on and on." Felix turned a charming smile onto the rest of the assembled staff. As he moved past Bryce toward a free seat, their shoulders brushing lightly.

Bryce did his best to continue paying attention, to actually listen to and absorb the new information instead of letting Felix's appearance throw him too far off balance. It was a challenge. The way Felix's shoulders shifted beneath his suit jacket, the way his hands moved the air around him as he spoke, the way his gaze would catch and hold Bryce's, all of it was distracting. Bryce was wound tight, his muscles tense and his knee bouncing up and down by the time the meeting finally came to an end.

Bryce shook himself out of his daze, shuffled his papers together and then stuffed them into his bag. After saying a few polite goodbyes, he hurried out of the room and left Felix, who was still engaged in conversation with another teacher, behind. He still had to get to work, busing tables at a local diner, and he wasn't interested in getting waylaid when his schedule was so tight at the moment. He couldn't afford to quit both of his jobs as soon as he'd found out about his new position at Summer Hearst, so while he'd cut his tutoring hours, he'd kept up his shift at the diner. He'd finally given his two week notice, but he'd waited until the last possible minute to do it so he still had a few shifts left before he was actually done.

The extra money from the diner helped pad his budget enough to tide him over until his first paycheck from the Academy, but things would still be tight for a while.

He was a good distance from the school, and well on his way to the diner when he noticed a sleek green car slow down at the curb. He didn't pay it much attention until a familiar voice called his name. Bryce turned slowly and sure enough saw Felix staring at him from the driver's seat, sunglasses hiding his eyes and a slight smile on his face.

"Mr. Cranshaw. Do you need something?" Bryce asked, careful to maintain the same polite distance that he had in the staff room.

"I'd like it if you'd call me Felix, Bryce. Actually I would have liked it if you'd have called me at all." Felix seemed more amused than discouraged at Bryce's cool tone.

"Seriously? That's what you're going to go with?" Bryce dropped his polite demeanor at Felix's less-than-smooth line.

"Not my best work, but it did get your attention and that's all that matters." Felix grinned and pushed his sunglasses up to rest in his hair. The bright slash of teeth caused his blue eyes to crinkle attractively.

"You were much smoother at the club, you know? Much more effective, too." Bryce smiled back as he shrugged. He couldn't deny it. The light-hearted and trite line had taken him off guard.

"I don't know about that. Out here in the middle of the day is different than in the middle of some club, especially since we've actually been introduced this time." Felix laughed.

Bryce shook his head in exasperation and not-so-concealed amusement. He wasn't the type of

guy to get upset about stupid pick-up lines, and he had to admit that Felix did have a bit of a point. He was however, the type of guy to get upset about being late to work.

“I’ve got to go,” Bryce said over his shoulder as he took off at a light jog. He chuckled when Felix jumped at his loud announcement. “I’m sorry, but we’ll have to talk some other time, I’m going to be late for work.”

“I was under the impression that’s where you just came from,” Felix said with a raised brow, confusion overtaking the amusement on his face. He quickly pulled the car back up along Bryce and kept pace with him.

“Yeah, but I haven’t exactly gotten paid for teaching since the school term hasn’t even started yet. I’ve still got bills to pay. Thus second job,” Bryce said sarcastically. He focused his attention on making it to the diner on time. Pamela had always been lenient to a degree in the past, but she didn’t like her waiters to be late. With him leaving her short staffed in a few days, she was already in a foul mood.

“Then let me give you a ride. I’m the one that stopped you, so it’s the least I can do,” Felix said as they turned the corner.

Bryce debated for a moment. He didn’t really know Felix, but he could handle himself. Plus, he was already running late and with light traffic the car would actually be much faster.

“Alright, I’d really appreciate it.” Bryce tugged open the passenger door. He slid inside, buckled up, and pointed Felix in the right direction. “It’s Pam’s Perfect Meals on Second, just pull up and I’ll hope out.”

“I know the place. I haven’t actually stopped by, but I’ve driven past it plenty of times,” Felix said as he pulled back into the main lane.

“I’ll give you some free pie and coffee if you stop in within the next few days as a thank you for the ride. After that I’ll be officially gone and finally back down to one job thanks to Summer Hearst.” Bryce couldn’t help the satisfaction in his voice. He’d been working his ass off for years now at the diner and tutoring. He was happy to finally be moving on to what he actually wanted to do with his life.

“That’s good. Less stress and more time for play.” Felix grinned at him, sunglasses back down over his eyes.

Bryce’s snorted and Felix laughed again, that same dark husky sound from the club that Bryce liked so much. They settled into a companionable sort of silence for the last few minutes of the ride until Felix stopped the car in front of the diner. Bryce hesitated a minute, hand on his seatbelt, before he turned in his seat and smiled at Felix again.

“Like I said, stop by for that coffee and pie, it’s worth it. But anyways, I guess I’ll see you around the school sometime.” He wasn’t sure exactly how often he’d be seeing Felix, but Bryce had to admit he looked forward to their next encounter.

“Oh, you can count on it. Me stopping by, and us seeing each other at the school. Now that I know you’re there, I’ll make sure I’m early to every meeting. It’ll be worth Miss Lenzy’s attempts to get me to meet her nephew.”

Bryce flushed at Felix’s words and hurried out of the car, shutting the door behind him carefully.

He’d only taken a few steps when Felix called out his name again. He turned, and was surprised to see the driver’s side door open with Felix leaning over the side of the car, sunglasses once again pushed up into his hair.

“What?”

“Do you believe in love at first sight? Or should I drive by again?” Felix asked him with a surprisingly straight face.

Bryce stared at him for a moment, completely unable to believe someone as sophisticated and obviously well off as Felix actually used that line.

“That ... doesn't actually apply you do know that, don't you? We've already met more than once.” He blinked at Felix in surprise.

Felix just laughed, and with an over-exaggerated snap of his fingers, winked at Bryce and got back into his car. Bryce watched as the man threw him a casual wave out the open window, turned, and drove away.

## Chapter Three

Two days later Bryce was working his last shift at the diner. Lunch time had just arrived and he was already tired and ready to go home to Snarl, when Felix strolled through the door dressed like a wet dream in another one of his tailored suits. Bryce smiled and waved him towards a seat at the counter while he finished clearing off his current table. After he'd carted the dishes to the back, Bryce made his way around the counter and over toward Felix.

"You here for that coffee and pie? 'Cause you're cutting it kind of close, today's my last day," Bryce asked Felix as he picked up and brandished an empty mug in his direction.

"Of course. I told you I'd be by to see you. I've been looking forward to it actually. More the seeing you part than the pie part, but now I'm here that pecan does look pretty tempting." Felix was obviously flirting, and it made Bryce feel warm inside even as he laughed.

"Trust me, it's not. That has to be the absolute worst pecan pie on the face of the planet," Bryce said as he tried to warn the man.

"I don't believe you. It looks too good, and I do so like to live dangerously," Felix said.

Bryce smirked as he poured Felix a cup of coffee then grabbed him a slice of the pecan pie. When that was done, he cut a slice of apple pie and poured a small glass of water, both of which he set to the side.

He watched avidly as Felix picked up his fork and dug into the pecan with obvious anticipation. The look of horror on the man's face when he took the first bite could only be described as priceless. Bryce smothered his laughter beneath his hand as Felix choked and gulped down the glass of water Bryce slid him.

"How could that happen? That was ... ugh. I didn't know pie was even capable of tasting like that." Felix shuddered and eyed the slice of apple pie Bryce pushed toward him distrustfully.

"I promise this one is actually good." Bryce grinned, safe in the knowledge that it was well worth the cost of the extra slice of pie to see the look of unguarded horror on Felix's face.

"I'm not sure I trust you. I mean, you actually let me put that ... poison in my mouth." Felix stared up at him, blue eyes narrowed suspiciously while a small smile lurked at the corner of his mouth.

"Excuse me? What happened to *living dangerously*, huh?" Bryce did his best to sound offended despite wanting to laugh. "Besides, I tried to warn you about it, but you didn't want to listen."

Felix stared at him for a moment, eyes still narrowed, before his mouth curved into a wide grin. "Touché." He lifted the now empty water glass up in a mock salute before he set it down and picked up the apple pie. Felix braced himself visibly, but when he finally took a bit Bryce watched surprise and pleasure wash across his face instead. "Damn. You weren't lying about this pie at all."

"Let this be a lesson to you about never doubting me." Bryce scolded Felix. Before Felix said anything else, Bryce noticed the couple at a corner table holding up their coffee cups and looking hopefully in his direction. With a nod in Felix's direction, Bryce hurried toward the other customers. Felix had just scraped the last of the pie off of his plate when Bryce made his way back behind the counter.

"I take it you enjoyed it since it didn't last long at all." Bryce motioned to the empty plate then topped off Felix's coffee cup without being asked.

"Hmm. Someone should call the police." Felix looked at Bryce over the rim of his coffee cup.

“Why?” Bryce arched his brows in confusion.

“Cause you just stole my heart with this pie.” Felix grinned at Bryce as he drained his cup then stood.

Instead of freezing like he had the last time Felix used such a cheesy line, Bryce fired back. “If that’s the case, I’ll pass it on to Manuel since he’s the one who baked it. Manuel!” Bryce called out as he looked back over his shoulder.

“What?” A heavily accented voice answered. Manuel, the wizened and weathered old cook, popped his head out from around the kitchen door, a scowl on his face and an unlit cigarette hanging out the corner of his mouth.

“Got a customer who says your pie stole his heart and someone needs to call the police,” Bryce said as he grinned at the older man.

“Unless it’s made of solid gold he can have it back. The wife would cut me, and you know how good she is with a blade.” Manuel looked from Bryce to Felix for the first time. “Well, he’s a pretty one so she might make an exception.” Manuel leered at Felix for a second before he grinned and winked at him.

Bryce barely held in a laugh at the look of horrified embarrassment on Felix’s handsome face as Manuel ducked back into the kitchen.

“You’re cruel.” Voice low and breathy, Felix glanced at Bryce. “Completely and totally ruthless. If I wasn’t sold on you already I would be now. I admire a man who’s completely willing and ready to humiliate me.”

“That’s a little bit personal, isn’t it? I mean, I normally don’t have these kinds of discussions until the fourth or fifth date,” Bryce said, proud of the way he shot the retort back at Felix without having missed a beat.

Felix flushed then smiled, wide and pleased and entirely too appealing. Bryce had to remind himself he wasn’t interested in one night stands or casual sex, had to remind himself that no matter how much he would enjoy climbing Felix like a tree, the aftermath wouldn’t be worth it.

“Does that mean you’d agree to there being a first date then? ’Cause I’m more than willing to work our way up to conversations of a more personal nature.” Felix smirked and leaned forward, palms planted on the counter that separated them. “All you have to do is say the word.”

“Don’t you have better things to do than sit here and pepper me with cheesy pick-up lines?” Bryce asked. He leaned against the counter as well and refused to back up, refused to concede the strange flirting game they were playing.

“Unfortunately, I do have to get back to the office. My office is across town and my secretary’s already going to be demanding a blood sacrifice to make up for me being late as it is.” Felix finally straightened, and pulled out that same slim leather wallet. “How much do I owe you?”

“On the house, like I told you a few days ago. For the ride to work and the captivating conversation.” Bryce waved Felix’s money away then gathered the dishes together.

“Ah, but we only agreed to one piece and, even if I do hate calling that pecan thing pie, you gave me two.” Felix placed a crisp twenty on the counter. “So take that and keep the change.” He didn’t acknowledge Bryce’s sputters and protests as he slipped his wallet back into his pocket and headed for the door of the diner. “I’ll be seeing you soon, Mr. Huttner. Like I told you before, I’ll be early to the weekly staff meeting to make sure we have a chance to talk.”

“That’s really not necessary,” Bryce said to Felix’s back, But the man pushed the diner door open and stopped to flash another wide grin in his direction.

“Oh, it’s necessary all right. A necessary pleasure that I’ve been looking forward to since we

met.” Then with another jaunty wave Felix was gone, the tinkling of the bell above the door left in his wake.

Bryce stared after him for a moment before he scooped up the dishes on the counter and took them back to the kitchen, smiling at Manuel again as he walked back through. A few seconds later the bell above the door sounded again and Bryce lifted his head, a greeting on his lips, only to pause when he saw it was Felix again.

“Did you forget something?” he asked as the lawyer strolled up to the counter.

“Yup, your heart. But I’d settle for your number.” Felix rocked back on his heels, hands in his pockets, and those same sunglasses from a few days before once again pushed up into his hair.

“That’s the best you got?” Bryce did his best to project an air of unconcerned and unimpressed boredom, but it was difficult while fighting back a smile. A burst of warmth slowly unfurled in his stomach.

“So cold, so cruel. Now I know I’m no mathematician, but I’m pretty good with numbers. So I’ll tell you what, you give me yours and then just sit back and watch what I can do with it.” Felix winked at him again and Bryce couldn’t help but laugh, a short burst of sound that only made Felix smile wider.

“Go to work. I don’t give my number out to strange men who only know horrible pickup lines.” He made shooing motions toward Felix when he got himself back under control.

“Then I’ll just have to wait for you to call me.” Felix sighed sadly. “I’ll just be by my phone, wasting away, waiting for you to call me.”

“How do you know I still have your number?” Bryce asked. “Maybe I threw it away.”

“Well, I hope you kept it. I mean it would be a shame if we had to leave that page out of the wedding scrap book.” Felix made his way toward the exit, his voice chipper when he spoke. “I mean, when we tell our grandchildren about this I’d really rather not have to tell them how you rejected me right off the bat.”

“Just leave.” Bryce couldn’t help but laugh.

“Why, Mr. Huttner I’m beginning to believe that you just like to watch me walk away.” Felix looked over his shoulder one last time and then he was out the door.

Bryce laughed again, surprised and unwillingly charmed, as he wiped down the counter. He found Felix’s warm and playful nature to be more than a surprise. From their first meeting at the club, and the way he’d looked earlier in the week at the staff meeting, Bryce would have taken him for the suave and debonair type instead of someone with the sense of humor he’d already displayed.

Felix wasn’t completely wrong. Bryce did still have the card and he did like watching Felix walk away. It wasn’t Bryce’s fault the man had a fantastic ass.

## Chapter Four

The first week of his new job was hard, but more satisfying than anything Bryce felt since his actual graduation ceremony. The kids were all eager and ready to learn, respectful and easy to engage with thanks to the academic standards of the school itself. Bryce went home every night that week, and collapsed into an exhausted sleep from all the stress of starting a new job, and the nerves from teaching his first class on his own. Still, thoughts of Felix constantly ran through his mind.

Despite Felix's flirting, Bryce was still convinced the lawyer wasn't as serious as he made out to be, but he found himself interested nonetheless. So when the next faculty meeting rolled around and Felix was there early as he said he'd be, all slicked back hair and serious demeanor, Bryce was surprised. They didn't get a chance to talk. Miss Lenzy monopolized Felix as soon as he'd walked through the door. But Felix sought him out with his gaze, and gave him a serious nod before he turned back to his conversation with the headmistress.

It took Bryce off guard, the way Felix could be so serious, so different from the flirtatious man at the diner. But at the end of the meeting, when the other teachers cleared out, Bryce hung back despite the way he wanted to hit himself for being obvious. Apparently his worry had no basis since as soon as they were alone, Felix immediately went back to flirting with him. He walked Bryce through the school, and graciously bowed out when Bryce made noises about needing to leave and get home.

It didn't stop after that, the pick-up lines and the outright flirting. If anything it got worse, more noticeable. Felix obviously found little reason to be concerned with letting anyone know about his interest in Bryce. The looks Miss Lenzy gave Bryce the first time Felix showed up to an early meeting, two cups of coffee in hand from the local café Bryce mentioned liking, had been priceless. When Felix kept doing that every time they met, Bryce was charmed and flattered that Felix would go to so much effort just for him.

Jamie and Maddy found the entire situation hilarious. Jamie told Bryce Felix sounded like their kind of guy, and invited themselves over for dinner when Bryce finally got around to actually dating him. Seeing his two closest friends pleased at the prospect of him having someone who got his attention the way Felix did made Bryce smile. The couple meant a lot to him, and having their blessing made Felix harder to ignore.

Felix was never overly-aggressive, never inappropriate, during a teacher's meeting or anything of that nature. Bryce never felt pressured or hounded. Whenever he had an obviously bad day, Felix always seemed warm and happy to see him. He even laid off on the teasing. The fact that the lawyer was so considerate made Felix all the more attractive to Bryce, especially after the way Trey, his last partner, always acted brash and rude.

The pattern kept on and Bryce found himself looking forward to the time he spent with Felix every week. He wondered what it would feel like to have dinner with him, to watch a movie with Felix on his couch, with Snarl curled up at their feet. What would it feel like to kiss Felix? To feel his lips, taste him? Was he the type to kiss slow and deep, or fast and rough and all consuming?

He forced himself to push the thoughts away, to keep meeting Felix's increasingly childish and amusing pickup lines with sarcasm and laughter. For all that Felix flirted with him, for all of the jokes and teasing, he'd yet to ask Bryce out again. So Bryce kept his thoughts and feelings to himself,



enjoyed the time he spent bantering with Felix, and tried not to dwell on it.

Then, to everyone's surprise and curiosity, Felix never showed up at the next meeting. Bryce answered all of the curious looks and outright questions from the rest of the staff about Felix's absence with a shrug, and his own barely concealed worried confusion. The meeting dragged on where it normally went quickly and smoothly, Felix's absence felt by all it seemed. Bryce had been disgruntled and strangely unsettled by its end. He'd felt uneasy, like the meeting had been a waste of his time without Felix. Bryce'd been all packed up and out of the building faster than he had since the beginning of the school year.

He walked toward the nearest bus stop, thoughts of a beer and a relaxing evening with Snarl dancing through his mind, when a familiar green car pulled up beside him. A thrill shot down his spine when he recognized the vehicle. Yet another chance to interact with the man occupying so much of his attention.

"Are you an interior designer? 'Cause when I saw you, the room became beautiful," Felix's smooth voice called out. A large grin split the other man's face.

"I'm a teacher as you well know, and we're outside so that one doesn't work either." Despite the pleasure that welled up in his chest, Bryce kept his tone dry.

"Eh, semantics." Felix dismissed Bryce's words with a wave of his hand as he leaned out the window of his car.

"In that case, I appreciate the thought. Although I have to admit I'd be slightly more impressed if your cheesy ass lines were at least situation appropriate." Bryce stepped closer to the curb, the strap of his bag clutched tightly in one hand while he pushed his hair off his forehead with the other.

"Really?" Felix asked, wide-eyed.

"No." Bryce grinned.

"Cold and cruel I say, cold and cruel." Felix shook his head and adopted a mock hurt look. "Since you've wounded my pride so terribly, the least you can do is let me give you a ride."

"You have absolutely no idea where I'm going." Bryce smiled.

"Well, I'm free for the rest of the evening so as long as it's within the state I don't really care. Any further than that and I might have to renegotiate the offer into some other ploy to spend time with you." Felix grinned back, a flash of white teeth crinkled eyes attractively.

"You're so subtle I almost can't see you there." Bryce debated for a second then made his way toward the passenger door. Felix was kind of sweet and Bryce didn't feel like walking. He refused to admit Felix had completely charmed him.

"You could always feel me then." Felix smirked and arched a brow as Bryce slid into the car.

Bryce laughed as he buckled his seatbelt, and then gave Felix directions to a corner near his house.

The ride tuned out pleasant and more entertaining than Bryce expected. Felix proved, once again, to be a good driver, able to hold a conversation while he stayed alert and attentive to the road and flow of traffic. They chatted about everything, from the weather to how Bryce's new job, and what kind of work Felix did at his firm. The ride passed quickly and when they finally reached their destination, they sat in the car for a moment in silence, both obviously reluctant to end the moment.

"So uh ... why weren't you at the meeting? If you don't mind asking, that is?" Bryce asked slowly as he fiddled with the strap of his bag, more hesitant than he'd ever been with Felix.

"A divorce proceeding between one of my oldest clients and her newest husband ran over a bit. I came here straight from her house so there'd be a chance I could still catch you," Felix said. He smiled at Bryce, a slow, teasing curve of his lips. "Did you miss me?"

“Yes,” Bryce said. He blurted out without thinking, and his face heated. His palms dampened as he hurried to cover his unthinkingly honest answer. “I mean, I missed the coffee you always bring me more than you specifically. Good coffee’s hard to come by.”

Felix’s face went soft and gentle. Bryce stilled when Felix cupped his shoulder.

“Have dinner with me, Bryce. Just the two of us. I’m asking you out on a date, a serious date. No jokes, no teasing. I want to get to really know you. I want the chance to let you really get to know me. No games, no bullshit. You and I, some food, and the opportunity to talk without a gaggle of curious teachers hovering over our shoulders. What do you think?” Felix asked him, barely above a whisper.

Bryce thought about how badly his last relationship ended. About the debt Trey left him with. He thought about not wanting a one night stand or casual sex, and not being able to afford the drama that often came with a relationship. Then he thought about Felix, the way his body felt against him the night at the club, the way he brought him coffee and smiled, the way his jokes and pickup lines were horrible and endearing all at the same time.

“Yeah.” Bryce sounded too breathy for his liking so he cleared his throat. “Yeah, I think I’d like that. A date, that is. Dinner and a night out with you. I think ... I think it’d be good.”

Bryce flushed at the way Felix smiled, not wide and bright like before, but soft and sweet and private. Like it was meant only for Bryce. Bryce liked that smile more than any other expression he’d ever seen on Felix’s face.

“So,” Felix said. “Does this mean you’ll tell me where you actually live, or do I just need to pick you up on this corner tomorrow night at around seven?”

## Chapter Five

Bryce was nervous, he wasn't ashamed or afraid to admit that. He'd been single, hadn't dated or come close to dating since Trey walked out on him. He was more than a little frazzled about going out with Felix, and it only got worse the closer it got to seven. He'd showered, scrubbed himself down with a surprising viciousness, and torn through his closet twice in an attempt to find something to wear.

Halfway through dissecting his wardrobe for a third time, he'd broken down and called Jamie for advice. Jamie laughed at him, told him it was about time he went out again and then put him on speaker phone with Maddy. Together they debated the appropriate attire. They finally all agreed on a pair of fitted slacks and a more casual button down shirt Bryce had in his closet, a nice outfit Maddy and Jamie had gotten for him the Christmas before, and something he never wore to the school.

He dressed, tried to calm down, and found himself still nervous when a knock sounded at his door around ten minutes till. Snarl went crazy like he always did, as Bryce took a moment and brushed his hands down the front of his shirt. He made sure he had his wallet and his keys, and then opened the door and stepped out onto his small porch. He locked the door behind him, and then took in his date for the evening.

Felix looked as sexy and captivating as always, hair messy around his face like that night at the club, clothes pressed and sharp, but more relaxed than the suits Bryce normally saw him in.

"Hey." Felix smiled, blue eye crinkled happily at the corners as he scrubbed a hand across his freshly shaven jaw.

"Hey," Bryce said back. He felt stupid at the way he stood frozen on his doorstep as his nerves thrummed and anxiety curled in his stomach.

"So," Felix said, drawing the word out for a bit. "Was there a rainbow around here today?" Bryce furrowed his brow.

"Must have been 'cause I just found the treasure I've been looking for." Felix beamed at him. Bryce barked out a laugh. "I thought you said this date was going to be serious?"

"Oh, it is. I plan to woo you like you've never been woo'd before. But it officially broke the ice, didn't it?" The lawyer grinned down at him again as he offered Bryce his arm.

"True." Bryce had to admit Felix's one ridiculous line already helped him relax.

"See, I told you those lines had a use. Now we can enjoy the rest of the night without any awkwardness that comes along with first dates." Felix lead Bryce around to the passenger side of the car, opened the door, ushered himself inside, and then made his way around to the driver's side.

Bryce buckled his seat belt, already looking forward to the way the date would end. Felix might be worth breaking a few of his own rules for.

Bryce figured out quickly Felix was serious about the wooing. The lawyer stepped up his game quickly and noticeably, and Bryce found himself drawn in.

The ride to the restaurant was filled with light-hearted chatter, snatches of small talk that put Bryce at ease instantly as he fell back into the comfortable rhythm he and Felix had developed between them over the past months. The restaurant, a quiet upscale Italian place Bryce had passed by a thousand times but never set foot in, ended up being as calm and tastefully decorated as he'd always imagined. The service proved to be excellent, prompt and discrete, the food delicious and the wine

rich and heady.

Still the most captivating thing about the dinner was Felix. All charm, his comments were quick-witted and his stories interesting. Bryce responded in kind, glad his sarcasm was still very much enjoyed and appreciated. Felix trailed his index finger down the back of Bryce's hand, linked their fingers together on the table top casually for a few moments, and even wiped away a bit of sauce from the corner of Bryce's mouth with the pad of his thumb.

Afterward, Felix offered his arm again and instead of taking him back to the car, led Bryce down the sidewalk. He bought them both an ice cream cone from a sidewalk vendor Bryce was surprised to see so late in the evening. They made their way to the local park, and strolled down one of the nicer jogging trails as they ate their treats and chatted. Still, a tension simmered between them, slowly building since dinner. Since they met, if Bryce was honest with himself.

Bryce was aware of being seduced, it was obvious it in the air between them. In the way Felix looked at him, blue eyes heavy, mouth curled up at the corners. Bryce couldn't find it in himself to care, to worry about anything but the way Felix made him laugh and smile, the way he made his stomach churn with a happy sort of nervousness.

He was tired of denying himself, tired of lonely dinners and cold nights. Tired of all of those things. He'd found a new job, finally found a new chance at living good. He was ready to take another chance on love, ready to explore things between him and Felix. So he let himself be pulled further in, let down his guard, and let himself laugh and smile and lean into Felix's warmth like he'd wanted to for weeks.

A couple of hours later, they finally managed to find their way out of the park and back to Felix's car. The ride to Bryce's house passed quietly, but surprisingly comfortable. Bryce enjoyed himself. Being around Felix made him happier than he'd thought. He almost loathed the inevitable moment when the night came to an end.

"If I kissed you, would you punch me?" Felix asked. He looked down at Bryce where they stood outside his front door.

The porch light Bryce had turned on before he left shined down on them.

Bryce laughed, low and breathy, and watched the way Felix's eyes went dark. Felix's hand on his shoulder tightened before loosening.

"Maybe," Bryce said. He wasn't serious, but was somehow unable to keep from teasing Felix. Low heat curled in his stomach, anticipation running high through his veins.

"Cold and cruel. Not sure if I want to risk it when I know how vicious you can be," Felix said. He swooped down and did it anyway.

Felix's mouth was soft against Bryce's, his lips thin but soft. When Bryce opened his mouth for the welcomed thrust of Felix's tongue, he tasted faint traces of chocolate and coffee. The kiss went hot, but stayed sweet with Felix in control, his mouth a hair shy of too gentle as he tangled his fingers in Bryce's hair. Felix tilted his head and changed the angle of the kiss, made it deeper, hotter, a shade or two rougher, and Bryce groaned into it.

Bryce finally pulled back far enough to look up into Felix's eyes. He stared at him, searched his gaze for a moment, and then had to admit he'd already made his decision. He'd made it as soon as Felix asked him out.

"Come inside with me?" he asked softly.

Felix's eyes went wide then narrowed slightly. "You sure, Bryce? Because I don't want this to be a one-time thing, I don't want casual sex with you. If we do this, then I want us to do it right." Felix's face was serious, gaze sharp and attention focused.

That same warmth curl worked its way through Bryce's chest, all because Felix wanted what he wanted. It was glorious.

"Oh yeah, I'm sure. We want the same thing, and we've known each other for months now. I'm tired of not admitting what I want, tired of not having you when it's all I think about," Bryce said, his voice low and steady, his gaze direct. He wasn't ashamed of what he wanted, not now, not ever.

"So, I guess it's safe to say those lines actually did work." Felix grinned down at him, expression delighted, but filled with heat.

"Shut up," Bryce said. The words came out as more of a huff before he reached up and pulled Felix back down into another heated kiss.

Felix ended the kiss then, pulled back and nudged Bryce forward to unlock his door. While Bryce was busy, Felix slid up behind him and dropped nipping kisses on the side of his neck. Bryce shivered and fumbled with his key as Felix chuckled, low and warm, behind him until he finally managed to get the door open.

He gestured for Felix to wait on the porch for a second as he slipped inside. He petted Snarl, reminded himself to introduce the two of them later, and then let the dog out into the fenced in yard. Felix waited for him underneath the light of the front porch. When Bryce got back, he noticed the way Felix looked, hair disheveled and mouth slightly swollen. Bryce couldn't pull him forward into the house and another kiss fast enough.

They were noticeably wilder then. Their hands roamed over each other as Felix closed the door with his foot, and crowded Bryce against the nearest wall. Felix tugged at Bryce's shirt until it slipped out of his waistband, and wasted no time in getting his hands on Bryce's skin. He traced his way across Bryce's stomach and up his chest. Felix raked Bryce's nipples with his nails. Bryce gasped and bucked his hips up as he broke the kiss. His cock pressed against his zipper painfully as he panted up at Felix.

"Bedroom." Bryce practically rasped the word out. He groaned low and deep in his throat when Felix's mouthed at his neck, his tongue skating along his skin before he nipped him sharply.

Bryce pulled Felix's shirt completely off then tugged at the fly of his pants as they stumbled towards his bedroom. Felix's hands were just as busy, and by the time they managed to get to Bryce's room, their shoes and socks were abandoned somewhere behind them. They stood at the end of his bed, panting, and stared at each other for a moment, and then Felix moved. He pushed Bryce, who fell back against the mattress, legs splayed and pants riding low on his hips.

Before he realized what had happened, Felix was on his knees between Bryce's thighs. He worked Bryce's zipper down, urging him to lift his hips. Felix tugged Bryce's pants down and off. When Felix mouthed the wet spot his cock left on his underwear, Bryce moaned. Felix pulled Bryce's underwear quickly, and then he was on Bryce with no hesitation, mouth wrapped around the head of his cock as he sucked.

Bryce's wrapped his hands around the bars of his headboard, dug the back of his head deeper into his mattress, and moaned. Felix showed him no mercy, setting a fast rhythm as he moved his mouth up and down the length of Bryce's cock. Felix swirled his tongue around the head in a way that drove Bryce insane, making him feel like he was going to shake apart.

One of Felix's hands slid up between his thighs, and Bryce shivered when a knuckle brushed against his balls. The pad of one of Felix's strong fingers pressed firmly against Bryce's hole. He made a noise low in his throat and spread his legs further, welcoming Felix deeper into the curve of his thighs. He liked the way Felix took control, liked the way he went intense and focused like he had that night in the club, in that way Bryce had only gotten to glimpse on occasion.

His mind blanked out when Felix pressed until the tip of his finger slipped past the ring of muscles, just far enough for Bryce to feel the burn of it, and then he pulled back. Bryce groaned in denial and bucked his hips up in demand, but Felix seemed determined. He pulled back off of Bryce's cock, gripped him by the hips with both hands, and urged him up and over until he was on his hands and knees.

“Lube?” Low and rough, Felix's voice made Bryce squirm.

“Bedside table.” Bryce words were little more than a gasp as he tried to resist the urge to rub himself against his sheets.

Felix's hands disappeared for a moment, and Bryce registered his drawer being opened and closed. Then came a rustling of cloth and the sound of plastic being torn, the small click of a top being opened, and finally Felix was back. Felix's bare legs rubbed against Bryce, and he shivered at the knowledge that Felix must have shucked his pants along the way. All he wanted to do was turn around and take him in, see what Felix looked like all bare and flushed and hungry. A slick finger pressed past his rim again and Bryce didn't bother focusing on anything else. He couldn't.

Felix slid his finger all the way inside, the lube slicking his way and making it easier. Bryce pressed back against his hand. His breath hitched and he squeezed his eyes shut. It hurt in a way he'd missed more than he realized. Felix gave him a moment to get used to it, and then he was relentless as he pulled back and added a second finger, and then a third, deep inside after only a few thrusts.

It hurt worse than before, but the burn and stretch made Bryce's stomach tighten. Made him burn hotter. He shivered and arched his back in a silent plea when Felix finally pulled away.

“Condom?” Bryce asked, his voice ragged and broken. As much as he wanted Felix in him, he wasn't stupid enough to take a chance with either of their health by not being careful.

“Already got it. Ready?” Felix sounded out of breath when he answered.

Bryce nodded in agreement. He pushed his face into the mattress, let his knees slide apart a bit more, and waited. Felix made a low, pained noise behind him, and then gripped Bryce by the back of his neck. Felix's cock pressed firmly against his slick hole.

Bryce forced himself to relax, to welcome Felix inside, and was rewarded with the slow slide of Felix's cock breaching him. The fit was still tight even though he'd been stretched, but it felt good, hot and hard and perfect. Bryce bucked back, trying to take even more.

Felix squeezed his neck, a sort of silent warning or a plea, and Bryce stilled. He didn't have the self-restraint to be patient for long. Felix didn't hesitate again. He slid deeper inside Bryce, the sensation making Bryce's cock throb against his sheets. He got even harder and thicker as need rushed through him. Still Felix took it slow, as if he was basking in the moment.

Then he finally bottomed out. They both groaned.

Neither of them moved for a moment. The only sound in the room was their own harsh breathing. Felix pulled back slowly, and then thrust forward again with a snap of his hips. He sank deeper inside of Bryce who moaned, low and dirty and ragged, at the feel. The sound seemed to spur him on, because Felix practically growled and slammed his hips forward again, hard and brutal. His grip on the back of Bryce's neck tightened further. Bryce was sure he would end up with bruises, but he liked the idea.

“Wanted to do this since the first moment I saw you, face sweaty and clothes too tight.” Felix sounded broken, his words a dark companion to the rhythm of his hips.

Felix found the perfect angle, and Bryce moaned and pushed back into Felix's thrusts. Stars lit up behind his eyelids. It was all going to be over embarrassingly fast on his part. The way Felix kept talking, kept whispering into the room around them as if he couldn't force himself to be quiet, only

made things worse.

“You looked so fuckable, and I just wanted to get my hands on you, wanted to drag you to a dark corner and have you against a wall. Thought I’d never get the chance to, thought I’d never see you again till you showed up at the school.”

Felix’s hips stuttered. His thrusts were still deep and hard, but the rhythm had begun to falter.

“Now I’ve got you and I wanna do so much with you, Bryce. So much,” Felix said, the words practically a growl. The hand gripping the back of Bryce’s neck moved away then reappeared, stroking Bryce’s cock.

Bryce barely held back his shout at the first few strokes, but then Felix twisted his wrist, pressed the pad of his thumb down against the underside of Bryce’s cock. His vision whited out. He came, hot and wet over the circle of Felix’s fingers. Bryce clenched his muscles down tight around Felix. With a painful sounding hiss, Felix followed him over the edge.

They panted together in silence for a moment, Felix’s body a hot, heavy weight on Bryce’s back, and then Felix pulled out of him slowly and carefully. Bryce collapsed onto his stomach, mind dazed and body exhausted. He barely registered it as Felix moved off the bed and into the adjoining bathroom. The cool cloth on his back and ass as Felix wiped him down was a welcome relief.

He came back around fully a few minutes later. He managed to turn his head and gazed at Felix who laid out beside him. The other man stroked a hand soothingly down Bryce’s spine. He smiled at Felix, drowsy, tilting his head back to receive the soft kiss Felix gave him.

He was almost asleep when Felix’s voice drifted to him, low and tired and obviously amused.

“No wonder the sky is gray today. All of the blue is in your eyes.”

“It’s night, and my eyes are brown.” Bryce didn’t even bother opening his eyes as he spoke. He just smiled and let Felix’s heat lull him closer to sleep.

“Eh,” Felix said, his voice soft and hazy and dream-like. “Semantics.”

The End

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