

A romantic close-up of a man and a woman about to kiss. The man is shirtless and has a beard, while the woman is wearing a black top. They are in a very intimate pose, with the woman's hand on the man's neck.

FAKE IT BOOK ONE

FAKING LOVE

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Faking Love
A Fate It Book
Allyson Lindt

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Blurb

Molly's favorite part of her job is telling people she sells naughty cartoon clothes to retailers. As a sales rep for a company that produces cosplay-themed lingerie, she also doesn't mind spending most of her time on the road for work. It makes relationships difficult though, and too many weeks in a row on the road drag her down.

When a sexy stranger asks to share her breakfast table, she welcomes the change in scenery. The easy banter and teasing that dance behind the eyes of the handsome voice actor have her wondering if just this once, a one-night stand might be worth her time.

Brandon is tired of the playboy image that comes with his cult-celebrity status. When he meets a woman with a travel schedule as hectic as his, she lights a spark deep inside. The problem is, he's hoping for long-term and she's hesitant to start anything long-distance. With less than three days before they go their separate ways, Brandon has to show Molly there's more to them than just an unconventional fling.

For my eternal dragon

Chapter One

Real food. Not day-old muffins and cheap donuts, but eggs and toast. Molly slid into the line for the hotel's hot-breakfast buffet and grabbed a couple pieces of fruit and a glass of juice, to top off her meal. The hotel she was staying in next week wouldn't have anything like this. She was going to enjoy this leg of her business trip for all it was worth.

Shrieks and giggles echoed from the adjoining lobby, bouncing in her head and making her eardrums wince. Maybe she should take her food back up to her room, but this was her favorite way to mentally prep before an all-day meeting at a client site. She scanned the dining room for an empty table. She spotted a free chair and cut straight for it.

The girl who checked her in last night had mentioned something about a convention, but Molly assumed it was some kind of business function. If she'd known she was walking into an anime convention, she would have adjusted her travel schedule. Or purchased a booth in the Dealers' Room. This was what happened when she let someone else do the research.

Her employer made lingerie based on Japanese cartoons, and she'd been trying to convince them that places like this were a reasonable sales channel. She'd never been to one before—didn't know anything about the cartoons outside of what work required—but if this was a place packed with fans, it had to be a viable outlet.

She trailed her gaze around the room, as she picked at her food a group of three girls, dressed in cosplays made of less fabric between them than Molly's T-shirt and yoga pants were made of, brushed by, giggling and draping their arms over each other.

Some of the businessmen nearby scowled into their newspapers, leered, or snarled and pointed as they talked to each other. The stuffy old suits needed to chill. Contagious energy surrounded the costumed girls. An entire lobby filled with people having fun. What a novel idea.

"Is anyone joining you?" A smooth tenor interrupted Molly's people-watching.

She snapped her attention to the owner of the voice and struggled to keep her expression impassive. *Drool worthy. Nice.* It was tough to tell while she was sitting, but he was probably at least six inches taller than her five-six. A black T-shirt hugged a narrow waist, defined chest, and solid

arms, and it might be illegal in some states for a guy to wear jeans that well. She forced her gaze to his laughing brown eyes and spiky hair. No less distracting.

“No.” The single word scraped through her suddenly dry throat. “Help yourself.”

He dropped into the seat across from her, instead of dragging it to another table to join someone else. She hadn’t expected that. Wait. Was he there with the crowds of people in bright colors or with the businessmen?

“Thanks.” He plopped a plate of eggs and a Styrofoam cup onto the fake-wood surface. “Can’t believe it’s already so packed in here.”

“It’s a little nuts.” She found her voice. No reason to stare. It wasn’t like she didn’t see gorgeous guys in every airport and half the sales presentations she walked into when she traveled. She wiped her fingers on the napkin draped over her knee and extended her hand. “I’m Molly.”

His calloused palm was warm and firm, without gripping too tight. “Brandon. Thanks for the seat.” His touch lingered a moment longer, before he returned to his coffee. “It’s a silly ritual, but I enjoy the people watching. Wait. That makes me sound creepy. There’s an energy about it, you know?”

“It doesn’t sound creepy at all. I get it.” She relaxed, as her surprise at being approached ebbed. The view was still incredible, as was the twitch of the corner of his mouth when he smirked. “I didn’t realize events like this drew such an enthusiastic crowd.”

He raked his gaze over her, lingering long enough to raise her skin temperature. “That answers that.”

“Oh?”

“You’re a suit.”

“Guilty as charged. In about forty-five minutes I’ll be stuffed into a room full of buyers, convincing them our product will be their next big hit.” She’d learned a long time ago it was best not to mention she sold sexy underwear if she wanted the conversation to stay neutral. She might not mind it veering off course in this case, though.

He furrowed his brow, and the lilt vanished from his voice. “Sounds like... fun?”

Maybe it wouldn’t hurt to slide in a few details. “It’s not bad. There are worse things than being paid to see the country, and sell panties to strangers.”

He almost choked on his coffee. “Didn’t expect that. Not that I’m complaining. It’s not often an attractive and reasonable woman opens the conversation with underwear.”

She ducked her head, heat rushing under her skin. At least she wasn’t the type to blush visibly. The problem with a line of conversation like that was she didn’t know where to go next. She forced herself to meet his gaze again. “Are you here with them?” She nodded at a group with gravity-defying hair. “What kind of costume do you have?”

“What I’m wearing is as close as it gets for me.”

She didn’t know if she was disappointed or grateful he dropped the other topic so easily. Now seemed like as good a time as any to start her market research. And learn more about her gorgeous breakfast companion in the process. “Do you do it a lot? Go to these things?”

“Probably more often than I should admit if I don’t want to scare you off.”

She smiled at the implication that he was enjoying the conversation as much as she was. “It’s not scaring me off. I spend seventy-five percent of my life on the road because I wanted to see the world when I was younger. I don’t judge anyone else’s hobbies. Especially if you enjoy it.”

He furrowed his brow, and studied her for a moment. The corner of his mouth pulled up. “It *is* a lot of fun.”

What a gorgeous crooked smile. She could imagine swapping stories with him, for both professional and personal reasons, for hours. Listening to that voice, watching that mouth move...

A motion behind him caught her attention. The hotel elevators were glass, rising up the open center of the building. The most vibrant array of hot pink, neon blue, and lime green she’d ever seen filled the glass box heading up. She was familiar with the artwork *Too Goode* based their lingerie on, but they kept their offerings neutral to reach a wider market. The rainbow in front of her was stunning.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him shift in his seat to follow her gaze. She turned to him, studying the line of his back as it led to his shoulder. It would be nice to have those strong arms pin her to a wall and... She pushed the thought away. Probably not the best direction to let her mind drift before she walked into a room to share pictures of underwear with businessmen.

He raised his brows as he met her gaze. She turned to her breakfast, but not before she caught the hint of a smile tugging up his lips.

“So you like to watch?” Teasing lined his question. “People, I mean.”

Say it or keep it to herself? What the hell. It wasn’t like she’d ever see him again, and the flirting was fun. “I could go either way.”

He chuckled. “I like that. Would you let me watch?”

Was she really having this conversation first thing in the morning, in the middle of a crowded room? “I might.”

“What do I have to do to make that a yes?”

“You specifically?” The attention was more fun than she’d had in a while. Not a bad way to start a morning even if it was all talk. “More of the same.” She glanced at her watch and frowned. She had a schedule to keep. *Damn it.*

He leaned in, and settled his forearms on the table. Lines creased his forehead. “Did I say something wrong?”

“Definitely not. But I have to get ready for work.”

Every time his attention lingered on her, it heated her skin further. He worked his jaw up and down, he shook his head, and snapped his mouth shut.

She blinked at the conflicting body language.

He stood when she did. “I’ll keep you company on the elevator ride up to your room.”

She wouldn’t mind spending the rest of the day in her room with him.

She tried to keep her gait casual when he fell into step beside her on the short path back to the elevator. His arm occasionally brushed hers and the soft scent of soap and cinnamon teased her. The group waiting for the next available car grew, and he pressed closer, resting his arm against her back, to make more room for the people around them.

“So.” His voice was low enough she was certain only she could hear it, his warm breath brushing her ear. “You don’t mind being the one on the other side of the glass?”

The tentative rein she had on her imagination snapped, allowing images and possibilities to dance through her thoughts. She kept her response soft. “If the situation is right.”

The doors slid open, and waiting people spilled into the car. He maneuvered himself behind her, his chest close enough to her back to brush her shirt, but not quite touching her. His question was hot against her skin,

as the car rose. “For instance, someone directly behind you, where the only thing anyone on the outside sees is a glimpse? A hint?”

She didn’t know what was more enticing, the fantasies he was evoking or how close he stood. The elevator slid to a stop. He settled a hand on her hip. “My floor. Enjoy work.”

He stepped around her and was gone, the doors closing behind him.

Too much fun. The conversation lingered in her thoughts as she reached her floor and made her way to her room. She stripped off her tank top, pausing in front of the bathroom mirror. Too bad she didn’t have an extra few minutes, to enjoy the fantasies he’d left her with. That would have to wait. At least the memories would make the day go faster.

Chapter Two

Brandon flopped back on his bed with a laugh. Not what he'd expected when he went down for breakfast, but he certainly wasn't complaining. It had been luck that one of the few empty seats in the dining room came with a stunning view—straight black hair framing a stunning face and brushing her shoulders, hips and an ass that made her yoga pants look like they were made for her, and the non-stop teasing that danced in her hazel eyes.

But the turn the conversation had taken... *Wow*. He laughed again. He hadn't expected her stern mask to crack. Incredible. Maybe he should've indulged his impulse to ask if she needed help in the shower.

What would it be like to spend the weekend tucked away in a room with her, escaping reality and pretending they were the only two people in the world? No, that was a bad road for his thoughts to go down. There were reasons he didn't consider weekend flings.

Besides, he liked the panels and autographs that were part of the convention, and she wasn't there anymore. It wasn't the attention of his fans that drew him to these shows; he loved meeting people. The kind of passion that induced that level of fandom was contagious and intoxicating.

Besides, if he ran into Molly again—

He wouldn't. As a business traveler, she'd leave the office at three or four and head straight for the airport. Oh well.

A buzz echoed through the room, and he shot straight up, heart hammering at the abrupt noise. He grabbed his phone off the nightstand. "Yeah?"

"How was your flight?" Adeline's voice tickled his ear.

This was a bad sign. Too perky meant his agent was pissed. *What did I do now?* "It was good..."

"So glad to hear it. You're set for your panel at eleven, and then autographs for most of the afternoon?"

"Yes." Things he knew. Things she usually trusted him to remember.

"Perfect." The single word sounded like sunshine being forced through a pinhole at high velocity. "And you're keeping your hands to yourself?"

Raw irritation rose in his throat. That's what this was about. He kept his hands to himself last time, and that had been the problem. A woman had

thrown herself at him during a con in the Midwest, and then told her local anime club what an ass he was, when he'd turned her down. She complained in forums and to anyone who'd listen that he'd pursued her relentlessly simply so he could walk away. Why would he do something so cruel?

"I'm behaving," he said.

"Have you checked the con hashtag?"

"Can't say I have. I was at breakfast." The buzz from his conversation with Molly evaporated, leaving annoyance in its vacated spot.

"I'll wait."

He made sure his sigh echoed off the mouthpiece trudged the few feet to his laptop.

"Oh, good." Irritation crept into the fake joy she'd greeted him with. "You don't even have to scan the feed; they tagged you."

He dropped into the chair, wood creaking. He couldn't afford to let this conversation take so much out of him. It was too early, and he had too much to do. After a few seconds, he found what she was talking about. Someone had posted pictures of him having breakfast with Molly. *Good shot*. They caught her profile, bottom lip between her teeth. Would it be stalker-creepy to save the image? *Probably*. "It was breakfast at the only open table."

"Then have breakfast in your room the rest of the weekend." The phony cheer disappeared. "Your career can't afford the negative publicity."

"Yeah. I get it." Funami, one of the companies he worked for, stopped letting him do casting calls, saying they wouldn't support someone who couldn't keep it in their pants—something about it not mixing with their family-values image. Or some other crap that didn't make sense when he considered the line of violent, innuendo-laden anime they released.

"Enjoy your weekend. Call me if something comes up." Her glee reemerged, echoing in his head even after the line went dead.

He tossed his phone onto the bed. It bounced on the white comforter a few times, before tumbling to a stop. So much for mingling with the crowds between obligations. What were the odds he could blend in and no one would recognize him?

He glanced at the photo on his laptop again. Probably not something he could get away with.

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BRANDON TOOK HIS SEAT behind the autograph table, alongside his colleagues. It felt good to have an excuse not to be confined to his room. The chatter and squeals around him were rejuvenating. The panel had been fun, he liked working with this group, and now he got to mingle.

His mood lightened, as he talked to fans, took pictures, and exchanged jabs with fans. This was what he loved about conventions.

He lost track of how much time passed, but it didn't look like the line was getting any shorter. One of the volunteer staff slid into an empty spot next to him.

"Excuse me," she said timidly.

"Hey." He made sure his smile was friendly and open. "What's up?"

"Um..." She twisted her fingers together, not quite making eye contact. "I know you're only scheduled to be here until four, but we were wondering if you could stick around a few hours longer? We're bringing in pizza."

"Of course. No problem." Perfect. As long as he was with his colleagues, his agent couldn't get after him for... whatever. Why was this even an issue? Oh, right—he couldn't afford to piss off another animation studio.

He gazed around the hotel lobby, as the next person waiting dug through her bag for something for him to sign. When Molly stepped through the front doors, Brandon smiled. She hadn't left for good after all. *Nice*.

She looked up, and he thought he saw her exhaustion fade when their gazes met. Her mouth twitched in a not-quite smile, before she turned toward the elevators.

How likely was he to run into her again without it earning him an angry phone call? Maybe it was worth the risk.

"Here." The next guy slapped down a joker from a deck of cards, with Brandon's character on it.

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MOLLY DRUMMED HER FINGER against her leg, flitting her gaze from spot to spot without stopping. What was he doing behind a table? With a line leading to it? And why did he have to look even better than she remembered, laughing and joking with to the people around him? Had she misinterpreted friendliness as flirting this morning? No. There was no way she misread the barely veiled innuendo about watching versus being watched.

A couple of people — in their late twenties, if she had to guess — stopped to wait for the elevator, their heads bowed together. Maybe they knew.

She nodded toward the crowd in the hotel lobby. “What’s the line for?”

They looked up, their eyes wide. “Are you talking to us?”

She looked around. Who else would she be talking to? “Yes.”

“Autographs.” The girl made it sound like it was the most obvious thing ever. The plastic strands of her blue wig suffered from too much time spent stored flat.

“Right.” Molly felt funny asking for more information after a brush-off like that.

“They’re voice actors,” the male half of the duo said. His hair looked like it was his own, and his white bodysuit with a blue miniskirt showed off pretty much everything else of his as well. “For that show everyone loves, on Adult Swim.”

This was one of those times she wished she followed the cartoons as closely as her co-workers. Would the girls at the office freak if they knew she met and flirted with a member of the cast? “The dark-haired guy — who’s he?”

Blue-hair giggled. “Hottest thing ever to hide his face behind a microphone.”

Bodysuit guy nudged his friend playfully. “Right? I’d turn gay for that.”

Molly looked between the two, her confusion growing. She thought she was familiar with the industry. Apparently she had a lot to learn. “How does a voice actor have a famous face?”

Blue-hair seemed to be gaining confidence, as the conversation continued. “He’s at almost every con. Or, like, the important ones. No clue why he’s here.”

They both giggled again.

Molly stepped onto the elevator with them.

“He’s got a reputation,” Bodysuit said.

“I wouldn’t mind being his weekend distraction.” Blue-hair’s gaze was glued to the back of the elevator and the view below.

“I don’t think I’d like the... You know...” Bodysuit trailed off.

Blue-hair shrugged and turned back to him. “If you know he doesn’t actually like you and he’s going to dump you at the end of the weekend anyway, you can ignore him when he insists the two of you are meant to be together forever.”

“I guess.” Bodysuit held the door for Blue-hair as they stepped onto their floor. He turned back to Molly. “You need to get out more. Really.”

Molly stared as the doors closed between them. She’d almost been some celebrity with a cult-following’s one-night stand. It was a good thing she left for work when she did.

Wasn’t it?

Chapter Three

Molly wandered toward her room, keeping to one side as more costumed and non-costumed people rushed here and there. Yup. A real good thing she hadn't been sucked into the flirting. She pushed into her hotel room and latched the door behind her. It would've been horrible to have a fling with an attractive, intelligent man, looking for a way to get off for a night or two. *To be pressed under that solid body...*

The images danced in her thoughts again, and a tingle grew in her belly and moved lower. She shook her head and stripped off her work clothes. The cool air brushed her hardening nipples. Her thoughts were far more alluring than they should be. And she didn't mind at all.

The red numbers on the clock glared back with the early evening hour. She hadn't been the only person in the office that week from out of town—she rarely was—and everyone else left by three, to catch flights. She still had two weeks of her business trip left. If she went back home for the weekend, she'd have a day or two alone in her empty apartment before she had to head out again. Instead, she'd decided to enjoy that time in a city with a rich culture—spend the weekend, see some of Nashville, and maybe hit up a few bars for the local music while she was here.

Except it wasn't even four, and the bars wouldn't be worth visiting until at least eight. What was she going to do between now and then?

She pulled on a fitted T-shirt and a pair of jeans. Clothes she'd never dare wear in the office, even on casual Friday. The thin spots in the seat and along the legs were familiar and comfortable.

She grabbed the remote and sank onto the bed. She could watch TV. Maybe catch one of the new movies on Pay-Per-View. Maybe find a way to run into Brandon, see if he was still looking for a weekend distraction.

No. She flipped through channels, not registering anything. If he was what Blue-hair and Bodysuit implied, he'd already found a replacement. Which was fine. One-night stand meant he was welcome to find whomever he wanted, as was she. It was easier than dealing with men put off by how much time she spent on the road when it came to long-term commitment.

Then again, none of them are Brandon. Who'd probably forgotten about her since this morning.

She snarled at herself and stood, chasing away the circular thoughts. It wouldn't hurt anyone if she wandered with the crowds for a little while, and the ambient noise might override her teasing thoughts.

She slipped on her walking shoes, grabbed her key, and left her rambling reason behind. As she stepped into the hallway, the crowd gathered in front of the elevator made her wince. Squeezing into a tiny box with that many people looked like a one-way ticket to claustrophobia. She headed for the stairs instead.

She stepped into the lobby, still not sure what she was doing. The line to see Brandon and his co-cast wasn't as long as it had been. Before she could talk herself out of it, she took a spot at the back.

"Excuse me." A man a few inches shorter than her, wearing a black polo shirt stretched over broad shoulders and a round belly, stepped in front of her. "Your badge needs to be visible."

"My... badge?" Molly stared back, trying to keep her expression neutral.

He wore a lanyard with a brightly colored card at the end, proclaiming his name was *Death Demon*. Or maybe that was his title? She should have guessed it would be like any other convention in that regard. Even though so much of what she'd seen already was unique, of course they'd need people to prove they'd registered to get in.

"Right. Sorry. I left it in my room," she said.

"You'll have to get it. I can't let you stand in line without it."

"Sure. Totally understand." She wandered away. It was a stupid idea anyway. What was she planning to do? Wait for an hour, so she could stop in front of him and say, *hi*? If she was going to spend her free time here, she should see the whole show. Work on that pitch to prove this was a viable market for their clothes.

The compulsion to talk to Brandon wasn't ready to give up on her as quickly as she wanted to push it aside. She stopped a few feet back from a group of people scattered on couches, chatting and laughing. She only needed a badge for an hour or two...

"See something you like?" One of the girls looked at her, eyes narrow and lips pursed.

"Does one of you want to loan me your badge for two hours?" Molly spat out the question before she could have second—or was it third at this point—thoughts. "I'll pay you twenty bucks."

"It only cost forty to get in," someone said.

"I'm not giving you my badge. Total scam." The way they were grouped, it was difficult to track who was talking without giving herself whiplash.

"I will." The first girl crossed the distance between them, holding out her badge.

"Andie." Someone's warning cut through the noise.

She glared at the guy. "It's not like we've decided what we're doing next. Besides, now I can afford that plushie in the dealers' room."

Molly handed Andie the money and hung the lanyard around her neck. "I'll be right over there." She nodded at the autograph line. "Feel free to stalk me the entire time, and I'll give it back as soon as I'm done."

Andie pocketed the money with a snort. "He's not worth it."

"Excuse me?" An edge slipped into Molly's question. She should dial that back.

"Nothing." Andie dropped back into her seat. "I'm not going anywhere."

Molly took her place in line again, giving the security guy a big grin and flashing the borrowed badge when he approached. She slowly crept forward with the rest of the group. Andie stood at the edge of her sight, her expression growing more impatient as the time ticked away. Every once in a while, Molly tried to send her a reassuring wave. *Wow. This is taking forever.*

Her heart dropped into her shoes when she reached the front of the line. What was she supposed to say? She shifted her weight from one foot to the other, while the actors took pictures with the person who'd been in front of her. And then it was her turn.

Brandon's eyes grew wide when she stepped forward, a smile quickly spreading on his face. "I didn't know you were a fan."

She couldn't help returning the pleased look but made sure to tuck away most of her giddiness. "I didn't realize you were famous."

He grabbed a small poster off a nearby stack that sported the cartoon characters she figured were him and his cohorts. "No more than you are."

"I'm not famous."

"How much do people pay for you to fly from city to city, to visit them?" His Sharpie hovered over the print, but he didn't write anything. "I'd say that makes you famous."

"Or a good negotiator when it came to my contract."

He scribbled something, holding the poster at an angle, so the glare of the lights above kept her from reading it. He nodded to his left. "Who's your friend?"

She followed his gaze to Andie, who stood at the edge of the line, almost hopping with irritation. Molly's smile faded to embarrassment. "That's who I borrowed the badge from."

He grabbed another print. "I'm flattered. What's your plan now that you're here?"

"I hadn't gotten that far."

"Hey, people are still waiting," an irritated voice from behind cut through the banter.

"Sorry." He looked like he meant it. "I need to get back to this."

"And I should probably give Andie back her badge." So much for this being a brilliant idea. Molly didn't know what else to say. "Are you in town the rest of the weekend?" she blurted out before she could talk herself out of it.

"Hey, bitch. You're holding up the line." The insult carried distinctly over the chatter of the hotel lobby, bringing most of it to a stop.

Heat flooded Molly's cheeks, but before she could figure out how to respond, Brandon jumped over the table and approached the impatient line-dweller. Molly whirled so quickly as she followed the movement, it made her head spin.

"Is there an issue?" Brandon stood toe-to-toe with the shorter man, his voice a low growl.

Any conversation that hadn't stopped before ground to a halt. An eerie silence blanketed the packed room.

Line-dweller had to crane his neck up, to look at Brandon. "I've... That is... I mean—I've just been waiting in line for a while."

"So have a lot of people." Brandon's quiet response echoed in the still room. "Apologize to the lady."

Line-dweller turned his head toward Molly, the rest of his body staying rigid. "I'm sorry."

"For?" Brandon prompted.

"C-c-calling you names. I'm sure you're very nice when you're not holding up a line."

Molly would have laughed at the qualifier, if she wasn't torn between appreciation and mortification. "It's okay."

Death Demon stepped into the middle of the tension. "You need to leave," he said to Line-dweller.

Line-dweller shot Molly one last look. "Sorry again."

For how hot her face was, she must be bright red. Molly forced a smile, her hammering pulse making it difficult to speak.

"I'm sorry." Death Demon turned to Brandon. "We can shut the whole thing down if you want."

Brandon shook his head. "It's all good now."

The room erupted in chatter again, as though a switch had been flipped.

Brandon made his way back behind the table, taking the time to walk around this time, and dropped into his chair. He tugged on Molly's hand. "Sorry about that."

Her head was still spinning, but she found her voice enough to reply. "No. Thank you. It was really sweet of you to do that."

He flashed the same slow, crooked smile that captivated her this morning. "What else was I going to do?" He handed her a print and nodded at the now wide-eyed Andie. "For your new friend." Then he handed her the second one. "For you. Don't get them mixed up."

Molly gave him one last smile. "Thanks."

She trudged toward Andie, handed off the girl's pass and the signed poster without another word, and then headed upstairs. So much for her brilliant plan to seduce the gorgeous stranger. She should stay in her room the rest of the night.

When she pulled out her signed print and turned it over to read the inscription, her embarrassed heat shifted to something new. Maybe waiting in line was worth it after all.

Chapter Four

Brandon resisted the urge to glance around him one more time. The phone call from his agent this morning still had him paranoid, especially since he was doing exactly what she told him not to.

The incident that afternoon must have made it to social media. If the animation companies didn't like him before, this new run-in wouldn't win him any popularity points.

At the same time, when he'd seen Molly standing in front of him in the autograph line, jeans hugging round hips and a T-shirt showing off perky tits, he'd lost any will to behave. And hearing someone insult her... It had taken all of his self-restraint not to threaten the kid.

Of course, none of that mattered if she didn't show up. He scanned the hotel bar, looking for her familiar straight black hair. Maybe she hadn't seen the note on the back of the print, asking if she wanted to pick up where they left off after breakfast. She was interested. Otherwise, why go to the trouble of running into him again? It was obvious how out of her element she was with this crowd. Even if she didn't know it, she had something in common with these fans—as much passion under the surface, even if she applied it to her life differently.

He grinned, and cut a straight path to the gorgeous brunette at the bar. Barrettes held her hair back from her face, and every few seconds she pulled her attention from her drink to let her gaze flit around the room.

He dropped into the seat next to her, arm brushing hers. A tingle rushed through him. *What is it about this woman?* “I was worried you might not show,” he said.

Molly shifted to face him but didn't break the contact. A soft smile danced on full lips. “Does that happen a lot? They don't show?”

He bit back his surprise. If she were one of the attendees, he might think the question was founded in the rumors about him. But there was no way she'd heard those. She didn't know who he was. Which was kind of nice. “I haven't made a habit of extending the invite.”

Her brows rose, and she studied him with hazel eyes. She shook her head and took a sip of her drink. “Thank you again for this afternoon. I don't think I've ever been rescued by a knight in shining armor before.”

Pride rushed through him but wilted when something occurred to him. “Is that why you’re here?”

She laughed—a beautiful, playful sound—and shook her head. “I mean, it certainly didn’t hurt. But I’m here to see you, not because I felt obligated.”

“Good. Perfect.” He fumbled for more words. It was difficult to concentrate, with the blood rushing from his head and into his lower extremities. He was having a hard time focusing on anything but kissing her gorgeous, full lips, and—if that was what her laughter sounded like—how incredible it would be to make her moan.

He tucked the thought aside. He needed to focus on the conversation.

“So, voice acting. How does someone get into that kind of work?” Molly asked.

That question came up in every single panel he sat on, and yet it sounded new from her. He could answer it, and he didn’t have to filter his words here. “Honestly? It’s all about who I knew.”

She trailed a finger over her bottom lip. “That’s it? Nothing about hard work, training, and studying how to make different sounds for years on end?”

“I had a fraternity brother who knew a guy who was looking for extras in a cartoon. One thing led to another…” He never told the story this way before, but it was true. “What about you?”

She winked. “I’d be a terrible voice actor. I don’t know anyone.”

“You know me.” The banter was the same he remembered from earlier. It made her that much sexier. “But I meant what kind of work do you do that has you traveling so much?”

“Boring stuff.” She leaned in, licking her lips. “We make clothes. I convince retailers to sell them.” She was glossing over the good stuff.

“Sounds generic. You mentioned panties earlier?”

She smiled and caught her bottom lip between her teeth. “I did. The costumes people are wearing here? We make lingerie versions of those. Sexy cosplay.” When she shifted her weight, her shirt moved, offering a fantastic view down her front.

He wouldn’t mind seeing her model the merchandise. Of course, that was exactly what he shouldn’t be doing. He’d promised to keep his hands to himself, and a fling with a random woman in the hotel was the opposite of that. “Sounds anything but boring.”

“It’s not as exciting when you live this day to day. Like my boss says, it loses some of its seduction and charm when you see what goes on behind the curtain.” She tilted her head to the side, watching him—“I kind of screwed this bit up, earlier.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Oh?”

A nervous tremor ran through her tiny laugh. “Yeah. I’m going to try and do it right this time. Do you want to come back to my room?”

Damn straight. His arousal kicked into overdrive. Except Adeline would kill him if she found out. Who might drop him next if people started more rumors?

She ducked her head and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “Sorry. I shouldn’t have asked.” Did she have to be so alluring?

“I’d love to.” He let the truth flow out, before reason could suppress it again. “More than you can imagine.”

She slid from her barstool. “I can imagine a lot of things.”

He offered his arm. When she rested her hand in the crook of his elbow, a new rush of want seared through him. Her soft palm against his bare skin sent a series of delicious images through his thoughts.

They only passed a handful of people between the bar and the elevator, and he was relieved when they were alone in the car. The glass walls were the only thing that kept him from pressing her against the doors and stealing a taste before they reached their destination.

The ride to the top floor seemed to take an eternity, but at least there was no one else around once they got there. He slid a hand into her back pocket, and she leaned against him as she led the way. Her hands trembled when she swiped the key through the lock.

The moment they were in her room, he spun to face her. He twisted his fingers in her hair, pushed her back to the door, and pressed his lips to hers. She whimpered and shifted against him, digging her fingers into his arms and holding him close.

They broke apart with a gasp, but he didn’t let go. “I’ve wanted to do this all day.”

She caught her bottom lip between her teeth. “Did it live up to the fantasy?”

He stepped back, grasped her fingers, and tugged her toward the bed. “Left it in the dust.”

He rested a hand on the side of her face and trailed a line over her cheek with his thumb. Her flushed skin seared his palm. Desire thrummed through him at the want reflected in her hazel eyes. He brushed his lips across hers, barely making contact. She gasped and closed her eyelids. He traced her jawline to her neck. Every time she made a soft noise, she rubbed against him, and his cock twitched.

He slid his hand to the base of her neck, twisting his fingers in her hair, and tugged. Her quiet mewls grew louder when he found the soft spot between her neck and shoulder and scraped it with his teeth. She pressed her frame to him, hand on the back of his head, holding him close. His blood pressure screamed, and he took the hint and sucked on the sensitive skin.

Roaming his hands down her sides, he found the hem of her T-shirt and pushed up. She felt incredible against him, yielding and molding to his every touch. They broke apart long enough for him to tug her shirt over her head and toss it aside. He raked his gaze over her smooth, pale skin. White lace restrained her round tits, her chest rising and falling with each breath. He dipped his head, to resume his attentions, seeking out her collarbone and then licking lower.

Everything about her sensual movements drove his senses wild. He reached her breasts and kissed along the top of one mound before switching to the other.

She stepped away, smiling when he gave her a questioning look. She reached behind her back, unhooked her bra and let it fall, then caught it and tossed it aside.

He brushed his thumbs over her swollen pink nipples, and she gasped and arched her back.

The reaction spurred him on. He pinched one nub between his fingers, rolling it and occasionally pulling. He lowered his mouth to the other, flicking his tongue lightly over the surface.

She pressed closer, pushing into his mouth, and he wrapped his mouth around the sensitive skin, sucked, and scraped his teeth over her nipple. With each light bite, her moans grew louder, and she ground her hips against him.

He alternated between breasts, sucking on one and kneading the other. His cock strained against his jeans, aching.

She pulled his face back to hers, to kiss him again. In one rapid movement, she grabbed the bottom of his shirt and yanked it off. She dropped her fingers to his waist again, only fumbling with his belt for a moment before undoing it.

And then something occurred to him. Disappointment crashing around him, he frowned, rested his hand on hers, and stepped back a few inches.

Chapter Five

Molly hadn't known what to make of him at the bar. He bounced between flirty and reserved enough to make her head spin. But once the door closed them off from the rest of the world, the hunger in that first kiss made her concerns evaporate.

Except his small frown brought back her doubt. She almost didn't want to ask. Then again, what she really wanted was for them to keep exploring each other, and whatever caused his dismay was stopping that.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

His expression shifted to a sheepish smile. "I maybe should've thought of this before. I don't have any condoms."

"Oh." It had been long enough since she was in a situation like this, she hadn't thought about it. No wonder he looked unhappy. Her shoulders slumped. As much as she enjoyed the moment, there were some risks she wasn't willing to take.

He met her gaze again and his scowl morphed into a wicked, seductive smile. He kissed up her neck, gliding his hands down her sides and finding his way to the button on her jeans. His voice caressed her ear. "Then again, maybe we're okay without."

She covered his hands with hers, more regret pulsing through her, along with the heat of his skin against hers. "You're making a big assumption, and I'm not comfortable with that."

"I'm hoping"—he nipped her earlobe—"you don't mind letting me watch."

Her pulse screamed, pounding between her legs. The trepidation of performing for this almost-stranger mingled with excitement that he might get off from watching her do the same. She stepped away until the back of her legs hit the edge of the bed. "Sounds like fun."

"Don't move." He vanished into the bathroom and returned a moment later with a hand towel. He spun the desk chair around and dropped into it, gaze never leaving her for more than a couple of seconds. Every time he looked her over, her skin grew warmer and her slick need begged more loudly for attention.

Her hands shook, as she undid her own jeans, hooked her thumbs in the waistband, and dropped the rest of her clothes to the floor. She straightened

and stood in front of him. Her embarrassment at being so exposed was tempered by arousal.

He undid his pants, worked himself free, and glided his hand up and down his shaft. She winced with regret. It would be nice to have him pounding inside her, stretching her out. But this was wicked enough on its own. She dropped onto the edge of the bed and then hesitated. *What first?*

“Play with your tits.” A controlling edge lined his suggestion.

She cupped her breasts and pinched the swollen nubs, moaning at the contact. She closed her eyes and tilted her head back, as she massaged the flesh, tugging harder when he grunted.

“Lie back,” he said in a husky voice. “Use one hand to spread yourself open for me.”

The direct command made her head swim. She gasped when she brushed her swollen sex with her fingers.

“Your pussy is so gorgeous.” His breathing grew heavy. “Shove two fingers inside.”

She did as commanded, arching her back at the penetration. She pumped her hips against her hand, pinching her nipple hard with her other.

“Fuck. I want to be buried inside you.” His growl filled the room.

A need built in her chest. This was incredible, but she wasn’t going to finish. Not by herself. “Please?” Her breathless request slipped out before she could stop it.

He chuckled. “*Please*, what?”

“Let me come for you?” She bit her bottom lip.

“I like that.” His abbreviated grunts teased her senses. “Play with yourself until you come.”

She slid her hand up, gasping when she found her swollen clit. Fingers on either side, she stroked slowly at first. She couldn’t hold out, though. She increased her pace, and from his ragged breathing, he did too. Moans tore from her throat, as her climax built. She arched her back as she peaked, waves of pleasure washing over her as she continued to finger herself. A tiny part of her registered his cries mingling with hers, but she was too lost in the rush to look.

The mattress shifted with a new weight. His hand covered hers, keeping her from pulling away from the now hypersensitive skin. She opened her eyes, to find him studying her, expression dark with lust.

“I want you to come again.” The control was still there. He propped himself up on his elbow and lowered his mouth to her breast, to suck on the raw nipple. He pushed her hand against her sex, prompting her to keep stroking.

The contact on the swollen bits made her head swim, but she didn’t pull away.

“I want”—his voice was broken up by frequent nips to her swollen nub —“to hear you scream again...”

The order itself was almost enough to push her over the edge. She lost herself in the sensations, a second orgasm building quickly and rolling through her. She shuddered as the climax gripped her and then slid away.

He slowed his rough attention and rested his hand on her leg, thumb stroking the inside of her thigh. He kissed her nipple softly one more time, before pressing his lips to hers.

She pushed up on her elbows, crushing her mouth against his, darting her tongue around. It was several seconds before they broke apart.

He trailed his fingers up her stomach, over her chest, and along her neck. “Absolutely amazing.”

She flushed at the affection in his touch and voice. “Definitely.”

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MOLLY SIGHED AT THE light brush of lips on the back of her neck, floating halfway between consciousness and sleep. Brandon’s bare chest warmed her back, and draped his arm over her hip, holding her close.

“Go back to sleep.” His soft whisper caressed her ear.

“Mhm...” *That sounds nice.* Especially if it meant she could stay wrapped up a little longer. She nestled against him and willed her brain to fall asleep again.

She wasn’t sure how much time passed, but she was just drifting off again, when the bed shifted, pulling her awake. Cold enveloped her, before the sheets fell back into place. She rolled over, so she could see him, and frowned as he pulled on his T-shirt. The red numbers on the clock next to him told her it wasn’t even five in the morning.

“Is something wrong?” she asked quietly.

He jumped but didn’t turn to face her. “I hoped you wouldn’t wake up.”

“Too late.” She failed to push aside her creeping disappointment. There was nothing to be upset over. It wasn’t like they were going to spend the rest of the weekend in her room, getting to know each other in every way

possible. She knew before she went down to the bar that this would be a one-night thing.

He slumped forward, dropping his face into his hands for a moment, before standing. He still wouldn't look at her. "I need to get back to my room. I had a great time."

She wouldn't stop him. This was the way things were supposed to go. A sliver of light from the hallway fell across her and then vanished again, as he stepped out the door.

Right. Exactly how it's supposed to go. Wide-awake now, she rolled onto her back, to stare at the ceiling. At least it was fun while it lasted. Maybe she could get a couple more hours' sleep, before she hit downtown to play tourist.

Chapter Six

Brandon leaned his head against the wall of the shower, and the cool of the tile seeped into his forehead. Scalding water poured down his back. For the first time since he started touring the con circuit, he dreaded spending the day with the crowds and fans. Not because his appreciation for the atmosphere had changed any, but because he'd rather spend the time with Molly, ordering room service, getting acquainted, and if they could get away with it, not getting dressed.

Well, maybe dressing long enough to drop by the hotel gift shop, for a box of condoms.

But then what? They'd still have to go their separate ways tomorrow. And it was never meant to last more than one night. She never implied she wanted otherwise—which was a shame, as far as he was concerned. A woman like her deserved better than a random fling in a hotel room.

This way his agent wouldn't kill him, for adding a layer of truth to the rumors.

He pushed the regrets aside. It was over, and it had definitely been amazing. No reason to ruin the memories by focusing on the downside. And they were good memories—her fingers digging into his back, her quiet sighs, and her loud moans... His cock reacted to the images. *No time for that.* He switched the water to cold. He had things to do today.

Fifteen minutes later, he was dressed and riding the elevator down. The familiar scents of bacon and coffee teased him, as they wafted from the hot-breakfast buffet below. Running into her again would be awkward. He should grab his food from the drive-thru down the street. He'd still be back in plenty of time for his first panel of the day. Despite his resolve, he cut a straight line for the complimentary coffee, only taking his attention away from the lobby long enough to mix cream into his drink.

He found a spot away from the crowds—one with a good view of the room. Part of his brain screamed that he was acting like a lovesick puppy. The other part stepped in, to remind him she wasn't here for the con. His odds of seeing her in the costumed crowds were slim.

"Brandon, I was hoping I'd run into you." A pleasant tone interrupted his surveillance.

He hid his wince. Trent from Funami, the company that refused to work with him anymore. Brandon pasted on a smile, turned to face the other man, and returned his handshake. “How’s it going?”

Trent was a few inches shorter than Brandon and thin, but the confidence the blond man exuded made him seem taller. Trent’s posture was casual, one hand in his slacks’ pocket. “Could be better, but could also be a lot worse. You must be busy lately.”

Brandon almost choked on the pleasantry. He’d never seen sarcasm pulled off so flawlessly. “Not as busy as I could be. Always looking for my next gig.”

“Really? Then it’s too bad we can’t get Adeline to return our calls.”

The words slammed into Brandon’s brain, making him fumble. *Calls?* “I’m sorry, what?”

Trent laughed. “It’s why I was hoping to run into you. I hate to go around your agent, but we’ve picked up this new series we really think you’d be perfect for, and we want you to come in and read.”

Brandon worked his jaw up and down for a few seconds, fumbling for a response. “What about the rumors?”

“The...” A blank look crossed Trent’s face. “The love-’em-and-leave-’em complainer?”

The cold assessment of the situation bothered Brandon. He might not have been interested in her, but he still didn’t like that she was hurt by the whole thing. “I suppose.”

Trent waved a hand. “Shit like that happens all the time. You can’t let it get to you, you know? Kids—whether they’re fifteen or fifty—say things that simply aren’t true. You can’t let something like that keep you from going after work.”

Brandon was missing something, but he was catching up quickly enough to realize that the *something* seemed to be on his agent’s side, and not on Funami’s. “Good point.”

“Glad to hear it.” Trent clapped him on the shoulder. “Have Adeline call us, set up a time, and we’ll get you in to read. You’re free next week?”

“Yeah, definitely.” Brandon’s thoughts were racing out of control. “I can be in on Thursday. I’ll let her know myself.”

“Perfect.”

They exchanged a few more pleasantries, then Trent was gone, chasing down another distributor.

The moment Trent left, Brandon pulled out his phone. He had Adeline's number up in seconds. Each ring in his ear was another layer of aggravation and need for answers. Her voice mail clicked on.

He wanted to leave her a furious message, but part of him hoped it was just a misunderstanding. That, and he would hash it out with her in real-time if it wasn't. "It's me. Something's come up, and it's important. Call me as soon as you can."

Fury pumped through his veins. Why had she lied? The person he paid to make sure he got work, and she'd cut him off from a source of income. What the hell was going on?

On top of that, based on meaningless threats, he'd walked away from a fantastic night. But—a sliver of glee wormed through his irritation—that meant no one actually cared if he saw Molly one more time before the weekend was up.

A quick glance at his watch told him he still had an hour before his first panel. He glanced at the growing pack of people in front of the elevator and sprinted up the stairs instead. By the time he reached the sixth floor, he had to pause in the stairwell, to catch his breath. Okay, probably not the smartest thing he'd ever done. But worth it. He strode toward Molly's door, slowing his pace when it came into sight. The cleaning staff was in there, and she wasn't.

He tried to be subtle about peeking through the crack in the door, but he couldn't see enough of the room to tell if her stuff was still in there. *Please, please let her just be out for the day.*

He stopped by his room on the way back to the main floor. Like a lot of the cons, this one had given him two passes—one for him and one for a guest. He never had a reason to use the second one before, but now...

He rushed back down to the lobby and made a straight line for the front desk. The girl behind the counter greeted him with a pleasant smile.

He gave her what he hoped was a winning grin. "I'm trying to find out if Molly in 610 has checked out yet?" Maybe he should've gotten her last name.

Her expression faded, though her smile didn't dim. "I'm sorry, sir. I can't give out guest information."

Of course. "Yeah—no. Totally understand." He set the passes on counter, one for the con and one for the concert that night. "If she's still here, can you make sure she gets these?"

She didn't touch them. "If she's not here, I'll have to throw them away."
Did that mean she was gone? "Do what you have to. Thanks."

Brandon fell back into his routine, as the day wore on. He didn't feel obligated to hide in his room anymore. If no one cared who he was friendly with, he could talk to his fans and enjoy the other panels.

He tried to ignore it, but as the hours ticked away with no sign of Molly, his disappointment grew, aggravated by the fact that Adeline hadn't called him back.

Chapter Seven

Molly pulled her rental car into one of the last empty spots in the hotel lot. Historic Franklin was gorgeous. She was glad she stuck around for the weekend. She was even happier that she went out, to enjoy the town. Staying in her room all day with a random guy would've been an absolute waste of the gorgeous day.

And for the number of times she told herself that throughout the day, she almost believed it.

Throngs of people in costumes milled around the entrance and spilled through the front doors. They seemed to have doubled in number since the night before. It must be nice to be that enthusiastic about something. She shouldered her way through the groups. She wouldn't look for Brandon. Not even a glance. She headed straight for the elevator.

She'd go upstairs, put on a pair of heels and her leather skirt, then take a cab downtown and drink until she couldn't think, drowning herself in live country music.

Perfect plan.

"Miss Whitman." A voice struggled to carry over the crowd.

Molly spun at her name, attention landing on the front desk and a gentleman waving to catch her attention. He held out an envelope as she approached. "Someone left this for you."

She opened the flap, surprise and unwanted hope blooming inside at the sight of a convention pass and something she didn't recognize. She looked at the hotel clerk again. "Did they leave a note with it or anything?"

He shook his head. "I wasn't here when they dropped it off."

"Thanks." She gave him a wide smile and headed toward the elevators again, a bit more of a spring in her step. Okay, so she'd spent the day trying to get him out of her mind, but one more night would definitely be worth it. Besides, she'd fly out tomorrow, the temptation would be gone, and she'd have incredible memories to take with her to the next town.

Within a few moments, she'd returned to her room, changed into the outfit she'd set out for the bar, and was back down amid the crowds. This time she tried to flow with them instead of moving around them. She wandered the same paths as groups of people in neon and spandex. She had

no idea where to find Brandon. Packs spilled out of the open conference rooms on the second floor and melted into the crowds on the first.

She didn't even know where to start.

A long line—longer than the autograph line had been—wrapped around one corner and then another. That looked promising.

She spotted a familiar face and made her way toward Andie and her friends.

Andie looked startled to see her at first, but her surprise quickly faded into a smile. "Who'd you borrow from, this time?"

Molly laughed. "I got my own. What's the line for?"

A shorter girl next to her rolled her eyes. "Yūta Furukawa. Duh?"

Molly stared back blankly. "The what?"

Shorter Girl sighed and pursed her lips.

"He's a singer," Andie said, voice soft but steady. "From Japan. He's doing a concert tonight."

"Oh." Molly pulled out the ticket that had been with the con pass from Brandon. "Like this?"

"Duh?" Short Girl grunted in disgust.

"You can join us in line," Andie offered. "Otherwise, you'll be waiting out here forever."

"She's not even a fan," Shorter Girl argued.

Standing in line longer meant she could scan the crowds, which was great, unless the person she was looking for was already inside. In her experience, it was almost impossible to find someone in a packed concert. With her odds at fifty-fifty, she opted for the easier surveillance. She gave both girls a smile. "Thanks, but I can't cut. I'll wait my turn."

"Stupid." Shorter Girl's insult hit Molly's back, as she searched for the back of the line.

Two hours later, Molly finally reached the entrance. Someone else told her the doors weren't even open yet when she arrived. The heels had probably been a bad idea. And there was still no sign of Brandon. She squeezed her way to the back of the room—they'd opened the four main convention rooms downstairs, to make one larger venue—and found a spot near the wall. There were no seats left.

What was she doing there? There was no way she'd find anyone in this chaos. And the lights were going down. *Great.* She crossed her arms. *What now?*

A warm body pressed against her back, and she shifted to move out of the way. Two hands rested at her hips, and the familiar scent of soap and cinnamon greeted her. *Brandon*.

She couldn't help her smile. Not that anyone could see it in the now pitch-black room.

"You came." He brushed her ear with his lips, his breath warm against her skin. He slid his hands to her stomach, pulling her closer.

Heat spread between her legs, and she leaned into him, his arousal hard against her butt. What was it about this man? "Not yet, but I'm hoping to," she said.

"I like that." He kissed up the back of her neck, his words vibrating through her. "What are the odds I could turn the innuendo into reality?"

Before she could ask what he had in mind, he dropped his hand to the bottom of her skirt. He traced his fingers along the edge of the hem, around to the back of her legs, until he caressed her inner thigh.

She gasped, intensely aware of the people around them but not sure she cared. She shifted her weight, and he glided his hand higher.

Bright lights strobed from the stage, but none reached them. Heavy music pounded through the room, pulsing through her feet and thumping in her chest. Or maybe that was her screaming heartbeat.

While he pushed one hand up the back of her skirt, his other made its way under her shirt, to rest his palm directly on her stomach. "You know"—his voice was low, but right next to her ear, it still cut through the bedlam—"if anyone catches us, we're in trouble."

She nodded, the confession heightening her arousal further. Need throbbed between her legs, and her nipples ached against fabric.

"And you'll let me keep going?"

She nodded again. "Don't get us caught."

His laugh rumbled through her back, as he slid his hand higher between her legs. "If I didn't have to be on stage for the rest of the show, I'd see that as a challenge."

He brushed the bottom of her breast through the lace of her bra, and she lost any reply she might have, temporarily misplacing her disappointment that they didn't have more time.

"Our Master of Ceremonies for the night, Brandon Powell." The announcement echoed through the room.

"Damn it, I've been summoned."

She grabbed his wrist, to keep him from leaving yet, and spun to face him. With her free hand, she fished her spare room key out of her purse and slipped it into his back pocket. “Meet me upstairs after the concert?”

He kissed her hard, before breaking away. “Give me thirty minutes after it ends.”

Chapter Eight

Brandon couldn't see Molly through the crowds, but it didn't matter. Her room key was an alluring weight in his back pocket. He hopped off the stage. A few more polite *goodnights*, and he could sneak out for the evening. His pocket buzzed, and he grabbed his phone, frowning when Adeline's picture grinned at him.

He pushed into the hallway, looking for a sort-of quiet corner. "What?"

"Sorry to call so late. But I knew you had that thing tonight, so I was hoping I could catch you before." She sounded pleasant.

"You did." He resisted the urge to add, *And I caught you*, still not sure what was going on. "Do you have a few minutes?"

"Of course. I called you back, didn't I?"

He glared at the phone. "So I talked to Trent from Funami today."

"Oh?" Her cheer vanished in the single syllable.

"Want to tell me what's really going on?" He wasn't going to lash out at her. She'd been his agent for five years. There was no reason to throw a fit until he had her side of the story.

"Not really." Her voice was flat.

Or he could tear into her now. "What the hell are you doing? He's got work for me, and you're telling me they never want to talk to me again. Is it personal? Did he piss you off? Are they trying to jerk me around? Help me out, here."

Her sigh echoed over the phone. "It's personal."

He didn't expect that. "Did he insult you or something? I don't want to be working with a company that isn't treating us right. You only had to tell me."

"No, it's not that." She sounded tired. "It doesn't have anything to do with Funami, except they didn't have a lot of work for you, so I figured you'd miss them the least."

He frowned. That didn't make any sense. "It's not a high-profile, big-money industry. I pretty much miss every job I don't get. What's going on?"

"I just..." Her voice faded off.

He waited. And checked his phone to make sure she was still there. And waited. Then— "You what?"

“It’s like you said.” Her tone was more sincere now. The voice she used when she wasn’t playing a part, simply talking to him straight. “We’ve worked together for five years, and it’s hard not to notice what a great guy you are, after all that time.”

This was weird. “Thanks?”

“I can’t believe I’m doing this. It’s killing me to see you out there, hitting on other women and not even noticing me.”

The words took a moment to sink in, their full impact pounding in his skull when they did. He had to be misunderstanding her. “We have a great business relationship. If I’m not saying *thank you* enough, I can try to be better about it. I appreciate everything you do for me.”

“This isn’t a professional thing.”

Shit. He understood correctly. “Okay?”

“I don’t want to be relegated to being your agent. I want you. I like you. A lot. I think I may have even fallen in love with you.”

He rubbed his face, shock coursing through him. *Love*. He couldn’t imagine. Except he could—but it wasn’t Adeline dancing through his fantasy. “Even if I felt the same, us hooking up is a bad idea. You can’t represent me *and* date me,” he said.

“So I’ll quit.” Hope clung to her offer.

“No, Adeline.” Damn it, he didn’t want to do this. She was a good agent. “That’s not what I mean. I don’t feel that way about you.”

“So what are you going to do instead?” An icy edge slid into her voice. “Spend the rest of your life picking up fan girls in hotels? Survive off one-night stands, until you’re too old to catch anyone’s eye? What kind of self-respecting woman, besides me, is going to understand your travel schedule? And if you did manage to convince someone to put up with it, could you really do that to her?”

The words hit hard. Could he? Someone like Molly didn’t want a guy who wasn’t home for her, because he played a cartoon character on TV. Pursuing her was guaranteed heartbreak. “You lied to me,” he said.

“I did it for us.” The sugar was back.

“No.” He snarled. “You did it for you. As far as I’m concerned, we don’t work together anymore.”

“Brandon, sweetie”—she didn’t sound sweet at all—“I can fuck your career if you leave me. Keep that in mind.”

“Good night, Adeline.” He disconnected. Back to the wall, he sank to the ground and set his phone next to him. How did he not see this coming? He should be terrified about the impact firing her would have on his career. But he was good at what he did, and his cousin was a lawyer.

Still, heading up to Molly’s room would be a mistake. Another night together would be fun, but he was already hooked. How much harder would it be for him to walk away if they hooked up again? He needed to sever ties so they could get on with their lives.

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ENERGY AND EXCITEMENT thrummed through Molly, making it impossible to sit still. She plopped on the edge of her bed for all of about two seconds, and then resumed pacing her room. The ambient energy from the concert raced across her skin, and anticipation tingled in her gut. Brandon would be there any minute. She should relax. She was acting like an anxious first-timer.

But her nervous feet wouldn’t listen, carrying her to one side of the room and then the other.

An hour later, the excitement had faded to anxiety, and the adrenaline of the night sat heavy in her stomach. She pushed herself to the top of the bed, rested her back against the headboard, and clicked on the TV. Every time a sound echoed from the hallway, she hit *Mute*. *Was that a knock?*

Something must have tied him up. Kept him longer than he meant. She should’ve given him her phone number. But that didn’t make sense if he didn’t have a reason to call her after tonight.

The minutes ticked away, and an ache spread through her shoulders and neck. The long week seeped into her bones, tempting her eyelids further down. Almost two hours. Damn it. What had she been thinking? Hurt and frustration flowed through her. She never should’ve gone down that path, taking the free passes. Or maybe her first mistake had been letting him join her for breakfast.

Her eyes drifted shut against her will. He wasn’t going to show up, anyway.

She jerked up with a start at a scratching outside her door. Her gaze flew around the room as she struggled to figure out where she was, and reality sank in when she saw the bright-red numbers on the clock telling her it was a little after five in the morning. The scratching was the staff slipping her check-out statement under the door. She stretched and worked the kinks

from her neck. *Falling asleep sitting up? Stupidest thing I've ever done in a hotel.*

And then the rest of the memories rushed back. Of Brandon. Of being stood up. Of letting herself believe there was more to their relationship than a single night. Falling asleep sitting up was only the second stupidest thing she'd done in a hotel.

She pushed out of bed in resignation. Her flight wasn't until two, but she couldn't stay in this place a minute longer than she had to. She'd get breakfast somewhere far away, hit up a couple more tourist spots, and crash at the airport for several hours if she had to.

Anything that didn't require her to be surrounded by memories of a mistake she should have known better than to make. She stripped off her wrinkled silk blouse, jammed that and the clothes from the night before into her suitcase, and grabbed the biggest, most oversized shirt she could find, to change into after her shower.

Half an hour, and she could be gone. She'd put the weekend behind her, and maybe after she threw herself into work for the next week or three, the ache in her chest would finally go away.

Chapter Nine

Brandon stared at the ceiling, blinking occasionally, to keep his eyes from feeling so dry. He wouldn't look at the clock again. It wouldn't do him any good. It would only be a minute later than the six-fifteen it was last time he looked. Sleep wasn't happening. Every time he closed his eyes, images of a gorgeous woman with straight black hair taunted him. Even with his eyes open, he felt every inch of her curves pressed against him. Heard her moans. The soft gasps she made when she was about to come.

He pushed out of bed, the sleepless night making him feel careless. Though he was about to do one of the most selfish things he'd ever done, he couldn't convince himself it was a bad idea. He had to tell Molly how he felt. That despite it only being a couple days, he couldn't imagine never seeing her again.

He was out of his room before reason could set back in. Hesitation gripped him, as he paused in front of her door. He breathed deep, slid the card into the lock, and pushed inside.

Shit. The comforter was wrinkled but still intact on the bed. The bathroom counter was empty. There were no bags on the floor, no clothes hanging in the closet, and the other key sat on the nightstand.

She was gone. *Fuck.*

He shuffled out of the room, letting the door swing shut behind him, and leaned against the balcony overlooking the middle of the hotel. The lobby was empty, except for a staff member watering the plants. Which made sense. Who would be up at this hour on a Sunday morning?

A gnawing pain grew in his gut. Maybe it was a good thing she was gone. Telling her he wanted to see if they were more than a random fling might be as awkward for her as Adeline's confession was for him.

Except he refused to believe that. There was no way she was faking interest.

A movement caught his attention. A flash of black, six floors below. He whipped his head toward it in time to catch what had to be Molly, vanishing out the front doors.

He was moving before his brain finished registering the sight, sprinting down the stairs as fast as he dared without tripping over his tired feet. He

pushed into the lobby and didn't slow, still racing for the front entrance. He paused outside, to scan the parking lot. *Please let her still be here.*

And she was, about halfway to the back of the lot, loading her luggage into the trunk of a generic, compact rental. He took off again and came to a stop next to her, seconds later. He gasped for air.

"What do you want?" She stared back, face a blank mask.

"I..." He struggled for oxygen. "Wait."

She sighed. "I need to go." But she didn't turn away.

"I'm sorry."

She crossed her arms. "Why are you doing this?"

"Doing what?" He found his breath in time to realize her question didn't make any sense. She didn't like the apology?

"Is the sadistic torture part of your weekend schedule?" Her jaw was set.

"I don't... What?"

She pursed her lips, silent for a moment, before saying, "I was fine with being your weekend fling. We're both traveling; we'll never see each other again. I knew that on Night One. But you had to stretch it out. Tease me. Stand me up. Is this fun? Is this the part you really get off on? Are the rumors true?"

So she'd heard those. Fan-fucking-tastic. The one thing she knew about him was the one thing that wasn't true. He reached for her but stopped short of making contact. "Hear me out?"

She tapped her toe against the ground. "Fine."

He had to make this good. He had to make her believe it. And nothing was coming to him. He opened his mouth, and the words spilled out before he could process them. "I don't do one-night stands." She scowled, and he hurried to add, "I swear. And I wouldn't have hit on you if I wasn't sincere, and I'm so sorry about last night."

"Why are you here?" Her tone was still hard, but the corners of her eyes softened.

He rested a hand on her cheek, relief nudging him when she didn't jerk away. "I know we'll never see each other again, but I really enjoy your company, and I think there's the potential for more if we give things a chance, and I couldn't let you leave without telling you."

"I—" Her brow creased, skepticism dancing in her eyes. "Really." The flat tone in her voice brought back his ache, but something warm and

hopeful lurked behind it.

“Honestly, sincerely, and I will swear on whatever it takes to prove I mean it. I promise it’s not a game. I mean every single word.”

She folded one arm in front of her, to grab the other, drumming her fingers on her elbow. “Then what happened last night?”

What did he need to say to fix this? “I thought I was doing what was best for you.”

“By standing me up?” She pursed her lips. “By extending an offer you never intended to make good on?”

“By letting you get on with your life.”

“I’d rather be the one to make that decision. I can think for myself, you know. And in that case, why are you here now?”

This question was easy. “Because I realized I couldn’t stay away after all.”

She smiled and leaned against his palm again, covering his hand with hers. “Me either.”

It took a couple of heartbeats for him to realize she meant she couldn’t stay away. “So you don’t have to leave yet?”

“I already checked out.” She nodded toward the open trunk.

She couldn’t go. Not yet. “When’s your flight?” he asked.

“Two.”

His smile grew. “So come back to my room.”

She chewed her bottom lip. “I haven’t slept all night. What if I can’t stay awake?”

“Then I still have you for a few more hours. But I’m hoping to keep you busy at least some of that time.”

She traced her thumb over the back of his hand. “All right. I’m in.”

He dipped his head and pressed his lips to hers, need screaming through him. She sighed and deepened the kiss, slipping her tongue into his mouth and dancing it around. She shifted against him, and every nerve in his body pulsed.

He broke away. The lust in her hazel eyes tempted him to see how far they could go in the parking lot. Instead, he slammed the rental’s trunk shut, grabbed the keys and dropped them in her purse, and wrapped an arm around her waist to lead her back to the hotel.

He paused in the lobby. “Stay right there.”

She gave him a questioning look. He cut a straight path to the gift shop, and less than two minutes later was back, a box of condoms in his back pocket.

She gave an embarrassed laugh and leaned against him, when he wrapped his arm around her again. They made it to the elevator, which he swore took forever to arrive. At least there still weren't many people around.

They stepped into the empty car. *Screw glass walls.* He wanted her desperately. The moment the doors slid shut, he pressed her back against them and kissed her hungrily, one hand on her hip and the other at the back of her head.

She shifted her weight, resting her foot between both of his and rubbing her hip against his cock through his jeans.

They stumbled into the hallway when they reached his floor. The seconds it took to find his room seemed to stretch on for an eternity. And then they were inside, and he was kissing her again.

She returned the gesture with as much hunger as he felt, dragging her nails up his back and holding him close.

Chapter Ten

The excitement she felt the night before rushed back to Molly full-force, obliterating any residue of disappointment and pushing aside her exhaustion. She didn't know how this was going to work after today, but she was happy to consider a long-distance relationship, to see where she and Brandon went next.

He yanked her shirt over her head and tossed it away, and her bra followed a few seconds later. Hands roaming her bare chest, they managed to stumble back toward the bed.

Her legs hit the mattress, and she lost her balance. She fell back with a giggle, her butt landing on the comforter.

"I love that sound." He paused for a moment, and then nudged her shoulder, pushing her onto her back. He tugged off his own shirt, before dipping his head to kiss her neck, throat, and breasts.

She traced his chest, memorizing the definition and smooth skin stretched taut over muscle.

He rolled onto his side and pressed close. His erection dug into her thigh. She wanted him inside her. He wrapped his mouth around a swollen, pink nipple, flicked his tongue back and forth, and she gasped. The sensation felt like a string attached to every nerve ending.

He slid his hand down her stomach, under the waist of her jeans, and over her panties, teasing her slick mound through the cotton. She thrust up her hips, to meet the contact, but he kept his touch light enough to continue teasing.

He pulled away completely when she pushed up again. "Patience," he said.

She smirked and rubbed her leg against his hard cock. "I can torture you, too."

He closed his eyes, a low growl rumbling up from his chest. When he looked at her again, desire was heavy in his expression. "Understood."

Within seconds, he'd undone her jeans and shoved her remaining clothing to the floor. He dropped to his knees at the foot of the bed, not touching her, only his head visible from where she lay.

Blood rushed through Molly's veins, making every inch of her skin hum in anticipation, as the seconds stretched. When he kissed the inside of her

leg, a sharp jolt of pleasure spiked through her. He glided his lips higher, up one thigh and down the other, never touching her aching sex. “I was kind of hoping”—his words rumbled against her skin—“to hear you beg again.”

She could do that. “Please?” The request came out softer, more needy than she intended.

His chuckle vibrated against her thigh, and his mouth moved higher again, each kiss slow and deliberate. When he reached his destination, and explored her slit with his tongue, she inhaled sharply. He trailed his finger down her wet skin and slid inside her. Her hips bucked against the contact. When he wrapped his lips around her clit, she almost came.

She tangled her fingers in his hair and held him close, grinding against him as he licked and sucked her pulsing button. A climax tore through her, and she screamed when she came, lifting her butt off the bed to get closer, and then dropping to pull away from the persistent attention.

He kissed her skin lightly and pulled her to her feet. She pressed her lips to his, tasting herself in his kiss, still wanting more—to feel him driving deep inside her. He spun them around, so his back was to the bed with her facing him, and then shed the rest of his clothes. He only fumbled with the rubber for a moment before rolling it on.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, he tugged her to stand between his legs. He roamed his mouth along her stomach, as he glided his hands over her butt and thighs. “I’ve been fantasizing since we met”—her skin muffled his words—“about feeling you wrapped around me.”

“I know exactly what you mean.” She straddled his legs and lowered herself onto his lap, stopping when his cock nudged her entrance. He gave her a curious look, and she smiled. “I told you I could tease too.”

He gripped her hips and thrust up, pushing inside her.

She gasped, as he spread her open.

“But I’m more impatient than you.” He lowered his mouth to her neck, sucking and biting hard on the sensitive skin as he slowly pumped inside her.

Their pace increased, his cock hitting her G-spot every time she dropped down. His hands at her hips set the rhythm, his moans becoming hungry grunts, as he pounded against her harder and faster.

Another climax closed in on her, and then ripped through her. Her pussy clenched around him, and he never let up as he pumped frantically.

For a moment he held his breath, and then he slowed his pace to a stop. He settled his forehead against her chest, and she dropped her chin to the top of his head, focused on every sensation at once—the ebbing pleasure, him still inside her, his breath against her skin, the brush of the air conditioner kissing away the heat.

When she trusted herself to stand, she extracted herself from his lap. Her legs wobbled, and she giggled.

“I don’t know if I’ve ever made a woman weak in the knees before.” He tugged her toward the bed and scooted further up, indicating she should lie next to him.

She crawled into the empty spot, resting her head on his shoulder and her hand on his chest. “I have a hard time believing that.”

“Believe what you want.” His voice was soft and low. He trailed his fingers through her hair. “It’s never been like that before.”

She didn’t know how to respond, so she nestled closer. Her eyelids drooped shut, reminding her she hadn’t slept much that weekend. His hand between her shoulder blades, his thumb rubbing lightly, sapped the rest of her consciousness, and she drifted off with a smile.

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SOMEWHERE ON THE EDGE of her consciousness, Molly’s phone beeped. She forced her eyes open. *Stupid alarm.*

“Ten more minutes.” Brandon’s mumble vibrated through her cheek.

She snuggled into him one more time, searing the warmth of his touch into her memory, before sitting up. “I can’t miss my plane.” She scooted to the edge of the bed and grabbed her T-shirt off the floor.

He wrapped his arms around her waist and ran his lips along the back of her neck and her shoulders. “So, what now?” The light kisses muffled his question.

“Now? I get dressed. In about six hours I set down in St Louis.” She leaned back into the attention. *Damn it. Why couldn’t this last a little longer?*

“Not what I meant.” He nipped at her shoulder. “I’m talking about us. What now?”

A sick pit formed in her gut. She hadn’t figured that out yet. “I don’t know. But I know I can’t just walk away.”

He settled his chin on her shoulder, the scruff of a day’s worth of unshaved beard scratching her cheek. “I was hoping you’d say that. Neither

can I.”

She finished putting her shirt on and focused on enjoying his arms wrapped around her waist. Without pulling away, she grabbed her purse from the nightstand, plucked out a business card, and scribbled her cell-phone number and personal e-mail address on the back. “Make sure you call me. If I can’t see you, I want to hear that million-dollar voice.”

His laugh rumbled through her back, and he took the card from her. “Million dollar, huh? I ought to make you my new agent.”

She rested her cheek against his. “Promise you’ll call?”

He tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and laid a line of kisses down her cheek. “I promise. I know it’s weird with the whole only-known-each-other-a-weekend thing, but I’m going to miss you.”

The words dug deep. Anything she felt needed to grow, before she named it, but she also desperately wanted whatever it was to have a chance. “Same.” Inspiration struck, and she grinned. “I’ll be in Dallas in three weeks.”

He nipped her neck. “Fort Worth in four. Hook up on the weekend between?”

“Looking forward to it.”

“Then I’ll let you go for now.” He kissed the edge of her ear, one last time. “Talk to you when your plane touches down.”

Chapter Eleven

Leaving the airport now. Be there as soon as I can.

That's what Brandon's text said. From her own flight in, Molly knew that meant he'd arrive at the hotel in thirty to forty-five minutes, and the clock crept forward fast.

She had no idea how she was supposed to act. She'd never booked a hotel room with the intent of meeting a guy there. Not like this, with a weekend of fooling around planned. She did know she didn't want to be wearing her work clothes anymore. It was after five on a Friday; she might as well change into something more comfortable.

But should it be the innuendo-laden kind of *more comfortable*, or was her jeans-and-T-shirt combination the right way to go?

She paced the floor, trying not to let neurosis overtake her thoughts. Three weeks seemed like an eternity ago. The memories of her weekend with Brandon were seared into her mind, but her whims of fancy had retreated since then. What were they doing? It wasn't rational.

The phone conversations were fun, sweet, and sexy. The random text messages and e-mails were the same. But none of them were ever long enough. They always lacked that connection she'd felt when she and Brandon met, as if they were trying too hard to recreate the moment. Maybe they could just talk when he got there? Part of her protested, wanting to taste him and feel him and be wrapped up in and around him. But if she didn't voice her concerns, was continuing their relationship worth it?

Then again, they *did* talk. She told him how work was, and he told her about working his contacts in the industry while looking for a new agent. That had to count as getting to know each other. They could spend the weekend exploring more physical things. Right?

A knock echoed through the room, and her racing pulse kicked up another notch, threatening to tear her heart from her chest. She took a few deep breaths but failed to calm herself before she let Brandon in.

He looked better than she remembered, and any greeting died in her throat. She leaned back against the door as it closed. His brown eyes shone with lust and joy, as he looked her over. Maybe she was worried about nothing.

“I missed you.” He rested his hands on the door—one on either side of her head—and brushed his lips over hers. He pulled away, studying her for a moment. “Are you okay?”

The contact and his genuine concern erased her doubts. They could talk later. She returned the kiss, diving into the tingles racing through her.

He dropped his hand to her waist, stroked his thumb over her hip, and glided his lips up her jaw. He traced his tongue along the edge of her ear, his breath hot against her skin. “You’re even better than I remembered.”

“You too.” She sank into the words and light touches, focusing on the moment and nothing else.

“You know what I was thinking”—he trailed kisses down her neck—“might be really nice”—he kissed along her collarbone—“after a long day of travel?” He brushed over the hollow at the base of her throat.

A sliver of disappointment wormed its way through her. He had to be exhausted after traveling all day. “Sleep?”

His chuckle vibrated through her. “Later, definitely. I was thinking of something else first.” He slid his hand from her hip to her back and tugged her forward. “Join me in the shower?”

Her heated blood grew warmer at the suggestion, and anticipation rolled under her skin. “I’m in.”

He guided her toward the bathroom, his palm rough against her waist and then her back. Her earlier anxiety had vanished and was replaced by an intense need to be closer to him than their clothing allowed.

He broke away, to fiddle with the faucet in the tub, and seconds later the sound of rushing water filled the room. He turned back to her. “Let it warm up while I warm you up.”

Her heart pounded in excitement at the gravel in his voice. She dropped her hands to his waist and pushed his shirt up. Friction flowed between his skin and hers when she shoved the fabric out of the way and then threw it aside. She trailed her fingers down his bare chest. How was it possible to have missed someone so much, when she’d only had him a few times? Each touch rocked her deep inside, soothing an unknown addiction.

He glided his fingers under her top and up her spine, and she arched her back at the light touch. He made quick work of her bra clasp and slid his hands along her ribs, moving her clothing out of the way in the process. He cupped her breasts, and she gasped at the firm, possessive caress, squirming

against him. He flicked his thumbs over her hard nipples—feather-soft touches that sent jolts of pleasure through her.

Wetness pooled between her legs, and she ground against him.

He stripped off her top and bra and lowered his head to her breast, closed his lips around the hard nub, and flicked out his tongue.

The sensation made her head spin. Steam filled the room, casting everything in a soft haze. She fumbled with the button on his jeans for a second, before releasing it and sliding down his zipper. She reached into his boxers and wrapped her fingers around his rigid shaft. His groan echoed through her skin when she freed him, and the sounds tearing from his chest made her wetter.

He tangled his fingers in her hair and raised her head. Shock and a new, intense wave of want coursed through her when he crushed his mouth to hers. She didn't know how he managed, but he pushed the rest of their clothes off without breaking away. His hard cock rubbed her bare hip.

She wanted to make him growl like he had during their last time together. Wanted to see him lost in the moment.

And she was tired of waiting. Hands on his shoulders, she broke the heated kiss and pushed him toward the tub. Seconds later, water streamed over them. The steam was nothing compared to what was in her veins.

Brandon rested a hand at the small of her back, to pull her close.

She smirked and broke away. "We're supposed to be showering, remember?"

He raised an eyebrow, and the corner of his mouth pulled up in that sexy-as-hell, crooked grin that drove her wild. "What did you have in mind?"

Since she'd been staying in the room all week, her toiletries surrounded them. She plucked her body wash from the corner.

He wrapped his hand around her wrist and narrowed his eyes, but his smile never wavered. "Apricot energizer?"

She twisted away from his grip with a laugh. "Are you worried about smelling like a girl?"

He ducked his head, his lips hovering close enough to her neck that she felt his breath, but he never made contact. He glided his nose lightly up her skin. "I'm concerned that if I smell like you, you're going to be even more impossible to get out of my head." His hard length dug into her stomach, nudging and pleading as he kissed along the edge of her ear.

She tilted her head back and sighed, sinking into the feather-light caress. “Good.” She stepped back as much as she could in the confined space—a few inches at the most—and poured a small dollop of soap into her palm. She set the bottle aside, rubbed her palms together to distribute and warm the body wash, and then slid around him. Her breasts rested against his back, and he groaned and leaned into her.

She glided her hands easily up his chest, with the suds. His scent mixed with her soap. Combined with the steam in the room, it pulled her into a pleasant state of mind, where she could imagine they were the only two people in the world and her concerns about thousands of miles and the end of the weekend didn’t matter.

She soaped over his shoulders and across the back of his neck, memorizing every line of definition as she went. When she slid down his back and over his ass, he let out a low groan. She moved her hands to his legs and worked her way back up.

He inhaled sharply when she brushed his erection. The water streamed over them, as she gently caressed the skin, covering every area and stroking him at the same time. He bucked back into her when she cupped his sack. She massaged and cleaned, letting the steady, artificial rain wash everything away. His breath came in short gasps.

“Not yet.” She moved away from his cock. She reached his stomach again, and he grabbed her wrists and spun to face her.

He dipped his head until his mouth hovered inches away from her ear. “I’m not as patient as you. Remember?”

She nodded. She also remembered his take-command tone, and she swore it stroked the ache between her legs until the sensation was a dull roar for attention. He pressed her against the wall, and her body slid against his. She was soaked between her legs, and it had nothing to do with the water.

He moved both of her wrists to one of his hands, and grasping them tightly, he pinned her arms over her head. He crushed his mouth to hers, swallowing her cries of surprise and arousal. He moved his free hand to her stomach, and then lower.

Her pulse raced through her veins at the strength in his grip. He set his foot between hers and pushed her legs apart. His fingers reached her pussy, and she gasped when he slid between her slick folds.

He sucked on her neck, working his teeth and tongue over her soft flesh. She gasped and arched her back when he found her swollen clit. He stroked her sex hard, while he ravaged her with his mouth. His stiff shaft ground against her hip, while he pushed so many other buttons at the same time.

She was only vaguely aware of rocking against him, as her climax built. He shoved two fingers inside her, and the sudden sensation of being spread open tore through her. Screams of pleasure ripped from her, as she came, leaving her hoarse.

Molly's legs wobbled beneath her.

He dropped her arms, and they fell limply by her sides. He fisted her hair and yanked her head back, to kiss her hard again. Lust and desperation darkened his crooked smile when he pulled back and locked his gaze on hers. He tugged her down.

She took the hint and dropped to her knees in front of him. He wrapped his hand around his shaft and thrust his hips. She took his length in her mouth, and slid up and down.

Brandon grunted and swayed his hips against her face. Fingers still wrapped in her hair, he helped her keep the rhythm.

She traced her tongue up the side of his cock and over the head every time she bobbed up and back down. She moaned against his skin when his pace increased.

She cupped his balls, kneading the skin. He thrust faster, groans coming in short, clipped breaths now. She looked up and met his gaze. Three weeks ago, she couldn't have imagined herself doing something like this, but during their phone conversations, she'd learned a lot about what she was—and wasn't—comfortable vocalizing. She pulled away long enough to say, "Come for me? I want to taste you." She glided her tongue down his shaft again.

His grip on her hair tightened, and his thrusting became frantic. A warm saltiness spurted against the back of her throat, and he let out a final groan and relaxed.

He tilted to the side, resting his shoulder against the wall of the shower, and held out his hand. Molly gripped it, and he pulled her to her feet. Water still spilled around them, erasing the tension in her limbs but calling to the exhaustion from the long week.

He kissed her lightly, laying a series of pecks across her lips and chin. His voice was soft, almost vanishing in the roar of the pipes. "Maybe we

should really get clean now.”

“I suppose.” She leaned into him, forehead against his chest. The entire moment felt so natural. So comfortable. Why couldn’t it stay that way longer?

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MOLLY’S HEAD ROSE AND fell with Brandon’s chest. His breathing became steady at least an hour ago; he had to be asleep.

But rest was nowhere to be found for her. The doubts she had before he showed up raced back in force. What were they doing? Sex once a month, in random hotels? A couple of lurid messages exchanged in between? That wasn’t the relationship she wanted.

She rolled onto her back. There was a connection between them that went deeper than sex, but how were they going to explore that option, with so little time together? It didn’t seem possible.

“What’s wrong?” His sleep-filled question drifted through the room. The mattress shifted, and a few seconds later his face appeared in front of hers.

She didn’t want to do this right now. She was drained, and he was exhausted after travelling all day. She shook her head. “Insomnia. I’ll be fine.”

He brushed a strand of hair off her forehead. “Tell me.”

No. It could wait. They’d talk about it in the morning. They had all weekend. But her mouth had other ideas. “What are we doing?”

His brows knit together, and he stared at her for a moment before responding. “Talking? Not sleeping?”

“I mean in general. A new city every few weeks, some really hot sex, and then abbreviated conversations in between?”

“What should we be doing differently?”

Frustration surged inside her. “I don’t know. It’s just that we don’t even really know each other.”

He yawned wide, and his hand flew to his mouth. “Sorry. We still have fun, right?”

She nudged him out of the way and sat up. The sheets dropped away, and the air rushed in around her bare skin. “Yes, but it seems like we’re missing something.”

He sat next to her, sleep lining his voice and mingling with a hard edge that wasn’t there before. “So what should we be doing differently?”

This was a bad idea. He was too tired to hear her out. But now that she'd started, she couldn't stop. "I don't know."

"Okay. Let's get to know each other. What's your favorite movie?"

She didn't want to do this. Not with both of them exhausted and stressed out. "*Chasing Amy*."

He made a noise that sounded like a half-groan, half-sigh. "Pseudo-intellectual dialogue and a miserable, ambiguous ending? What the hell's so great about that?"

She clenched her teeth, annoyance shoving aside her reluctance. "I like it. Your favorite movie is better? *Dumb and Dumber* or something?"

He snorted. "*Ace Ventura, Pet Detective*."

She rolled her eyes and flopped back onto the mattress. "Forget I said anything."

"What?"

"This isn't working."

"You didn't give it a chance," he said with irritation.

She glared at him with disbelief. "First thing out of the gate, and you all but told me my favorite movie was stupid."

"So? That's my opinion. I'm allowed to have those, aren't I? It's not my fault you like something lame. Relationships aren't built on favorite movies, anyway."

This was a bad idea. She rolled over, so her back was to him. "Forget it. The sex is fantastic—that's what matters"

"Molly." He sighed. "I'm sorry. If you'd like to talk, I want to listen. I'll take it seriously." He traced his fingers along her skin, sending a pleasant chill through her. "Please?"

The light touch filled her with ambivalence. "I don't want to fight. We can do this in the morning."

"We're both awake now." He tugged on her shoulder. "And it's still eating at you."

She adjusted her position, so she was looking up at him. "But it's not the kind of thing we can fix with a few hours of swapping favorites. That's the problem. We'll never have more than a few hours. And when we manage to find that time, we have to choose—get to know each other, or lose ourselves and our clothes in the moment?"

He trailed a finger down her arm. "We knew it was going to be like this. We both spend our working lives on the road; we live worlds apart. Okay,

maybe only states, but it feels like worlds. It's a balance we'll have to strike."

"Except we're not building on a solid foundation." She shouldn't be making this difficult, but she needed to get it out now, or it would devour her. "A couple of stolen kisses and shared words don't last long, and then weeks or months apart at a time are going to feel like we've taken two steps back. We'll spend as much time catching up as we will on moving forward."

He frowned and pulled away. "Have you ever heard this speech before?"

His question triggered something inside, but she pushed it aside. She wasn't sure what it was, but it made her stomach churn and her head ache. "No."

"Are you sure?" He leaned back on his arms, his dark gaze seeping into her. "Not from those other men, who got fed up with your schedule and didn't think it was going to work out?"

Shit. She sounded just like them. The realization cut deep. Something else joined it, and she choked back the frustration. "What if they were onto something?"

He clenched his jaw and narrowed his eyes. "Really. Then you actually believe this is only sex, wrapped in a waste of time and frequent-flier miles?"

The words dug into her and hurt more when she couldn't deny them. "Maybe."

He stared at her for a moment, lips pressed into a thin line. He shook his head. "If you feel that way, this isn't the relationship I signed on for."

"It's not a *relationship*. That's the problem. It's hot and heavy screwing, punctuated with long-distance dirty talk."

Frustration, hurt, and anger smeared his face, and he turned away. "If that's what you think, who am I to argue?"

Chapter Twelve

Brandon's fingers itched over the pocket holding his phone. He wasn't going to check it again. There wouldn't be anything from Molly on it. He paced near the luggage carousel in the airport. He hadn't heard from her in two weeks, but that didn't stop him from checking, hoping, and glancing for new messages every few minutes.

Funny how quickly she'd become a habit and how much it ached to try and break himself off her. Even now, he swore he caught a tease of her body wash, from that evening in the shower.

As much as he hated to dwell, she had a point. He didn't want to admit it, because it meant things wouldn't be as easy for them as he'd hoped. The more he thought about it, the more he knew she was right. Meeting occasionally for a quick screw didn't make a relationship.

His familiar duffel bag dropped onto the carousel. He'd debated about whether or not to replace it with a sturdier black suitcase but he liked being able to find his bag at a glance, among the others on the conveyor.

He hopped on the rental-car shuttle and stood near the door, not interested in sitting down. Her schedule said she'd be in Phoenix this week and next. She wasn't looking forward to it when she told him. He didn't blame her. It was October. It shouldn't be one hundred degrees.

Twenty minutes later, he had his destination programmed into the GPS on the rental car and was following the mechanical voice's directions. He pulled onto the 202 Loop, heading east.

The biggest problem he had with Molly's logic was that it didn't make it any easier to forget her. There was something between them, and he couldn't move past that.

His mind drifted to fantasies of her straight black hair and intoxicating laugh. His brain checked in to focus on driving, but mostly pored over images of Molly. Each time he dove into those memories, his resolve grew. He needed her in his life. She was a haunting image he couldn't ignore. A desire he could only sate with her.

It was early enough in the afternoon, even on a Friday, that traffic wasn't too heavy. He'd wanted to make sure he arrived before anyone started leaving their offices. Still, he made a brief detour, to the dismay of the GPS, pulling through the drive-thru before finishing his trip.

By the time he pulled into the hotel parking lot, his fingers were drumming on the steering wheel without permission. He couldn't ignore the adrenaline pumping through him anymore. He made his way to the front entrance. *One foot in front of the other. Nice and normal-like.* There was no need to run. It wouldn't make time go faster.

The building was five stories tall, mostly brick, with minimal but well-groomed plants out front, like every other hotel he'd seen over the years. Inside, the lobby was as predictable—polished tile floors stretching past a check-in desk to elevators and a smattering of plush furniture.

The man behind the counter looked up with a practiced smile as Brandon approached. "Can I help you?"

Brandon took a deep breath. *Please let this work. Please, whoever's listening out there in the ether, let this be the right thing to do and the right place to be.*

• • • •

MOLLY WASN'T LOOKING forward to the weekend. For the first time in ages, she wanted to go home, hide in her apartment, and eat ice cream. Fat chance of that. She was stuck in Phoenix for another week.

She tried not to linger on thoughts of Brandon, struggling with every ounce of willpower to convince herself he'd only been a fling. The problem was she didn't believe her own denial. The connection she felt to him was so much more than a one-time deal.

Cool air blasted her skin, when she stepped through the hotel front doors, shoving away most of the heat. She stopped just inside the entrance, legs refusing to move, when her gaze landed on the lobby. *No way.*

Her heart skipped. Her brain screamed that this was going to hurt again, and she told it to shut the hell up. Brandon sat in one of the chairs, half-turned toward the door, his attention on a book.

He looked up, grin threatening to split his face when his gaze met hers. He was on his feet and crossing the room in an instant. He stopped before he reached her.

Was she relieved or disappointed at the distance between them?

He held up a generic white paper bag, full of something. "Italian sub, no onions,"

Her favorite food. She couldn't help her smile. She nodded.

"Tomorrow, I'm picking. That is, if you've got a few hours to spend getting to know each other."

She closed the remaining space, threw her arms around his neck, and pressed her lips to his. For the first time today, she welcomed the heat. He rested his free hand against the small of her back. He returned the kiss with a hungry growl, tongue diving in to probe her mouth.

She broke the kiss but didn't pull away. She'd missed this feeling so much. But she wouldn't let it be a repeat of the last two times. "You wanted to talk?"

He nipped her bottom lip. "Yes. I know you have to work next week, but I'm between gigs and cons, so I was hoping you'd let me stick around."

He was there. He'd tracked her down and offered what she asked for. Maybe she was dreaming. She tugged him toward the elevators. "I would love that."

The moment the doors closed behind them, he pressed her against the far wall of the car and kissed her again. His solid frame pinned her to the wood paneling, and her pulse raced. She ran her fingers up his arms, burning every sensation into her memory.

The elevator jerked to a stop at her floor, and he pulled back with a gasp. He grasped her fingers and tugged her into the hallway.

She led the way, her thoughts still trying to wrap themselves around the situation. He let go of her the moment they were in the room, set the food on the table by the door, and stepped away from her.

That was a little disappointing.

His fingers twitched at his side.

When she stepped closer, he moved out of reach. She raised her eyebrows in question.

His shoulders slumped. "It's taking all of my restraint not to strip you down, toss you on the bed, and ravage you until you're too worn out to move."

She *did* like the sound of that. "Okay?"

"But"—he tapped his foot, maintaining his distance—"I want to make this work, and I need you to be happy with it long term. So we have to set some ground rules first."

"Like what?"

"I couldn't handle being away from you for two weeks. We weren't talking, and that made it infinitely worse, but you're right; long-distance is going to be tough."

She nodded. The way he spoke directly to her doubts, instead of brushing them under the rug, made hope blossom inside.

He grabbed her fingers again and pulled her toward the bed. He sat down and prompted her to do the same, their hips and arms touching. “So I want to know everything about you, or as much as we can fill a weekend with. And I want to see you as often as possible. I want to give us a real chance.”

It wouldn’t fix things right away, but he recognized that. She liked the solution, and adored that he came up with it. She leaned her head on his shoulder. “And then you’ll strip me down and have your way with me?”

He chuckled. “I might do that in between, but not unless you tell me one or two more ways to make you scream loud enough our neighbors know what we’re up to.”

Heat spread across her cheeks. “You just have to ask the right questions.”

He slid from the bed and knelt at her feet. A pleasant tremor traveled through her when he ran his palms up her calves and back down again. He pulled off one shoe and then the other, and set them aside.

He stood and kicked off his own shoes, made himself comfortable at the head of the bed, fluffed the pillows, and sat so his back was to the headboard. He patted the comforter. “Join me?”

She climbed between his legs and sat with her back to his chest. He draped his arms around her shoulders, and she snuggled into him more. “What now?”

“Now, we start simple. We’re both ruled by our jobs, so talking about work makes sense”

The warmth of his arms was reassuring, and as much as she wanted to dive into the physical, she was content with what they were doing. “Sounds reasonable.”

“So I’ve got a couple of nibbles on a new agent. Two have made me offers, and I’m narrowing things down.”

She turned her head to the side as much as she could without pulling away from him. “That’s fantastic. Are you leaning toward one or the other?”

“I’m getting close. They’ve both got an impressive client list, but I won’t be making my call until I’m done with more important things—you, namely.”

“That’s fantastic. Congratulations.” It felt incredible to be happy for someone else’s good news. It was even better that it stemmed from the thing that almost kept them apart to begin with.

He kissed her cheek. “Now you tell me how you got into a job that keeps you on the road so much. You wanted to travel when you were younger. How did you get from there to here?”

He remembered her comment from the very first day they met. The realization warmed her as much as any of his flirting. “Well, when I was seven, I figured out the difference between a state and a country...”

She paused. “Maybe I won’t go that far back. I started with my current employer as an administrative assistant. I have a knack for finding things, and my boss felt like my talents were underused, so he promoted me.”

“Finding what kind of things? You said they make cosplay-themed lingerie. So, like, lace? Gravity defying satin?”

“Not quite.” She laughed at the imagery. It felt amazing to relax and chat with him. Knowing the physical connection was there, and exploring an emotional and intellectual one on top of that. “When I was an assistant, I found information. Who owned domains. Property. Businesses. Now I look at sales opportunities we haven’t explored yet, and pitch to retailers to get our clothing in their stores. After the weekend in Nashville, I’ve added anime conventions to the list. Or at least, I hope to.”

He squeezed her tighter. “I like that. So there’s a chance work might keep us together more often?”

“I’m hoping.” As she said the words, they rang through her with a kind of desire that stole her breath. It sounded like an amazing possibility.

• • • •

CONVERSATIONS CLATTERED off tile and stainless steel. Lines inched forward. Luggage slid along the footprint-covered floors. Molly didn’t care how crowded the airport was. She was a little disappointed to be there, but the warm body at her back made the looming separation easier to ignore.

She leaned back into Brandon, who was using a nearby wall for support. He wrapped his arms around her waist and rested his chin on her shoulder. “What are you proposing?” His voice was low, but so close to her ear it cut through the noise at the gate for her flight.

It was an incredible week—not just the sex, but everything. “Joint apartment custody?” she said.

He pushed the bottom of her shirt higher, enough to trail his thumb along her bare skin. She loved that sensation. He kissed along her neck. “Technically, that term doesn’t make any sense. It means we’re sharing an apartment, but not at the same time.”

She gave a fake growl, unable to wipe the smile off her face. She wasn’t looking forward to leaving this behind. “It sounded clever in my head, and you know what I mean.”

“You’re right; I do. And yes, you should come stay with me whenever you can get away with it, and I’ll do the same.”

She rested her cheek against his. “Final boarding call.”

He nudged her away, grabbed her wrist, and spun her to face him. Hands at the small of her back, he tugged her close again. “I’ll see you next weekend?”

She slid her body against his, burning every contour into her memory, to keep her company until they saw each other again. She draped her arms around his neck and kissed him, and he tangled his fingers in her hair, holding her captive for a moment.

When they broke apart, he still didn’t let her go. She gave him a sad smile. “Really. Final boarding call.”

He pecked her bottom lip, and dropped his hands. “I love you.”

The three words shot through her like a spark. Neither of them had said that yet. She expected panic to follow, but all she felt was joy, relief, and rightness. She smiled. “I love you too.”

He gave her another quick kiss and then spun her toward the gate. “Go. Before I talk myself out of letting you make your flight. Besides, I need to get to my gate.”

She fell into line with the last of the stragglers, shuffled down the walkway to the plane like everyone else, and found her seat. One perk of so much business travel was frequent first-class upgrades.

As she was getting comfortable, her phone buzzed. It was in her hand in a second.

The text message was from Brandon. One of these days, I’m joining you on a flight. Mile-high club anyone?

She was grinning like an idiot, and she didn’t care. She sent back a reply. *Don’t make promises you can’t keep.*

Seconds later, he buzzed her again. I fully plan on keeping this promise.

The text banter kept up until the flight attendant made everyone shut off their phones. She leaned back in her seat, smile cemented in place. *I love you*. The words echoed in her head, muffling the noise of the airplane wheels on the runway.

For so many years, she'd struggled with—and eventually learned to avoid—any relationships that might lead to that conclusion. She'd reached the point where it hurt less to push aside that kind of affection, rather than deal with another guy who didn't understand her work schedule.

Now she had someone who not only understood, but also embraced the same things she did—the need to travel, the desire to see as much of the world as possible, and the passion for experiences.

The realization tugged deep inside her chest and traveled through her, warming her heart.

It would be tough to be apart, but he was worth it. They were worth it.

Epilogue

Six months later

Brandon made his way through the crowded airport, dodging slow movers and stepping aside for the speed walkers. Most bits of travel had become so commonplace, he didn't think about them anymore. It was part of the commute, which—thanks to his new agent—Brandon was doing a lot more of and for better jobs than he ever lined up through Adeline.

But touching down in his hometown always filled him with a bit of apprehensive excitement. From the moment final descent was announced, until he retrieved his car from long-term parking, a thrum of hyper-energy went through him.

He pulled up an e-mail that came in from Molly while he was flying. The subject was *Just showing you what you're missing*. Heat rushed through him, as the pictures loaded one by one, each of her in less clothing than the last.

His cock throbbed. It was late, so the airport wasn't too crowded. Still, he wanted to be completely alone, to enjoy these. There was one thing he could do, though. She was in an earlier time zone, so it was only nine there—no need to worry about waking her up. Besides, she'd be waiting for his call.

"Hey. You just get in?" Her bright voice sent a combination of longing and lust through him.

He loved talking to her, but he'd much rather be doing it in person. "Yup. Safe and sound." He bypassed the luggage carousel and headed straight for the shuttles. They exchanged banter and small talk—how was his trip... the basic stuff—while he made his way outside.

There was no one on the shuttle to the long-term parking. The silence, except for the sound of the heater, was pleasant. "So, what are you wearing?" he asked.

She laughed. "You're horrible. And still in public."

"Only kind-of public." Maybe she had a point. He shifted in his seat, as his cock reminded him of the pictures waiting on his phone. And then something nagged him. Something was off about those pictures. What was it?

"In that case... one of your ties," she replied.

All the blood rushed from his head at the thought of Molly in nothing but a tie. “Wait. Do I own any ties? I don’t think I do.”

“Hmm...” A throaty, seductive tremor ran through her words. “I guess I’m not wearing anything, then.”

He knew she was teasing, and he loved the sound of her voice when she did. The shuttle rumbled to a stop, and he tipped the driver and made his way across the lot to his car.

The flirting was fun, but there was something more important he needed to know. “How did it go at work?”

A long silence greeted him, and large chunks of his good mood shirked. “Molly?”

“I’m working on it.” The teasing cheer was gone from her voice. “I mean, they took the request, they’re thinking about it, and it doesn’t look like it will be a problem.”

That meant she didn’t have a *yes* yet. She was negotiating with her employer to let her do all of her job remotely, since she was on the road so often anyway. Brandon spent most of the off-con season at home, and that was where most of his voice jobs were, so they hoped she could find a way to move in with him.

Still, it wasn’t a *no*.

“I’m pretty sure they’ll say *yes*.” Some of the sadness vanished from her voice.

He tossed his bag into the trunk, slid into the driver’s seat, and started the engine. “I was hoping... sooner, rather than later.”

“Give it a little more time. I have a feeling it’ll all be good.” Her tone was smooth and soothing.

He nodded at the empty car interior, still unable to completely squash his disappointment. “I’m pulling onto the road. I have to let you go.”

“I understand. I’ll talk to you soon. I love you.”

He still wasn’t tired of hearing that. “I love you too.”

He tossed the phone onto the passenger seat. Moments later, he was navigating the familiar route home. *Empty home*. He tried not to dwell on the thought, but he couldn’t help it. Every time he said *goodbye* to Molly, it got harder to walk away.

Within thirty minutes, he was pulling up to his condo. He trudged up the stairs to the second floor and down the hallway to his door. When he pushed inside, his heart leaped into his chest.

Molly looked up from the couch, one corner of her mouth tugged up, and her bottom lip caught between her teeth. “Surprise.” She wasn’t wearing a tie, but she was wearing one of his T-shirts and a pair of his shorts. God damn. She’d never looked sexier.

He dumped his stuff and crossed the few, short feet. He pulled her from the couch, wrapped his arms around her, and lifted her off the ground.

She dug her nails into the back of his neck and kissed him deeply, a whimper escaping from her throat.

He rested his forehead against hers. “You didn’t say anything.”

“I didn’t want to ruin the surprise.” The impish smile was still there.

That was what had been off about the pictures—his condo in the background. He pushed up the hem of her shirt, so he could settle his palm on her bare back. “How long are you here?”

She shifted, sending tremors of want through him. “It depends on you.” Her voice was soft. Almost uncertain.

His brain clicked over the words, struggling to process them, which was made more difficult by the insistence below his waist. “Explain?”

She laid a series of light kisses across his lips. “I may have left a detail or two out about work.”

The gears in his head struggled to move forward and finally pushed the snag aside. “You mean...?”

She laughed. “Yes, I got permission to telecommute. So if you still think you can stand living with me...”

He kissed her hard again, focusing on the fact that this time he didn’t have to let her go nearly as often. This incredible woman who made his pulse race was here. She was moving in. Spending every morning waking up next to her teased his thoughts. “I was starting to wonder how I’d make it another week without you, so I’m pretty sure I can stand it.”

“Good.” She relaxed a little. “Then join me in our bedroom?”

THE END

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About the Author

USA Today Bestselling Author Allyson Lindt is a full-time geek and a full-time author. She likes her stories with sweet geekiness and heavy spice, and loves a sexy happily-ever-after. Because cubicle dwellers need love too. Read all of her books to see why *A Lust for Reading* said her books made them **"smile and literally laugh out loud"**, *Revenge of the Feels* loved the **sizzling attraction, ...danger, betrayal and humor**" and readers call them **"book nirvana", "geek hotness", "sexy" and "fast paced"**.

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