

A photograph of a person lying on a bed, viewed from the side. They are wearing a light pink, ruffled top and grey shorts. Their legs are crossed at the ankles. The background is a light-colored wooden headboard and a white pillow.

The Last to Leave

ERICA LEE

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Chapter 1

“Wait, what?” Nicole Dawson shook her head full of brown curls at her phone, sure she must have heard her best friend, Roberta, wrong.

“I said, Fulton won a trip for four to an all-inclusive resort in Cabo, and we want you and his best friend from college to go with us.”

Ah, so that was the catch. Roberta was always trying to set her up with one of Fulton’s friends. It didn’t even make sense anyway since Roberta and Fulton lived on the opposite end of the country so it wasn’t like the four of them could go on double dates if she ever ended up hitting it off with anyone. Something that never happened anyway.

“So, what’s he like?” Nicole asked as she held in a sigh.

“Who?”

Nicole rolled her eyes. Were they really going to play this game? “Fulton’s friend from college.”

Roberta laughed as if this was all some big joke. “Well, first of all, he is a *she*.”

Nicole breathed a sigh of relief. “And you’re completely cool with Fulton having a female bestie?”

“Obviously. I’m a strong, confident woman who knows my man only wants me. Plus, she’s super gay.”

“So, this *is* a setup,” Nicole said with a groan.

“It’s not. I promise. It was all Fulton’s idea to invite you two. He was actually insistent that it *has* to be you two who come along. You know I’m the one behind all of the matchmaking endeavors.”

This was true. It not being a setup actually piqued Nicole’s interest. She put Roberta on speakerphone, then pulled up her Facebook app, prepared to do some stalking. “So, what’s her name?”

“It’s Courtney Fields. She actually—”

No. Absolutely not. This had to be some strange coincidence, right? There was no way Fulton’s friend Courtney was the same Courtney Fields she knew. Except, the Courtney Fields she knew *did* go to school in California. Stanford to be exact. Nicole could never forget how her biggest

rival, the absolute bane of her existence, attended a college with an acceptance rate of just four percent.

“Wait. Remind me once again where Fulton went to college.”

Roberta laughed. “My sexy nerd went to Stanford.”

Shit. Nicole sat her phone down on her kitchen table and crossed her arms over her chest. “Like you can talk. We didn’t exactly slum it by going to UPenn.”

She felt an anger that she hadn’t felt in years as she remembered finding out that even though she was going to a school that was one of the top ten in the nation, Courtney Fields was going somewhere ranked even higher.

“I’m not going, by the way.”

“Wait, what?” Roberta asked, sounding exasperated that Nicole would turn down a free trip to Cabo.

“I know Courtney,” Nicole said, offering no other explanation.

“I wondered if there was any chance you would when I realized you guys only live about a half hour apart.”

“We do?” Nicole laughed incredulously. This had to be some sick joke. “I had no idea. She went to my rival high school.”

“In Maryland? Wow. What a small world. Maybe it’s fate.”

“Trust me, it’s not fate,” Nicole said through gritted teeth. “She’s awful.”

“Please don’t tell me this is about some high school rivalry you can’t let go of.”

Nicole opened her mouth to argue, but closed it when she realized that’s *exactly* what this was about. Roberta wouldn’t understand though. She never played sports. She didn’t get it.

“She broke my nose, you know.”

Nicole was hoping for some sort of support, but instead, Roberta just laughed. “Oh, Courtney is *that* girl. The nose breaker. You told me about that back in college. A few times, I believe.”

Nicole shook her head, feeling annoyed all over again. “Well, it’s never been the same. It’s probably the reason I’m still single.”

Now, Roberta laughed even harder. “You’re still single because you’re so competitive over everything. You’ve probably turned sex into a competition.”

“Have not.” Although, now that she mentioned it, there was something kind of hot about sex being a competitive sport. She needed to keep that in mind.

“Well, you’re also hard-headed. Case in point, you’re still holding a grudge against someone from high school. We’re twenty-six, for God’s sake.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“You’ll think about what?”

“Going to Cabo. It’s only three months away. That’s not much time to plan.”

“I think you’ll figure it out.”

Nicole could tell by the tone of her friend’s voice that she was probably rolling her eyes at her right now.

“When do I need to let you know?”

“Take all the time you need. I know you’ll end up coming so it’s not like I have to ask anyone else.”

The confidence in Roberta’s voice pissed Nicole off, so much so that she thought about telling her she wasn’t going just to prove her wrong. This was a free trip to an all-inclusive resort though. Two weeks spent drinking with her best friend at no cost to her. How did she turn that down? Courtney Fields. That’s how.

A few days after her call with Roberta, Nicole’s phone rang, and this time, it was Fulton calling her. She and Fulton had hung out a decent amount since he and Roberta started dating. His family lived close to her, so she saw them whenever they traveled to see his family for a holiday, and she had visited them in California a few times. She could probably count the number of times Fulton had texted her on one hand and he had definitely never called her before.

“Hello?” she answered, curiosity showing in the tone of her voice.

“Hey, Nicole, it’s Fulton. I, umm, wanted to talk to you about the Cabo trip.”

Had Roberta really recruited him to do her dirty work? That was a new low, even for her. “Tell Roberta I haven’t made up my mind yet.”

“Roberta doesn’t know I’m calling you. She can’t know, actually.”

Where was he going with this? “I’m flattered, but this just won’t work between us. I won’t do that to Roberta,” Nicole joked.

Fulton snort-laughed through the phone. “Not what I meant. Kind of the opposite. I didn’t win a trip to Cabo. I just told Roberta that so she wouldn’t get suspicious. I’m going to propose to her. That’s why you have to be there.”

A smile immediately broke out on Nicole’s face as her stomach fluttered with excitement. Her best friend was getting engaged. Roberta was going to be so happy. It would be amazing to see her face after he proposed and celebrate with her, but there were so many reasons that probably couldn’t happen. “That’s amazing! Congratulations. I don’t know if I can afford a trip to Cabo though. I’m sure the plane ticket alone will be pretty expensive.”

“Oh, you don’t have to pay for anything.”

“Fulton, I’m not letting you pay for me to go on vacation.”

The other end of the phone was silent for a few seconds, then Fulton cleared his throat as if he was anxious or embarrassed. “Well, actually, my parents are paying for most of it. They are too nice to say it, but I think they realize Roberta is way out of my league and want me to tie that down before it’s too late.”

Nicole loved Fulton and it was obvious that he and Roberta were perfect for each other, but she could also see why they might seem like a mismatch to some people. Roberta was a free spirit. She was the girl who grew up in Florida and went to an Ivy League school in Pennsylvania just to prove she could. Afterward, she decided she wanted to try her hand at acting and moved to California right out of school. She was the life of every party, and in college she was that enigma who could party all weekend, then pull an all-nighter the night before a test and ace it. Nicole had never seen her stress over anything.

Fulton, on the other hand, took everything seriously. He was an absolute genius, and although Roberta was too, he showed it more—nose always buried in a book, glasses that weren’t quite in style, and a job that Nicole couldn’t even pronounce let alone understand. Between his job and his trust fund, Roberta was set for life. Not that she had fallen for him for his money. That wasn’t important to her. The two of them balanced each

other out. He kept her grounded and she helped him loosen up. He also treated her like an absolute queen, which Nicole appreciated.

Still, paying for the trip wasn't the only barrier. As if reading her mind, Fulton added, "I know you have a history with Courtney."

Nicole laughed. "She broke my nose."

"I'm sure she didn't mean to."

"That's her story and you're welcome to stick to it. Plus, it's not even about the nose. I'm over that."

Fulton snorted once again. "Sounds like it."

Nicole rubbed her forehead as she paced the living room of her apartment. "It's just weird, you know? I hated her in high school and now we're supposed to play nice for two weeks while we celebrate the biggest moment of our best friends' lives?"

"No offense, but yes, that's exactly what you're supposed to do. Who knows. You might even like her now."

Nicole scoffed. "Doubtful." She stopped pacing and threw her head back, angry over the fact that she could feel her resolve slipping. "How does *she* feel about this? Did you happen to mention my name to her?"

"We've actually been playing phone tag these past few days so I haven't gotten a chance."

A smile came to Nicole's face as she thought of an idea. "Let's put a little wager on this. I bet you she won't agree to go once she finds out I'm invited. When I win, you have to invite your brother to go with us. If you somehow win, you get to have the trip you wanted."

The other end of the phone was quiet and Nicole figured that meant Fulton was either considering her bet or stewing over the fact that she brought up his brother, or more than likely, both.

"There are a few things I need to dissect from what you just said. First of all, what's with the obsession with Griffin? I love him, but only because he's my brother. He'll probably grow up someday, but he's an immature douchebag right now."

Griffin was Fulton's younger brother and the two couldn't have been more different. Griffin took advantage of the fact that they came from a rich family and did whatever he wanted. He was brash, but hilarious. Also, Nicole found him extremely hot. She knew he had no long-term

potential, but he was a good time. “Your brother is very easy on the eyes. Plus, he’s a good kisser.”

“Stop. I’m trying to forget the fact that you guys made out at that New Year’s Eve party. You should really stick with girls, because you have awful taste in guys.”

“Speaking of girls, let’s get back to my bet. What do you think?”

“I think it sounds like I don’t actually win anything.”

Nicole scowled at the phone. “You win my presence.”

“I get your presence whether I win or lose.”

“Lucky you.”

Fulton groaned, which made Nicole smile since she knew she had won this battle. “Fine. I agree to your bet, but only because you just told me that you’re coming no matter what, which means I actually just won.”

Wait. What? Fulton had totally just played her at her own game. She had to give him credit. She didn’t know he had it in him. “You’re right. I’ll start packing. Tell Griffin I can’t wait to see him.”

“I wouldn’t count on that.”

He had no idea. For how much Nicole disliked Courtney, she was pretty sure Courtney hated her even more.

“Did you say Nicole Dawson?”

Courtney hadn’t heard that name in years and the last place she expected to hear it was coming out of her best friend’s mouth.

“Yeah. She’s Roberta’s best friend. They were roommates at UPenn.”

Courtney shook her head in disbelief. “This is why it’s wrong that you guys don’t have any social media. I would have already known this if you did. I could have warned you.”

“Whatever. I heard you broke her nose.” Fulton laughed and a snort came out with it. If she wasn’t so annoyed with him right now, Courtney would have found that endearing. She loved how dorky Fulton was.

“It was an accident.” Courtney couldn’t help the smirk that came onto her face. “A happy accident, but still.”

“So, were you the problem or was she?”

Courtney glared at her phone as if her best friend could see her. “She obviously was. She was so cocky. I’m sure she still is.”

Fulton laughed once again. “She’s actually really nice. Super competitive over stupid stuff, but I think that’s why I like her. She reminds me of you.”

Courtney scrunched up her nose but tried not to take that comment too personally. Although it was hard because being compared to *Nicole Dawson* was far from a compliment. “I’m going to pretend you didn’t just say that.”

“Hold on.”

Courtney could hear Fulton say something to who she assumed must be Roberta, then heard what sounded like a door opening and closing. “Okay. I told Roberta I was going for a walk. Now I can tell you what’s up. So, here’s the thing—I’m going to propose in Cabo.”

No way. This was amazing. “Dude, that’s awesome,” Courtney said excitedly. “I’m so freaking happy for you!”

And she really was. Courtney adored Roberta, even if they had only met a few times. Mostly, she loved her because she made Fulton so happy. She had never seen him as happy or confident as he was since meeting Roberta. He was certainly much more laid back than he was in college, and she was sure that was because of Roberta.

“I want this proposal to be perfect, which means I need both of our best friends there.”

Courtney held back a groan. She couldn’t say no to her best friend. Well, normally she couldn’t. “Nicole Dawson though? Really? What is she even like?”

“She’s beautiful. Has curly brown hair and blue eyes. An athletic build. She’s funny as hell. She’ll say whatever because she really doesn’t care what people think of her. She’s also bi.”

Wait. Was he trying to...? He wouldn’t. Would he? “Fulton Shea, you better not be trying to set me up with her. You’ll be lucky if we don’t kill each other on this trip. There’s no way we will actually like each other.”

“I never said you had to like her. I just thought you might want to know that. It’s Cabo. We’ll be drinking. You could—”

“Stop right there. I’m sure Nicole is hot. Heck, she was back in high school.”

Courtney thought back to high school and how she used to find herself watching Nicole as they warmed up with their respective teams. There was so much about her that caught her eye. The way her brown hair looked pulled up in a ponytail, those piercing blue eyes, or her toned arms and legs. She was definitely nice to look at, and noticing her, along with some of her other competition, was what helped her realize she was gay.

But Nicole's looks were always ruined when she opened her mouth. Whether it was on the field, court, or track, she was obnoxious as hell. Although elbowing her in the nose during that basketball game was a mistake that she felt bad about at the time, there was also something satisfying about the fact that it made her shut up for once. Well, for a few minutes, at least. Then she ran her mouth once again as she unsuccessfully fought to have Courtney benched for the rest of the season. Thinking about that made her angry and brought her back to the current moment.

"Listen, I'm not going to lie, if Nicole is as hot as she was in high school and I happened to see her across the bar after having a few drinks, there's no question I would try to hook up with her. But I know her and for that reason alone, it will *never* happen."

"Okay, I get it. I don't need you to hook up with her. I just need you to not kill her."

"And I can't guarantee that. Hence the reason why I don't see how this could work."

Fulton groaned and Courtney was sure he was about to give up, but she was wrong. So very wrong. He knew exactly how to get her. "She bet me you wouldn't come. It sounds like she's going to win that bet."

Damn him. Damn him for knowing her well enough to know she wouldn't let Nicole win. And damn her for assuming she was somehow special enough to keep Courtney away. For all she knew, Courtney didn't even remember her anymore. It had been years after all. "I'm not letting that girl win anything. I'll be there." She thought about how that sounded and added, "Obviously, I wasn't going to miss this. You're my best friend, and I'm honored you want me to be part of it."

"Uh-huh," Fulton said with a sarcastic laugh. "I'll take care of your flight and everything then forward the information to you. See you in Cabo!"

He was so giddy and excited that it almost made her forget about the stipulations of this whole deal. She could do this. It was two weeks. She could survive anything for two weeks, right?

Chapter 2

“Please tell me Courtney at least got ugly and out of shape,” Nicole said over the phone to Roberta as she drove to the airport.

Courtney had always been good looking. It was another thing that annoyed Nicole about her. She could play a whole game of soccer or basketball or compete in all of her track events, and her dirty blonde hair was never out of place. Guys from both of their schools swooned over her, which looking back, probably didn’t mean too much to Courtney, but it really got under Nicole’s skin.

“I could tell you that, but it would be a lie,” Roberta said with a laugh. “She’s gorgeous. I don’t know what she looked like in high school, but she looks even better now than she does in any of Fulton’s pictures from college. She somehow looks like she’s more in shape than she was when she played college soccer.”

Nicole rolled her eyes. “Let me guess. She’s one of those annoying CrossFit girls who has to talk about her workouts all the time and tries to get you to join in the *lifestyle*.”

“Not that it’s ever come up, but I don’t think so. I’m not sure what she does to work out. I do know that she volunteers with *Girls on the Run*.”

“That bitch.”

Roberta laughed once again. “Excuse me? Not exactly the response I expected. Do you even know what that is?”

Of course she knew what it was. She had been thinking about getting involved with it for years, but just hadn’t had the chance to look into it yet. It was a way to help young girls grow into confident women, partially through physical activity. Frankly, it was an awesome program, and if it was anyone else, Nicole would probably find it super attractive that she was involved. “I do. It’s just Courtney. She always had to be perfect, and it looks like that hasn’t changed.”

“Just give the girl a chance, would you?”

Nicole sighed loudly, trying to over dramatize it for her best friend. “Fine. I’ll look for the good or whatever. But only because I love you. You

said you guys are scheduled to get there about a half hour before me, right?”

“Yeah, so we’ll probably be going through customs when you guys land.”

Nicole shook her head as if she was trying to clear water from her ears. “Wait. Did you say *you guys*? Please tell me you didn’t put us on the same flight.” She held her breath while she waited for Roberta’s answer.

“Of course we did. You’re both flying out of Philly. Why would we put you on different flights?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe so we don’t kill each other on the airplane?”

“I mean, if you guys are seriously going to kill each other, I’d rather have it happen before we’re together anyway. That way, we don’t have to deal with any bloodshed.”

Nicole smiled in spite of her annoyance. “Yeah. Yeah. Whatever. I just hope you were smart enough to at least not seat us next to each other.”

“Oh, um... you know what? I think you might be losing service. I can barely hear you. Better go. Be safe. Love you.”

Nicole quickly looked down at her phone that had full service. She couldn’t help but laugh as she followed the directions to airport parking. This whole situation was too ridiculous *not* to laugh at. What had Roberta gotten her into?

At least she should have some time to relax at the airport before she had to deal with Courtney. Her parents had ingrained in her that you always had to arrive two hours early, and even though it seemed absolutely ridiculous, she still did it every time. Most people her age weren’t so anal about it, so chances of Courtney being there already were slim.

She was happy to find that she was correct when she made it to her gate, and there was no sign of Courtney anywhere. She took a seat at a bar right across the way and ordered herself a beer. For the next hour, she sat at the bar scrolling through her phone and drinking enough beer to be right on the edge of tipsy, but not quite there.

“Could I see your cocktail menu?” a sweet, smooth voice said as someone sat down two seats away, leaving an empty one between the two of them.

Nicole lifted her eyes from her phone to sneak a peek at the girl to see if she was as cute as her voice. The first thing to catch her eye were long, muscular legs, perfectly tan and covered only by a very short pair of jean shorts. The girl's arms were just as muscular, leading Nicole to believe that she must be an athlete, or at the very least, work out on a regular basis. Perfect wavy blonde hair rested just below her shoulders, and when she turned toward her, the most stunning green eyes met hers. She hadn't seen green eyes like that since... *shit*.

She choked on her beer when she realized she was looking right into the eyes of none other than Courtney Fields. Courtney lifted an eyebrow and smirked as if fully aware of the fact that Nicole had just checked her out. "Nicole Dawson. It's been a long time. You like what you see?"

Oh yeah. She had totally been caught. She held her beer up toward Courtney. "Ask me sometime when I haven't been drinking." She took another sip of her beer, then stared at it as she set it down, not willing to make eye contact again. "Pulling it kind of close, aren't you? I've been here for over an hour already."

"Is that so?" Courtney asked, a cheeriness to her voice that told Nicole she was about to say something really annoying. "I've been here for over two hours. I had lunch at that restaurant over there."

Nicole scoffed and shook her head. There was no way she was going to let Courtney somehow believe she was better because she got to the airport sooner. "That seems like overkill. The rule of thumb is to arrive two hours before your flight."

"Technically, it's three for international flights."

Nicole chanced a look at Courtney and could feel her blood boiling as she watched Courtney continue to smirk as she took a sip of her drink. "Whatever. At least I didn't have to find ways to entertain myself for an extra hour."

"I think you would have been just fine. You seem to be enjoying the view."

Two could play at this game. Nicole hadn't missed the fact that Courtney hadn't taken her eyes off of her since walking over to the bar. "You don't seem to mind the view much either."

Courtney scrunched up her nose, but continued to smile. “The view is fine. It’s the noise that’s too much for me.”

Nicole couldn’t help but smile back as she pointed toward their gate. “Run along then.”

Those green eyes continued to stare into hers while Courtney finished the rest of her drink, then she turned around without another word. Nicole watched her walk away, the smile on her face growing even wider. Just like high school, that girl could still get under her skin, but that little banter between them had almost been fun. Not fun enough to make her look forward to spending the next two weeks together, but enough to keep her from dreading it quite as much as she was before.

Nicole had one more beer, then settled her tab and stood up just as they started boarding her flight. When they called her section, she resisted the urge to try to beat Courtney into line, mostly because Courtney was closer. She didn’t want to deal with the smug look she would get from her if Courtney figured out what she was doing and beat her there due to nothing but proximity.

Instead, Nicole hung back and didn’t get in line until she saw Courtney board the plane. By the time she reached their row, Courtney was already settled in.

When Courtney noticed her standing there, Nicole nodded her head toward the seat next to her. “Looks like they gave me the window seat.”

That was her code for *I’m the favorite, bitch*. Everyone knew the window seat was the best one, and even the few who would argue it was actually the aisle know that the middle is the absolute worst. And the middle was exactly where Courtney was sitting.

“I doubt it was on purpose,” Courtney said as she rolled her eyes and stood so Nicole could get in.

Nicole sat down and let out an exaggerated yawn. “Either way, I’m going to take advantage of the next five plus hours and take a nap.”

She leaned against the pulled down window shade, waiting for Courtney to say something, but, instead, heard her opening her backpack. She opened one eye and watched as she pulled out a book.

“I’d rather use my time wisely,” Courtney said in a tone that a mother would use to lecture her child. She wiggled the book. “I finally have time to finish this.”

Nicole blinked as she tried to focus on the book that she was pretty sure she recognized. “Wait. Is that—?”

“You’ve probably never heard of it,” Courtney interrupted. “It’s by an indie lesbian romance writer.”

Nicole coughed out a laugh as she opened her own backpack and pulled out the exact same book. Courtney lifted her eyebrows and Nicole couldn’t tell if she was surprised or impressed. “You’re a Laurel Lake fan?”

Nicole crossed her arms over her chest and lifted her eyebrows. “Yep. Have been from the beginning.”

“I have too. Watched her whole love story play out over Twitter.”

If this was anyone else, even a complete stranger, Nicole would have swooned over Laurel and her wife. But this was Courtney. She refused to let Courtney see her melt in her seat over a couple she never even met. Instead, she pointed toward Courtney’s copy of the book. “What chapter are you on?”

“Chapter five. How about you?”

“Chapter six.” Pride swelled up inside of Nicole as if she was back in high school and her team had just beat Courtney’s in a district championship game, rather than being one chapter ahead of her in a romance novel.

“Well, I’m a fast reader. I’m sure I’ll catch up pretty quickly.” She opened her book and immediately started to read.

Nicole opened hers as well, determined not to let Courtney beat her at this. As the hours passed, she became so lost in the book, she almost forgot about competing with Courtney. It wasn’t until she heard Courtney laugh out loud at the same time she read a particularly funny line that she was brought back to reality.

“Did you just get to the part where the grandma caught them having sex?” Nicole asked, a laugh escaping from her own throat as well.

“I did. Laurel Lake is a literary genius. She has me laughing out loud at all of her books. I actually heard that the funniest scene of this book was based off of a true story that happened to this couple Laurel met once. It had to be that scene.”

“No way. That’s crazy.”

“Almost as crazy as me catching up to you already.” Courtney licked one finger and dramatically flipped the page.

Even as she stared intently at the page, Nicole didn't miss her smug grin. They *almost* had a nice moment. Of course Courtney would have to ruin that. Nicole had no idea why everyone always thought she was the cocky one in high school and Courtney was the golden child. Sure, it wasn't a lie that Nicole was cocky. It was fun and made sports more exciting. But Courtney was too, and everyone seemed to believe the sun shined out of her ass.

Instead of acknowledging her, Nicole went back to reading her book. There were plenty of opportunities for her to beat Courtney once they got to Cabo. This wasn't the end.

Courtney stood from her seat and stretched, trying to wake up her legs, which had been squashed throughout the flight. It was one of the curses of having such long legs, and long flights like this one killed her.

She snuck a glance at Nicole who was doing the exact same thing. Her T-shirt slid up the slightest bit as she lifted her hands over her head, revealing a tight stomach, which Courtney was sure had abs if she could see it better. She had to admit Nicole was even better looking now than she was in high school. Her loose brown curls had a wild, but sexy look to them, and her eyes had somehow become even more piercingly blue. Not to mention that she didn't seem to have gotten an ounce out of shape, her body looking as much like one of an athlete as it did back when she knew her.

It actually hadn't been too bad so far. She was sure she would want to kill Nicole by the end of the trip, but their back and forth was almost kind of fun. She couldn't act like that with most people in her life because they would think she was crazy or rude. Nicole just gave it right back to her. It was refreshing.

Almost. Until Nicole laughed and shook her head. "Who's enjoying the view now?"

Courtney rolled her eyes, but couldn't stop her smile from widening. "We've already been over this. The view is nice. It's the noise that's too much for me."

She normally wasn't this forward, but Nicole brought it out of her. She wished she was this confident with girls she was *actually* interested in, instead of turning red and stumbling over her words most of the time. Of

course, she would never admit that to Nicole. Nicole had to believe she was a pro at all things, including flirting.

Nicole pointed behind her and Courtney turned around to find it was finally their turn to get off the plane. She grabbed her backpack and her extra carry-on stored above and followed the signs leading them to customs. She groaned when she saw how long the lines were and made her way into the shortest one. She was surprised to find Nicole going into the one beside her, which was the slightest bit longer.

“Didn’t anyone ever tell you the left line always goes faster?” Nicole asked, a grin on her face that reminded Courtney why she couldn’t stand this girl.

Instead of responding, Courtney stared straight ahead and tried to will her line to move faster. When a person a few spots ahead of her fumbled around trying to find his passport, it took everything in Courtney not to groan. Of course, this caused Nicole to get through the line faster. As she waited with arms across her chest and foot tapping, Courtney knew she would have something obnoxious to say.

“Told you,” Nicole said simply before spinning around and walking away, leaving Courtney to stare at the back of her head.

She let herself get lost in those curls until the sound of a voice squealing, “Colie!” brought her back to reality.

She watched Nicole drop her bags and run across the airport to smash right into Roberta for a big hug. Fulton made his way over to her much more slowly and calmly, fixing his glasses before pulling her into his arms.

“Glad to see you’re both still alive,” he whispered in her ear as he held her tightly.

She pulled away and stared into the brown eyes of her best friend, taking in his wild brown hair which had gotten a little longer since she last saw him. Not enough to be considered a style, but enough to show he hadn’t cut it in a while. She ruffled his hair as if he was a little kid. “There were a few close calls, but I let her live to see another day.”

“I appreciate that,” Fulton said with a laugh before moving away from Courtney to greet Nicole.

Once the welcoming hugs were over, they took a shuttle to their hotel. Fulton rambled off facts about Cabo throughout the entire ride,

leaving it impossible for anyone else to get a word in, which was very unusual for him. Courtney made a mental note to tell him to calm down so Roberta didn't get suspicious.

When they got to the hotel, Fulton checked in and got them the key cards for their room. Courtney wished he had let her pay to have her own room, but she understood why he wanted the one room to keep up the appearance of winning a contest. Their spacious suite had two queen beds in one room, a pull-out couch in the main room, and a small kitchenette.

Nicole looked around the room, then threw her backpack onto the couch. "I call this bed. That way if I have any *special guests* stay over, it's not weird for you guys."

"Absolutely not," Roberta said as she shook her head at her best friend. "We are not having strangers staying here. You can go to their room."

"You wouldn't have had to worry about a stranger if Fulton had just brought Griffin."

"And that's *exactly* why I never would," Fulton said before turning to Courtney. "Nicole has some weird obsession with my brother."

Courtney's stomach turned at the thought of Nicole and Griffin hooking up. Griffin was a complete asshole, and sure, so was Nicole, but Courtney wouldn't wish Griffin on her worst enemy.

Fulton laughed as he studied her face. "Those are my thoughts exactly."

"Jealous?" Nicole asked with a smug tone.

Courtney scoffed. The thought of her being jealous over anyone hooking up with Nicole was absolutely insane. "As if. I just thought you would have better taste than that."

"She normally does," Fulton said. "Griffin is her kryptonite."

Now it was Nicole who scoffed. "Absolutely not. I don't have a kryptonite."

Courtney shook her head at Nicole. "Everyone has a kryptonite."

"Oh yeah? And what's yours? Sexy brunettes at an airport bar?"

Really? She had the audacity to call Courtney out when *she* was the one checking *her* out? Sure, Nicole was nice to look at and Courtney hadn't hidden the fact that she was taking notice of that, but Nicole acting like it

was one-sided was laughable. “That’s ironic coming from the girl whose eyes I literally watched scan my whole body at said bar.”

The sound of Fulton snorting grabbed Courtney’s attention. When she looked over at him, he gave her a goofy grin. “Should we leave you two alone?”

“Excuse me?” Courtney said at the exact same time that Nicole uttered a *what* that sounded just as bewildered.

Roberta threw an arm over Nicole’s shoulder, but stared at Courtney. “What my boyfriend is trying to say is that you guys look like you’re seconds away from either gouging each other’s eyes out or ripping off each other’s clothes. Either way, we don’t want to be here for it.”

Courtney was about to argue with how ridiculous that was when she was interrupted by the sound of Nicole letting out a loud laugh. “You definitely don’t have to worry about any clothes being ripped off, and I’d say our eyes should probably be fine too. Courtney likes to go for people’s noses.”

This girl was absolutely infuriating. “Oh my God. Seriously? It’s basketball. I was making space. Your face just happened to get in the way of my elbow. Maybe you shouldn’t have been so close.”

“Sorry. I guess I don’t understand because some of us didn’t have to resort to violence to do well in sports.” Nicole raised her eyebrows as if in a silent challenge to Courtney.

“Seriously? I can’t even count the number of times you took me out on the soccer field. Acting like you were going for the ball when it was clear you were going for me.”

Fulton laughed awkwardly, causing both Nicole and Courtney to look from each other over to him. He ran his hand through his hair, signaling to Courtney that he felt uncomfortable. “What do you say we explore outside the hotel room for a bit?”

“That sounds like a great idea, babe,” Roberta said a bit too enthusiastically as she clapped her hands together.

As soon as they walked outside, the annoyance Courtney was feeling over Nicole’s comments drifted away. This place was breathtaking. Way too breathtaking to waste any time allowing Nicole to get under her skin. Right outside the doors of the hotel was a huge pool, surrounded by cabanas and multiple bars, two of which you could swim up to. Mere steps

from the pool was the sandy beach which stretched as far as her eyes could see. The deep blue ocean looked oh so inviting as the hot July sun beat down on her, already causing sweat to gather on her skin.

Fulton nodded his head toward the bar on the edge of the beach.
“Shall we, ladies?”

“What do you say we start this trip out right?” Nicole asked when they got to the bar. “Tequila shot anyone?”

“Hell yeah!” Roberta shouted as she signaled the bartender over.

Nicole stared at Courtney as if issuing a silent challenge. Two could play at this game. Courtney kept her eyes trained on Nicole’s as she picked her shot glass up off the bar. She continued to watch her as she took the shot, refusing to wince as the strong liquor burned its way down her throat.

Courtney watched as Nicole lifted one finger to motion to the bartender. “I’ll have another,” she said, never removing her eyes from Courtney’s.

“Me too,” Courtney quickly added.

She would let herself get completely trashed before she ever let Nicole have the satisfaction of thinking she beat her at something. As she held her new shot up toward Nicole, she knew this was about to be one hell of a trip.

Chapter 3

Four days into their trip and Nicole was happy to find that she hadn't killed Courtney yet. Even though she would never admit it out loud, she was actually enjoying the trip. The worst part was she wasn't enjoying it *in spite* of Courtney, but rather *partially* (a very, very small part, she reminded herself once again) *because* of Courtney. Courtney was stubborn and arrogant, but the competitiveness between them was kind of fun. She had missed that for the four years after graduating college since she no longer had sports to scratch that itch.

Not to mention, Courtney made the beautiful views of the beach even better. Her tanned, toned body looked amazing in the skimpy bikinis she wore. Nicole took that moment to sneak a peek at Courtney, who was laying next to her on the beach, her eyes shut as the sun caused beads of sweat to trickle down her skin in the sexiest way possible.

"I can feel your eyes on me," Courtney said without even opening her own.

Damnit. How did she do that? "Don't flatter yourself," Nicole said with a laugh. "I wasn't looking *at* you. I was looking *past* you at the water trying to decide if I should join Roberta and Fulton. It's hot as balls out here."

Courtney kept her eyes closed, a small smile now playing on her lips. "First of all, I hate that expression. I realize you enjoy the male species, but even so, who wants to think about sweaty balls? Second of all, the ocean is in front of you. I'm beside you. There is absolutely no need for you to be looking in my direction."

"Fine. It's as hot as tits out here," Nicole said, refusing to acknowledge Courtney's second point and give her the satisfaction of admitting she was, indeed, checking her out.

Courtney shook her head and sat up slightly, resting her weight on her elbows as she stared out at the ocean. "It's ridiculously hot. Although, what's making you hotter right now—the sun or the sight of me in this bikini?"

“I don’t know why *I* had the reputation of being the cocky one in high school. You’re just as bad as me.”

“I’m not cocky. I’m confident. There’s a difference.” Courtney was silent for a moment, then put a hand over her eyes and looked over at Nicole. “I’m normally not like this though. I guess you bring out the best in me.”

“If this is your best, I’d hate to see your worst.”

“I could give you my worst.”

Wait. What? Nicole’s head immediately went to all the dirty things that statement could mean. She tried to say something back, but her mouth went dry just thinking about it.

Courtney laughed hard as if she knew exactly what Nicole was thinking. “Get your mind out of the gutter. That was a challenge, not a come on.” She nodded her head toward the water. “Race you to the ocean. Loser buys the winner’s drinks the rest of the day.”

Nicole jumped to her feet and scrambled to catch up with Courtney, who was already sprinting toward the water. She closed the space between them just in time to have her feet hit the water right before Courtney’s did.

I’ve still got it, she thought to herself as she threw her hands in the air in victory. “UPenn track! Six time All-American sprinter. Represent.”

“What did you end up studying at UPenn?” Courtney asked, completely ignoring her comments.

Nicole took it as a double win that Courtney refused to acknowledge the fact that she beat her. “I studied biology. Then I got my master’s in occupational therapy. I work with people who have been injured and need to gain back skills that we take for granted, like holding silverware, for example.”

“That must be really rewarding,” Courtney said, sounding more sincere than Nicole had heard her over this whole trip so far.

“It is. It’s hard though. I’ve worked with athletes who were used to being the best at their sport and now have trouble eating dinner. I can’t even begin to imagine how that must feel.” Nicole cleared her throat. She had to change the subject or else she was going to start to cry, which was the last thing she wanted to be doing right now. “What do you do?”

“I’m a school counselor.”

Her answer surprised Nicole. She assumed Courtney had gone for a job that would make her sound like a big shot, like a lawyer or doctor. “What made you decide to do that?”

Courtney shrugged. “My counselors sucked in high school. If I had wanted to talk to someone about my struggles over my sexuality, I *never* would have felt comfortable going to them. I always wished my counselors had done more than just pressure students to take the college track of classes. I wanted them to do what I felt like they should have been there for—to make sure the students knew they didn’t have to go through anything alone. So, I became that person.”

Why did she have to say that? It was hard to dislike someone who chose their career for that reason. “That’s very noble of you,” Nicole said, not willing to give more than that.

Apparently, that was more than enough though, because Courtney’s cocky smirk returned immediately. “Did Nicole Dawson just compliment me?”

“Don’t read into it.” Nicole chopped at the water to splash Courtney, then turned to walk back toward the beach. She turned around as soon as she hit the dry sand. “I believe you owe me a drink.”

Much to her surprise, Courtney draped a wet arm over her shoulder and leaned in close to whisper in her ear. “It’s an all-inclusive resort, sweetheart. Drinks are always free.”

Damnit. Of course. How did she let herself fall for that? She cursed herself as Courtney dropped her arm and walked backward in front of her so she could stare at her with that shit-eating grin. *What a bitch.*

Later that night at dinner, Roberta and Fulton laughed much harder than was necessary as Courtney retold the story.

Nicole crossed her arms in front of her and rolled her eyes. “I think you’re all missing the most important part of that story. I *won* the race. Who cares if Courtney doesn’t actually have to buy my drinks? She has to deal with the fact that I beat her in a race *once again*. It’s like being back in high school all over again, huh?”

Courtney tried to feign nonchalance, but Nicole could see it in her eyes that the fact that she lost was killing her. She loved it. Almost as much as she had loved when she beat her back in high school. Almost. The payoff wasn't quite as sweet this time. Well, thanks to Courtney tricking her, there was no payoff at all aside from the satisfaction of winning. She needed to do something about that.

Nicole directed all of her attention on Courtney. "You owe me, by the way. I'm willing to compromise though. A double or nothing sort of thing. We'll think of a new bet. If I win, you have to buy me one of the meals that isn't part of the all-inclusive package. If you win, I'll stop reminding you that I beat you in that race."

Nicole started running through ideas of what they could bet on when her thoughts were interrupted by Roberta. "Absolutely not. I'm putting my foot down. We have yet to go out after dinner thanks to you two drinking each other under the table. I'm not letting it happen again. There's a DJ playing at the hotel bar tonight. I want to go dancing." She reached over and squeezed Fulton's arm. "What do you say, babe?"

Fulton gave his soon-to-be fiancé a tired smile. "If that's what you want to do, then it sounds wonderful, sweetie."

Roberta laughed as she made lovey eyes at Fulton before looking back at Courtney and Nicole. "What that really means is he would rather go back to the room, but is agreeing to go to make me happy. Take note, ladies. This is what you need to look for in a significant other. Someone who does stuff they don't want to do just to make you happy." She placed a kiss on Fulton's cheek, before pulling back slightly and rubbing her nose against his. "You don't have to go though, babe. We can have a girl's night if you want to go back to the room and relax."

Fulton looked between Roberta, Nicole, and Courtney as if he was considering the offer, but then shook his head. "I can't leave you alone with these two. They'll probably find a way to turn clubbing into a competition."

A smile bloomed on Nicole's face as she came up with a fantastic idea. "That's it! You're a genius, Fulton. We'll see who can get more people to dance with us. Highest number at the end of the night wins."

Courtney's lips dipped into a pout. "That's not fair. You have double the prospects. More than that since most of the girls here probably aren't even gay."

Nicole lifted an eyebrow at Courtney, already tasting the victory. “Are you saying you aren’t willing to back your trunk into some junk in the name of friendly competition?”

As soon as the words were out, Courtney dropped her fork back onto her plate and pushed the plate away from her. “Just hearing you say that makes me want to throw up.”

“I mean if you can’t handle it...” Nicole let her words trail off, knowing exactly how Courtney would react.

“Oh, I can handle it. I’m just going to need *a lot* more to drink.”

Courtney already felt like the room was spinning as they walked into the bar. As soon as Nicole mentioned the bet, Courtney knew her gay ass was going to have to be drunk to pull it off. She could have taken the time to scope out the room and figure out which girls were potentially into girls, but that’s not what tonight was about. Tonight was about doing whatever she could to beat Nicole so she would shut up about that stupid race.

It didn’t take her long to notice a group of guys watching them from across the bar, so she made a beeline over to them. “Any of you boys care to dance?”

She turned without waiting for an answer and strutted onto the dance floor, happy to find that all five guys followed her out. She quickly made her way from one to the other, counting them off in her head as she went. Nicole never specified *how long* she had to dance with them, and she was going to take full advantage of that.

As she walked away from them, the sight across the dance floor made her mouth go dry. Nicole was dancing behind another girl, her hands wrapped around the girl’s hips to keep their bodies tightly connected. Nicole’s brown curls flew freely and she bit her bottom lip as she focused on her body’s movements, clearly determined to be perfect even at dancing in the club.

Courtney’s body heated up as she watched the way Nicole ran her hands up and down the girl’s sides and whispered something in her ear. Suddenly, it wasn’t as hard to dance with these guys. With every person that

she pulled close to her, she closed her eyes and pretended it was Nicole behind her. It was strange, but it was working. She let herself drift away with the thought of that brown hair surrounding her, those long slender fingers grazing her skin, that silky smooth voice causing goosebumps to rise on the back of her neck as it sounded in her ear.

If it wasn't for the alcohol, Courtney would have been angry at herself for allowing her mind to have these thoughts about Nicole. *Nicole*—her archnemesis from high school who was still as cocky and possibly even more annoying now than she was back then. She was sure once she sobered up she would chastise herself for even entertaining these fantasies, but for now, with the alcohol pumping through her veins, she couldn't think about anything else.

“Can I cut in?”

Courtney thought she was imagining it when Nicole took the place of dance partner number thirteen.

“You're a good dancer,” Nicole whispered as she wrapped her arms around Courtney and rested her hands on her hips. “You also totally won. I'll deny saying this when we're both sober, but I didn't have a chance. You owned this bar tonight.”

What the hell was happening? Why was Nicole complimenting her as she danced up against her in the most delicious way possible?

Courtney threw her head back as she felt lips on her neck, peppering her skin with light, yet intoxicating kisses. “Nicole, I...” Courtney had no idea what confession was about to pass through her lips, but it was cut off when she felt bile rising in her throat. “I think I'm going to throw up.”

As she desperately searched for the exit, she heard Nicole make some comment about Fulton taking care of his best friend and Fulton responded by saying it was Nicole's responsibility since it was her fault.

She didn't have time to think into their conversation because she spotted the exit and rushed toward it, taking a deep breath of the fresh summer air as she stepped outside. Unfortunately, that wasn't enough to make her feel better, and she stumbled over to the nearest trash can, wasting no time to empty all the contents of her stomach.

“I brought you some water,” a voice said that definitely didn't belong to Fulton.

Courtney turned to find Nicole standing behind her with a bottle of water in each hand and a slightly lopsided smile on her face which was so much different than her usual obnoxious smirk. Courtney grabbed the bottle of water out of her right hand and quickly chugged it down, then took the bottle from her left hand and did the same.

Nicole looked down at her empty hands as if she was shocked. “That second one was supposed to be for me, but okay. You’re welcome.”

Courtney shrugged and walked out onto the beach, throwing herself down onto the sand after only a few steps. She closed her eyes and tried to wish away her dizziness.

“The sky is spinning,” she said when she felt Nicole sit down beside her.

Nicole laughed and sprinkled some cold sand onto Courtney’s arm. “I’m pretty sure it’s your head that’s spinning.”

Instead of saying anything, Courtney lay still and tried to gain control of her body. She wasn’t sure how long she laid like this before she finally started to feel a little better, but she was sure it had been a decent amount of time. She half expected Nicole to be gone when she finally opened her eyes, but she was still there, her eyes staring up at the night sky.

“I won,” Courtney finally spoke, unsure what else to say.

“I already said that.”

“I know, but I had to rub it in. I don’t think I’ve danced with that many people my entire life, let alone one night.”

“So, what’s your number?” Nicole asked after a minute of silence, a tone to her voice as if she was challenging Courtney.

“Of people I’ve danced with?” Courtney asked sarcastically, even though she knew exactly what Nicole was actually trying to ask. “I don’t keep track.”

“You know exactly what I’m asking. The number of people you’ve slept with.” Nicole looked over at Courtney and must have noticed her hesitancy because she laughed and added, “That low, huh?”

“I dated someone for five years. Of course my number is going to be lower.”

Nicole let out a low whistle. “That’s a long time. What happened?”

Finally feeling a little bit more human, Courtney pushed herself up so she was now sitting beside Nicole. “If you’re looking for some big

dramatic story, you're not going to get it. We met freshman year of college, dated throughout school, then couldn't make the long distance thing work after we graduated. There wasn't any crazy ending. We really never fought, even at the very end. But that's only because we had zero chemistry. She even ended up moving to New Jersey three years ago for work, but it didn't matter. We were meant to be friends, not more. She's still one of my best friends."

"Spoken like a true lesbian."

"Whatever." Courtney nodded her head toward the bar. "Do you think we should go back in so Fulton and Roberta don't get worried?"

"They left the bar over an hour ago."

Courtney's eyes went wide in surprise. *An hour? How was that even possible?* "That can't be right. They were still in there when we came out. There's no way we've been out here longer than a half hour."

Nicole laughed so loud and hard that it annoyed Courtney. She had no idea what was so funny. Nicole stopped laughing and studied her face. "Wait, you're not joking, are you? Dude, you fell asleep for like an hour when we first got out here."

"You're lying," Courtney said as she pulled her phone out of her pocket. She was shocked when she looked at the time and realized Nicole must have been telling the truth. "You stayed with me that whole time?"

"I didn't have a choice. Fulton said you were my responsibility. He and Roberta would have killed me if I let the ocean wash you away or something."

Now, it was Courtney's turn to laugh. "You know, for a second there I almost thought you were nice."

"To the girl who broke my nose? Never." The way Nicole smiled at her told her she was kidding, and it felt like something passed between them. It was different from the lust-filled dancing in the club. This was actually a nice moment. "My number is ten by the way. Ten people who are now living a much more satisfied life because they got a piece of Nicole Dawson."

And there it was—the reminder of why Courtney couldn't stand her. It was exactly what she needed to knock her down to earth. "You're quite the charmer," she said sarcastically.

“I’ve been told I am.” Nicole stood up and wiped the sand from her clothes, then reached a hand down toward Courtney. “Shall we?”

“Wow, an offered hand,” Courtney joked as she stood up. “Be careful. You might charm the pants right off of me.”

“Let’s be honest, you couldn’t handle this.”

“Wanna bet?” Courtney responded before realizing what that might imply.

Nicole laughed as she walked away from her. “You wish,” she called over her shoulder.

Absolutely not. It didn’t matter how hot Nicole was or how good it felt to dance with her. Nothing could ever possess her to do more than that. Absolutely nothing.

Chapter 4

“Remember. No bets tonight. No foot races across the beach. No shot for shot competitions. We’re all going to be on our best behavior,” Fulton said as he looked at himself in the mirror and straightened out his bow tie.

Courtney rolled her eyes at her best friend. Sure, she and Nicole weren’t subtle in their competitiveness, which had somehow ramped up even more since that night in the bar, but she wouldn’t do anything to ruin this night for Fulton. “Come on, man, you’re my best friend. I’ve got your back. I’m not going to do anything stupid. I promise.”

Fulton ran a hand through his hair as his face turned red. “I know you’re not. I’m sorry. I’m just so nervous.”

Courtney rested her chin on his shoulder. “You have nothing to be nervous about. You should be excited. Roberta adores you. This is going to be the happiest night of her life, all thanks to you. You’ll propose, you can call everyone and tell them, then we’ll celebrate by getting completely—” Courtney stopped herself from saying *hammered* when Fulton gave her a warning look. “Then we’ll celebrate by drinking a completely respectable amount of alcohol.”

“I know, I know. You’re right. I just want tonight to be perfect for her.”

“The love of her life is proposing. It *will* be perfect.”

Fulton’s phone went off and Courtney watched him fumble around with it until he could finally hold it still enough in his shaky hands to read the text. “Okay. They are just finishing up with dinner now. Nicole said they should be out on the beach in about ten minutes, just in time for the sun to be setting.” Fulton looked up at Courtney and nodded his head, clearly trying to exude a confidence he didn’t feel. “That’s our cue. Let’s go.”

As they walked out of the hotel and onto the beach, Courtney caught Fulton checking his pocket that held the ring multiple times.

Courtney patted him on the shoulder and nodded her head toward the photographer Fulton had hired who was hidden off to the side. “You got this. I’ll be right over there.”

Fulton walked farther onto the sand and smiled at something off in the distance. Courtney followed his line of sight and watched as Nicole said something to Roberta then pointed toward Fulton. Roberta seemed rightfully confused and Courtney couldn't help but laugh as Nicole had to physically push her in Fulton's direction.

Courtney must have caught Nicole's eye because she began walking in her direction. The closer she got, the drier Courtney's mouth became. Nicole's black dress left nothing to the imagination. It was skin tight, stopped inches above her knees, and the neckline dipped unfairly low.

Courtney hated that her body was having this reaction. When she caught Nicole checking her out in the airport, she felt like she had the upper hand. But ever since the club and that dancing that neither of them had acknowledged since, it seemed like she was no longer in control.

"Nice to see you, Courtney. My eyes are up here by the way."

Courtney quickly moved her eyes from that plunging neckline up to Nicole's face, which was wearing the stupid smug grin once again. Damn it, she'd been caught. "I'm pretty sure when you put that dress on, you had no intention of drawing attention to your eyes."

Nicole put a hand over her chest. "Wow. That was *almost* a compliment."

Great. She had really done it. Nicole would never let her live any of this down. "Don't let it go to your head. It can't afford to get any bigger."

"Just for the record, I could totally come up with a thousand witty comebacks, but I have a proposal to watch."

Courtney tore her eyes away from Nicole and looked across the beach just in time to see Fulton go down on one knee. Roberta threw her hands over her mouth, then began to jump up and down before jumping right into Fulton's arms. Courtney's heart warmed at the sight. She was so happy for her best friend. He deserved this moment and she was so glad she was able to share it with him.

When she heard a snuffle beside her, she turned to see Nicole with tears in her eyes. "Are you crying?" she asked, as if it wasn't obvious.

Nicole wiped her eyes. "Yeah. So what?"

"I'm just surprised."

"Just because I've got more game than Nintendo doesn't mean I don't have feelings." She sniffled once again, clearly not trying to hide her

emotions. “I’m just so damn happy for her. In college, we spent so many nights talking about our futures and what it would be like to meet our person, get married, have a family. And now, here we are. It’s surreal.”

Before Courtney could say anything back, Roberta came sprinting over to them holding her left hand in the air. “I’m engaged, bitches!” she yelled before jumping into Nicole’s arms the same way she had jumped into Fulton’s.

Nicole spun her around in a circle, and even Courtney had to admit that it was rather adorable. “Hell yeah!” Nicole said as she put Roberta’s feet back on the ground and pulled on her hand to look at the ring. “This thing is huge.”

Courtney took another look at the ring she had already seen multiple times since Fulton was questioning whether he picked the right one. The huge princess cut diamond looked even bigger on Roberta’s slender finger.

“I can’t believe you all kept this a secret,” Roberta said, barely taking a breath as she spoke. “When Fulton said he won a trip, I never even considered that this could be happening. I used to make fun of girls who were somehow shocked when they were proposed to on vacation. Now I’m one of them. Oh my God, we have to celebrate. I guess we should call our families first though. Oh my God, do our families know?” When Fulton nodded, Roberta slapped him on the arm playfully. “You sly dog. They are totally waiting for our call, aren’t they?”

Before Fulton could even respond, Roberta was calling her parents. After many tears from both her mom and dad, they hung up and called Fulton’s family.

“Is that my favorite daughter-in-law?” Fulton’s mom said as soon as she answered their FaceTime call.

Courtney’s mind drifted as Roberta showed off her ring and then discussed every detail of the proposal. She stared out at the ocean and tried to imagine what it would be like when she got engaged. She already decided that whenever it happened, she wanted to be the one to propose, but how she did it obviously depended on the person she ended up with. No matter what, she hoped her future in-laws would be as excited as Fulton’s parents.

“We have a surprise for you two. We booked the hotel’s honeymoon suite for you for the rest of your trip. We thought as a newly engaged couple you might want some alone time.”

Courtney came crashing back to reality when she heard Fulton’s mom reveal their surprise. She looked to Fulton to try to figure out if she had heard it right, and his face was beet red. He ran a hand over the back of his neck as if he was embarrassed. “Oh, um, you didn’t have to do that.”

Courtney looked at Roberta’s phone screen where Fulton’s mom was laughing and shaking her head. “Oh, honey, don’t be embarrassed. We just figured since you don’t have to keep up the charade of winning a contest anymore, the four of you could use the extra space.”

Easy for her to say, thought Courtney. She wouldn’t be stuck alone in a room with Nicole. Knowing her, she probably *would* actually try to bring someone back to the room now that Roberta wouldn’t be there to stop her, and Courtney could only imagine the type of person she would go for given that her type was guys like Griffin.

As if summoning him with just her thoughts, Griffin chose that moment to show up on the screen. “Take the hotel room, bro. Mom is offering you a free pass to have a ton of sex with your hot fiancé.” Griffin laughed at something his mom said that Courtney couldn’t make out, then focused his attention in her direction. Except, she quickly realized it wasn’t her he was looking at but the person standing beside her. “Speaking of hot, how are you doing, Nicole?”

Courtney looked over at Nicole whose lips were quirked up to one side in a flirtatious smirk. Courtney obviously had no issue with the fact that Nicole liked both guys and girls, but the fact that she found a guy like Griffin charming was repulsive. Courtney ignored the back and forth that went on for the next minute or so before Fulton’s parents stole the phone back from Griffin and said their final goodbyes.

Once they were off, Roberta laughed and clapped her hands together as her eyes drifted between the three of them. “I honestly don’t know the best part of Fulton’s parents getting us this suite—the fact that I won’t have to kick you guys out to have celebratory sex with my fiancé or the fact that you two will now be sharing the room alone without Fulton and me to break up your stupid fights. You’ll probably stay up all night arguing about who scored more points in basketball.”

Nicole shook her head. “That’s not necessary. It’s a big deal if you hit one thousand points, and if memory serves me correctly, Courtney never did. Or am I mistaken?”

Courtney wanted to smack that grin right off of Nicole’s face. Out of all the things to bring up, why did Roberta have to choose the one thing Nicole *did* have over her? Courtney knew all about Nicole reaching that milestone because she did it in the last game of her career when her team was playing Courtney’s in the district championship. Luckily, she had an easy comeback for this one.

“I was just under one thousand. I could have gotten it during that same game you did, but was too busy working together with the rest of my teammates to make sure we beat your asses instead.”

Courtney was satisfied when she saw the sour look that her words brought to Nicole’s face. “Whatever. You had a whole extra game to hit the thousand and still couldn’t. If memory serves me correctly, your next game was practically a shutout.”

How did she even remember that at this point? Courtney barely did. Although, that was mostly because she didn’t want to think about it because Nicole wasn’t wrong. Her team had barely put up *any* points in the last basketball game of her career. It wasn’t the most fun way to go out. Still, she couldn’t let Nicole see that. “Yeah, by the team who went on to win the state championship that year. I would have hated to see what they would have done to you guys since you couldn’t even beat us.”

“As much as I would love to relive your high school glory days from almost *ten years ago*, I have an engagement to enjoy that’s happening right now,” Roberta joked, her voice lighthearted in spite of Nicole and Courtney’s ridiculous argument.

“Sorry, Roberta,” Courtney apologized. “What do you guys want to do to celebrate?”

Roberta gave them all a not-so-innocent smile. “Honestly, I want to take advantage of the hotel room that Fulton’s parents got us, but I need to know that I can trust you guys not to kill each other overnight. That would really put a damper on the mood.”

“I’m too tired to kill anyone tonight. I honestly think I’m just going to go to bed soon,” Nicole said before Courtney had a chance to answer. “But tomorrow, all bets are off. No guarantees what will happen then.”

Roberta shrugged and tugged on Fulton's hand. "Good enough for me. Have a good night, you two."

Before they could even say a proper goodbye, Roberta and Fulton were long gone. Nicole looked over at Courtney and lifted her eyebrows in a way that Courtney wished she didn't find sexy. "Well, looks like it's just the two of us now."

The TV quietly played in the background as Nicole lay in the bed that used to belong to Fulton and Roberta. She had been tired when they first got back to the room, but now she couldn't sleep. She could hear Courtney laughing at something on her phone so she knew she was still awake as well.

Nicole rolled on her side and looked over at her. If the two of them had to share a room, they might as well try to make it as minimally awkward as possible, which could only be done if she tried her best to play nice. "So, when did you come out?" she asked.

"What?" Courtney blinked as she focused her eyes on Nicole as if she was surprised she was talking to her.

"When did you come out? I figured if it was during high school, I would have heard about it since people in our area didn't have anything better to talk about."

Courtney laughed. "Oh yeah. That would have been the talk of the county, which was why I waited until the summer after senior year, right before I jetted off to California for four years. I knew for sure at least a year before that, but I wasn't willing to let anyone know at that point. How about you?"

"I figured it out at some point throughout high school, but my mom was the only person I told before college." Nicole laughed as she remembered that conversation from her senior year. "At first, she actually tried to blame Trey Smith for *turning me gay*, which was funny since I told her I was bi so it's not like I was choosing girls *over* guys."

"Wait, why would she blame him?"

"Because I dated him for a year in high school. I'm surprised you didn't realize that. I was convinced we were a power couple."

Courtney scrunched up her nose, making Nicole laugh once again. “Ew. Most hated couple would have been more like it. Trey was such a douche. I think he was more cocky than you if that’s even possible.”

“Oh yeah. He was a million times cockier than me. He also lacked any intelligence, hence why my mom thought dating him had convinced me girls would be a better choice.”

“Man. Trey Smith *and* Griffin Shea. What a track record.”

“Hey, I can’t argue with that. Ever since I made out with Griffin, Fulton has joked that my taste in girls is much better than my taste in guys, and honestly, he’s right.”

“That’s good to know since I’ve seen you check me out multiple times on this trip.” Courtney smiled, and Nicole could tell she was proud of herself for finding a way to point that out.

“Don’t think too much into it. I said my taste in girls was better than my taste in guys. I didn’t say it was always good.”

Nicole felt satisfied when Courtney didn’t have a response to that. After a minute of silence, she closed her eyes at the same moment Courtney spoke again. “Did she come around to it? Your mom, I mean. Is she okay with you being bisexual now?”

“Oh yeah, totally. I think my parents would actually prefer it if I ended up with a woman.”

“Given your track record with guys, I don’t blame them.”

“What about your parents?” Nicole asked, surprising even herself that they were actually holding a nice conversation.

“My parents asked me if I was gay before I even had the chance to tell them. Apparently, I wasn’t very good at hiding it.”

Nicole nodded. “You did always give off that vibe.”

“Are you sure about that or was it just wishful thinking on your part?”

Nicole scoffed. “You would love that, wouldn’t you? If I always had a candle burning for you. Sorry to disappoint, but the only thing burning was my desire to take you down on the field, court, and track.”

“Could you do me just *one* favor?”

Nicole was intrigued. “What’s that?”

“Just admit that you never took me down on the field. I want to hear you say out loud that I was a better soccer player than you.”

Nicole rolled her eyes. *Of course*. Why would it be anything else? “I’ll admit that once you admit that *I* was the better track runner. Although, the stats alone prove that.”

“My soccer stats prove it too.” Courtney lifted one eyebrow. If Nicole was going to have a weakness, it would be the way Courtney looked when she did that, but of course, she *obviously* didn’t have any weaknesses when it came to Courtney. “So, do we have a deal?”

Nicole rubbed her forehead. As she was deciding whether she wanted to do this, her eyes landed on Fulton’s bottle of Jameson sitting across the room. She got out of her bed, picked up the bottle, then sat down on Courtney’s bed. “If I’m going to do this, I need to have a drink first.”

She took a big swig straight out of the bottle then handed it to Courtney to encourage her to do the same. Once she had, Nicole took the bottle back and sat it on the nightstand. “Okay. We’ll say it on the count of three. One... two... three. You were better at soccer than me.”

“I was better at soccer than you,” Courtney said at the same time.

“You asshole!” Nicole shouted, although she couldn’t stop herself from laughing. She had walked right into that one, and she honestly wasn’t sure how she hadn’t realized Courtney would pull something like that.

“Now, say what you were supposed to say.” Nicole used her finger to poke Courtney in the side.

Courtney yelped and wiggled away, giving Nicole an idea. She dug her fingers into Courtney’s side and was happy when she started to laugh and unsuccessfully tried to pull away. Nicole kept a strong grip on her as she continued to tickle her. “Say that I was better at track. Say it.”

Courtney flailed her body back and forth. “Never,” she said between fits of laughter.

Without thinking about it, Nicole straddled Courtney’s hips so she could get better access to her stomach, and continued to tickle her. “Say it.”

“Fine. You... were... better... at... track.”

Nicole stopped tickling and smiled down at her, feeling triumphant. “Thank you.”

Now that their battle was over, she became much more aware of her position. She knew she should move, but something was keeping her rooted in place. Well, she knew exactly what was keeping her there. It was the

throbbing deep in her center. The throbbing that was currently betraying her. How dare her body be so turned on by Courtney Freaking Fields?

“Nicole,” Courtney said, a low timbre to her voice leading Nicole to believe she was feeling it too.

Nicole licked her lips. “Yeah?”

“I said it. You can get off me now. Unless, of course, there’s something burning deep inside of you that’s keeping you here.” Courtney’s knowing smile was enough to keep Nicole from ever admitting what really was happening inside of her.

“Don’t flatter yourself.” Nicole forced herself off of Courtney and went back to her own bed.

She stared up at the ceiling while she waited for her heart to stop beating so quickly. “I’m probably going to regret saying this, but this trip isn’t nearly as awful as I thought it would be when I heard you were coming.”

“Gee, thanks,” Courtney said with a laugh. “I’ll take that as a compliment coming from you.” The room was quiet for a few seconds before Courtney added, “For what it’s worth, I’m having a much better time than expected, too.”

Feeling satisfied, Nicole rolled onto her side to face away from Courtney. “Goodnight, soccer star.”

“Goodnight, Speedy.”

Even if she had wanted to, Nicole couldn’t have stopped the smile from spreading across her face as she drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 5

“Cheers to you two not killing each other on this trip,” Fulton said, while holding up his wine glass.

The four of them were sitting in the hot tub that was located inside of Fulton and Roberta’s suite. A luxury that Nicole insisted they take advantage of before they had to leave the next day. Courtney resisted the urge to look at Nicole in her bathing suit. At some point on this trip, the tension between them had become less competitive and more sexual and Courtney wasn’t sure how to feel about that. Luckily, she didn’t have to worry about it much longer since they would be flying out the next day and probably wouldn’t see each other again, aside from at the wedding.

“Hey, we still have one more night. You never know. I could have just been spending this whole time plotting,” Nicole joked.

Courtney went to splash Nicole, but Nicole must have caught on to what she was doing because she reached out and grabbed her arm before she could.

Roberta smiled as she looked between the two of them. “You know, if I didn’t know any better, I’d say you guys are actually starting to like each other.”

“It’s a good thing you know better,” Nicole answered playfully before using Courtney’s arm to cause her to splash herself.

Courtney laughed as she wrestled Nicole away and when she looked over at Fulton and Roberta, they were watching them with dumb smirks on their faces. “Who wants to play *Never Have I Ever*?” Courtney asked, trying to get the focus off of her interaction with Nicole.

“I’m in,” Nicole said, seemingly completely oblivious to what was going on. She put five fingers in the air. “Never have I ever gotten engaged in Cabo.”

“Well, that’s just rude,” Roberta said as she dropped one of her fingers. “Never have I ever had sex while my roommate was in the room.”

Nicole laughed as she put a finger down. “I thought you were asleep, okay?”

“I *was* asleep. The moaning woke me up.”

“Just for the record, the moans were coming from the other girl, not me. I can’t help it if I’m that good.”

Courtney could tell Nicole was directing this comment toward her. She didn’t know whether it was to tease her or try to show her up, but either way, she found it strangely satisfying. Courtney wiggled her finger. “Does it count if my roommate was the one I was having sex with?”

Courtney watched Nicole as she asked the question and she could have sworn Nicole’s pupils dilated just from hearing her question. Nicole reached over and pushed Courtney’s finger down. “Unless it was phone sex, she was definitely in the room.”

“It most certainly wasn’t phone sex. We were both very much present.” Courtney bit her lip and kept her gaze trained on Nicole, loving the effect her talking about having sex with someone was having on her.

The hot tub seemed to be rising in temperature by the second as Nicole continued to stare into Courtney’s eyes. Courtney had no clue what was happening, but she couldn’t get herself to look away. That was until the sound of a throat clearing caught her attention. She looked in the direction of the sound to see Roberta staring at her with her eyebrows raised.

She moved her eyes to Fulton who just shrugged and let out an awkward laugh followed by a snort. She silently begged him to save them all from this awkward moment and luckily he understood.

“I guess it’s my turn. Never have I ever had sex in a hot tub.”

Roberta put a hand over her chest as if she was shocked. “Babe! You haven’t?” When he shook his head, Roberta turned her attention to Courtney and Nicole. “Sorry, ladies, I’d love to continue to watch whatever this is, but I have some important business to attend to.”

Courtney and Nicole quickly dried off, then put their sweats back on over their wet bathing suits. They were both quiet as they walked back to their hotel room and the silence continued once they were inside. Courtney watched as Nicole poured herself another glass of wine and tried to think of what to say to her.

“Wanna keep playing?”

Nicole’s head shot up as if she was surprised to hear Courtney’s voice, but soon a sweet smile spread across her face. She moved her eyes between their two beds. “Your place or mine?”

When she realized Nicole was talking about where they should sit to play, she pointed to Nicole's bed. "Yours. I don't want mine to get wet."

Nicole threw herself onto her bed and put her hands behind her head as she lay down on the mattress. "Fine with me. I'm used to girls getting my bed wet."

Courtney chastised herself for her choice of words. She should have known Nicole would somehow make it into something dirty. "That's disgusting."

"Jealous?"

Was she? It didn't matter because even if she was, she would never admit it. "You can go first," she said, trying to think of anything to change the subject. She sat down on the bed next to Nicole who was now tapping her chin dramatically as if she was deep in thought.

"I got it. Never have I ever broken someone's nose."

Courtney picked the pillow up from behind her back and hit Nicole with it. "That's dumb. Do a real one."

"Fine. Never have I ever been the first to come."

Courtney threw her head back in laughter. Who the hell did this girl think she was? "Bullshit."

Courtney watched as Nicole crossed her arms in front of her chest, a smug look on her face that she wanted to slap right off. That or kiss it off. Shit, what was she thinking?

"It's true. Not once."

"Prove it." The words slipped out before Courtney could think better of them.

Nicole lifted an eyebrow. "And how do you propose I do that?"

So many inappropriate responses floated into Courtney's brain, but she shook them away. God, what had come over her? "Never mind. I don't know why that just came out of my mouth."

Nicole's eyes drifted away from Courtney's and stopped when they landed on her lips. "It's a really nice mouth," she said breathlessly.

Nicole licked her lips as she continued to stare, and Courtney knew she was seconds away from melting into a puddle just from the extra attention.

She had to keep her cool though. She had to exude a confidence she wasn't quite feeling at the moment, so she lifted one eyebrow and leaned

closer to Nicole so their lips were now just inches apart. “I haven’t had any complaints.”

Nicole ran a hand up Courtney’s arm, then let it settle at the back of her neck, pulling her the tiniest bit closer so their noses were now touching. “Do you really want me to prove it?”

“No.”

Nicole looked surprised, and a little hurt, by Courtney’s blunt response. Her hand fell away from Courtney’s neck and she broke their eye contact for the first time since this conversation started.

Courtney took a deep breath, knowing there was no turning back as soon as she spoke the words begging to be set free. She put a finger under Nicole’s chin to force their eyes back together. “I’m not gonna let you prove it. I’m going to be the one who changes it.”

Courtney pushed Nicole away just enough to give her the space to crawl on top of her. That was it. Everything else was completely out of Courtney’s control. She was now at the mercy of her body. A body that was desperate for a taste of Nicole Dawson.

She crashed her lips against Nicole’s and was not disappointed. Her lips tasted sweet like the wine she had been drinking all night. But there was nothing sweet or tentative about the way Nicole kissed her back. She welcomed Courtney in by opening her mouth to her and allowing their tongues to connect. Their tongues fought for dominance while their bodies did the same. Before Courtney knew what was happening, she was on her back and Nicole was smiling down at her.

“You should probably realize it by now, but I’m always on top.”

Courtney held onto Nicole as she maneuvered herself out from under her and positioned herself back on top. “I guess we’ll see about that, won’t we?”

Before Nicole could fight her on it, Courtney gestured for her to sit up so she could take her shirt off of her. She tossed Nicole’s shirt onto the floor then did the same with her own. She knew she probably only had a short window of time before Nicole began to protest, so she quickly removed both of their bikini tops as well.

She paused momentarily to take in the sight in front of her. Nicole was a freaking work of art. She was perfection in every sense of the word.

Courtney couldn't take it anymore. She had to taste the skin that was currently teasing her.

She ran her tongue across Nicole's neck, then sucked at her pulse point. She moved lower until she was level with Nicole's chest. She took one nipple into her mouth and used her fingers to work the other one. A moan escaped her lips when she felt Nicole's hands scratching at her back. She was sure there would be marks in the morning, but at that moment she didn't care.

She slipped lower and peppered kisses across Nicole's stomach, then licked at her tight abs. She stopped when her tongue was just at the waistline of Nicole's sweatpants and brought her hands down to remove them.

Before she could, a hand grabbed onto hers to stop her. She looked up at Nicole to see what the problem was and was met with hooded eyes, burning with desire but also Nicole's classic cocky smirk that normally annoyed her but looked extremely sexy right now.

"I can't let you do that," Nicole said, her voice low and husky.

What the hell? Courtney could have screamed. This girl was going to be the death of her. "Why the hell not?"

Nicole tried to pull her up, but Courtney stood her ground, and Nicole settled for running her fingers across her shoulders instead. "It puts you at an unfair advantage. We can't have that."

"I thought that was the point." Courtney tried to grab at Nicole's pants again, but was stopped for a second time.

She was so frustrated at this point, she let out a low growl. Nicole laughed, which only made Courtney feel even more frustrated.

"I'm Nicole Dawson. Do you really think I'm going to go down without a fight? Especially against you."

As infuriating as this was, it was also sexy as hell and Courtney was getting more turned on by the second. All she wanted to do was take Nicole into her mouth and listen to her scream as she came. She laid her chin on Nicole's stomach as she smiled up at her. If this was the game Nicole wanted to play, she would play right back. "You see, the problem is, I'm down here, and I'm ready to go. I couldn't possibly stop now."

Nicole returned her smile and ran a hand through her hair. "I never said you needed to stop. I just said we need to level the playing field."

“Oh yeah? And how do you propose we do that?”

Nicole tugged lightly on Courtney’s hair. “I think you know *exactly* what I’m proposing. Once you take off your pants, and turn yourself around to give me the same access, you’re free to do whatever your heart desires to me. You know, for as long as you can hold on with what I’m about to do to you.”

Courtney quickly sat up enough to remove her pants and bikini bottom. She slipped them off slowly to give Nicole a good show. “Game on.”

Nicole loved the way it felt as Courtney removed her pants. She loved the way Courtney’s nails scratched at her legs as she went. And most of all, she loved how Courtney wasted no time positioning herself right over Nicole’s mouth so she could finally taste Courtney on her tongue. She ran her tongue through Courtney’s folds at the exact moment Courtney did the same thing.

She moved her hands to Courtney’s ass to give herself better access and sucked her clit into her mouth, loving how Courtney’s moans vibrated against her own center. She had no idea how she was going to last, but she was determined to. She couldn’t come first. Not with Courtney. Especially not while she was on the bottom.

She moved her tongue more quickly. The one hope she had of holding on was if she made Courtney come as quickly as possible. She added a finger, slipping it inside while her tongue continued to lap at Courtney’s wetness. In response, Courtney added two fingers, so Nicole added a third and Courtney did the same.

Nicole couldn’t stop herself from thrusting up against Courtney’s fingers, forcing them even deeper and pushing her closer to the edge. That sensation mixed with the feeling of Courtney riding her fingers had her body going insane. She felt Courtney everywhere. She felt her inside of her and on top of her. She even swore that she felt Courtney in her bones and rushing through her veins. She was everywhere and everything and it was all too much to handle.

Nicole pulled Courtney even tighter against her, and replaced her fingers with her tongue, pushing it deep inside of her as she fell apart. She screamed out, the sounds muffled by Courtney's body as it jerked against her face. Her scream was followed by a long moan from Courtney before her body movements came to an abrupt stop and she fell into a heap on top of Nicole, laying there for a minute before rolling off.

They were both silent as they caught their breath. Nicole's chest was moving up and down rapidly as she tried, and failed, to control her breathing. When Courtney flipped herself around so they were finally face to face again, she had a wide grin on her face. "Looks like I won."

Oh no. Nicole wouldn't have that. She rolled over so she was straddling Courtney's hips and smiled down at the girl pinned below her. "Double or nothing."

Nicole stretched out in bed and tried to remember what physical activity she had done that would have made her so sore. When her eyes landed on the bed across from hers, the memories of where she was and what had happened the night before flooded her mind.

Courtney was asleep, her naked body barely covered by the comforter. Nicole looked at the clock on the nightstand that read 8:30 AM. Courtney hadn't made it back over to her own bed until almost 4:30 thanks to their extracurriculars. Nicole sighed when she thought about it. Although she would never admit it to Courtney, last night had been the best sex of her life. She knew it didn't mean anything. She wasn't dense enough to believe they would ride off into the sunset together, and she knew Courtney wasn't either. They could barely stand each other at this point. It just so happened that they had amazing sexual chemistry. Who knew?

"Why are you awake and why are you staring at me?" Courtney asked without even opening her eyes.

Busted. "How could you possibly know I'm staring at you?"

"I feel your eyes on me." Courtney opened just one eye. "So, do you like what you see?"

"It's alright."

Courtney rolled onto her side so her back was to Nicole, and Nicole knew it was no mistake that she let the comforter completely fall away from her body, her bare ass hanging out in all its glory. “Just alright? The sounds you were making last night told me otherwise.”

“I could say the same to you. But that’s no surprise. I always make my shot.”

Courtney sat up in bed and Nicole tried to make her wandering eyes as subtle as possible while she watched Courtney grab a piece of paper off the nightstand and crinkle it into a ball. Much to Nicole’s surprise, Courtney threw it at her then nodded to the trash can across the room. “Do it then.”

“Excuse me?”

“You said you always make your shot. Make that one.”

Nicole laughed when she realized what Courtney was asking her to do, but she still picked up the makeshift paper ball. Obviously, she wasn’t going to shy away from a challenge. “Easy.” She tossed the paper and was happy when it soared right into the trash can. “Your turn.”

Courtney stood up, grabbed the paper ball out of the trash can, then walked to the farthest corner of the room. As if that wasn’t enough, she turned around and threw it over her shoulder, somehow finding a way to get it into the trash can.

Show off. “You know,” Nicole said as she slipped out of her own bed and walked over to where Courtney was standing. “We never concluded who was the better basketball player. What do you say we decide with a little game of one on one?”

“It’s on.” Courtney’s eyes moved across the room as if she was looking for something. “Are my clothes still in your bed?”

Courtney began to move toward the bed and against all her better judgment, Nicole grabbed a hold of her wrist. “Those won’t be necessary.”

Nicole didn’t mean to have sex with Courtney again. She also didn’t mean for it to cause them to miss their last brunch with their best friends and have to make up an excuse about oversleeping. She felt guilty as she said goodbye to Roberta at the airport since she didn’t know when she would see her best friend next. She felt even more guilty when Fulton

let them know that he had upgraded their plane tickets to first class since they had successfully made it through the trip without killing each other.

The mimosa she was handed soon after sitting down was enough to squash some of those worries though. She held her glass up to Courtney's. "To not killing each other."

They sipped on their drinks and were both quiet as the plane took off. They continued to sit in a weirdly comfortable silence for the next hour. Nicole wanted to sleep, but her mind was too busy running back through everything that had happened on this trip, especially the events from the night before. When Courtney looked over at her, she hoped her face wasn't flushed from reliving those moments.

Courtney didn't seem to notice and leaned in close to whisper into Nicole's ear. "Are you a member of the Mile High Club yet?"

Nicole coughed on the drink she had just taken a sip of. Out of all the things she had expected Courtney to say, that was not one of them. "Is this your way of asking me to sneak off to the bathroom with you so you can have your way with me?"

Courtney took the blanket that was draped over her lap and spread it out across both of them. Then she slipped her hand onto the button of Nicole's jean shorts and silently asked her for permission.

Nicole nodded and tried her best to keep her cool as Courtney unbuttoned her shorts then slid her hand inside. She couldn't help but laugh as those fingers ran over her. This was all so insane. "I always knew you were bad. Back in high school, everyone thought I was the troublemaker. People from my school, your school, every other school in our goddamn district. I always knew the truth though. You tried to hide it behind that sweet smile, but I saw right through it."

"Are you going to shut up? This really isn't as much fun with you running your mouth."

"My point exactly." Nicole bit down on her lip and closed her eyes in response to a particularly good stroke of Courtney's fingers.

When Courtney's thumb landed on Nicole's clit and started making circles around it, Nicole put her hand down on top of hers to show her she was at the right spot.

Courtney stopped what she was doing, but only for a second to whisper to Nicole again. "This is the one and only time you'll ever hear me

say this, but you're in control. Show me what you want."

Nicole directed Courtney's hand across her center, making sure she hit each and every spot that drove her absolutely insane. As Nicole came closer to the edge, Courtney moved her fingers faster and Nicole held them in place, silently riding out her orgasm as her other hand dug into her seat.

She quickly breathed in and out until she finally caught her breath. "Courtney, that was..."

"I know." Courtney's lips settled into a smirk.

Never mind. Nicole couldn't have that. There was no way she could have Courtney believing she had won. She needed to get that smug look off her face, and she knew exactly how to do that. "Your turn," she whispered loud enough for just Courtney to hear.

Between the comfy seats and the entertainment, the flight went by quickly and before Nicole knew it, they had landed and made their way back through customs.

"Well, looks like our time has come to an end," Nicole said as she and Courtney stood outside the airport waiting for shuttles to take them to their respective car lots.

"That it does." Courtney paused and looked around. "I have to admit that I didn't have a *terrible* time with you on this trip."

"So, does that mean you'll be excited to see me at the wedding?"

"I wouldn't go *that* far. I certainly won't dread it though."

Both stood there silently just staring at each other until Nicole's shuttle pulled up. She awkwardly hitched her thumb toward it, then chastised herself for being so uncool. "That's me. See you at the wedding."

And just like that, Courtney Fields was back out of her life. It had been a nice, satisfying trip, especially at the end, but she was happy she and Courtney seemed to be on the same page with everything. They agreed not to tell Roberta and Fulton since they would make a much bigger deal out of it than it needed to be. Because it wasn't a big deal at all. The two of them hadn't even exchanged numbers. They were both able to have fun and not endure any sort of awkward fallout. It was perfect.

As soon as she sat down inside her car, her phone began to ring with a FaceTime call from Roberta. "Miss me already?" she asked after picking up.

“Obvi, but that’s not why I’m calling. I wanted to ask you this during brunch, but since *someone* decided to sleep in, I didn’t get the chance. Nicole Marie Dawson, will you be my Maid of Honor?”

Even though Nicole figured this was coming, it still warmed her heart to hear Roberta ask. “Of course! I’m going to be the best damn Maid of Honor to ever maid of honor. Just give me the details whenever you start planning and whatever I can do for you, I will.”

Roberta gave her a smile that told her she was about to drop a bomb on her. “So, that’s the thing. As soon as we got engaged, Fulton’s mom got the ball rolling on starting to plan. I think she had already started *before* we were engaged, but that’s fine. Do you remember that place in Philly that we went to for that charity ball during college?”

Nicole laughed at the memory. “You mean the one you got us invited to because you were doing your professor?”

“First of all, I wasn’t *doing* my professor. It was the teacher’s assistant and I was done with the class at that point. Second of all, that doesn’t even matter anymore. Do you remember how gorgeous that place was? Huge dance floor, that beautiful chandelier.”

Nicole nodded. She was pretty sure she knew exactly where this conversation was going. “Of course I remember. You told me you were going to find yourself a sugar daddy so you could get married there someday.”

Roberta covered her face with one hand as if she was embarrassed. “Oh shit. I did say that, didn’t I? Well, I promise that’s *not* why I got with Fulton, but apparently I’ve mentioned the place to him multiple times while I was drunk. So, being the sweetheart he is, he mentioned that to his mom, and she started looking into it. Did you know that place books up like three years ahead?”

“Ouch. Sorry. That sucks.”

“It does. Except it turns out luck is on our side. They had a cancellation for September that happened to fall through the *same day* Fulton’s mom was meeting with them.”

Nicole’s eyes went wide. Certainly, Roberta didn’t mean *this* September. “September, as in three months from now?”

There was that smile again. “Yeah. I know it’s quick, but how were we supposed to turn it down? Waiting three years to marry the love of my

life would be crazy.”

Nicole laughed. “Yeah, almost as crazy as trying to plan a whole wedding from across the country in *three months*.”

“See. That’s why I need my bestie. Are you up for the challenge?”

“You know I’m always up for a challenge. I might think you’re insane, but I’ve got you. Plus, hey, this will give me a chance to spend some quality time with Griffin. I’m sure he won’t take his Best Man duties nearly as seriously, but I’ll keep him on track.”

Now, Roberta was the one to laugh. “Oh god, you don’t actually think Fulton would trust Griffin to be his Best Man, do you? He asked Courtney to be his Best Woman instead.” *Courtney? Wait. What?* Roberta must have noticed the shocked look on Nicole’s face, because she immediately looked down at the watch on her wrist. “Sorry, bestie, gotta go. I’ll send over the details!”

Before she could answer, Roberta had hung up. Nicole rubbed her forehead as she took in what she had just learned. Roberta was getting married. In three months. In Philly. And she and Courtney were the two people chosen to help them pull it off. Well, this certainly just got interesting.

Chapter 6

Courtney took a deep breath as she stared at the building in front of her. She couldn't believe any of this was happening. Fulton and Roberta were getting married in three months and she was expected to help make sure the planning went smoothly. Not only that, but she was expected to do it with her enemy turned one-night stand. Not that Fulton and Roberta knew about the one-night stand part. She knew how their minds worked. Telling them about it would get their hopes up for no reason. Nicole might have been amazing in bed, but she was still Nicole Dawson, that obnoxious girl who couldn't get over the fact that she accidentally broke her nose one time.

Yet, here she was, walking into the wedding venue Roberta chose and about to see Nicole just a week after their trip. Her jaw dropped as soon as she stepped inside. She knew Fulton's family was rich, but this took richness to a whole new level. The room was huge. The dance floor in the center seemed bigger than entire wedding venues she'd been to in the past. The stage at the far end of the room looked like it was set to hold Taylor Swift rather than a wedding band. When she looked up, a breathtaking chandelier caught her eyes.

"Excuse me, miss, are you lost? I thought this was a place for people who could find someone to marry them."

Courtney glared at Nicole, who had somehow snuck up beside her without her noticing. "If that's the case, why are you here?"

Nicole's blue eyes sparkled under the light of the chandelier, and Courtney hated that she couldn't look away. "Honestly, I'm not sure. Roberta texted to let me know I needed to be here at this time. She didn't give me any details."

"I got about the same from Fulton's mom. She said she had to make some very important decisions today and needed help from the two people who know Fulton and Roberta the best, which apparently is the two of us."

Courtney's attention was torn away from Nicole by the sound of footsteps getting closer to them. She looked over expecting to see Mrs. Shea, but instead it was a tall woman with perfectly straight brown hair who

was rocking a sexy fitted pantsuit. She was quickly moving toward them, which was impressive given the heels she was wearing.

“Are you here to discuss the Shea wedding?” She pulled out a large calendar book that was filled to the brim with a random assortment of receipts, checks, and random papers covered in notes. She thumbed through the pages as if she had no time to be doing this. “The wedding is in September, which means this would normally be the time when we are starting to finalize things. Instead, this is the beginning so bear with me. We’re kind of going to be doing everything at double time.”

“Lucky for you, I’m great at double time,” Nicole flirted, causing Courtney to roll her eyes.

The woman looked up from her notes and smiled for the first time since walking over. “Perfect.”

Her smile faltered when her eyes caught something behind them, and she grabbed Courtney’s arm, pulling her to the side just in time for someone to come stumbling by with a very large wedding cake. The woman breathed an audible sigh of relief before releasing Courtney’s arm. “Well, that was close.” She pointed back toward the man with the cake. “I’m going to go take care of that. Once the third member of your party gets here, meet me at that table on the far right over there. I’m Kay, by the way, I guess I should have led with that.” She flashed them both a shining smile before walking away.

“Did you see that?” Nicole asked as soon as she was out of ear shot.

“See what?”

“She was totally flirting with me.”

Courtney scoffed. What the hell was this girl on? “In what universe?”

“Okay. Maybe *she* didn’t flirt, but she readily accepted my flirting. Maybe I should see if I can get her number.”

Something bubbled up in Courtney’s chest that she couldn’t identify. “If she was flirting with anyone, it was me. Did you see how she grabbed my arm?”

Much to her surprise, Nicole started to laugh. “Yeah. So you didn’t become part of someone’s wedding cake. Pretty sure that was more about the cake than you.”

“She held it longer than she had to.” Courtney wasn’t even sure if this was true, but she was sticking to it. “Plus, either way, she saved me. She’s like my knight in shining pantsuit. Maybe *I* should get her number.”

“Sorry I’m late, girls,” a sweet high-pitched voice called from behind them. Mrs. Shea hurried over to them and gave each a big hug. “It’s nice to see both of you. I’m very thankful you’re willing to help so much with this. I know it’s all very crazy, but anything to make my future daughter-in-law happy. Speaking of which, Roberta asked if you could FaceTime her for the important parts of the meeting, Nicole.”

“Of course. No problem.” Nicole pointed at the table Kay was now sitting at. “Should we get this show on the road?”

When they sat down at the table, Kay flashed them another wide grin. “I apologize for how things started out. It’s been a bit of a long day already.”

“No worries at all. You’re doing great,” Nicole hopelessly flirted. Kay’s eyes fell on Nicole’s. “Thank you. I appreciate that.”

Nicole knocked her knee against Courtney’s under the table as if to silently say that she was winning. Courtney gave her a subtle glare before smiling back at Kay, who returned her smile tenfold.

“So, I hear that the bride and groom are in California so most of this will be done remotely. I’m glad you’re all able to be here though. It will make things easier. Tell me a little bit about the couple before we start.”

Courtney let Mrs. Shea take that question since she seemed happy to give her son and future daughter-in-law’s life story. Courtney zoned out and took in every intricate detail of the wedding venue. She zoned back in as Mrs. Shea explaining Fulton’s proposal in Cabo.

“Oh, Cabo is beautiful. Did you guys have a nice time?”

Nicole smirked and Courtney had a feeling she was about to say something inappropriate. “We found ways to entertain ourselves. That’s for sure.”

“That’s great,” Kay said, seemingly not catching on to what Nicole was getting at. Thank God. Courtney didn’t need this hot woman to think there was something more between her and Nicole. “My husband and I went to Cabo last summer. We stayed at a more family-friendly resort though because our kids were with us.”

Just as Courtney was chastising herself for assuming this woman was gay, her phone vibrated with a text message from an unknown number. *Looks like neither of us are getting laid.*

Courtney shook her head and tried to bite back her smile, hoping Nicole didn't notice she had put it there. *How did you get my number? Stalker.*

Nicole let out a brief laugh. *Roberta gave it to me.*

This text was followed closely by another. *For planning purposes. I didn't ask for it.*

Obviously. You're too busy pining over married women.

Whatever. Married or not, she was still flirting with me. Too bad for her though. I'm just not that kind of woman.

And what kind of woman are you? Courtney knew she was asking for trouble, but she couldn't help herself. Flirting with Nicole was too hard to resist.

For a minute, there was no response and Courtney thought maybe Nicole was done with this conversation. Courtney reached out and took the glass of water sitting in front of her, taking a sip as her phone vibrated again. When she read the words, she spit out the water she was drinking. *The kind that can make even her worst enemy come five times in one night.*

"Are you okay?" Mrs. Shea asked and Courtney noticed that all eyes were now on her.

She could feel her face turning red and could see Nicole out of the corner of her eye biting back a laugh. "Oh yeah, sorry. My water went down the wrong tube."

"Alright. Let's get started," Kay said. "If you want to FaceTime Roberta now, you can."

After an hour and a half that felt more like half a day, they'd made a lot of progress. Courtney had no idea there were so many decisions that had to be made for a wedding, from chairs to colors to table arrangements. It was crazy and made her want a small, intimate wedding even more. Luckily, Roberta was easy to please and not very picky, making the process much easier than it would be with someone opinionated but indecisive.

Kay leafed through her calendar once again as the meeting was winding down. "We find that a lot of times when people have a chance to sit back and really think about some of this stuff, they realize they changed

their mind about what they want. So, if it works for everyone, let's meet at the same time in three weeks and go over everything from today again. Then we'll start talking about food and bar options."

They all nodded in agreement before standing to leave. Once outside, Mrs. Shea gave them both hugs again, then left so it was just the two of them.

"Well, I guess I better be getting home." Nicole said with a sigh. "I'm starting with some new clients at work tomorrow so it's going to be a long day."

"Where is home?" Courtney asked. It seemed strange that she knew every curve of Nicole's body and exactly how she sounded when she came, but didn't know what town she lived in.

"King of Prussia. I live less than five minutes from the mall. What about you? Roberta told me we live like a half hour apart."

"Even less than that actually. I live in West Chester about a mile away from the college."

Nicole laughed and shook her head. "Kind of crazy how we both ended up here, about three hours from where we grew up, after going to college on opposite ends of the country." She focused on Courtney and the light from the sun had her blue eyes sparkling once again. "What brought you to this area anyway? Makes sense for me since I went to UPenn."

"California was great, but I wanted to be closer to home. Still, I couldn't imagine actually living back at home, so I ended up applying for jobs all over within a one- to four-hour radius and this is where I happened to end up. I love it though. I couldn't imagine ever moving more than a half hour from where I am right now."

"I get it. I feel the exact same way."

A comfortable silence fell between them once again as Courtney thought about just how weird all of this was. Nicole was right. It really was crazy how so many parts of their lives were connected. If it was any other girl, she probably would have convinced herself it was fate or some divine intervention, but obviously that wasn't the case with Nicole.

"Well, I'll let you go," Courtney finally spoke. "See you in three weeks."

"Yup. See you then."

Three weeks later, Nicole walked into the wedding venue feeling completely spent. Work had been crazy in the month since getting back from their trip. Trying to keep her best friend calm over the fact that she decided to plan a wedding in three months wasn't making anything easier. Most of their friendship had been spent with Roberta talking Nicole off of the ledge over a variety of things, so Nicole owed her this.

She wasn't very talkative during the meeting and felt like she wasn't much help, but when it ended, both Roberta and Kay seemed satisfied, so she took that as a win. All she wanted to do was get home and sleep, so she said a quick goodbye then slipped out. She had just made it out the door of the venue when a hand caught her arm.

"Are you okay?" Courtney asked, her face showing genuine concern. "You were really quiet today. I don't think you made one obnoxious comment that whole time. Plus, you look really tired."

"Telling someone they look tired is just a nice way of saying they look like shit."

"This is me you're talking to. If you looked like shit, I would say it." Courtney nodded her head down the street. "There's a little coffee shop on the next block. Why don't we get some fuel and you can tell me what's going on?"

This interaction was so different than most between her and Courtney, leaving Nicole feeling confused. "Why are you being so nice to me?"

"Honestly? I could use some coffee, but I need an excuse to have my third one of the day."

Nicole couldn't help but laugh at this. "Fair enough." She motioned for Courtney to lead the way then followed behind her.

"So, what's up?" Courtney asked once they were seated at a table, drinks in front of them.

"Work has just been crazy lately. One of my coworkers quit so I took some of his clients, plus I got a few new ones of my own. I love what I do, but sometimes it's so damn hard. I'm not just physically exhausted. I'm emotionally exhausted."

“I get it. A lot of times the most rewarding jobs are also the most taxing. Did something specific happen recently?”

Nicole stared down at her drink, stirring it slowly as she thought about her newest client. She was worried she might start to cry right there at the table, which was something she admittedly had done a few times after getting home from work or while sitting in her car during her lunch break. “One of my new clients. She’s seventeen years old. She was supposed to be starting at UPenn this fall, and believe it or not, was going to be on the track team. She’s now taking at least a semester off school and probably won’t ever run again.”

“Oh God. What happened?”

Nicole took a deep breath. *Don’t cry right now*, she told herself. “Drunk driver ran a red light and hit her car head on. She’s lucky to be alive, but of course she doesn’t see it that way, and I don’t blame her.”

Much to Nicole’s surprise, Courtney reached out and touched her hand. Courtney must have noticed her reaction and quickly took her hand back. “You get to make a difference in her life though. Just keep reminding yourself of that.”

“I can’t give her what she truly wants.” Nicole shook her head. “I mean, could you imagine that? I realize people will always say *things could be so much worse*, but what would you have done if you couldn’t compete in college?”

“Honestly, I’ve been out of college for five years now, and sometimes I *still* feel like I don’t know who I am without sports. And I had my time. I didn’t have anything ripped away from me. So, yeah, I have no idea what I would’ve done.”

It was refreshing to talk to someone who understood this. Most of her friends didn’t understand the loss Nicole felt when she was no longer an athlete. “Exactly. I have yet to find something that gives me the same feeling that playing sports did. Nothing seems as fulfilling, which sounds pathetic to say. Work comes close. Seeing my clients make gains is amazing. I gotta be honest though. Sometimes, I wish I still had a crowd of people cheering me on telling me I was doing the right thing.”

Nicole couldn’t believe she had admitted her insecurities out loud and to Courtney of all people. Maybe this lack of sleep really was getting to

her. “Anyway, I know I shouldn’t complain. I just feel bad for her. It’s hard to see.”

“You don’t have to explain. I totally get it. You’re passionate. That’s a good thing. It’s what made you a good athlete and now a good occupational therapist.”

“Did you just give me multiple compliments?”

Courtney scrunched up her nose as if she was disgusted. “Ew, you’re right. What am I saying? I hope you don’t think this means I actually like you.”

“Absolutely not. Don’t worry. The contempt is totally mutual.”

They both laughed in response to their playful banter, but as the laughter wore off the moment seemed to get heavy again and Nicole felt like she should say something else. “Thank you for listening though. Seriously. I needed this. Normally, Roberta is my go-to, but she’s a bit busy with everything.”

“Don’t mention it. Like I said, I needed more coffee anyway.” She shook her empty coffee cup, but then became serious. “But if you need anything else, let me know. I mean it.”

Nicole was surprised by the first thought that popped into her head in response to Courtney’s offer. Damn her dirty mind, coming out even in the midst of a serious conversation. She couldn’t help it though. When she thought back to the last time she felt totally at ease, it was a month ago in Cabo. It wasn’t the beautiful beach or the endless alcohol that had made her feel that way though. It was that night they had together that she hadn’t stopped thinking about since.

“You look like you want to say something,” Courtney’s voice interrupted Nicole’s thoughts.

“I just had a crazy, stupid idea, but just forget about it.”

Courtney tilted her head slightly to one side. “Well, now I’m intrigued so you have to share it.”

What the hell, she might as well. What did she have to lose? It’s not like it mattered what Courtney thought of her. “I don’t know how work will be for you once school starts back up, but I’ve realized that, between work and this wedding, I’m not going to have any time to date. If my level of exhaustion stays the same, any hope of going out to a club and hooking up

with someone is off the table too. And it's not like I'm one of those people who needs to have sex, but—”

“Nicole Dawson, are you propositioning me?”

Nicole shrugged. “It depends if it's working. If not, I'll deny ever bringing it up.”

“You're right. It's completely crazy. We just reached the level of somewhat tolerating each other. You're essentially suggesting that we become enemies with benefits.” Nicole was about to make up some lie about how she didn't mean it when Courtney spoke again. “So, when do we start?”

Nicole was so shocked, she almost didn't register what Courtney was saying. Luckily, she quickly snapped herself out of it. She looked down at the non-existent watch on her wrist. “I'm free now.”

Courtney threw her empty cup into the trash can a few feet away, a proud smile adorning her face when she looked back at Nicole. “Your place or mine?”

Chapter 7

“Wait. So, tell me again. *Why* are you at Courtney’s apartment right now?” Roberta asked Nicole over FaceTime.

In the two weeks since they’d made their agreement, Nicole had spent a lot of time at this apartment. She was there at least a few hours every night of the weekend and had even stopped by after a few particularly challenging days at work. She wasn’t sure why Courtney’s apartment had become their designated sex spot, but she didn’t mind. Her one-bedroom apartment was cute and welcoming. It was filled with bright colors and even had cream-colored furniture that Nicole had yet to figure out how Courtney kept clean. Big windows allowed for the sun to provide natural light to the whole apartment. It was in such contrast to Nicole’s apartment that mostly consisted of dark brown and black, that coming there felt like an escape. Not to mention, the mattress on Courtney’s bed was so soft, it felt like having sex on a cloud. Some nights, it was nearly impossible for Nicole to not just let herself drift off to sleep on it, but that would have broken every unspoken rule of their agreement.

“Earth to Nicole,” Roberta’s voice cut through her thoughts.

“I’m sorry. What was the question?”

“I asked why you’re at Courtney’s apartment on a random Friday night.” The way Roberta’s eyes lit up when she asked the question told Nicole why Roberta *wanted* her to be there, but she could shove that pipe dream of the four of them going on double dates up her ass because it would *never* happen.

“I told you. She’s *helping* me with something.”

Before Nicole knew what was happening, Courtney crouched down in front of the couch, unbuttoned her jean shorts, and slowly pulled them off of her legs. She gave her a look that silently asked what the hell she was doing but the only thing Courtney gave her in return was a seductive wink that made her even more turned on than she already felt.

“What’s she helping you with? And where is she anyway?”

Nicole had to work to keep her breathing steady as Courtney scratched her fingers down her thighs. “She’s touching, um, I mean

teaching me some new relaxation techniques. She's, ah, preparing them right now."

Courtney replaced her hands with her mouth, kissing and licking the inside of both of her thighs, and Nicole wondered how she was ever going to hold herself together to finish this phone call.

"Interesting," Roberta said as if she wasn't convinced. "Anyway, I just wanted to confirm that you guys are okay with doing the tasting for me on Sunday. Fulton offered to fly me to Philly to do it, but that's ridiculous. We're pretty sure we want the choices to be filet mignon, salmon, and chicken pasta primavera, so I just need you guys to try them and make sure they don't taste like shit."

Nicole bit back a groan as Courtney placed multiple kisses over her underwear-clad center. "Sounds great. Courtney says she *can't wait* to taste it."

Not missing her innuendo, Courtney wiggled her eyebrows, then removed Nicole's underwear, so she was completely nude from the waist down. "I really should go though," Nicole said quickly, trying her best to keep her voice steady now that Courtney's kisses were directly on her center. "Courtney is *impatiently* waiting to go over these techniques."

As if on cue, Courtney spread Nicole's legs farther apart and ran her tongue through her folds. Yep, Nicole was going to lose it.

"No worries. Have a good night, you two."

"Goodnight," Nicole and Courtney said in unison.

Nicole threw her phone down on the couch and glared at Courtney. "What the hell was that?"

"What? Did you not like it?" Courtney asked, sounding so innocent for the girl who had just been trying to get Nicole off while she was on the phone.

"No. Well, okay, yeah. But still. What if I had lost control and screamed or something?"

"Is this your way of admitting that I can make you scream?" Courtney asked while she moved her thumb in a circular motion over Nicole's clit.

Good lord, this girl was going to be the death of her. "Not any louder than I make you scream," Nicole said in protest.

Courtney stood for a second, before removing her own pants and straddling Nicole's lap. "I guess we need to test that theory out, don't we?"

The sound of Nicole's phone ringing once again pulled their attention away from what they were doing. "I swear if that's Roberta again..." Nicole said with a huff, but when she looked at the screen, it was her mom who was FaceTiming her this time.

"Shit, I need to take this," Nicole said as she gently pushed Courtney off of her. "If I don't call her back within ten minutes, she'll send out a police force to check on me or at least have my whole family looking for me."

Nicole pulled on her shorts and underwear and motioned toward Courtney's on the floor. "We'll continue this shortly, but I refuse to have either of us naked while I talk to my mom. That's where I draw the line."

Nicole hit the button to return her mom's call as Courtney pulled her pants back on. It only took about two rings before her mom picked up, her brown hair looking slightly disheveled and worry lines across her forehead. "Oh thank God you called back. I was starting to get worried."

"Mom, you called like two minutes ago."

"I know, but I was expecting you to pick up."

Nicole laughed. "It's Friday night. I don't always just sit at home, you know."

Her mom's eyes moved around as if she was trying to look at something past Nicole. "Speaking of which, where are you right now?"

"Funny story, actually. Do you remember Courtney Fields from Somerton?" Nicole wasn't sure why she hadn't mentioned Courtney to her mom in all the times they talked since her trip to Cabo.

"Courtney Fields? Of course I remember her. She was an excellent athlete. Gave you a run for your money."

Nicole rolled her eyes. "Well, she's friends with Roberta's fiancé Fulton. She was on the Cabo trip with us and now we're both helping to plan their wedding. I'm at her apartment right now."

Nicole's mom squealed as if this was very exciting information, and Nicole was immediately reminded why she hadn't said anything before. "Put her on! I want to say hello."

Courtney scooted close to Nicole on the couch so she could be seen on the screen and waved to Nicole's mom. "Hi, Mrs. Dawson. It's nice to

meet you.”

Nicole’s mom shook her head as if she was amazed. “Wow. Two of our county’s best athletes of all time. I wish your father wasn’t out picking up dinner right now. He would love this. It’s very nice to officially meet you too, dear.” Nicole’s mom moved her eyes from Courtney back to Nicole. “She’s very pretty,” she said as if Courtney suddenly couldn’t hear her, the tone of her voice making it clear what she was trying to get at.

Nicole groaned. “Mom, we’ve talked about this. You can’t just assume all my friends are gay. It’s weird.”

“I’m sorry. I hope I haven’t offended anyone.”

“You didn’t offend me, Mrs. Dawson,” Courtney answered cheerfully. “I’m very happy to accept any compliments and I’m also very much gay.”

“*And very much just my friend,*” Nicole added before her mom could start making their wedding plans.

“Well, I think you should bring your *friend* to our Labor Day party next month.”

“I don’t even know if I can make it, Mom.”

Her mom laughed as if this was a joke. “Of course you can, honey. You work too hard. You need this time with your family. And Courtney, you should invite your family as well.”

Nicole opened her mouth to argue with her mom, but was stopped when Courtney answered instead. “That sounds great. I’m sure my parents would love it.”

Her mom’s already wide grin grew even wider. “That’s wonderful. I’ll let you two get back to whatever you were doing, but I can’t wait to see you both next month.”

Once she hung up, Nicole glared at Courtney once again. “I can’t believe you told my mom you would go to my family’s Labor Day party.”

“What can I say? Your mom’s very convincing.”

“All she did was call you pretty.”

“And complimented my athletic ability.”

“So, you’re saying all someone has to do to get you to do what they want is shower you with compliments?”

Courtney shrugged. “It certainly doesn’t hurt.”

Nicole pushed Courtney down into a lying position and crawled on top of her. “In that case, you’re sexy as hell. Now, take your pants off, please.”

I’m bored.

Courtney laughed when she read Nicole’s text, knowing exactly what that was code for. *Bored or horny?*

...Maybe a little bit of both

Courtney had to hand it to her. She had no idea how Nicole still had energy for sex after how many rounds they went the night before. What started on the couch had eventually moved to the bedroom and went until Courtney insisted Nicole leave so she didn’t fall asleep on her drive home.

Well, you’re going to have to control yourself for a bit. I’m about to go do a workout at the high school track. Wanna come over in about two hours?

The track? What kind of workout are you going to do? Can I come?

Courtney looked at the text, thinking she might have read it wrong. While it wasn’t weird that Nicole wanted to work out, she was surprised she would want to do it together. In a way other than one that involved them getting naked, of course. She looked at her watch and realized it was just slightly past 2:00. There was no reason she couldn’t wait to start. *Sounds good. I’ll send the address. Meet me there in 45 minutes.*

Like clockwork, 45 minutes later, both Courtney and Nicole were pulling up to the high school. “Fancy meeting you here,” Nicole said as she stepped out of her car—a navy blue Jeep Wrangler. “What workout did you have in mind for today?”

“I was going to do twelve 200s, mid-speed, 3 sets of 4 with minimal recovery. Think you could keep up?”

Honestly, Courtney wasn’t even sure if she could keep up. That wasn’t the workout she originally had in mind at all, but she had altered it to show Nicole she was in tip-top shape.

She didn’t miss the way Nicole’s eyebrows raised slightly for a split second, but she quickly recovered. “That’s all of you’ve got for me? Bring it.”

After stretching and warming up, they began the workout. Against her better judgment, Courtney pushed herself harder than she normally would, but it seemed to be paying off since it appeared that Nicole was starting to have trouble keeping up.

When they were about to start their last two-hundred, Courtney smirked at Nicole. "I was going to ask if you wanted to end the day with a race, but I'm not sure you can handle it."

Nicole scowled at her and jumped up and down to warm up her muscles more. "Do you realize who you're talking to? I'm surprised you're giving me the opportunity to beat you on the track again."

Oh, it was totally on. "I guess we'll just have to see about that, huh? Because, from where I'm standing, you don't seem to be in the same shape you used to be, old lady."

"Still in good enough shape to beat you," Nicole said as she took a spot at the starting line. "You can start us."

Courtney lined up in her lane as well and counted down from three. Even though she was exhausted from the workout, she felt good as she swiftly moved down the track. She looked beside her and found that she and Nicole were neck and neck so she pushed even harder and felt herself pulling ahead. Unfortunately, she felt something else pulling as well. She tried to keep pushing through her tiring muscles, but came to an abrupt stop when the pain was too much to bear.

"Shit," she said, not only because it hurt but also because Nicole was about to cross the finish line.

Much to her surprise, when Nicole realized what had happened, she stopped, and instead of running the last few feet to the finish line, turned around and ran back to Courtney. "Are you okay? I swear to God, if this is some trick where you say *gotcha* and run away to beat me, I'm going to kill you."

Courtney shook her head. "I wouldn't stoop to that level," she lied since it was definitely something she would do. "I think I pulled a muscle."

Nicole looked at her with a genuine concern that surprised Courtney. "What hurts?"

Courtney was embarrassed, but pointed right toward her butt. In a not-so-surprising turn of events, Nicole started to laugh. "Your ass muscle? You pulled your ass muscle?"

“I truly hope you’re smart enough to realize it’s not actually called *ass muscle*.” Courtney smiled when her next comment popped into her head. “But then again, I guess you weren’t a Stanford grad. Maybe you don’t know.”

“I’m going to let that one slide for now, but as soon as you’re feeling better, I’ll go through all the reasons UPenn should be ranked over Stanford. And yes, I realize it’s not called your ‘ass muscle,’ but I like that better than *gluteus maximus*. Much funnier that way.”

Courtney rubbed at her butt. “Well, this isn’t funny. It actually hurts.”

Nicole pointed to their cars in the parking lot. “Meet me at your apartment and I’ll help nurse you back to health.”

Courtney was sure there was a sexual innuendo in there, but that was the last thing on her mind right now. “I can’t have sex right now. I’m sorry.”

“Is that how they taught you to take care of a muscle strain at Stanford? Is that old research or new research? Because I would love to be part of those studies. I was thinking we would use the ice and medicine method for today though.”

“You... you want to come over even without sex?” Courtney didn’t know why that fact was making her feel choked up. Maybe the pain was getting to her.

“Yeah,” Nicole answered quickly, before adding, “I mean, if you want me to. If you just want to be alone I completely understand.”

“No. I want you to. I was just surprised.” But was she more surprised that Nicole wanted to be there or that she wanted her to be there so badly? Either way, it was a strange feeling.

“Okay. I’ll see you there.” Nicole quickly turned around and practically jogged to her car.

What the hell was that all about?

“Make yourself comfortable and I’ll get everything you need,” Nicole directed once they were back at her apartment.

Courtney sat down on the couch and watched as Nicole rushed into her kitchen and grabbed an ice pack out of the freezer before taking a bottle of water out of the fridge. She then walked down the hallway and came back into the room a minute later carrying the comforter and pillows from Courtney's bed.

"Stand up real quick," she directed, then placed a few pillows across the couch and sat the ice pack on top of one of them. "Sit right there. I'll set a few alarms so we remember to take the ice pack off and on."

Courtney was in awe as she made herself as comfortable as she could and Nicole draped the comforter over her. This was the last thing she expected from her. Although, given her job, it was probably her natural instinct to take care of people.

"So, are you going to take up the whole couch or can I join you?"

And just like that, the sarcastic asshole was back. Courtney couldn't bring herself to be annoyed this time though. She moved closer to one side of the couch and Nicole sat down on the other, stretching her feet out so they met Courtney's in the middle.

"Trying to play footsie with me?" Courtney joked. Although, she had to admit that she liked the feeling of that light touch from Nicole. It had been a long time since she was in a relationship, and not that that's what this was, but she had missed having this closeness with someone. She shook those thoughts from her head. Why was she even thinking about Nicole that way?

"No, I'm just trying to stretch out, but your big feet are in the way."

Courtney kicked her foot into Nicole's leg. "Hey, you know what they say about big feet."

"Big shoes?"

"Big strap-ons."

Nicole coughed and spit out the water she was drinking, clearly just as shocked by Courtney's words as she was. "I was not expecting that."

"Honestly, neither was I. I'm not sure where that came from."

"So, is it true? Is it big?"

Courtney shrugged. She couldn't believe they were having this conversation. "It's average."

Nicole laughed and shook her head. "I think that's the most humble thing you've ever said." She stopped laughing and Courtney could tell she

was nervous by the way she chewed on her lip. “I’ve never had that done to me. I mean, by a girl. I’ve been with guys, but they....”

Courtney put a hand up to stop her. “I may be a lesbian, but I know how male anatomy works. You don’t need to explain it to me.”

Nicole nodded slowly, but didn’t say anything else. Courtney wondered why she had even mentioned that. She was tempted to ask her, but decided to leave it be.

“Is this where you expected to be when you were twenty-six?”

“On Courtney Fields’s couch talking about strap-ons while she iced her ass? Absolutely not. High school me would be mortified right now.”

Courtney picked up the pillow from behind her back and tossed it at Nicole. “That’s not what I meant. I meant, is this where you expected your life to be at this point?”

Nicole looked out in the distance as if deep in thought. “Honestly, no. I thought I would at least be in a serious relationship by now. None of my relationships have lasted long. I don’t think people can handle my strong personality.”

“You are a lot to handle,” Courtney joked. When Nicole didn’t laugh, she added, “You just need to find someone who can keep up with you. I get it. I feel like I’m the same way.”

“I’ve never admitted this out loud, but it kind of sucks. In some ways, it can be nice to only have to answer to yourself. I can do what I want when I want, but at the same time it all feels a bit immature for twenty-six.”

Courtney understood that feeling even more than she wanted to admit, but right now it was Nicole that needed some consoling so she was going to give it. “It’s not immature. You’re twenty-six. You’re not dead. Maturity is about taking things seriously that need to be, like your job. Clearly, you take that seriously. Having meaningless sex and joking around about ass sprains are fine as long as you can be serious when needed.” For some reason, Courtney felt strange calling what had been happening with Nicole *meaningless sex*, but she tried not to think into it too much.

“Yeah. You’re right. It just sucks sometimes because my brother is only two years older than me but has been with his wife since high school, so they’ve been married for six years already and have two kids. I don’t mean to complain. I really like my life. I’m just ready for all of that.”

“You have a brother?” Courtney asked. “I’m surprised you never mentioned him.”

“We don’t seem to do much talking when we’re together,” Nicole said with a laugh.

That was true, but now that Courtney knew that Nicole had a sibling, she wanted to know more. She wanted to know exactly what made Nicole tick, and not just in bed. “Do you have any other siblings?”

“Nope. Just Sean. His wife, Marissa, is like a sister to me though. How about you?”

“I have a younger sister. She’s eight years younger than me. She was my parents’ miracle baby after they were told they couldn’t have any more kids.” Courtney smiled as she thought about her sister. She was starting to grow on her to the point that she found herself missing her more now. Luckily, that wouldn’t be the case for long since they would soon be living less than an hour apart. “She’s a good kid. She starts her first year of college in a few weeks.”

“Oh yeah? Where’s she going?”

Courtney cringed at the question. There was a very specific reason she hadn’t mentioned her sister to Nicole before this. Nicole was going to love this way too much. “She’s actually going to UPenn.”

Nicole slapped the couch as she let out a joyful laugh that made Courtney kind of want to slap her and kind of want to kiss her. “No shit! Smart girl.”

“Clearly not as smart as her sister. Just kidding. She’s actually smarter than me.” She stuck a finger up at Nicole like she was lecturing her. “But if you don’t take that fact to your grave, you’re going to be going there much sooner.”

Their conversation was cut short by the sound of an alarm telling Courtney to remove the ice. “So, how’s it feeling?” Nicole asked.

Courtney wiggled around on the couch trying to regain feeling in her butt. “Numb,” she said with a laugh.

“Want me to massage it?”

“My ass?”

Nicole shrugged. “It might help.” Her face turned the slightest bit red as if she was embarrassed for suggesting it.

Courtney lay face down on the couch so Nicole had full access to her behind. “If only high school Courtney could see me now.”

Nicole didn’t say a word. Instead, she put her hands onto the bottom of Courtney’s back and slowly moved down to knead the muscles between her fingers. God, that felt good. Courtney knew Nicole was good with her hands, but this took it to a whole new level. She bit back a groan as those hands meticulously worked. Much too soon, Nicole stopped massaging and instead moved her hands back up to Courtney’s back, running her fingers along the waistline of her shorts.

“It might work better if I, um, do it directly. I don’t mean to be forward, but it’s not like it’s anything I haven’t seen before. So, um, yeah, do you mind if I take these off?”

“Do what you need to do,” Courtney said as nonchalantly as possible even though her heart was now beating at a hundred miles per hour.

Nicole slowly pulled her shorts and underwear down to her knees, then started to do exactly what she was doing before, but with the shorts no longer in the way. This time, Courtney couldn’t control the low moan that escaped through her lips. It was so strange. Nicole had seen her naked multiple times at this point. She had taken her in so many different positions. But somehow this was different. It was more intimate and Courtney felt more exposed than ever before. Yet, she loved it. She wanted to bottle up this moment and keep it with her forever so she would never forget how it felt.

As if the feeling of Nicole’s hands working on her weren’t enough, she then leaned down and peppered kisses up her neck. She placed one final kiss behind her ear before releasing a breathless whisper. “How do you feel now?”

Courtney swallowed hard. “Wonderful. Absolutely wonderful.”

Nicole pulled back and just stared at her for a moment, those ocean blue eyes becoming darker as her pupils dilated. Then, as if she suddenly realized where she was and who she was with, she cleared her throat and quickly stood to her feet. “I guess I should probably go; let you get some sleep since we have the tasting tomorrow.”

“No,” Courtney answered much too quickly, making her sound desperate.

“No?”

A part of Courtney wanted to ask Nicole to stay the night; to tell her that it only made sense since they were going to be together tomorrow anyway. But why? Nicole was... well, honestly, she wasn't sure what Nicole was to her, but she wasn't someone who stayed the night.

“It's still early. Why don't we watch a movie before you leave?”

Nicole's whole face lit up as she smiled down at Courtney. “Deal. But I'm going to need you to pull your pants up. There's no way I can focus on a movie with your ass hanging out teasing me.”

Courtney did as instructed then moved over on the couch to make room for Nicole. This time, instead of sitting on the opposite end, Nicole sat tight up against her. This is how she stayed throughout the whole movie that Courtney couldn't even name at this point because all she could focus on was Nicole.

As promised, Nicole stood up to leave as soon as the movie ended. She said goodbye, then headed to the door without another word, only turning around once her hand was on the doorknob. “If you're up for it, once your gluteus maximus heals, I'd like for you to use your *strapeus averagous* on me.”

As if that was a perfectly normal way to leave things, Nicole turned the knob and was out the door before Courtney could fully comprehend what she said. When the words sunk in, Courtney almost melted into the couch. What. The. Hell. Just. Happened.

Chapter 8

I know this is last minute, but is there any chance you girls could go dress shopping with me tomorrow? I have an appointment at a shop in King of Prussia at 10 AM. I thought we could get lunch after. Sorry. My friend canceled on me and Griffin and my husband have no taste.

Nicole stared at the text message from Fulton's mom and tried to decide how to respond. She knew she would end up saying yes since she didn't have any plans, but she had been looking forward to her lack of plans. If she was honest, she'd been hoping Courtney would want to do something tonight, and she hoped that something would leave her feeling too tired to do anything the next day.

Nicole's thoughts were interrupted when another text message came through, this time from Courtney. *I'd be happy to help. Just send me the details and I'll be there.*

A few seconds later, Courtney sent another text just to her. *Looks like I'm going to be in your neck of the woods tomorrow. Wouldn't completely hate it if you could come.*

Nicole rolled her eyes as an involuntary smile came to her face. *How could I possibly resist that charm?*

So, that's a yes? I thought I was going to have to pull out the big guns and bribe you with a certain something you mentioned last week.

Nicole pulled her sweatshirt over her head, suddenly feeling like her apartment's temperature had gone up one hundred degrees just from that text. Nicole had never let another person have control during sex. That was until she met Courtney, of course. Ever since Courtney had brought up her strap-on, it was all Nicole could think about. She couldn't believe she had made that comment while leaving Courtney's apartment and had regretted it, especially since Courtney hadn't mentioned it again. They hadn't seen each other since the tasting the next day as they had both been exhausted—Nicole from work and Courtney from getting things ready for the start of the new school year in two weeks.

If Nicole was honest, as turned on as she felt from Courtney's text, wanting to see her went beyond sex. She had actually *missed* her this past

week, not that she would ever admit that. Courtney would enjoy that way too much and she wasn't in the business of trying to make her head any bigger.

Nicole held her phone in her hand and stared at it as she contemplated what to reply. *On second thought, maybe I do need to be bribed. How does tonight sound?* She pushed send before she could overthink what she was saying. Why was she overthinking it anyway?

Sounds like a good time. My place again?

Nicole was about to say yes when a thought popped into her head—a terribly idiotic thought that made no sense. But now that it was there, she couldn't unthink it. If Courtney was going to be in King of Prussia the next day anyway, wouldn't it make sense for her to just come tonight and stay over? *No*, she fought with herself. It made no sense. In just two months, Courtney had gone from her mortal enemy, to her sexual release, to what now? Friends with benefits? There was no reason to blur the lines more and make things even more complicated.

Apparently, her fingers didn't get the memo though because she typed out a message she was sure she'd regret once she hit Send. Yet, as soon as the message was typed, her fingers betrayed her once again by sending it off. She cringed as she re-read it. Courtney was going to think she was insane. *Actually, want to switch it up this time? Since you need to be in this area first thing in the morning and I plan on tiring you out tonight, how would you feel about staying over?*

After reading it back, she quickly added, *You know, for logistical purposes.*

She held her breath as she waited for Courtney's response, only letting it out when she finally read the words she didn't expect to see.

I think that is a logistically sound plan. See you tonight. I'll be sure to bring my footy pajamas... Ten seconds passed before another text came through. *Although, that's not all I'll be packing ;)*

Nicole typed back the only thing she could think of. The only thing that could possibly sum up exactly how she was feeling. *Ded.*

Nicole paced her apartment as she waited for Courtney to arrive. She wasn't sure why she was acting this way, but ever since she asked her to stay over, she was nervous as hell. She looked around and tried to see her apartment through Courtney's eyes. It was an open concept with the kitchen attached directly to the living room, making the area right inside the door very spacious. On the right side of this room was one door that led to her bedroom. Connected on the other side of her bedroom was the master bathroom. On the left side of the main room were two doors—one went into a small den and the other led into a half bath.

For a moment, she wondered if she should have done something to prepare. Maybe light some candles or buy some champagne. She shook her head at herself. Why was she even thinking that way? This was a hookup. A hookup where the person just happened to be staying over. It's not like this was the first time someone would spend the night with her. She didn't know why it felt so much different with Courtney.

She didn't have time to think about that because she was interrupted by a knock at her door. She cleared her throat and ran her hands down the T-shirt and jeans she was wearing, suddenly worried they weren't nice enough. "Come in."

Nicole put her hands on her knees, laughing hysterically as soon as she saw Courtney. Clearly, she shouldn't have been worried about her outfit since Courtney chose to wear a unicorn onesie over to her apartment, complete with feet and everything. She made her eyes go comically wide when they met Courtney's. "You weren't kidding about the footy pajamas."

"Oh, I don't kid," Courtney said flirtatiously.

Something about seeing Courtney Fields standing by the door of her apartment, overnight bag in hand, clad head to toe in unicorn attire, was too much for her. She was so turned on and couldn't wait any longer to touch her.

Without saying a word, she rushed over and pushed Courtney back against the door, crashing their lips together as if it had been years rather than just over a week. Courtney let out a surprised gasp and dropped her bag from her shoulder, but quickly recovered. She wrapped her arms around Nicole's shoulders and pulled her even closer. As their kiss deepened, they both let out a deep, throaty moan at the same time. Nicole probably would have found it funny if she wasn't so caught up in the moment.

After a few more seconds of kissing, Nicole pulled away and moved her mouth to Courtney's ear. She licked behind it, then on it, before taking the bottom between her teeth and biting gently. "Couch or bed?" she whispered, the low timbre of her voice from being so turned on surprising even her.

Courtney jumped up and wrapped her legs around Nicole's hips anchoring herself in place. "Definitely bed. Take me, Nicole Dawson."

That was all Nicole needed to hear. She carried Courtney into her bedroom and gently dropped her onto the bed. Before laying down herself, she pulled her T-shirt over her head and then brought her pants down her legs, trying to make it look as sexy as possible even though she was rushing to get them off.

"Someone's in a hurry," Courtney said as she positioned herself against the pillows on the back of Nicole's bed. She lifted an eyebrow and ran a hand over the spot on the bed next to her.

Nicole jumped onto the bed and immediately continued the kiss that had started in the kitchen. She removed her mouth from Courtney's only so she could kiss across her jaw and down her neck. When she got to the top of the onesie, she brought her hand up to the zipper so she could take it off. She didn't care if she was moving fast. She needed to feel Courtney *now*.

Much to her annoyance, Courtney brought her own hand up to stop her. "You should know that I'm completely naked under this, so to even the playing field, you should really take the rest of your clothes off."

That was all Nicole needed to hear. She practically ripped her underwear and bra off since she was moving so quickly. "Better?"

Courtney licked her lips as her wide eyes traveled the length of Nicole's body. "Much."

"Okay. My turn."

Nicole put her hand back on Courtney's zipper and this time she wasn't stopped. She slowly brought the zipper down, trying to find a way to make unzipping a onesie into a sexy activity. Her eyes went wide and her throat dry and she thought she might pass out when she saw what was waiting for her.

"I told you I don't kid. I said I would be packing, didn't I?" Courtney wiggled a little, causing the object between her legs to move as

well. “How do I look?”

Nicole had to clear her throat a few times before she was able to finally find her voice. Even with how turned on she was, she still managed a smirk. “You look... stunningly average.”

Courtney burst out laughing and it was sexy as hell. Nicole couldn't believe her life. There was a girl in her bed dressed as a unicorn and wearing a strap-on and it was hands down the sexiest thing she had ever seen in her entire life.

“You ready for me?” Courtney reached into a secret pocket and pulled out a tiny bottle of lube.

Now it was Nicole who burst into laughter. “There are pockets in that thing too?”

“It's very versatile,” Courtney said as she slipped it off of her body.

Courtney laid the lube beside her, then moved her hand in between Nicole's legs. “Oh my God, you really are ready for me.”

Nicole could only imagine how wet she was as Courtney ran a finger through her folds, making her even more turned on.

“I want to be in control tonight. Will you let me?”

Nicole couldn't believe she was about to let someone else take control, especially when that someone was Courtney, but she didn't even need to consider the question. She quickly nodded, ready for whatever Courtney wanted to give her.

Courtney pushed Nicole onto her back and placed kisses down her stomach. In one swift motion, she ran her tongue up Nicole's center. As she continued to taste her, Nicole knew she wasn't going to last long. Courtney was an expert with her tongue, and Nicole was already so close to the edge. Except, no matter how much she loved it, she didn't want this to be what sent her over. She clawed at Courtney's shoulders and Courtney must have gotten the hint because she backed off and kissed her way back up Nicole's body.

“Tell me what you want, babe,” she said as she moved a hand back down between Nicole's legs. With the way she was situated slightly on top of her, Nicole felt the dildo rubbing against her leg and it was driving her absolutely insane.

“I want you.” Nicole could hardly breathe at this point so she had to force herself to get the words out. “I want you inside me.”

Courtney smiled down at her with a smirk that would have gotten on Nicole's nerves before, but was now only adding to how turned on she was. Courtney continued to stare at her as she grabbed the lube and rubbed some over the dildo. It's not like she would need it at this point with how wet she already was, but Nicole knew she was mostly doing it for show. And God, was it working. Just when Nicole thought Courtney couldn't get any sexier, she did something else.

Courtney positioned herself over Nicole and slowly brought the tip of the dildo to her entrance. Nicole couldn't take it anymore. She needed this *now*. "Courtney, please," she said desperately.

Courtney's smirk became even bigger and cockier. "I like when you beg." She slowly moved into Nicole and Nicole gasped at the contact. "Are you okay?"

The only thing Nicole could do was nod and pull Courtney closer, forcing her even deeper inside. Courtney pulled back a little, then pushed back in, this time with a little more force. She continued to do this, picking up the pace each time, until she was thrusting into Nicole, hard and fast. Nicole moved with the motions and pushed right back into Courtney. Nothing had ever felt like this before and she knew it wasn't because of *what* was inside her but *who* was inside her. And with that thought, everything around her stopped. Her vision blurred as she screamed out Courtney's name and scratched at her back, forcing her to stay in place deep inside of her as she rode out her orgasm.

As Courtney slowly pulled out of her, Nicole lay flat against the bed, heaving for air, completely and utterly spent. Courtney came up beside her and wrapped one arm around her stomach, pulling her closer in the process. She nuzzled her face into Nicole's neck and Nicole tried not to overthink just how much she liked that.

They were both quiet for a few minutes, just enjoying this moment together. Finally, it was Courtney who broke the silence. "That was... wow. I'll totally deny ever saying this, but that was the greatest sex of my entire life."

Nicole pulled back a bit so she could look into those green eyes and see if she was actually being serious right now. "Really? But did you even...?"

Courtney let out a single breathy laugh. “Seriously? Yes. Just watching you was all I needed. Of course, the way you were moving your body against mine didn’t hurt either.”

“So, does that mean you’re okay if we take a little break?”

“Um yes, I absolutely need that.” Courtney looked around the room as if she was searching for something. “Now the question is, what else do you have to entertain me in this apartment?”

Nicole smiled as an idea popped into her head. “I know just the thing.”

“What is that?” Courtney asked as Nicole pulled out a giant case filled with some sort of CDs or DVDs. A few minutes ago, they had slowly made their way back out to the living room where Courtney was now sitting on the black leather couch.

“So, my parents are absolutely insane and recorded every single sporting event of mine throughout high school and college. Then, a few years ago, they put them all on DVDs for me. This is the full Nicole Dawson collection. Guaranteed to sell for millions some day.”

Courtney laughed. “Honestly, the only part of this whole thing that surprises me is the fact that you have a DVD player.”

“I only have it for these.”

Of course. “Also, not surprising. I’m sure that means you use it all the time.”

“I’ll have you know, I haven’t watched these in years. In fact, the only time I *did* watch a few of them was when my parents first gave them to me. I’ve been saving them for a special occasion.”

“And what would that special occasion be?”

“My first sleepover with Courtney Fields, of course.”

Courtney’s mind immediately got stuck on the word *first*. Nicole had made it seem like this was a sleepover of convenience, but was there more to it than that? She shook these thoughts from her head. There was no reason to overthink this. She couldn’t remember the last time she felt this happy and content, so she might as well enjoy it, whatever *it* was.

“So, which one are we watching?” she asked as Nicole skimmed through the case.

“Don’t worry. I have the perfect one in mind.”

The look on Nicole’s face told her all she needed to know. She knew *exactly* what they were going to be watching, so she wasn’t surprised when Nicole put in the DVD and it was filled with games from her junior basketball season. She watched Nicole scroll until she landed on that infamous game—the one where Courtney broke her nose.

“Do you have popcorn? I totally need popcorn for this,” Courtney joked.

Instead of answering, Nicole walked into the kitchen area where she grabbed a bag of popcorn from a drawer and threw it in the microwave. Just a few minutes later, she poured it in a bowl and brought it over to Courtney.

“That smells excellent,” Courtney said as she breathed in the aroma from the bowl that was now sitting on her lap.

Nicole sat next to Courtney on the couch, leaving no space between them. “Does it? I wouldn’t know. My nose hasn’t been the same since that night.”

Courtney shoved her shoulder into Nicole’s. “Yeah. Whatever.”

Nicole turned on the game and the two of them watched intently as they waited for the big moment. It happened a few minutes before the end of the first half. Nicole was jumping around in front of Courtney, making all sorts of noise and leaving no space for her. Just as they had been taught, Courtney moved her arms to make space around her.

As Courtney watched the video, she cringed when she saw her elbow getting closer to Nicole’s face and had to cover her eyes when it actually hit. She watched through her fingers as Nicole’s head whipped back and she fell to the ground. Man, that was hard. No wonder Nicole was pissed. That had to hurt like hell.

Nicole paused the video and looked over at Courtney. “Hurts to watch, doesn’t it? Imagine it happening to you.”

“Okay, I get it. But still. You shouldn’t have gotten in my way.”

“Oh, is that so?” Nicole playfully lunged at Courtney and began to tickle her.

Courtney tried to squirm away, but Nicole was too strong. “Stop,” she begged between fits of laughter.

“Just admit that you’re an asshole and I’ll stop,” Nicole joked as she continued her attack.

“Fine. I’m an asshole. Your nose was perfect and I ruined it.”

Nicole smiled victoriously as she pulled her hands away. “Thank you.” After a few seconds, her smile dropped. “It’s not really ruined, right?”

Nicole rubbed at her nose and before she could think better of it, Courtney grabbed her hand away. She continued to hold Nicole’s hand as she leaned in and placed a quick, light kiss on the tip of her nose. “It’s perfect. You wouldn’t even know it was broken.”

Instead of responding, Nicole stared down at their linked fingers, then back into Courtney’s eyes. Her eyes gave the impression that she had so much to say, but she remained silent. Those blue eyes just stayed steady, never moving, barely blinking. Courtney could barely handle the weight of that stare, but at the same time, she couldn’t look away either. Then suddenly those blue eyes shut, and before Courtney could even fathom what was happening, Nicole pecked her lips with a kiss that was just as quick and light as Courtney’s kiss on her nose. And then those eyes were back on hers.

It was such a strange feeling. It reminded Courtney of their moment on her couch the week before, but this was somehow even more charged. She didn’t get it. This was the girl who, just a little bit ago, had been begging for her to go inside her; the girl who probably saw her naked more than she saw her dressed. Yet, that one kiss, where their lips had barely grazed, had her more confused than anything else.

Courtney couldn’t handle it anymore, so she removed her eyes from Nicole’s and looked back at the TV. She cleared her throat then pointed to the screen. “Watch my reaction. I’m not a *total* asshole.”

Nicole’s eyebrows furrowed. “What?”

Courtney pointed to the screen again. “You’ll be able to tell I feel bad.”

Nicole shook her head as if trying to shake something away, then smiled her signature smile. “Moment of truth, I guess.”

She hit the button to unpause the game just in time to see on-screen Courtney throw her hands over her mouth. She immediately dropped to

where Nicole was sitting on the court holding her nose and began to run a hand over her back.

“Wait,” Nicole said as she watched. “I always assumed that was one of my teammates. It was you?”

Courtney laughed. “Yes, it was me! I felt awful. Well, at least I did for about a minute.”

“And then what?”

Courtney nodded toward the screen where Nicole was now sitting on the bench with a bag of ice on her nose. There was no way to tell what she was saying but it was clear she was running her mouth. “Then that happened.”

Nicole laughed and shook her head. “In my defense, I was in pain. I wouldn’t even let anyone look at my nose until the game was over.”

Stubborn asshole, Courtney thought. She lifted one eyebrow. “And whose fault is that?”

“Oh, totally mine. I’m a stubborn asshole.”

“Funny. I was just thinking the exact same thing.”

“You know what *I’m* thinking?” Nicole asked as she leaned over Courtney, her confidence seeming to return as she watched her with flirtatious eyes. “I think I’m ready for round two.”

Courtney woke up to hints of sunshine sneaking through Nicole’s dark blinds. It took her a second to remember where she was until she noticed the strong arms wrapped around her. Nicole had a tight grip around her waist, and her head rested on Courtney’s chest.

After having sex on Nicole’s couch, Courtney had assumed it was going to continue in the bedroom. What happened when they were both in bed was so much better though. Nicole had stroked her arm and told her all about her niece and nephew. They went on to talk about people from high school that they both knew and what college was like for each of them. When neither of them could keep their eyes open anymore, Nicole had wrapped Courtney up in her arms as if it was the most natural thing in the world. And that’s how it felt—completely natural, like this was exactly where she was supposed to be. She didn’t know what that meant, but she

didn't need to. Courtney, who normally had to have every piece of her life figured out, didn't feel the need to figure this out. She didn't want to talk about it or define it. She just wanted to enjoy it.

She was about to do just that when the sound of Nicole's phone caused her to jolt awake. Courtney watched as she quickly sat up and moved her hands around the bed, searching for the phone. When she found it, she blinked down at it as if she couldn't get her eyes to focus.

"Shit, it's Roberta. She's FaceTiming me."

"Pick it up. I'll stay over here." Courtney moved away from Nicole. It's not that they wanted to lie to their best friends, but telling them would complicate something that didn't need to be complicated.

"Hey, Berta," Nicole said when she answered the call.

"Hi! I don't have much time so I'm not even going to ask why you're naked right now, but are you free in two weeks?"

Nicole yawned and stretched as much as she could while still keeping the comforter wrapped around her. "Something wedding related?"

"Don't sound so excited," Roberta said sarcastically. "This is actually fun wedding-related business." Roberta made a sound like she was doing a drumroll and Courtney had to keep herself from laughing when Nicole rolled her eyes. "Fulton was able to get his boss to let him work remotely for a few weeks leading up to our wedding so we're coming to Pennsylvania in a week and a half. Which means, bachelor and bachelorette parties are happening in two weeks. Don't worry. You don't have to plan anything. It's going to be super chill. Dinner as a group, then my peeps and Fulton's will separate for a few hours, then come back together at the end of the night. How does that sound?"

"Sounds perfect, Berta. I can't wait. Let me know if there's anything I can do."

"You're too good to me, sweetheart. Thank you. I'm going to go. Fulton is waiting until I'm off to call Courtney because apparently I'm loud."

Courtney's head snapped up when she heard her name. She looked at Nicole with pleading eyes. It's not that she didn't want to talk to her best friend. She just didn't want to talk to him while she was naked in Nicole's bed.

Nicole nodded as if she understood. “I can just tell her. I’m going to see her soon anyway. We’re helping Fulton’s mom pick out her dress today.”

“Perfect,” Roberta said loudly through the phone. “Just warn her that Griffin isn’t happy he wasn’t chosen as best man and has been a huge douche to Fulton because of it so we wouldn’t be surprised if he’s a douche at the bachelor party as well. Sorry.”

“I’ll tell her. No worries.”

When she hung up from the call, Courtney scooted up on the bed to sit next to her again. “Griffin’s being a douche, huh? Shocking.” Courtney rolled her eyes, a strange feeling of jealousy coming over her. “I can’t believe you actually want to hook up with him.”

Nicole leaned over and kissed across Courtney’s neck, almost making her forget what they were even talking about. “You’ll be happy to know I haven’t thought about hooking up with Griffin at all since Cabo.”

“Oh yeah? Something distracting you?”

Nicole kissed her more, bringing their lips together for a searing, but much too short kiss. “You could say that. You could also say I’m extremely turned on from waking up to you completely naked in my bed. Want to distract me more?”

Courtney brought their mouths back together. Now that was a no brainer.

Chapter 9

Courtney winced in pain as she lay on her couch with a heating pad and a pint of ice cream. This was the one time of month she hated being a girl. She was happy her period had come this weekend instead of next though. She would hate to deal with this during Fulton's bachelor party, especially since she talked to Fulton a few days earlier and it seemed Griffin was acting even douchier than usual. Courtney could only imagine how he would act at the bachelor party.

She put down the spoon for her ice cream when she felt her phone vibrating. She looked to find that it was Nicole calling and couldn't help the smile that spread on her face. "Hey, you," she said when she picked up.

"Wanna go out tonight?" Nicole asked. She didn't even let Courtney answer before she started talking again. "Some of my friends who live in the city asked if I wanted to go out in the gayborhood tonight and I thought you might want to come. I don't know about you, but I had a long freaking week and could really use dancing and drinks."

Courtney took a moment to unpack everything Nicole was saying. Nicole wasn't just inviting her to go out, but to meet some of her friends. Normally, Courtney would jump at this opportunity. The gayborhood was the part of Philly with all the gay bars and she had only been there a few times since moving to West Chester. Drinking and dancing also sounded great. It was too bad her body currently felt like it was being attacked from the inside and doing anything more than laying on her couch felt like too much.

"I know the city is like 45 minutes from you, but it's only a half hour from me. You can drive here and we can split an uber. It won't be cheap, but totally worth it, right?"

Courtney wasn't sure why Nicole was rambling, but she had to admit that she found it incredibly cute. It was too bad she was going to have to turn her down. "I can't do it tonight. I'm sorry. My red mistress came to visit, so now I'm spending the night with my heating pad and Ben and Jerry."

“Wow. Sounds like things are getting crazy over there. Maybe I should skip going out and come to you instead.”

Nicole laughed, leading Courtney to believe it was all a joke, but part of her was tempted to ask Nicole if she really *did* want to spend the night with her instead. She couldn't do that though. Nicole already had plans and seemed to be very excited about them. Courtney couldn't expect her to drop those plans for her almost-friend with benefits, even though whatever this was was starting to feel like so much more than that.

“Have fun tonight. Maybe we could hang out tomorrow and you can tell me all about it?”

“Sounds great. I'll text you after my hangover wears off. Feel better.”

Nicole hung up, and Courtney developed a heavy feeling in her stomach that wasn't related to her monthly gift. She tried to tell herself it wasn't jealousy. Nicole had every right to go out and dance and hook up with whomever she wanted to. Courtney just had every right not to think about it. She was too emotional from her period and that was making her extra sensitive. She walked her ice cream to the kitchen and put it away, then went back to the couch and shut her eyes. She just needed to sleep. Then she would feel better about everything.

Courtney was woken from her sleep by the sound of someone knocking on her door. *Who the hell...?*

She rubbed at her eyes, then stood up and stretched, before slowly making her way to the door. When she opened the door and found Nicole standing there with what looked like an overnight bag in her hands, she rubbed at her eyes again.

“It took you long enough,” Nicole said sarcastically. “Are you going to let me in or am I going to have to stand out here all night?”

Courtney moved to the side and Nicole breezed past her, dropping her bag on the floor as if her presence was completely normal and expected. “Hi?”

“Hey there,” Nicole replied as she threw herself down on the couch.

Courtney laughed. Was she going insane? Had she somehow slept all night and it was now Saturday? She walked over to the couch and sat

next to Nicole. “I thought you were going out. You said you needed to drink and dance.”

Nicole shrugged and waved her off. “You sounded sad on the phone so I thought you could use the company.”

Courtney was still having trouble believing this. “But what about your friends? Aren’t they upset that you bailed?”

“Nah. They are all looking to hook up with people tonight. They probably won’t even realize I’m gone.”

Courtney wasn’t sure what to say to all of this. “Sorry. I think I’m in shock right now. You really wanted to go out, but now you’re here because you thought I sounded sad on the phone?”

Nicole’s smile dropped for the first time since arriving and she tilted her head to the side as if she was confused. “Yeah. Sorry. I guess I should have asked if you even wanted company. I just—”

Courtney put a hand on Nicole’s arm to stop her. “Stop. Please don’t apologize. It was nice. I’m just surprised.”

“Because it’s me?”

Courtney shook her head and ran her fingers up and down Nicole’s arm. “No. Because it’s probably one of the sweetest things anyone has ever done for me.”

Much to her surprise, Nicole laughed. “You need better friends. All I did was change my plans when you needed me.” She wiggled her eyebrows mischievously. “If you think me showing up here uninvited is sweet, just wait. I have an even better surprise for you.”

She stood from the couch and went to her bag, digging through it until she pulled out a book. When she held it up, Courtney couldn’t believe her eyes. “Is that...? But how?”

Nicole nodded her head. “An early release of Laurel Lake’s newest novel. I entered a contest and of course I won, because I’m Nicole Dawson. What *don’t* I win? It came in the mail today and I took that as a sign that I *definitely* had to come over. I thought since you weren’t feeling well, I could read it to you. Otherwise, you’ll have to wait until I finish it because hell would have to freeze over before I would let you read it before me.”

Courtney laughed. She still couldn’t believe that any of this was happening right now. “I’m more than happy to let you read to me. That

sounds absolutely wonderful and just what the doctor ordered. Could we do it in my bed though?”

Nicole smirked and raised an eyebrow. “Are you trying to seduce me? You know I can’t resist that cloud-like mattress.”

“If by seduce, you mean trying to lure you into bed so I can be one of the first people to experience Laurel Lake’s new book, then yes. If you mean anything else, absolutely not.”

A slight frown came onto Nicole’s face. “Not even snuggles?”

Courtney couldn’t take this. Had Nicole Dawson really just said the word *snuggles*? And why was she fine with getting just that from Courtney? Another cramp hit and Courtney realized this wasn’t the time for overthinking. It was the time to just accept this wonderful gift she had been given.

“Oh, I thought snuggles were just a given,” she answered flirtatiously. She stood from the couch and reached her hand out toward Nicole. “What are you waiting for? I was promised Laurel Lake and snuggles and I want it now.”

“Those may be the sexiest words I’ve ever heard spoken aloud,” Nicole said as she followed her into the bedroom.

Once in bed, they organized the pillows so they could be propped up and comfortable to read. “You ready for this?” Nicole asked, her voice filled with a giddiness that was comparable to a kid on Christmas.

“I’m so ready.” Courtney nodded her head at the book Nicole was opening. “You do realize we’d have to stay up all night to finish it, and there’s no chance that’s going to happen for me, right?” She yawned for dramatic effect.

Nicole laughed. “I figured that. I have the whole weekend free if you do.” Courtney watched as Nicole’s face turned red and she bit her lip. “But if you don’t, that’s fine. We’ll finish it some other time.”

Courtney smiled and squeezed Nicole’s hand, trying to ignore how that contact made her feel. “I’m all yours this weekend.” *And she really was...*

Nicole stretched out as much as she could without waking Courtney, who was snuggled up beside her, and reached for her phone. She squinted her eyes and was surprised to find it was already 10:30. She couldn't remember the last time she slept in that late on a Sunday. This was supposed to be the week she actually caught up on chores around her apartment, but when she called to invite Courtney out on Friday night, that had all changed. She wasn't sure what had come over her, but after hearing Courtney wasn't feeling up to going out, all she wanted to do was be with her. She sounded down on the phone and Nicole wanted to be the one to cheer her up. Nicole had always been very cognizant of the feelings of those she spent time with, but this was different. She had never met someone she was willing to drop anything and everything for, but she felt like she would do that for Courtney.

This was no longer about sex. With Courtney having her period, nothing like that had even happened this weekend. They spent Friday night and Saturday reading Laurel Lake's book. When they needed breaks from reading, they just talked—about life, family, work. It was nice. It was comfortable. It wasn't what she ever expected when she heard she was being forced to spend two weeks in Cabo with her. She figured she would find a way to enjoy the trip in spite of the unwanted company and would then come home to life as she knew it. She didn't bargain for this. She didn't expect Courtney to become so important to her.

They hadn't talked about what was occurring between them, so Nicole didn't know how to feel about any of it. Sure, they could both admit that somewhere along the line they had become friends, but was it more than that? It was a talk that they would need to have eventually, but Nicole was happy right now. If she was honest, she was happier than she had been in a really long time. She didn't want to ruin that. She wanted to just hold onto whatever this was for as long as she could and just let it be. Why did it matter what this was anyway? If she was happy, why question it?

Her thoughts were interrupted when Courtney began to stir beside her. "What time is it?" she asked through a yawn.

"It's past 10:30. I didn't think you were ever getting up," Nicole joked.

Courtney squeezed her side as she stayed cuddled up close to her. "It's not *my* fault someone kept me up late last night."

“I had to make sure there was a happy ending. I couldn’t possibly have fallen asleep without knowing that Annie and Jane were both happy again.”

“Such a romantic you are,” Courtney said teasingly. She ran her fingers up and down Nicole’s arm and she thought she might doze back off to sleep because of how nice that felt.

Nicole didn’t want to move. She wanted to stay lost in this moment forever. “I’m going to be honest. I wish we didn’t have to get out of bed.”

“Who says we do? I don’t have anything going on today. Do you?”

Just an obscene amount of chores. “No. I’m completely free.”

Nicole looked around Courtney’s room. “Do you have any board games or video games? I feel like it’s about time for me to whoop your ass at something again.”

Courtney removed her hand from Nicole’s arm and brought it to her chest. “Aw, that’s cute.”

“What’s cute?”

“The fact that you think you can beat me at something. It’s adorable.”

So, that’s how this was going to go. Nicole crossed her arms, trying her best to appear serious, but failing when a smile crept onto her face. “Oh yeah? That’s funny since I vividly remember beating you in races multiple times. We won’t even mention the amount of times I’ve brought you to the big O first, but then again, that kind of sounds like a win for you.”

Nicole burst out laughing when Courtney slapped her on the arm. “That is so not true,” Courtney said, now laughing right along with her. “You have climaxed first just as much or more than me. You’re welcome for that, by the way.”

“Anyway, back to my question. What games do you have?”

“Just wait.” Courtney jumped out of the bed and ran from the bedroom, coming back a few minutes later holding a big pile of board games with an Xbox 360 balanced on top.

Nicole chuckled at the ridiculous sight. “You know, you could have asked me for help.”

Courtney scoffed. She walked slowly with her tongue sticking out as if she was deeply focused and looking like she could lose everything

with one wrong step. “I don’t need your help. I’ve got this.” She stumbled over to the bed and sat the pile down with a thud. “See.”

Nicole studied the pile. “Is that an Xbox Kinect? I don’t think I’ve played that since high school. Do you have Kinect sports?”

Courtney made a face at Nicole as if she was crazy. “What kind of question is that? Of course I do. I thought you didn’t want to get out of bed though.”

“Touché. Let’s start with some board games and we’ll ease into Kinect.” Nicole looked through the games once again. “I can’t choose. There’s too many.”

Courtney looked over the pile as well. “How about we start at the top and make our way down?”

Nicole smirked. Courtney made this way too easy. “I love starting on top.”

Courtney smiled right back at her and Nicole knew she had just walked herself into something. “I know you do. You also love finishing on the bottom.”

Well, shit.

After arguing over board games for hours, they finally made it through all of them. Nicole’s stomach growled, yelling at her for only having a sandwich for lunch and telling her it was time for dinner. “We might have to take a raincheck on the Kinect,” she told Courtney. “I’m famished.”

“Want me to make something?”

Nicole stood from the bed and stretched. “As much as I’m enjoying our time in, maybe it’s time we went out and let the world see our beautiful faces.”

“Works for me. We should probably shower before we go since neither of us have all weekend.”

Nicole wiggled her eyebrows and reached a hand out toward Courtney. “I really hope this is your way of inviting me to shower with you.”

Courtney groaned as she stood up. “I wish, but I feel so gross right now. I’m not in the mood for anything like that.”

Nicole ran her eyes over Courtney’s body, not trying to hide the fact that she was blatantly checking her out. “First of all, you could never be gross. Second of all, as much as I love shower sex, I wasn’t asking for that. I just figured it would save us time so we can get to dinner faster. Plus, I miss your naked body and this gives me an excuse to look at it.”

Courtney slowly ran one finger down Nicole’s arm, then leaned in flirtatiously as if she was going to whisper something seductive. “You had me at ‘*get to dinner faster.*’ Let’s go.”

She walked away from Nicole and removed one piece of clothing at a time, throwing them on the floor and leaving a path as she went. Nicole’s mouth watered as she followed behind and watched. Once she made it into the bathroom and turned on the water, she turned back around to look at Nicole. “Well, what are you waiting for?”

The way her eyes slowly burned a path from Nicole’s feet to her face made her whole body feel like it was on fire. Courtney continued to watch her as Nicole quickly stripped out of her clothes. “Is that better?”

Courtney’s eyes moved across her body once again and she bit her lip as her green eyes landed on Nicole’s. “Much.”

Once they were in the shower, Nicole wasn’t sure what felt better—the hot water covering her body or the arms that wrapped around her and pulled the two of them impossibly close. Never mind. It was no question. It was those arms. Being wrapped up with Courtney was great, and it only got better when Courtney laid her head on Nicole’s shoulder and squeezed her tightly.

“I hope this is okay,” Courtney said into her neck, causing the tiny hairs to stand up. “I know you’re hungry, but this feels really good right now.”

Nicole breathed her in completely and willed herself to remember every single part of this moment. If there was ever a time in the future she felt lonely, she would look back at this exact time and feel comforted by the memories. She was actually happy they couldn’t have sex because this was so much more intimate.

She was disappointed when Courtney pulled away a few minutes later, but that disappointment was short lived. Courtney lathered a

washcloth with soap and slowly, and meticulously, ran it over Nicole's body. The mood in the shower continued to get more and more intimate and Nicole thought her heart might burst.

"Courtney, I..." Nicole let her voice drift off as she stopped herself from saying whatever confession was about to leave her lips. This wasn't the time or place for that. She needed to think it through before she made any big declaration. She cleared her throat. "I think it's your turn."

Courtney handed her the soapy washcloth and she used it on her as well. After they were both finished, they stood under the water together for a few more minutes until it became cold.

"So, where do you want to eat?" Courtney asked as she dried off and got dressed.

Nicole looked up at Courtney, standing there drenched and lovely, and suddenly had no interest in going out. She wanted to escape the world together for a few more hours instead. "On second thought, you still owe me some Kinect sports. What do you say we order in instead?"

Courtney put a hand over her chest, acting like she was shocked. "Are you telling me you had me shower for nothing?"

Nicole ran her eyes up and down Courtney's body, making sure it was completely obvious what she was doing. When their eyes met again, she licked her lips and lifted one eyebrow. "Trust me, it wasn't for nothing."

Chapter 10

“I’m so excited to see you guys,” Roberta screamed as she ran up to Courtney and Nicole and jumped into Nicole’s arms. When Nicole put her back down, Roberta looked between the two of them, a confused smile on her face. “Did you two come together?”

“Yeah, it’s, uh, closer to the city from my place so Courtney came to me. That way we can take a rideshare back together at the end of the night.”

Roberta’s smile became even wider. “To your place? Together?”

Nicole shrugged. “Yeah. For logistical purposes.”

Courtney laughed internally as Nicole used the same excuse she had when she first asked her to stay over. If *logistical purposes* meant Nicole going down on her when she had barely made it through the door to her apartment then it wasn’t a lie. She needed to stop thinking about that though or she would be way too turned on with no outlet until the end of the night.

Any amount of turned on she was feeling melted away when she saw Fulton walking over with Griffin at his side. Griffin had a sneer on his face, and Courtney was sure he had something douchey to say.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t little Miss Best Man.” Griffin looked her up and down. “Sounds fitting.”

Fulton shoved an elbow hard into Griffin’s side, making him lose his breath. “Shut up, dude. No one wants to hear it.” He reached his arms out toward Courtney and pulled her into him. “Ignore him. He’s just jealous.”

“There’s just four more people coming,” Roberta explained once the greetings were over. “It’s two of Fulton’s friends from high school and two of my friends from college. I’m honestly surprised we could get that many people on such short notice, so I’m excited.”

Roberta’s eyes focused on something behind them and before Courtney could turn around, two high-pitched voices were ringing in her ear. “Berta! Nicole! I can’t believe the whole gang’s back together again.”

Courtney watched as Nicole greeted the two girls with big hugs. After Roberta gave them hugs as well, she turned toward Courtney. “These are our friends, Shannon and Amelia. They were in the dorm room right next to ours freshman year and we’ve been besties ever since.”

“Yes. Except now they all have men in their lives leaving me all alone,” Nicole said while wiping at a fake tear.

“If you’re looking for a man, he’s right here,” Griffin said, a shit-eating grin on his face that Courtney wanted to slap right off.

Nicole laughed, but Courtney was happy to see she didn’t seem impressed. “The only man I see is the one who’s getting married.”

Courtney laughed out loud at Nicole’s comment, causing Griffin’s attention to turn back to her. “Did you have something to say, Miss Best *Man*?”

Courtney was about to tell him just what she thought about him when she was interrupted by Fulton’s friends, Mario and Darren. After more introductions were made, they were taken to their table that Fulton had reserved in the back of the restaurant.

Courtney watched as Nicole took a seat by Roberta and was disappointed when Griffin went to sit in the seat on the other side of her.

Nicole put her hand down on the chair as he tried to pull it out. “Sorry, little boy, this seat’s taken.” She confirmed what Courtney was hoping was the case when she looked at her with a smile and winked, tapping the chair in a way that told her it was all hers.

“Why, thank you,” she said as she sat down, ignoring the way both Roberta and Fulton watched their interaction.

Once they were distracted by other conversations, Nicole leaned in close to whisper in her ear. “Not going to lie. I wish we weren’t separating at all tonight.” She ran her eyes up and down Courtney’s body in a way that only she would notice. “I know I said it already, but that dress looks really good on you.”

“You did say it. You said it right before you dropped to your knees and—”

Nicole squeezed her leg to cut her off. “You can’t say that or I’m going to get turned on all over again.”

This gave Courtney an idea. She put her hand onto Nicole’s thigh and let her fingers sneak underneath her dress. When Nicole gave her a

questioning look, she took her phone out in her other hand and typed out a text. *I bet you can't stay quiet.*

She watched Nicole's face as she opened the text and was satisfied when she saw the slightest hint of blush on her cheeks. She waited anxiously while Nicole typed something back.

Hit me with your best shot.

Oh, it was so on. Courtney moved her hand up higher and higher until it reached Nicole's underwear. She ran a finger lightly over the front and smiled to herself when Nicole took a big gulp of her water. She engaged in conversation, nodding along when needed and laughing when warranted, but her focus was on Nicole. She slipped one finger underneath her underwear and was happy to find how wet she already was.

The conversations going on around the table were interrupted by Roberta's loud voice grabbing everyone's attention as she spoke to Nicole. "Are you okay? Your face is really red right now."

Nicole laughed awkwardly and ran a hand over her forehead and Courtney chose that moment to run her finger in a circle right over her clit. Nicole moved her hand from her forehead and coughed into it. "I'm good. It's just hot in here. Is anyone else hot?"

Courtney ran her finger up and down, picking up her momentum with each stroke. "I'd say it's the perfect temperature," she said calmly. "This temperature really feels like a *win* to me. *I bet* it's just you. Are you sure you're feeling okay? I'd hate to have to leave here and take you home to bed."

Courtney loved this. She loved everything about it. She loved that even though they were surrounded by people this moment belonged completely to her and Nicole. She loved that the quicker she moved her fingers, the more Nicole struggled to keep control. And God, she *loved* watching Nicole Dawson lose control.

"I'm fine," Nicole squeaked out. "Whatever is going on with me should pass in just a minute. I have a feeling I... umm... *it*... won't last much longer."

Roberta shrugged and went back to whatever conversation she had been having before, causing everyone else to move on as well. Courtney felt Nicole beginning to tense underneath her fingers. Nicole reached her hand down and held Courtney's in place, gently pushing her body up into

both of their hands until Courtney felt her body go completely stiff, then relax and fall away from her touch. Courtney watched as Nicole let out a long breath then chugged the rest of her water. She wasn't sure who had just won, but it didn't matter because that was probably the sexiest thing she had ever seen.

As she had that thought, her phone vibrated from a text. She looked down to see that it was from Nicole. She figured it was probably going to be her bragging about winning because she somewhat kept her cool, but her words were surprisingly gratifying. *That was hands down the hottest orgasm of my entire life.*

Just when Courtney thought she couldn't feel any more proud of herself, another text came through. *This is the only time I'll ever say this and I'm probably going to regret it, but you win. You win the bet and you win this whole night.*

Aw shucks. That's probably just the orgasm talking, Courtney typed back.

Probably. Once I come down from this high, I'll deny ever typing those words.

Looks like I'll just have to save these texts forever <3

As soon as she sent the text, Courtney regretted adding the heart. That was until she got Nicole's reply. *I know I'll be saving this memory forever <3*

With her heart happy, Courtney put her phone away and finally let herself fully engage with the conversations going on around the table. The rest of dinner went by much too quickly and soon the two groups were parting ways, leaving Courtney with the guys. Fulton had given her the job of figuring out what to do for the bachelor part of the party.

"So, what's the plan?" Fulton asked once they were standing outside of the restaurant.

"I reserved a table at a cigar bar, complete with some of your favorite things—cigars and whiskey," Courtney said proudly. She knew Fulton was going to love it.

Fulton's face lit up, but before he could respond, Griffin let out an obnoxious laugh. "We could do that if we wanted my brother to have the most boring bachelor party in history. *Or* we could go to a strip club. I have a list on my phone of the best ones."

Fulton patted Griffin's shoulder as if he was a child he was about to let down. "Sorry. Strip clubs aren't really my thing. I'd rather do the cigar bar."

As expected, Griffin's mouth went into a pout. "That's bullshit. You're only saying that because we have a *girl* with us tonight. It's not like she wouldn't enjoy it though. I'm sure she gets a lot less ass than the rest of us. This could do her some good."

Fulton gripped Griffin's shoulder tighter and Courtney could tell he was about to go off at him, so she gave him a look to tell him it wasn't worth it. He loosened his grip and started to laugh instead. "I can guarantee you Courtney has been with many more women than you have. So, back off."

"Personally, I think the cigar bar sounds awesome," Mario said, while Darren nodded his head in agreement as well.

Fulton smiled and pushed his glasses up on his nose. "There you have it. Five to one. Cigar bar it is."

Griffin crossed his arms over his chest, apparently still insistent on acting like a child. "There aren't even six of us here."

Fulton shoved him playfully. "It's my bachelor party so I get two votes." He nodded his head toward Courtney. "Lead the way."

Courtney was happy to. She needed something to distract her from how annoying Griffin was. Although, she didn't know if cigars and whiskey would even be enough to drown him out.

"This is the *best*," Roberta shouted as she threw an arm over Nicole's shoulder and pulled her close.

Nicole wasn't sure how Roberta had gotten this drunk in the two hours since dinner, but she was at the point where she could barely stand on her own, so Nicole put an arm around her waist to steady her. "Are you sure? We can go somewhere else if you want. I don't want to make tonight about me." Nicole had suggested going to the gay bar as a joke, but Roberta took her suggestion seriously and jumped at the opportunity.

"Are you kidding me?" Roberta slurred. "I love gay bars—where the drinks are strong and the women are stronger."

Nicole lifted an eyebrow at her best friend. “I’ve literally never heard anyone say that.”

Roberta laughed way too hard. “I know. I made it up. But seriously, I love it here. Not a single guy has hit on me. It’s marvelous.”

“Well, I’m glad you’re having a good time.”

“What about you? Are you having a good time? You don’t seem like yourself. Normally, you’d be dancing up on every single girl in this place, and I haven’t seen you dance with one person.”

That’s because the only person she *wanted* to dance with wasn’t here right now. Nicole forced a smile onto her face and ignored the way she could actually *feel* how much she missed Courtney right now. “I’m good. I’m not dancing because I’m taking care of you. You’re my one and only tonight.”

Roberta laughed loudly once again. “Okay. Whatever you say, buddy.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Roberta waved her hand around dramatically. “Nothing, nothing. Just forget about it.”

But Nicole couldn’t just forget about it. What did Roberta *think* she knew? And if she actually did know something, could she share the wealth because Nicole was confused as hell.

As if she could tell she was thinking about her, a text came through from Courtney at that very moment. *Where are you guys? We’re ready to meet up with you.*

We’re at Woody’s. Not sure if the guys will want to come here, but I don’t think there’s any chance of Roberta leaving. Haha.

Fulton made the executive decision that we’re coming there so we’ll see you soon.

Nicole told Roberta that the rest of the group was on the way to the bar and it seemed like she was more excited for Courtney to be there than Roberta was about her fiancé arriving. Still, when they arrived, Roberta drunkenly skipped over to him and jumped into his arms, almost taking him out in the process.

Nicole made her way over to Courtney slowly, feeling almost shy. *What the hell was wrong with her?* When she was finally by her side, she noticed Courtney seemed down. “Are you okay? You seem tired.” Nicole

cradled her head into the crook of Courtney's neck. "You also smell like a cigar, and I have to say I find that smell incredibly sexy on you."

Courtney lifted her head slightly giving Nicole even more space to nuzzle in. "Thank you. I'm good now. Much better."

"Griffin wasn't a jerk to you, was he?" Nicole asked before placing one kiss on Courtney's neck and forcing herself to pull away.

"Griffin was... well, he was Griffin." Courtney smiled at her, but Nicole could tell it was forced. "Don't worry about it. I'm good now. I promise."

Nicole was worried about it though. She was furious. Griffin had no right to be rude to Courtney just because he was jealous about not getting the stupid best man title. The only reason Nicole hadn't ripped Griffin's head off during dinner was because she knew Courtney wouldn't want her to fight her battles for her, but now that she saw how upset she was, she couldn't keep it in anymore. She decided she would talk to him by the end of the night, but for now, she had more important things on her mind. She was going to do whatever it took to cheer Courtney up.

"Jell-O shots?" Nicole asked when she noticed the shirtless man across the bar holding a tray of them.

"Jell-O shots sound wonderful," Courtney replied, her smile finally starting to look sincere.

"Coming right up." Nicole quickly made her way over to the man, bought four jello shots, and took them back to Courtney. "Two for you. Two for me."

Courtney held one of the plastic shot containers in the air. "To the prettiest girl in the bar tonight. Cheers."

Nicole held hers up to Courtney's and smiled at what popped into her head. "To the *second* prettiest girl in the bar tonight. Being under Nicole Dawson isn't bad though. I'm sure you can confirm that."

Courtney ran her tongue along the plastic jello shot slowly and seductively and kept eye contact with Nicole the whole time. When she was done with one, she did the exact same thing with the other. "I'd love to be under Nicole Dawson later."

Nicole thought she might faint right there in the bar. Instead, she grabbed Courtney's hand and pulled her out onto the dance floor. She brought Courtney up against her and rested her hands on her hips to keep

their bodies close. How was it that no matter how many times they had sex, this still felt so damn good? She honestly didn't know if she would ever get tired of feeling Courtney's body under her hands.

She put her mouth right by Courtney's ear and gently bit it, loving the way she purred and pushed against her in response. "I lied before. You're by far the sexiest woman in this entire bar. Hell, you're the sexiest woman in this goddamn city."

"Why don't you two get a room already?"

Nicole and Courtney jumped apart at the sound of Roberta's voice. Once Nicole regained control of her body, she turned to see Roberta, Fulton, and Griffin standing beside them. "So, where's the rest of the crew?"

Roberta pointed toward the exit. "They just left. You two were busy dry humping on the dance floor, so we didn't want to disturb you."

Nicole rolled her eyes. "It's not dry humping, Berta. It's dancing, and I happen to be very good at it."

Roberta threw her head back in laughter, much more amused by this than she should be. "Call it whatever you want. Either way, you were getting your jollies on the dance floor."

Fulton put a firm hand on Roberta's shoulder, but began to chuckle. "Ignore my future bride. *Someone* got her very drunk tonight."

"And now I have to pee," Roberta said with a pout.

Courtney reached out and grabbed her hand. "It's fine. So do I. I'll lead the way."

Once they were gone, Fulton nodded toward the bar. "I'm going to go get Roberta some water and try to convince her it's vodka when she gets back."

Once he turned away, Griffin sneered at her. "Looks like it's just the two of us now. Wanna dance?"

Ew, what did she *ever* see in this guy? Sure, all they had ever done was make out that one time, but now even that thought repulsed her.

"Certainly not with you."

"Why not? What's your problem?"

"You've been a complete douche to Courtney and frankly I'm pissed off." Nicole looked around, then dragged Griffin away so Courtney

wouldn't see her yelling at him when she got back from the bathroom. There was no need for Courtney to know she was doing this for her.

Griffin wiggled his eyebrows at her. "You actually want me to believe you brought me to this dark corner of the bar because you're pissed off at me?"

"Yeah, that's exactly what I did. I wanted to yell at you in private."

Griffin stepped closer to her. "Or you could skip the yelling and make out with me again."

She used one hand to push Griffin away. "Nope. Never again. You need to grow up, Griffin. You can't just go around treating people like shit just because you didn't get what you wanted. Fulton made his choice and you need to respect it. None of this is Courtney's fault."

"I don't understand why you're so pissed. It's all in good fun."

Nicole could feel her face getting red as she became more and more angry. "Calling her a man and making her so upset that she looks completely exhausted is not *in good fun*. There are three weeks until this wedding. If I hear about you doing anything else, I swear I'll beat your ass."

Griffin shrugged. "Whatever. I don't understand why you're getting so ang—" He cut himself off as a smile spread across his face. "Wait. There really is something going on between you two, isn't there? You're protecting your little girlfriend."

"Whatever, Griffin. Just keep your mouth shut, okay?"

"Oh yeah. My lips are sealed," he said with a laugh that made Nicole feel uncomfortable.

She didn't have time to fight anymore though. She could see Courtney across the bar now and the only thing on her mind was getting back to her. Well, that and the way that hearing Courtney referred to as her girlfriend made her stomach do somersaults.

Chapter 11

“I think I’m going to throw up,” Roberta said as Courtney tightly held onto her arm walking out of the bathroom.

“You just did. Twice.”

Roberta put a hand over her mouth and laughed. “Oh shit. You’re right. Thanks for taking care of me. You’re my favorite friend of Fulton’s by far. I don’t even care that you broke my best friend’s nose back in high school. You’re still a good one in my book.” Roberta dramatically whipped her head around the bar. “Speaking of my bestie, where is she?” She threw a hand over her head. “Oh lord, she’s with Griffin. I swear, she better not be hooking up with that douche again.”

Courtney had to squint her eyes to see Griffin and Nicole back in the far corner of the bar. A very dark corner that would have been the perfect spot to sneak off to for a makeout session, but Nicole wouldn’t do that to her, would she? What exactly would she be doing to her though? It’s not like they were exclusive. The only thing they had actually discussed was having sex with each other.

Courtney knew this was mostly because she was too much of a coward to bring up how she was feeling. What if she told Nicole she was falling for her and she didn’t feel the same way? What if this really was just sex for her? It certainly didn’t seem that way. Courtney had finally found someone she had amazing sexual chemistry with that she could also have fun with outside of the bedroom. She didn’t want to risk losing that just yet.

“Something wrong?”

Courtney jumped at the sound of Nicole’s voice. She was so caught up in her own thoughts she didn’t realize she had come up beside her. “I’m good. I think we need to call it a night though. Your bestie christened two toilets in the bathroom with her barf.”

Nicole nudged her in the side. “At least she hit the toilet, right?”

“Thank God. So, what were you and Griffin doing?” she asked as nonchalantly as possible. There had to be a simple answer to it.

Nicole shrugged. “Nothing important.”

Not exactly the answer she was hoping for, but that also didn't necessarily mean anything happened between them. Before she could think into it more, Fulton and Griffin joined them again. Griffin had a sour look on his face that she couldn't read, but she secretly hoped it was the face of someone who didn't just get what he wanted.

"Hey, baby, it looks like we need to get you out of here. Ready to go back to the hotel?" Fulton asked as he wrapped an arm around Roberta's waist.

"Yeah, I should probably go," she slurred. "Courtney, make sure my bestie gets home safe. I think she's drunk."

"Don't worry. I'm sure she'll take good care of me." Nicole's eyes sparkled as she winked at Courtney, making Courtney start to forget her worries from just seconds before. "Shall we go?"

Courtney nodded, said goodbye to the others, and followed Nicole out of the bar where she called an Uber. After a few minutes, they were in the car riding back to Nicole's apartment.

Nicole squeezed her knee and studied her face, a serious look on her own. "Are you sure you're okay? You've been quiet ever since getting back from the bathroom."

Courtney put her hand on top of Nicole's to try to reassure her. "I'm okay. I promise. I'm just tired."

Nicole nodded, her face still uncharacteristically serious. "Just so you know, I was kidding about the whole *taking care of me* innuendo. If you're tired, I'm more than happy just cuddling until we fall asleep."

Courtney looked at Nicole in awe. Where did this girl come from? Well, she knew exactly where she came from. She came from a town just fifteen minutes from where she grew up and somehow ended up twenty minutes from her as adults. She didn't *want* to think of it as fate since they weren't actually together, but that's the only way she could describe it.

Without even thinking about it, Courtney leaned over and connected her lips with Nicole's. Nicole pulled away slightly at first as if she was surprised, but then her lips moved against Courtney's as well. Courtney didn't think about the driver just feet away from them. She didn't think about the fact that this was the first time they shared a sensual kiss that wasn't part of sex. All she thought about was how good it felt to have Nicole's lips against her own; how right it felt.

The half hour drive seemed to last mere minutes with Nicole's mouth as a very welcome distraction. Courtney's lips continued to tingle as they walked into Nicole's building and rode the elevator up to her apartment. Once inside, Nicole took her hand and led her into her bedroom. She didn't say a word, but she didn't need to. Courtney knew they were both on the same page.

When Nicole let go of her hand, Courtney slowly removed her own clothes layer by layer. She loved the way Nicole's eyes burned into her skin as she let the clothes drop to the floor. She loved the subtle way Nicole licked her lips once Courtney was naked, right before she removed her own clothes as well.

Nicole took her hand once more and led her to the bed. She sat down and pulled Courtney down beside her. She leaned in and put one hand on Courtney's hip while planting kisses across her neck and up to her ear. Her lips barely grazed Courtney's ear as she spoke in a breathless whisper. "Tell me what you want."

"I want you. I want all of you."

What she really wanted to say was "I want you to make love to me," but she kept those words hidden inside.

Luckily for her, Nicole seemed to understand exactly what she needed. She was finding more and more that Nicole always knew what she needed.

Nicole slowly, but surely, pushed her down on the bed and crawled on top of her. "Do you mind if I'm—?"

Courtney nodded emphatically. This was the first time Nicole had actually asked to be on top. Most of the time it was the two of them fighting for dominance, and while that was sexy as hell, this was different. This was special.

Courtney closed her eyes and breathed in Nicole's scent, wanting to memorize every single part of this time together. She smelled like a mix of her perfume, alcohol, and just a hint of sweet sweat. Courtney wanted to bottle up that scent and keep it forever. She wanted to cover herself in it on lonely nights. Although, she was secretly wishing that just maybe those were gone.

All conscious thought left her mind when Nicole slipped her legs between hers, connecting them in the most intimate way possible. As

Nicole moved against her, she brought their lips back together in the same way they had been on the ride home. Their lips moved at the same pace as their bodies, slowly at first, then more quickly as they both got closer to the edge.

With one final push, Courtney melted under Nicole's body. She held Nicole tightly against her as they both rode out their shared orgasm, ending at the exact same time as if their bodies had become one.

Nicole still didn't speak as she rolled off of her and lay down beside her. The two of them just lay there in silence, staring up at the ceiling together. The only communication between them came in the form of Nicole reaching out her hand and intertwining their fingers together, and that in itself said more than enough.

Nicole slowly opened one eye as the sun streaked through her blinds into her room. She looked at Courtney, who had her body spread across the whole bed, and smiled to herself. Last night had been indescribable. It was like nothing Nicole had ever experienced in her entire life, and it brought perfect clarity to all of the questions she had been tossing around in her head for the past few weeks. She had fallen for Courtney, and all she wanted was to make things official between them.

Somewhere along the line, Courtney had gone from the girl she couldn't stand to somewhat of a friend to someone she absolutely couldn't live without. She knew she was getting ahead of herself but Courtney felt like her *person*. She didn't think there was anyone else in this world who could keep up with her the way Courtney could. Heck, she had tried with other people. No one seemed to understand her until Courtney, and she seemed to get every single piece of her. It made her feel like maybe she wasn't crazy. Maybe she wasn't the issue. As Courtney had said once, she just needed to find someone who could keep up with her. She just never in a million years thought that person could be Courtney Fields.

She knew she had to talk to Courtney about all of this, but she was honestly scared to death. If she didn't feel the same way, that would break her apart. That's why she had decided it was best to wait until *after* the wedding to tell her. It's not like she was going anywhere. This way, if things

did become awkward, they wouldn't have to see each other again. Except, just the thought of never seeing Courtney again made Nicole feel like her heart was being ripped from her chest. She *had* to feel the same way, and at least she would know soon enough.

Only three more weeks, she reminded herself.

"Only three more weeks until what?" Courtney asked with a yawn.

Shit. Did she really say that out loud? "Roberta and Fulton's wedding. I love those two, but I'm ready to party and then move on. This has been a lot of work."

Courtney's lips turned down in a slight frown and Nicole wondered what she had said wrong. She was about to ask her when she was interrupted by the sound of Courtney's phone ringing.

Courtney grabbed her phone, then looked at Nicole apologetically. "Sorry. I have to take this. It's my sister." She smiled again as she answered the call. "Hey, Alissa, what's up?" Courtney hit a button on her phone and sat it beside her, using her now free hand to draw patterns with her finger along Nicole's skin.

"Mom told me you were going home next weekend. Can I ride with you?"

"I'm actually riding home with one of my friends..." Courtney looked at Nicole with a question in her eyes and Nicole nodded her head. "But she'll be fine taking you too."

"Cool. I can't wait. One week into classes and I'm exhausted already. What friend is this? Anyone I know?"

"Nicole Dawson. She's the one who also went to UPenn." Courtney winked at Nicole and it was so unbelievably sexy that Nicole wished she wasn't on the phone.

"Oh! The illustrious Nicole Dawson. The girl you used to hate and now can't stop talking about. Now I'm excited."

Nicole wiggled her eyebrows at Courtney to be funny, but inside her stomach was turning. Courtney told her sister about her? What had she said?

"I don't talk about her *that* much," Courtney argued.

Her sister chuckled through the phone. "Okay. Whatever you say. I feel like I know everything about her and I haven't even met her yet."

Courtney looked embarrassed, but Nicole was completely loving it. She wanted to hear more but was sure Courtney wouldn't allow that to happen.

“Whatever. I have to go, but I'll give you a call when I find out what the exact plan is for next week.”

When Courtney hung up, Nicole smirked at her. “So, you talk about me all the time, huh?”

“Don't listen to her. She's eighteen. She has no idea what she's talking about. So, what are we doing today?”

“You want to spend the day together?” Nicole was pleasantly surprised and already running through ideas of what they could do.

“Only if you're not busy. If you have other stuff to do—”

Nicole placed a brief kiss on Courtney's lips to stop her rambling. “There is nothing else I would rather do today. In fact, I have an idea. What do you say I make us naked breakfast in bed, then we snuggle naked while we watch a movie, then after that maybe we can find some other naked activities to partake in?”

Courtney was now the one to lean in and kiss Nicole. When she pulled back, there was a smirk on her face. “You had me at naked.”

“Perfect,” Nicole said, feeling excited about the day ahead of her. She jumped out of bed and didn't bother to put any clothes on before heading out of the room. She made sure to shake her ass as she walked to give Courtney a show. “I'll be back. Don't go anywhere or put any clothes on.”

“I wouldn't dream of it,” Courtney yelled after her.

Nicole got to work in the kitchen making absolutely anything she could find since she wasn't sure what Courtney liked. When she was finished, she had a tray filled with bacon, sausage, eggs, and pancakes. She also had a mimosa for each of them.

Courtney's eyes went comically wide when she entered the room carrying the tray, which made Nicole laugh. “Is that face over me or the food?”

“Both. I'm not sure I've ever seen anything so sexy in my entire life.”

Nicole sat down on the bed and laid the tray between them. “I think you've said that before.”

“What can I say? You’re constantly raising the bar for sexiness.”

Courtney grabbed a piece of bacon off of the tray and brought it to her lips, letting out a low moan as she chewed.

“And *that* might have been the sexiest thing *I’ve* ever seen. Do you always moan when you eat bacon?”

“I moan when I eat excellent food and this bacon is incredible.” Courtney shoved her shoulder into Nicole’s. “You’ve been holding out on me. I didn’t know you could cook.”

“Well, I mean, that’s just bacon. It’s not like it takes a world-renowned chef to cook it, but I’ve been known to get around a kitchen pretty well. I could... make you dinner sometime... if you’d like.”

Nicole didn't mean for her words to sound so much like a date invitation, but she also didn't care. Dating Courtney was exactly what she wanted.

“I would love that,” Courtney answered softly, her voice leading Nicole to believe that maybe she realized it was a date. But before Nicole could say anything else, Courtney cleared her throat and began to speak again. “So, tell me, what’s the big Dawson Labor Day bash like?”

Nicole did her best to mask her disappointment over the switch in conversation by putting on a wide smile. “Oh, you know, it gets pretty crazy. My dad grills a bunch of food. My family and neighbors come over. Sometimes my mom drinks too much wine and starts telling embarrassing stories.”

“Oh, man. I’ll be sure to stick around long enough to see that. I’m excited to meet your family, by the way.”

Nicole was amazed by how nonchalantly Courtney talked about meeting her family. Even without an official title, meeting the families felt important and she was nervous as hell over it. “I’m excited to meet your family too. What are they like?”

“Just your average rural Maryland family. My dad likes watching sports and going fishing. My mom’s favorite pastime is going to lunch with her friends and gossiping about the neighbors.”

“Oh, man. I hope your mom likes me. I wouldn’t want to be part of her lunchtime gossip.”

Courtney dropped her fork and wrapped an arm around Nicole. “Don’t worry. She’ll love you. How couldn’t she?”

“Coming from the girl who hated me at first.”

“Who says I don’t still hate you?”

“Ouch. Not nice.” Nicole reached her hands toward Courtney like she was going to tickle her, but Courtney blocked her with her fork.

“I’m obviously kidding. I guarantee you that by the end of next weekend, every single member of the Fields family will absolutely adore you.”

That’s all Nicole wanted, especially one person in particular.

Chapter 12

“First stop, the best school in the nation,” Nicole said once they were in her car, ready to head home for Labor Day weekend.

Courtney laughed. Nicole made this way too easy on her. “That’s funny because last time I checked, I believe UPenn was ranked about eighth in the country, at least two spots behind Stanford.”

“Whatever. What do those websites know anyway?”

The rest of the drive to pick up Alissa was spent comparing stats about their respective schools, and when that got old, fighting over what music to listen to. When they pulled up in front of Alissa’s dorm, she was waiting outside with a backpack and an overnight bag thrown over her shoulder. Courtney didn’t realize how much she had missed her sister until she was standing right in front of her. Alissa had requested she didn’t help move her in, mostly because she knew if Courtney was there her parents would stay longer. Because of that, Courtney hadn’t seen her since the beginning of the summer.

“Hey, guys,” Alissa said excitedly as she crawled into the back seat of the car.

“I’m Nicole. It’s so nice to meet you. I hear you’re smarter than your sister. Makes sense with your excellent taste in schools.”

Alissa grabbed onto Courtney’s shoulder from behind her and shook it. “I like her already, Court.”

Courtney rolled her eyes. Her sister hadn’t even been in the car for a full minute yet and they were already ganging up on her. She was sure her sister would also agree with Nicole’s awful taste in music. “Don’t say that. Her head can’t afford to get any bigger.”

“Or maybe you just can’t stand that someone might be cooler than you.” Alissa giggled, clearly very proud of herself for making fun of her big sister. As if that wasn’t enough, Nicole reached back to knuckle bump her in response.

Courtney slapped Nicole’s arm, but she just laughed as she started the car back up and put it into drive. Nicole and Alissa continued to pick on her the whole way home, and even though Courtney acted like she hated it,

she secretly loved it. She loved that her sister, and well, whatever Nicole was to her, got along so well.

“So, this is where Courtney Fields grew up? Nice,” Nicole said once she pulled into their driveway.

“No other comments? I’m shocked.”

Nicole pointed at the basketball hoop that was sitting in front of the garage. “I mean, I could’ve made a comment about how you might have benefited from a little more time on that thing so I didn’t always beat you on the court, but I decided to keep that one to myself.”

Courtney put a hand over her chest to feign admiration. “How very sweet of you.”

“I know. That’s me. Sweet as pie.” Nicole gave Courtney a big smile, then smiled back at Alissa as well. “It was very nice to meet you. Are you coming tomorrow?”

“I don’t think so. I have some plans with friends. But I’ll see you for the ride back on Sunday. In the meantime, I’ll think of more ways we can drive my sister nuts.”

“Can’t wait.”

Courtney simply shook her head at the two of them, then opened her door to get out, but turned around once more to say goodbye to Nicole. It was absolutely crazy, but she already missed her even though she knew she would be seeing her the next day. “I’ll see you tomorrow. I can ask my mom if I can borrow her car and come over early to help out if you’d like.”

The way Nicole’s face lit up you would have thought Courtney just offered to take her on a free vacation, not set up a party. “I would love that.”

“Cool. See you then.”

Courtney had to force her body to move or else she would have spent the whole night just staring at Nicole. She waved one more time once she was out of the car, then turned to walk up the sidewalk into their house.

Alissa came up beside her and draped an arm over her shoulder. “You’ve got it *bad*. I’ve never seen you like this with anyone.”

Courtney shook her head. She could feel her face turning red from the embarrassment of being called out by her sister. “Oh, um, no, it’s not... we’re not... Nicole is just my friend.”

“And you’re telling me absolutely nothing has happened with this *friend*?”

Courtney opened her mouth to argue, but wasn't sure how she was supposed to argue with that so she closed it once again.

"Ha! I knew it!" Alissa said with a laugh. "You guys are totally hooking up."

No. Absolutely not. They were not having this conversation right now. She waved a hand in the air. "Stop. I'm not talking about my sex life with my baby sister."

"First of all, I just said you were hooking up. I never said anything about sex, but thanks for confirming that detail. Second of all, I'm not a baby anymore. I know what sex is. From personal experience."

Courtney cringed. She couldn't listen to this. She still saw Alissa as a little six-year-old girl with pigtails. She didn't know if she'd ever see her as anything else. "Ew, stop. I don't want to hear that."

Alissa just laughed in response. When they made it to the front door, she stopped and faced Courtney completely. "Seriously though, you really like her, don't you?" When Courtney didn't answer right away, Alissa rolled her eyes. "Come on. I know you'll always see me as your kid sister, but I'm older now. You can talk to me about this stuff."

"Okay. Don't tell anyone, but yes. God, I like her so much. I've never felt this way about anyone before but I'm being a total coward and haven't said anything because I'm scared to death of what she'll say. What if she doesn't feel the same way?"

Alissa gave her an incredulous look. "Are we talking about the same person? Because there's no way that girl I just spent the past three hours in the car with doesn't like you. You were *both* practically drooling over each other."

"I think *that's* a bit of an exaggeration, but I sure hope you're right. I just don't know how to tell her."

"When did you say Fulton's wedding is?"

"Two weeks from tomorrow. Why?"

"You should *totally* tell her at the wedding. How romantic would that be? Ask her to dance, pull her in close to you, then kiss her and tell her how you feel."

Courtney's heart beat faster just thinking about that scenario playing out. "You watch way too many movies, but I actually like that idea. I think I will do that."

Alissa smiled proudly. “See! I told you I’m good to talk to!”

“You’re right. I’m sorry. And you know, if you ever want to talk to me about guys or sex or anything, I’m here for you too.”

Alissa shrugged as her smile became more of a smirk. “Sure. Once I’m actually having sex, I’ll be sure to talk to you about it.”

“Wait. But you—”

“I lied. I just wanted to watch you cringe. It will happen soon enough though.”

Courtney pulled her sister close and gave her a noogie. “Let’s get inside, kiddo.”

I know the party doesn’t start until 1:30, but I’m up and about so whenever you want me to head over I can.

Courtney felt pathetic as soon as she sent the text. It was only ten o’clock, and she was practically begging to see Nicole. Courtney knew Nicole wouldn’t let the opportunity to make fun of her pass and she wasn’t disappointed when Nicole’s reply came in.

Miss me already, huh? ;)

Before she could come up with a good reply, Nicole sent another text. *Lucky for you, I happen to miss you too. Come whenever.*

Courtney couldn’t help the smile that sprang to her face. She couldn’t wait to tell Nicole how she felt. She just really hoped this didn’t all backfire on her. She still had a bad feeling about whatever was going on with her and Griffin at the club and felt like Nicole was trying to hide something with her answer, but she pushed those feelings aside. She was acting like a crazy girlfriend to the girl who she technically wasn’t even dating yet. Nicole had given her no reason not to trust her.

Awesome. I’ll be there ASAP, Courtney typed back, laughing when Nicole’s reply came through.

I’ll time you.

Exactly twenty-two minutes later, Courtney pulled into Nicole’s driveway. It was a modest two-story house that reminded her a lot of her own. Two large trees were in the front yard and flowers lined both sides of the sidewalk. Courtney took a deep breath as she got out of her car. She

couldn't believe she was about to meet Nicole's family. She tried to blow it off like it was no big deal when they had talked about it, but the truth was, she was freaking out. She wanted to make a good impression more than anything.

"Took you long enough," a voice shouted from the front of the house.

Courtney looked up to see Nicole standing on her porch, one hand on her hip and the other shading her eyes from the sun. She was wearing skinny jeans and a white V-neck T-shirt that even from this far away Courtney could tell dipped unfairly low. To put it simply, she looked hot, and Courtney couldn't keep her eyes off of her as she made her way up the sidewalk.

"It took me exactly twenty-two minutes from the time you texted me, which means I left my house approximately seven minutes after that text."

"That's good. I would have made it in five though," Nicole said before opening her arms and pulling Courtney into a tight embrace.

Courtney loved how it felt wrapped in those strong arms, and she was happy when Nicole didn't let go right away. For a while, it seemed like Nicole had no intention of letting go, but she eventually gave one final squeeze before freeing her arms and taking a step back. "So, ready to meet the 'rents?"

"Is that even a question? I was born ready." Courtney's words made her sound a lot more confident than she actually felt, and when Nicole turned around, she closed her eyes and took another deep breath, slowly exhaling through her nose to center herself.

"My parents are in the back already getting things set up. I'll give you a tour later," Nicole said.

They walked past a staircase on the left and a wall filled with pictures on the right. Courtney was pretty sure every single one of Nicole's sports' pictures from the time she was about five were squeezed onto that wall. As she looked at Nicole from high school, it felt like a completely different person than the woman she was walking with now. Even though they had only known each other about three months, she could barely remember what it felt like to *hate* Nicole. The Nicole she knew now was caring and funny, and, yes, she was incredibly cocky and overly

competitive, but Courtney loved that about her. *Wait. Loved? Where had that come from?* Courtney knew she was developing strong feelings, but love was much too intense for someone she'd known for such a short period of time. Sure, she knew *of* Nicole since high school, but she didn't really *know* her until recently.

She didn't have much time to overthink it because soon they were walking out a sliding door onto the back deck. It was a decent-size deck with a very spacious yard behind it.

"You're here," a voice squealed. Courtney turned in the direction of the voice and saw a woman who was the slightest bit shorter and wider than Nicole, but with that same brown hair and blue eyes, running toward her. Before she could react, the woman was beside her and wrapping her in a big hug.

"Sheesh, Mom, let the girl breathe, would you?"

Her mom pulled back, but kept one hand on Courtney's arm.

"Sorry. I'm just excited. This is Courtney Fields; *THE* Courtney Fields."

Courtney looked at Nicole just in time to see her rolling her eyes.

"Oh Lord, way to stroke her ego. She doesn't need any more of that, trust me. She already thinks *very* highly of herself."

Nicole's mom swatted at her arm. "Oh, you stop that. Don't be mean." Her face suddenly lit up as if she had an idea. "I have something funny to show you girls. I'll be right back." She scurried away almost as fast as she had arrived.

Nicole pointed back at her. "And that's my mom. Figured I should tell you since she didn't *actually* introduce herself."

Courtney put a hand over her chest. "Can you really blame her though? She was in the presence of *THE* Courtney Fields."

"I'm going to kill her for saying that. You're never going to let me forget it."

"You're right. I'm totally not going to. I'll probably even make *THE* an official part of my name."

As Courtney laughed, she felt like a weight had been lifted off of her shoulders. It apparently wasn't too hard to impress Mrs. Dawson, which would make the day much more relaxing. Mrs. Dawson, who was now briskly walking back out of the house, waving a newspaper in the air. "Look what I found," she said as she held it out in front of them.

Courtney laughed out loud when she saw the picture on the front page of the sports section of their local newspaper. It was her and Nicole running right beside each other on the track. Courtney's mouth was slightly ajar with a grimace and the veins in Nicole's neck were popping out. Courtney could tell it was from their freshman year because she still had braces. It was so ridiculous, but she absolutely loved it.

"Mom, how the hell did you find that?" Nicole asked, her hands on her knees as she doubled over in laughter.

"I have boxes full of all the articles your name is mentioned in. I was reminiscing and going through them the other day since I knew you were coming home, and I couldn't believe it when I saw this."

"What I can't believe is that we're side by side in this picture. It had to have been early in the race," Nicole said.

Mrs. Dawson shook her head. "Actually, according to the caption, this was right before Courtney pulled ahead of you."

Nicole threw her hands in the air, which made Courtney laugh even harder. "Of course. They *would* put my picture in the paper one of the only times you beat me."

Courtney loved that she could hold this over Nicole's head. It was absolutely hilarious, and Nicole looked outrageously cute when she was worked up. "Man, I wonder if my parents still have this. I need a framed copy."

"You really don't," Nicole said as she snatched the newspaper from her mom's hands and tossed it onto a chair sitting behind her.

"Do I hear my baby girl?" a man's voice called.

Just a few seconds later, a man who had to have been Nicole's dad joined them on the deck. He didn't look quite as much like Nicole as her mom did, but Courtney could still see the resemblance. He was tall and muscular with curly black hair that had hints of gray throughout it.

"There she is," he said proudly before leaning in to place a kiss on Nicole's cheek.

He turned to Courtney and wiped his dirt-covered hands on his shorts, then studied them before looking back up at her. "I'm Mr. Dawson. Sorry, I would shake your hand, but I'm a mess right now. I just got done pulling weeds and mowing."

Courtney put on her best parent-wooing smile. “That’s no problem, Mr. Dawson. It’s very nice to meet you. Nicole has told me so much about you. It was so sweet of you guys to invite me and my family to the party today.”

“Well, we love meeting Nicole’s friends, and it’s not every day we’re in the presence of such an area legend.”

Nicole threw her hands in the air once more. “Oh my God! Not you too!”

Courtney lightly patted Nicole’s shoulder as if she were a child. “Now, now. You can’t blame them for recognizing raw talent when it’s standing right in front of them.”

For a second, Courtney worried if that level of sarcasm at the sake of their daughter would be too much for Nicole’s parents. But soon her dad started to laugh and pointed a finger at her. “I like this girl, Nikki. She puts you in your place.”

Courtney couldn’t help the wide grin that spread across her face as she turned toward Nicole, partly because her dad had said he liked her and partly because of the nickname that she knew Nicole must hate. “Nikki, huh?”

Nicole wagged her pointer finger at Courtney. “Don’t even think about it. My dad is the only one who gets to call me Nikki and the only reason I even let him do it is because I got half of my DNA from him.”

Nicole’s dad chuckled again. “I’m going to go shower, but keep it up. You’re good for her. I’m excited to talk to you more in a little bit.”

“I’m going to freshen up as well,” Mrs. Dawson said. “You girls just relax for a bit. We don’t need anything until it’s time to set out the drinks and snacks closer to party time.”

“Sounds good. Thanks again for inviting me into your home, Mrs. Dawson,” Courtney said before Mrs. Dawson walked away.

When she looked back at Nicole, Nicole was already staring at her with a shit-eating grin on her face. “What?”

Nicole shook her head as she continued to smile. “You’re such a suck up.”

Courtney shoved her shoulder. “Oh stop. You’re going to be the exact same way with my parents.”

Nicole stuck her nose in the air. “I don’t need to suck up. I’m naturally charming.” Nicole reached her hand out toward Courtney. “Want to watch some TV and snuggle on the couch for a bit?”

Courtney squeezed Nicole’s hand and so many emotions swirled through her body. “That sounds wonderful.”

Absolutely wonderful.

Chapter 13

At one-thirty on the dot, friends and neighbors began to arrive at the Dawsons' house. By two-thirty, the party was in full swing. As much as she normally enjoyed her family's Labor Day party, she was kind of disappointed to have it underway now. Hanging out at her childhood home with Courtney and watching her get along so well with her parents was kind of surreal and Nicole didn't want it to end. She secretly hoped Courtney would stick around after everyone left the party so they had more time like that together.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Courtney coming up beside her and putting an arm around her waist. "My parents just texted to tell me they're here. Ready to meet the people who made such perfection?"

"But that already happened hours ago when you met my parents."

"Ha-ha. Good one. Let's go."

Nicole was surprised when Courtney grabbed her hand and dragged her through the house. When did hand holding become so natural between them? Nicole had no idea, but she didn't care, because it felt amazing. Unfortunately, Courtney dropped her hand as soon as her parents were in view.

"Mom! Dad! Over here!" she yelled while waving her hands.

Courtney definitely resembled her dad more than her mom. He had short blonde hair and those same green eyes while her mom had brown hair and eyes. They were both tall just like Courtney. They honestly looked much younger than Nicole expected, but she figured they must have had Courtney earlier than Nicole's parents had her since they had another daughter eight years later.

"Hi! You must be Nicole," Courtney's dad said as he reached his hand out to her.

Nicole accepted his firm handshake and tried to return it just as firmly. "It's very nice to meet you, sir. I've heard so much about you both."

"We've heard a bunch about you too. My daughter couldn't stop singing your praises last night," Mrs. Fields added. She held her arms out

toward Nicole. "It's so nice to meet you, dear. I hope you don't mind, but I'm a hugger."

Nicole readily accepted her embrace. "I don't mind one bit. I'm also a hugger."

Except, that was a slight lie. Nicole hadn't been much of a hugger before meeting Courtney, but now that she knew how good it felt to be wrapped in those arms, she was obsessed. The prime example was their hug earlier when Courtney first arrived. It killed her to pull away. She would have stayed like that all day if she could have.

"Let me take you guys out back and introduce you to my parents. They'll be so excited to meet you."

To absolutely no one's surprise, their parents hit it off as soon as they met. They had a lot in common, including their obsession with their daughters and sports and the fact that their daughters used to play sports.

"I'm sure they'll entertain each other for hours," Nicole whispered to Courtney. "Now is the time to sneak off to my room."

She took Courtney's hand once again and led her back through the house and up the stairs to her room. Her bedroom looked the same way since high school. The walls were covered with pictures of her and her friends and the shelf that lined the whole room was filled with trophies and plaques.

Nicole dropped Courtney's hand and wrapped her arms around her from behind, kissing the spot just below her ear. "Want to try out my old bed?"

Courtney turned around and pushed her away with one hand. "I'm *not* having sex with you while your parents are hosting a Labor Day party downstairs. That's just wrong."

"Says the girl who gave me an orgasm in the middle of a restaurant."

Courtney smiled and bit her lip in a way that caused so many dirty thoughts to run through Nicole's head. "That was different. You were wearing that tight black dress. I couldn't control myself."

"And you're not a fan of this outfit?" Nicole asked, faking a pout but also somewhat disappointed that Courtney hadn't taken notice of the low V-neck shirt she had worn just for her.

That disappointment didn't last long since Courtney's eyes dropped to the top of her shirt and she ran a finger down the V. "I'm a big fan of this outfit. Unfortunately, I'm also a fan of impressing your parents and I don't think having them catch us naked in your bed is the way to do that."

Nicole groaned. All she wanted to do was throw Courtney onto the bed and have her way with her. "Can we at least make out for a few minutes?"

Courtney slipped her finger inside the V of the T-shirt and pulled Nicole over to the bed. "Now, *that* I can do."

Unfortunately, they had barely started when Nicole heard little voices coming from downstairs and the sound of her brother telling his kids to go find *Auntie Colie*.

"Shit," she whispered against Courtney's mouth. "They really will find me. I guess we better get downstairs."

As soon as they were at the top of the staircase, Nicole found her two nephews, Braxton and Cole, staring up at them from the bottom. Cole was five and had brown curly hair. Braxton was his complete opposite. He was three with straight blonde hair that her brother refused to have cut, even though it desperately needed it.

They both jumped up and down when Nicole and Courtney started walking down the stairs and giggled as Nicole swept each of them into her arms.

"Auntie Colie, will you race me?" Cole asked.

Nicole swelled up with pride. That little boy wasn't only named after her, but also acted so much like her. "Where are your parents? Shouldn't we ask them first?"

Cole shrugged. "Daddy told me to find you. He said you would watch us."

Of course he did. Leave it to her brother to pass his parental duties over to her as soon as they were back in the same house. She didn't mind though. She adored these little boys. She looked around to see where Braxton had gone and found him with one arm wrapped tightly around Courtney's leg and his thumb in his mouth.

"Looks like you made a friend," Nicole said, her heart swelling even more now. The sight of Courtney with a little boy that she loved so

very much wrapped around her legs was giving her such a deep, longing feeling, she almost confessed all of her feelings to Courtney on the spot.

“This little guy is going to help me judge the race. Aren’t you, buddy?” Courtney asked as she ruffled Braxton’s hair.

Nicole’s heart was absolutely done for. This was all too much to handle. She scooped Cole up under one arm and carried him out front as he kicked, screamed, and giggled the whole way. They walked all the way down to the road with Courtney and Braxton following closely behind.

She set Cole down right next to her parents’ mailbox. “Okay. You know the rules. I’ll say 1-2-3 go. First one to get to that next mailbox right there wins.” She pointed at the next door neighbor’s mailbox. “Are you ready?” When Cole nodded, she started the countdown. “Okay. 1-2-3 go!”

Nicole let Cole run ahead as she slowly jogged behind him, grunting as if she was putting in a lot of effort. Near the end, she acted like she was going to catch up, but let him touch the mailbox first. “Aw, man. You beat me *again*. You should take your brother out back and you guys can tell Grammy and Pappy all about it.”

It took a little bit of effort, but Cole was eventually able to convince Braxton to let go of Courtney’s leg and the two of them held hands as they ran around the side of the house into the backyard.

“They’re absolutely adorable,” Courtney said once they were out of sight. “So, Cole...?”

“Yeah, he’s named after me.”

“That’s so sweet. You and your brother must be close.”

Nicole nodded. “We are. He’s one of my best friends.”

“In that case, do you think I could meet him now?”

Every time Nicole thought the day couldn’t get any better, Courtney did or said something that was so sweet, she thought she might melt right to the ground. “Of course. I’d love that.”

They took the same path the kids had just run and as soon as they rounded the corner to the backyard, they were greeted by her brother’s wide smile. “Colie!” he shouted as soon as he saw her.

As he was walking over to them, Courtney leaned in to whisper to her. “Umm... you never told me your brother looks like he could be your twin.”

Nicole smiled at the remark, taking it as a compliment. She had always loved when people made comments about how much they looked alike growing up because she always wanted to be just like her brother. Heck, she still wanted to be like him. A loving family with two rambunctious little boys and a beautiful wife sounded pretty good to her.

Before she realized what was happening, Sean was lifting her in the air and spinning her in a circle. "It's been too long," he said excitedly. "You never come home anymore."

"I've been a little busy." *Falling for someone I never, ever thought I would.* "Sean, this is my friend Courtney."

"Courtney! It's nice to meet you. I was just talking to your parents. They're hilarious." Sean turned from Courtney back to Nicole. "Heard Cole beat you in a race again."

"Oh yes. Very tragic."

Sean pointed his thumb behind him. "I gotta get back there because we were in the middle of talking about our fantasy football teams, but I had to come say hello. We'll talk more soon I promise. Courtney, please keep my sister in line."

"Always," Courtney answered with a laugh. Once he was gone, she gave Nicole's hand a quick squeeze. "You guys are so much alike. I can already tell you have the exact same sense of humor."

"I'm better looking though, right?"

Courtney held her fingers close together. "It's close, but you're a girl, so I'll give you the edge."

"So, want to mingle or should we continue what we were doing earlier?"

"As much as I'd love to continue, we really should mingle with everyone."

"Well, that's no fun."

Apparently mingling could be fun when you had the person you were falling for with you. Nicole couldn't remember a time that she'd ever had so much fun at the annual Labor Day party. The day flew by way too fast as they hung out with both of their families and even some of Nicole's

high school friends who were shocked to find Courtney Fields in attendance. Still, Courtney easily won them over with her charm and witty remarks and Nicole found herself falling more and more.

She was happy when people started to leave and Courtney stuck around. Sean's family and Courtney's parents were the last to leave, all of them staying until about eight o'clock. Nicole wanted this for her future. She wanted to watch her mom and Courtney's mom gossip together and listen to their dad's talk about sports. She wanted to play with her nephews with Courtney by her side. She wanted Courtney to be the last to leave, always.

Only two more weeks, she reminded herself once again. At this point, she had no idea why she was waiting to say anything. Courtney *had* to feel the same way. Yet, when she made up her mind about something she stuck to it, and she had already decided it would happen after the wedding.

Nicole brought her attention back to the other side of the deck where Courtney was trying to clean up trash. Her mom waved a hand to stop her. "Oh, dear, you don't need to do that," she said as she grabbed the trash from her. "We'll take care of this tomorrow. Come inside. I have something I want to show you."

What could she possibly want to show...? Oh hell no. Nicole rushed after her mom and Courtney, catching them as they got to the door. "I don't think that's necessary, Mom," she said between breaths.

"Calm down, honey. You don't even know what I'm going to show her."

"I know exactly what you're going to show her. You're heading in there to get out old photo albums."

Her mom shrugged, completely unphased. "Okay. I guess you do know what I'm going to show her."

"I can't wait for this," Courtney said giddily as she followed closely behind Nicole's mom.

Nicole groaned, but followed after them. Soon, the three of them were sitting on the couch with her mom in the middle with one photo album on her lap and a big pile of them in front of her on the coffee table.

She opened the album and pointed to the first picture, which was a picture of Nicole soon after she was born. "See that head. Her head was so big I had to deliver by C-section."

“Looks like some things haven’t changed,” Courtney joked.

Even though Nicole tried to protest, they continued to go through photo albums for over an hour. Finally, after showing just about every embarrassing picture of Nicole that existed, her mom stretched and yawned. “Well, this has been fun, but I need some sleep. Goodnight, girls. And Courtney, I really hope I’ll be seeing more of you.”

“You definitely will, ma’am.”

Those were some of the sweetest words Nicole had ever heard. It was an unspoken promise that whatever this was between them wasn’t ending anytime soon.

“I better get going,” Courtney said once Nicole’s mom had left the room. “My sister keeps texting to ask when I’m coming home. Apparently, her friends are done hanging out so I’m cool enough for her again.”

Nicole stood from the couch and reached out to help Courtney up. “I’ll walk you out.”

They were both quiet as they walked to Courtney’s car. Once they made it, Courtney leaned back against her car and faced Nicole, her appearance shy and subdued. She looked toward the driveway and ran her foot along the pavement. “So, I was wondering if... maybe I could... kiss you goodnight?”

Just when Nicole thought the day couldn’t get any better, Courtney had to go and shyly ask permission to kiss her. As much as her heart was racing, she couldn’t help but laugh at the irony of it all. “You’ve screwed me with a strap-on, gotten me off at dinner, and gone down on me while I was on FaceTime, and now you’re asking if you can kiss me?”

It was hard to see through the dark night, but Nicole was pretty sure Courtney’s face had turned red. “It does sound pretty silly when you put it that way.”

“It’s not silly. It’s sweet.” Nicole lightly brushed her fingers against Courtney’s. “There’s nothing I want more.”

So, Courtney kissed her and just like her words, it was so damn sweet. It wasn’t hard or demanding. It was quick and nice and absolutely perfect. When the kiss was over, Nicole kept her forehead resting against Courtney’s. She wanted to just say what she needed to say. Tell Courtney everything she was feeling. Lay it all on the line.

“Courtney, I...” *Just say it.* “I had a really nice time today.”
Coward.

“I did too.” Courtney placed one more quick kiss on Nicole’s lips before turning back toward her car.

Nicole watched as she got in her car and pulled away. *Two more weeks.*

Chapter 14

“Want to come to my parents’ house for dinner tonight?” Fulton asked Courtney over the phone. “My mom has been bugging me to invite you over. Plus, I thought we could hang after. Roberta is going out with her college friends and I can’t remember the last time we hung out, just the two of us.”

Courtney already knew Roberta was going out with friends because Nicole was one of them. It had been just under a week since Nicole dropped her off after going home for Labor Day, but Courtney still missed her. She had been disappointed to find out Nicole had plans, especially since they had barely spoken all week because Nicole had a lot going on at work. She promised to tell her all about it when they finally got together on Sunday, but Courtney hated to wait that long. God, she was pathetic.

“I’m in. What time are you thinking?”

“My mom said dinner should be ready at six, so want to plan on coming around 5:30?”

“Sounds perfect.”

“Not entirely,” Fulton said hesitantly. “Griffin will be there.”

Courtney couldn’t help her groan. “I guess that shouldn’t be surprising since he still lives with your parents.”

“Yeah, I was hoping he’d have plans, but apparently no one wants to spend time with him. Shocking.”

Courtney laughed. “I can’t imagine why. Is he still being a douche to you?”

“Oh yeah. It keeps getting worse and worse the closer it gets to the wedding. And he wonders why I didn’t choose him as the best man. He’s a freaking child.” Fulton sighed and Courtney could feel his frustration through the phone. “Anyway, I’ll see you tonight.”

“See you then,” Courtney said before hanging up the phone.

Courtney spent the day lounging around the house until it was time to get ready to go to the Sheas’ house. Even though she had been there a few times before, she was still amazed every time she saw their house, and this time was no different. She wasn’t sure what qualifies something as a

mansion, but she had to imagine this was it. It had three stories, plus a finished basement and was big enough to be sectioned into “wings.” The second-floor west wing was where Fulton’s bedroom was, but it was more of its own apartment than a bedroom since it included a *sitting room* with a TV, couch, and mini kitchenette, a full bathroom, and then a separate area to sleep. Aside from his bedroom, she had only really seen the basement and the main dining room since Fulton always insisted it was too annoying to give a tour. She assumed it was because he didn’t like showing off just how much money his family had.

As she walked up to the house, she had to admit she didn’t blame Griffin for moving back in with his parents after college. Even with his trust fund and whatever job he was working now, nowhere he lived would be nearly as nice as this. When she reached the door, she hit the button for the intercom system.

“Sorry. We’re not taking in any strays tonight,” the voice on the other end said. Courtney rolled her eyes. *Freaking Griffin*. “Don’t roll your eyes at me.” Courtney looked around and Griffin started to laugh. “Do you really think my parents wouldn’t have a camera at the front door? That shirt is hideous, by the way.”

Courtney just laughed. That was the worst jab he could have made since the selfie Courtney had sent Nicole earlier was answered with a bunch of drooling emojis and a text that said *That shirt is hot, but it would look even better on my bedroom floor*. God, she was hot just thinking about it. Thank God she was going to see Nicole the next day.

“Shut up, asshole,” Courtney heard Fulton say to Griffin. “Sorry, Court, I’ll be right down.”

After a minute or so, Fulton opened the front door with an apologetic look on his face. “Sorry about Griffin. And I apologize in advance for anything he might say over dinner. He’s just acting like such a jerk lately.”

Luckily, Griffin was quiet during dinner. Except he was eerily quiet almost to the point that it made Courtney nervous. He was too invested in something on his phone to even contribute to the conversation.

After dinner, Fulton and Courtney went up to Fulton’s room to play video games. Courtney was happy that Griffin didn’t try to follow and they were able to have a Griffin-free night.

“Leaving so soon?” a voice asked when she reached the door.

Courtney cringed knowing exactly who that voice belonged to. “Yes. It’s 9:30 and I’m tired.” She didn’t even turn around to look at him, instead opening the door and stepping outside.

“Let me walk you to your car. It’s a long driveway.”

“I’m fine,” Courtney said through gritted teeth. She knew there was no way Griffin was being nice just to be nice.

“Please. I want to talk to you about something. I promise I won’t be a jerk.” Courtney ignored him and continued to walk until Griffin stopped her by grasping her arm. “It’s wedding related.”

“Fine.”

He gave her a satisfied smile, then fell into step with her. “Are you and Nicole friends?”

What the hell? “I thought you said this was wedding related.”

“It is. It’s about me getting laid at the wedding.”

Courtney snapped her head toward Griffin. “There is no way in hell you are having sex with Nicole after the wedding, so don’t even try it.”

Griffin crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back against the front of Courtney’s car, a smug look on his face. “It’s not a question about whether or not it’s happening. It’s definitely happening. I was just wondering if she’s ever mentioned what she likes in bed. Gotta make it good for her. Not that it would be too hard.”

Courtney could literally feel her blood boiling. Who the hell did this guy think he was? “I’m not sure where you got the idea that Nicole was going to have sex with you, but believe me when I tell you you’re wasting your breath right now. It’s not happening.”

Courtney opened the door to her car. She wasn’t going to stand here and listen to his nonsense.

“She really didn’t tell you?”

Courtney paused at Griffin’s words. “Tell me what?”

Griffin laughed and shook his head. “Guess she doesn’t kiss and tell.”

A heavy feeling settled in Courtney’s gut, and she thought she might throw up. Even though she knew it couldn’t be true, just the thought of Nicole kissing someone else made her sick. “What are you talking

about?” she asked, putting her hand against the car to brace herself for whatever he was about to say.

“We hooked up at the club. I almost forgot what a good kisser she is.”

Courtney wanted to run away, but she also couldn't move. Her mind flashed back to that night in the club and Roberta's comment and the way Nicole blew her off when she asked what she was doing with Griffin. But that night when they were in bed together... no. There was no way. Nicole could never be that intimate with her right after hooking up with someone else.

She shook her head back and forth wildly. “You're lying.”

Griffin laughed once again. “Not sure what I have to gain by lying about this.”

Courtney started to squirm. *Why would* he make this up? It's not like he knew what was going on between her and Nicole. No one did. Heck, *she* barely knew what was going on and now she was even more confused.

“I don't know. Maybe to stroke your ego or something.”

Griffin lifted an eyebrow but the smile never left his face. “If I was trying to stroke my ego, why would I waste my breath bragging to Nicole's friend who I assumed already knew?”

What he was saying made sense. She didn't want it to, but it did. What didn't make sense was Nicole hooking up with him. Why would she do that? She couldn't believe it. She shook her head once again.

Griffin groaned. “Why is this so hard for you to believe?” His smile grew even bigger, and Courtney was sure whatever came out of his mouth next was going to make her want to pummel him. “You have a crush on her, don't you? Oh, that's so cute that you actually think Nicole would go for you.”

Tears were threatening to fall, so she just kept shaking her head. She would talk to Nicole about this and Nicole would clear it all up. This couldn't be what Griffin was making it seem like.

Griffin rolled his eyes. “You could just ask Nicole to confirm it, but I'm sure you won't because you probably want to keep this little crush of yours a secret. I'll save you the trouble. I have all the proof you need right here.” He took his phone out of his pocket and waved it in front of her.

“Do you want to see all the times she called me?” He brought up his call log and the majority of his calls the past week were from Nicole. “I have texts too. Don’t worry. I’ll find a PG one for your sake.”

He scrolled through his phone, then held it out toward Courtney. She couldn’t believe her eyes when she read the texts on the screen. It was only two, but they said it all.

Thanks for last night.

We still on for tomorrow?

Courtney couldn’t be here anymore. She couldn’t stand there and look at Griffin’s smug grin and be reminded of everything she lost. Everything she lost that was never really hers to begin with. What a sick joke.

She got into her car without saying another word and drove away. It didn’t take long for the tears to start falling. She felt like such an idiot. She had fallen head over heels for a girl who was hooking up with someone else. For all she knew, Griffin wasn’t the only one. She could have had other random hookups throughout their whole fling. The worst part was she had no one to blame but herself. It’s not like she could be mad at Nicole. They never set ground rules for what they were doing. They just were. And whatever it was that they were was clearly more important to Courtney. She should have just said something. She should have told Nicole how she felt. Maybe then she wouldn’t have felt the need to turn to someone else.

But it was too late now. Nicole hadn’t hooked up with just anyone. She had hooked up with *Griffin*, the guy that was set on making both her and Fulton miserable. She felt betrayed by that fact. Out of all the people, why him?

Somehow, between sobs, Courtney was able to use the Bluetooth in her car to call Alissa. But when Alissa picked up, she couldn’t get any words out.

“Courtney? Are you there? Are you okay?”

She took a few deep breaths to try to gain some semblance of control so she could talk. “No.”

Okay. It wasn’t much, but it was a start.

“What’s wrong? What happened?”

Courtney felt bad about her sister’s panicked tone, and she knew she had to explain herself before she thought something had happened to

her or their parents. “It’s Nicole.”

Courtney rehashed the whole story to her sister, losing it once again when she told her about Nicole’s texts.

“Are you sure he’s telling the truth though?” Alissa asked once she finished.

“I saw the calls and texts, Liss. He couldn’t make that up. Plus, why would he? It’s not like he knew there was anything going on between me and Nicole. No one does, except for you.”

To Courtney’s surprise, Alissa started to laugh. “Honey, anyone who’s been in the same *county* as you two would have to be an idiot to not realize there was something going on there.”

Was it really that obvious? Courtney didn’t think so, but maybe she was wrong. Alissa had called it after the one car ride and her mom had called to talk to her about Nicole at least three times since last weekend. None of that really mattered though.

“Well, Griffin is an idiot, so there’s that,” she said. “Plus, even if he knew and tried to get with her just to get back at me, it clearly worked. And she *thanked* him. I might throw up.”

“Don’t throw up. Do what you do best and go out there and win this break up or whatever it is. Ask Fulton if it’s too late to add another person to the guest list and take a date that’s even hotter than Nicole.”

Courtney shook her head. She knew her sister meant well, but this is what she got for talking to an eighteen year old. “That’s terrible advice for so many reasons.”

“Whatever. Here’s better advice. Get a good night’s sleep, then come pick me up tomorrow and we’ll have a sister day.”

“Deal.”

After saying their goodbyes and hanging up, Courtney thought more about her sister’s original piece of advice. While she wasn’t trying to *win the break up* by any means, it would be nice to have someone there for support. It’s not like she could talk to Fulton. This was his big day. She wasn’t going to ruin that. Now it felt like fate that Fulton had mentioned the fact that one of his cousins and her husband could no longer make it to the wedding so their plates were going to go to waste.

Before overthinking it, she called a number she hadn’t in much too long. Her ex, Audrey, picked up after just two rings with a worried,

“Everything okay?”

Just another reason they never would have worked out—Audrey was way too sweet for her. “You shouldn’t be so nice. You should be telling me how much I suck. I’ve been a terrible friend lately.”

“It’s cool. Friendship is a two-way street. I haven’t done well either. But I’m here now. What can I do for you?”

Without wasting anymore time, Courtney hopped right into the whole story of her and Nicole. Because that’s how her and Audrey’s friendship worked. They could go months without talking, but as soon as one of them needed something, the other was all in. “So, long story short, if you’re free next weekend, I could use a wedding date. I know it’s a two-hour drive for you, but it’s a free party. I’ll pay for your gas and for anything else you want to do while you’re here.”

“You really don’t need to work so hard to convince me. I already decided I’m coming.”

They talked for a little while longer, their conversation lasting all the way back to Courtney’s apartment. She hung up as soon as she was inside and sat down on the couch just in time for another call to come through. The name that lit up the screen was the last person she wanted to talk to right now so she let it go to voicemail. Soon, a text came through.

Got home from girls’ night earlier than expected. Did you leave Fulton’s yet? Want to spend the night at my place? I miss you.

Nicole’s words didn’t mean as much knowing what she knew now and what would have made her so happy before only made her feel sad. She typed out her reply and threw her phone onto the coffee table. It was officially the beginning of the end.

I actually can’t hang out tomorrow. My sister wants to hang out with me.

Nicole looked at the text that had just come through and could physically feel the disappointment coursing through her body. After the week she had, she could really use time with Courtney. At the risk of sounding pathetic, she tried once again to convince Courtney to hang out tonight.

What time are you guys getting together? You could still stay over tonight. Or I could come to you.

She waited for a reply and frowned once it came through.

I had a really long day, so I'm exhausted. I'm sorry.

Something felt off about their exchange. She wondered what she could have possibly done to piss Courtney off. When she came up completely blank, she figured she must be overthinking it. Courtney probably really was tired.

Nicole was the one who was off. After her exhausting week, anything was bound to get to her. On Monday, her young client who was supposed to be starting at UPenn broke down to her about how hard it was being at home re-learning how to do simple everyday tasks when she should have been starting school and her career as a college athlete. She had worked with people in similar situations in the past and many struggled to deal with it, but none that seemed to take it this hard, and that scared her. Nicole was so concerned about her mental health that she spent any free time away from work researching how to support someone in that situation.

She was so desperate, she had even turned to Griffin for help, which had ended up being only minimally useful. She remembered him once telling her about how he was supposed to play football in college, but an injury his senior year of high school had ruined that, so she thought he could provide some insight on how to help.

For one night, he actually acted human. He talked to her on the phone and told her all about what it felt like to hear he wouldn't play football again. Then he insisted she go to lunch with him so he could explain the rest, but instead of doing that, he spent the whole lunch trying to convince her they should *have some fun together* after the wedding, and she not-so-kindly reminded him *not in a million years*.

By Friday, she ended up finding a therapist that seemed like a good fit for her client and recommended she see her. It was all worth it for the appreciation she was shown, but God, was she emotionally and physically exhausted.

The only thing that got her through the week was the promise of seeing Courtney at the end of it and now that wasn't happening. She couldn't blame Courtney though. Her relationship with her sister was just

another thing on the long list of reasons to like her. Nicole shut her eyes. If she couldn't see Courtney, she should at least get some rest.

Nicole's Sunday dragged by. Courtney must have been busy with her sister because she barely answered her texts. So, Nicole's entertainment was lacking. She was so bored that when Roberta called her that evening, she jumped at the opportunity to talk to someone.

"Berta! How are you?"

"Why are you so excited?" she asked. "Did you just have sex or something?"

Unfortunately, no. "Nah. I'm just excited to talk to you."

"You saw me last night, but I'll take it. It's sweet that you're so obsessed with me."

"So, what's up? Did you call for any particular reason?" Nicole asked as she stood and started clearing dishes off the coffee table from the takeout she had just finished.

"I did, actually. I was wondering if you knew anything about Courtney taking a date to the wedding. She called Fulton today and asked if she could."

Nicole stopped in her tracks and dropped the container in her hand, along with a fork that made a loud noise when it hit the hardwood floor.

"Everything okay over there?" Roberta asked, the question laced in a tone of curiosity.

"Oh yeah. I just tripped, sorry. What's this about a date?" She struggled to try to keep her voice level.

"She's apparently taking Audrey to the wedding."

Nicole wracked her brain trying to figure out if that name should mean something to her, but she couldn't think of anything. "Who's Audrey?"

"Her ex..." Roberta said hesitantly.

The ex she was with for five years? The one who she apparently had no chemistry with?

"You honestly didn't know?" Roberta asked.

Nicole sighed. She didn't want to be having this conversation. She wanted to sit down by herself and try to figure out what the hell was happening. "Why would I know that?"

“Oh, come on, it’s not like we don’t realize that you two are together all the time. Ever since you had sex in Cabo—”

“Wait. How do you know we had sex in Cabo?”

Roberta laughed as if this was a joke. “You missed brunch. There was no way I was going to believe you *slept* through it. I’ve known you since college. The only thing you’ll miss a meal for is sex and after the way you two were acting in the hot tub the night before, it wasn’t too hard to put the pieces together.”

“But you never said anything.”

“It wasn’t my place.”

“But now it is?”

“Honestly, I accidentally let that slip out, but I guess it is my place now because I need to make sure you’re okay.”

Nicole threw away her dishes, then stumbled over to her couch, throwing herself down on it. It honestly felt like the room was spinning and she wasn’t sure if she was going to throw up or pass out. “I’m not sure how to feel. I’m shocked. I... I thought...” She shook her head at herself. What an idea. “It doesn’t matter what I thought. I was clearly wrong.”

“Do you want me to have Fulton talk to her and see what the deal is?”

“No!” Nicole answered much more intensely than she meant to. She took a deep, calming breath before speaking again. “Sorry. No. This is between me and Courtney. You guys shouldn’t have to worry about it.”

“Well, I am worried. I’m worried about *you*, Nicole. I know you really like her. You confirmed it with the way you were looking at her at the bachelorette party and how you found any reason to bring her up in conversation last night. So, are you? Okay, I mean.”

Roberta knew. Somehow she always knew. It was exactly what she needed in a friend. Exactly why they had been best friends since college. Only, right now, it wasn’t enough. “No, Roberta. I’m completely heartbroken.”

And with those words out, she dropped the phone and broke into tears.

Chapter 15

“You look absolutely stunning, Berta. I’m so happy for you,” Nicole said as she stood behind her best friend who was staring at her wedding dress in the full-length mirror in front of her.

Roberta focused on Nicole through the mirror. “And how are *you* doing?”

“We’ve been over this. I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine.” Roberta shook her head. “I mean, you’re *fine* as hell. But you look sad.”

“I’ll be okay. I promise.”

Was she going to be okay though? She had no idea what had happened with Courtney. One day things were perfect and the next they were just being cordial to each other, exchanging texts here and there out of habit more than anything. Maybe what was happening between them always had an expiration date, and Courtney wanted that sooner rather than later. Maybe she thought her ex could offer her something Nicole couldn’t.

Nicole chastised herself for what had to be the millionth time this week. If she had just been honest, maybe Courtney wouldn’t have found the need to look elsewhere for what was lacking. She wondered how long whatever this was had been going on between Courtney and Audrey.

As if reading her mind, Roberta said, “Fulton doesn’t think there’s actually anything going on between them. Courtney was kind of quiet about her reasoning for bringing her, but he really thinks they’re just friends.”

If they were just friends, why would Courtney bring her along to this wedding where she already had a somewhat date? Except that was just it. Nicole had never even taken her on an official date. For all Courtney knew, she just saw her as someone to have sex with, but that wasn’t the case. She was so much more than that. Right now, she felt like everything.

“Ladies, it’s time,” the wedding planner said from the door.

Nicole smiled at Roberta. “Time to marry the love of your life.”

“Best words ever,” Roberta said with a grin wider than any Nicole had ever seen on her face before.

Nicole lined up behind the three other bridesmaids and right in front of Roberta. Soon, they were directed to the doors outside of the chapel. When the doors opened, Nicole's eyes immediately went to the five people already standing at the end of the aisle. Okay. That was a lie. Her eyes went to one person in particular—the beautiful girl standing right next to Fulton.

Courtney's floor-length black gown looked absolutely breathtaking on her. Its cut was high enough to be classy but low enough to have Nicole's mouth watering. As Nicole walked down the aisle, she couldn't take her eyes off of Courtney. She wished more than anything that things could be different and wondered if they still could. As she got closer, Courtney's eyes met hers and it was like those green eyes were seeing into her soul. She wondered if she could see how much she wanted her; how her heart completely belonged to her and how it was killing her to watch it slip away.

Nicole had to look away. She couldn't keep staring at Courtney or she was going to lose it. She let herself get swept up in the wedding ceremony and when she cried, it was tears of joy for her best friend.

But the end of the ceremony brought the march back down the aisle and that meant walking with Courtney. They met in the center and Courtney put her arm out for Nicole to take. As soon as they touched, all of the feelings Nicole had spent the week trying to convince herself weren't as strong as she thought, came flooding back. She wanted to confess all those feelings then and there, but that would have been wrong. Courtney was there with someone else, and Nicole was not that kind of girl.

Still, she leaned close to Courtney to whisper in her ear. "You look extremely beautiful today." *Just a harmless compliment.*

Courtney closed her eyes and took a deep breath then sighed, but when she opened her eyes back up, she gave Nicole that winning smile. "As opposed to every other day?"

"Of course not. You're always beautiful to me."

Nicole could feel Courtney's eyes on her, but she refused to look over. She couldn't. It was too hard. "You're always beautiful to me too," Courtney said so quietly Nicole might not have even heard it if her senses weren't on high alert.

That was it. That was all they said to each other before they reached the end of the aisle and parted ways and Nicole was once again left wondering what the hell had gone wrong.

“Why don’t you just talk to her?”

Courtney broke herself from the trance she was in to focus back on Audrey. “Wait. What?”

“Instead of staring longingly, you could talk to her.”

“I wasn’t staring.”

“You’ve been staring all night.”

Courtney groaned and put a hand on her head. “Do you think she’s noticed?”

“Honestly, I’m not sure. She’s been doing everything she can to *not* look at you.”

“Great,” Courtney said sarcastically.

Audrey reached out and grabbed her hand to comfort her. “No. I don’t think that’s a bad thing. You don’t avoid looking at someone you feel neutral about. She clearly still wants you.”

That shouldn’t have been surprising. From Nicole’s end, nothing had changed. It’s not like they broke up. You couldn’t break up with someone you were never dating. Nicole was probably just acting weird in response to how Courtney was acting. She knew she had to talk to her, but she wasn’t sure what to say. Should she put it all out there? Beg her to forget about whatever it is she has with Griffin and be with her? It’s not like she had any trouble looking at him tonight. Much to her dismay, she had seen the two of them together quite a few times throughout the night.

Before she could think into it more, Audrey was pulling her to her feet. “They just announced the last dance. We haven’t slow danced all night. You owe me one.”

Courtney reluctantly followed her onto the dance floor and put her arms around her waist. “Sorry I’ve been such a sucky wedding date,” she said once they were face to face.

Audrey laughed. “The food was some of the best I’ve ever eaten and the alcohol is literally top shelf. I’ve made it through just fine.”

Audrey's face became serious as she studied Courtney's. "Just talk to her, Court. Seriously."

Courtney shook her head and tried not to cry. "I'm afraid of what she would have to say. Feeling rejected is bad enough without having to hear it from her mouth."

"Can I ask you something?"

Courtney shrugged. She knew she didn't have much of a choice. "Go for it."

"How did you feel after we broke up?"

Courtney hesitated with what to say so she wouldn't hurt Audrey's feelings. "Worried, I guess."

"Worried about what?"

"Not having you in my life at all. I didn't want to lose your friendship."

"And how do you feel right now?"

"Like someone ripped my heart out of my body, ran over it with their pickup truck, then backed up to make sure they got it all." Dramatic, but true.

"Exactly, Court. We were together for five years and you didn't feel even an ounce of what you're feeling right now when we broke up."

Courtney looked toward the ground, feeling embarrassed. "I'm sorry."

"You don't need to apologize. No offense, but I wasn't broken up about it either. But that just proves how strong your feelings are now. I've never in my life known you to back down from a battle. Now isn't the time to start. Don't go down without a fight." Audrey's eyes landed on something behind Courtney. "And here comes your chance."

Before Courtney had a chance to ask what she meant, a soft voice spoke behind her. "Can I cut in?"

Audrey practically jumped away from Courtney, putting out her hands as she did. "She's all yours."

Nicole put her arms around Courtney's waist and pulled her so close, it took everything in Courtney not to just kiss her then and there. "Beautiful wedding, huh?" Nicole asked dreamily.

"It really was."

"Is it making the itch worse for you?"

“The itch?”

Nicole’s dreamy state matched her tone. “Yeah, you know, the itch to settle down and have all of this some day.”

“Oh.” Courtney hadn’t really thought about it. She was so caught up in thinking about the present and what to do about Nicole that it hadn’t crossed her mind, but now that she mentioned it... well, she did have the itch. But there was only one person she could imagine a future with. As crazy as that sounded.

When she didn’t say anything else, Nicole cleared her throat as if she felt awkward from the lack of conversation. “It seems you and Audrey found the chemistry after all. That’s good. I’m really happy for you. Seriously.”

“Wait. What? That’s not what’s happening at all.” Did Nicole *actually* think she had gotten back together with Audrey in the two weeks since they were last together? “She’s here as a friend because I didn’t want to see you and Griff—” Courtney shook her head to cut herself off. “Never mind. It’s none of my business.”

“To see me and Griffin?” Nicole asked, sounding much too confused.

How in the world could she be so dense? Did she really not see how that could be upsetting for her? It didn’t make sense that their relationship could have been so one-sided. What started out as anger and frustration burst out of Courtney as all of the feelings she had been holding in all these weeks. “You know what? I’m just going to say it because this might be my only chance. I like you, Nicole. You drive me up a freaking wall most of the time, but I think I even like that. I know this whole thing started as sex and a way to just blow off steam, but somewhere along the line it became so much more than that to me. *You* became so much more to me. And I don’t even care what has happened between you and Griffin since that night at the club. If you have even the slightest bit of feelings for me, I’m begging you not to have sex with Griffin tonight. Give me a chance. Let me show you what we could be. Let me scratch that itch for you.”

Nicole shook her head back and forth furiously, somehow looking even more confused after Courtney’s speech. “Why in the hell would I have sex with Griffin tonight?”

“He was under the impression that’s what was going to happen since you guys have been hooking up lately.”

Nicole’s face turned more red than Courtney had ever seen it as her eyes quickly darted around the room. “Griffin told you that?” When Courtney nodded her head, Nicole gritted her teeth. “I’m going to kill him. I am literally going to murder that asshole.” When she looked at Courtney, her face softened the slightest bit. “It’s not true. None of that is true. I have no interest in hooking up with Griffin. I don’t want to be with anyone but you.”

Courtney couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “You don’t?”

Nicole laughed dryly. “Of course not. You’re the whole freaking package. I was just waiting until the wedding to tell you because I didn’t want to make things awkward if you didn’t feel the same way.”

Courtney put a hand on her head and this time, she laughed too. “I had the exact same plan. Well, that is until Griffin convinced me something was going on between you two.”

“I don’t get it. Why the hell would you believe that?”

“He had proof. He showed me calls and texts from you. Which, come to think of it, I’m still confused about that part.”

Nicole threw her head back and groaned. “I thought you Stanford grads were supposed to be smart. Why wouldn’t you just, oh I don’t know, *ask* me about it? Then I could have told you that I was so desperate to help that one client I told you about before that I actually turned to Griffin since he had a career-ending injury back in high school. That’s what my calls and texts were about.” Much to Courtney’s surprise, Nicole started to smile. “But could we circle back to the more important part of all of this?”

“And what’s that?”

Nicole pulled Courtney even closer and rested her forehead against Courtney’s. Courtney could feel her breath on her lips as she spoke and it was driving her absolutely insane. “We both feel the same way. We both want more.”

The childlike grin on Nicole’s face was too much for Courtney to take. She crashed their lips together and reveled in the way Nicole tasted. It had only been two weeks since their last kiss but that was way too long. Courtney didn’t want to go that long ever again. She didn’t think about anyone else in the room as she ran her tongue along Nicole’s bottom lip or

when she slipped her tongue inside of Nicole's mouth and kissed her with abandon. As far as she was concerned, they were the only two in the room.

When the kiss ended, their foreheads rested against one another and their eyes continued to burn into each other's. Courtney was so lost in the moment she didn't even realize the song had ended and everyone else was beginning to leave the dance floor. The DJ announcing that the buses to transport them back to the hotel would be leaving shortly brought her back to the present.

The reality of what had happened hit Courtney and the blissful feeling from a moment before faded and was replaced by anger. "I'm going to kill Griffin. This was a new low, even for him."

Nicole just smiled at her as her anger rose. "Trust me, I feel the exact same way. We'll finally team up for once and teach that boy the lesson of his life. But let's worry about that tomorrow. For now, all I want to worry about is how quickly I can get you naked in my hotel bed."

And just like that, Nicole made all of Courtney's anger melt away. She ran a hand down Nicole's arm, until she reached Nicole's hand and laced their fingers together. "There's nowhere I'd rather be."

With hungry eyes, Nicole pulled Courtney off of the dance floor, stopping briefly to grab their things before quickly making their way to the exit. Nicole stopped just before they could leave. "Wait. What about Audrey? You might just be friends, but you still came together. You probably shouldn't ditch her."

Courtney pointed over toward the bar where Audrey was ogling the female bartender while her chin rested on her hand. "She's been chatting up that bartender all night. I think she's going to be just fine having a room to herself."

With those words, Nicole began to move even more quickly. When she pulled her out of the doors and toward the right, Courtney pointed in the opposite direction where the buses were sitting. "I think you're going the wrong way."

"Nah. We're walking. I think the cool fall breeze will do us both well, plus the hotel is only a few blocks away. This is going to be much faster than waiting for everyone to load onto the bus."

"I like the way you think," Courtney said with a wink Nicole couldn't see anyway. Never in a million years did Courtney think she would

feel this happy tonight. Heck, this was probably the happiest she had ever been in her entire life. No prize, no trophy, no victory compared to winning over Nicole Dawson's heart.

Thankfully, the walk to the hotel went quickly, and once they were in Nicole's hotel room, it took them no time at all to strip each other down to nothing. Nicole took her hand and led her to the bed. Once they were both lying down, they began to kiss once again. Courtney was awash with emotions as Nicole ran a hand up and down her side as they kissed. This was everything. She loved this. It wasn't the only thing she loved though. That thought stuck in her mind and wouldn't leave, so she pulled back from the kiss to look at Nicole.

"I lied when we were dancing," she said while she ran a finger over Nicole's cheek.

"About what?" Nicole didn't seem worried by that confession. She seemed to be too preoccupied by Courtney's touch that she was leaning into.

"When I said that I liked you. It might be crazy to say this so soon, but I don't just like you. I love you."

Nicole put her hand on top of Courtney's, stopping its movements. "You do?" When Courtney nodded, the smile that came to Nicole's face lit up the whole room. "If you're crazy, then we both are, because I love you too."

Courtney's heart swelled and she thought she might burst from all the happiness she was feeling. This was the best feeling in the entire world. "It looks like I won then," she told Nicole.

Instead of fighting her, Nicole simply kissed the hand that had been on her cheek, then held it against her chest. "Oh yeah? How so?" she asked.

"Nicole Dawson is in love with me. There's no greater prize in the world than that."

"If that's true, then I need you to do something for me."

"Anything," Courtney said breathlessly. And it was true. She knew she would do anything it took to make Nicole happy.

"Make love to me."

Courtney smiled. She loved how those words sounded. "Now that I can do." And so she did. She spent the rest of the night making love to the love of her life. It didn't get any better than that.

Chapter 16

Nicole was relieved to wake up and find Courtney lying next to her. “So, this wasn’t a dream?” she asked.

Courtney giggled, and it was the sweetest sound Nicole had ever heard. “Not a dream, sweetheart.”

“So, it’s official? Courtney Fields is my girlfriend?” Even just saying those words made all of the love that Nicole felt in her heart seem to grow even more.

“Yep. And Nicole Dawson is my girlfriend.” Courtney shook her head. “If only seventeen-year-old Courtney could see me now.”

“She’d think you were crazy.”

Courtney chuckled. “Maybe I am a little crazy.”

“I think we both are, and I’m pretty sure that’s why this works so well.”

“It looks like you finally found the person who can keep up with you.”

Nicole scrunched up her face to act like she was unsure about that comment. “Maybe in life, but definitely not on the track.”

Courtney slapped her arm playfully. “Whatever. I want a rematch from our last race.”

“You sure you want to risk pulling your ass muscle again?”

“To get you to shut up about it? Yes. One hundred percent.”

Nicole laughed, absolutely loving this back and forth between them. It was just one of the many things she loved about Courtney. God, it felt good to finally admit that. “You know,” she said as she traced circles along Courtney’s stomach. “I had this big speech planned out before Griffin had to go and mess everything up. I came up with it after you left my parents’ house. After you spent all day there until the very end, when it was just you, me, and my mom sitting on the couch together. After the most amazing day of my entire life. I started thinking about how much I loved it that you stuck around, and I decided I was going to end my speech by telling you that I always want you to be the last to leave. Forever.”

Courtney shook her head. “It would have been a cute speech, but it just doesn’t work for me. I don’t want to be the last to leave. First of all, because I’m never last. Second of all, because I don’t ever wanna leave you.”

“Do you really mean that?” Nicole asked, feeling so fragile yet so strong all at once.

“I do. I know we haven’t known each other that long—”

Nicole stuck up her pointer finger to interrupt her. “Technically, we’ve known each other for more than ten years.”

“Okay. I know we haven’t been able to stand each other long—”

“Technically, I never said I could stand you,” Nicole interrupted once again.

“My God. Would you shut up and let me finish? What I’m trying to say is as crazy as it is and as nuts as you drive me, I don’t think there’s anyone in this world more perfect for me than you. And for that reason, I don’t plan on ever letting you go.”

“Good. Because there’s nothing I want more than to drive you insane for the rest of our lives.” Nicole looked at the clock on the nightstand, then moved on top of Courtney. “Now, if you don’t mind, we have a lot to do. We have approximately one hour of making love before we have to get ready for Roberta and Fulton’s post-wedding brunch. And while we get ready, we have to figure out what to do about Griffin that doesn’t involve having to dispose of a body. How does that sound?”

Courtney smiled. “You had me from making love, but,” she maneuvered their bodies and flipped them around so Nicole was now looking up at Courtney, “*I’m* always on top.”

After a glorious morning, it was time to enact the plan they had come up with. Not only did Roberta and Fulton not mind what they were doing, but after hearing what Griffin pulled, they wanted to be involved. Unfortunately, the plan involved spending brunch apart while Nicole schmoozed Griffin, but since they both agreed they were in this for the long haul, Nicole figured she could make it through a forty-five-minute brunch.

She went down to the room brunch was being held in alone while Courtney went to the hotel room that should have been hers, to check in on Audrey. As soon as she spotted Griffin, she sauntered over to him. She ran a hand along his arm and batted her eyelashes. “You cut out early last night.”

Griffin watched her hand with wide eyes. “Uh, yeah. It was lame.”

“That’s too bad. I thought maybe we could have had a little fun.”

Nicole felt accomplished as she watched Griffin swallow hard as he tried to regain his composure. “Oh yeah? What about Courtney?”

Nicole shrugged. “She’s over me, apparently. Whatever. Her loss is your gain.”

Griffin now smiled, clearly proud of himself for pulling off his idiotic plan. “That’s too bad.”

“You don’t look too distraught over it.”

He crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against the table, his grin now a smug one. “Like you said, her loss is my gain. I’d argue it’s a gain for both of us. You’re definitely stepping up.”

“I’d say so,” Nicole said as she looked Griffin up and down. Thank God he wasn’t awful to look at or else that lie would have been even harder to tell. “Sit by me during brunch?”

Nicole kept the flirtation going throughout brunch, being sure to throw in little touches here and there to really sell it. When the meal was almost over, she leaned in close to whisper in Griffin’s ear and placed a hand on his thigh. “Any chance you’d wanna come to my hotel room after this?”

Nicole had no question what Griffin’s answer would be since he was highly predictable and ridiculously horny. So, when he nodded his head, she wasn’t at all surprised. “Perfect. Give me a chance to freshen up for you, okay? Come to my room in thirty?”

“You got it,” Griffin answered eagerly.

Exactly half an hour later, there was a knock on her hotel room door. Nicole was happy she had packed an extra low cut shirt in her bag, because when she opened the door for Griffin, his eyes went right where expected.

Nicole cleared her throat. “My eyes are up here.”

“Don’t act shy now,” Griffin said, rolling his tongue over his lips in an apparent attempt to look sexy that was totally failing.

Nicole grabbed onto his shirt and pulled him closer to her, her voice sultry as she whispered in his ear. "I have a confession for you. I know you lied to Courtney about what was going on between us."

"Y-you do?"

Nicole leaned closer. "I do. I was a little pissed at first, but now I have to admit that I actually find it pretty hot that you would do that for me."

"R-really?"

Nicole pushed him away. "Of course not. I think you're a complete jackass."

"That makes two of us," Fulton said as he walked out of the bathroom where everyone was hiding.

"Three," Roberta said from right behind him.

Courtney came out next and stared daggers at Griffin. "I don't think it should be too hard for you to figure out my feelings toward you."

"I don't even know you, but I also agree that you're a jackass," Audrey added.

The girl standing beside Audrey nodded. "Same."

Griffin gave her an exasperated look. "Weren't you one of the bartenders last night? What the hell are you even doing here?"

"I'm with her," she said, pointing to Audrey.

Fulton took one step closer to Griffin. "As you can see, little bro, everyone in this room has someone but you. Keep up this bullshit and it's always going to be that way."

Griffin crossed his arms like he was a little kid about to have a temper tantrum. "I don't have to stand here and take this. I'm out of here." He stormed out of the room, slamming the door shut behind him.

Fulton winced at the scene. "I'm really sorry, guys. I don't know what his deal is."

Courtney shrugged and put an arm around Nicole's waist, pulling her closer and making Nicole's body buzz from head to toe. "It's fine. I got the girl and he got a severe case of blue balls. I'd call that a win."

Nicole looked over at Courtney, and she saw her whole world in front of her. What a crazy twist of fate that Courtney Fields would come back into her life and end up being the person she was waiting for.

“Uh-oh.” Roberta’s voice interrupted Nicole’s thoughts. “We better get out of here. These two look like they are about ten seconds away from tearing each other’s clothes off.”

Everyone said a quick goodbye, leaving Nicole and Courtney alone in the room. Courtney removed her arm from Nicole’s waist and put both arms around her shoulders. “Would you look at that. Looks like I’m the last to leave.”

Nicole brought Courtney in closer and placed a quick kiss on her lips. “No, darling, you’re the first to stay.”

Nicole thought they were having a nice moment until Courtney burst into laughter. “That was the cheesiest thing I’ve ever heard,” she said between chuckles.

Nicole dotted kisses along Courtney’s neck. “Don’t act like you don’t love it.”

Courtney stepped back just enough to be able to sweep her eyes up and down Nicole’s body. “The view is fine. It’s the noise that’s too much for me.”

Epilogue

27 years old

“You have no idea how excited I am that you guys invited us along on your one-year anniversary trip to Cabo,” Courtney said over the phone to Fulton. “This might seem a little crazy, but I bought a ring and I’ve been trying to decide how to propose to Nicole and this is absolutely perfect. I’m going to do it in Cabo.”

Fulton chuckled slightly, a small snort escaping as he did. “That’s great! I’m excited.”

Courtney knew it probably sounded crazy. They had been dating just short of a year and hadn’t officially moved in together yet. That was only because they had leases that hadn’t run out yet. There was almost never a night that they weren’t together at one of their places. The one reason Nicole wasn’t with her right now was because Courtney had gotten home from work before her.

“Am I completely insane?” Courtney asked. “I mean, we’re in the process of closing on a house. Should I really throw wedding planning into the mix too?”

“Listen, you and Nicole are oddly perfect for each other. If you’re ready to propose and this is how you want to do it, I say go for it. It’s not like you have to start planning right away.”

“Says the guy who had his wedding three months after getting engaged.”

Fulton groaned. “That was all Roberta. Speaking of which, I need to go. She just walked in. We love you! Can’t wait for Cabo. Should be a very interesting trip.”

Once they were off the phone, Courtney walked to her closet where she had the ring hidden in a pocket of a random sweatshirt in the very back. She pulled it out and looked at it once again, unable to help the smile that came to her face. In just a few weeks, she would be proposing to her best friend and it was going to be perfect.

*

Only one more day. Nicole could hardly believe that she would be proposing to Courtney the next day. It was so surreal. The plan she had been working on for months was playing out perfectly. Courtney completely bought the story that Fulton and Roberta had invited them along for their anniversary trip since they were all together when Fulton proposed.

As she walked along the beach with Courtney and watched the beautiful Cabo sunset, she took the hand that wasn't holding Courtney's and ran it over the pocket she was carrying the ring in. She had no idea why she brought it along when she wasn't proposing tonight, but the truth was, it had barely left her sight since she bought it.

She was brought back to reality when Courtney came to a sudden stop. "Isn't it beautiful?" she asked.

Nicole looked from Courtney to the setting sun and then back at Courtney. "It really is."

"I want every sunset with you," Courtney said so quietly Nicole could barely hear it.

"Huh?"

Courtney cleared her throat. "I want every sunset, sunrise, rainy day, snowstorm; every up; every down. I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

Wait, what the hell was happening? As Courtney turned to her, then dropped down on one knee it was clear exactly what was happening.

Nicole shook her head and dropped down on one knee as well. "Whoa. Wait."

She scrambled in her pocket to fish out the ring, determined to be the first to propose. When Courtney saw the ring, her mouth dropped open in shock and then a wide grin spread across her face, but just as quickly, that grin was replaced with a look of determination as she pulled the ring box out of her purse.

Oh, no you don't, thought Nicole. She fumbled with the ring as she brought it closer to Courtney's hand. "I had a whole big speech planned out, but as usual you ruined it, so I need to ask this before you do. Courtney Fields, will you marry me?"

Courtney lifted an eyebrow and pulled out Nicole's ring. "I don't know. I think the real question is will *you* marry *me*, Nicole Dawson?"

As happy as she was that Courtney wanted to spend forever together, Nicole wasn't backing down from this. "I asked first."

"I got down on one knee first."

Nicole laughed. She loved this crazy girl. "Well, I decided first."

"You might have planned it first, but I decided the night—"

"Oh, for God's sake," Roberta interrupted from behind them. "Just say yes to each other already."

Nicole imagined she must have been cheesing so hard as she looked at the girl whose smile was more beautiful than the most perfect sunset. "Yes, Courtney Fields, I'll marry you."

Courtney slid the engagement ring onto Nicole's finger and Nicole did the same. After staring down at the ring for a few seconds, those green eyes sparkling more than ever before, Courtney looked back up at Nicole. "Yes, Nicole Dawson, I will totally let you marry me."

Nicole stood and pulled Courtney up with her, then picked her up and spun around with Courtney in her arms. "I'm the luckiest woman in the entire world."

Courtney wrapped herself even more tightly around Nicole and shook her head as she brought her mouth just inches from Nicole's. "No way. That's not even a competition. It's definitely me."

Nicole closed the little bit of space between them and kissed Courtney with everything she had. When she pulled back, she looked into the eyes of the woman who was everything she always wanted and so much more. "Looks like we'll have to call it a tie."

29 years old

"You're not going to do something embarrassing today, are you?"

Courtney laughed at her sister's question. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"It means that you and your soon-to-be wife like to turn everything into a contest and normally that leads to you looking stupid."

Courtney laughed incredulously. "Well, thanks, little sis. Got any other compliments for me on my wedding day?"

Alissa squeezed Courtney's bare shoulder. "You look beautiful. Nicole is going to go nuts over this dress."

Courtney looked in the mirror in front of her and ran a hand over the front of her strapless lace mermaid wedding dress. “You think so?”

“I know so. Now back to being embarrassing. This is the first big event Caleb is going to be at with our whole family. Please be on your best behavior.”

Courtney raised an eyebrow. “Oh, so this is about the new boyfriend, huh? Maybe you should talk to your future sister-in-law. She’s the one who always starts it.”

Courtney caught her sister rolling her eyes in the mirror. “She would say the exact same thing about you. You guys are so insanely perfect for each other it’s sickening.”

Courtney’s stomach bubbled in anticipation. Nicole really was perfect for her. She was caring, funny, and, at times, pretty infuriating, but life with her was never boring. Ever since they met, every single day felt like an adventure, and she couldn’t believe that after today, the love of her life would also be her wife. No accomplishment from her past even compared to the feeling of committing to a life with Nicole. It was by far the greatest thing she had ever done.

Courtney turned toward her sister. “Let’s get going then. It’s time to marry the love of my life and embarrass the hell out of you.”

*

“Breathe, sweetheart,” Nicole’s dad whispered to her as they walked down the aisle, surrounded on both sides by friends and family.

“I think I’ve forgotten what breathing is,” Nicole said with a laugh. “I’m so nervously excited, I don’t know what to do with myself.”

Her dad squeezed her hand and gave her a subtle wink. “I understand completely. I felt the same way with your mom. Just wait until you see your bride. She looks absolutely stunning, sweetheart.” Tears started to come to his eyes. “And so do you.”

Nicole took a deep breath. She really hoped Courtney liked the princess V-neck wedding dress she had chosen. She knew Courtney could walk down the aisle wearing a paper bag and she would still think she was the most beautiful girl in the entire world.

Soon, they were at the end of the aisle and Nicole's dad leaned in to give her a kiss on the cheek before taking his seat. Nicole watched the doors as she waited for her bride to walk through them. The two of them had fought over who got to be the first down the aisle, mostly because they both wanted to be able to watch the other walk down, but it was Nicole who had won out in the end. A lucky win in a game of Go Fish they were playing with her nephews was what had given her that chance. Of course, she didn't tell Courtney it was luck. Even though everyone knew there wasn't much strategy to the game, she insisted she was a Go Fish pro and that's why she won.

If she thought she was having trouble breathing before, when the doors opened and she saw Courtney, she just about passed out. Stunning didn't even begin to cover how good she looked. Her gown was tight, leaving nothing to the imagination while still remaining classy, and her blonde hair was in a half updo that framed her face and brought attention to those sparkling green eyes.

Nicole could barely focus throughout the ceremony since she was so entranced by her bride. She stumbled over her vows and practically forgot how to speak, which had everyone, including Courtney, laughing.

When it was time to walk back down the aisle, a thought popped into her head and she couldn't resist as she leaned in to whisper to Courtney. "Race you to the end of the aisle. Winner gets to choose the first *position* of the night."

Courtney scoffed. "That's absolutely insane."

"Does that mean you're too chicken to do it?"

"Absolutely not. I just can't believe you're going to give up any chance of being on top first."

Nicole continued to smile straight ahead while she spoke through her teeth. "I'll say 1-2-3 go. First person to cross through the doorway wins. 1-2-3—"

"Go!" Courtney said in a loud whisper before pushing away from Nicole and doing some strange waddle toward the door in her tight dress.

Nicole only took a brief moment to shake her head over her wife's blatant cheating, then hiked up her dress and hurried to catch up, ignoring the whispers of the confused wedding guests. She caught Courtney right before she reached the doorway and leaned forward to beat her.

“Yes! Winner,” she shouted as she turned around to gloat.

She was surprised when Courtney scooped her right into a hug. “I’m officially your wife. In my book, that makes me the winner,” Courtney said before placing a big kiss on Nicole’s lips.

30 years old

“We’ll do it, but I have to tell you that I don’t suggest it.” The fertility doctor rubbed her forehead, looking stressed about Courtney and Nicole’s decision.

Courtney knew it was crazy for her and Nicole to attempt to get pregnant at the same time, but when they couldn’t decide who should carry first, it seemed like a logical way to solve it. It also increased their chances of getting pregnant sooner, and they both wanted babies... well, yesterday.

“Not to state the obvious, but you do know there is a chance you could be pregnant at the same time, right?”

Courtney couldn’t help but laugh at the doctor’s question. With all of their research, plus basic knowledge, she certainly knew how this worked. “We’re very much aware of that, and if it happens, it happens, but the chances of that have to be extremely low.”

The doctor nodded her head. “They are. The probability of a successful pregnancy attempt doing intrauterine insemination is already less than twenty percent. So, the chance of both of you getting pregnant at the same time is very low.”

*

Apparently, Nicole and Courtney needed to play the lottery because they certainly beat the odds. Those were the thoughts running through Nicole’s head as she sat by her wife’s hospital bed; Courtney about to deliver after being a week late and Nicole just a week away from her due date. At least if Nicole went just as late, they still had at least two weeks before there would be two babies in the house.

Just as that thought crossed her mind, Nicole felt a pain that was much different than the normal pains from a kick or Braxton Hicks

contractions. The pain lasted for about a minute, then went away for a bit giving her just enough time to feel relieved before another one came.

This time, she let out a soft “Oh,” as she grabbed at her stomach and that was enough to grab the nurse’s attention.

“Are you having contractions?” the nurse asked, obvious concern written all over her face.

“No, no. I’m good—ouch!” Nicole held her stomach. “Okay. I might be. But that doesn’t necessarily mean anything, right?”

She knew *exactly* what it meant and suddenly everything was a complete blur as she was checked in as a patient as well. After what felt like days of pushing, Shaun Demi Dawson-Fields was born just before 10 PM, approximately ten hours after her sister, Alice Demi Dawson-Fields.

“Could our lives get any crazier?” Nicole asked as she fed Alice and Courtney fed Shaun.

Courtney laughed, and it was the most beautiful sight in the entire world. “We have two daughters who are essentially twins. I don’t even think we know the definition of crazy yet.” She reached out with the hand she wasn’t using to feed Shaun and squeezed Nicole’s hand. “I wouldn’t change a thing though.”

Nicole looked from her wife to her two daughters and her heart felt more full than it ever had in her entire life. “Me neither, babe. *Me neither.*”

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