



daddy's
Billionaire
inventor

HALEY TRAVIS

DADDY'S BILLIONAIRE INVENTOR

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Epilogue One

Epilogue Two

Also by Haley Travis

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Once again, my life had taken a bizarre turn because my parents were doting on my older sister.

Turning the music up, I nodded along, impressed by the sound system in Mom's otherwise boring car. One perk of this odd errand.

Dad had plans to go out with an old friend tonight until Katrina called. A new aquarium was being installed in her fancy new office, and she apparently needed their guidance to make sure that the arrangement was perfect before the fish arrived tomorrow. So, as always, my parents had to drop everything and go help.

Whatever. I was left to cancel Dad's "man date." With anyone else, a quick phone call would have sufficed. But this guy wasn't anyone else.

Warrick was Dad's friend from high school. He'd skipped several grades, and it sounded like he was some kind of scrawny brainiac that Dad had felt sorry for, since he was several years younger than the rest of the kids.

They'd reconnected around six months ago when Warrick needed a chipped tooth repaired, but couldn't make it to Dad's dental office during the day. Dad had seemed slightly annoyed at the time, but understood that Warrick would sometimes get lost in work. He was some sort of inventor now.

Anyway, they bonded more than just his tooth.

Dad had been in a slump lately, meanwhile it turned out Warrick was attempting to pull himself out of his shell and try new things. So they had gone out to all sorts of strange events over the past few months together.

Snorkel lessons in a local pool. A personalized golf lesson with a professional instructor. A private whiskey tasting at some old-fashioned cigar club.

I liked that Dad was getting out more. He was devoted to his job, but I wasn't sure how exciting the dental industry was. I was perfectly happy to put in my six hours a day as his receptionist over the summer, then work on my own projects.

I pulled into a parking lot next to a massive field just as the sun was going down, and wondered how I was going to find this guy. According to Mom, he was "charmingly kooky," one of those freaky creative types.

After parking the car, I went over to the edge of the field that was supposedly the meeting point.

There was a huge bonfire blazing, a few smaller fires, and I saw several dozen people arranging their instruments. I smiled. A real hippie drum circle! It looked amazing and I was excited to peek in on something a bit different.

Then I noticed an incredibly tall, striking, broad-shouldered man pacing back and forth in front of two women with flowers in their hair who were greeting everyone.

Even though he was a bit shaggy and unkempt, and he was wearing an unflattering green plaid shirt that didn't fit properly, he was gorgeous. There was no hiding his powerful frame.

As I passed by him, his brilliant green eyes latched onto mine. We both paused, then he flashed me a dazzling smile. It was like being hit with a lightning bolt of joy, so strong it was hard to breathe for a moment.

"Welcome," said a blonde wearing a pink flower tiara as I approached. "Will you be drumming or dancing tonight?"

"Neither," I said. "I'm looking for a man named Warrick Cedar. Do you know him?"

She shook her head, but the gorgeous man stepped to me. “I’m Warrick. Why are you looking for me?”

Holy crap. *This* was Dad’s geeky high school friend? He barely looked thirty-five, and the more I stared, the more I realized he was absolutely jacked. Yet it was those sharp, curious eyes that left me breathless.

“I’m Frank’s daughter,” I said, as we stepped out of the way to make room for three long-haired guys carrying djembes. “Brooke.”

Warrick shook my hand warmly, his eyes dancing. “Brooke. You just turned twenty-one. Studying engineering and robotics. Working reception at Frank’s dental practice over the summer before you go back to university.”

His palm felt so good in mine. That innocent skin on skin contact made something in my lower belly prickle and awaken.

“That’s me.” He released my hand, but stayed close. “Um, Dad was called away tonight. He asked me to come and let you know.”

Warrick nodded. “Yeah. I’m useless when it comes to the phone.” His smile was a ray of sunshine as he asked, “Do you want to stay? I bet it’ll be fun.”

Although I didn’t know what was going on, I did know one thing for certain. I wanted to do anything that made Warrick smile like that. There was something electrifying about him. He was strange, yet wildly sexy.

I’d never thought that way about anyone before, and the idea surprised me.

But there was no denying it: this older, fit, slightly dorky inventor was the first man who had ever made my libido stand up and say hello. It was definitely worth checking out a drum circle to explore that a bit further.

“Sure.”

I couldn't believe that this gorgeous girl was even speaking to me. Her soft eyes were the blue of faded denim. Honey-blond hair swung around her shoulders in a slight wave. Her black jeans hugged her lush hips perfectly, and her pretty floral top was both playful and sexy.

I probably shouldn't think of her as sexy, but there was no way to stop it. My heart was pounding with lust as I drank in every detail of her beauty.

I couldn't believe that she was Frank's daughter. I knew that he'd gotten married very early, and it sounded like Gloria was already pregnant at the time.

But I didn't care that Brooke was a bit young. Those eyes held such a glow of curiosity, warmth and purity. Until this moment, I'd never felt drawn to a person.

People were difficult, and I always felt they misread me.

I adjusted my shoulder bag, then held out my arm to Brooke. She took it with another sweet smile, then I led her to the edge of the circle of drummers setting up.

I pulled out a thin blanket that I'd packed just in case the grass was damp. It wasn't, but I didn't like the thought of her sitting on the ground. I offered her the blanket, and she slid over to the edge, making room for me to join her.

One of the hippie guys with orange streaks in his hair gave a short speech about how this was soul-directed drumming, and everyone should play whatever they felt.

Digging in my bag again, I pulled out four silver spheres, handing two of them to Brooke.

“What are these?”

They rattled as I dropped them into her palms, then she gave each one a test shake. One had a lower pitch than the other.

“I didn’t have time to learn how to make drums,” I said. “But shakers seemed pretty easy.”

Brooke gave me a strange look. “You just made these?”

“Yeah. In my lab. Figuring out what to put inside them took the longest.”

Her eyes closed as she softly shook one of them next to her left ear. “Metal screws?”

Wow. Impressive. “Yes.”

She did the same with the other beside her right ear. “It’s like...sand, but heavier.”

“Close. Metal filings.” Reaching out with the two shakers in my hands, I shook one beside her ear, then the other.

“The first is smaller screws.”

“Correct.”

“The other is something chunkier. But lighter?”

“You’re very good,” I said. “Aluminum washers.”

The drumming was thankfully not too loud, and I drank in every note of Brooke’s delightful laugh. We began shaking in time with the drumming, finding different emphases on various beats.

It was interesting, communicating without speaking. Brooke would try a different beat either in sync with or in opposition to the drummer sitting closest to us. I would match her for a while, then take off in a different direction, and she would follow me.

Likely no one else could hear our shakers, but there was still the sensation of being part of a larger circle, a community.

This is what I assumed drum circles were actually about, and why I'd wanted to give it a try.

But the only circle that mattered to me now was the energy bubble that seemed to hold Brooke and I together. I felt like I was under a spell.

I'd always focussed completely on my work, often forgetting to eat, drink water, even sleep. Having my attention riveted on those sparkling eyes and gentle laugh made me feel energized.

My hands wanted to drop my makeshift instruments to touch her hair. Stroke her cheek. Caress her dewy soft skin. Our bodies shifted closer, shoulders brushing together as we played with the rhythm, making up our own little call and response riffs. Her electrifying eyes burned into my soul every time she laughed.

A few of the ladies with flowers in their hair jumped up into the center of the circle.

"Dancing time!" the cinnamon-haired girl said, clapping her hands as the drummers paused so that she could speak.

"Don't be shy – these are simple folk dances. Just follow along as best you can, and have fun."

My eyebrow raised in Brooke's direction. She nodded immediately.

In a flash, we dropped the shakers and walked into the center of the circle. Being completely surrounded by the drums, the beat pulsed differently. Taking Brooke's hand, we followed along with the steps.

I'd never really danced before, but there were several other men who looked equally clumsy, with women who didn't seem to mind one bit.

The next dance had us holding hands, facing each other. As we twirled in slow circles, our fingers entwined, eyes locked on each other. Our breath, our laughter, our movements were all completely in sync. The connection between us was a living, breathing thing.

Everything about Brooke felt natural. Her softness, her lively attitude, her bright smile. Her delight in trying something that some might consider ridiculous.

My experience with dating was limited to some random attempts many years ago. My experience with actually feeling so much and so fast for a woman was nonexistent.

I always used experience to build up my knowledge base. That wouldn't be possible this time. I was going to have to make Brooke fall for me – a weird inventor who was close to her father's age, who had no idea how to impress a woman – and I was going to have to wing it.

Those plush, pillowy lips tantalized me. Kissing Brooke was all I could think about. My heart started racing as I realized she was using every step to move us closer together.

The dance finished, then a flute player started a melancholy tune. The dancers all grabbed a partner and faced each other, so we followed suit.

My pulse was now that of a frantic rabbit. I tried to study every tiny reaction as my arms slipped around Brooke's waist. Her fingers glided around the back of my neck as we circled in the grass. Then our feet stopped moving.

Even as she seemed to be pulling my mouth to hers, I paused as our lips were almost touching. "Yes?"

"Yes," she breathed.

The sensation of those luscious lips against mine was like lightning through my core. Some long-dormant part of my mind snapped to attention.

I wanted her.

No. Be precise.

I craved her. Hungered. Yearned.

Brooke had to be my girl. We belonged together. She was meant to be mine.

I just had to discover how to be a good, normal partner for her.

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I'd only kissed a few guys briefly, and it was...nice, but sort of awkward.

Kissing Warrick was like entering another dimension. Somehow he used his entire body to hold me, caress me, warm me, all at once. His hungry mouth pulled me in, blanking my mind until I couldn't remember what life was like when we weren't kissing.

The way he held me close was both protective and incredibly sexy. As if he never wanted to let me go. His tongue teased at the seam of my lips, and as soon as they parted, he tasted me completely.

Thank goodness he was so strong, since my knees were wobbling.

Arousal coursed through my veins, until the only thing I could think about was immediately getting somewhere private, ripping off his shirt and examining the hard body I felt under my palms.

Time stopped as we melted into the kiss. I had no idea how long we stood almost motionless, clutching each other desperately. I didn't realize the music had changed until another couple bumped into us slightly.

Warrick instantly shifted us away from them, holding me tight into his chest as he glanced over his shoulder while they laughingly apologized.

We looked around to see the dancing area was completely packed.

Taking my hand, he led me back to the blanket. “That was...intense,” he said, looking at me sheepishly.

“Yeah.” I nodded.

He reached out to run his fingers through my hair. “I’m sorry if it was too much.”

I grinned, which seemed to make him relax. “Not too much. Surprising, but that’s a good thing sometimes.”

He nodded, causing his hair to fall into his eyes. He pushed it away distractedly, then his eyes found mine again as he ran a hand for the hundredth time along the top of his head. “Too shaggy?”

Pursing my lips, I tilted my head from side to side, analyzing. “Your hair, your call. But maybe a bit.”

His chuckle was rich and deep. “I get lost in work, and don’t notice when my hair is out of control. Sometimes I kind of lose track of time, then somebody tells me it’s the middle of the month and I’m shocked.”

I shrugged. “That just means you’re a hard worker.”

He shook his head in an exaggerated way that made his hair flail around and made me giggle far too loudly. “I don’t mean to be a scatterbrain. Actually, no, it’s the opposite. It’s a super focused brain. I have to set a timer to remind me to drink water, or I get dehydrated. There’s a different beep at noon, so I shuffle to the kitchen in the lab to find food.”

“Are you okay out here in the big bad world?” I laughed.

Warrick’s grin sent my stomach off kilter. It was not natural for a man to be that sexy, and have absolutely no clue about it.

“That’s one of the reasons I’m trying to get out and do more,” he explained. “I have people around me now who have taken over a lot of the busywork. So I don’t even have things like buying food to distract me these days.”

The drumming changed, becoming slower, deeper. Warrick reached out to take my hand. “Distract me now, please, so that we don’t end up making a spectacle of ourselves on this blanket. What made you want to study engineering and robotics?”

“Don’t forget children’s psychology. That’s my minor.”

His incredible green eyes looked mossy in the dim light. “What an interesting combination. What’s your end goal?”

“Children’s toys.”

He blinked hard, then beamed. “Brilliant. Go on.”

With anyone else I would have felt put on the spot, but as an inventor, I knew that he would be one of the few people who understood.

“There are many children who, for whatever reason, feel rather isolated. There are plenty of toys like dolls or animals that help children interact. None of them is designed to help a shy or quiet child speak up more. I’d love to design a friendly robot doll that was built specifically to help with language, sharing feelings, and helping a child discover their true self, in case they don’t have any friends.”

Warrick squeezed my hand and nodded. “Brilliant.” He stared down at our hands for a moment, then nodded again. “Brilliant. I’ll help you, if you like.”

“Oh...” My palms felt sweaty as I instinctively shook my head. “I don’t...I mean, I don’t even have proper plans and things. It might take years for me to figure out what I really want to do.”

“That’s fine,” he smiled. “I can help as much or as little as you like.” He rolled his eyes. “Beny, my lab manager, keeps suggesting that we take on some different projects.”

“That’s really sweet of you, but things like that cost an absolute fortune, even just to develop.”

Warrick shrugged. “My money people keep telling me that my company and investments are growing in leaps and bounds. I’m pretty sure that Darryl, my accountant, said

something about dropping a few million into new projects to balance out some things.”

He glanced shiftily from side to side before whispering, “I don’t pay attention to the money stuff. All I know is there’s a lot of it.”

He really was a mad scientist. Why was that so endearing?

We looked around to see everyone pulling out bottles of homemade liquor as the drumming started to turn into a party.

“Should we go before it gets rowdy?” Warrick suggested.

“That’s probably a good idea.”

He jumped up, taking my hand to help me stand up, then packing away the blanket and shakers. His arm slipped around my waist as he walked me to the parking lot.

“It’s that blue one,” I said. “Borrowed from Mom.”

Then he pulled out his phone. “Your number, please?”

He made a new contact for “Brooke Beautiful,” then assigned it a ringtone that sounded a bit like the flute music that played when we were dancing. My phone went off in my purse from his text.

“I just don’t want to think of your last name when I text you,” he said. “That’s a reminder that your father and I are going to have a hugely awkward conversation at some point.”

“Maybe we could avoid that for a while,” I suggested.

The thought of discussing this was-it-a-relationship with Dad was uncomfortable. I knew he would be upset. Somehow it would be yet another point that proved I wasn’t as wonderful and perfect as Katrina.

Although so far, Warrick was definitely perfect for me.

He slipped his phone into his pocket, then his hands circled my waist, holding me close as we swayed back and forth, almost dancing.

“I don’t want to let you go. But I also don’t want you driving home late.” He smiled gently, then drifted his lips

along my cheekbone. “Will you text me when you get home?”

“Sure.”

“Maybe you’d like to see the lab tomorrow?”

I nodded for half a second before he captured my lips, kissing me softly but deeply as he pinned me between his body and the car. It made it easy to imagine what we’d be doing together if we were alone.

The thought of being with a man made me a bit nervous, but Warrick made everything feel natural. My hands drifted around the back of his neck to caress his skin, as he gently pressed our bodies together.

I couldn’t hold back the moan against his mouth as I felt his erection shift, standing at full attention as our bodies moved together.

Instantly he pulled his hips back. “I’m so sorry, Brooke. I don’t want you to think—”

Pulling his lips to mine, I cut him off with another quick kiss. “It’s okay,” I whispered. “I’m thinking the same thing.”

He grinned widely, making his eyes sparkle. “I love that we’re on the same wavelength. It’s almost as if... “

Warrick stared at my shoulder strangely, then his gaze drifted off into space.

“As if?” I prompted gently.

“The right wavelength! An electrical burst would line up the molecules and help the bonding process in those specific materials.”

Warrick’s eyes were wild. “I’m sorry, beautiful. I have to go.”

He hurried me into my car, then as soon as the door was locked he sprinted across the parking lot and jumped into a dark green SUV. I waited until he peeled out of the parking lot before starting my car and driving home.

“Kooky” indeed.

By the time I got home, I assumed that Warrick would be completely absorbed in whatever idea had been triggered, so I didn't expect him to respond to my text.

Me: Home safe. Thanks for a great evening.

He responded less than a minute later.

Warrick: So sorry I had to take off. Finally figured out how to get two materials to stick together properly.

Warrick: I hope that you'll stick with me, even when I'm a weirdo. Can't wait to see you tomorrow, beautiful.

Most people would have added a heart emoji of some sort. Maybe a dancing kitten. Instead, Warrick sent a photo of a sticky note on his messy desk with a big red heart scribbled clumsily in thick marker.

It was genuinely the most romantic thing anyone had ever sent me.

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I kept promising myself I'd stop sleeping at the lab, but at five a.m. there was no point in going home.

After I sent my latest results and notes to my researchers and techs, I crashed out hard. Instead of my usual broken sleep, my mind was pulled completely under, filled with vivid dreams, all centered around Brooke.

When my eyes snapped open after six hours of the most restful sleep I'd had in ages, I felt transformed.

After a quick shower, I stepped directly into the lab, where some thoughtful assistant had left a mug of coffee on my desk. The heart I'd drawn for Brooke last night was next to it. Slipping it into a drawer, I wasn't even embarrassed that my staff may have seen it.

That was what was different. I was no longer some guy drowning in work and avoiding social interactions with anyone I couldn't talk about my projects with.

I was a man with a girlfriend.

Sipping my coffee as I walked from station to station to check on everyone's progress, I realized I had to confirm that statement for validity. There was a woman I wanted to be in a relationship with. But one night of dancing and kissing didn't automatically confer girlfriend status.

Never assume.

The new experiments on the two materials that I'd been trying to bond for some time showed promising early results.

Tonight I simply had to get Brooke and I to bond too, and become a real couple.

Her lovely, sweet face hovered in my subconscious, giving me a moment to envision her. When I went to refill my mug, I allowed myself to recall the sensation of her lips against mine. The way she felt in my arms.

My head jerked up as I realized I needed to romance her. I couldn't just show her the lab and go to dinner.

My reflection in the microwave caught my eye. Holy crap. Did I really look like that? It was bad enough that I was dangerously close to forty. My gorgeous girl couldn't be seen with someone who looked so scruffy. I had a multi-million dollar corporation with dozens of subsidiaries, for God's sake.

I went back to my desk, sipping my coffee. I had a massive office at the far end of the space, but I preferred to be close enough to hear the researchers' "Aha!" or "Dammit!" exclamations when something went wonderfully right or terribly wrong.

Darryl approached with one of his many interns in tow. "Warrick, is now a good time to discuss the recent launch?"

It was difficult not to roll my eyes. Cedar Industries had thousands of projects and products – there was something new launching in some division almost every week. Not a big deal anymore.

"Sure. But could I please have the short version?"

Darryl smiled. He'd been with me for years, and understood that I didn't care about the money, only the challenge of the work. Lately he'd been checking in a lot more frequently though, seemingly growing more and more excited about my bizarre wealth.

"Of course. That line of new connectors in the transit sector is selling five times as well as we expected. Between the orders from airlines, and, surprisingly, motorcycle companies, the company is seeing massive returns." He lowered his voice, leaning in to whisper, "Your personal

wealth has just jumped significantly due to the latest round of patents. Shall I tell you the numbers?”

Shaking my head, I had to brush my hair out of my eyes. “No, that’s fine.”

Looking at the intern, an idea formed. “Who cuts your hair?”

He blinked in surprise. “Oh. Um. My cousin Susan down at Barry’s on Birch Street.”

My fingers drummed on the desk. “What do you call those people who pick out clothes for you and...put you together better?”

The intern gave me the smile I was quite accustomed to when someone thought I was a bit nuts, but entertaining. “Like a personal stylist?”

“Yeah. Can you please find me one of those immediately?”

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By the time I got down to the kitchen the next morning, Dad had already left for work. Luckily there was still coffee, so I chugged some while toasting a bagel.

Mom had her laptop open and notes scattered all over the place. “What are you doing?” I asked.

“Katrina is thinking of writing a book about her career so far,” Mom gushed, her eyes glowing with pride. “So I’m putting together a few ideas for the book launch party.”

I slapped cream cheese on my bagel while trying not to laugh. “You know that her publisher will take care of that, right? Does she even have a publisher yet?”

Mom had that strange look at her eyes that I’d seen quite often. She rarely acknowledged reality when it came to Katrina.

“There are three that she is considering contacting,” Mom beamed. “But you know, first she has to get a handle on the tone. That will determine which press she’ll offer the book to.”

Pretending to clear my throat to camouflage the snicker, I washed down my hastily-eaten bagel with the rest of my coffee.

I arrived at the dental office with five minutes to spare. We were booked solid, and it was almost noon before Dad and I had a chance to chat.

“Thanks for getting my message to Warrick last night,” he said. “I appreciate it, Brooke.”

“No problem,” I said, trying to sound casual. “I stayed for the drumming, and we had fun.”

Dad’s gaze snapped up from his tablet. “Really? You didn’t mind hanging out with him?”

“No – he’s amazing. We got talking about robotics. I think I’m going to see his lab this afternoon.”

He nodded, already walking away. “That’s nice, honey.”

Not the interaction I was expecting, but it was good enough for now.

My phone sang a soft flute ringtone precisely at noon.

Warrick: Hi. How about a lab tour and dinner this evening?

Me: Sure.

Warrick: What time do you get off work?

Me: Three.

Warrick: I’ll pick you up then. Ow. What was that?

I stared at the phone for a few blinks, wondering what he meant.

Warrick: Sorry dash I’m using voice to text. I’ll pick you up at three. Can’t wait to see you, sweet beautiful girl.

Me: See you soon.

His strange behavior might be off-putting to some people. Yet I understood. Warrick was simply in his own world when he was working. I was the same way with school.

After a long study session, I sometimes couldn’t remember basic words. I once asked Mom to order pizza with “extra meaty circles”, because I’d forgotten the word “pepperoni”.

While eating a sandwich at my desk, I looked up Cedar Industries online. It was a giant umbrella organization that held dozens of companies. Individually, they didn’t seem very interesting. It was all parts for large machines. Yet there were thousands of products spanning many industries.

The afternoon flew by. I looked up at two minutes to three to see Warrick waving from the street.

I checked with Dad that I was good to leave, then went out to see that Warrick was standing in front of a stunning silver convertible.

It wasn't half as stunning as Warrick himself. His shaggy hair had been cut into a breezy, almost sporty style. His navy button down shirt was slim-fitting enough to show off his thick chest and narrow waist, clinging to his biceps. Black suit pants hugged his hips and thighs just enough to show off his incredible physique.

I thought that he was handsome last night, but now...*wow*. He was the sort of gorgeous that was going to make every single head turn whenever he walked down the street.

With me.

"Hi," he said gently, walking toward me as if he were trying not to run.

Even though the huge windows of the dental office faced the street, his arms wrapped around me, pulling me in for a deep, seductive kiss. Just as we began to relax together, our breathing becoming ragged, Warrick stepped back. "Dammit. Forgot about Frank. Sorry."

He helped me into the gorgeous car, then we drove away. "This car is incredible," I said, sinking into the deep leather seats that smelled brand new.

"Thanks. It was a gift," he said, stopping well in advance for an elderly lady at a crosswalk.

"Who the heck gives you a car?"

He shot me a sheepish glance. "There were two companies competing to be the exclusive distributor of one of our products. One sent this. I'd already made up my mind, so it was a complete waste on their part. But Beny insisted that I keep it, and he's been hounding me to drive it now and then." He reached over to give my hand a squeeze. "He says I have no fun."

“You obviously work too much,” I said. “But last night you were a dancing machine at a drumming circle. If that’s not fun, I don’t know what is.”

Warrick’s deep chuckle was unbelievably sexy. We chatted about our favorite scientific news websites for several minutes before he pulled into the parking lot of a massive industrial structure.

One end appeared to be offices. The other had truck bay doors, and looked like a warehouse.

Warrick parked near the main doors, then held my hand as he walked me straight through the offices.

He was completely oblivious that every single one of his employees was looking at us, their mouths hanging open in shock.

“Everyone is staring,” I whispered.

He looked around. “Oh. Well. I got a haircut.”

It was adorable how totally oblivious he was. “Am I the first woman you’ve ever brought here?”

We reached a desk littered with notes and several empty coffee mugs. Warrick opened a drawer and pulled out the scribbled heart note, slipping it into my purse. “Yes. Brooke, I haven’t dated in...” He stared into space for a few seconds. “I can’t even remember.”

He slipped an arm around me, kissing the top of my hair as he held me close. “I feel comfortable with you, beautiful. And I hardly ever feel comfortable with people, so this is a remarkable discovery. “

We laughed, then I stepped back, whispering, “I just don’t want to make your staff freak out or anything.”

His eyes darted around as he released me. “Right. Sorry.”

I looked toward the endless rows of tables and workstations filled with the most unbelievable equipment I’d ever seen. “Okay, what do you actually make here?”

Warrick’s sharp laugh surprised me. “Connections.”

“Huh?”

He laughed again at my puzzled expression. “It’s one of the least exciting parts of manufacturing, but often the trickiest. Connecters between different parts of machinery. Sometimes one part will vibrate, while the other has to remain still. Or one will be heated and one will be room temperature. Or different materials – one might expand and contract, the other doesn’t.”

“Right...”

He led me over to a long table that held an array of plastic and metal tubes that were connected to flexible rubber hoses. “Sometimes it’s water, or air, or some type of fuel that has to flow between two parts,” he explained. “There’s another building behind this one that works on electrical connectors. They’re separate, for safety reasons.”

“Of course.”

“Connectors are often one of the first parts of a machine to fail. This causes production to stop, which loses money. After it’s happened a few times, they realize it’s worth it to pay a little more for our products. We’ve become the go-to name for most manufacturing plants.”

It was wild to think that his work was so important, yet completely unknown. “How many of these connectors have you made?”

A strong hand slipped around my waist as he gave me a squeeze. “Zillions. We have manufacturing plants all over the place.” He shrugged. “I’m not into the numbers.”

It was endearing that he was less interested in the business side, and only wanted to research and create.

Warrick walked me through the lab, pointing out some of the more interesting stations while his staff stayed carefully out of our way. He didn’t seem to have a clue that everyone was studying him – us – carefully.

Once we’d done a full lap of the enormous space, he led me into a huge, rather stark office.

We had barely sat down in two large easy chairs when an assistant appeared at the open door. “May I get anything for you and your guest, Mr. Cedar? Coffee, sparkling water?”

“Two lime waters, please. Thanks, Trisha.”

As soon as she was gone, he lowered his voice conspiratorially. “There are always people all over the place trying to help me. Great experience for them. Sometimes it’s handy. Sometimes it’s just...weird.”

“I could imagine.”

Trisha floated back in with our waters and a tray of sliced fruit that she placed on the desk before disappearing again.

Warrick chuckled for a second, then picked up an apple slice. He regarded it with amusement. “The women are always trying to get me to eat, and the men are always trying to get me to look at numbers.”

I helped myself to a couple of grapes as I glanced around. Several framed diplomas were clustered in the far corner on the wall, but one wall was filled with huge pictures of ocean waves.

Looking back, I saw Warrick staring at me. “What is it?”

He moved to sit on the edge of his desk, pulling me to stand between his legs. “I can’t stand not kissing you,” he murmured as his lips drifted gently against mine. “You’re so beautiful, Brooke. I love that you’re genuinely interested in my work. I know the end results aren’t terribly exciting, but I love the creative problem-solving challenges.”

“I get it,” I murmured, as my fingers caressed the back of his neck, then up into his freshly shaved hairline.

“I brought you here so that you’d understand me better,” he explained. “Sometimes I sleep here overnight because I’m in the middle of something. I lose track of time, then it’s suddenly Saturday and I don’t understand why there isn’t any coffee.”

His incredible green eyes were emerald under the office lights. “I want to be with you, Brooke. I adore every single

thing about you.” He kissed my temple gently. “This freckle. The way your fingers flutter slightly when you’re trying to figure out what to say. That you have a clear purpose in life already and know what you want to do.”

This time his kiss was deeper. Hungrier. His hands gripped me possessively as he pulled me close. “I’m a complete lunkhead when it comes to socializing,” he whispered. “I’m going to need your help in that department. I promise that I’m going to try as hard as I can to be good for you, Brooke Beautiful.”

My feelings for this incredible man were so powerful. Would it be bad to lock the door for a few minutes alone? He grinned as my hands slid along the ridge of his wide shoulders while I stared up at him in awe.

Warrick kissed the tip of my nose, then smiled sweetly. “I don’t know if people even ask this question formally anymore, but will you be my girlfriend?”

A deep shiver ran through me. He was too good to be true. I didn’t think that he’d want to be serious right away, and it was lovely that he already thought we were real.

I opened my mouth to say yes, but Warrick couldn’t even wait for the word, simply kissing me deeply, holding us together like he never wanted to let go.

Someone cleared their throat right behind me, making me jump about three feet as I realized how inappropriate we were being.

I couldn’t get Warrick in trouble on my first visit to his office.

I didn't know whether Brooke was easily startled, or whether she felt strange about us kissing in my office. It was probably wrong, but I'd never done a single inappropriate thing before, so I figured it was okay.

Reaching out, I caught her shoulder to pull her back against me, wrapping my arm around her. "Hey, Darryl. I'd like you to meet Brooke."

He nodded quickly, seeming even more frantic than usual. "Hi, Brooke. Warrick, I'm truly sorry to interrupt, but I think this is important." I looked behind him to see there were a number of employees peeking in the door. "You're...uh... you're about to become a billionaire."

He held out his phone, and the three of us looked at a figure on the screen. We stared for a few seconds, then the number updated, requiring an extra comma.

Brooke made a tiny gasp of astonishment. My hand tightened around her waist as she turned to look up at me, blinking in amazement.

Everything became deadly silent except for the hum of the machines in the lab. Nobody moved a muscle. They simply stared at me.

Brooke spun in my arms, giving me a hug as she whispered, "They're expecting you to give a little speech. Thank them. They probably want to throw a party or something."

After a quick kiss on the forehead, I gave Brooke another squeeze, keeping my arm around her as we faced the growing crowd in and around my office.

“Thank you,” I said, giving Darryl a nod. “This is...well. You all know that I don’t really care about money. I’m not going to let it make me even weirder, don’t worry.”

Relief began to temper my nerves when everyone chuckled. Brooke patted my back as if to tell me to keep going.

“Obviously most of it is the ownership of the company, not piles of cash lying around, but still – I don’t need much. So let’s start spending more on the labs and you guys. Can somebody start a suggestions email thread? New equipment, better coffee machines, catered lunches on Wednesdays?”

Darryl was already nodding, so I added, “I have no idea when the last round of raises and bonuses was, but we’ll look into that immediately.”

He gave me a low thumbs up to tell me I was on the right track.

“What day is it, anyway?” I asked Brooke.

She giggled. “It’s Friday.”

“Am I allowed to give everyone the rest of the day off?” I asked Beny, who was lurking just inside the doorway.

He was already wearing the biggest grin I’d ever seen on his usually stern face. “The brand new billionaire and owner of the company would like to know if he’s permitted to send everyone home early? I vote yes.”

“Okay then. Everyone, go home. Get out of here.”

A cheer went up, then everyone began to clear out. Darryl smiled sheepishly as he looked at the way I couldn’t stop holding Brooke. “I’m really sorry to have interrupted, but that was kind of a big deal.”

“Yeah. Thanks.”

He turned to leave, and I added, “Hey, Darryl? Can you please make sure this doesn’t hit the news or anything? You know I don’t like people in my business.”

He nodded. “Yup. We understand. Carry on.” He pulled the shades, shutting the door behind him.

Brooke turned to face me, her lovely eyes soft and warm. “I like your staff. They understand you’re an inventor before a CEO.”

My palms landed on her waist, pulling her between my legs again. She tucked into my shoulder as I held her.

“I’m lucky to have found great people. Beny runs the lab, Darryl runs the money, Kevin and Colleen oversee the production at most of the factories, and Amy runs the office.”

Brooke’s fingertips slowly traced a circle around the center of my chest. “What do you run?” she asked softly.

My hands ran along her back in a slow caress. “I’m the ideas geek in the middle of the tornado. I have a personal trainer that comes to my home gym four times a week. A housekeeper that cooks and cleans. A gardener for the yard, and an assistant to make sense of my notes and input them digitally...”

“And now you have a girlfriend.” My heart surged as her pretty little face looked up at me with such happiness. She really was mine. “What if we went to your place and ordered pizza or something?”

I loved how easily she made me laugh. “Most women would want to go to the fanciest restaurant in town to celebrate such an occasion.”

Her nose crinkled as her head shook. “I’d rather just eat in your kitchen and, you know...chill.”

Leaning in, I nuzzled along the side of her throat. “I was never able to chill with anyone before you came along, baby.” My lips skimmed along her skin until she shivered in my arms. “But you make me calm. One of the many, many things I adore about you.”

Taking her gently by the shoulders, I pushed her away and stood. “Let’s go before I start thinking extremely inappropriate thoughts for the office environment.”

“Fair. Hey, can I drive?”

Maybe most men would remember the exact moment they became a billionaire. Whatever.

I would never forget the look Brooke gave me as I tossed her the keys and I realized I was already completely in love with her.

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I 'd been joking. Most men would never let their girlfriend drive a brand new sports car. But then most men wouldn't be so quick to declare someone their official girlfriend, either. And many older men would be eager to show off their much younger woman publicly instead of having a casual pizza night at home.

I loved that Warrick was unique. He put his own spin on the world. Maybe it was that he had spent so many years in the lab with machines instead of people.

His house was certainly grand, yet unpretentious and comfortable. As we ate pizza and had a glass of wine in his spacious earth-toned kitchen, I saw he was clearly more at ease at home.

His manner of speaking changed when he left the lab and entered his house. Perhaps it was a shift from constant analysis to relaxation mode. Maybe he felt he had to put on a different persona when he was the boss.

Warrick poured us each another half glass of wine, then we went to the couch in a small den. He switched the huge flatscreen to a fireplace, turning the volume of the crackling to a soft murmur.

"I like the new cut," I said, running my fingers through his hair. "Finally got sick of it in your eyes while you're working?"

His adorable smile lit up his eyes. "I didn't want you to be seen with a scruffy guy. At work people forgive me because

they know I'm an inventor and I'm kind of lost in my own head. But I want to be presentable with you in the outside world."

"I don't want you to change for me," I whispered.

He took my hand, slipping our fingers together. "No deep, fundamental changes. I think we're already great for each other. But I'm going to need you to guide me when I completely miss social cues."

He leaned in to kiss my temple. "Like, thanks for suggesting today that I was supposed to speak to everyone. That was overwhelming."

"Seriously. Did you know that you were almost a billionaire?"

Warrick shrugged, looking away. "I don't like to dwell on it. My father was really greedy with money. He set me up for success by paying for my education, and giving me seed money to start my first lab. I'm grateful for that."

He paused, running his fingers along my collarbone. "But Dad always flaunted his wealth, defined himself by it. I have all kinds of vague plans for labs and things I can build someday. Other than that..." He shrugged. "I guess I didn't realize how much it had been piling up."

Pressing my lips together, I stifled a laugh at the thought of excess money just "piling up". But sweet, scatterbrained Warrick honestly didn't care.

"I love that your first thought was to give everyone raises," I said.

"*Pfft*. They work almost as hard as I do."

"I still think it's sweet," I said saucily. "Just let me be impressed by your niceness."

"As long as you let me be impressed by your beauty, and light, and..." he gently tilted my head back to kiss under my ear. "This little nook right here."

His breathing changed as he felt the deep shudder roll through me as we kissed. Everything became steamy, heated,

as we clung to each other, finally alone.

Then Warrick pulled back. “Brooke, I’m not expecting anything. I want to be with you as much as you’d like. But please – if I cross any lines, stop me.”

My hands tightened on the back of his shoulders. “Thank you for saying that. I want you. But...”

His eyes softened as he gave me a gentle smile. “Not yet. Of course. I’m in no rush, beautiful.”

His finger trailed around the neckline of my shirt. “Whenever the time is right, I would love to see all of you. Kiss you. Admire you. Know you through and through.”

“Will you take your shirt off for me first?” The words popped out before I even realized what I had said.

From the sultry look in his eyes, he liked it. “Absolutely, sexy.”

Warrick leaned back just far enough to untuck his shirt before unbuttoning it and slipping it off. I was instantly breathless. He was certainly not built like any inventor-engineer-tech guy I’d ever seen.

Layers of muscle filled out his already large frame, his huge shoulders seeming to take up more space now that they weren’t restricted by the fabric. A string of small tattoos formed a ring around his bicep.

“What are those?”

He pointed to each symbol in turn. “They’re the molecular structures of water, caffeine, adrenaline, and dopamine. When I was in university I decided that was all I’d ever fundamentally need.”

His finger swirled over them, writing my name. “Now there is something in my life even more important.”

I laughed. “I’m not more important than water—”

Warrick cut me off with a kiss.

I’d never truly believed that good things would happen for me, since every bit of luck and attention always seemed to go

Katrina's way. Warrick felt like my piece of luck that had finally arrived.

The money wasn't important. But I loved that he had his life set up just the way he wanted it, yet was open to change. Open to me.

"Brooke, feel free to say no, but would you like to help me with an experiment?"

"Definitely. What should I do?"

His eyes blazed as he smiled. "Allow me to strip you naked and spread you across the couch. Then, through trial and error, we will assess precisely how much pressure and repetition it takes while licking your clit to make you come all over my mouth."

The combination of engineering and dirty talk was both hilarious and seductive.

"Okay."

His hands were quick and precise as he slowly slipped each item of my clothing off, while caressing every inch of me. Then he laid me back, making sure I was propped up on a pillow before spreading my legs gently.

"Every single piece of you is breathtaking." His lips glided around my ankle bone, then skimmed along my calf. By the time he reached my knee, I was twitching with anticipation.

As his warm breath reached my center, I was struck by how comfortable I was with him. I couldn't imagine anyone else having the right energy for me to allow such an intimate act.

Warrick paused, staring. "This is the prettiest pussy In the world," he muttered, almost to himself.

His fingertips glided softly against my skin, exploring carefully. He determined what made me gasp, what made me quiver, and what made me jolt forward, gripping the edge of the couch.

His playful grin helped me relax.

“Experiment time,” he whispered, leaning closer. His thumbs lightly brushed up and down my folds, then parted my flesh so that his tongue could press directly against my entrance, then upward, flat against my button.

A low level shock hit my nervous system, sending fire and lust through me.

“There we are.” His words vibrated against me, sending another shockwave.

His fingertips teased around my inner lips, entering just enough to drive me wild. His tongue swirled around my clit gently, testing my reactions. Finally he determined that sharp, upward strokes caused the biggest reaction.

His broad shoulders spread me wide as he dug deep, sucking and licking at my skin while I tried not to scream. All the while, those beautiful eyes locked on mine, studying me.

I’d never been the center of anyone’s attention. Having an incredible man like Warrick completely devoted to my pleasure was more than—

Oh.

My shoulders tightened as I seized, reaching forward to caress Warrick’s hair as I moaned loudly, the climax washing through me in a wave of heat and perfect pleasure.

His eyes smiled even though his mouth continued licking and sucking, lapping up my juices as if he wanted to consume me.

Warrick seemed to adore every single part of who I was. It felt incredible to be accepted so deeply.

I wanted to believe that his changeable focus was real, and wouldn’t suddenly shift away to something else.

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Feeling Brooke completely let go for me was the biggest high of my life. Even though she seemed satisfied, I couldn't stop.

Kissing my way upward, I did several slow, looping figure eights around her lovely breasts, taking some time to lick and nibble at her nipples until she quivered under me.

“Our experiment needs more data.” I winked. “May I run it again?”

Brooke giggled sweetly, then nodded. “If you really want to.”

I kissed her gently. “Baby, you have no idea.”

Working my way back down, I stared into her fresh pink pussy, and the juices that glistened at the edge of her opening.

Slowly circling my tongue around, I thrust it inside, which made Brooke grip the sides of my hair. “Oh!” she cried, hips shifting as she instinctively tried to pull me deeper.

My innocent girl clearly needed to be fucked. But I wasn't ready to tell her that. We needed more time.

She was so responsive. Dragging my tongue slowly around her clit without quite touching it, her moans and gasps told me everything.

The blunt end of my middle finger slipped inside just enough to make Brooke's eyes fly wide as she clutched at me.

Returning my tongue to her clit, I licked upward, steady and slow, watching her eyes. Increasing my pace gradually, I loved that she was so easy to read. Her breath, her twitches – it was all data that told me how close to a climax she was.

I brought her right to the brink, then slowed down, teasing, prolonging the moment where she hovered right on the edge. Waiting until those soft eyes were frantic, I licked faster, harder, watching as she exploded from the inside, tensing around me as she gasped loudly.

Watching my gorgeous, polished girl writhing naked on my couch was something I would never forget. Making her come so hard gave me a deep, primal satisfaction.

I kissed my way slowly up her stomach, noticing every place she was ticklish or sensitive.

When I met Brooke's luscious lips again, she kissed me even more passionately. As if there was less of a barrier between us.

That felt fantastic. It always seemed like there were walls of all kinds between me and other people. I needed Brooke and I to be open if we were going to be together permanently.

"It feels like I've known you so much longer," I said. Getting up, I sat on the couch and snuggled her into my arms.

"I know," she said softly, running her hand along my bare chest.

I'd always kept myself in top condition because all the experts said it improved cognitive connections and mental efficiency. Now I was glad I kept in shape because Brooke seemed fascinated by my body.

"This heat between us," she said softly, "It's not...normal, is it?"

I snorted, making her laugh. "I have no idea. I work on mechanical connections, not human ones. But I agree that the heat is...intense."

Kissing along her temple, I murmured, "I think we're going to have to do a *lot* of research. Run multiple

experiments.”

She shook her head sadly. “See, I don’t have a lab coat. I don’t know how official I can be.”

I laughed so hard it took a few moments to pull myself back together. “Nobody has ever made me feel as light as you do.” I sighed deeply, tightening my hold on her as I trailed my fingers lazily around her breasts. “Some women would have been offended by that. I’m glad that you get me, beautiful.”

She looked up, her eyes hazy. “I’m glad you understand me. That you even see me as a person.”

“You’re the most important person in the world, baby. Well, to me. There’s probably a whole bunch of people in northern Thailand who have absolutely no idea who you are.”

Brooke’s head fell back as she laughed, giving me the perfect opportunity to close my lips around her nipple, licking and sucking gently until she shivered.

Then I pulled away. “I really want to ask you to stay over, but the good boyfriend thing to do would be to drive you home at a reasonable time. Right?”

“Yeah,” she nodded reluctantly, reaching down to grab her clothes. “With more advance warning, I can make up an excuse, like staying over at a friend’s house.”

“No.” Although I was admiring her as she dressed, my mind was turning. “We’re adults. There must be a way to tell Frank and Gloria that we’re together without them getting upset.”

Brooke sat down again, straightening her shirt as she looked at me with a strange expression. Sadness? Resolve?

“Simple. We wait until my sister Katrina is in the midst of something dramatic. That’s pretty much always. Then I’ll casually breeze the news past Mom. She’ll wave it off and won’t really hear me. Then days or weeks later when she remembers what I said, it’ll be too late because she didn’t say anything at the time.”

Squeezing her hand, I said, “It sounds like you’ve had to do this before.”

“I’m accustomed to using their disinterest to my advantage.”

“It’s not right that they favor one daughter over the other.”

Brooke shrugged. “It’s just the way it is.”

It was clear that the situation hurt her. There was nothing I could do about that, other than give her so much of my attention that she never thought about it again.

“May I drive you home now, then pick you up first thing in the morning?”

She smiled. “Yes.”

“Am I permitted to think about you all night long?”

Her lips met mine in a soft kiss. “Also yes. In fact, as your brand new girlfriend, I insist.”

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My eyes fluttered open slowly. Saturdays were for sleeping in, and reaching for my phone, I saw that it was almost eight-thirty. I already had a few texts.

Warrick: Hey, can I pick you up at 8?

Warrick: Or maybe 8:30?

Warrick: I'm sorry, you're still asleep. Please let me know when you're up.

Wow. I'd never been the focus of someone's attention before, and had to admit it felt pretty incredible.

Me: Just waking up. Let me shower and get caffeinated.

Warrick: There will be coffee where we're going. Can you be ready by nine?

Me: Yes-ish. I'll text you as I'm walking out the door, and you can tell me where to meet you.

Dropping the phone, I dashed into the shower, then found a flirty dark teal dress that would probably be good for almost any occasion. It was barely past nine as I walked out my front door, texting.

Me: Walking west to the corner of Sinclair Avenue.

My eyes snapped up to see Warrick parked in our driveway, leaning on his car.

I had just passed my parents in the kitchen, murmuring that I was going out. They must have heard him drive up.

Warrick grinned as he took me in. “I am officially the luckiest man in the world. It’s killing me not to kiss you until we leave.”

He casually tossed me the keys, then opened the driver side door. “M’lady.”

As I backed the beautiful sports car carefully out of the driveway, the living room curtains were pulled aside. Yep, my parents definitely saw me driving away with Dad’s friend.

“You’re probably going to get a call from Dad at some point, “I said. “They just saw us.”

Warrick turned to me. “Really?”

“Parents tend to look out the window when their daughter is leaving the house. It’s a thing.”

“Damn. Sorry. That didn’t occur to me.”

He reached over to pat my knee, then pulled his hand out of the way as I smoothly changed gears. “I’m glad that you can actually drive a stick. Turn left here, please.”

So many naughty double entendres flooded my mind.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“Surprise.”

He wouldn’t talk about anything else except the weather and the ridiculously slow construction on Eglinton Avenue. “Pull into the parking lot with the big green sign, please.”

Violet’s Kitchen was a small, elegant restaurant that looked like a private supper club. There were only two other cars in the parking lot.

“Is it even open?” I asked.

We walked to the door, and Warrick tapped gently. “People go for fancy dinner all the time. Why not fancy breakfast?”

A smiling woman opened the door. “Miss Nelson. Mr. Cedar. This way, please.”

Every table in the restaurant was covered in a white cloth, but no tableware. We reached a corner banquette, the only

table set with dishes, flowers, and candles.

“Are we the only people here?” I whispered to Warrick.

“Yes.”

The woman settled us on the cushioned corner bench, then handed us menus. “I’m Tina, and I’m delighted to be serving you both this morning. Now, regular coffee, or can we whip up something special? Maybe a hazelnut latte, or chocolate cinnamon?”

“You know,” Warrick said, “I’ve actually never had a latte.”

“Why don’t we get one of each, and we can try them both?” I suggested.

Tina tapped her finger to her temple. “Smart. I’ll be right back.”

Once we decided on our orders and were settled with giant lattes in front of us, Warrick slipped an arm around my waist.

I flicked my finger through the cinnamon foam in front of him, then held it up. He sucked my finger into his mouth, running his tongue in circles before I snatched it back to dry it on my napkin. “Sassy. You’re going to have to behave yourself when more brunch people arrive.”

His green eyes sparkled. “I’ve just done my first insufferable wealthy person thing.”

“What do you mean?”

He chuckled deeply. “I bought out the entire restaurant. Called ahead last night, and said that I wanted a private brunch until they open at eleven-thirty.”

My mouth fell open, and he used the opportunity to kiss me. Then he leaned back. “Does that make me a douchebag?”

My hand drifted up and down his thigh as we snuggled closer. “Nobody is particularly inconvenienced, I guess. You’ll have to try much harder if your intent is to become a douchebag.”

“Never.” His lips drifted gently along my ear. “My intent is to make sure you have everything you need.”

Although it came out sounding more like the wishes of an engineer than a poet, his sentiment was in the right place.

Our incredible meal became a game of how much we could fondle each other anytime Tina was safely on the far side of the swinging kitchen door.

Warrick heard her footsteps quicker than I did. If she hadn't interrupted so often with extra appetizers and tasting dishes, we would have ended up naked underneath the table.

Somehow our conversation managed to continue flowing, even as our hands explored as much of each other as we dared. Warrick was very concerned about my life goals, education expectations, and where I saw myself in five years.

Maybe he was trying to put himself in my headspace, since he was so much older. I knew he'd never bring it up. I'd have to ask.

After Tina cleared the dishes, my hand gripped Warrick's thigh as I looked deeply into his eyes. “Do you care that I'm younger?”

He turned so that his hand casually wandered between my breasts and down my stomach. “Not at all. I never think about things like that. I just like being with you because you're you.” His hand shifted to my hip, giving a firm squeeze. “Do you care that I'm older?”

“No. In fact, I think I like it. Your life experience will probably help me get a head start on things.” I sighed. “That didn't come out right. I don't mean I'd use you to get ahead. I mean you'll have lots of great life advice along the way and help me avoid stupid mistakes.”

Warrick's hands snapped back as Tina flashed us a grin on her way to unlock the front door. “I think I know what you mean. It's always good to work in a lab when the previous technician was a good note taker. Don't expect to get a lot of social advice from me, but engineering, education, health and wellness – that I can help with.”

“And perfect breakfast spots, apparently.”

“My taste in girlfriends is also impeccable. Where would you like to go next? Anywhere in the city. Or I could get us a plane. One of my assistants was saying that I don’t challenge her enough.”

Staring into his sweet eyes, having his entire focus fixed on me, all I wanted was to be alone with him.

“Your place,” I whispered.

He grinned, leaning back to pat his washboard stomach. “I’m too full to drive. You’re going to have to take over again.”

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On the way back to my house, I peppered Brooke with questions about her interest in robotics, and ideas for interactive toys.

She had a brilliant mind, and was truly creative. I'd always loved smart people who enjoyed becoming mesmerized by tiny engineering details. She knew what it was like to fall into a work trance, or become obsessed by a new invention.

It was fantastic to think that the most beautiful woman I've ever met wouldn't be driven bonkers by my technical rambling, as long as I kept things under control.

Plus, her ideas for the robotic toys truly were innovative. I couldn't wait to help with them when she got to the testing phase.

When we got to my house, we walked to the front door, then I pointed to the panel. "962 212."

"What the what now?"

"It's your own security code. Four numbers from the center of your phone number, and the day we met was the twelfth."

Brooke's perfect lips fell open in astonishment. "You're basically giving me the key to your house already?"

I smiled. "Well, yes. We'll be coming here more often than to your place, right?"

The grin she gave me was like being hit with a wave of sunshine. She keyed in the number, then the entry button, and the door made a soft click. I followed her delighted giggle into the house, then went to pour us some water with fresh lime.

Brooke looked around the kitchen, smiling. “This place is really nice, Warrick. Extremely livable.”

“That was the idea. Not to generalize, but women really do seem to have better instincts when it comes to homes, comfort, and nesting. So I asked the women at work for decorating ideas, then had them all over for lunch so that we made a group decision on everything.”

Brooke shrieked with laughter. “You had your coworkers help decorate?”

I shot her a smirk. “They understand how I speak, and were able to translate for the actual decorator. Plus, from their point of view, it gave them all an afternoon away from work to have some face time with the boss.” I rolled my eyes. “That sounds cringey, sorry. Bottom line, everyone seemed very happy.”

Brooke nodded. “I think it’s great that you asked for help. A lot of powerful men refuse to do that.”

“A university professor told me once that the more brains were working on a project the better, within reason.”

Brooke stared at me strangely for a moment, then smiled. “You have so much, and you’ve done so much, yet there’s not a hint of arrogance about you,” she said softly. “Just sweetness.”

I pushed my chair back so Brooke could sit in my lap. The instant we began kissing, I could feel a change sweep over both of us. She wanted more.

Lifting her in my arms, I asked, “Bedroom?”

“Bedroom.”

I felt like I wasn’t supposed to tell her she was the first woman I’d brought to the bedroom of this house.

The methodical, slow way I slipped off her clothing seemed to amuse her, but I enjoyed unwrapping her like a precious gift.

“I need you naked as well,” she said, reaching out to unbutton my shirt.

We slipped off my clothing together, but I noticed Brooke’s fingers trembling as she reached my boxer briefs.

“I have no expectations,” I said. “If you like we could just snuggle.”

“I want to touch you. Is that okay?”

“Of course. As long as you understand that I haven’t been with a woman in a very long time, and don’t judge me on my first reactions.”

She helped me slip off my boxer briefs. Then she stared, muttering a curse under her breath that made me laugh.

We laid down in the center of the bed and I pulled her against me. “It’s a bit big,” she whispered. But her hand immediately began to stroke my steel-hard length.

My heart hammered in my chest as I caressed her soft skin. Kissing her ravenously, my hand slipped between her legs stroking as gently as I could.

Time slowed to a stop as we moved faster, slower, testing each other to see what movements elicited a moan or a twitch.

Brooke’s soft palm and delicate fingers felt incredible as she moved tentatively all the way up and down my cock. Her thumb flicked over the tip, discovering the few drops of pre-cum. I groaned.

Her breath became choppy as I spread her open, working her clit as she began to move against my hand.

“Am I doing this right?” she breathed against my lips.

“Yes. You could go a bit harder and faster if you wanted... you know. A reaction.”

She began to laugh, but just then I must have hit the exactly right spot, as her body began to shake almost violently

against me. “Warrick,” she cried out, twitching harder as my thumb brushed against her sensitive nub while my finger barely penetrated her, stroking her wet skin.

I loved how quickly she came. How aroused Brooke was for me. Having her naked in my bed was more than I could have ever dreamed.

Kissing her throat as the climax continued to rattle through her, her gasping cries spiked my lust until it became physically painful to hold back my release.

Brooke pulled away and stared into my eyes. “That was wild.” Her teeth sunk into her bottom lip for a second, then she grinned. “I want to try something.”

She pushed me so that I was flat on my back, and brought her lips to the swollen head of my shaft. I stared in complete disbelief as she pulled my cock into her mouth, licking and sucking eagerly.

“Brooke,” I choked, my fingers threading through her hair. “Baby, I was already so close. I’m going to...”

Those soft eyes looked up at me as she nodded, using her hands at the base as she worked over my entire length.

Her beauty... Her sweetness... Knowing that this was definitely the first blow job she had ever given... Everything hit me at once like a punch to the gut as I growled, thrusting my cock into her sweet little mouth as I came so hard I saw stars.

“Baby,” I rasped, as my come burst down her throat. “Brooke...baby.”

She swallowed happily, not seeming to care that I had accidentally been a bit rougher than I intended.

As I fell back against the bed, she sat up and licked her lips thoughtfully. “It’s a bit salty. Weird.”

Something about the intensity of that moment combined with her innocent observation made me crack up. Brooke joined me, cuddling into my shoulder as we laughed together.

I couldn't imagine Brooke leaving after we'd bonded so closely. I didn't know if she wanted more, but even just sleeping side by side felt like it would increase our connection.

Stroking her hair, she didn't even seem phased when I burst out laughing again.

“What is it?”

“I'm thinking about bonding two elements,” I explained. “Wondering if we slept in each other's arms tonight, would it increase our connection.” My hand drifted around her shoulder, then lightly teased the edge of her breast. “Can you stay over tonight, in the interest of science?”

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Of course I wanted to stay with Warrick. I also didn't want to start more family drama.

"I'd like to," I said. "But I have to check my phone."

Warrick went to grab my purse, which I'd left downstairs. Watching a huge, beautifully muscular man walking back into the bedroom, naked, holding out my handbag, was both breathtaking and hilarious.

He lay back down beside me as I dug out my phone. Skimming the texts from Mom, it seemed my parents were staying at Katrina's to test out her new guest room, and I was to eat the meatloaf in the fridge.

Honestly, I was grateful that they sent a message at all. Sometimes they didn't bother.

"My parents are out for the night," I said. "So they won't notice if I stay over."

Warrick's lips tightened into a straight line. "I'm glad you can stay, but I don't like sneaking around. I want to be open about us to the entire world. But I get that it's going to take some time to make them understand."

"Meh. They're always so focussed on every detail of Katrina's life that they tend to leave me alone." I put the phone away.

Thick arms slipped around me. "They're missing out. I adore every single one of your details."

As he kissed me again, I felt transformed. Needing to connect so deeply with someone else hadn't ever been on my radar. I'd always thought that having a boyfriend would be an amusing inconvenience.

How wrong I had been. It was wildly exciting and incredibly comforting at the same time. Warrick truly listened to me, something I hadn't known that I'd been craving.

As his tongue gently slipped into my mouth, kissing me deeper, I felt empty inside. The urge to be filled was nearly overwhelming. Warrick's huge, thick cock was going to be a bit scary for my first time, but I couldn't imagine anyone else inside me, ever.

Moaning against his lips, I tore myself away.

"Sorry, baby. Did you want to go to sleep?"

"No. I just wanted to mention that I went on the pill almost a year ago, just in case."

His eyes blazed as he stared at me. "Is this your way of telling me that you want..." A slow smile spread across his face. "More?"

"I want everything."

I took hold of his shaft, stroking him gently. Warrick's eyes closed for a moment. He was so hard he was throbbing in my hand. Then he looked at me very seriously. "Brooke, I'm a bit, um, big. For your first time."

"Too bad. We're going to have to make do."

His fingers glided against my pussy, already warm and wet. Ready for him. "You're sure?" He was already shifting to lie over me.

"Positive."

I shuddered when I felt the round head of his shaft brushing through my folds.

"I'll try to be gentle," he whispered. "I just hope I don't lose my mind."

I giggled, yet he seemed completely serious.

“Brooke, this means so much to me.” Warrick stared deeply into my eyes as the very tip of his cock pressed inside. “I already know that we belong together.”

Gasping, the pressure of his thickness was wild. It felt incredible, but also downright strange. I knew that sex was intimate, yet this was a lot to take in. Literally.

Warrick’s one hand on my hip. The other at the back of my head. His strained breath, as if he were holding back the urge to thrust deeper. The warm, pulsing shaft slowly sinking inside me as my body became wetter than it ever had been before.

“Yes,” I whispered softly.

“You feel so perfect around me, baby.” He kissed along my temple and across my forehead. “You want a bit more?”

“Yes.”

He was so careful. Somehow he managed to ease his way inside without any pain, just a few brief moments of discomfort.

“Breathe, baby,” he urged, giving my hip a small shake. “Relax.”

Wrapping my legs around his waist seemed to create more space, allowing him to plunge deeper as he groaned. “You feel so good, baby. Your hot little pussy is squeezing me perfectly.”

He groaned again, kissing me lightly while we panted from desire as he eased even deeper in. Finally I felt him tap the very end, and was oddly proud of myself for taking as much as I could.

Incredibly slowly, Warrick pulled all the way out, then slipped all the way in again as we stared into each other’s eyes.

“Incredible,” he murmured. “How does it feel, gorgeous?”

“Fantastic.” I reached up to trail my thumb along his cheekbone. “I like feeling this close to you.”

He nodded, kissing the tip of my nose as he smiled. “All the time I’ve spent trying to improve my body and brain, I’ve

completely neglected one important part.”

He slowly pulled all the way out, then thrust in a bit more quickly. “My cock has never been this happy in its life. Feeling you gripping me so tightly...Brooke, I think I’m already addicted to you.”

Then his mouth crashed down on mine in a ferocious kiss.

My hand slipped around the back of his neck, my hips undulating to urge him on as he began taking steady strokes. Every single nerve was ignited, my body on fire with the pleasure coursing through my veins.

Warrick seemed to be listening to my breathing, picking up on my cues so he knew when I wanted him to go a bit faster and when I was ready for him to thrust a bit harder.

Reaching between us, he spread my folds, then pulled my legs up higher around his waist. I gasped as the base of his cock brushed against my clit with each stroke.

His powerful body was still so gentle, his entire attention focussed on me even as he groaned in pleasure.

I loved that I could make him feel so good. Our connection felt precious. Rare.

“Is this too much, baby?” Warrick whispered against my lips. “I’m trying so hard to be gentle, but you feel too good.”

“It’s amazing,” I breathed. “It’s okay to go faster.”

I could feel my body opening up, my arousal allowing him to move more freely. His thrusts became deeper, quicker, as the steamy pressure in my core rose to a boiling point.

Just when I thought I might explode, Warrick began sweeping his thumb lightly back and forth against my clit.

My fingers dug into the back of his shoulders. “Yes,” I sputtered.

Warrick stared down at me in wonder. “That’s it, baby. Just let go. Just let that luscious pussy come all around my cock. I need to feel you come, gorgeous.”

I couldn't believe he was speaking like that, and his words sent me tumbling over the edge. I screamed his name as my entire body clenched in bliss.

I loved him. The knowledge washed through me along with a deep feeling of elation. It was as if my body and emotions were finally joined together.

“Brooke,” Warrick chanted, staring into my eyes as he thrust harder, faster. “Brooke, I—”

His shoulders seized up as he went still, except for his pulsing shaft as it erupted inside me and his wet warmth spread through me. He kissed tenderly along my forehead as he began stroking gently again, extracting every last drop of pleasure for us both.

“Baby,” he murmured softly, “That was incredible.”

“Mmm hmm.” I couldn't even form words.

Warrick rolled carefully to the side as we reached for each other, cuddling so close that our hearts were practically beating together. He pulled a blanket over us and tucked it around me.

His large palm drifted slowly up and down my back. “Every day I work on new connections. This one was different. Completely natural.” His lips drifted across the top of my hair.

His low voice was barely a murmur. “Brooke, you mean so much to me.”

I wanted to tell him that I felt the same, but waves of sleep were already pulling me under.

Even though I knew that nothing was ever perfect, just for a few moments, I believed that we really were going to fit into each other's lives completely.

Having never had a woman spend the night, I wasn't completely sure of the protocol the next morning. But since Brooke was still sound asleep, I slowly slipped out of bed, tucking the blanket around her.

After a quick shower, I went down to make coffee and see what my housekeeper had left in the way of food. I avoided carbs on Sundays to reset my system, but Brooke might want toast?

By the time she came downstairs wearing only one of my button-down shirts with the sleeves rolled up, I had a variety of options on the counter.

"You're so gorgeous." Pulling her against me, I kissed her softly, then laughed at the bright taste of mouthwash. "Minty fresh, too!"

She smiled. "When she doesn't have a toothbrush handy, a girl has to improvise."

"As soon as possible, I'd love it if you brought whatever you needed over here. Toothbrush, extra clothes, whatever. Oh, and I'll set you up with a credit card for expenses."

Her smile faded. "I don't need that."

I shrugged. "And that's fine. But good to have just in case, right? Now, what is your Sunday breakfast of choice?"

Brooke helped me create omelets with some leftover steamed broccoli, which were unexpectedly delicious, and low carb.

Over breakfast and a second cup of coffee, we chatted out on the back deck about everything from butterfly migration to debating the point of scaring the crap out of yourself by watching horror movies.

We were just taking the dishes back into the kitchen when my phone rang. I glanced at the screen. “It’s your father. Brooke, I can’t lie to him.”

She nodded tensely. “I understand.”

“Good morning, Frank, how are you?” I walked back outside, hoping that the fresh air would sharpen my mind so that I could figure out what he wanted to hear.

“Is Brooke with you?”

“Yes.”

He cursed under his breath. “I couldn’t believe it when I saw you two leaving together. What the hell are you doing with my daughter?”

Brooke was pacing in the kitchen as I lowered my voice. “To be honest, falling madly in love with her.”

There was a pause, then Frank sputtered, “What the— You’re way too old for her.”

“Isn’t that her decision?” I asked as mildly as possible.

“She’s too young for you,” he snapped. “Brooke needs to be concentrating on working to help pay for school. Maybe getting a second job. Not gallivanting around town with a guy your age.”

“I have no idea how to gallivant,” I said honestly. “She’s into tech. She understands my inventions. She’s seriously looking into robotics, did you know that?”

There was dead silence for several seconds. “Really?”

“Yes. We connect on a deep level, Frank. This is real.”

I paused, trying to figure out what a father would want to hear. “I can see you being worried about an older man with your daughter, treating her like some kind of beautiful trophy. But you know me, Frank. You know that’s not my style at all.”

He sighed heavily. “You’re right.”

“You also know how much I value education. In fact, as soon as I discuss it with her, I’m looking forward to helping her.”

“That’s not your concern.”

“But what if it was?” An idea was forming. “Frank, I don’t want this to get out, but my accountant updated me about my personal net worth yesterday.” I’m not sure why I was hesitant to tell him the actual number. “Let’s just say that I could pay for any education Brooke wants. At any school.”

Another muffled curse. “You think you can just waltz in and take care of her however you see fit?”

“We work really well together. It will always be her choice.”

Brooke came back out, hovering in the patio doorway.

“It sounds like you and Gloria are often busy with Katrina. I want to give that kind of attention to Brooke. Give her everything she could possibly want. Right now, I want to see if she’d like to go to an art gallery this afternoon.”

“Send her home. We want to speak with her.”

I sighed, looking at Brooke’s wide, worried eyes. “I’ll give her the message and ask her what she would like to do.”

“I’ll come pick her up right now.”

“No.” My firm tone surprised me. “If she wants to go, I’ll let her drive my car.”

“Why are you letting her drive that sports car, anyway?”

“It makes her happy, Frank. Plus she’s a great, steady driver.”

“*Hmf.*”

“Did you not even know that about your own daughter?”

Silence.

“That’s what I thought.” It felt weird to be so short with my old friend, but he was being an ass. “I’ll relay the message

and she can decide. Goodbye.”

Slipping my phone into my pocket, Brooke flung her arms around me. “You were so calm,” she murmured. “Thank you.”

“He wants you to come home right now. I was going to invite you to an art exhibition. We’re getting some new artwork for the office lobby and I want to be able to make a few suggestions so they don’t think I’m totally useless about anything besides my inventions.”

Brooke’s smile faded as she stared out across the lawn.

Perhaps it was immature, but I wanted her to choose me.

I wanted to feel like we were already a team. I wanted to be her man. Not to replace her father, but to be her special person at this new phase of her life.

But all I could do was hold Brooke gently, rubbing her back as I tried to relieve some of the stress that I was obviously causing my sweet girl.

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BROOKE

I 'd overheard Warrick and Dad discussing my education, and it sounded like a civilized conversation, like they were on the same page.

So I didn't need a recap of all that was said, but I knew that staying away any longer would create chaos. I decided to go home.

We got ready, and Warrick tossed me the keys so that I could drive.

Finally, I had to ask. "How angry was he? I want to know what I'm walking into."

"I don't think he was really angry," Warrick said slowly. "He just wants to know what's going on, I think. Until he has all the details, he can't make up his mind about anything."

"Yeah. I've been like that when I'm thinking about what courses to choose for fall."

As I paused at a stoplight, I glanced over to see Warrick staring at me strangely. "That can all change right now if you want, Brooke."

"What do you mean?"

"Your education. You don't have to just go to the school that's closest."

I laughed as I drove by the park. "Of course I do."

"No. For robotics, you should be going to Caltech or MIT. You're definitely smart enough to get into either of them."

“They’re much more expensive. I couldn’t live at home for free.”

Glancing over, I saw he was blinking rapidly as he stared into space. “I have money. Don’t worry about that.”

I slowed down as I approached my neighborhood, wondering where he was going with this.

“Beny keeps reminding me that I can hire people to do things. It could be really easy. A great apartment, furniture, everything that you need for school.”

My knuckles tightened around the steering wheel. Did he actually want to send me away?

“Frank said your education is the most important thing, and I agree. You should be going to the best possible school to pursue your dreams. Especially since I can hire somebody to set up a home right near your classes, and make it so that you don’t have to work any part-time jobs.”

He turned to flash me a dazzling grin. “Just focus completely on your studies. Amazing, right?”

Amazing for him, maybe.

I couldn’t believe it. We had been so intimate. So connected. Bonded together like one of Warrick’s projects. Then in the space of one car ride, he’d decided that my education was more important than us being together?

I was trembling as I pulled into the driveway.

“Brooke? What’s wrong?”

Fighting back tears, I tried to appear calm. “Bracing for an awkward conversation with my parents.”

“I’m sorry that I can’t help with that, but if I went in with you, Frank would raise his voice. That would upset you, right?”

“Right.”

It crushed my heart that Warrick didn’t get the larger problem at all.

He reached for me, but I escaped the car quickly, walking into the house to get the discussion over with.

My heart sank completely. I thought that I'd finally done something Katrina-worthy. Gotten the chance to pursue my dreams with an incredible boyfriend who had seemed to adore me.

But no. Apparently I was disposable. A mere fling.

Warrick hadn't seemed like the fling type in the slightest. Yet if he was fine with sending me off to a school in another state for months at a time, he clearly didn't want me around permanently.

For someone who perfected connections between machines all day long, he honestly didn't have a clue about how it worked with people. He was a bit odd in so many ways. Perhaps love just wasn't in his mental wiring.

I shouldn't have gotten so attached so quickly.

I should have known better.

People connected through shared experiences. One drum circle, a few meals, and the most incredible night of my life weren't enough to bond us together. Not enough to make Warrick see that we could be a great couple, and have a future together.

I couldn't bring myself to turn around and wave, instead only listened as the car pulled out and drove away.

Slumping into the house, I was going to have to tell Dad that it was already over.

Our connection was broken.

I didn't always know when I did something wrong, but this time I was sure.

Brooke had looked so happy this morning. We started to drive to her place, and she seemed resolved to have what was sure to be a slightly unpleasant chat with Frank.

But as we pulled into her driveway she seemed utterly crushed. Possibly...angry? It was hard to tell, since she wouldn't meet my eyes.

Yep, I had massively screwed up somehow.

Whenever this happened at work, which of course it was bound to because I was such a weirdo, I would get someone to point out the problem, then I would apologize profusely and rectify things any way I could.

But asking Brooke to point out exactly what I had done wrong didn't seem like an option here.

I drove home, then decided to call Beny. He knew my quirks and was usually helpful in these types of situations.

After quickly recounting every detail of my conversation with Brooke, I asked, "So what did I do or say that was wrong enough to make her angry?"

I could hear Beny's slow sigh. "Warrick, it seems like the two of you were getting pretty close. Then you said you wanted to send her away to school. Don't you think that will make her feel rejected?"

“What?” I bolted upright on the couch. “I want us to live together wherever she goes. I mentioned hiring someone to set up a home.”

Benny’s voice took on that quiet, patient tone that I was used to. “Did you say that you would get *her* an apartment, or an apartment for the *both* of you?”

I tried to recall every detail, but my mind was beginning to spin. “I – I’m not sure.”

“She probably thinks that you’re using the excuse of school to get rid of her,” he said gently.

“Why would she think that? She has to know that I’m falling hard for her.”

“Warrick, older men who have just become billionaires tend to float around with hot young girls. Perhaps a new girl every week. They don’t latch onto their first real girlfriend forever.”

“But...Brooke must know that I’m not like that!” I sputtered.

“You’re still getting to know each other,” he said calmly. “Since she’s the younger person in the relationship, she’s going to have her defenses up. She’s scared that if she gives you her heart you’re going to break it.”

“Well, shit.”

Beny laughed. “This must be serious. I don’t think I’ve heard you swear before.”

“This is the most serious problem I’ve ever had to solve. What do I do?” I begged.

“I’m not sure.” Beny paused. “I think you’re going to need a woman’s perspective here.”

“Okay. Thanks. I really appreciate it.”

I ended the call, then made fresh coffee. I didn’t know a lot of women, but there were a few at work who were always straight with me. Not nervous because I was their boss. I was genuinely lucky to have people like that on my team.

As always, when faced with a problem, I was going to have to get down to work, and ask my entire team for help.

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I felt like such a phony as I tried to put a bright smile into my voice with every call I took Monday afternoon.

“You’re all booked for your cleaning next Tuesday, Mrs. Stevenson. Looking forward to seeing you then!”

I hung up, then checked the clock wearily. Almost home time. I couldn’t wait to get back to my room, where I’d spent most of the weekend alternating between staring into space, crying, and looking up details about dream schools and programs that I couldn’t afford.

Once I told Dad that Warrick and I were finished, he let the matter drop, thank goodness. He didn’t want to have the awkward conversation any more than I did.

I didn’t want to leave Warrick. But if he could send me off to school so nonchalantly, maybe it was for the best.

A tiny part of my mind kept whispering that education was the most important thing, and if his guilt in letting me go so soon made him want to pay for everything with a few snaps of his fingers, I should let him. But of course I couldn’t do that.

And a much, much bigger part of me was screaming that I couldn’t let him go.

I was already in love with him. Every single thing about him. Not because he was rich, or powerful, or older. I loved the way he sniffed his coffee before he drank it. The way he was so curious about every detail of the world. That he’d

drawn that silly heart and slipped it into my purse without saying a word.

Plus he was sexy as hell, and totally adorable. How often does that mix come along?

But he was a guy. Of course he didn't want to get serious right away. I hadn't even thought that far ahead, but I should have seen it coming.

Plus, he was powerful. Powerful men always did whatever the hell they wanted. They didn't ask for anyone else's opinion or help. That was just a fact.

After sending out a few last appointment reminder emails, I closed the computer and turned on the voicemail before waving to Dad on my way out.

Warrick was outside, leaning on a sports car that was identical to his, but light blue.

"On the night we met, you mentioned that you'd borrowed your mom's car," he said quietly. "I thought that you might like one of your own. What do you think?"

I was too stunned to speak.

"If you don't want this color, we can go to the dealership right now and change it," he said. "They're open until six."

"I love it," I said, slowly stepping closer. "But you didn't have to do this."

I tried to hold back the bitter words, but they burst forth anyway. "Is this to make it easier for me to drive around when I'm away at school?"

Warrick took my shaking hands and guided me into the driver's seat. Then he walked around the car and got in beside me.

"I figured out what I did wrong," he said cautiously. "Yesterday I organized a meeting with Colleen, Amy, and Gloria from work. Fed them snacks and had them teach me about being a better communicator with women. "

My mouth fell open. He called in help?

I couldn't quite believe it. It was the first time anyone had really gone out of their way for me, after watching people practically do backflips for Katrina my entire life.

"What did they tell you?" I asked.

"Brooke, I'm so sorry," he said gently. "I was so focused on thinking about which schools might be best for you, and all the ways I could help, that I forgot to say I would want to move with you to whatever city you needed."

Staring into those beautiful eyes, I couldn't make a sound.

"When I said get a home, I meant for both of us," he continued. "House, apartment. Whatever is most convenient for your education. But I always meant for us to go together, baby."

His fingers slipped through mine. Hope and love and lust flooded me all at once.

As I tried to calm my racing heart, I looked up to see Dad marching out the door. "I thought this was over," he snapped.

Warrick looked at me sharply. "Just a misunderstanding, Frank."

"You both agreed that her education comes first. So Brooke will be going back to school soon, and this..." He waved his hand vaguely between us both. "Whatever it is needs to be done."

Warrick turned to me. "You're right. Brooke's education comes first. She comes first. So I'm paying for her to go anywhere she wants, and I'm moving there with her."

"Really?" I whispered.

"Really. Unless you tell me to go, I'm not leaving you. Ever."

His thumb drifted along my skin as he turned to Dad. "You know that I'm a decent man. You know that I'm going to do everything in my power to be good for her. It's natural for you to be a bit freaked out about this at first, but if we all go for a beer in a couple of weeks, I promise that you'll see I'm treating her like the precious angel that she is."

Dad's face froze. It was as if his mind short-circuited. He was usually a mellow guy, and I'd only seen him this overwhelmed a handful of times. After a long pause, he nodded. "Fair enough."

Then he turned on his heel and went back into the dental office without a word.

As Warrick and I faced each other again, I couldn't believe the deep pull to him I felt right down to my bones. Even though it was fast, I knew that being with him was what I wanted. Needed.

He reached up to caress my cheek, leaning closer. "I've never really wanted anything before, Brooke," he said slowly. "Success in business came easily to me. I guess I'm just really lucky."

"Or really talented," I whispered.

He shrugged. "Whatever. I hope I'm lucky now. Because this is the first time I've ever wanted something purely for myself, and I want you, Brooke. With me. Permanently. Whether that's here, or at whatever university you choose, or if we bounce around the globe for a while. I just need us to be together."

He leaned closer, brushing his lips gently against mine as I shivered. "I'm sorry that things came out wrong. I'm sorry that I sometimes need help in order to communicate in a non-engineering way. But I love you. I need you. And I want to try very hard to make you happy forever. "

Warrick gave me a light kiss, full of promise. Then he sat back and stared calmly into my eyes while I tried to collect my thoughts.

Blinking quickly, I forced myself to smile as I took a few deep breaths.

Even though every second I paused was probably awkward for him, I had to pull myself together for the very important words I needed to say.

I 'd never been so nervous in my entire life.

It felt like my heart was a live wire, ready to be shocked or explode from the slightest touch.

As I stared at Brooke's perfect, angelic face, I didn't know whether the tears she was trying to blink away were a good sign or not.

"I love you too," she finally whispered. Then she laughed slightly at my exaggerated sigh of relief.

"I know it's fast. That doesn't mean it's wrong."

Brooke nodded, then leaned into me for a swift kiss. "You really want to move with me?"

"Of course. I'll keep the house here, though. Maybe when you're busy with exams or something, I might come back to the lab for a week or two. With video calls, it'll be like I never left."

I stared at her shoulder for a second. "Except for the time change. I might have to keep strange hours. But you'll be studying all the time anyway. We'll just schedule a specific time for dinner every night, so that we always connect—"

Brooke interrupted my babbling with a deep, sultry kiss. Then she murmured, "We will work it out. It means a lot to me that you called in some women for their opinions, that you went out of your way to understand the problem."

I nodded, reaching into my pocket. “I’m sorry that I’m going to be difficult to deal with sometimes. But I really do love learning, so the more you explain it to me, and tell me how I can improve, the better.”

I opened the little black box quickly before she could guess what it held. “Amy, our office manager, said that it’s way too early to give you an engagement ring. But the ladies all agreed that a little piece of jewelry was appropriate.”

Brooke’s hand trembled as she picked up the box, staring down at the three-quarter carat diamond stud earrings. “This isn’t a man claiming his woman thing,” I explained. “I just thought it would be sweet if you wore a present from me most of the time.”

She picked up an earring and twirled it in the sunlight thoughtfully. “Simple and sparkly,” I continued. “You’re my little fairy princess and I want to spoil you. Is that okay?”

Her bottom lip wobbled, and I realized she was holding back tears again. “Yes,” she murmured. “It’s okay.”

She leaned toward the rear view mirror to put the earrings in, then pulled back to admire them. “Wow. These are gorgeous.”

I grinned. “I’m glad you like them. I picked them out myself. I was thinking of the relative sizes of the stone and your earlobe, and didn’t want to get something too big or heavy.”

Brooke’s palms pressed to either side of my cheeks. “I love them. I love you. And although I want to be a strong woman who puts her education and career first, and doesn’t make life decisions based on her man, yes, I also want to be your fairy princess some of the time. Is that okay?”

Pulling her into my arms, I laughed. “That is perfect.”

As she snuggled into my shoulder, I whispered, “There is absolutely no rush to make your decision. But one of the interns is compiling a giant spreadsheet of all of the features of the schools with the five best robotics and engineering programs, just to help make your choice easier.”

She laughed, as her fingers trailed around the back of my hair. “Thank you. That’s very thoughtful.”

“Some men spoil their women with flowers and love songs. I’m going to spoil you with spreadsheets and sparkly things.”

She sat up, her eyes twinkling. “This is why we belong together.”

As we cuddled together in the front seat of Brooke’s new car, I felt a deep wave of satisfaction roll through me.

I always solved problems in the end. But this was a very different sort of success. It wasn’t like I had won her over, or engineered a solution for our relationship.

All I had to do was listen better, and let Brooke help me be the best boyfriend I could possibly be.

Well, for a few months, anyway. I wanted to be promoted to fiancé as soon as possible.

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EPILOGUE ONE

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I loved that my gorgeous boyfriend was always excited to show me his latest experiment. I drove up to the building and parked right beside Warrick's SUV. As always, an intern with a tablet in their hand rushed to greet me.

“Good afternoon, Brooke. I'm Matt. Warrick is in the middle of something, but I'm to take you to him.”

“Thanks.”

As I followed him through what I'd come to think of as the “business center” with its regular offices, everyone nodded hello. His staff seemed to appreciate the slightly mellowing influence I'd had on their boss. Warrick was less scattered these days, more focussed in the good way, and more aware of the world – not to mention the people – around him.

They were also probably happy that he went home nearly every night instead of crashing at work. I know I appreciated it, since I'd moved in with him a month ago, and sleeping in Warrick's arms gave me the most peaceful rest I'd ever known.

Matt led me the long way through the giant lab. “They're working on something a little sensitive in the east end,” he murmured.

I'd discovered that the countless interns and assistants at Cedar Industries weren't relegated to low-paying grunt jobs. Warrick loved hiring people straight out of school, because, as he joked, “Their brains are still fresh that way.”

But sometimes they didn't know exactly what they wanted to do yet, so they assisted in several different areas as they soaked up the atmosphere, while earning a very decent paycheck.

We approached a long workbench in the corner where Warrick was working on a computer in front of a large monitor and what looked like a three-foot-wide game show prize wheel.

Matt cleared his throat politely. "Mr. Cedar, Brooke has arrived."

Warrick practically leapt over to me, and instead of squishing me in one of his giant bear hugs, simply kissed me on the forehead. I'd explained the concept of office appropriate displays of affection and it looked like it had stuck, thank goodness.

Taking my hand, he led me to the computer, pressing a key so that the large screen lit up with a list of names.

"These are the top charities that we discussed donating to. Luca, Jeff and Helena have entered a bunch of data that calculates which ones need the money the most desperately right now, and which ones will help the most people."

He was grinning like a five year old with a new toy, as he always did whenever he invented something cool. The rest of the staff backed up to give him plenty of room as he became more excited and animated.

"Darryl pointed out that since we'll be sending larger donations, there are phone calls and other time-consuming bits involved. So we're all going to work on it together. Whenever any employee has some free time and can take half an hour to do the legwork, they'll consult the chart, and pick one of the top five."

"That's amazing!" Looking closer, all of the charities were very deserving. "But what if you can't decide? You could waste a lot of time just trying to pick one."

"Precisely!" Warrick hit another key, and the wheel lit up with the names of the charities. "Instead of being mired in

indecision, just spin the wheel.”

I burst into laughter, as did everyone around us. Quite a few people from the office area had followed the noise and a crowd had gathered.

“I wanted you to have the first pick,” Warrick said, waving me toward the laptop. “Matt can take care of the paperwork with whatever charity you select.”

“So is this going to be a reward for people completing their work and therefore having extra time?” I asked.

His mouth fell open. “I didn’t even think of that. I just thought it would be fun.”

Luca asked, “Is there any limit? One donation per day, or per employee?”

Warrick grinned again. “Nope, not for the first week. Then Darryl is going to keep an eye on how much we should donate every week so that the interest doesn’t build up to such ridiculous amounts again.”

He pointed to the large button on the laptop’s touch screen. “Go on, give it a shot.”

It was just so inviting. After I pressed the bright red button, fireworks took over the main screen, and the wheel spun quickly, slowing down to land on the local children’s hospital.

“Perfect,” I beamed, as Warrick hugged me.

“Do it again,” he said.

“Okay.”

I clicked the happy red button again, but this time the screens and wheel went dark. Crap. Warrick crawled under the desk to check a cable, and I hoped that I hadn’t broken the system.

Then the large monitor flashed back to life, showing pink and purple clouds and flowing script.

“BROOKE, I love you more than anything else in this world. I always feel like the best version of myself with you, and I want to keep upgrading with you forever. Will you marry me?”

LOOKING DOWN, I saw that Warrick had emerged from under the desk and was on one knee, holding up a box containing a plain silver ring.

He took my hand, which was shaking. “This ring is only temporary until we go shopping together tomorrow. That is, if you say yes. Brooke, will you please marry me and allow me to keep trying very hard to make you happy forever?”

Blinking through tears, I nodded, finally managing to whisper, “Yes.”

Warrick jumped up, slipping the ring, which I realized was just a piece of laser cut steel, on my finger. He kissed me in a manner that was definitely not appropriate for the workplace, but could likely be forgiven just this once.

The next several minutes were a blur as Warrick wouldn't stop hugging me while someone popped a bottle of champagne and passed out glasses. He finally released me so that some of his team could shake his hand.

Beny came over and gave me an awkward little hug. “Congratulations, Brooke. Now that you're officially part of the family, hopefully we can talk more about your robotic children's toys.”

I giggled, spluttering slightly on my sip of champagne. “Warrick was probably just trying to be polite. I don't want to use up any of your resources for my pet project.”

Beny grinned wildly. “No, no. I've sort of mentioned it to a few people and we're all really excited. Inventing connectors for machines brings in a ton of money, and it's a creative challenge for Warrick. But most of us want to work on something a little different now and then. Honestly, it would be an incredibly enjoyable project for the whole team.”

“Oh. Well, in that case, I’ll start making more sketches and nailing down my ideas.”

“No rush. You still have school, and you know...” He waved toward Warrick who was being high-fived by a row of interns. “A wedding to plan. “

“Good point.”

As Warrick returned, Beny said, “You two are going to make the most adorable robot toys together, aren’t you?”

“That’s the plan.” Warrick gathered me in his arms, spinning me in a slow circle as if we were waltzing. “The most adorable house. The most adorable children. The most adorable entire life.”

I had known early on that we belonged together. The way he was holding me now was proof. “I love that you’re seriously into trying new things,” I said.

“Me too. Without that drum circle, I wouldn’t have met the love of my life.”

“We’ll have to go back and thank the hippies sometime,” I laughed, then Warrick spun me around the corner so that we could make out in secret for a few minutes.

My gorgeous quirky inventor was still a bit socially awkward here and there, but as the heat flowed between us, giving me a tiny peek of what would happen later tonight, I was pretty sure that our public naughtiness would be forgiven.

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EPILOGUE TWO

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The second I answered the front door, I was rudely shoved aside by stampeding little feet.

“Auntie Kat-ina!”

Katrina stepped inside and scooped Jacob into her arms. “How’s my big boy?”

He grinned from ear to ear as he waved his fingers in her face. “I’m going to be my whole hand old next week!”

“Five years already, goodness.” Katrina flashed me a smile as I led her inside. “Will there be a tiny party?”

Jacob looked at me, his eyes huge. “Party?”

“Possibly.” I went to the living room to scoop up our seven-month-old baby Angela, who remained sound asleep. “I was thinking for your birthday we could have pizza, and maybe one cupcake each.”

“Cupcake!” Jacob was so excited that Katrina had to put him down so he could run in circles around the foyer a few times.

“You’re not telling him?” she whispered.

“Hell no. Otherwise he won’t sleep for days.”

She picked up the diaper bag. “Fair.”

We tried not to spoil the kids too often, but my little man would only turn five once. I’d rented an hour of time at a local speedway, where one of the drivers was going to let Jacob sit

in his lap and help steer while they did a lap of the empty track at ten miles an hour.

That would be followed by a massive racecar cake with a handful of his friends and everyone watching a few drivers doing practice laps afterward. Jacob was already completely into cars, and was going to lose his mind.

I walked Katrina out to our SUV. After buckling the kids into their car seats, I gave her a hug.

Once Brooke had temporarily put a little distance between her and her family, and everyone got a bit more perspective, the entire dynamic had changed. The parents were more focussed on enjoying their own lives, and gave Katrina some space.

Brooke hadn't even realized that Katrina had been feeling smothered, which was one of the reasons why the girls didn't particularly get along for a while. Now they were practically best friends, which was handy for me when I wanted a night alone with my lovely wife.

"Thanks so much," I said, opening the door for Katrina as she got in.

"Any time," she said. "Jacob is going to help me proofread my new book, isn't here?"

"Book!" he chirped from the backseat.

I waved as they drove off, then hurried inside to where I'd left Brooke.

Saturday afternoons I usually took the kids for a few hours so that she could have a bubble bath in her custom tub. She always pulled out all the stops, with a glass of wine, a bowl of fruit, and some fluffy movie that she would probably never admit to enjoying.

I heard her stepping out of the water as I approached the door, knocking quietly. "May I come in?"

"Sure."

When I peeked in, I was rewarded with the incredible view of Brooke's naked body, glistening from the bath. She gave me

a saucy shimmy before reaching for her robe.

I took it from her, patting her dry, then hanging it back up so that she remained naked.

“You’re up to something...” she said with a knowing smile.

I’d surprised her with many little things over the years, from special food to weekends away. I’d cut back my work hours drastically, but the past few weeks had been frantic.

Lifting Brooke gently in my arms, I carried her to our enormous bed.

“What if the kids come in?” she whispered, glancing nervously at the door which I hadn’t bothered locking.

“Auntie Katrina has kidnapped them for the night. You’re all mine.”

Her lovely mellow blue eyes glowed. “You’re the sweetest husband ever.”

“And you’re the sweetest wife on the planet. Probably in the universe, but we haven’t searched enough of that yet to know for sure. Time will tell.”

Lying her down, I yanked off my shirt, then settled between her creamy thighs. “You can be as loud as you want, beautiful.”

She certainly didn’t need my permission. In seconds her fingers threaded into my hair as I devoured her pussy. Brooke was so relaxed that it took less than two minutes for the pressure of my tongue lashing against her clit to make her cry out, shaking from head to toe as she came against my mouth.

Then I slipped two fingers inside, palm up, so that I could find her g-spot and lick the magic button steadily until she screamed again.

I always loved making Brooke come at least twice before I thrust my cock inside her. Not just so that she was wet and ready, but also so I didn’t have to be quite as cautious as I was during our first few months together.

No more restraint. No more holding back when she gave me that look.

“Strip. Now.”

“Yes, dear.”

In seconds I was naked, wedging myself between her open legs as I kissed her with all of the love and passion I had for her. Brooke returned my kiss with her own fire, her thighs clamping around my hips as my cock sunk in all the way to the hilt.

Pinching her nipples gently, I waited until we found our rhythm, her hips bucking up against me.

Brooke squealed with surprise as I flipped us, moving closer to the headboard so that she could grip it while she straddled me.

She tried to bounce up and down, but I gripped her hips, keeping my length firmly seated inside her as she moaned. “Don’t tease me,” she whispered.

“But it’s so much fun,” I smiled.

I waited for a few moments, torturing us both. Then I released her, quickly thrusting upward as she wriggled above me, circling her hips in a figure eight pattern.

“Yes,” she gasped, rocking her hips faster and faster.

The feeling of her softness wrapped around my steel brought me to the edge quickly, as she leaned forward, rubbing herself against the base of my shaft, her incredible breasts swaying tantalizingly in front of my mouth.

Catching her nipple between my teeth, I bit gently, making Brooke even more frantic. “Harder,” she gasped. “Please.”

I always gave my wife precisely what she wanted. No matter what.

“Come for me,” I growled, slamming home again and again as her arms clenched, holding herself up.

She was so beautiful, her hair a gorgeous mess as she tossed it out of her face, bucking as she rode my cock faster

and faster as her climax began.

Her body vibrated as she came around me, her frantic wails driving me onward as my own orgasm took over. My cock swelled, thrusting deeper and deeper before spurting every drop of come into her softness.

Brooke collapsed against my chest, both of us breathing hard as we clung to each other.

“Wow,” she whispered. “It’s always even wilder when we are alone.”

“Yes. And to think, we have about twenty more hours to go.”

Brooke propped herself up on elbow, grinning from ear to ear. “Twenty hours might not be enough.”

My darling girl was completely insatiable. We both were. Even through Brooke’s three years of university, with a wedding in the middle, and launching a robotic toy business, we were always starving for each other.

We had formed a perfect connection and invented the perfect life for ourselves where we fit together perfectly. Nothing could keep us apart.



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Daddy's Billionaire Chef

Julia finally meets her Dad's celebrity chef, who happens to be gorgeous, wildly sexy, and just the excitement she's been craving.

Daddy's Billionaire Lawyer

Just a few stolen kisses with a sexy masked man in the rose garden. I would never have expected to start a relationship with a hot billionaire.

Daddy's Billionaire Coach

Hockey was something that left me cold, until now. My reason to warm up to the game was six-foot-four, wildly sexy, and definitely out of my league. Until he insisted we start dating.

Daddy's Billionaire Author

Darien was gorgeous, sexy, and helped me explore the sensual side I'd ignored for too long. Things got more than cozy by the fireplace (and the hot tub) as we were isolated together.

Daddy's Billionaire Broker

Not twenty minutes after we'd met, Jack talked me into a date right in front of my father. *Who does that?* I had to say yes.

ALSO BY HALEY TRAVIS

Adam's Angel: Mackton Mechanics

I thought I was helping a damsel in distress with car trouble. Instead, I fell for an angel.

Her New Bodyguard: Jackson

Ashley was so sexy and innocent that my need to care for her was far more than professional.

Diablo: Dirty Sinners

Can this devil atone for his many sins?

I had no right to even touch an angel like Avery, much less claim her. But if she needed protection, she would get everything I had.

Never Date The Boss

Ashley was talked into one little "business date" with her boss, and everything changed in a heartbeat. Or rather, a flutter of them.

Mr. Right... As Rain

A gorgeous man saved me on the way to an interview. Maybe it was the good luck kiss from a stranger, but isn't falling in love so fast just a fantasy?

Teased by my Roommate

A new roommate named Hawk. He's breathtaking, sexy, and I've already seen FAR too much of him. Now he'll never stop teasing me. But I love it.

Fake Summer Boyfriend

I'm terrified of giant men. But when Leif volunteered to scare off my stalker by pretending to be my boyfriend, I knew the gorgeous hulking security tech was the perfect man for the job.

The Last Date

I was infatuated with Sasha. I will tease her, even court her, until I make her mine. Forever.



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