You Were Always On My Mind

by fionnabhair

Summary

The campaign is up and running, and Amy has a lot of decisions to make.
Chapter One

Amy hates Omaha.

It’s a thought she’s had more than once – in fact, a thought she’s had every single time Selina has dragged her to the Madison-Monroe dinner – but she thinks it with more…passion than usual, on this occasion.

There’s been some kind of accident on the highway, and traffic back into the city has slowed to a crawl, meaning she’s stuck in a car with Dan, Kent and Leon as they make their back to the hotel after the dinner.

She keeps her eyes on her phone, not wanting to make eye contact with Dan or get dragged into further conversation with Leon. Dan is twitchy as hell, shifting in his seat and trying to catch her eye and coughing significantly whenever she says something, and Leon… she does not like the way Leon looks at her, to put it mildly.

But Dan is the real problem.

As long as she’s known him, almost, she's known it's best to avoid giving him any kind of advantage over her, and now… well, that's basically pot now.

But she had thought about this a lot, she had winnowed out any… expectations of him, and she’s not going to be distracted from her plan by his antics.

So she looks up discussion of the dinner on twitter, and asks Kent for his opinion, and if she can feel Dan getting annoyed beside her, well… that’s just tough.

She doesn’t have the energy to deal with a hissy fit right now.

She’s fucking exhausted, among other things – she’d barely slept the night before, worrying about… how to tell him, what to say (as though it made any difference whatsoever), and she needs sleep now, like it’s a drug and she’s a junkie.

Her conversation with Kent peters out eventually, and, worn down, Amy turns to look out the window, trying not to see Dan wringing his hands in the reflection. The Secret Service must be losing their minds at the extended delay, and they’re not stuck in a car with Leon, she thinks – and it’s her last thought for a while.

When she wakes up, they’ve finally reached their hotel, but it’s not the car stopping that wakes her, it’s a hand on her knee.

She assumes, in her half-awake state, that it’s Dan, and goes to push his hand away, irritated with him for touching her so intimately in front of other people (now is really not the time).

But it’s Leon who’s touching her skin, Leon who’s saying her name, and…and he gives her the fucking creeps. Even Kent would have been better, but he would never presume…

When she gets out of the car, everyone’s waiting, and she spares a thought to wonder just how long she’d been asleep. Selina’s on a high, thrilled to be back in the game at long last, certain her speech went down well, and Amy smiles along and makes positive noises, and tries to pretend she can’t feel Dan all but hanging over her shoulder.
They’re going for drinks, Selina says, and Amy nods, and demurs, and excuses herself. Not just because she can’t drink, though she can’t, but because she really is tired… and there’s no way Selina will let Dan go too, so it gives her a built-in reason to ditch him.

He knows what she’s doing – she can tell from his face – and if she were less exhausted she’d smirk at him, or grin, or something, for having got one over on him, but… as is, she just makes her way, slowly, back to her hotel room, and goes to bed.

She’s told him. The worst has to be over.

When she wakes up the next morning she has five missed calls from Dan, and nearly a dozen text messages. And she can’t help it, she smirks looking at them – karma’s a bitch.

Selina and Ben have a breakfast meeting with some gasbag from the Iowa committee, which means she has time, so she takes a long, hot shower and dresses carefully for the day ahead. The pre-campaign campaign is a lot more leisurely when the candidate isn’t simultaneously holding office, but all the same, she wants to take advantage of any and all down time she gets.

It’s nine thirty by the time she makes it down for breakfast, and Dan has called her twice more. She’s going to deal with him – she knows she has to deal with him – but she wants to eat first. She’s been having hungry days the last few weeks, days when it feels like she’s been hollowed out and nothing will fill the space, and she has a bad feeling that today will be another one.

She orders french toast with a side of bacon, and tries to feel satisfied with orange juice as a substitute for coffee (she fails). While she waits for the food to arrive, she reads Dan’s text messages and tries to decide whether to text him back – does she really want to have this fight first thing in the morning? But, knowing him, does she really want to put it off much longer? He’s probably pissed at her for ignoring him, and she wouldn’t put it past him to make a scene in front of everyone out of spite.

She’s just sent him a message saying she’s in the restaurant if he wants to talk, when she hears his voice, “Morning Ames.”

She can’t help it, she sighs. She’d hoped she’d get at least a few minutes to prepare for this conversation.

“Good morning,” she says, watching him sit down opposite her.

“You look fresh,” Dan says, and then has to pause when the waitress asks if he wants anything. (When he orders coffee Amy kind of wants to cry – the smell is torture).

There’s a pause when the waitress leaves, and when she finally looks at him she can see he’s all but… pulsing with energy, which does not bode well. Not that she’d had any hope it would be a pleasant conversation, but she’d thought at least…

“Did you sleep well?”

“Yes,” she says, tartly, and adds a moment later, “Like the dead actually.”
She’d meant it to suggest that she hadn’t been ignoring him, not really, but Dan clearly takes it as some kind of obscure insult, because he grimaces and says, “Got a weight of your chest all of a sudden?”

“What do you think? I wasn’t exactly looking forward to it.”

There’s a tone in her voice she doesn’t like, and she avoids his eyes for a second, before adding, “Late night?”

“You know that it was.”

She rolls her eyes. “I really *don’t* want to hear about whatever…”

“Did you check your phone?”

“This morning,” she says, and she knows she sounds petulant, and she really doesn’t fucking care. “When I woke up.”

“Then you know the last time I texted you was what, two a.m?”

“So? Like you wouldn’t –”

“Amy.”

The waitress comes back with her food, and Amy thank her (mostly just to fuck with Dan), and takes a mouthful (definitely to fuck with Dan). When her stomach rumbles, loudly, he almost smiles, and she lets herself think, for a moment or two, that maybe it won’t be completely terrible. And then…

“Mind if I join you?”

Fucking Leon.

She would *really* rather he didn’t, and she can tell from Dan’s face that he feels the same, but… if she tells Leon to fuck off, they’re having a private conversation, he’ll know something’s up, and once Leon knows, it’s a virtual certainty that the rest of the team will too, and she is not ready for that, not at all.

So what she *says* is, “Of course.”

The only good thing about having Leon there is that he doesn’t need much help to keep a conversation going, launching immediately into some baffling story about a Nebraska Senator he did an exposé on some time in the stone age and how Bob Woodward told him it was the best piece of journalism he ever read and Amy really doesn’t know why the fuck he’s telling her this or why he imagines she’d care, but…

She can see Dan getting more and more furious as Leon continues, and so she eats as quickly as possible, trying to tune them both out, and focus on chewing carefully.

As soon as she’s finished she interrupts Leon, saying, “I have to get to work,” and stands. Feeling Dan’s eyes on her she adds, “You wanted to talk to me about the –”

“Yeah,” he says, and smirks at Leon.

“Then come with me, I’ve got to –”

She doesn’t bother trying to look apologetic for ditching Leon, but turns on her heel, wanting to get
He rolls his eyes, but follows her out of the hotel and across the road to the shitty diner she’d noticed the night before. At least she can be reasonably sure that no one from the team will see them here, even if it does look like it would fail a health inspection.

She orders a slice of apple pie, with ice cream, because fuck it, the french toast did nothing, and leans back to look at Dan. “So,” she says, “Going to scream at me?”

She’s caught him off guard, she thinks, because he opens his mouth for a second, and then says, “Why’d you ignore me last night?”

“Guess, idiot. And I didn’t ignore you, I was fucking…tired, all right, and I figured you’d be…” She stops herself, and considers for a second before continuing. “I was always going to talk to you, I just…I needed to sleep.”

“Turning you into a pod person already, is it?”

For a moment, a long-ish moment, she wants to smack him right across his smug face, but… but her pie arrives, and so she takes a loaded forkful instead. Dan rolls his eyes, and says, “How long have you known?”

“Since…since the day after I came to DC for the…interview or whatever. I hadn’t really thought about it, since you said… but then Kent said something, and I did the math, and…”

It doesn’t really put into words how it had felt, the weird, unbalanced feeling she’d had as soon as she’d realised, the complete certainty about what she was going to do that made, oh, every other thing in her life unsteady… but then there’d be no point in telling Dan that anyway, so she doesn’t try.

“That’s, what, three weeks ago?” Dan says, his eyes fixed on her face. “You waited that long to tell me?”

“Well I didn’t feel like being dragged off to an abortion clinic before I… I had to make a decision.” She slides her hands under the table so she can clench them into fists. Even telling him this makes her feel nauseous.

“As if you’d let me drag you anywhere.”

“Fine, I wouldn’t,” she says, “But I didn’t want you to try.”

She can tell Dan’s caught the hitch in her voice, and she looks out the window for a moment, composing herself. She must be out of her goddamn mind.

“Have you told anyone else?”

She doesn’t look at him. “Not yet,” she says. “I wanted to… get the worst part over with first. But that doesn’t mean you can…”

“I’m not going to try to change your mind.”

That gets her attention back on him. “You’re not?”

He gives her this look, like he knows exactly what she’s thinking, though he can’t, he can’t know the
sick hope that’s flooding her body right this very second.

“I’m not that kind of sick that I’d force you to… okay? Amy, you can trust me.”

She laughs. “The last time I trusted you I wound up pregnant, so… that’s not as reassuring as you think it is.”

“No one is more surprised than I am.”

“Sure,” she says, “Or maybe you just didn’t care. It’s not like you’re the one who has to deal with it.”

The scepticism in her voice surprises her almost as much as it does him and…it’s strange that, as much as she’s decided she’s going to have this baby, she’s still pissed at him for lying to her, for putting her in this position in the first place.

“Amy, I swear, I didn’t know.”

“It doesn’t matter,” she says, shrugging, “What’s done is done, so…”

“Is this where you tell me I’m free to back away, you don’t expect anything from me, you’re going to give me an out if I want it?”

“No,” she says, and this is the really hard part. (If she was being honest with herself, she’d admit that she wants to tell him to fuck off, she wants to say she’ll go it alone, because it would be easier in the short term, dealing with him is unbearable, but…she can’t do that). “This child is going to deserve more than some fucking deadbeat, and I am not letting this turn into one of Sophie’s… I don’t expect you to give a fuck, and I don’t expect that you’ll…remember birthdays or read stories or anything, but… we can come to some sort of arrangement. Like…a college fund or something.”

“That’s it?”

“What were you expecting? That I’d fall at your feet and beg you to give a shit about your child, even if you don’t care about… no, Dan. I actually know you.”

“The way you were making googly eyes at me in D.C. suggests otherwise, sweetheart.”

Oh for fuck’s sake.

“In case you haven’t noticed, things have changed a bit since then.”

“Yeah. Your boobs are bigger, for one.”

“You know what,” she says, picking up her purse, “All of this will go much more smoothly if you shut the fuck up for once in your godforsaken life. It is hard enough without you… fuck it, I’ve told you, and we’re done now.”

She stalks away, leaving him to pick up the bill, and checking her phone.

They have a strategy meeting before their flight back to New York, and she needs to make a good showing – Selina’s almost certainly miffed that she passed up on drinks the night before, and she really can’t afford to aggravate her too much.

There’s a fairly good chance she’ll rip into Dan the moment he pisses her off, and so Amy sits beside Leon on the smaller of the suite’s two couches, trying to pretend she’s interested in whatever he and Kent are talking about.
The problem is, Dan knows her as well as she knows him, maybe better, and he’s probably already worked out what she’s trying to do, because when he joins them, he sits on the arm of the couch beside her, instead of across the room (like a normal person). It’s the most transparent bullshit, but, fine, she gets the message.

If she wants to avoid him, he’s going to be unavoidable.

Why she couldn’t have gotten knocked up by someone who even vaguely resembled an adult…

But two can play at that game, which is why she suggests that Dan go to New Hampshire to start building up a campaign infrastructure there. He has worked in the state more recently than the rest of them after all, maybe he can put some of that local knowledge to good use.

It’s a shot across his bow, really, because she knows Selina will never go for it, but it has the desired effect of pissing him off, which is win enough for her.

They have to fly back to New York, so Selina can go meet with donors, and Amy spends the time reviewing outfit options with her and Gary. She would rather be doing literally anything else, but it keeps her out of Dan’s way, and that’s almost certainly for the best. And it means she gets to listen to Selina complain about ‘Little Richard’ and how noisy and messy and smelly newborn babies are which…is exactly what she needs to hear right now.

It’s when they land that all hell breaks loose.

As usual, everyone turns their phones on as soon as the plane lands, and, as usual, a whole sheaf of news alerts comes through, which they all review as they walk to the car. And one of them, one of them is about…

Buddy Calhoun.

Amy groans when she sees his name, but when she reads the story in the Los Angeles Times, she starts laughing, giggling actually, in her seat.

Prostitution is legal in Nevada, something of which Buddy has evidently been taking full advantage. Only of course, being Buddy, he couldn’t admit to himself that that’s what he’d been doing, so he’d started seeing a dominatrix and asked her for the girlfriend experience and…there are videos…

That poor woman.

They’re all looking at her like she’s about to explode, but it’s Ben who says something. “You okay, kid?”

She doesn’t know why she’s laughing – nothing in that video is funny, and yet… “That’s my shirt,” she says, “I left it behind in Nevada, and… that is the most fucked up thing I have ever…”

“Oh honey,” Selina says, “You really haven’t dated properly in a while, have you? Men are awful.”

“I know that,” Amy says, and does not look at Dan, and does not look at Dan.

“And you told me he was such a gentleman. I didn’t think he had it in him.”

“I did,” Amy says, quiet now.

Buddy getting off on humiliation isn’t new to her – his own or his partner’s – but she doesn’t want to talk to Selina about that, not in the car, not with everyone listening.
“No wonder you ran the fuck away from him.”

“Well that’s what I do, ma’am. We need to get ahead of this.”

“Why the fuck do you think we’re driving back to the Bronx. I swear, Ame, if your ex-boyfriend fucks up my campaign…”

“Ex-fiancé,” she says, for no real reason.

“At least you didn’t marry him the way I did. Dodged a bullet there.”

“Yeah,” Amy says, thinking of the night Buddy tried to convince her to elope to Reno with him, to launch the campaign as a married couple – if she’d had a few drinks more she might have actually considered it.

By the time they get back to the office the phones are already ringing. There’s fuck-all happening in D.C. and Buddy’s scandal has a comforting familiarity to it that will fill at least three or four inches of space. Plus, the videos are guaranteed hit generators, so every two-bit paper in the country is using them.

Leon’s suggestion is that they issue a line from Amy, saying how much she regrets that Buddy has relapsed or some shit, send it to the Press Association and let them distribute it, after which they can shut the fuck up and get back to focusing on the campaign. He and Dan bat possible wording back and forth, Dan sharpening it up as much as possible, with a glint in his eye that…

She knew he didn’t like Buddy, but the way he’s taking such visible pleasure in drafting the most insulting line possible…

She can already feel how things will get out of hand, and so she asks if she can speak with Selina privately.

Naturally, Selina makes such a production of it that by the time they’ve entered her office everyone in the building knows Amy wants to tell her something secret.

For the first time in years, she has no idea how her boss is going to react. Still, it has to be done, or their small problem will, very rapidly, become a huge one, so Amy crosses her legs, squeezes, and says, “I have to tell you something, ma’am.”

“Jesus,” Selina says, looking at her expression, “Did he fucking rape you?”

“It’s not about Buddy, it’s…” She takes a breath, calms herself. “I was going to wait, just a little longer, when it was absolutely safe, but… I think with this in the news I should tell you now. I’m pregnant.”

The shriek she’s expecting doesn’t come, and instead, Selina merely looks thoughtful. “I know you didn’t have time to be flying back and forth to Nevada, and if… after that, if you let that gormless human haystack touch you –”

“It’s not his.”

“Good, cause I was about to recommend Catherine’s therapist.”

Selina has a calculating look on her face, and Amy knows what she’s thinking. In some ways, the baby being someone else’s is good – it allows them to draw a clear line under things, make it clear to everyone that any connection with Buddy Calhoun is well and truly severed. But at the same time…
Selina walks to the door, and Amy hears her say, “Can you come in here for a second?” and she hopes like hell that she’s talking to Gary, or even Leon.

But when the door has closed again, and Selina has walked back to perch on the edge of her desk, Amy looks up, and sees Dan.

He knows that she’s told Selina, she can tell, and he looks… not quite nervous, but certainly less assured than usual.

Selina looks at them and shakes her head.

“Congratulations daddy-o.”

There's a horrible pause, and Dan turns to look at Amy, with an expression she can't read, as Selina continues.

"What am I going to do with you two now?"
Chapter Two

When Amy drops her little bomb, he feels winded, like she’s knocked him off his feet. And it takes hours – hours – for him to get his breath back. (It doesn’t help that she ignores his calls).

So when she finally deigns to talk to him, it takes everything he has not to snap at her, not to demand answers and apologies and… and that’s exactly what Amy’s expecting him to do, he can tell. Which is the only thing that holds him back.

He’s learned a thing or two.

For someone who constantly demands things, Amy doesn’t always fight back the way he expects. Sometimes, sometimes she just walks away. And once she’s done that, convincing her to change her mind is just about impossible.

She never even told him she was moving to Nevada.

If he pushes her hard enough… she’s more than capable of doing the same thing again – and he won’t get any warning when she does.

So, he restrains himself, even if her…attitude, her whole way of carrying herself, is pissing him off. She’s all… tight and tense and… if she wasn’t pregnant, he could almost imagine they’d never fucked, because she's exactly like she was after Carson City.

Not that Amy gives him any credit, using Selina and Gary as human shields, as though he’d have a fight with her in front of their entire team. (Well, he wouldn’t have this fight with her).

That her fuck-up of a fiancé is back in the news is just the cherry on top of a delicious day. (And she doesn’t even seem pissed, she just laughs, even though the asshole was doing some messed up Vertigo-shit, dressing his new ‘girlfriend’ in Amy’s clothes and calling her by her name and… well, Dan can imagine what else).

Amy asks to speak with Selina privately, and he gets that feeling again, like he’s in a car with no brakes that’s just started to roll downhill. When it was just between him and Amy, it was at least theoretically possible that they could…come up with some arrangement, get to grips with the situation, but now…

And then Selina calls him in.

"What am I going to do with you two now?"

She looks far more intimidating than any hobbit-sized woman has a right to, perched on her desk and staring at them over her glasses. Amy’s looking at her with… the weirdest expression on her face, and after a moment she clears her throat and says, “Ma’am, I didn’t say that Dan –”

“Oh, please,” Selina says, “Don’t insult me by pretending… you’ve been curled up in a little ball for the last year mourning that desert rat. The only other man under fifty you’ve been around is Gary, and even you’re not that desperate. Dan’s obviously the father. Or am I wrong?”

Neither of them say anything.

“So,” Selina continues, “You’re, what, nearly three months along? You did have a weird smile on your face back in November, and I know it wasn’t the prospect of sleeping with Leon that brought
that on."

"I was never going to –"

"Oh you would have, sweetheart, if I told you to."

He doesn’t quite know what they’re talking about, but under the circumstances, he’s not about to ask any questions. To say that Amy and Selina’s relationship is unique is putting it mildly, and he’s not about to step into that line of fire.

“So what’s your plan, Ame?”

“Well, I’m still…kind of working that out, Ma’am, but it won’t disrupt my work, there’s no reason it should have an impact on –”

“Damn right it won’t, or you’ll be out the door with your swollen ankles, believe you me.”

“You know, ma’am,” Dan says, seeing an opportunity, “Firing a pregnant woman probably wouldn’t reflect well on –”

“Oh, I see,” Selina says, turning her gaze on him, “You think because she’s pregnant, she’s bullet-proof? Let me be one hundred percent clear. I will fire the fuck out of both of you whenever I feel like it and there’s not a thing you can do to stop me.”

Amy had mentioned that she’d gotten worse, but… even so.

“I understand that,” Amy says, and she clearly isn’t thrown by Selina’s aggression in the least. “And I promise, I will find a way that this doesn’t impact you, you won’t even know I have a baby.”

“You’re right, I won’t know – you can disappear for six weeks on maternity leave, I don’t give a shit, I probably won’t even notice you’re gone. Richard can fill in for you – he’s already doing most of your job, better than you ever did it. Still,” she smiles at Dan, acid sweet, “I guess congratulations are in order. I always knew the low motility thing was bullshit, it was only Catherine and her incompetent cervix you couldn’t knock up.”

“Wait, that was true?” Amy says, and for fuck’s sake… he told her (and okay, maybe she was too drunk to remember all the details of the conversation, but still).

“Oh I see,” Selina says, and rolls her eyes. “I mean, really Amy, going near that thing without a condom… I thought you had better judgement. It does not speak well of you.” (This, from a woman who got knocked up by a meathead she barely even knew, not to mention Andrew).

“I know that,” Amy says, still looking away from him, “But at least… there’s no reason anyone ever has to know. It’s not like – they might not even suspect.”

“Right,” Selina says, “And when the kid comes out with black hair and freckles, everyone’s going to figure, what, it was the Immaculate Conception?”

“No, I mean…” Amy bites her lip. “I could have used a donor.”

Selina sighs, and glares at Dan again. “I see. So your whole plan revolves around the idea that Dan will just…fuck off?” Amy shrugs, her eyes fixed on some point in the middle distance, as Selina continues. “Which, I have to ask, when has Dan ever fucked off when you wanted him to?”

At least someone is giving him some credit.
“You two have…decisions to make, whatever,” Selina says, “That’s not my business. What *is* my business is my campaign manager being at the centre of a very public sex scandal, since apparently her snatch is so goddamn unforgettable, and then it comes out that not only is she knocked up, the daddy also works on my team, and, oh, he’s had an affair with every woman he’s worked with in the last two years. How do you think that *plays*, Ame?”

Amy presses her lips together. “Not well,” she says, and Dan thinks it’s through gritted teeth.

“At least you haven’t completely lost your grip of reality, cause I’m telling you, even Leon couldn’t polish that turd.”

“You know, there are ways in which this could be a good thing,” Dan says, “It could play well for us.”

“Fuck off,” Amy says, glaring at him.

“It could be a very relatable story – we’re making a whole thing of being inclusive, so…”

“Shut the fuck up, Dan, I already told you, I don’t –”

“No,” Selina says, “Go ahead.”

“We get ahead of it,” he says, “Make an announcement – Amy’s so massively upset by this Buddy thing, right when she was looking to build a brand new life for herself, please don’t pursue her, the stress of press attention is bad for the baby. We can put her in a pastel-coloured dress and make her look like a saint.”

“Oh *really,*” Selina says, and he can tell she likes the plan, “And what do we do when your name comes up, which it will if the identity of the father is a great big vacuum, I guarantee it.” Amy makes a noise of protest, and Selina rolls right over her. “Spare me,” she says. “Dan’s been sniffing around you since the first day he worked for me, and you really think I’m the only one that noticed?”

“I can put a ring on it,” he says, trying to sound careless. “Nothing I haven’t done before.”

He doesn’t expect Amy’s response.


“Oh please,” he says, “Like you haven’t been wanting to hear me say that for –”

“No!” Amy’s eyes are wide, and wet, and it throws him. He hasn’t seen her look like that in years. “I won’t.”

“Come on,” Selina wheedles, “It’s not like you haven’t had a sham engagement before. And Dan’s a shit, but I think we can be pretty sure he won’t go round harassing police officers.”

“Don’t make me do this again. Please.”

“Amy, grow up,” Selina says, sharp as a knife. “You knew perfectly well there would be consequences when you decided to go through with this. You could have gone to Planned Parenthood and flushed it all away, but since you didn’t have the good sense to take that option, you have to compromise. Unless you want to go look for another job – because everyone knows employers are just falling over to give pregnant women opportunities. And let me make one thing clear girlie – *you* are not going to torpedo my comeback just because you got it into your head to re-enact a Judd Apatow movie.”
Amy gives Selina what might be a pleading look, but it does nothing, Selina doesn’t bend, and
finally Amy chokes out, “I’ll think about it.”

“Great,” Selina says, “Good to know where your head is at. We don’t need to rush anything, so
why don’t you go home and sleep on it?”

Amy practically jumps out of her chair, and fine, he gets it, he wants to get away too, but she doesn’t
meet his eyes as she goes, just speeds out of the room. Before she’s even reached the door, Selina
says, “You’re staying. We have to nail down that press line, remember?”

He’d been planning to follow Amy, to chase her down and make her talk to him, but… fine. Quite
possibly the press line is more important right now, even if it does mean Amy storming off in a huff.

Once the door has closed, Selina looks at him with an amused expression and says, “Drink?”

He can only nod.

(And in a way he’s thankful for the inevitable hustle and bustle when she calls Gary and tells him to
pour them two whiskeys, not on ice, no with water, jesus Gary, don’t you know anything, yes she
wants the good Scotch this time, what does he take her for?)

When they’re finally alone, he says it. “You really hardballed her.”

“A little tough love never did her any harm.”

“Yeah, but… I wasn’t even going to –”

“You were just going to what… wait around and not say anything until some day, five years from
now, she realises you’re not going anywhere? She needs to face reality – you both do. You’re stuck
with each other for the rest of your lives, unless you’re even more of a bastard than she thinks you
are.”

“No, I think that’s exactly as much of a bastard as she thinks I am.”

“That’s what I’m talking about. She ought to know better than to try to go it alone, but… I suppose
when it’s you she never did think with her brain.”

“No, she doesn’t,” he says and smirks to himself.

“Don’t get cocky,” Selina says, “Being better than Buddy the Shit is not exactly a ringing
endorsement.”

“Oh, I know,” Dan says, “Believe me, Amy’s made that very clear. And she’s been a real bitch
about it, too.”

“You know,” Selina sloshes back a mouthful of whiskey, “The only reason I married Andrew…
well, it was a situation a lot like this.”

He tries to do the math for a moment, and it must show in his face, because she continues, “Oh, I
miscarried that one. Not in time to save me from the worst fucking mistake of my life, but… and
then Catherine came along.”

He coughs. “With all due respect –”

“Oh, this’ll be good.”
“I’m not like Andrew, so –”

“No,” Selina says, thoughtfully, “You’re not. You have actually achieved things without other people’s money, I’ll say that for you.”

“So what’s your point?”

“You want to know why Amy’s fighting you off tooth and nail all of a sudden?”

“Yeah, actually I do. The day she came to DC she was looking at me like –”

“She’s scared. You do realise she’s not stupid, right? One good dicking didn’t erase her memory of, oh, everything else about you, though obviously it helped, if she came over all moon-eyed. But I know that girl, I know her better than you, and let me tell you something… she doesn’t get over things. You and me, we’re the same, couple of weeks and it’s water off a duck’s back, but she… she just folds in on herself, tries to pretend what hurt her never happened. She’s always been that way.”

“Yeah,” he says, “I know.” (Though he’s never quite put it to himself like that). “But how does that help?”

“It’s not supposed to help, Dan, it’s supposed to… I don’t know what you did to her – and I don’t really care – but I’m telling you now, you need to fix it.”

“She won’t even fucking talk to me.”

“Well then man up, princess. Who do you think is more freaked out, you or her? You’re not the one whose body is going through some fucking science fiction transformation right now, and believe me, that’s scaring the shit out of her. Not that any of this matters to me, particularly, but it should matter to you.”

“I never wanted kids.”

“No. But you want your job, don’t you? And let’s face it – if I’ve got to fire one of you, we both know it won’t be her. That would look terrible.”

“So all that… ‘I’ll fire the fuck out of you’ was what…”

“Can’t have her getting complacent, now, can I?”

Selina smiles at him, and he feels like he’s probably seen that expression before somewhere (in a mirror maybe), and…

He makes a mental note never to let her use that smile in public, downs his drink, and leaves the room. It takes another forty-five minutes or so to hammer out a line with Leon, and once that’s been nailed down, they send it to PA and email a twitter card to Amy so she can put it out over social media.

He’d like nothing more than to go home and down a few beers, collapse onto the sofa and kill the day, but there’s no time for that. If the Buddy story blows up more – which it almost certainly will – they may need to put out an additional statement in less than a day, and if Amy’s still all wound up and determined to have nothing to do with him…

She doesn’t answer his calls – though he has a suspicion she’s not answering any calls right now, (wisely, too many journalists have her phone number) – and he has to get her address out of Gary.
(Which, coupled with Selina knowing about his fertility issues, is just more proof that no one in this place has any respect for privacy.)

Fortunately, or not, Amy lives uptown, not many stops from Selina’s office, so it doesn’t take him long to get there. (They’re all going to have to move back to DC soon, he knows – though how they’ll manage that when travelling around the country on the campaign he has no idea).

It’s an old apartment building, the kind with a sturdy fire escape attached, and he’s rather surprised when Amy buzzes him in without even asking.

It’s nowhere near as pleasant a place as her DC apartment, there are too many people, too much noise…it would be impossible to ever be alone with one’s thoughts in this building, but…who knows, maybe that was part of its appeal.

He knocks on her door, and tries to put on an ingratiating grin when she opens it. She’s talking to someone on her phone, and he hears her say, “I know you’re worried about me, but I thought you’d be happy that –”

She starts when she sees him, and Dan moves closer, getting his shoulder in the door before she can slam it closed. She rolls her eyes at him, but all she does is say, “Dad, I’m sorry, but I really have to go.”

She hangs up. “What are you doing here?”

“You know why – why did you let me in?”

“I thought you were…pizza, maybe… though…” She checks her phone quickly. “The order never went through, my Dad called me, and –”

“So your parents know now.”

“Well, I didn’t want them finding out from the Washington Post or something, they’re going to be unbearable anyway, but…”

“Huh,” he says, “I should probably tell mine, right?”

“Dan, do what you want – it’s not like they’re ever going to get a chance to see –”

“You would deny your baby their grandparents? What are you, a monster?”

Amy brushes her hand over her eyes, seemingly frustrated, and he sees her phone light up with two-three-four-five text messages. She sees it too, because she mutters, “Shit. Now Sophie knows and I can’t even drink.” He laughs, trying to think of a joke, and Amy groans, “Don’t even say it.”

“At least you didn’t get knocked up by the delivery boy.”

“Shut up.”

“I’m just saying – things could be so much worse.”

“Have you any idea how much I hate you right now?”

He leans in to her, because he can, because if she’s pregnant with his kid there is absolutely no point in holding back any more, and says, “We both know you’ve never really hated me.”

She sighs, and hangs her head. “All I want right now is to eat and sleep, so save me some time.
“What are you doing here?”

“Let me buy you a burger.”

“Why would I want to do that?”

“Because you can have this fight with me tomorrow, in front of the whole office, or you can have it now in restaurant full of people you never have to see again.”

She moans and groans, but she comes, if only because she’s hungry. And he can’t stop…looking at her, checking her out. He knows it’s too early for her to be showing, and yet, he can’t help it, he keeps looking for signs.

If Amy notices this, she gives no sign of it, wrapping her coat tightly around herself and keeping her head down, taking care not to slip on the wet sidewalks. (After years in DC he’d forgotten just how much he didn’t miss New York winters).

When they finally reach the restaurant, she does something he’s never seen her do before, and orders a large serving of fries and a hot dog. When she sees his look, all she says is, “I’m hungry.”

“Yeah,” he says, handing her the mustard (for Amy hotdogs are mostly a mustard delivery system), “I can tell.”

“No,” she says, “You can’t. I mean, I’m always hungry, all day, it’s like nothing will fill me up, no matter how much I… I know people get cravings, but I wasn’t expecting –”

“It’s all that time you spent living on egg whites and spinach.”

“Yeah, well,” she says, not quite looking at him, “My figure’s going to be ruined anyway, might as well enjoy it.”

“It’s got to be better than throwing up every five minutes, though, right?”

“That may still happen,” she says, “I don’t know – I don’t think Sophie had it, but… anyway, it’s bad enough. All I can think about is eating and sleeping and…”

“And?”

Amy shifts in her seat, looking uncomfortable, and says, “It’s like…my skin is five times more sensitive, I can feel everything.”

“That doesn’t sound bad.”

“You don’t have Leon breathing down your neck – I swear to god, if he touches me one more time… I’ll have to put up with it, since he’s Selina’s golden boy now.”

The waitress brings them their food, and for a few minutes they don’t really speak, too busy eating (or inhaling, in Amy’s case).

It’s only just been twenty-four hours, and already he feels adjusted to the new status quo. She’s having a baby, he’s going to be a father, they’re going to work together – he can deal with all of this. He doesn’t exactly know how, but the trick… the trick, he thinks, is not to get tangled up in worrying about the next twenty years. If he can work out how to get to the end of next week, the rest will handle itself.

But Amy’s unlikely to come round to that way of thinking, so he has to be sneaky. And the main
thing, the main thing right now, is to calm her down so she doesn’t go haring off to Canada or something.

Which means he has to knock her feet out from under her, unbalance her just a little bit, break through her wall of denial, so she’ll listen to him.

“Why’d you run out on me?”

“What?”

“That night – the night we…you ghosted me.”

“I had a meeting,” Amy says, looking at him like he’s a moron.

“And you couldn’t have woken me up before you left?”

“Are you fucking serious?”

“I had to wake up in that cold bed, all alone, Ames. You didn’t even text me afterwards.”

“And I’m sure that’s what you preferred.”

“It would have been good manners to at least kiss me goodbye, you know.”

“Are you seriously lecturing me on appropriate one night stand behaviour?”

“It wasn’t a one night thing.”

“Sure it wasn’t.” Amy scoffs so hard her face looks momentarily grotesque. “You totally wanted to have a cosy breakfast and plan our next date, that definitely sounds like you.”

“Fuck dates,” he says, “I got you a job.”

“Yeah, because I’m useful to you, don’t pretend it was some kind of gesture.”

“When you brought it up last night, I thought maybe you wanted to go again.”

“So that’s why you dropped into your sex voice the second I mentioned it?”

“Oh,” he says, and slides his foot against hers under the table, “Did I? What happens in Omaha stays in Omaha, baby.”

“Don’t. And stop… trying to be cute, okay. I want to be really clear about this. You can fuck off. I know you want to, and I am officially giving you permission. You can set up a standing cheque or something and back away. Go back to fucking every other woman on the planet.”

“Could be I don’t want to.”

“Or you’re afraid that Selina will fire you, and you figure getting in with me is the best way to avoid it, at least until you can slither off somewhere else.”

“Or maybe I’m enjoying the idea of my own personal miracle baby, and I don’t feel like going anywhere else.”

“I’m serious. If you’re going to abandon us, just fucking do it, okay, I’ll even let you.”

He can see her slowly winding herself up, raising her own blood pressure, and he leans across the
table. “You need to calm the fuck down and think about this like yourself.”

“Is that supposed to mean something?”

“It means, if this was anyone else, you would know that I’m right, and Selina’s right, and you would let me buy you a fucking ring, and wear it for as long as you need to. At the least, it gets the press off your back, and if we can’t make some arrangement, well, then I’m the scumbag who wouldn’t stand by his own kid, and everyone’s going to know it. You’re usually good at recognising the smart play.”

The waitress comes back, and, in a fit of defiance perhaps, Amy orders the biggest dessert on the menu.

He doesn’t say anything.

In truth, while he’ll take her any way he can get her, there have been times when he’s thought she was too thin, wearing herself down to a narrow wire of ambition. She got very lean when she was campaign manager, he remembers that – and it had crossed his mind (much, much later), that maybe it was a warning sign.

In other words, she can have all the desserts she wants.

When they’re alone, she looks across at him and says, “You’re right, I guess.”

“Well obviously.”

“This is exactly what I didn’t want, you know.”

“You’re going to have to get used to doing a lot of things you don’t want. Unless you actually enjoy changing diapers.”

Amy grimaces, and Dan laughs, he can’t help himself.

He takes one of the horrible paper napkins and tears a strip from it. Ignoring Amy’s quizzical expression, he takes her left hand and winds the strip round her finger.

“Are you seriously checking my ring size?”

“Yep, got to make sure it fits.”

“Are you enjoying this in some weird way? Some bit of metal doesn’t mean you get to…claim ownership of me.”

He raises an eyebrow at her. “Rings are temporary, Ames, we both know that. Children aren’t.”

“Jesus,” she says, “You know at least with Buddy – he was fucking awful – but at least I knew he would give a shit about his kid.”

That rankles – in fact everything about Buddy Calhoun rankles, though he doesn’t think much about why – so he smirks, and leans back in his seat. “Yeah,” he says, “That’s probably true – he was exactly the kind of limpet who’d suck on to you for all of time. And you didn’t even like fucking him.”

“Are you done?”

He tucks the strip of tissue into his wallet and grins. “Yeah,” he says, “I’m done.”
By the time Amy has finished her ice-cream and he’s had his coffee, he can see her starting to wilt, her face flushed and rosy with tiredness, and so he doesn’t try to prolong the conversation. (He’s fixed things for now, which is all he needs).

He does insist on walking her home, right to her door, which pisses her off – and him saying he’s worried she’ll slip on the ice doesn’t help. (He was right though – the sidewalk is slippery enough, that he eventually pulls her into his side, the two of them steadier supporting each other than they are alone).

Normally – normally – if he’d just got engaged to someone, he’d expect to spend the night, and not sleeping, but Amy’s so out of it he doesn’t hint that he wants to be invited in, doesn’t even try to kiss her.

But the way she’s staring up at him, sad eyes in a tired face, makes him want to.

So he brushes her hair out of her face, says “Sleep well,” and leaves. Amy might be crashing for the night, but he has bigger plans.

He needs to go buy a ring.
Chapter Three

The ring is fucking huge.

It’s not completely a surprise, if she’s honest. She knows Dan, and if his taste in watches is anything to go by, tastefully restrained jewellery isn’t his style.

It’s not ugly or tacky or anything, she’ll give him that, it’s just… like a romantic-comedy dream ring, and she can’t stop looking at it.

It’s…large, in other words.

When she meets him before work so he can slide it on her finger (because Selina had texted that morning to say the rest of the team had to be looped in immediately), she feels like she might vomit.

Nothing Dan says makes her feel better – she didn’t want this, she never wanted any of it, and the idea that they’re going to try to sugarcoat the entire national media speculating over the contents of her uterus is enough to bring on her first bout of morning sickness.

Fuck Selina, and fuck Dan, for doing this to her.

She’s too nauseous to eat, and too tense to pretend she’s listening to Dan talk – she’s so wound up and hypersensitive that just his hand touching hers is enough to give her a jolt, so the way he keeps…hovering over her is a problem (she’s not fooling herself, she knows she used to like it when he did that).

She’s fucking dreading telling them all, and the way Selina sets up the meeting, like it’s a tea party, makes everything worse. She can already hear all the jokes Ben’s going to make in her head and… and this wasn’t how she’d pictured any of this playing out.

They’re heading back to Iowa in a few days for a solid week or two of on-the-ground pre-campaigning, and Selina wants Amy’s “little problem” wrapped up by then (as if that was even possible).

They sit around Selina’s office, waiting for the core team to trail in (Leon arrives last, claiming he had a late night with Jennifer, claiming he’d had to all but fight her off, which seems… unlikely), and finally Ben says, “So, what the fuck is all of this about?”

“Amy and Dan have some news,” Selina says, smiling like she’s trying to be gracious.

“Did you finally track down that vet Danny Chung has been using as a meat puppet?”

“No,” Amy says, keeping her eyes firmly fixed on the middle-distance, trying to imagine the conversation has already happened and she can move on to something else. “I’m pregnant.”

There’s silence for a moment, and she sees Kent give Ben a Look, but neither of them say anything, and finally Dan holds up her left hand, saying, “And engaged.” (He’s loving this, she can tell). (She doesn’t snatch her hand back, though she wants to, because that’s not the act of a happily coupled expectant mother, she’s pretty sure). (And Dan’s skin is warm, an anchor, against hers, and she needs that).

“Congratulations,” Kent says, and she can almost see him calculating the cost-benefit ratio.
“Guess you two finally went for that nightcap after all,” Ben says, and she shakes her head at him sharply (too sharply, she can tell Dan’s caught her reaction) (but the last thing she wants to do right now is revisit that shitshow).

“Yes, yes,” Selina says, (and Dan gives Ben a questioning look), “Isn’t it delightful, we have a campaign baby, but with Amy’s ex doing his best Jimmy Stewart in the press, there’s a little bit of a problem, don’t you think?”

She outlines Dan’s strategy from the night before, and they all bicker over it, Kent questioning Dan’s reasoning, and Ben saying it doesn’t really matter, and Amy stares at the carpet, trying to steady her stomach. (She wants to tell them all to go to hell, but Dan squeezes her hand, and she knows it’s a warning).

But then Leon speaks, and for the first time in her life, Amy’s glad to hear him.

“I wouldn’t put anything out there yet, ma’am,” he says, clearing his throat. “It’s too defensive – like we think the story is about Amy, and it isn’t.”

“So what do you suggest?”

It’s the first time she’s spoken in a while, and she startles everyone. (Ben’s expression is actually concerned, which does make her wonder what her face is doing).

“We stick with last night’s statement for now, and if in two-three days, they’re still pushing, or something new comes out about Calhoun –”

“Which it will,” Selina says, pissed off. “Men never do the fucked up thing once.”

“Well then we put it out,” Leon says, “Along with a line about it being a private matter, and the last thing Amy wanted to do is discuss it, but the constant press pressure is becoming stressful, and she hopes that now they’ll respect her privacy and go away. We can even send her out looking like she does right now, and then it will definitely seem true.”

“See,” Selina says, gesturing to the rest of them, “See what it’s like when we have good press advice? I knew there was a reason I hired Leon – and now I definitely don’t have to fire you, Amy.”

(Amy must have taken a step through the looking glass – she’s willingly having a baby and Selina is saying nice things about Leon West. Fuck her life).

“No can we focus on what’s important, please?” Ben says. “We still haven’t got anywhere on the Chung thing, and we know he’s running.”

“Sure,” Selina says, and she gives Amy this huge smile, “Nothing I’d like better than to crush that little worm.”

And then they’re moving on – Dan suggests hiring someone to look into Chung’s past, to find the missing war vet, and Kent and Ben bicker about who would be best placed to do the opposition research, and she is so goddamn relieved that it goes right to her stomach.

They’re three minutes into the conversation when she has to make a dash for the ladies room, not even attempting to be polite about it.

She hasn’t vomited this much since she was a teenager, and that’s not something she wants to think about right now.
When it’s over, when she has thrown up everything, including possibly her stomach lining, Amy slumps on the floor, letting her head rest against the cool porcelain of the toilet bowl for a moment. All that practice was good for something at least, because she’d remembered to hold her hair back, and her aim was still good.

She wants her Mom.

It happens, very, very occasionally – when Buddy’s dash cam footage leaked, when she got home the night she found out Dan had been made campaign manager – that she wants her mother to hug her and smooth her hair and tell her that everything will be all right in that mindless way her mother does, wants it more than anything, wants it in the fierce way Dan wants a promotion or Ben wants a drink.

She is going to be the worst mother on the planet.

Amy’s not warm, or nurturing, or even a good liar – she couldn’t tell someone ‘everything will be all right’ and have them believe it, she can’t even tell herself that.

She feels gross, sweaty and clammy and… empty, weak almost, and she really doesn’t want to go back into that meeting room to dissect her love life some more if she can possibly avoid it.

But that is what she is going to have to do, if she wants to keep her job (and she has to have a job, she can’t just fuck off whenever the fancy strikes her anymore), and so, slowly, painfully, Amy drags herself off the floor.

She doesn’t look as bad as she feels, but she looks pretty terrible, white-faced and round-eyed, as though she hasn’t slept for a month. Maybe Leon was right.

She’s bent over the sink, trying to rinse her mouth out, when she hears the door open. And of course it’s Dan – she feels like a rag doll that’s lost its stuffing, so it has to be Dan.

An insane part of her wants to just… throw herself at him, have him hold her, just hold her, for a minute or two, arms firm and steady…

But Amy is not insane, and so she does no such thing. Instead, she takes a couple of hand towels, folds them, holds them under the tap water, and then presses them against the side of her neck. The coldness of the water on her skin gives her a shock, and goosebumps erupt down her arms as Dan says, “You dying in here?”

“No,” she says, “It feels like it, but no.”

“Selina’s trying to work out a way to get Sherman Tanz back – you might want to be in the room for that conversation.”

“I don’t think so,” she says, throwing the towels in the bin. “I told her not to pardon him in the first place so… he’s never been my biggest fan.”

“Why did she give him a pardon?”

“You remember what she was like that last week, she was in fuck it all burn everything down mode. I actually called her from Nevada, trying to change her mind, but… Richard thought it would be a good idea.”

Dan smiles then, the smile she occasionally thought might just be for her, and she says it, the thought she’d been sitting on ever since Leon made his suggestion. “Can you take this back?”
She holds the ring out to him, and for a second, just a second, she sees a flash of...something, before his usual anger takes over. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Not forever, I know I agreed, I just...” She’s stumbling over her words a bit, and she’s not quite sure how to... explain this to Dan in a way he is capable of understanding, but... she has to try. “It’s a lot, and I need... I need to get used to it.”

“You need to get used to it?” Amy nods, and a detached part of her brain notes that Dan’s expression when he’s genuinely angry is...actually kind of scary. “I’ve known about this for three whole days, and you’re the one who needs to get used to it? Unbelievable.”

She’s so angry she might cry. “I never thought... I thought I was going to tell you and there would be... a Dan-shaped hole in the nearest wall, okay? I expected that, I was prepared for that.” For a second, his expression softens, just a little, but it’s not enough – she can’t give him an inch. “And I get it, you don’t want to get fired any more than I do, but I need a couple of days before I can play-act the doting fiancé, again. And having to stare at your storybook-fantasy ring makes it...even more confusing, so can you give me just some time to --”

“Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re not going to fight me?”

“Do I look like I want you to burst a blood vessel?”

“I don’t know – a convenient aneurysm sure would make your life easier right now.”

He actually looks mildly horrified, and Amy can’t help it, she starts to giggle, she can’t help herself. (It might be hysteria).

Her laughing fit doesn’t endear her to Dan, if his expression is anything to go by, but he does reach out and take the ring from her, much to her relief. But when she pushes past him – to rejoin the meeting, like he’d suggested – he stops her, gripping her upper arms (and his touch makes her feel shaky all over again).

“Storybook-fantasy ring?"

“Shut up.”

“But I want to know – what kind of books have you been reading, exactly? The Tiffany’s catalogue?”

“I’m bored with this conversation,” she says, hoping he’ll get the hint.

He doesn’t. “I’m not,” he says, and his eyes are dancing.

And... fuck this. She’s having his kid, there is no point in trying to pretend any more – not to mention that he’ll work it out anyway. “Fine,” she says, and looks straight at him. “It’s beautiful. Is that what you want to hear?”

“So you like it then?”

“It just makes things worse. Besides, I’m sure every other woman you gave it to thought the same...
“Ames, come on,” he says, and lifts his hand off her arm to stroke her cheek.

She doesn’t mean to do it, is the thing, she didn’t even realise she was doing it until after it had already happened, but she flinches. And Dan sees it.

He has his faults (he has so many faults) but he would never, ever touch her without her permission, and his hand stops in mid-air (which would look fucking weird, if anyone were to walk in on them, his hand hovering an inch or two above her face), and, strangely, this is the thing she wants him to be clear about.

“It’s not… you,” she says, knowing she sounds utterly ridiculous. “It’s just… I can’t stand to have anything or anyone touching me right now, I couldn’t even wear a sweater this morning, it was too much. And you fall under the heading of anyone.”

(In the abstract, sex with Dan is incredibly appealing – if she comes hard enough, maybe she can stop thinking for a minute or two and get some fucking rest. The problem is… sex is only appealing if she can have it without him touching her body in any way, shape or form, and, while she can’t help but suspect Dan could find a way to do that, she’s too tired to want him to).

He gives her a measuring look, and says, “Is that why you’re so jumpy?” She shrugs (their situation isn’t exactly easy). “How long is this going to last?”

“I don’t know – it’s not like I’ve ever done this before. I think the first three or four months are supposed to be the worst, so…”

“Want me to buy you some silk sheets?”

She laughs, and it’s the first time in a while her laugh has sounded vaguely normal. “I think that’s okay. It… it’s worse when I’m stressed, so… it’s not really a problem when I’m asleep.”

“Better keep you away from Leon then.”

Dan makes a suggestive face, and she groans, slapping at his arm. She doesn’t want to think about that right now. “Come on,” she says, “We should go back to the meeting.”

He grins, and says, “I’m glad you like the ring.”

If she didn’t know him so well, she might imagine he was serious.

Selina is happy to follow Leon’s advice, and they spend the rest of the week planning for the move back to D.C. (something Amy’s trying not to think about too much) (she’d leased out her apartment until January – before she knew she was pregnant – and that was going to become a headache, she just knew it) and having off-the-record meetings with people who definitely aren’t donors.

That the peace prize committee issue a statement saying they cannot strip Laura Montez of her award – it’s never been done in the entire history of the prize, it would be unprecedented – only puts Selina in a better mood, especially as the New York Times accompanies it with a long op-ed about
Montez’s fundamental untrustworthiness.

She doesn’t talk to Dan.

Well, she talks to him, obviously, the same way they do every day, but she doesn’t talk about the… situation. It’s childish, she knows that, she knows that they won’t ever come to the ‘arrangement’ she’d suggested if they don’t work out what the arrangement might be, but… she’s still waiting for the axe to fall, she knows him, he’s going to go running off to a better offer any minute now, and she is not putting herself through that again.

When they arrive in Des Moines, she discovers that they’re sharing a room (just in case an eagle-eyed journalist decides to focus on their sleeping arrangements – something Selina at least thinks is a possibility) which… fine.

There’d been a time when such a scenario would have been rife with tension, chances are they’d have wound up playing some weird game of chicken in an attempt not to, but right now… right now she’s too fucking tired to want to play his mind games.

Not that it matters – Dan barely spends any time in the room with her, maybe preferring the company of Ben and Kent, or of whatever co-ed can be induced to spend time with him, Amy doesn’t care (okay, she does care) (she just knows there isn’t anything to be gained from caring, so she tries not to think about it).

He laughs, a little, the first morning, when he sees her in her pyjamas, and won’t tell her why, though the way he’s eyeing her stomach means he doesn’t really have to. She’s not showing – exactly – but she’s… more. Her boobs, her bottom, her belly, they’re all… rounder, full in a new way, and tender too (she doesn’t tell him that).

She still feels like she wants to jump out of her skin, and none of her clothes fit comfortably, and all in all, it’s a miracle she hasn’t snapped Leon’s head off or something. (Dan has been keeping his distance, wisely).

She doesn’t actually know when Dan comes to bed – she’s always asleep by then, and her sleep is deeper, she doesn’t even wake up when he crawls into the bed with her – but one benefit of his mystery man shtick is that she’s alone when she calls Buddy.

She has no actual desire to speak to him – not if, for instance, getting her nails pulled out one by one is an option – but it seems the sensible thing to do. His voice still makes her angry, because how dare he, how dare he pretend to be the most decent man on earth when he used her as an excuse to abuse other women, when he threw everything she did for him back in her face…

So, maybe, when Amy tells Buddy she’s knocked up, and the daddy is Dan (Dan—who-she-told-him-didn’t-matter-to-her), she’s not as patient as she should be. She’s not patient at all in fact, and she ends up pacing the hotel room, telling him at length just what a shit he is, and how she’s not sorry in the least, and if he has an ounce of sense he’ll go to ‘a spa’ for six years of therapy (for a start).

It’s incredibly cathartic.

For the first time since she saw the positive pregnancy test, her blood is rushing for a good reason, and caught up in the moment, she decides, fuck it, she’s not going to be a hermit just because Dan is avoiding her, and goes out for the finest Italian meal Des Moines can offer (it’s pretty terrible) (why the fuck would anyone live in Iowa, seriously?)

She gets gelato for dessert, and goes for a walk along the river, reading the latest news off her twitter
feed and laughing at Jonah’s latest cock-up. Shawnee Tanz is a hard nut to crack apparently.

By the time she gets back to her room, it’s almost midnight, and in a bizarre twist, Dan is waiting up for her.

She could start a fight with him – it’s very, very tempting – but she feels almost like herself for the first time in weeks, so she doesn’t, just lets him show her the video again, and laughs at his jokes. It almost feels like before, when things were normal, when he hadn’t fucked her sister and she wasn’t pregnant.

But things aren’t normal. And not only because it’s incredibly strange to fall asleep beside Dan when she isn’t drunk.

The next day’s campaigning is… dreadful, in the usual way. They go to a farm fair and admire the produce (as though Selina even knows where food comes from), and cheer on the prize-winners, and when they get back to the hotel, her Dad is there.

It’s one of the more wtf moments of her life so far, seeing her Dad and Selina in the same place, and the way he greets her, calling her sweetheart and trying to hug her, just makes it stranger.

He’s come out to Iowa to see her, because he’s so worried, apparently, and Amy can’t even talk to him properly, because she’s trying to shut him up in front of her co-workers. (From the look on Gary’s face, he at least does not approve of Selina’s time being wasted in this manner).

They’re going to a local diner for a photo-op, before they have to grab drinks with some of the local bigwigs, and, with no other option, Amy decides to bring him along. She’s not needed for the pictures after all.

So, she and her Dad grab a separate booth while Selina poses with a hamburger and Dan uses it to enhance her social media presence.

There are quesadillas on the menu, and for a moment her mouth waters at the thought… but Amy doesn’t trust any restaurant in the Midwest to serve Mexican food, and so she orders a burger too and hopes for the best.

Her Dad has no scruples, and gets waffles with fried chicken, (this is what happens when he gets out from under the eagle-eye of her mother, he thinks he’s immortal), and once the waitress has gone, he looks her in the eye, and says, “Amy, we’ve been worried about you.”

“Why? I thought you’d be over the moon, now I’m reproducing at long last. Isn’t this what you want?”

“We didn’t even know you were seeing anyone – and now you’re having a baby? It’s all very… sudden, Amy.”

“I’m not seeing anyone, that’s not what…” (The way Dan cocks his head, she can tell he’s listening in, and for fuck’s sake… can she not have one minute that’s just hers?)

“I didn’t think you wanted this. You were always so –”

“Well, maybe I changed my mind.”

“Did you?” Her father looks her in the eye, and says, very seriously, “I’m going to say to you what I said to your sister, and maybe you’ll actually listen to me. Doing this alone, being a parent, it’s not easy Amy – you know what it’s done to Sophie’s life.”
“It’s not going to be like that – I’m not dropping out of college for this, I have my own apartment, I have a career Dad, it’s not the same.”

“I know it’s just… you have options you know. You don’t have to do this unless you absolutely want to.”

“Are you seriously trying to talk me into having an abortion? You and Mom have been pushing me for what, the last ten years, and now you want me to –”

“I just don’t understand the hurry,” he says, looking at her seriously. “You have plenty of time, you don’t have to rush into doing this by yourself – what if you meet someone?”

“Oh, you think some Prince Charming is going to sweep me off my feet? Just begging for me to fuck him up the way I fucked up Buddy? If I thought that would happen, I’d run for my life.”

“No,” her Dad says, and looks at her seriously. “I didn’t like Buddy.”

“Oh for fuck’s sake,” Amy says, irritated past endurance and trying not to see Dan gesturing at her, “Everyone liked Buddy, he was the perfect gentleman Mom dreamed off, don’t pretend otherwise.”

“No,” he says, “I didn’t like the way he talked to you.”

Dan, tired of her ignoring him, slides into the booth beside her, trying to show her something on his phone.

If he thought that would get her attention, he was wrong.

“What are you talking about? Buddy was…polite, he didn’t even swear, he was probably your dream son-in-law.”

“I didn’t like the way he talked to you…when you were alone. And before you call me a prude, Amy, I don’t think you liked it either.” Dan is starting to grin, and she’s staring at her Dad, a horrifying suspicion growing in her. “When you two came home for Thanksgiving, I heard him talking to you in the kitchen and… the things he was saying to you … I couldn’t like anyone who treated my little girl that way.” (He glares at Dan as he says this, and if he doesn’t like Dan now, just wait).

“As fun as this is,” Dan says, “We need to talk. Your saddlebag ex has gone viral again.”

“What’s he done now?”

He shows her a video – Buddy being interviewed on CBS This Morning… it starts like any other interview, but forty seconds in…

“Oh my god,” Amy says, “She actually made him cry.”

“No,” Dan says, “You made him cry. How is it he knows you’re pregnant?”

“Because I told him,” she stammers. “I thought… I thought it would be better if he heard it from me, not through the press, I didn’t think –”

“You didn’t think to say anything to me?”

“When exactly was I supposed to do that? You’ve been avoiding me ever since we got here.”

“I was giving you your precious space, since you’re so –”
“Amy, what’s going on?”

Her poor father. He doesn’t have the faintest clue what’s about to hit him – and the sheer speed with which political fuck-ups can accelerate is brand new to him.

“Buddy’s… made a public show of himself, again, that’s all.”

“Does that matter – to you, to this?”

“It matters,” Dan says, “Because he also just told the whole country that a brand new baby Brookheimer is on the way. Meaning our phones are going fucking explode in the next ten minutes. You know we have to get ahead of this.” He takes the ring box out of his pocket, and Amy sighs. “I’ve given you time, I’ve given you space, but now, now you have to wear it.”

“Fine!”

She has never, never seen her father look more horrified than when she slides Dan’s ring on her finger, and, thinking objectively, she really can’t blame him.

“Is he the –”

“Yes, Daddy,” she says, hoping to soften him up. “I was going to…ease you into that.”

“You deserve so much better than –”

“It’s not real, it’s just for the campaign, okay, so you don’t have to worry – you’re not stuck with him forever.”

She meant it to be reassuring, but her father clearly doesn’t hear it that way. “You mean to say that this shitbag got you pregnant and he doesn’t even have the decency to – what kind of man doesn’t even –”

“Great, Amy,” Dan says, rolling his eyes, “Would you like to freak your Dad out some more maybe?”

“What, am I supposed to say you got down on one knee or some shit?”

“You could at least make it clear I’m not abandoning you on the streets for fuck’s sake.”

“Oh, you’re not?”

“Amy,” her Dad says urgently, “This isn’t what I want for you – you deserve much more than him. He’s no better than any of Sophie’s deadbeats – he doesn’t respect you.”

Okay, she’s done. She cannot hear one word more of this, and she starts to gather her things and push Dan out of the booth so she can leave.

“I get it, okay,” she says, “I get it. When Sophie gets knocked up, oh it’s flowers and fireworks, but when it’s me, well, you think it’s a colossal mistake, just like every other person on the fucking planet, I get it. But right now I have to go deal with Buddy’s fuck-up, because he just painted a target sign on me the size of… Alaska. Again.”

She, Leon, and Dan drive back to the hotel, fighting out the press strategy as they go, to her father’s extreme consternation. They leave him in the lobby and go up to the suite to continue the argument, and two or three hours later, they have something they can all live with, and have started to distribute it to the press. (The statement came from Dan, in the end, because he and Leon both seemed to think
that the protective fiancé angle would play better. Heaven forbid Amy ask the press to lay off her on her own behalf.)

Leon insists that they let him set up some kind of feature interview in the next few days, which is the last thing she wants to do, but is probably a necessity. (Normally, she’d appeal to Selina in a case like this, but she’s not sure how much clout she has, relative to Leon, at the moment, so she doesn’t bother).

By the time they’re finished, there’s absolutely no point in trying to join Selina at the drinks reception, and so she says she’s going to bed, although, to her complete lack of surprise, Dan doesn’t join her, preferring to go down to the hotel bar instead.

(This means he doesn’t catch her amusing herself by experimenting with the many ways her new ring can catch the light, which is probably for the best).

She’s showered and changed into pyjamas, when Dan comes in. With her father.

A less likely pair of drinking buddies she can’t imagine, and she suspects Dan is lucky her Dad didn’t hit him.

“What’s up?”

“I’m flying back to DC tomorrow morning, early,” her father says, looking uncomfortable. “I only came out to see you.”

“Okay,” she says, “Well thanks for coming, I guess. You don’t have to worry about me, Dad, okay, I can do this, I can.”

“I know I upset you, but…Amy, your mother and I, we couldn’t be happier. You’re having a baby. We just want to be sure that it’s the right thing for you.”

“Okay,” she says, and tries not to sniff.

“And, I’ll say the other thing I said to your sister. You’re not alone. Anything you need, anything we can do, we’ll do it.” And then he hugs her. And it’s…what she’s wanted, what she’s needed, ever since she saw that damn test and her whole world tilted, and she just…clings. And her Dad clings back, and kisses the top of her head.

“Everything’s going to be all right, sweetheart,” he says, and for a minute, a whole minute, Amy believes him.

But of course it can’t last, and the real world intrudes, and he lets her go. “I’ll get up and have breakfast with you,” she says.

“No, no – I’m leaving very early, and you need your sleep now.”

She can feel Dan trying not to laugh from where he’s sitting, behind her, on the bed, and she almost can’t blame him – her Dad is just about the… Daddest man there’s ever been.

“We’ll see you in D.C.”

“Yeah,” she says, “We’ll be moving back down in three, four weeks at the most.”

“Okay then. Stay in touch.”

Fortunately, Dan doesn’t let a silence grow when her Dad leaves, just laughs and says, “I should
have known you were a Daddy’s girl.”

She rolls her eyes. “All women love their fathers – even Selina loves her Dad – don’t you know anything?”

“Think he might like me a bit more now?”

“What, because you’ve impregnated me with the world’s most beautiful sociopath?” She lies down, and curls up on her side, one hand under her cheek. “I wouldn’t bet on it.”

“You really think the baby will be prettier than me?”

“I’m its mother,” she says, as though it should be obvious. When he doesn’t say anything, she adds, “Isn’t this the part where you tell me there are fifty hotter women you could have done this with?”

They are not going to have any… nice moments, not if she has anything to do with it. A nice moment was what landed them in this mess to begin with.

But for once, for once in his life, Dan doesn’t take the bait, just says, “You think Buddy has a crush on Jane now?”

“Oh my god, he does,” Amy says, laughing at the idea, almost against her will. “She broke him, on camera, she humiliated him… he’s going to be in love with her for the rest of his life.”

“And you’re fine with that?”

“If it means he stops trying to turn seventeen year old victims of sex trafficking into my clone or whatever, I think we’re all better off.”

“Maybe he just missed you.”

Dan is staring at his phone, frowning almost, and she’d think it was meaningless except… except for his tone. There’s that softness in his voice that she used to think she’d imagined, she’d convinced herself existed in a drunken haze.

“Well there’s an easy fix for that,” she says, plumping her pillow and turning away from him.

“Oh. What’s that?”

“Not making me feel like shit to begin with.”

He doesn’t answer, and she falls asleep watching the light of his phone flickering against the walls. She can't give him an inch.
Chapter Four

Selina’s move back to DC becomes far more of a headache than it needs to be. Partly because she keeps arguing with them that New York is a viable base, and partly because Jennifer, her diary secretary (and the person who kept the office running behind the scenes) up and leaves two weeks before the move is due to happen, meaning an already...convoluted process becomes pure chaos.

Dan had already moved back to D.C. when they set up BKD, so his personal upheaval is minimal. Or, it would be, if he hadn’t agreed to drive Amy and her stuff back from New York.

She doesn’t seem particularly grateful for the favour, but it seems like the kind of thing he’s supposed to do, and at least it spares her from trying to bring it all on the Acela. And besides, his car was the last thing he had left in New York, and he was going to have to pick it up eventually.

She doesn’t have as many things as he’d expected – two big (big) suitcases, and a black sack full of coats. She’d been subletting a friend’s apartment, and so hadn’t brought much in the way of furniture or other stuff with her. She’d even sold her car when she moved to Nevada, which is why she needed him to drive her (though she’s clearly annoyed at the necessity, suggesting she just borrow it instead).

But he doesn’t like the idea of her driving so far alone – not that he says that to her, he’s not stupid – and he has this dim hope that maybe, just maybe she’ll actually talk to him.

For all that his rock is on her finger, they haven’t discussed...anything really, not the practicalities of how they’ll take care of the baby, or where they stand with each other, or anything.

It’s not that Dan has ever been eager for ‘deep and meaningful’ conversations about the nature of his relationships or anything, he’s not, though their state of limbo is kind of pissing him off. But at the same time... at the same time, Amy’s been so damn twitchy, he hasn’t wanted to push her.

They did the interview Leon had set up, and she’d smiled at him, and talked about how much she was looking forward to becoming a mother, and how happy she was to have found the right person at long last, and how romantic Dan’s proposal had been. She’d worn a dark pink dress and a bland expression, and Dan would have laughed for a minute straight if she’d managed a sincere smile even once. But she so transparently hated all of it, hated every part of it, that he’d found himself feeling unwilling to make fun of her.

The interview, when it came out, said that Dan sucked up all the energy, drew the interviewer’s attention, and maybe that was true... but it wasn’t because he wanted to be the face of Selina’s campaign romance, it was to give Amy a minute or two out of a spotlight she clearly loathed.

Selina didn’t care though, which was something, and she didn’t seem to notice that Amy was even more withdrawn than usual afterwards.

In some bizarre way, Selina seemed to think the interview had...resolved the pregnancy somehow, and when, ten days after they’ve set up the office in DC, Amy asks to take the afternoon off for an appointment with her gynaecologist, her reaction is ludicrously over the top. She berates Amy for a solid ten minutes, telling her Amy can’t expect to have allowances made for her, Selina’s not paying her to take a holiday, no one else is asking to take an entire afternoon off for some pissy little doctor’s appointment, and so on and on and on.

Dan’s not even sure why she’s so pissed – it’s not like they have a busy day. Drinks are being held
to celebrate the retirement of some committee chair or something, and Selina’s expected to show her face and make a few remarks, but Leon can handle that.

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” Amy says, four minutes in, “But I’ve been putting this appointment off for a week, and…I have to go.”

“Fine. Who needs you?” Selina says, throwing herself down on the couch in a rather melodramatic manner. “Richard!”

Amy gives Dan a look, and picks up her coat, and Richard, coming in, bumbles through helping her put it on, naturally getting it wrong, so Amy ends up with her right arm in the left armhole and has to twist around to undo it.

Which is when Selina glares at him and says, “Why are you still here?”

“What?”

“Move your ass. You are going to look an involved fucking father whether you like it or not, so get out of that chair.”

“Ma’am,” Amy starts, “That’s really not – ”

“I don’t want to hear it, Ame. The two of you better be out of my sight in the next thirty seconds, or I swear to god, I will turn you both into my own personal meat puppets.”

They don’t stick around.

It’s only when they get out of the office that Amy breathes out, “She’s insane.”

He’s so surprised – usually he has to coax her into admitting anything negative about Selina – that he laughs, smiling down at her.

She’s still as pretty as ever, sweet-lipped and flower-faced, at least until she opens her mouth, that is. He has a suspicion she’s been getting plumper, her body rounding out around the baby (and he feels a kind of panic when he thinks about it, like Amy’s body is timebomb), though he’s not sure how much… he has a suspicion she’s been dressing to hide it.

But she doesn’t smile back. All she says is, “You know you don’t have to come. You can go get coffee or something –”

And then she walks away, and he has to jog to catch up to her. “Is that why you didn’t tell me about this?”

“Why would I tell you?”

“Because maybe I would have wanted to be there.”

Her look of disbelief is so intense he wants to frame it. “Dan, I don’t even want to do this, why would I imagine you do? Not to mention that you hate hospitals.”

“Because it’s my fucking kid?”

“Okay, first of all,” Amy says, stopping in her tracks. “A kid is not something you can own, you need to be clear on that, I am not having them turn out like Catherine, all fucked up because you were so disappointed they didn’t turn out the perfect little doll you have in mind. He – or she, whatever – is not going to be yet another accessory.”
“And I was so looking forward to having the picture perfect family.”

She glares at him, but starts walking again, “And anyway, I’ve been trying to get an appointment with my gyno ever since we came back, it hasn’t been easy, with the schedule changing so much, so… I didn’t even know it was going to be today.”

“This is the same doctor you’ve gone to before?”

“Yeah,” Amy says, “Since I moved to D.C.”

“So she’s the reason Buddy never knocked you up – I should thank her.”

“If Buddy had knocked me up I’d have gone straight to –”

“Oh really?”

“Shut up,” Amy says, “It’s not a compliment to you. The last thing I would want is to be tied to that grasshopper for the rest of my life.”

“But you’ll be tied to me.”

“If you think I’m under any delusions that you’re going to stick around… I’m not that stupid.”

He rolls his eyes. She’s been saying things like that for weeks – ever since she told him about the baby, in fact – and it doesn’t seem to matter that he’s still here, that he hasn’t left, that he gave her a ring, nothing seems to shake her certainty that he’s going to fuck off at the first opportunity.

She drives them to the doctor’s office, and bustles in, intimidating the receptionist, though he doesn’t think she means to.

She’s rushed through a check-up, her blood pressure and weight checked, a nurse taking a blood sample, and then they’re brought into the doctor’s office. It’s light and bright and the kind of place Dan hates. There’s no arguing with cold hard scientific fact, no charming a doctor into changing a diagnosis, and it always makes him uncomfortable.

Amy’s doctor is professional and objective, scolding her, less than gently, for delaying the scan for long. (Between eight and sixteen weeks is meant as a guideline, apparently, not an excuse to put it off). That Amy only did it because she wanted to use the same doctor all the way through the process seems to mollify her slightly, but only slightly.

“Your weight looks good,” she says, looking at Amy over her glasses, “I know that’s hard for you, so I’m very pleased with that. How’ve you been otherwise?”

“Not much morning sickness,” Amy says, “Though there was a week or two… but it’s gone now. And I was… I don’t know, oversensitive, for a while. I couldn’t stand to have anything touching me.”

“All sounds pretty normal,” the doctor says, “Has that passed? I know it’s uncomfortable.”

“Mostly,” Amy says, and looks uncomfortable.

But the doctor only smiles, and says, looking at Dan, “Lucky you.”

Amy flushes up, but the doctor doesn’t seem to notice, continuing, “Seems you’re just like your sister – in which case, I think you can look forward to a very easy pregnancy. Realistically, the worst part is over.”
“Other than you know, pushing it out.”

The doctor only laughs, and tells Amy to lie down for the scan. It’s the moment that’s always supposed to be so moving or whatever, but in all honesty, what he sees looks like a smudged grey space alien, and the idea of getting emotional over it seems bizarre.

The doctor tells them the heartbeat is strong – a good sign, apparently – and everything looks the way it should. She can’t say if it’s a boy or a girl – the baby not having placed itself in a cooperative position – but assures them they can find out at the next scan. She makes Amy book it there and then, and warns her that she won’t be able to reschedule at the last second again (Selina’s most recent Andrew crisis meant she’d had to postpone an earlier appointment).

Dan makes a note of it in his phone, and stands in the waiting room, trying not to look anxious, while Amy pees.

It’s a relief to get the fuck out of there – all those serene, soft, contented-looking women bother him. If Amy turns into one of those he really will run for the hills.

Fortunately, she returns from the restroom her usual grumpy, discontented self, not some Stepford Wife, and he’s so relieved he suggests getting lunch.

Amy, however says he can go for lunch, but she has plans. Plans which, he discovers, involve shopping.

Babies need a lot of stuff, apparently, and Amy is determined to get all of the shopping done today. She’s inherited a crib from her sister, along with a metric ton of baby clothes, but there are other things that have to be bought new.

Dan can’t help but feel that the salesperson is making fun of them, because the pile of things keeps getting bigger and bigger – car chairs and changing bags and baby monitors, a weird plastic mat for changing the baby on and a breast pump (he jokes about that, naturally, and Amy sighs in long-suffering fashion). The stroller alone is eye-wateringly expensive, especially when they haven’t even begun thinking about where they’re going to live (though Dan has some thoughts on that) (more to the point, he has the money to make his thoughts a reality, thanks to CBS).

He suggests buying some toys or something, and Amy rolls her eyes. “Do you know what newborns are like?”

He shrugs, toying with a stuffed animal, “Can’t say that I do – this is the only one I’ve ever been interested in.”

“They’re barely even awake for the first three months – they don’t have the motor control to play with anything.”

“Yeah, but we’re going to need something to distract it from your swearing.”

The salesperson pipes up, saying that shopping for toys will be easier if they wait until they know the sex, and Amy rounds on her, “What because I’m going to glue a pretty little bow to my kid’s head before she’s a month old so that everyone knows she’s a girl? I’m going to wait, oh a minute or two, before dropping five thousand years of gendered bullshit on his or her head.”

“But toys are good for their development!” (He has to admire this idiot’s tenacity, if nothing else. Few people are tough enough to stand up to an enraged Amy).

“Yeah,” Amy says, “Sure they are, that’s why kids spend half their time playing with boxes and
sticks and rocks, instead of all this overpriced shit.”

Half to placate the salesgirl, and half because he still thinks toys are a good idea, Dan picks out a couple of things – stuffed toys, some rattle that looks like a sex toy, a kind of pop-up mobile (for when you want to distract the kid and drink some wine, he’s guessing).

There’s so much stuff they can barely fit it all in the trunk of the car, but Amy merely shrugs and heads back into the mall.

He’s hungry, and he figures he can at least pick up a sandwich or something, and so he follows her. “Please tell me we don’t have to get more baby stuff? Let’s just go for coffee.”

“You go,” Amy says, “I still have to do something.”

“Well, I’ll come with,” he says, “All this baby stuff weighs more than a very overweight six year old, you’ll need help.”

“No,” she says, looking annoyed, “I don’t. And it’s not for the baby. I have to…buy a dress.”

“Then I’m definitely coming, I can tell you –”

“Dan fuck off.”

There’s not a trace of humour in her face, and he must look startled, because she continues, “Go buy yourself a latte or something, and stop breathing down my neck. Selina told me I have to make an impression tonight, for god knows what reason, so not only do I have to buy a dress, I have to buy a bra, and I hate getting measured, so you are not coming with me.”

He’s tempted to make a joke about her brand new boobs, but he knows his girl, and this is one of those times when if he says anything but “Yes, Amy,” she will tell him to go fuck himself, loudly and at length.

“Want me to order something for you too?”

Amy seems to think about it for a second, which is progress, and then says, “I don’t know how long I’ll take, and I’m not really hungry, so…”

He narrows his eyes at her, remembering what the doctor said, but lets her go. It means he gets a good forty minutes to read his emails and check in with the investigator he has looking into Danny Chung, which is more than he’d ever get on a normal working day, so really, Selina should be glad.

Amy eventually shows up, two shopping bags in hand and a drained expression on her face. She doesn’t even object when he offers to get her a muffin, merely saying, “Raspberry,” and settling down to look at her phone.

He charms the barista, because he can, because it’s nice to be reminded that he can after Amy giving him the cold shoulder for the last month, and orders her a hot chocolate, with cream, because it’ll do her good.

And when he gets back to their table, Amy is talking to Mike.

Retirement hasn’t made him any more together, or coherent, but he’s smiling at Amy, saying, “And you were going to freeze your eggs.”

What?
“I told you it would work out somehow. Hi Dan.”

“Mike,” he says, wondering what the hell he just heard. “How’s your tribe of children?”

“Doing great – Ellen’s reading at fifth grade level now.”

“Fantastic,” Dan says, not giving a shit. (He is never going to turn into one of those people who only talks about his kids, that’s for sure).

“I always figured you two would –”

“Would what?” Amy says, her tone sharp.

“Oh, you couldn’t hide it from me, Amer, I knew there was something going on. You only said he was a minor-league gigolo.”

“Minor-league? It was good enough for you.”

“That’s your objection, really?”

“You two had a soft spot for each other, I could always tell. You can’t get anything past McLintock.” Mike smiles then, and it’s genuine, it’s sincere, it’s the whole reason Dan was never able to hate him as much as his incompetence deserved. “You’ve got that glow, Amer – I knew you’d be a great, Mom.”

“Thanks Mike,” Amy says, “Maybe we can set up play dates.”

“Maybe we can.”

Being out of politics for so long has clearly had a damaging effect on his faculties if he can’t understand sarcasm that blatant.

“Anyway,” Mike says, and picks up his stuff, “I’ve got to get back to Wendy, but I had to say hi. I told you it’d work out in the end – no adoption needed, not with Dan on the case.”

She gives him a twisted little smile, which turns into a grimace the moment Mike has left the table. (If she hates all the pregnancy stuff so much, Dan wonders why she ever decided to go through with it in the first place). She doesn’t even smile when he nudges her shopping bag, saying, “So, what colour is it?”

“Red.”

“The dress or the bra?”

“Seriously?”

“Can you lighten up for five whole minutes?

“No. If I could do you think I – I am actually trying you know.”

He decides to wait until they’re in the car, and leaves her in peace for the time being. At the least, she seems grateful for the hot chocolate, so that’s something. And after a few minutes she gets a news alert about the latest Montez cock-up, which she’s shares excitedly, the first time she’s been eager to talk to him in quite a while.

He hadn’t realised just how much he missed talking to her until she stopped, withdrew into her tight
little shell all over again.

So, he waits until they’re in the car before bringing it up – she won’t be able to run away from him there. She’s driving them back to her parents’ house, where she’s living right now, so she can drop off the baby stuff and get changed ahead of the evening’s event.

It’s not a long drive, but long enough for his purposes. Once they’re stopped at an intersection, he pounces.

“So, what was that, with Mike?”

“He was saying hello – the way people do with their friends, former co-workers.”

“You know that’s not what I mean.”

“No, Dan, I don’t.”

“You wanted to get pregnant.”

“Are you insane?”

“Why else would you have let me bareback you?”

“You seriously think I what… tried to baby-trap you, are you out of your fucking mind? I would have to have an IQ lower than Jonah’s to even imagine that would work.”

“Well then what was Mike talking about?”

“None of your business.”

“Amy, fill in the blanks here – last I knew, the mere notion of kids made you come out in hives, and all of a sudden…”

“Well I changed,” she says, looking at the road, “I mean, did you think I was the exact same as… we barely spoke for two years –”

“And whose fault was that?”

“Yours. Obviously. I don’t recall rubbing your nose in – anyway, did you really think I agreed to marry Buddy without thinking about kids?”

“He looked like your hayseed country cousin and you were going to reproduce with him?”

“Maybe,” Amy says, tightly. “We talked about – he really liked the idea of a campaign baby, same as you, but I just… the longer I waited, the more it seemed like a really bad idea.”

“When did you even start thinking about this?”

He’s genuinely curious – it seems like such a big change that it should have been impossible for him to have missed, and yet…

“I guess, after the election, when everything was so… up in the air, I realised I wanted more than just being Selina’s, or anyone’s, punching bag. Like an actual life.”

“And you never mentioned this to me, because –”
“Because why would I?” Amy looks at him, quickly, a sharp little glance. “You didn’t give a shit how I felt about anything, you made that very clear, so why would I talk to you about…”

“Well if I’m so unbearable for you to be around, then why are you –”

“Because it happened. I didn’t expect it, I didn’t plan on it, I was hoping maybe I’d…meet someone or something, but let’s face it, Buddy’s probably ruined any chance of that, with all his… antics, so… it happened, and I’m going to deal with it. But do you seriously imagine that I wanted this? Do you not understand what you’re like? You are nobody’s first choice for this, okay, you’re certainly not mine, not when I have to worry that you’ll fuck me and our three month old baby over the moment we’re not an advantage to you.”

He taps the ring on her left hand. “You do know that’s not going to happen.”

“Given that both your previous engagements lasted, oh, three weeks before you… no, Dan,” she says, “I don’t.”

She parks the car, and they get into a fight about whether he’s coming into the house or not, which is one of the more ridiculous conversations they’ve had. He wins, because there’s simply no way she can carry all of the stuff by herself (all piled up, it’s bigger than she is).

But the moment they get through the door, he realises why she wanted him to stay in the car. Because, naturally, Sophie Brookheimer is at the door waiting for them, in the worst case of bad timing since Jane McCabe walked into his HR meeting.

“Hi Dan,” she says, and Amy rolls her eyes so hard, she looks like she might strain a muscle.

“Sophie.”

“You’re looking well,” she says, and reaches out to stroke his tie. “Guess you’re going to be part of the family now.”

“Jesus,” Amy says, taking one of the heavier bags out of his hands and stomping up the stairs. “Nope. Not doing this.”

She doesn’t look back, even though Sophie practically has him pinned against the wall.

“Oops,” Sophie says, “Must have a hit a nerve there. Seems like you haven’t softened her up at all. Should have knocked me up – at least you’d be getting laid.”

Under normal circumstances he’d have no qualms telling her that if she’d been the one he’d knocked up he’d have vanished in the cloud of dust Amy kept saying she was expecting… but telling Amy’s sister exactly what he thinks of her is unlikely to endear him to any of the Brookheimers, and he needs them to at least… tolerate him.

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” he says, “I think you’ve got enough illegitimate children to contend with.”

“Yeah, but think how much more fun you’d be having – Amy couldn’t even keep her ken doll cowboy happy, no way she’s enough for –”

She’s got her boobs squashed against him almost, and he kind of wants to push her away, but… but then Amy’s Dad comes into the hall, saying, “Sophie have you seen my – are you actually depraved?”
Can he not catch a fucking break today, not even one?

“Oh, Daddy,” Sophie says, “Dan and I were just talking – it’s not my fault if Amy’s too boring for –”

Okay, fuck it. They’re almost guaranteed to hate him anyway, he might as well go for it.

“Sophie,” he says, “I’m sorry that your baby sister is hotter, smarter and more successful than you are, really, I am, I get that it must upsetting every time she’s in the same space with you and you have to realise how inadequate you actually are, but I promise you, I have no intention of wasting even a minute on the lesser Brookheimer now that I don’t have to. So, you can keep this up if you want, but… it really is pathetic. Maybe find yourself a nice delivery boy.”

He ignores her protests (and her Dad’s outraged expression) and vaults up the stairs after Amy (her entire family is so intolerable, maybe he should just drag her away to an island somewhere).

She’s in what must be her old bedroom, though it’s crammed with baby furniture and bags of clothes and all kinds of shit, so much so that there isn’t much room for Dan to stand in.

She doesn’t even look up when he comes in, though she does say, in a weary tone, “You and Sophie have a nice ‘catch-up’?”

“The best,” he says, and looks for a place to put the bags down. “How do you even breathe in here?”

“It’s not like I’m here often,” she says, “We’re on the road so much.”

“Why didn’t you just move in with me?”

Amy makes a face. “I’m sorry, was that an option? Besides, we’d kill each other.”

He’s not sure that’s true.

“Whereas you and Sophie are a match made in heaven.”

Amy shrugs. “At least with Sophie I know what I’m dealing with. And it’s only temporary.”

“Oh?”

“I get my apartment back in January, and in the meantime, I can save the rent for – I mean you saw how expensive all of this was.”

“For fuck sake, I have money, you don’t have to –”

“Well I don’t want it.”

“Seriously, do you actually want me to fuck off? Is that why you’re being such a bitch?”

She looks up at him for a moment, and it might be the most vulnerable he’s ever seen her look. She doesn’t want him to fuck off, it’s obvious, she’s just so scared he will that she can’t let herself think otherwise for even a minute.

For once in her life, Selina Meyer was right.

They’re interrupted by Amy’s Mom, who comes in to call them down for dinner and won’t accept any of Amy’s excuses that they have to leave soon for the drinks, a quick meal won’t kill them, they
can’t have Amy getting peaky after all.

It is the most uncomfortable meal Dan has ever had the misfortune of attending.

Amy barely speaks, eating quickly and giving monosyllabic answers to her mother’s questions. In a fit of inspiration, Dan takes out the printout of the scan from earlier in the day, but Sophie and Amy’s Dad are so furious with him, they don’t react much. The only saving grace is Sophie’s kids who are… who are brats, frankly, are loud and obnoxious and a blessed, blessed distraction.

As soon as she’s finished, Amy stands up, saying she has to go change (and is she seriously going to leave him alone with her family, that is cruel and unusual punishment), and that is when the explosion happens.

It starts innocuously enough, with her Mom saying, “But sweetheart, you haven’t even had dessert.”

“It’s fine,” Amy says, “I don’t even want –”

“She’s already plumping up, Mom, she’ll only get fat if she has dessert, it’s better if she skips it.”

It’s an obnoxious thing to say, of course, though Dan has to admit it’s easily the kind of thing he might have said, once upon a time. But it’s Amy’s Mom’s reaction that throws him, because she is furious.

“Sophie!” she says, and she’s staring at her older daughter like an angry cat. “Apologise.”

“What, it’s true?”

“You know perfectly well that –”

“I’m getting changed,” Amy says, and leaves.

Meaning he has to sit there and listen to a very nice woman try to lose her temper while still remaining polite, which… in any other situation, would be hilarious, but in this one… Sophie keeps trying to defend herself, and her Mom snaps back every time, and it’s like there’s some weird faultline that’s just been exposed, some unhealed wound.

And Sophie keeps fighting back, saying, “There’s no need to be such a drama queen about it, she’s going to get fat, that’s what happens, it’s not my fault, she needs to get over it.”

“You know perfectly well –”

“And you can’t tell me what to say to her anyway, I’m not a fucking teenager.”

“But you live under our roof,” her father says, “And so long as you do, you will not talk to your sister that way. No excuses, Sophie.”

“Fine,” she says, somehow managing to flounce in her chair. “No one round here has a sense of humour.”

Dan takes the opportunity, and says he’s going to check on Amy – like he’s some doting baby-daddy – and gets the fuck out of the Brookheimers’ kitchen as fast as humanly possible. At least his family don’t pretend to be nice.

She’s waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs, her coat buttoned up and her purse in her hand, and she drives them both to the hotel where the retirement drinks are quickly and efficiently. Dan can’t help but suspect she’s relieved to get away from her family (and who could blame her).
But it’s when she takes off her coat, to give it in at the cloakroom, that he gets his first real surprise. Because… the red dress is not what he was expecting.

Ever since she told him about the baby – or longer, really, when he thinks about it – Amy’s been dressing, well, he’d say conservatively.

In truth, she’d been dressing like her greatest fear was someone accidentally touching her skin, all high necklines and long sleeves, chunky sweaters and full skirts, which… well, he hadn’t said anything. Partly because if he was going to have a fight with her, he planned to save it for something important, and partly because… he didn’t really care? Sure, he might think the blouses with the bows were kind of dowdy, but ultimately, it’s not like she ever looked bad.

But Selina evidently did, and the red dress seems to be the direct result of her interference.

He’s not sure it quite fits with the image they had in mind. They were trying to sell the love story, the campaign baby and the star crossed lovers, all that shit… but it was hard to think of Amy as wholesome when she showed up dressed like sex.

The dress is sleek, and form-fitting, and for the very first time, her baby-bump is visible. Small, but visible – not that anyone would be looking, since her tits were also on display, thanks to the square neckline of the dress.

“Well look at you,” he says and Amy scowls.

“What?” She’s lush, all emphatic curves and blonde hair, and he never, ever thought he’d be into the pregnancy thing… but it’s really working for her. He wants to slide his hands down her sides, get to grips with the round new curve of her ass, and he must be staring like a freak, because Amy folds her arms, clearly uncomfortable under his gaze. “What is it?”

This is what a whole month without sex has done to him. “Mike was right,” he says, and for once he’s telling the truth. “You’ve got that glow.”

“Whatever,” she says, but he can see a flush creeping up her neck. Maybe that doctor was on to something. “You’re just fluffing me.”

He puts his hand on her lower back, steering her into the bar, (and if his grip is a little firmer than it needs to be, sue him). “At least I’m speaking in complete sentences. I wouldn’t expect a lot of that tonight.”

And he’s kind of right.

The moment Furlong sees her, he comes barrelling over to kiss Amy’s cheek, congratulating her on the pregnancy and saying, “Well aren’t you resplendent, Brookheimer,” in such an openly sleazy way that Dan almost laughs out loud.

They mingle, the way they always do at these things, but gradually, gradually, Amy starts to stick by his side, not even complaining when he puts an arm around her, rests his hand on her hip. She doesn’t like it one bit, he thinks, the way everyone keeps staring at her (Will from Furlong’s office is the worst, transparently gawking, though Speaker Marwood is equally bowled over, and Leon never takes his eyes off her).

But it’s when Candi Caruso comes over to congratulate them – and touches Amy’s stomach, without asking – that he thinks she might lose it. She’s desperately trying not to recoil, he can tell, everything in her straining not to physically remove Candi’s fingers from her body, and Candi is burbling on, congratulating them both (but only looking at Amy), and saying that she’s due in June, did Amy
know, and maybe she and Amy can…share tips or something (though, to look at her, you’d hardly
know Candi was pregnant).

Amy’s smiling a furious little smile, and asking through gritted teeth if Gary is excited, and Candi
burbles on, “Oh, he was thrilled, he’s working on the nursery already! I think he’s more excited than
I am – he was so disappointed it wasn’t twins. But, you know, we’ll get there. One is more than
enough work for me at the moment. I cannot imagine trying to do this job and have a baby without
him, you know? He’s been there for me one hundred percent ever since I found out.”

“That’s wonderful,” Amy says, and does not look at Dan, and does not look at Dan.

Which is why he steps in. “It must have been extra stressful, what with Montez’s approval going
through the floor.”

“Oh Dan,” Candi says, smiling a tricky little smile, “It’s sweet of you to be concerned after so long,
but I’m not one to let a temporary setback like that get to me. I don’t waste my time on…little bumps
in the road.”

Amy’s looking between them, and he sees something in her…shrink when it dawns on her what
Candi means. Not that she seems surprised, just… smaller.

Candi sees it too, he thinks, because she turns on the charm again, saying, “Anyway, I just wanted to
say… if you feel like a decaffeinated coffee and a chat some time, let me know. Being pregnant in
this business is the pits, and we girls need to stick together.”

“Right,” Amy says, looking like she’s trying to swallow an entire lemon, “I’ll think about that.”

He waits until Candi has vanished into the crowd before saying, “All of that… it was a long time
ago.”

“I bet.”

“It was only for… it was a few weeks, she was useful.”

“Right.”

“You don’t have to worry about –”

“I’m not worried.”

She keeps looking at his shoulder, not at him, and he has to tamp down an instinct to take hold of her
arms, shake her just a little, make her react. It won’t help anything.

“Look,” he says, “All of that was just…business”

“Dan, I get it, okay. Just another notch in the bedpost. Not something I really want to hear about.”

“You don’t have to get upset.”

“I’m not,” Amy says, and her face creases up. “I’m a fucking laughing stock now, and I wish I
could have a fucking drink, but I’m not wasting my time getting upset about you being the whore of
Babylon. Go ahead, enjoy yourself – you will anyway.”

He doesn’t know how to talk to her when she’s like this. Every word, every sentence becomes a
potential trap, and…he wouldn’t mind if she was mocking him, but it’s more like she’s mocking
herself, taking some masochistic pleasure in assuming the things about him that will hurt her the most
And it doesn’t help that he’s had sex with at least, oh, seven or eight of the women in the room. At
the least, it makes it hard for him to make his case.

He’s not used to wanting to make his case. He’d always adopted a strict ‘dump the corpse
overboard’ policy to failed relationships (well, what women thought were relationships), so he’s
never had to try to dig himself out of the shit before. He’s not sure how.

And then Ben interrupts them. “Word of warning,” he says, “Richard just got talking to the head of
FEMA.”

Amy shrugs. “She’ll love him, everyone else does.”

“You look glum,” Ben says, “No nightcap for Dan tonight?”

Amy ignores him, and says, “I’m done, I’m going home.”

“Whoops,” Ben says, as she leaves, “Guess that’s a raw nerve even now.”

“What?”

“You mean you still don’t know. Really?”

“Ben, just tell me.”

Ben knocks back his drink. “I’m getting another one of these. And if you really want to know, you
should ask her.”

He catches up with Amy as she leaves the coat check, staring down at her phone with a frustrated
expression on her face. “Why are you leaving?”

“Because I hate everything,” she says, and he worries for a moment that she’s going to scream right
there in the hotel lobby.

“Oh come on, this is what you supposedly want.”

She makes a noise that’s a little like a moan, and tries to walk around him, and that’s when he
catches her wrist in one hand. “Just talk to me. Tell me what’s so terrible.”

“Everything,” Amy says, with more passion in her voice than she’s shown in a while. “Literally
everyone I know thinks I’m ruining my life, I’m the size of a fucking house, I feel like I want to jump
out of my skin, it’s like I’ve turned into fucking Jonah only worse, and I can’t ever, ever be alone,
I’ve got my family or Selina or you smothering me every minute of every day, Richard giving me
cupcakes or cookies or fruit every time he sees me, and Leon trying to smell me or whatever and I
just –”

“You don’t mind it when I do that.”

“Because it’s you,” Amy says, all but stamping her foot. “It’s not the same. I feel like I’m going to
lose my mind.”

Maybe he should drag her away to a desert island after all.

And someone calls his name.
It’s Brie. She’s in town getting coverage of the cherry blossom festival or something (he really doesn’t give a shit), and she’s halfway into giving him her hotel room number when Amy walks away from them.

It takes him longer than it should to get away from her (it’s not that he doesn’t like the idea of a night in Brie’s hotel room, of course he does, but…) and when he walks into the parking garage, he’s honestly expecting to find that Amy’s left.

But she hasn’t.

She’s standing by her car, and she looks entirely freaked out – though she’s not looking at him, she doesn’t even look up when he approaches her, she’s staring down at her stomach.

It’s only when he’s very, very close that she even seems to notice him. She takes his hand, and places it low on her stomach. “Can you feel that?”

It’s the first time she’s touched him in weeks, and he lets himself enjoy it for a second. “Feel what?”

And Amy drops his hand like a hot coal, backing away from him. “I think I just felt the baby move. I mean, I know I just felt… I wasn’t sure before, but that was definitely it.”

“Okay,” he says, “Good to know – our baby kicks like every other one.”

She looks up at him, and she is… completely panicked. “Dan, we don’t have our shit together, not even close, and there is an actual person about to –”

“Ssh,” he says, and leans his forehead against hers, pushing her back against the car. “Stop acting like a crazy person – it doesn’t help anything.”

He gets his arm around her waist, pulling her more closely into him. “Listen to me. You want this, right?” She nods, immediately. “Then fuck everyone, including me, who makes you think otherwise. You think I’d let those assholes put me off from doing something I wanted?”

“I think you’d do it just to spite them,” Amy says, and he laughs.

“Of course I would. Now what do you need? I’ll paint a damn nursery for you, if that’s what you want.”

“I’d like to see you try,” Amy says, sounding genuinely amused for the first time in he doesn’t know how long.

So, he kisses her. Hauls her up by her waist, and presses his mouth to hers, bends her back so she’s pressed right into him, and while he’s doing that, he takes her keys from her right hand, and presses the button to open her door.

When it beeps, Amy starts back from him in surprise, though not very far. She’s stroking his forearm with one hand, staring up at him with questioning eyes, and maybe that’s why he says, “Get into the backseat,” his voice rougher than he’d expected it to be.

Amy’s eyes go round, but she does so, moving slowly, as though she’s expecting him to change his mind at any second.

He hasn’t made out with someone in the back of a car since he left home to go to college, but somehow, it feels like the right thing.
It’s a mess, of course. He’s too tall to fit into a back seat without folding himself up somehow, and he winds up planting one knee on the floor of the car, and bending the other leg so he’s all but kicking the front seat, but…

But Amy’s under him, arching her back to press her breasts against him and pulling him closer, letting his hands roam all over her, and kissing him back like she never, never wants him to stop.

He manages to get one hand under her, and pull the zip of her dress down, enough that he can pull it off her shoulders and get his mouth on her breasts, and…

It’s quiet, just the two of them in the car, no music, no ambient noise, nothing, which means he hears every little breath, every little moan that gives away her reactions. And when he scrapes his teeth over her skin, she actually whimpers.

He can’t help it, he pauses to grin up at her. “Guess all that oversensitivity is good for something, huh?”

“You’re such an ass.”

“Yeah,” he says, not bothering to sound repentant. “But this… I can help with this.”

“In between every other woman in –”

“Sssh,” he says. “Don’t make me beg, Amy, I want to. Do you have any idea how fucking luscious you are right now?”

“Shut up.”

“If it were up to me… I’d have tied you to that bed in Iowa and not stopped until you soaked it through. I’d take you home tonight and fuck you till you couldn’t walk straight the second you asked.”

“But you always make me do it, you never just –”

“That’s because I’m a gentleman.”

Amy bursts out laughing, shaking underneath him for long seconds. “That,” she says, between gasps for breath, “Is the funniest thing I have ever heard you say.”

“Yeah,” he says, grinning (because she’s talking to him, because this feels like them, at long last), “But it’s true. I’m not going to creep all over you, unless you want me to. I have standards, Ames. You’re the one who’s ‘acting like Jonah.’”

She glares at him, and fists one wee hand in his hair, “This is what happens when I tell you things, you turn them into fucking weapons.”

“Yeah I do,” he says, leaning closer in. “Want me to stop talking?”

Amy doesn’t bother answering, just yanks his head down, her tongue gliding against his, and then they’re just kissing, slow and languid and messy, sucking and licking and biting each other, tasting and tasting again.

She doesn’t even stop when he pulls her skirt up and gets his hand into her underwear, barely pauses for breath, only stopping when he breaks away to kiss her neck.

She’s so responsive to his fingers, her breath hitching in her throat when he presses into her, one
moan being swallowed by the next when he moves, and moves again.

She’s not loud, but she’s never needed to be, not with him, he can read her, knows what every sigh, every whimper, every sound she makes means. And when she says his name, stretches it out into two whole syllables, then he knows he’s got it just right.

He sits up as soon as she’s come down from her orgasm, saying, “I don’t want to crush you,” when he sees her questioning look.

“It’s okay,” Amy says, and flushes. “I like that you’re big. Bigger than me, I mean”

“Everyone’s bigger than you. Ten year old children are bigger than you. Our kid’s going to be bigger than you.”

“Still.”

She sits up too, leaning against his shoulder like she’s too worn down to hold her own head up. Now’s the time.

“So, Ben keeps talking about nightcaps?”

He actually feels her go still beside him, and he takes one of her hands in his as a precaution. When she says, “It’s nothing,” he knows not to believe her.

“Doesn’t seem like nothing. What did I miss?”

“It doesn’t matter now,” Amy says, looking away from him, “I was stupid, that’s all.”

“Yeah, but whatever it is, you’re still pissed at me for it, so I think it does matter.”

(He doesn’t really need her to tell him, if his suspicion is true, but… he thinks she needs to say it).

“It’s nothing,” she says, “Just something Ben knows about that I wish I’d never done.”

“And he thinks I need to know about it for some reason. What, did you drunk dial him, thinking he was me?” It’s meant to be a joke, but the way Amy freezes, he realises he’s hit pretty close to the mark. “When was this exactly?”

“It doesn’t matter, we don’t have to –”

“Just say it. I’m going to find out anyway, might as well get it over with.”

Amy clenches her free hand into a fist, and says the word through gritted teeth. “Nevada.”

She pulls away from him then, sitting back against the car door, and holding her head up to look him in the eye. It’s like she’s putting her armour on to deal with him, and for the first time, maybe ever, he genuinely regrets, in his heart, having been such a shit for so long. There’s a reason she won’t let him see her.

“It wasn’t worth it.”

Amy rolls her eyes. “What, having Sophie text you twenty-four-seven for a month, I bet it wasn’t.”

“You.”

“That’s not true,” Amy says, clear-eyed and sad at the same time, somehow. “You had your fantasy
life, famous Danny Egan and god knows how many –”

“You were an entire fucking continent away, what did you expect me to do?”

“What you did. You got exactly what you wanted, Dan.”

“Yeah, and it was shit.”

“But that has nothing to do with me, it’s just that you hated Jane, or being called Danny, or whatever.”

“My point is, none of that was worth making you run all the cross country ‘cause you were pissed at me.”

“I wasn’t pissed at you. I was… hurt. And it was my own fault – I know what you are, and I still let myself think that… you do it every time, and I’m the moron, because I keep forgetting that you… you’re the one who had sex with my sister, not to mention all the other shit.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I don’t think you’re capable of being sorry. It’s just that CBS didn’t turn out the way you wanted it to.”

He leans over to kiss her again, to kick start the thing that works between them, but while Amy kisses him back, there’s no… enthusiasm on her part. The mood is quite definitely gone.

“Do you think I called you the same day you dumped Buddy because I didn’t miss you?”

“I figure you saw an opportunity.”

“Yeah,” he says, pissed off, “I did. And I wasn’t going to let you fucking disappear on me again. I was going to take every single opportunity you gave me, and I’m not sorry for that.”

“Only now you’re stuck with me.”

“You think I’d want to be stuck with anyone else?”

“I don’t know.”

Amy gives an elaborate shrug, and he realises that, for now at least, it’s hopeless. She’s been poisoning herself with this stuff for two whole years, and he… he wants to groan when he realises just how much he’d helped her along the way.

There’s no fixing this with a quick fuck and a few sweet words.

So he taps her thigh, and tells her to go home, get some sleep, he’ll go smooth things over with Selina. Amy looks so relieved to get away from him it’s almost insulting, but she hates talking about emotions as much as he does, so it’s not really a surprise.

He watches her drive away, fixes his hair in a car side mirror, and dives backs into the drinks reception. He smiles and charms and laughs when Ben calls him Daddy Egan, and doesn’t even pretend not to look smug when Furlong congratulates him on getting ‘in there’ with Brookheimer at long fucking last.

When the party’s over, he stays for one last drink, thinking over his next move, and when he works it out, he almost laughs, because it’s so obvious. If she wants to avoid him, he needs to be
unavoidable; the one thing Amy’s never been able to resist is his presence.

He texts her, figuring she’ll see it before she goes to sleep, or first thing in the morning. He’s going to be her first and last thought.

*I meant what I said. Think about it.*

And then he makes his way up to Brie’s hotel room.
Chapter Five

There’s still snow on the ground in New Hampshire.

It’s the first time Amy’s been grateful that the pregnancy has her running hot – though she doesn’t like to think about what July in DC will be like – because her coat would be wholly inadequate in this situation.

Selina’s in New Hampshire to meet the state leadership, give a speech and set up a campaign office (not that they’re saying so officially), and bitches endlessly about the terrible weather and the polling suggesting Jonah will be the likely winner in the primary. It doesn’t matter how many times Amy reminds her that he’s a native son and related to Jeff Kane, Selina’s not about to be distracted by little things like facts, and eventually Amy lets Ben take over.

Not giving a shit about anything has given him truly godly levels of patience.

When they arrive at the town hall, there are snow drifts everywhere, and Dan helps her out of the car, his hand warm in hers. He doesn’t seem the least bit phased by the cold, but it’s probably one of the advantages of his reptile blood.

He’s been doing things like that constantly, and Amy doesn’t know how to feel about it. He’s not hovering (which is a relief, because she couldn’t stand it), but he’s touching her a lot more.

It’s…nice. He puts his hand on her lower back or her arm when they walk places, slings his arm around the back of her chair, brushes her hair out of her face. Nothing obtrusive, just little, gentle touches, and Amy is… entirely uncomfortable with how much she likes them.

But she does like them, and so she hasn’t asked him to stop, though sometimes she thinks she should. What if she gets used to having him around?

Still, she can’t help but pull a face when she sees who’s waiting for them. Apparently CBS are in town to cover the early stages of the primaries, and that meant Brie (or fucking Brie, as Amy had taken to calling her privately) was there to record a piece.

She knows it’s irrational to hate Brie just because she’s tall and slim and gorgeous and basically Dan’s fantasy woman all in one package… but she’s nearly five months pregnant, and fuck it, she gets to be irrational if she wants to be. And besides, Brie really brings it on herself, being so charming, all smooth words and bright smiles, and if Amy envies her ability to just tell Dan she’s going to have sex with him and have him go along with it, well that’s Amy’s business.

Somehow it’s never worked out that way for her.

But five months pregnant is definitely better than three or four months pregnant, that’s for sure. For all that she’s bigger, with a definite belly now, she doesn’t feel quite so swollen or puffed up, not even close. She’d also given in and bought a suitcase of maternity clothes on eBay – none of them were what she’d call beautiful, but at least she didn’t feel like she was going to bust out of her dresses any more.

They’re standing in one of the waiting rooms when Jonah comes in with the parade of misfits and felons that makes up his entourage, and her luck must be worse than usual, because while Dan is chatting up Brie, Jonah makes a beeline straight for her.

“Amy Brookheimer. I can’t believe my eyes.”
“What do you want Jonah?”

The expression on his face when he looks her over is even more objectionable than usual, which is really saying something. “You know,” he says, “If you got the mommy-germ, you could have come to me, Amy, we do go all the way back after all.”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but at least Dan’s foetus is normal size. I have no desire to give birth to a cyclops.”

“You sure about that? I would have gotten you so pregnant, first time you asked,” Jonah says, and then he reaches out, and touches her stomach, actually *caressing* it, getting a great big feel of her.

“Get the fuck away from me, Jonah,” she says, and she must have spoken louder than she meant to, because the entire room falls silent. She can feel them all staring at her, like she’s the one who’s being inappropriate, and Jonah still hasn’t taken his hand off her.

“How?” he says, actually *grinning*, like she’s said something funny. “Little man getting excited?”

“If you don’t remove your hand from my… I will projectile vomit all over you.”

And then she walks over to Selina and busies herself with her phone, even though her hands are shaking. Mostly with rage, but only mostly. She *hates* how her body has become practically public property overnight, everyone feeling like they can grab on whenever the fancy strikes them.

She spends most of the event quietly fuming over it, and having to listen to Gary hustle and bustle and drive himself half-crazy because of a missing earring doesn’t help. How Selina doesn’t go nuts with this, Amy doesn’t know – she must never get even a moment’s peace.

On the way back to the campaign office, she ends up in the middle seat (she always ends up in the middle seat, it’s infuriating), and she can’t help it, she shifts herself so close to Dan she’s practically sitting in his lap.

It’s just that the only other option is having the entire other side of her body pressed against Leon, and she doesn’t want that, not one bit. She’s *sick* of being poked and prodded and touched by everyone she meets, and Leon is one of the worst.

Dan is one of the only people she can stand to have touching her at the moment, and a big part of that is… she’ll never have to tell him to back off. It’s like he *knows*. There’s only so much touching she can put up with on a given day (sometimes more, sometimes less), but he never, ever, goes beyond her threshold. And he smells *good*.

If he weren’t such a shit, she’d have slept with him twice a day for the last month. At least.

But as their first conversation upon returning to the office more than demonstrates, he *is* a shit, and always will be, so… Apparently fucking Brie wants to do an interview with Selina.

Or, rather, CBS are planning to do an interview with *all* the primary candidates, and they want Selina to go last – or first – whichever position she would be most comfortable with. At least, Dan seems sure he can *negotiate* to that effect. He’s so smug about it too, so confident that he can get Brie to give him anything and everything he wants, that Amy wants to slap him across the face, or punch him in the gut, or maybe both.

Still, she goes along with it (for reasons of her own), and doesn’t even say anything when Dan says he’s going to set up drinks with her that evening. But her face must have given something away, because he lingers by her desk after it’s all been agreed, grinning in a way that would be
disconcerting if she wasn’t used to him.

“Everything okay pumpkin?”

“Of course,” she says, very conscious that Leon is listening in. “Couldn’t be better.”

“You won’t be lonely without me tonight?”

“Why, because you’re going to spend it in her hotel room? Go right ahead, enjoy yourself.”

“You’re not seriously encouraging your fiancé to –”

“We’re not attached at the hip, you can do what you want. I’m not playing your fucked up little game – sleep with her. Go right ahead. I bet it’ll be great.”

“Yeah,” Dan says, and she can tell she’s pissed him off. “It will.”

“Fine. Enjoy yourself.”

“And what will you do while I’m –”

“Whatever I feel like.”

She cuts him off as sharply as she can – she has plans for the evening, and she doesn’t want to get drawn into giving them away, because Selina will go apeshit if she finds out. Well, more apeshit than usual.

She’s pissed him off, she can tell, which…good. She has no intention of – she is not going to be the little woman pining away for him, just because she’s having his child. Any tendency in that direction needs to be nipped in the bud immediately.

She settles down to some serious work – the kind of thing she used to love when she’d just come to DC and thought recognisable policy was sometimes enacted. They need to build up Selina’s policy credentials – really draw a line between her and Jonah, while still embedding her brand new emphasis on being the most inclusive politician to ever include into her platform. Amy’s not having some university radicals start a shitstorm on twitter because they accidentally left out the disabled or something, and so she’s combing through the policies, looking for ways to update them. She has more of a feel for this kind of work than any of the others, barring maybe Kent, but it feels kind of pointless. None of this stuff is ever going to make it onto the statute books, no matter what she does.

It still takes most of the afternoon, and she’s gone wall-eyed by the time she finally looks away from her computer. Selina had departed to give a speech at Dartmouth, with Kent in attendance, and Dan had left for his drinks with Brie (in the most ostentatious manner possible), so it’s just her and Leon in the office.

She pushes her chair back from her desk and rolls her shoulders – sitting for as long as she has been is not good for her back. Maybe it never has been, maybe it’s the additional baby weight, she’s not sure which.

She closes her eyes, massaging her neck with one hand and thinking about the meeting ahead. She needs to be on the top of her game, and that means thinking through every possible angle.

Which is maybe why she’s so startled when Leon puts his hand on her shoulders, moving them like he’s trying to rub the stiffness away.
It’s so fucking weird when he does things like that.

“Thank you,” she says, “That’s much better.”

She’d expected him to move away, to stop, but he just chuckles and keeps going. “You like that?”

“Yeah,” she says, “But it’s much better now, you can –”

“Oh, if you’re enjoying it, I wouldn’t –”

Amy turns in her seat, trying to get a better look at him. “It’s really fine,” she says. “And I’m going now.”

Leon moves to stand in front of her, saying, “Oh, I think you can spare a few minutes.”

He’s too close, it’s weird, and she can smell his stupid old man aftershave and the tweed of his jacket, and see each individual hair of his moustache and… and she wants Dan, she wants him to be here so much right now, Leon wouldn’t be standing so close to her if Dan were around, but he’s not, he’s off fucking Brie, and she has to get out of this herself.

She tries to stand, saying, “I’ll be late so –”

And then he pushes her back into her chair, places his hands on her shoulders and actually shoves her down, and she’s so shocked she can only sputter, “What the fuck are you –”

And then he’s unzipped his fly, and he’s pushing his crotch into her face, and she can’t… she can’t believe this is happening, it’s like she’s viewing it from outside her body, like it’s happening to someone else, and it takes her a second to gather her wits and push back, she’s off balance, at an awkward angle in the chair, still so shocked that he pushed her, let alone…

He’s got his hand in her hair, fingers all tangled up in the strands, and it hurts, it smarts, and she can smell him so much more now, he’s taking his dick out, and Jesus, she doesn’t want to be here, she doesn’t want this, she wants to get away, she doesn’t want to know what’s going to happen next, and she starts rocking back and forth in the chair, trying to get her head away from his hand, trying to…

What happens if he hits her – what if he kicks her? What happens to the…

She knocks the chair over, and she’s on the ground, crawling away from him, on hands and knees, and her phone is in her purse, if she can just get there, she can…

But he’s behind her, he’s faster than her, and he grabs her arm, his grip tight, wrenching it back just as she picks up her purse, and she knocks him away, this can’t happen, it can’t…

As she gets to her feet, she hears someone opening the outer door of the office, and Leon hears it too, she can tell, because he immediately starts to… rearrange himself.

It’s Ben.

“Hi Ames,” he says, “Leon. I forgot my mug. What are you two still doing here?”

She grabs her purse and her coat, fumbling, trying to get them into her hands as fast as she can. “I was just leaving,” she says, and she can tell her voice is trembling.

“Probably need your rest,” Ben says, and smiles at her. “Leon wasn’t touching you inappropriately?” He says it like it’s a joke, and Amy thinks she’s going to throw up.
“Nothing like that,” Leon says, and he’s so calm, the fucker, like he wasn’t just… “We were just collaborating.”

“I don’t care if Selina offered her up in a moment of desperation,” Ben says, “It’s never going to happen. You should accept that, you’re a grown man.”

“What?”

She hadn’t meant to say that out loud, because… oh of course Selina had, of course she had, she should have known, she should have guessed…

“Back when I broke the Tibet story,” Leon says, with an ugly little smile on his face. “Said I should take you from behind, it’d be better without seeing your face.”

She doesn’t bother answering him, just pulls her coat on and leaves, getting out of the office as fast as her pregnant ass can move. She hears Ben say, “What the fuck is wrong with you?” and then he’s coming after her.

He catches up to her on the street corner, grabbing her shoulder in a way that makes her jump half out of her skin. She feels like fucking prey.

“Amy,” Ben says, and she almost can’t hear his voice, “Amy, didn’t you know?”

She shakes her head, she can’t quite talk, can’t quite breathe even, and oh god, she wants her Mom, she wants Dan, she wants to get the fuck away from New Hampshire and never come back, and, dimly, she sees Ben realise how upset she is. “All right,” he says, “I’ll talk to her. She probably didn’t mean it.”

“What’s the point? He’s… he’s her fucking golden boy, he’s even got the New York Times writing positive press about her, she’s never going to –”

She’s actually shaking – violent, full-body, contractions, all her muscles moving at once. What the fuck just happened to her?

“Take tomorrow morning off,” Ben says, “We’ll come up with something – he shouldn’t be…”

“Shouldn’t be what?”

“I’ll talk to her.”

Ben means it, she can tell, but… but there’s no way, it won’t make the slightest bit of difference, Selina’s been looking for an excuse to fire her, and if she takes away the source of all her new positive press…

“I have to go,” she says, “I have a… I have a thing.”

“Ohay,” Ben says, “I’m going to get drunk and watch the football game.”

Amy gives him something she means to be a smile, though she doesn’t think it’s successful, and sets off on foot for her dinner meeting.

She’s going to fuck it up. She’s already massively late and… and this meeting was going to be like tap-dancing over landmines already without… she can’t even think straight.

She thinks about calling Dan, having him come with her, having him handle it while she tries to get a grip on things, but…
But she can’t tell him this. If she tells him, if she even tries to put it into words, she thinks she’ll fall apart – and she can’t fall apart in front of Dan, she can’t, she can’t, she can’t, he’ll only laugh, he’ll only use it against her the way he always does, and she can’t… she can’t give him a weapon like this, not like this, it would be fatal.

Besides, he’s probably too busy fucking Brie to answer his phone.

When she gets to the restaurant, she tries to take a deep soothing breath, but it does nothing, she still feels like she just stepped off a cliff.

Since failure is inevitable, she might as well just go with it. So she puts on some lipstick, wills her hands to stop shaking, and walks in to where Senator Tom James is waiting for her.

The hostess takes her coat, and escorts her to the table where he’s sitting. They’re at a discreet table, tucked away in the back, because of course they are – Tom’s too much of a professional to have a clandestine meeting in plain sight.

He stands to greet her, kissing her on the cheek in the way that people do, and she manages not to cringe away from it. Tom James is like her Dad, he’s never once treated her as anything but a colleague, she’s fine, she’s safe, it’s fine, she can do this.

“You’re looking well,” he says, “Five, five and a half months?”

“About that,” she says, and tries not to rest her hand on her stomach. The baby seems to have caught her nerves, dancing around in there like fucking Nijinsky.

“It suits you,” he says, with a smile, and she tries to smile back.

“So everyone keeps saying.”

“Have they started grabbing your stomach yet? My wife hated that.”

She nods, and then the waitress comes for their orders, and she points at the menu, more or less at random, because she’s not sure she’s up to reading just now.

“So, Amy,” he says, when the waitress is gone, “I was surprised you took the meeting?”

“Well, I figured… it’s better than if you tried to meet with Selina directly. She always makes mistakes with you.”

“We are old friends,” he says, and it’s such transparent bullshit, she has no patience left for it.

“What do you see in her?” she says. “I know there must be something, but… I don’t get it, you’re normal, and she’s… really not. She’s like a dog – if you stop paying attention to her for five minutes she actually goes crazy.”

“Oh Amy,” Tom says, looking at her with a smile. “I thought you of all people would understand.”

“Why?”

“How’s Dan?”

“He’s even worse,” she says, and tries not to sob.

“I’m surprised he’s not here with you – you two always were a matched set.”
“Well, he had somewhere he’d rather be.”

Her tone must make it clear that she wants to close the subject, and Tom complies, leaning back and saying, “So, what I wanted to know is… why did you recommend me for the VP slot?”

“Isn’t it obvious?”

“Maybe, but I want to know why you thought it was a good idea.”

This isn’t what she’d been expecting. She’d been waiting to hear that Tom James had announced his candidacy, no doubt to universal acclaim, and had figured the meeting was an informal warning. Honour among thieves and all that shit.

“There wasn’t one reason,” she says. “I mean, if we were going just by electoral math, we would have gone for Furlong, because let’s face it, Maine didn’t do shit for us in the Electoral College.”

“But?”

“But… Furlong couldn’t even win an election for governor. It wasn’t clear he could bring the state. And also… Selina can’t stand him. She always seemed to like you – you worked well together – at least until you screwed her out of the Presidency. Which, wasn’t the main factor, but half of Hughes’ problem was no one in his Cabinet liked him. That’s a recipe for leaks everywhere.”

“So what was the main factor?”

“You weren’t tainted. All the other possibilities had spent, what, a year or more tearing the Hughes administration down, and that was always going to blow back onto Selina. The stuff Chung said alone – the attack ads would have written themselves. Since you’d been out of the game for a couple of years, there wasn’t anything in the public domain that could be used against us – I mean, I’m sure you hated Hughes as much as the rest of us did, but there wasn’t anything in the press. Plus, you had a sympathetic story, and since you were divorced, at the time, there was no chance of any Selina versus your wife bullshit – I mean, you saw how damaging the stuff with the First Lady was.”

Weirdly, laying it out like this is making her feel calmer, steadying her. She knows how to do this.

“Sounds like you had it all worked out.”

“Well obviously not,” she says, irritated. “You were supposed to have the common sense to realise your only route to power was through her, but you fell into the VP bear trap. ‘I could do so much better if I was President.’ I warned Selina about it for years, you know – but I honestly thought you were smarter than that.”

The waitress arrives with their orders, and the smell of the food awakens a genuine hunger in her. Fortunately she’d ordered ravioli, (it turned out), and so it’s easy to stuff her face. And Tom is rambling on about how well his book had sold and how he’d been having meetings up and down Wall Street, and Sidney Purcell had been putting out feelers for him.

It’s boring as shit, so when she’s finished eating, Amy says, “You’re running for President, I get it. Do you want me to tell Selina so she doesn’t shatter all the glass in New Hampshire when she finds out?”

He gives her a strange look. “No. I’m telling you because I want to hire you.”

She replays his words in her head for a second, then licks her lips and leans forward, “What?”
“I want you for my campaign manager.”

“I don’t understand.”

“What’s to understand? You’re one of the brightest political minds in the party, easily one of Selina’s best assets, and I trust you to tell me the truth. Isn’t that what I need in a campaign manager?”

“But… but I’m pregnant.”

Tom cocks his head, and Amy realises how…young that sounded. “No one wants a campaign manager who’s going to disappear and have a baby for two weeks, Selina’s made that very clear, let alone one whose name is tied to a sex scandal, why would you want to take that on?”

“Because you’re the best.”

“I don’t understand – Selina’s been threatening to fire me every two minutes and making me do these awful press interviews and I can’t even tell her that Leon just tried to…”

She puts her hand to her mouth, willing herself to stop talking, she has to stop talking (she is not going to lose her shit in front of Tom James, she’s not).

There’s a long moment of silence, and then he says, very quietly, “Leon tried to what?”

When she looks up at him, it’s the first time she’s ever seen him look angry. And she realises…she doesn’t have to say it. “You already know.”

“There’ve been… rumblings, for a while now – one of my old staffers interned at the Post, so I heard things. Never be in a lift with him alone, avoid having a drink with him, the usual warning signs. Did he assault you?”

She nods, because she doesn’t trust herself to speak, and fortunately the waitress interrupts them with the dessert menu.

It shakes in Amy’s hands, and ultimately she puts it down, flat on the table, though she doesn’t know why she’s pretending to read it. She can’t look at him.

When the waitress comes back, Tom orders apple pie (because of course he does), and then, with a winning smile, suggests Amy have a banana split. When she gives him a questioning look, he says, “The potassium is good for the baby,” and it’s… such a Dad thing to say, she actually laughs.

Once they’re alone, he folds his hands on the table, and looks at her seriously. “I was always going to offer you a job, but I really do think it’s your best option right now. However, there are conditions.”

“Oh?”

Here it comes. There was always going to be something. He wants her to tell him Selina’s deepest darkest secrets or something.

“First of all – maternity leave.”

“What about it?”

“Minimum two months. Ideally three.”
“But – but you can’t want me away from the campaign that long, I’ll lose track, I’ll –”

“Two weeks, Amy? That’s what Selina was giving you?”

“We hadn’t really… she won’t talk about it.”

“It’s barbaric. My wife had a baby recently, and trust me, you’re going to need more than that. It wouldn’t be good for you or for the baby.”

“But…three whole months –”

“We can conference call or something for the last two, three weeks if need be. But this is non-negotiable. How would it look if my campaign manager collapsed because she was trying to work a full schedule minutes after giving birth? What message does that send? Besides,” he smiles, “We’re not going to announce until September – October, maybe.”

“Everyone knows you’re running.”

“Maybe. But they won’t start really digging until it’s official, and I want to give them as little time for that as possible.”

“Why? What’s the skeleton?”

“There isn’t one,” Tom says, and she laughs, “Other than my… with Selina. But the press will invent one if they can – you know how quickly they get bored. And unlike Selina, I have one or two bodies still buried.”

Their desserts arrive, and Amy digs in. She doesn’t know what to do, what to say, but she does know how to eat, so…

He lasts all of three minutes. “So, what’s your answer?”

“I… I spent my whole life trying to…you have to understand, Selina taught me everything I know.”

“Did she?” Tom says, sounding sceptical. “Amy, if she won’t even tell you what maternity leave you can have… can you really trust her to give you a safe working environment?”

“Politics has never been safe,” she says, thinking of Jonah and half a dozen others.

“I imagine you know that better than most. But this is different.”

It is, but she doesn’t know if she can explain it to him.

“Look,” he says, “I don’t want to push you, especially not when you’re upset, but…I am going to need an answer, and soon.”

She nods. “Can I… can I sleep on it?”

“What do you take me for? Of course.” He smiles at her, and then says, “Now eat your dessert before it melts.”

They talk for a few minutes more, and then Tom settles the bill, and walks her out to her cab, and fifteen minutes on from him offering a job, she’s walking into her hotel room.

She’s so exhausted, so relieved to be inside, to be away from people, to be somewhere with a locked door and solitude, that she slumps and leans her head against the door as soon as she’s closed it.
Tears are already leaking down her cheeks, and she can’t stop them, she can’t even try.

She doesn’t want to go. She doesn’t want to be driven out of her job by a sexually abusive prick but… but she can’t stay. She knows she can’t say. It’s not safe, like Tom says, it’s not good for her, it’s not good for them…

“Honey, I’m home.”

Fuck.

When she looks up, she sees Dan, sitting with his legs stretched out on the bed. He’s wearing pyjamas – well, boxers and an old tee shirt – and there’s an iPad beside him.

She tries to swallow back the tears, tries to call them back in, but it comes out as one long, shuddering breath, and Dan sees it, she can tell, because the grin slides right off his face.

She cannot deal with him right now.

“What’s the matter?” he says, starting to get up, and no… that is not happening, they’re not going to talk about this.

She runs, almost, for the bathroom, and closes the door right in his face. She can hear him say, “What the fuck is going on?” in a genuinely irritated tone of voice before she turns the shower on.

She’d been so sure he’d be with Brie, certain she’d have time alone to… to decompress and think and settle in her mind what she needed to do. But instead he’s right there, right in her face, and how is she supposed to…

She takes a long, hot shower, and makes sure she’s finished crying before she’s switched it off. She feels wobbly, but she can’t afford to set him off, so she needs to clamp down hard on any impulse to talk.

She wraps herself in a towel, takes a deep breath, and goes back into the main room. She can feel him staring at her, so she walks briskly to his suitcase, saying, “I need one of your shirts. My pyjamas don’t fit any more.”

“Okay.”

She pulls a dark navy tee shirt over her head, taking the towel off underneath and pulling her panties back on afterwards – Dan’s so much taller than her that, even with her belly, it still falls to mid-thigh. It will do.

She takes her phone out of her purse, and plugs it in to charge, and then curls up on the bed, under the covers but as far away from him as she can get.

“You were a long time in there.”

“It has a rainfall shower. I like rainfall showers.”

“Is that the only reason?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

There’s a pause, and then Dan heaves a long-suffering sigh. “I didn’t sleep with her.”

Even after everything, thinking about him with another woman still makes something twist in her
gut, but she shakes her head. “I think you mean you didn’t sleep with her tonight.”

“Amy, come on –”

“What? Am I supposed to feel honoured because you managed not to have sex with a human woman, for once?”

“You can’t possibly be threatened by Brie.” He’s closer behind her now, his breath tickling the back of her neck. “She’s never going to be present me with my own personal bundle of joy.”

“Shut up, just shut up! Can you not just… not be you for once, can you just –”

She’s going to start crying again, it’s fucking ridiculous – how has she let her life get to this point?

“Hey,” Dan says, and his hand is on her shoulder, “hey, hey, hey, you have to calm down.”

He turns her over, so she’s looking at him, and she can’t stop herself… she rolls into him, curling into his side, burying her face in his neck, trying not to cry again.

(Later, she’ll realise that it’s to Dan’s immense credit that he didn’t comment on this, didn’t question her suddenly flinging herself at him, just took it).

“Look,” he says, “If it bothers you so fucking much, you could have just come with me – staked your claim right in front of her.”

She mumbles something into his neck, and Dan chuckles. “You’re going to have to stay it out loud sweetheart.”

“Watching you flirt with Miss America all night is not my idea of a good time.”

“I’ll happily flirt with you instead if you’ll let me.”

“I don’t want to flirt.”

She doesn’t even know what she means, and she really doesn’t want to talk about this right now anyway, but… he’s warm, and strong, his arm tight around her so that she’s cuddled right up to him. He’s slid his under hand under her tee shirt, so it’s resting on the small of her back, and his thumb is stroking her skin, gently, lightly, back and forth and back and forth. For the first time since Leon… she feels like she can take a full breath.

His other hand is playing with her hair, smoothing it out, and she feels him smile when he says, “Are you done using me as a human comfort blanket?”

“No,” she says, burrowing closer.

“Is this just about –”

“It’s just been a really fucking horrible day, okay?”

There’s a hysterical tone in her voice that she really doesn’t like, but Dan doesn’t seem to notice it. All he says is, “What ever happened to that guy anyway?”

“What guy?”

“Your little debate monkey.”
“Jackson?”

“Yeah, that was his name. What did you do him?”

She shrugs, just a little, and says, “There was no need for him once you came back, so –”

“So you just threw him overboard? Harsh. All he wanted was for you to pay attention to him and maybe sit on his face a few times, and you just –”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

Dan sounds gleeful. “Did you not know? His crush on you was so obvious he could barely walk straight. I swear, you don’t notice anything.”

“You’re being ridiculous.”

“Prove me wrong then.”

She tilts her head up, looking him in the eye for the first time since she came into the room. “You think that’s what he wanted because it’s what you wanted – you’re so narcissistic you can’t imagine anyone being different to you.”

Dan snorts, and says, “You think I would have settled for just that?”

She’s too tired for this. “I don’t know,” she says, and nestles into him again.

“Okay,” Dan says, and, in an extremely unusual move, leaves it at that. She falls asleep, slowly, listening to his heartbeat and the evening news playing on his iPad.

When she does wake up, in the middle of the night, surprisingly, he’s still holding her. She’d thought… she’d expected to wake up marooned on the far side of the bed, and it’s a pleasant surprise to be wrong.

But she has to pee, so she gets up and goes to the bathroom. It’s only when she comes back that she realises… she’s not sure if she can cuddle up to him again, if he’ll let her, if she should keep her distance.

So, she lies down, right beside him but not touching him, staring at the little she can see of his face in the low light. And after a moment or two, he slits one eye open, and grabs her hand, pulling her back on top of him again, saying, “Don’t be fucking stupid.”

Slowly, very slowly, she reaches a hand up to touch his face, and when he doesn’t do anything, doesn’t say anything terrible, she gives in to the impulse, and kisses him. It’s slow, at first, all lips, but then he slides one hand up to the back of her neck, and pulls her in closer.

She can’t get close enough, is the truth, can’t press herself into him enough, and when he laughs she feels it run through her.

It’s horrible, feeling this way. She loves him, she’s known that, known it for a long time now, but to love him like this, to feel it in every cell of her body, it’s awful, it’s the worst thing that’s ever happened to her, and…

And she’s going to leave him.

When he starts to pull her tee shirt off she fights him (though they don’t stop kissing), trying to keep it on, trying to move his hands elsewhere.
“What’s the matter?” he says, in between kissing her jaw, her neck, the little hollow at the base of her throat.

“What’s the matter?” she says, “It’s just…I’m different now.”

“Yeah, I know,” Dan says, getting his hand on one of her breasts. “In case you haven’t noticed, I’m kind of into that.”

His teasing her nipple with his thumb, and sliding his other hand into her underwear. “I want to see,” he says, and Amy shakes her head.

“No yet. I don’t even know how to… when I’m like this, I don’t –”

“Ssh,” he says, “I get it. But I can still touch, right?”

Her nod is probably too eager, because she feels him grin. He doesn’t stop touching her, not until she’s moaning out loud, wet around his fingers and gasping in his ear.

And that’s when he turns them, slightly, so she’s lying on her side. “Is this easier?”

She nods, and then turns her head back to kiss him. With his body pressed against hers and his arm over her front, she feels surrounded by him, and it’s good.

When he pushes into her, they both moan, and Dan grits out, “Why’d you wait so long to do this?”

He thrusts, hard, and she gasps, “I don’t know.”

And it takes… no time at all to find their rhythm, his body moving with hers so perfectly it makes her want to sob (why couldn’t she have this with someone who wasn’t terrible?) He keeps kissing her, keeps touching her, sure and confident, as though he knows her body as well as she does (and how could he? It’s not like they’ve done this much), and…

It ends. And it ends so soon, both of them tumbling over the brink, one after the other, much faster than Amy has ever managed before. If only it could have lasted forever.

They fall asleep, still entwined, and she doesn’t wake until late the next morning, when she feels Dan shaking her by the shoulder.

“Wake up, sleeping beauty,” he says, “Or you’re going to be late.”

He’s sitting beside her on the bed, fully dressed, shirt perfectly pressed, cufflinks shiny and tie neatly knotted. And so she does something she’s never had the courage to do before, and just kisses him, pulling him down by his tie and sliding her tongue into his mouth.

He’s properly on top of her, propping himself up with his arms, by the time they break apart, and Amy wraps her legs around him, hoping to keep him there. His weight on her feels good.

“We have an early meeting,” he says.

“You do,” Amy says, starting to unbuckle his belt and undo his fly, “I’ve got the morning off, so…”

Whatever Dan was going to say is cut off by his reaction when she gets her hands on him. He groans into her neck, and kisses her fiercely, his mouth demanding and hot on hers.

He’s never been one to just play along, and soon enough he’s touching her, warming her up the same way she is with him, quick and just a little mean (she is making him late) and completely
unrelenting.

When she puts him inside her, he pauses for a second, and says, “Is it all right this way, me on top?”

“What, are you seriously telling me that after all that time in the gym you can’t do a plank for five minutes?”

“It’s not me I’m worried about.”

“Dan! Shut the fuck up and move.”

He laughs, right in her face, the asshole, and then she’s laughing too, and it is the weirdest sex she’s ever had. It’s funny, and yet… not, not at all, she feels she’s barely had him and now she has to…

It could have been like this all the time.

Oddly enough, this time it’s slow, drawn-out, Dan taking the time to savour each movement, making her beg for him to go faster, to give her more, to push harder (and Amy knows that when she remembers this, she’s going to be embarrassed right down to her toes). He’s…tender with her, and she didn’t know he could be like that.

When it’s over, he slumps into her neck for a moment, and says, “You’ve been holding out on me.”

“Yeah, well,” she says, trying to smile. “Maybe if you weren’t such a prick all the time, you’d get laid more often.”

He snorts in amusement. “You realise I’m going to have to get this dry-cleaned?”

“I always wanted to fuck up one of your suits.”

“Oh really?”

She rolls her eyes. “We both know you won’t be able to get it up again for at least… you need to go to work.”

Dan’s smiling so brightly, it’s like he doesn’t even feel her little jab. He kisses her again, and lingers, his mouth open and hers, and it’s fucking torture, she needs him to go.

He sits up and looks comically dismayed at just how mussed his appearance is. It takes five minutes or so for him to change, and he talks to her the whole time, talking through the headlines and speculating on what the PI might be able to tell them about Danny Chung.

Right before he leaves, he kisses her one more time, threading the fingers of his left hand through hers. “Rest up,” he says, “cause I’m going to keep you busy tonight.”

“Promises, promises,” she says, and hopes he’s too focused on the engagement ring to see the anguish in her face.

“I told you, Ames. We can be great,” he says, and kisses her forehead.

She has never, never been more grateful to see him leave.

She waits a few minutes, savouring the last warmth Dan left in the bed, and then takes out her phone, and drafts an email to Selina and another to Tom James.

It’s very simple – two words.
“I’m in.”
Chapter Six

The campaign office is near the hotel, so Dan walks to work, stopping for a coffee on the way, and enjoying the crisp morning air. When he catches glimpses of himself in car windows, he can see he’s grinning the smuggest, most obnoxious grin imaginable, and he doesn’t even try to stop.

It’s a good morning.

Birds are singing, the sun is shining, his PI has made some progress on Chung, and Amy finally let him in.

He knew she would eventually, of course, it was inevitable, but…

But he’s relieved he won’t have to wait until the baby’s born – or longer – to make proper arrangements. They’re in New Hampshire for a few more days, so he’ll soften her up some more, take her for dinner a few times, go down on her until she cries, whatever, and once they’re back in DC…

He’s been scouting for houses. Near her parents’ house, but not too near – close enough to take advantage of free childcare, but not so close they can’t get away from them if they want to. And a not unreasonable driving distance from the centre of DC – adding a lengthy commute on to things would only create unnecessary stress.

Given the choice, his favourite was the town house in Georgetown, but they’d go on a little trip, and she could tell him what she thought, and then they’d be set up.

He’d have mentioned it before now – living with her parents, not to mention Sophie, clearly wasn’t doing Amy any good at all – but she’d seemed half an inch from jumping ship entirely. The last thing he’d wanted to do was upset the equilibrium.

They’ll buy the house and get settled in with the unending stacks of baby stuff, and maybe then, maybe then Amy will calm the fuck down and realise it wasn’t going to be the disaster she imagined. And if every night was like the night before had been… He was definitely going to benefit from the arrangement. (At least, if he could get her to relax enough to take all her clothes off).

Kent’s already in the office, and reports back on the Dartmouth event. Selina was a hit, apparently, as unlikely as it sounds, and she sat down and agreed to do an interview on the spot with the college newspaper. Normally, this would be ominous, but Kent assures him it went well, and that Selina’s stance against on-campus harassment went down a treat.

It’s hard to get used to positive press attention. Not that Dan expects it to last, but he finally understands why Selina keeps Leon on despite him being a creepy fuck. Which isn’t to say he’s going to let himself get used to it.

Selina arrives, Gary in tow, preening herself about having inspired so many young people the night before, and demanding a bottled water. She’s in an unusually good mood, and doesn’t even complain when Ben says he gave Amy the morning off.

Well, she does complain, but only a little, which for Selina is a fucking miracle. If even she’s noticed how stressed out Amy’s been… Dan would like to think that the sex had helped with that, but somehow he didn’t think two orgasms were enough. She’d been so damn clingy the night before…
If he’d known his seeing Brie would upset her so much – well, he’d probably still have done it, that interview on CBS was too good an opportunity to pass up, but he might have been more…he’d have brought Amy along, really riled her up, pissed her off enough that she’d actually talk to him.

He’d rather deal with her screaming at him than fucking crying.

Ben and Kent are discussing potential ways of undercutting Jeff Kane when all hell breaks loose; Selina screaming at him, “What the fuck did you do?”

“Nothing. What?”

She shakes her phone in his face. “What is this shit? You two were supposed to use this fuck-up for the campaign, not turn it into a goddamn farce.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, ma’am.”

“Your fucking girlfriend just resigned from the campaign –”

“What? That’s impossible, she was – we just –”

“Read it, shithead.”

He takes the phone from Selina, and reads a short – very fucking short – email from Amy, thanking Selina for everything, and resigning with immediate effect from the Meyer Campaign.

Ben is swearing – mostly at Leon – and Selina is screaming at Gary that she needs a coffee, and Dan has to take a second to read the email again, because it cannot…it cannot say what he thinks it says.

It makes no sense.

And that’s what he says. “Ma’am, I haven’t done anything – we were fine, better than fine, it’s not…”

“Get out of my sight,” Selina says, pointing at the door. “Putting your fucking love story at the heart of the campaign was your idea, so you go get her and you fix it. Fuck her into a coma, I don’t care, whatever it takes.”

He doesn’t need to be told twice. When she gets in her more…aggressive moods, he doesn’t want to be anywhere near her – and he needs a second to clear his head.

She was fine.

Or, okay, maybe not fine, maybe he’d upset her more than he realised, but he’d seen the look on her face that morning when he kissed her. Amy could never hide anything, not from him, and he knew what that look on a woman’s face meant. She's in love.

It takes him ten, twelve minutes to walk back to the hotel, and he builds up a serious head of steam on the way. He tries calling her as he goes, but she doesn’t pick up.

What is she doing? Why didn’t she talk to him, why didn’t she say something, if she’d got it into her head to do something insane?

When he gets into the hotel room, the first thing he sees is Amy’s suitcase, neatly packed, on the bed. She’s laid an outfit – dress, shoes, underwear – out for herself, and there’s the remains of a room service breakfast on the table.
He pushes open the bathroom door, and sees her. She’s in the bath, lying back and actually relaxing (Amy never relaxes). Her hair is piled up on her head, and the round curves of her belly and breasts are sticking out of the water. If it weren’t for an ugly, deep purple bruise on one arm, she’d look like a photo shoot, a painting even.

He hasn’t seen her naked since that night in New York – she’d been so shy around him – and he’d had no idea, no real idea just how much she’d changed.

He still would, of course, but looking at her, it’s like it hits him, really hits him, for the first time that… there’s an actual baby in there, more than half way to being grown. Jesus fucking Christ, no wonder Amy’s been a wound-up freak for weeks on end.

They really don’t have their shit together.

She opens one eye and looks up at him. “Oh no,” she says, and there’s a weird, playful tone in her voice. “Cavalry’s here. Did I fuck up?”

“What the fuck, Amy?”

She heaves a deep, exhausted sigh. “Hand me a damn towel and stop staring at me like a freak.” When he doesn’t move, she barks at him, “Now.”

He picks one off the rail and holds it up for her. When she gives him a look, he ostentatiously turns his head away, only looking back when he feels her take the towel from his hands. She doesn’t wait for him, but steps back into the hotel room, padding over towards the bed and picking up her underwear.

At any other time, watching Amy... arrange herself as she puts on her bra would be incredibly distracting, but he’s too angry to notice (well, almost).

“What the fuck, Amy?”

“Something bothering you?”

“You’ve resigned… you just emailed Selina and resigned, what the –”

“Yeah.”

“What are you thinking?”

“I got a better offer,” she says, starting to pull her dress on. “And I took it. Nothing you haven’t done a thousand times.”

“A better offer – why didn’t you talk to me?”

“I didn’t see that it was necessary,” Amy says, and she has this… overly calm quality to her voice that tips him off. It’s an act.

“We’re having a kid… we’re fucking engaged, and you didn’t even –”

“That’s one of the perks of the new job, you know. No press interviews, no having to act like some fake fiancé, none of this shit that I never wanted. Oh, and full maternity leave.”

“So you’re just going to fucking vanish? Again?”

Amy shrugs. “Didn’t seem to bother you before. I figure I solve both our problems. I get away
from this fucking cesspit, and you can go back to using women like fucking… I can’t even come up with a metaphor, you know what I mean.”

“And even after last night, you didn’t think to warn me?”

She’s trying to sound careless, but her face twists in anguish as she says, “You of all people ought to know that sex doesn’t mean anything.”

“Yeah, you’ve always been one for meaningless sex, that sounds exactly like you, Ames.”

“How would you know?”

“Because I know you. I know everything about you, and don’t you try to tell me for even one second that last night was just a casual fuck. If that was what you were after you could have just grabbed Leon by the –”

Amy slaps him. And it’s not some light, girlish tap, no, she really goes for it, hitting him so hard his head snaps to one side.

She turns her back to him, and he can see she’s rubbing her hand – it must have hurt her too. It takes her a second to speak, like she’s swallowing something down. “Don’t make jokes about things you don’t understand.”

“Well then make me understand. You’ve worked for Selina since you were…we would have sorted out the maternity leave shit, that’s not a good enough reason.”

“It’s just for the best.”

Her voice is… is little – wounded sounding.

“Walking away from Selina – from me, that’s for the best? If it was you wouldn’t look like you’re swallowing back vomit even thinking about it. You don’t want to do this. I know you don’t.”

“You know a lot less than you think you do.”

“Amy, you’re a terrible liar, you always have been. You think I don’t know… you fucking love me, your heart beats like fucking house music whenever I touch you, even when I smile at you, so don’t tell me –”

“Fine!” Her face is flushed, and the halves of her dress are dangling down her back. “Fine, yes, fine. I do. And it has made me fucking miserable as long as I’ve felt this way, it is the worst thing that has ever… Want to taunt me about that some more? One more thing for you to fucking poke at and make fun of, the same way you always do. Is it funny, like it was funny when you fucked my sister? Or like when Buddy humiliated me, is it funny like that?”

“You’re angry at me because of what Buddy did?”

“I’m angry at you because you enjoyed it. Do you have any idea how that felt? Or was it just more entertainment for you? One more chance to fucking laugh at me. Well forget it – I’m not sticking around for… and if you think I’m bringing a kid into… you are out of your fucking mind. I’m not putting a baby through that, and if you had even an atom of decency, you wouldn’t either.” She pauses for a moment, swallows, and continues. “Now zip me up.”

Numbly, he does so – and then he puts his arms around her, pulling her back against him. And it works too, for a second at least – he feels her go soft, and maybe… maybe he can still win her over.
He bends so his mouth is right by her ear, and says, “You know how I feel about you.”

But it doesn’t work. If anything, it backfires, because Amy stiffens again, and says, “You can’t even say the word, Dan. And even if you did…even if I believed you, it’s not worth much, is it?”

“What?”

“How was fucking Brie?”

“I told you,” he says, letting his hands rest on her stomach. “I didn’t sleep with her.”

“You didn’t sleep with her last night. But that night in D.C., you did, didn’t you?”

“You were giving me the cold shoulder,” he says, and it’s weak defence even to his own ears.

“And so you went off and fucked another woman. My loving fiancé. Not ten minutes after telling me… you’re sick. And I’m better off away from you.”

She pushes out of his arms, and goes to put on her shoes. He wants to grab her, pull her back, because he knows…he knows, this isn’t it, this isn’t the real reason, it can’t be. But the way she’s acting…

All he can think of to say is, “What about the ring?”

“I left it on the nightstand.”

“Take it.”

“Dan, I’m leaving the campaign, there’s no need to keep the charade going anymore, you can –”

“Take it with you.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, I’m not going to walk around with –”

“Take it, or I’ll leave it here. Give some chambermaid a really big tip.”

“You’re not going to do that – you’re not that stupid. That ring cost you money, and now you can get it back.”

He picks the ring off the night stand and walks over to her, pressing it into her hand. “Take it,” he says. “It’s yours.”

Amy rolls her eyes, but accepts the ring. “I’ll keep it until you’ve come to your senses,” she says, and he can’t help it…

He kisses her. Cups her cheek in his hand and kisses her mouth, and then her cheekbone, her forehead, her lips…

She’s breathing heavily, her chest rising and falling against his, and he skims his other hand down to feel her swollen belly.

And for the first time, he feels it… a ghost of a movement, barely even anything, a flutter, and yet…

“Don’t go.”

“I have to,” Amy says, and she sounds like she might cry. She kisses him, quickly, firmly, and says,
“Come on. You knew we weren’t going to work together forever.”

“We can be great, Ames, you know that.”

“I’m not going to be paraded around like some fucking Barbie doll fiancé, smiling on cue for you and pretending not to have a thought of my own, forget it, Dan, it’s not worth it.”

And then she pulls away, puts her coat on, picks up her suitcase and her purse, and walks for the door. Just before she leaves, he manages to say, “Amy I do… you know I actually love you.”

But Amy just laughs. At least, it could be a laugh, though it could also be something else entirely. “No,” she says, and her face does that thing where she’s clearly trying to hold it still. “You don’t.”

And then she’s gone.

He sits on the floor, leaning back against the bed, staring into space. This is not how this was supposed to go.

She just left.

It takes ten minutes or so for him to notice that his phone is lighting up. When it finally penetrates his consciousness, he realises he has to get back to the campaign office, and pushes himself off the floor.

He’s in a daze the entire time he walks back, and he’s not really…prepared for the chaos that awaits him. Chaos for he’s not sure what reason – it was supposed to be a light day, so there’s no reason for anyone to panic, and yet Gary is running around trying to get Selina one of the twelve things she needs right this second, and Ben is talking about getting Catherine on the phone, and they all look at him like he’s about to pull a rabbit out of his hat the moment he walks through the door.

“She’s not coming back,” he says, and sinks into one of the office chairs.

“What?”

Selina sound dangerous, but he kind of doesn’t care right now. “She got a better offer, she said, and… she’s already gone.”

“That ungrateful little… after everything I did for her! I’m the one who turned her into something useful – I’m the one who found her when she was some wide-eyed little nothing and made her a player, and this is how she…”

“Of course, ma’am,” Ben says, “But you know she was never comfortable with the whole engagement thing, it was clear enough –”

“Comfortable? I’m the one who made it so that Dan couldn’t fuck off and abandon her and the kid, and she wasn’t comfortable? She doesn’t even begin to know what’s good for her, that’s the fucking problem, she went off and nearly married a sex offender, so she should have known to listen to me –”

“Well maybe if you hadn’t threatened to fire her over a doctor’s appointment she’d still be here,” he says, and from the look on Kent’s face, he can tell he’s too angry, too angry to speak to the candidate.

“Ma’am,” Ben says, “Can we have a word in private?”
He takes her into her private office, and they come back ten or fifteen minutes later, and Selina seems to have accepted that yes, Amy isn’t coming back, no matter how much she screams about it.

Not that that stops her. Like clockwork, she takes the time to remind him, once (or twice) an hour that it’s his fault she’s down a campaign manager, it’s his fault Amy left, and…

And by the Friday night he feels about ready to boil over. He skulks around the hotel bar, picks up one of the locals, and comes into work late the next day.

It doesn’t help.

He feels like shit. Waking up in the middle of the night and seeing the redhead’s pretty face on the pillow beside him just made him feel worse, if anything.

He gets up early and goes for a run, because he doesn’t want to waste his time talking to her, talking to her will just make it worse. Every word that comes out of her mouth will remind him that she is Not-Amy, that she could have been Amy, if he hadn’t… if he’d just…

Ben takes one look at him when he finally arrives, and shakes his head. But they don’t talk about it – at least, they don’t talk about it until late that night, alone at the bar.

He’s on his fifth whiskey, and still not feeling better. It fucking hurts, knowing he has to go back up to a room without Amy in it, knowing that she’s somewhere else, probably with someone else, and… if this is how she’d felt, all this time, well then no wonder…

“Look kid,” Ben says, “I get the feeling Amy didn’t tell you everything.”

“Oh?” he says, making eye contact with the barman to request a top up.

“The night before she left, she found out something…she found out Selina tried to pimp her out to Leon.”

“What?”

“During the… when he was printing all that stuff. Selina offered her up, apparently, said he could have Amy if he stopped printing the stories. He told her.”

“Why – why would he even —”

“I don’t fucking know,” Ben says, “He’s a creep – he was still pissed off she was with you, I guess. Anyway, after her fuck-up of a fiancé parading her around as part of his sex scandal, maybe it was the final straw.”

“I can see that,” he says, though he can’t… not really. She could have just screamed at Selina and got it over with, there was no need to blow everything up.

“How’s she doing anyway?”

“I’m the last person who’d know.”

“Oh for jesus’ sake,” Ben says, “Have you called her?”

“I tried.”

“Didn’t your father teach you anything? She’s the mother of your kid, and you just let her, what, walk off alone?”
“She didn’t want me,” he says, and knocks back the rest of his drink.

“Dan, take it from someone older and wiser. That girl has never not wanted you. You just fucked her up so badly she’s given up. Do you even have a plan here?”

“She’ll come back eventually,” he says, with a certainty he doesn’t feel. “She did before.”

“That’s the plan?” Ben heaves a deep, disappointed sigh. “You have got to shape the fuck up.”

“Well what am I supposed to do? She won’t even answer her phone – it’s exactly the same as when she fucked off to Nevada.”

“And what did you do then?”

“She came back, the way I knew she would, I didn’t –”

Ben laughs then, a deep, malicious laugh. “Doing nothing isn’t the grand plan you think it is. Do you always make her do all the running?”

“Worked so far.”

“Yeah, well, unless you want to wait another two years to get a chance to hold your fucking kid, I suggest you think of something else. If only because you are a fuck-up waiting to happen. Every time you’re around Selina right now you’re a goddamn menace. It’s not her fault Amy decided to run and blow everything up on the way out.”

“I’ll think about it,” he says, and downs his final drink.

He stumbles into his – their – hotel room a few minutes later, and tries to call her. Just hearing her voice on the answering machine makes him want to swear out loud, and he hangs up before he can leave a message.

He’s never felt like this before.

It’s another two days before he thinks of something, and it’s purely because he’s reviewing his calendar for the next week, and sees the appointment.

She might not answer his calls, but she has to go see her doctor.

So, on the day in question, he shows up an hour early and sits in the waiting room. Amy’s not going to want a scene in front of her gynaecologist, and maybe seeing him here of his own volition, without a command from Selina (or anyone else) will make her realise he’s serious.

When she does finally walk in, he notices two things almost immediately. Her Dad’s with her (because Dan has the worst fucking luck), and she’s wearing the engagement ring.

He’d think of it as a good sign, except she greets him with, “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“Oh, did your leaving Selina’s campaign magically change the father of that child? Besides, you knew I wouldn’t miss it,” he says, louder, as her father approaches. He tries to give him a winning smile (but he’s nervous, and he’s pretty sure it slips a bit).

Fortunately, Amy doesn’t seem to want to start a fight in front of her father, because she doesn’t say anything else, and they sit in an awkward row until the doctor calls them in.

Her Dad takes the seat beside the table, and Dan has to hang back, leaning against the wall, while the
doctor asks Amy the usual array of questions and does the scan. He feels like a spare part.

Everything looks good – looks great – apparently, and Amy reports that the kid is kicking the shit out of her (well, that’s not what she says, but it’s what she means). “It’s worse when… if I’m upset about anything,” she says, “It’s like it knows, it starts bouncing around in there.”

“I wouldn’t worry,” the doctor says. “Though of course, we do recommend avoiding stress.”

Dan laughs and tries to turn it into a cough. At this stage of her life, Amy probably finds a lack of stress stressful.

When the scan reveals that the baby is a girl, he’s not sure who’s more dismayed, him or Amy’s father. Yet another Brookheimer girl to be fucked over by men and screwed by her own fertility.

How this pregnancy alone hasn’t given him a second heart attack, Dan doesn’t know.

Even Amy seems disappointed, though she doesn’t say as much.

Afterwards, he’s stuck in the waiting room with her Dad, trying and failing to make polite conversation. It’s not that he minds that it’s a girl – he doesn’t – but he also… he feels like someone’s playing a cosmic joke on him. She’s bound to be gorgeous, and whip-smart too – she’s his, after all – and the things that could happen…

Amy agrees to go for lunch with him, saying, “Daddy, it’s fine,” when her father objects. She doesn’t talk in the car though, doesn’t even comment, not until he pulls up outside an Indian restaurant.

“How did you –”

“You kept complaining that you wanted ‘hot’ food in New Hampshire, so…”

She seems startled, but follows him in without argument. He waits until they’ve ordered before asking the question.

“You’re still wearing the ring.”

“It was just easier,” she says, not looking at him. “With my family. They’re already freaking out about my leaving Selina, I didn’t want them to… it doesn’t mean I have expectations.”

“Don’t you?”

She meets his eyes then, giving him a curious look, as though she’s trying to work out his angle. “Why did you come today?”

“Because you weren’t answering your phone, and I needed to talk to you.”

“About what?”

He takes an envelope out of his pocket and slides it across the table to her. “About your family, among other things. Open it.”

When Amy takes out the key, she seems baffled. “What is this?”

“The key to my apartment.” He holds up his hand to stave off the inevitable protests. “I should have given it to you before. I’m going to clear out the office – you can put all the baby stuff in there.”
“What?”

“Look,” he says, “I didn’t talk about this stuff, cause you were stressed out enough already and I didn’t want you running for the hills. But since you’ve already done that…keep it.”

“For what?”

“For whatever. You need a quiet place to get the fuck away from your family, because let’s face it, they piss you off even more than I do, well you’ve got it. You want to move in, so you’ve got your own space when the baby comes, well, like I said, I’ll clear out the office.”

“And where will you be?”

“We’re on the road so much right now… I’m barely there two nights a week, so…”

“So, you want me to move in with you even though we’re not –”

“It’s not what I want,” he says, “But… right now, if it helps –”

“What’s in it for you?”

“I don’t know – you not having a meltdown and turning our kid into an adrenaline junkie before she’s even born? You know as well as I do your family get on your last nerve.”

“If I did this… it wouldn’t mean…”

“It wouldn’t mean we’re together, yeah, yeah,” he says, “I get it.”

“Are you seriously pissed at me?” Amy says, and she seems incredulous. “I’m the one who should be… how do I know you’re not going to bring home other –”

“Yes.” She says it like no other answer to the question is even…imaginable, and when she sees his face, she adds, mocking, “Oh, did you want to marry me? Were you picking out monogrammed towels?”

“I don’t want to marry anyone else.”

“That’s not the same thing,” she says. “And this doesn’t mean I’ll sleep with you.”

“Look,” he says, leaning forward, “This is a win-win for me. You move in, if you want to, stay until you can move back into your apartment, and I know your family aren’t wearing you and the kid down to bits. And maybe, maybe you stay longer, and you realise I meant what I fucking said. Either way, we all benefit. I have only one small, small request.”

“This’ll be good.”

“When my parents come to visit – which, they will – tell them we’re engaged. For now, at least. Because trust me, neither of us wants to deal with the tsunami of shit they’ll throw at us if they think we’re not.”

“I’ll think about it,” Amy says.

Their waiter arrives with the food, and after a moment’s awkward pause, they dig in and talk about the ultrasound and how fucking weird it was to see their daughter’s skull, and how creepy all the
posters in the waiting room are.

She doesn’t let him drive her home, insists on calling an uber instead. But she does agree to answer her phone at least once a week, so…

She’s said she’ll think about it.

He really hopes she does.
Chapter Seven

When he tells Ben and Kent that the baby is a girl, Ben laughs so hard he slides off the couch, almost knocking over his treasured mug.

Dan is glad someone finds it funny.

Selina actually fucking commiserates with him, apparently assuming he’d wanted a boy. (He hadn’t really sat down and thought about which he wanted, but even so… the assumption is kind of gross).

She jokes that he’ll wind up with a baby girl even more awkward and socially incompetent than Amy, and it kind of pisses him off. Maybe Amy wouldn’t have been so awkward about everything, if they’d all just got off her back for five minutes. Maybe if Selina hadn’t made her feel like she was walking on eggshells, she wouldn’t have run at the first opportunity.

Still. His plan worked.

Kind of.

Amy doesn’t move in with him immediately or anything, but she does start to answer her fucking phone, which is a relief. Admittedly, she only calls him once or twice a week, but at least he knows she’s okay.

He misses her in a way that’s almost physical.

Working for Selina without Amy there beside him, without getting to hear her voice in meetings or her private thoughts on Kent’s strategy… there’s a wrongness to it that he can’t stop feeling. Every time Leon, that fucking interloper, pipes up, Dan kind of wants to punch him. It’s his fault that she left - it’s Selina’s fault…

He’s not sure whose fault it is, but when he finds out, they’re going to pay.

In the meantime, he makes sure to text her regularly, remind her that he hasn’t vanished off the face of the earth just because she’s tried to. Before the blasted baby, he hadn’t given a shit, he’d text Amy - text any woman - back when he felt like it, and not a minute earlier, but now… he gets the feeling that every time he’s late texting her back, or calling her back, or anything, she takes it as yet another sign.

Having to give a shit about someone’s feelings is an alien experience.

And that’s how it goes, for weeks on end - text messages once or twice a day, and a couple of phone calls a week - until he comes home one night in May, and finds Amy asleep in his bed.

He’d given her the key and hoped… hoped it’d make her come to her senses, but there’d been no sign of it. Every time he came home, his apartment was exactly the way it had been when he left - not a thing was out of place, nothing appeared to have been touched.

But now, she’s asleep, curled up on one side of the bed, one hand under her cheek. She’s much bigger than she was the last time he saw her, and it crosses his mind that she must be exhausted, carrying all that around.

So he doesn’t wake her.
At least, not immediately. He’s got to go to the CNN studio the next morning as Selina’s spokesperson, which means an early start, so he showers and lays out a suit and tie.

Amy had teased him once for having more clothes than she did, but he hadn’t really cared. Women loved a well-dressed man, and however much she tried to hide it, he’d seen the look of admiration in her eyes when he wore a tight tee-shirt, or a really well-cut suit. She loved to look at him almost as much as he did her.

Amazingly, he doesn’t wake her, not even when he slides into the bed beside her… something he feels slightly weird about, but if he wakes her now… she’ll get wound up and freak out and run home to her parents. Whereas, if he waits until she wakes up naturally, it’ll be too late for that, and maybe he can convince her to stay.

Which is kind of what happens.

Sometime in the night - he’s not sure exactly when - Amy must get up to pee. He knows, because he feels her get out of the bed, even in his sleep, and he’s awake by the time she’s turned the bathroom light on.

It means he’s ready for her, sitting up and rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. She wasn’t expecting that, he can tell, because she starts when she comes back into the room and sees him looking at her. “I was just going to -”

“I want you to stay.”

Amy narrows her eyes. “Why?”

“Do I need a reason?”

“Yes.”

“Oh for fuck… why did you come in the first place?”

“Because I thought you wouldn’t be here.”

“What, were you twitter-stalking me?”

“I…I keep track of where the campaign is.”

“So you don’t accidentally run into me?”

“Something like that,” Amy says, and she looks more than usually mulish. “Sophie was driving me crazy, and I figured… I figured the apartment would be empty, and maybe I could get some fucking rest, and -”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it.”

They stare at each other for a second, and then he says, “Come back to bed. It’s four in the morning, if you show up now your parents will think I kicked you out or something, and I need them to like me.”

“Yeah, good luck with that.”

“Well, tolerate me, at least. They need to realise I’m not going anywhere.”

“So you can con them out of their life insurance or something?”
“Ames. You know that’s not why.” He looks her dead in the eyes, and has the pleasure of seeing a light blush rise in her cheeks. Knowing he can still get to her makes him feel better. “Come back to bed.”

“You can’t possibly be that desperate for sex that you want to get it on with me when I’m six and a half months pregnant.”

“Who said anything about sex? Do you want sex?”

“No, I…” Amy pauses, wincing, and rubbing her stomach.

“Everything okay?”

“Yeah, she… she’s just awake.” He gives her a curious look, and she adds, “I think she likes voices.”

“You mean she likes my voice?”

“No, I… I didn’t say that.”

“She kicking you?”

“No… not exactly. She just moves a lot. It’s so fucking weird - I can’t get used to it.”

It’s maybe the most honest conversation they’ve had… since she told him she was pregnant, and it redoubles his desire to have her stay. If she’d just talked to him, instead of running the fuck away, maybe things never would have reached this point.

He pats the mattress beside him. “You’re exhausted - I’m fucking exhausted. Just get in and stop wasting time.”

For a long moment, Amy really does look like she’s considering making a run for it, but eventually she sighs, and gets in, curling up on her side. He leans over her to turn off the light, and lets his arm fall over her waist when he lies back down.

She sounds irritated when she says, “I’m not going to - are you fucking serious?”

He squeezes her closer, because he knows this tone - this is Amy trying to sound more annoyed with him than she actually is. “Let’s be clear,” he says, “If you don’t want to fuck, then we don’t fuck. But that doesn’t mean… can’t I just like holding you?”

“I don’t know,” she says, yawning part way through, “Can you?”

Rather than answer her immediately, he nuzzles the side of her neck, enjoying the silky feel of her hair against his face. “Do you think if you say enough bitchy things to me, I’ll give up and go away?”

He feels the hairs on her neck stand up, and to keep the effect going, he strokes her arm, lightly, using only his fingertips. “In case you haven’t noticed,” he says, whispering right into her ear, “I don’t give a shit - you can say anything, it’s not going to make a difference.”

Amy twists in his arms, turning her head to look back at him. “I don’t understand,” she says, “Why are you pretending to care? I know you’ve probably had a different woman in your bed every night since I -”

“Oh you know that, do you? That’s odd.”
“Thinking you’re a slut and a half isn’t odd, it’s…making a deduction based on evidence.”

“I meant,” he says, and kisses her neck. “It’s odd that you didn’t change the sheets. If that’s what you thought. And, for the record, there’s not been a day since I’ve known you when I wouldn’t…happily have fucked you any way you felt like.”

Amy’s whole body expresses how much she doesn’t believe him. “Do you ever know when to stop lying? It doesn’t make me like you more.”

Fine. She asked for it. “That first day - the day I came to work for Selina -”

“You were such an unspeakable asshole.”

“Yeah?”

“I was forced to go on a date with Jonah and you fucking giggled about it.”

“Well, it was that or spread you out on Selina’s desk, and then she wouldn’t have hired me. Believe me, Jonah’s little fantasies were nothing compared to -”

“Oh please, like you even -”

“Or I could have bent you over it - would you prefer that? I could have pushed that tight little skirt of yours right up around your waist and -”

“Shut up!” Amy shifts slightly, and he wonders if she’s getting turned on, but she continues. “You would fuck literally anyone, so don’t try and sell it as a compliment.”

He pauses for a second, and lets his hand skim over her body, not quite squeezing her breast before resting it on her stomach. “Don’t confuse business with pleasure, Ames. You’ve had nothing to give me but yourself for…years now, and yet, even with that schoolmarm blouse you had on the day of the interview, I’d still -”

“It was for the voters.”

“Yeah,” he says, spreading his fingers out over her belly. “That and I can’t imagine you felt like dressing ‘sexy’ for Buddy.”

“I’m not talking about that.”

“Think how much more fun you’d have had if you’d been telling me what to do.” And then he feels it. Not a ghost movement, not a flutter like before, but a firm, jerky even, kick. “Holy shit - she’s fucking alive in there.”

“I told you,” Amy says, “She likes voices.” She pauses for a moment, and then her tone is more certain - like she’s decided to hell with it, she might as well. “She likes your voice.”

“Yeah?”

Amy nods and he kisses her, gently, but firm all the same. “Good,” he says, once they’ve broken apart. “Now go the fuck to sleep.”

It doesn’t take her long - and she doesn’t wake up the next morning when he leaves for CNN. Which means she doesn’t see when her phone gets five messages and he looks at it to… to see the sender.
(Yes, it’s creepy. No, Dan doesn’t care).

He’d expected that it would be her mother or something, asking where the hell she was, but it’s worse than that. It’s Tom Fucking James.

Which means… which means Tom James is entering the race. There’d been nothing hinting at it in the press, so Dan had let himself hope that maybe, just maybe… but if he’s texting Amy first thing in the morning, that can mean only one thing.

They’re going to get destroyed.

Danny Chung had been in the public eye too long - people were already getting tired of his schtick, and Selina, having saved Tibet, had more gravitas than him by far… and that’s not even getting into Dan’s plans for him. But Tom James… with his ‘saved the economy’ story and picture-perfect wife - with half the DC establishment sucking his dick and the other half wanting to - with his veteran son and seemingly genuine folksiness…

And with Amy.

He has Amy now, and, oh, Dan can see it so clearly. Selina had been making her life hell for… for longer than the pregnancy, he knew that, had thrown her to Leon as nothing more than a piece of ass… and then Tom James came floating in offering flattery in one hand and full maternity leave in the other.

It makes complete sense, is the fucking thing, and that’s the worst of it. When he hadn’t known where Amy was working, he’d entertained hopes that maybe, maybe she’d come to her senses, maybe she’d come back to Selina (to him) the way she had before, but… Tom James wasn’t going to be stupid enough to drive her away.

He was an unscrupulous bastard, Dan knew that, but he was also… smart about it. Just having Amy on his team would give him a psychological advantage over Selina, and no way he’d give that up at the top of the race.

It’s a fuck-up waiting to happen.

When he tells Ben and Kent, Ben insists that they sit on it until James announces - says Selina will go batshit if she finds out, will storm into D.C. demanding to see one or both of them, and then there’ll be no chance of keeping a lid on it. Just this once, they have to present her with a fait accompli.

He doesn’t entirely agree, but he’s also not looking forward to hearing Selina scream about it, so he goes along with the plan - for now.

He has other things to get on with. He does some research, finds what looks like the best possible college investment fund and sets one up. Amy doesn’t reply when he sends her the details, but it must have earned him some serious brownie points, because about a month after their sleepover, she emails him to say she’s thought it over, and she’s going to move in like he suggested.

And her Dad’s going to help her, so he doesn’t have to do anything - she doesn’t want him to.

For the first time, he’s grateful for Sophie Brookheimer being such an unmitigated twat. If even Amy’s Dad thinks she’s better off away from her…

Their schedules are so divergent that he doesn’t actually see her again until she’s over eight months and a week or so along. He comes back to the apartment to change the clothes in his case, and finds
her pouring a glass of water in the kitchen.

She… she’s fucking huge, is the only word for it - not that he’s going to say it to her. But he’d always liked that she was so little, that he could tuck her under one arm whenever he wanted to, that she had to tilt her head up to reach him. In actuality, Amy’s easily one of the toughest people he’s ever known, but it didn’t change the fact that she looked like a dainty little porcelain doll half the time.

And even more so now. It’s actually…kind of cute?

From how she greets him though, it’s obvious she doesn’t feel cute. She’s got her hair piled up on her head and she’s wearing… a pair of his old workout shorts and a tank top (which doesn’t fully cover her belly).

“I thought you’d be at work,” he says, and she shakes her head.

“I have to pee all the fucking time now, and I’m so…hot and sticky and… so I’m working from home. When I can.”

“You mean when Tom lets you?”

For a moment, she looks surprised, and then shrugs, “Sure. His wife had a baby not that long ago so… he understands.”

“I know why you went to work for him.”

“That seems unlikely.”

“Look, Ben told me about Leon.”

She goes still, her eyes wide, and says, very slowly, “Told you what about Leon?”

“I know Selina tried to pimp you out, and I know you were pissed about it. But what I don’t get is… you’ve been fending off fucking creeps for years, so why was that the-”

“Maybe I got tired of it,” she says, and she seems… way more upset than she should be.

“Whatever,” he says, “I get it, all right? But you should have just told me.”

He goes into his - their - room to pack his case, throwing his old clothes and so on in the dry cleaning bin, and stacking shirts in the new space. When he’s finished, he turns to leave and sees Amy hovering in the doorway. She’s wringing her hands.

“What is it?”

“I… maybe I can… about Leon… it wasn’t just -”

His phone rings, and he has to take it. It’s the PI he’s had investigating Danny Chung - fucking finally - and he wants to meet. He writes down the time and place - he can’t be seen walking into the guy’s office, so they have to be at least somewhat stealthy - and zips his case closed as he finishes the conversation.

If anything, Amy seems relieved by the interruption. He stops in front of her on his way out, and says, “Just so you know, I’ve got time off from the 20th, so I’ll be back for when you -”

“You’re coming back for the birth?”
Her face is a little puffed up, he guesses with the pregnancy, which makes her expression of disbelief even more cartoonish than usual. But he just rolls his eyes at her and drops a quick kiss on her lips. “Wouldn’t fucking miss it. When else am I going to hear you swear in front of your mother?”

“I guess I figured you’d rather be ball-deep in some intern.”

She really doesn’t have the faintest clue how to handle it when he’s nice to her.

“Been there, done that. None of them compare to you, babe. See you in two weeks.”

And then he has to rush across town to meet the PI - who has actual proof that the only reason the damn tank was on fire in the first place was Danny Chung’s incompetence - and get to the airport. It only strikes him when he sinks into his seat on the plane… they haven’t even talked about names. Somehow, he doesn’t think Amy will go for Danielle.

They’ve got ten days scheduled in California - some fundraisers in LA, a ‘fact-finding’ trip to wine country, and what is definitely not soliciting of donations in Silicon Valley.

He doesn’t really like it. Maybe if the tech assholes had some finesse at being the people they pretended to be… but they’re utterly transparent, and quite possibly more self-interested than the average DC douchebag. He never thought he’d miss Hallows or Furlong’s sense of decorum… but the snapchat shitheads bring it out in him.

They’re in L.A. prepping for the third of their fundraisers, when Amy calls him. He’s getting in the limo with Selina and the others, and it is really, really not a good time… but he knows he has to take the call, even if it will piss Selina off.

Amy’s voice sounds strange, out of breath, like she’s been running a marathon or something. “I’m just calling,” she says, “cause I thought I should tell you. I’m on my way to the hospital.”

It’s like he didn’t quite hear her, like her voice has been distorted by the thousands of miles between them, and despite Amy’s huff of irritation, he has to ask.

“What?”

“My water broke, about… fifteen minutes ago.”

“You’re not due for another week, how the fuck is -”

“I know that,” Amy says, still sounding annoyed. “But I guess she’s eager. Anyway, I’ve called a cab and my mom’s gonna meet me there, I just… I guess I thought maybe you’d want to know.”

She still sounds out of breath, and he can’t help it, he has to ask, “Are you okay?”

“What do you think? Didn’t you go to grad school or something? All that fucking education and a complete waste of -”

“You sound like you’re about to keel over.”
“That’s because the lift in your building is out. You try walking down four flights of stairs carrying an overnight bag while you’re in fucking labour.”

His colleagues aren’t even pretending not to listen in - even Selina seems fascinated - but they recoil in horror when Amy suddenly… wails is the only word for it, and the sound carries through into the car.

He hears a clatter, and Amy’s breath, and when she doesn’t say anything, he tries again, “You okay?”

“I fell,” she says, “Goddamn contractions, I can’t - you were supposed to be here.”

“Oh, did you want me to hold your hand?”

Ben slaps the back of his head, hard, as Amy says, “I don’t care, I don’t care - I can’t…”

“You have to get up.”

“Dan, it hurts so much, I can’t -”

“I know, honey, but you have get up and go to the -”

“No, you don’t know. I can’t. Why did everybody lie?”

“Jesus Christ,” Selina says, “My left kidney would give a better pep talk than you. Put her on speakerphone. Now.”

Reluctantly, he does so - given how fucked up Amy and Selina’s relationship can be at the best of times, he’s not sure this is a good idea.

“Ame,” Selina says, “Where the fuck are you?”

“In the stairwell - on the second floor of Dan’s building.”

“Right - well get the fuck up and go to the hospital. Believe you me, girlie, you do not want to do this without an epidural.”

“I can’t,” Amy says.

But the stubbornness in her voice which had baffled him doesn’t seem to phase Selina in the least.

“Can’t? Who the fuck do you think you’re talking to? You don’t even know how bad it’s going to get, so don’t tell me you can’t manage one pisspoor early labour contraction.”

“Ma’am, with due respect, shut the fuck up.”

“You listen to me, Amy Brookheimer. This is going to be the worst thing that has ever happened to you - it’s going to hurt so much more than anything else you ever imagined. But this ‘I can’t’ bullshit - I don’t want to hear it. I didn’t hire you back when you were one of twenty wet-behind-the-ears expendabelles because I thought you were cute. That’s what men are for.”

“This doesn’t have anything to do with -”

“I hired you,” Selina continues, “Because I took one look at you and knew… there was a girl who knew how to take a punch. I knew immediately you’d get the shit kicked out of you and go ahead and pick yourself up for more of the same. You’re just like me, a glutton for fucking punishment -”
“That’s not true.”

“Amy - you fell in love with Dan.” (This is apparently unanswerable, because all they hear is a deep sigh coming from the other end of the phone). “Now I don’t want to hear another word about not being able to do this. You’re going to grit your fucking teeth, pick up your suitcase and go.”

“I don’t think I can.”

“Horseshit. Don’t make me tell you again. On your feet, Brookheimer.”

There’s a long pause, and then miracle of miracles, he hears Amy getting up. After another moment or two, she’s clearly walking down the stairs again, and he almost bursts out laughing when she says, “You didn’t have to be such a bitch about it.”

“There,” Selina says, looking at Dan pointedly, “I fixed her. Now I’ve to go give half of Hollywood a reach-around, so you deal with her.”

She gets out of the limo, and leans back in to say, “A little tough love never did her any harm.” And with a wink, and a flurry of her long skirt, she’s gone.

Dan has to waste a couple of minutes negotiating with Ben, and then with the limo driver, and by the time he can get back on the phone with Amy, she’s safely out of the building and in a car being driven to the hospital. “Have you got everything?” he asks, “Anything you need?”

“You’re going to have to get the couch cleaned,” she says, and he recoils a bit at the mental image. “Or better yet, burn it. I hate that fucking couch.”

“Don’t you have fond memories of -”

“Of what, being one of the god knows how many women you’ve fucked on it? No. Not to mention… you do remember what that sex was like?”

He grins, just a little. “What can I say, I was excited.”

“I should have known,” she says, “then and there, I should have known never to sleep with you again.”

“But then we wouldn’t be having our very own -”

“And I can’t believe you still have all the same furniture from when we…from the first time. I hate that apartment.”

“It’s a nice apartment!”

“Every time I walk in I remember how fucking stupid I was to think - forget it.”

“You weren’t stupid,” he says, and even he can admit that his voice sounds weird when he tries to be sincere. “It’s not as though I didn’t like you.”

“Well you have a bizarre way of showing it. And, yes, I was. I was stupid enough to let you knock me up, which must make me far and away the dumbest woman you have ever slept with.”

The funny thing is, when she’s bitching and moaning like this, it doesn’t worry him. She continues to tell him every single thing that’s wrong with his apartment, including the “fucking ludicrous” mirrors in his bedroom, the fact that his refrigerator is bizarrely small, and that he apparently eats every meal off a coffee table, which she finds offensive for some reason.
When she reaches the hospital, she tells him she’s going to have to hang up, and there’s a…quiver in her voice that makes him think she doesn’t want to. Maybe she really does want him there to hold her hand, who the fuck knows.

At least her mom is with her.

The remains of rush hour traffic means it takes the best part of an hour before he reaches LAX, and then he has to enter into the most ridiculous negotiation imaginable at the ticket desk. He’s wearing a tuxedo and demanding that they get him on the next flight to D.C. and, he has to admit, if it was happening to anyone else, he’d be laughing his ass off.

Eventually, he manages to get a flight to Baltimore airport through O’Hare… it’s not ideal, and it’ll be three o’clock the next day before he makes it to the hospital, but… he doesn’t have a lot of options.

He then has to wait, in departures, for about three hours before his flight takes off. Amy’s not answering her phone - she may not be able to answer her phone - and he ends up having to walk up and down the terminal to try and calm himself down. Calling Richard to arrange a pick-up at the other end does nothing to soothe his frayed nerves.

The whole journey is like that. His plane gets stacked outside Chicago, and then he has to run approximately eleven miles to make it to his connection, only to discover that they’d bumped him for some asshole who was on stand-by.

He tells his sob-story - that his fiancé is in labour, and he wants to make it to her before the baby is born - but he’s so drained, he doesn’t manage anything like his usual charm, and it’s only when he shows them the text message updates from Amy’s Mom, and points out that he’d hardly be travelling in a tuxedo by choice, that the flight attendant decides to help him.

When he sees who Richard sent to pick him up, he considers just hiring a car himself - he’s had about three hours sleep, but he’s not sure that makes him a worse driver than Mike. Even his ‘Dad Egan’ sign is written in crayon.

Mike’s car is some kind of hellscape, full of crumbs and car toys and baby chairs, and it smells (according to Mike someone spilled some milk in there, and it’s actually kind of a funny story, and if Dan had until the end of time, he would not be able to count all the fucks he does not give about that time Ellen said something really clever).

Naturally, Mike gets lost on the way to Sibley Hospital, and they get into an argument on the freeway, made worse because Amy still isn’t answering her fucking phone, and by the time they actually make it into the reception, Dan feels like he’s about to lose his mind.

It doesn’t help that, when they finally get there, he’s sent to a room full of fucking Brookheimers, and no Amy. Her Mom welcomes him in, delighted to see him the way she always is, but it’s like he can’t quite hear her.

He actually interrupts her, midway through whatever it is she’s saying, asking, “Where the fuck is Amy?”

“Oh, she’s in surgery, but there’s someone else who wants to meet you!”

“Wait a minute, where is she, is she all right, I need to -”

And then he has an arm full of baby, and he’s supposed to react or something, but Amy’s Mom is looking at him with this look on her face, like she’s expecting him to start crying any minute, and she
hasn’t actually answered the question. “Where is Amy?”

“She’s fine - she’s just in the operating theatre.”

His knees don’t quite buckle, but it’s a close-run thing, and he sounds shaky to himself when he says, “Is she all right? What happened?”

It’s her Dad who answers, and thank god he doesn’t keep Dan in suspense for much longer. “It’s nothing serious - the placenta didn’t come out fast enough, so they took her in. It’s only a local anaesthetic.”

“Oh, our surrogate had that,” Mike says, and slaps him on the back, “Nothing to worry about Danny Boy.”

“Right. Right,” he says, and actually looks at the baby for the first time.

She’s so fucking small. He could fit her whole head in one hand, and even so... she has ears, tiny, perfect ears, and weirdly long fingernails, and a tuft of dark hair and... eyelashes. Sooty, long, black eyelashes.

He’d always thought newborn babies looked all red-faced and squashed, and she does, but...

Sophie huffs out an irritated noise - the same noise Amy always makes - and moves his arms into a better position. “You’re even worse than Amy,” she says, sounding impatient. “She’s only a baby - don’t hold her up in the air like that, she wants to be close to you.”

“I didn’t know - I’ve never held a baby before.”

Sophie rolls her eyes. “Well get used to it. Give her your finger, at least.”

On this she seems to know what she’s talking about, and so he does, and his daughter grabs on, her grip startlingly strong. “She’s so fucking tiny,” he says, and hopes no one can tell what he means.

He’s going to break her. He’s going to roll over in the middle of the night and crush her somehow, or drop her on the floor or choke her by holding her too tight... she’s barely bigger than his laptop, and he’s broken more than a few of those in his time.

“She has a lot of growing to do,” Amy’s Mom says, in this syrupy tone, and when he looks at her she has actual tears in her eyes. He doesn’t know what to do with that, so he looks back down at the baby and...

It had always been kind of abstract. Amy was having the baby, and therefore he was having the baby too, and that meant doing whatever it took to convince Amy to keep him around. He’d never really thought about the baby beyond that - he wasn’t going to let Amy run away from him again, and as a result, he’d sort of accepted the necessity of at least half-assing it with the baby, because if he didn’t... but she’s definitely an Egan. She’s so definitely and obviously his...

In a quiet corner of his mind, he thinks that his mother is going to lose what’s left of her mind when she sees her grand-daughter. He doesn’t know how it took him so long to realise that.

And then they’re wheeling Amy in, and the whole family is cooing over her, and she looks like all she wants to do is sleep... until she sees him, that is. “What are you doing here?”

“I told you I wouldn’t miss it,” he says, coming to stand by her bed.
“But you hate hospitals.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees her Mom ushering everyone out, mouthing that they need privacy (and threatening to pull Sophie out by her hair, if need be). Amy doesn’t notice though, still staring at him like he’s baffling. “How did you even get here?”

He tells her the whole story, and she turns on her side as he does so, her face languid with tiredness, but her eyes alert all the same. She actually laughs when he tells her that he cried to the flight attendant to get on the Baltimore flight, though she grimaces immediately afterwards.

She doesn’t try to take the baby from him, though she does reach out and touch her head once or twice. Eventually, once he’s finished his story and run out of things to say, she says, “I was thinking… Emily.”

“Yeah?” It’s fine by him - he really hasn’t given it much thought. “And Marian for the middle?”

“Why Marian?”

“Brownie points with my mother.”

“Well my Mom already loves you forever, so… I suppose that makes sense. We’re not having a fucking baptism though.”

“Do I look like any kind of Catholic to you? Besides, if we name her for my mother, that’ll keep us out of the doghouse even if we are raising a heathen.”

Amy rolls her eyes, but agrees, and tells him to call the nurse so they can update Emily’s label. (Not that it’s necessary - he’d be able to pick her out in a field full of babies, any day of the week).

“Everyone’s calling me ‘Mom’ now,” she says, sounding irritated. “It’s what you are, sweetie.”

“Not to you,” she says fiercely. “She can call me that, no one else.”

“Fair enough.”

He goes out later, and buys them dinner, since Amy hates hospital food, and when she’s finally, properly asleep, goes to the supermarket, buys all the food and flowers and diapers within reach, and spends the evening cleaning the apartment, while talking to Kent about when exactly they should release the Danny Chung story.

They can take Emily home the next morning, once the doctor has given her and Amy one final check-up. It feels like they should be getting permission from someone, and he damn near has a heart attack in the car, but they manage it without incident.

Fortunately, Amy’s parents had come with them, because the lift in his building was still malfunctioning (he’d called the super and was going to call again, and again, until it got fixed, but in the meantime…)

When he tells her Mom to carry Emily up, he’ll look after Amy, Amy gives him this look, like she knows what he’s planning.

“You have got to be joking me.”

“Do you feel up to climbing four flights of stairs? Cause somehow, I don’t think that -”
“No, but…”

“Well it’s this, or give your father a second heart attack, sugar.”

Amy grouses and complains, but she sees the sense in what he’s saying all the same. So she gives her father her overnight bag, and lets Dan pick her up and carry her into his apartment, pretending not to like it the entire time.

Her parents leave them pretty quickly, and they get a full half hour of peace, sitting together in a daze, realising that this is it. And then Emily starts to cry.

They’re parents now.
Chapter Eight

Emily Marian Brookheimer-Egan (they’d had a lengthy discussion in the registrar’s office, and settled on the name as a compromise, even if it was a mouthful) is the single most exhausting person he has ever met.

He manages to weasel an entire week off work out of Ben (with an assist from Kent, who launches into a lengthy discussion on the importance of paternal bonding - it’s totally meaningless to Dan, but helpful all the same), meaning he’s there to help Amy in those first, strange days.

It’s a little like being drugged.

His daughter is - effortlessly - the centre of the room, constantly sucking up energy and attention and conversation. They don’t even really talk much - too busy handing each other diapers and wet wipes and fresh onesies and every other thing Emily needs right this goddamn second.

It is a very good thing that she’s cute.

Of all people, Sophie shows up a couple of days after the birth and walks Amy through certain practical points. By the end of her visit Amy is practically spitting with fury, but it does seem to help, especially with feeding. (He doesn’t ask for details - though he does notice that a squeezy bottle full of water appears in the bathroom afterwards…and pads in the freezer). It helps that Sophie has finally stopped acting like she wants to hump his leg every time they’re in the same room - if anything, she seems to dislike him now, more than she does Amy. From the way Amy watches them, he can tell it’s still a sore point.

They don’t talk about it. Other than arguing about Emily’s name, they don’t talk about anything. They’re too tired to talk. (Well, not to talk, but to talk about anything beyond the kid). He finds himself relegated to a bizarre, sexless role, where his chief job is to hand Amy whatever she needs right at the moment she needs it, and to take the baby when she’s done feeding it.

He feels a strange gratitude to Tom James for insisting she take full maternity leave. Even after a week he can start to feel the lack of sleep wearing on him, and his body hasn’t just taken a pounding. To his immense surprise, Amy chooses to breastfeed (he has a suspicion that there’s some weird competitive bullshit with Sophie behind this, but he doesn’t ask) (all she’d said about it was that it helped with losing weight, which… Dan’s not touching that subject with a barge pole).

What’s more, she actually seems to like it (once she’s got the hang of it). It helps that she can watch MSNBC or read twitter while feeding Emily, balancing the baby in one hand and her phone in the other. She seems…not relaxed (Amy never seems relaxed), but without fail, by the time she’s done feeding Emily, she’s…rested somehow.

Even when he goes back to work, they manage to compromise - when Emily wakes up in the middle of the night, it’s his job to go pick her up, change her diaper if need be, and bring her to Amy for feeding. And to put her back down again… which can be tricky. Emily does not like to be let go of, and he soon realises that walking her up and down until she’s properly asleep is faster than just dumping her in the crib and hoping for the best.

Most of the campaign work is confined to Maryland for the first month or so (they’re getting the campaign office up to Selina’s standards), which helps, but eventually they have to go do a handful
of campaign events in Des Moines, Manchester and Chicago.

It’s a relief - to sleep through the night, to wear clothes that aren’t stained with spit up or the weird liquid shits Emily comes out with, to have conversations with adults that aren’t about the baby. Though, he has to acknowledge that...at least Emily’s wants and needs are straightforward - food, clean underwear, sleep, and an endless stream of cuddles. He never truly understood how mercurial Selina was until he had to deal with an infant.

Amy sends him photos every day, which he dutifully sends on to his mother (he had managed to convince her that now wasn’t the time to come visit, that he and Amy were too exhausted to deal with it right now... but it was only a matter of time).

He’s away for six days, and when he comes into the apartment he’s amused to hear Amy directing a stream of invective at Emily’s head about Fox News being a cancer and she better not ever dream of becoming a Republican or Amy will never forgive her, my god, where do they find these redneck shitgibbons, Amy’s had periods that were more educated.

He laughs, because he can’t help it, and Amy’s head snaps round to look at him. She’s obviously forgotten that he was coming home today, and... he knew she cuddled Emily for no reason when he wasn’t there.

Amy rolls her eyes when he makes sure to remove his jacket and tie before taking Emily from her (but come the fuck on, dry cleaning is expensive, and her spit-up smells). He doesn’t tell her, but he likes it better like this anyway - he can feel Emily’s warmth through his shirt, feel the faint puffs of her breath against his chest.

Amy curls up on the couch, twisting her legs under her and leaning her head against the cushions (which is a good sign, he thinks - she was moving quite...carefully, the first few weeks). She seems like she might fall asleep on him right there, so he says, “Selina thinks she’s cute.”

“She likes babies when they’re in pictures.”

“Cuter than Little Richard.”

“Well...” Amy says, and then seems to think better of it. “Poor Catherine.”

“She does have my genes.”

“And my ears.” Amy has a genuinely mournful expression as she says this, and he decides to tease her.

“Is that a bad thing?”

“I was hoping she’d get yours. If she got your ears and my ego, she’d be set - but if it’s the other way round...”

“Somehow I doubt they’re linked genetically. Besides, I like your sticky-out ears.”

“Well, you’re the only one.” She yawns. “Sophie used to say I should wrap a band around my head, make them normal.”

“So she was the worst person to ever live even when she was a kid.”

“No, that’s you.”
There’s no venom in her tone though, no actual anger, so all he says is, “We should introduce her to Jonah.”

“Don’t put that out into the universe,” Amy says, sounding weary, “Can you even imagine what their kids would be like?”

“She already has three, she surely wouldn’t.”

“If she’s with a guy for longer than, I don’t know a week, she always ends up pregnant.”

“Good thing for your Dad they doesn’t often last that long.”

“I think he gave up the dream of a grandchild not called Brookheimer a long time ago.”

Emily snuffles into his shirt for a second, as though she’s dreaming, and the room seems full of light - the sun must be going down. “Come on,” he says, “Let’s go.”

“Go where?”

“Out - for dinner - somewhere people are.”

“I don’t - I haven’t - what about Emily?”

“What do you think, we bring her with us.”

“I…”

“You have gone outside since I’ve been gone?”

“Yes,” Amy seems indignant. “Ever since they fixed the lift, I’ve gone for a walk - a long walk - every day. I just haven’t.”

“Go put on something that hasn’t been spit or shit on, and we’ll go.” When she looks doubtful, he adds, “You can have wine again, remember?”

That gets her out of her seat, and he sits on the couch, listening to Emily breathe and thinking about which restaurant they should go to - where has the best networking opportunities on a Thursday night, and isn’t so noisy she’ll start screaming.

When Amy comes back, she looks more like herself than she has in a while (the Amy in his head will always be pink and telling him to go fuck himself and trying not to seem flustered by anything), though he can’t entirely get used to seeing her with waves in her hair. (Which is ridiculous, he knows - it’s how her hair actually looks, he even likes it better, and yet…)

For practicality’s sake, they don’t take the stroller - fitting it in to a restaurant would be a nightmare, and Emily’s small enough that he can strap her to his chest and almost not notice the weight.

They end up at a steakhouse, and he has the pleasure of seeing Amy absolutely tear into a fillet steak. A couple of the idiot congressmen from Jonah’s group (the Madisons? He can’t remember) come over to see the baby, and congratulate Amy. And then…

Congressman Pierce was in the far corner - Dan had seen him when they came in, but hadn’t realised who he was with… not until they stood up to leave. Because right there, in the flesh, is Buddy Calhoun. And he’s staring at Amy like…

Dan had joked about Buddy, about his twisted way of handling the break-up, but it’s not so funny
when they’re in the same room, and he’s staring at Amy like he needs to go knock up the first blonde he can find as some kind of revenge.

Fucking Nevada. Dan never wants to go back to that shithole ever in his life if he can help it.

But Amy’s reaction isn’t what he expects, because she doesn’t freak when Buddy comes to stop at their table, doesn’t scream at him, just accepts his congratulations and waits for him to move on. The moment he does, she goes back to eating her meal.

They can’t talk about work - or rather, Amy won’t talk about work (she knows him too well, fully expecting him to try to use her for information - which he had, in a half-assed kind of a way… knowing Amy would probably walk out entirely if he used her again meant his heart wasn’t really in it), and Dan’s not about to give Tom James’ camp an advantage - so he fills her in on his plans for meeting his parents. Florida is part of Super Tuesday this time, so his suggestion is that they spend the following weekend with his parents, and then get the fuck out of there, the primary campaigns giving them a good excuse.

(It’s going to be torture, and his mother will probably insist that he take her to mass, but he doesn’t tell Amy that).

It’s kind of nice, though he can tell Amy’s…nervous or something, at being out with the baby. Still, the glass (okay, two glasses) of wine she has clearly help - she’s actually swaying slightly when she stands up.

The drive home takes longer than he expected, but it’s worth it… when he leans over Amy to give her Emily and the baby carrier, she breathes out, “You smell really good” and flushes up to the roots of her hair.

He doesn’t say anything, just smirks, and finally she hits his arm, saying, “Don’t flatter yourself - I’m surrounded by milk and shit and more milk all day… Richard would smell good to me right now.”

By the time they get back to the apartment, Emily’s awake and starting to whine again, so Amy flops down on the sofa and gets her tit out, saying, “Give her to me.” (To think less than six months before she hadn’t even let him see her naked, and now…)

He gets a weird kick out of watching Emily feed - it’s so strange to see Amy still, calm, he’s used to her active and in motion… and he can’t help it, every time he remembers that he’s the reason she changed, he’s the reason she even has Emily in her arms…

He gets her a bottle of water from the kitchen (it’s thirsty work, something they were both surprised to discover), and sits beside her to watch. Emily might not even be able to roll over yet, but she definitely knows how to feed - he can actually see the movements of her mouth as she sucks the milk out.

Amy rolls her eyes when she sees him staring. “It’s fucking weird the way you do that. Is it some weird Dad hormones? It can’t be my boobs, lord knows you’ve seen enough of those in your time.”

He shakes his head and leans over to kiss the top of Emily’s head (avoiding the soft patch in the middle, because it freaked him out to think that there was a hole in his daughter’s skull, no matter how many times he was told it was normal), and then… possessed by some odd instinct, he kisses Amy’s breast, pressing his mouth to all that soft skin.

When he looks up at her, Amy’s eyes are wide, the pupils blown, but all she says is, “What? Do you want me to get ‘property of Dan Egan’ tattooed on there?”
“I do like the sound of that,” he says, and lifts his head to kiss her properly.

For all he has to take care not to crush Emily, sandwiched between them, the kiss is heady, Amy surging forward to meet him, opening her mouth and letting her tongue slide, soft, and dance with his, and smiling against his mouth when he grasps the back of her neck with one hand, pulling her in closer.

A faint burp from Emily is what breaks them apart - though, fortunately, she doesn’t start crying (she is also very good at crying).

After a moment in which Amy flushes pink under his gaze, she says, “I can’t… it’s too soon for…”

“Okay,” he says (and inwardly he’s cheering, because ‘too soon’ means that someday…) “Is that why you gave Buddy the cold shoulder?”

“I didn’t - he’s nothing to do with me anymore, that’s all.”

“Really? You’re not pining for a genteel cowboy of the Old West?”

“I was actually thinking I’d dodged a bullet,” Amy says, “But you’re definitely starting to change my mind.”

“Oh really?”

“I mean… things could be much worse,” she says, not quite looking at him. “I could be stuck out in Nevada, with him telling me I’m doing everything wrong all the time. At least you don’t give a fuck.”

He’s not sure that’s the ringing endorsement he’s looking for. “You know, Selina assumed I’d want a boy.”

“How unsurprising.”

“Yeah, except… the way you were in the doctor’s office… is that what you wanted?”

“No. Not exactly. I… it’s not that I wanted a boy, I just thought… it’d mean an easier life.”

“Because girls are so difficult to deal with?”

“No,” Amy says, sounding annoyed. “I meant… for her. Not being sexually harassed every five minutes, not having to be public fucking property the moment she decides to reproduce, not having to worry all the time about being too fat or too sexy or too pretty or too ambitious or too smart or too frigid or too slutty. You just get to be. You don’t even know how lucky you are.”

“Oh,” he says, smiling at her, “I have some idea.”

Emily falls asleep as she feeds, and Amy puts her down immediately, and insists on going straight to bed. He wants to laugh, but she falls asleep so quickly… he doesn’t know how they’re supposed to live like this. 2am feeds take so much more out of him than he ever expected.

In a strange way, it gets easier when Amy goes back to work. She’d come to some arrangement with Tom James where she shared his nanny (his kid being about a year or so older than Emily), and she has some super-intern who keeps track of her schedule and Dan’s, so that they can arrange to be in the same hotel rooms whenever they’re in the same city. He’s not around as much as he probably should be, but between D.C, Iowa and New Hampshire, he manages to spend at least four nights a
Tom James announces a week after Amy goes back to work. For all that they had warned Selina in advance, she still throws things when she sees Amy standing behind him for the announcement, growling that she should have “let that stubborn gash bleed out in Dan’s stairwell. I made her, I made both of them, no one thought Tom was president material before I chose him for my running mate, they should be thanking me on their motherfucking knees after everything I did for them.” He keeps his distance - ever since Amy left, he’d become Selina’s favourite target for abuse… now that he’s on the receiving end, he understands even more why she’d jumped ship.

In a way, they’re lucky with how things worked out - Emily is so small that she’s relatively mobile… he doesn’t want to imagine what it’d be like to be on the campaign trail with a three or four year old. (Once she’s fully weaned, he guesses he and Amy will have to split days with her… since he doesn’t have a super-intern, he’s not entirely sure how that will work, but… he’s not worrying about that just yet).

Amy’s more tired than he is, he can tell, but overall, going back to work is good for her. Between long walks and breastfeeding, she’s lost most of the baby weight, though she’s clearly still sensitive about it. He can tell by the pyjamas she insists on wearing - she’s lost enough modesty that she’ll haul up her shirt to feed Emily without appearing to notice that he’s there, but she doesn’t want him looking at her body beyond that.

It’s not very sexy. She’s exhausted, clearly - the first time Emily sleeps all the way through the night (meaning Amy can sleep all the way through the night), he thinks she might cry. She doesn’t even wake up the next morning until Dan pokes her, and when he tells her to get up (for whatever event she has to go to with Tom), she actually gets upset, yelling that he has no idea how it feels and why doesn't he try getting up after ass o’clock every morning and it’s not fair...

And when he starts laughing, she does too, though there’s a note in her laughter that makes her sound almost out of control.

It’s mid-November by the time Emily is regularly sleeping through the night (well, she wakes up around seven for a feeding, but that’s nothing they can’t handle), and he starts to plan for when he’ll spring the house move on Amy.

If the pregnancy had taught him anything, it’s that Amy responded better when he didn’t wait to be asked. If anything, expecting her to make all the decisions just stressed her out, made her think he was only doing her a favour, that he was going to vanish without warning.

So, he’d bought the Georgetown townhouse. It costs just about all his CBS money, and it’s not as huge as the word ‘townhouse’ implies - but it’s close to the Sidwell Friends School and Amy’s parents, and there’s a reasonably sized yard out the back. (He’s thinking Emily should play tennis; it’s great for photos and social media, and she can practice her serve against the back wall).

It had been sold halfway through a renovation, meaning it had a beautiful kitchen and living room, but the upper floors had been gutted. Still, once they’ve sold either his or Amy’s apartments, they can put the money into fixing the rest of it. The only part that has to be fixed is the bathroom, and so he arranges for contractors to go in early December and install a proper shower.

He knows they haven’t talked about whether they’re together or not - and he knows that Amy is convinced he’s going to dump her and Emily at the first opportunity - but sooner or later she’s going to realise that it’s been almost a year, and he’s still there. Besides, it’s not like she wants to be with anyone else.
The bathroom will be installed by mid-December, so he figures they can move in before Christmas - which gives them a neat excuse to avoid spending the holidays with his parents. (His mother alone will be enough to set Amy running again).

The first primary debate takes place at the end of November, and he finds himself…oddly nervous in the run up. He’s never been on the opposite team from Amy before.

Their plan, such as it was, had been to leak the information about Danny Chung a day or two before the debate - hobble him right out the gate. It was a good plan, and it might even have worked… except for the stories about Leon.

Politico put out a story about his harassing a number of junior journalists when he was at the Post - a damnably well-sourced, credible story too. (Not just credible in a newspaper sense either - Dan actually knows one of the women, distantly, and he’s sure (or at least, as sure as one can be about a journalist) that she’s telling the truth).

That’s bad enough, but they had a way to deal with it. Not a great way, admittedly, but none of the behaviour described was criminal (necessarily), and Selina hasn’t received any complaints about Leon, so she can’t justly firing him on the basis of, effectively, hearsay.

At least, that’s what they say. But at five pm the day of the debate, things get worse. Politico put out a story at 5pm, from a woman who’d left journalism to become a high school teacher. She says Leon gave her a lift home one night, and when she tried to get out of the car she discovered that the passenger door wouldn’t open. The way what happened next is described, it takes a moment or two to work out what happened… he’d forced her to perform oral sex on him before letting her go.

They have a huge fight in the campaign office, because there is no fucking way Dan is letting Leon anywhere near the press corps tonight, having him there would be worse than having no one. Dan might antagonise journalists but… but white, college-educated women are their core voters, and if they think Selina is weak on sexual assault, if they think Selina doesn’t give a fuck about the kind of men who ruin women’s aspirations for a quick thrill… It will destroy them in the polls.

Eventually, she agrees, and tell Leon to wait for them in the campaign office - they’ll make a decision about what happens next after the debate.

The first thing he sees when they get to the debate site is Amy, and it… it’s like his whole heart unclenches. She’s feeding Emily, and she holds up a hand as he approaches, saying, “Jonah, I swear to fuck, if you try to look at my tits one more time…”

“I didn’t expect you to bring her here.”

Her head snaps up when she sees him, and, sounding irritated, she says, “Keep your distance. I mean it.”

“The debate hasn’t even started -“

“Not that! You get her excited, you know you do, and I need her to sleep now.”

“Fine,” he says, rolling his eyes.

He sits beside her, out of Emily’s eyeline, and nudges her arm. “Nervous about tonight?”

“No.”

(Which makes sense. Everybody loves Tom James, and he’s never caught off guard, so… unless he
actually has a stroke on stage, there really isn’t much for Amy to worry about. Dan *wishes* he had that problem).

She hands Emily off to Angela-the-Super-Intern, and then makes Dan stand in front of her while she does up her dress. He’s so tempted to reach out and touch her that he ends up doing her top button, letting his thumb linger for a moment in the hollow at the base of her throat.

Amy’s biting her lip, and for a moment he’s tempted to kiss her, really kiss her, right now in front of the entire press corps… but then he catches Selina glaring at him, and he’s on thin ice with her already.

So they retreat to their teams for the duration of the debate, giving the candidates last minute talking points and checking over their hair and make-up one last time (there’s a particular angle from which the back of Tom James’ head looks absolutely ghoulish - grey hair combed over a dead white skull - and Dan's hoping it will get caught on camera).

When Tom kisses Amy’s cheek right before going out onto the stage, he thinks Selina is going to actually explode all over the debate site. But in an unexpected burst of restraint, she doesn’t say anything, just sweeps past Amy as though she doesn’t exist (Gary leaning in to prompt her with Amy’s name is a nice touch of nastiness, Dan has to admit).

The debate starts better than he had dared hope. The first question is on foreign policy, and Selina absolutely trounces them all, makes Danny Chung look like a fool and a half. Admittedly, it’s her strong spot, but still… he wants to cheer. She’s also good on questions about supporting working families, managing to sound as though she doesn’t fundamentally despise the lumpen proletariat (well, almost).

Which is the problem. She does so well that they all start to relax, start to feel like they might win this thing… and that’s when the trap springs.

The moderator, a smooth-faced woman with a calm voice, asks a question for President Meyer. “One of the biggest scandals of recent times has been the proliferation of sexual harassment allegations inside politics. With even a member of your own staff implicated, how can voters trust you to stamp out this abuse of power?”

They’d prepped Selina on this in the car - thank god - and she’s always had a talent for plausible bullshit. He sees her take a deep breath, and smile sunnily at the camera. “I’m glad you asked me that, June. As a woman who made her way in politics when it was even more dominated by men than it is now, I wish I could say I was surprised by the many, many allegations that have come out over the last year. But I’m not. I’ve seen worse - and heard about worse - in my years in DC, and I think it is high time we adopted a no tolerance policy towards all forms of harassment. The bravery of the women who have spoken up is unquestioned, but no woman should have to be that strong. No woman should ever feel afraid in her place of work - whether it’s the factory floor or the shop floor or the floor of the House of Representatives - and if you elect me as your President, I will make that a reality.”

She smiles at the camera again, and the live poll shows a definite bump… and then Tom James speaks.

“I’m very glad to hear you say that Selina. In fact, I know I’m not the only one.” Selina gives him this *look*, like she is graciously giving him the floor and also wants to kick the ever-living shit out of him, but in a polite way. “There’s a young woman I know - we both know - who I am sure will be incredibly reassured by what you just said. She came to work for me recently - and I’m very lucky to have her, as Selina well knows - and she came under… perhaps the most difficult circumstances
imaginable. She was pregnant, with her first child, her previous employer had threatened to fire her for even going to doctor’s appointments, she couldn't be certain that her child’s father would step up and support them… think about it. The most vulnerable position a woman could possibly be in. And then she was sexually assaulted by a colleague. And she had to ask herself, could she trust her employer…would she be believed? Would she be protected? Or would she be fired for causing an inconvenience? I know it wasn’t an easy decision for her to leave - and, for all I’m glad to have her on my team, I’m even more glad to know that she was wrong, and that you would have defended her. Because I agree with you - no woman should be afraid in her place of work. No woman should have to choose between safety and a career that she loves.”

It’s fucking masterful.

That’s his first thought, before the full meaning of what Tom James had said really sinks in. The calm way it’s delivered, the tone of concern, the sincerity with which he speaks.

It’s the first time he’s seen Selina lose her composure on camera, and he sympathises because… jesus fuck it makes so much more sense now. He’d thought and thought and thought about it, and Ben’s explanation had never seemed like enough, but now…

She’d been so fucking clingy the night before she left.

He’d never seen her like that before - he’d assumed it was because of Brie and maybe the pregnancy fucking with her emotions, making her lose her composure, but… but it hadn’t been that at all. It had been…

She’d had a bruise, on her arm, the next day, he remembered, a massive, ugly, purple bruise. It had stood out on her skin like Jonah in a crowd of human-sized people.

He’s going to murder Leon.

He’s going to tear his skin of strip by painful strip - he’s going to pull his teeth out one by one - he’s going to bash his fucking skull in and stamp on his fingers and -

She cried.

She came back to the room and she was fucking crying and she hadn’t said anything. She hadn’t told him.

This all runs through his mind in the time it takes Ben to turn to him and Kent and say, “We’re fucked. No spin, we have to get her straight out of here, invent a Catherine emergency or something.”

“Yes,” Kent says, staring at the live poll (which now resembles a cliff edge), “I think that would be wise.”

The realisation of precisely who Tom James was talking about is slowly filtering through the room, and Dan can tell, looking at his team, that they weren’t expecting him to drop this bomb tonight. After a quick, huddled discussion, James’ wife, who’d been sitting with the team, escorts Amy out of the room, the two of them moving quickly, with their heads down. (Four different journalists try to interrupt them as they go, but they don’t seem to get anything).

Why didn’t she tell him?

Selina manages to keep her face on during the closing remarks, and doesn’t even glare at Tom James for dumping her in it. They gather up their computers and other gadgets and make a dash for the side
of the stage. They need not to be here right now.

She waits - through some supreme act of will - until they’re in the car to say anything, and of course her first question is directed at Dan. “What the fuck - why didn’t I know about this?”

“Do you think I knew? You think Leon would still be walking if I knew?”

“Well if you didn’t know, how can we be sure it’s true? Tom James claimed I practically raped him, when he instigated the - how do we know he’s not just making it up?”

“It’s true.” He’s surprised that Ben said it before him, and he continues. “It was that last night in New Hampshire, I’d swear to it. I came back to the office and… jesus, I should have guessed, she was fucking...shaking.”

“She had a bruise,” Dan says, and he’s clenching his fists. “On her arm, I saw, I just didn’t -”

“You’re girlfriend shows up with finger marks on her arms, and you don’t even question it? What the hell kind of sex were you having?” (Selina’s desperate for a way to make this his fault, he can tell).

“I was too busy trying to convince her to stay on your campaign, ma’am, to start pushing about…I thought she was just upset that I slept with Brie.”

The look Selina gives him is so full of disgust it’s like he’s Catherine. “I’m starting to see why she made such a fuss about having to be engaged to you and your immense personal problems. No wonder she didn’t tell you Leon tried to use her as a fleshlight.”

“You have to fire him, ma’am,” Ben says. “Now, tonight.”

“I know that,” Selina says, “I’m not an amateur. Are none of you capable of keeping your dicks in your fucking pants for five fucking minutes? Dan obviously isn’t.”

“I would never -” he starts, affronted that she would ever compare him to Leon.

“Please,” Selina says, “You think the way you are with women has nothing to do with this? You’re more brutal than you are with Jonah - Amy was probably scared you’d chop her up and leave her under your bed or something if she ever let you in.”

After a moment of silence, Kent says, “Is she all right?”

“I don’t know.” The judgemental looks everyone is giving him start to piss him off, and he adds, “She seemed fine… she was pissed at me, but that’s not new.”

“You should call her,” Kent says. “I don’t think she knew Tom was going to say all of that, and… if you two can present some kind of united front, it would really help us in terms of messaging.”

“This is why people call you a robot, you know. This, right here.”

“Call Amy, don’t call Amy, I don’t give a shit,” Selina says, “You have to get right on a statement saying Leon is fired with immediate effect and I’m horrified that my trust has been abused in this manner, and no one should doubt my commitment to inclusivity blah blah blah. And keep Leon the fuck out of my sight, because if I castrate him with a pair of manicure scissors, it will probably look bad in the polls.”

Dan hasn’t seen her this angry, ever, and while he’ll happily hold Leon down if she wants him to, he’s not sure quite how to approach her like this.
Amy always knew.

After a moment or two, Gary reaches out and touches Selina’s arm (like she’s a pet or something), “Is there anything you need sweetie?”

“Yeah,” Selina says, “I need the men in this business to have some sense of fucking decorum, and actually do their work instead of using my campaign manager as their own personal blow-up doll. I cannot believe Amy jumped ship to Tom James because of this, I’m going to pluck out every single one of Leon’s moustache hairs and make him swallow them along with a gallon of his own fucking jizz and then we’ll see how he likes it.”

“Want me to help?”

Of all people, he hadn’t expected to hear that from Gary, but from the look on his face… maybe he actually did have some residual fondness for Amy, even if she was a human being who wasn't Selina. (Dan remembers hearing a rumour that Gary beat up Andrew, and for the first time, it seems credible).

To everyone’s complete lack of surprise, Leon is gone when they get to the campaign office. The little fucker probably jumped on the first shuttle out of Manchester, and as much as Dan would like to cave his face in, he doesn’t have the time to chase him down, because the phones will not stop ringing - and, with no Leon, he’s their default press guy. (Which is problematic in a whole other way, but it’s not like they have a lot of options).

To add insult to injury, Leon had sent Selina a letter of resignation - a letter she absolutely refuses to acknowledge, preferring to stick to her statement that she had, in her words, ‘fired the fuck out of Leon’ the second she found out.

Stripping him of severance pay and health benefits seems completely inadequate.

It’s close to midnight before he can call Amy - well, close to midnight before he can call her and have her pick up. (She’s probably locked in a similar campaign huddle herself).

She sounds drained. “Going to ask me if it’s true?”

“Don’t be fucking… I know that it’s true,” Dan says, “Are you okay?”

“What do you think? Now I get to be defined for the rest of my life as Leon West’s chewtoy, how do you think that feels?”

So Kent’s suspicion was correct - she hadn’t known it was coming. Suddenly, more than ever, he wants her here, with him, he wants to be able to look at her face and see what she’s feeling.

His voice is very low, very quiet, when he says, “Ames, why didn’t you tell me?”

“It’s… complicated,” she says. “You wouldn’t understand. I couldn’t.”

“But you could have sex with me… right after…”

“That’s different.”

“Of course it’s different, I’d never… but why did you… jesus, I could have hurt you without even knowing.”

“Would you have cared?” He has to take a breath, because… it’s one thing to hear it from Selina,
but it is another entirely for Amy to say it. She must sense his reaction, because she continues, “If I’d come to you and said ‘Leon just tried to shove his dick down my throat, and I only got away because…’ would you have cared? Or would it just have been another fucking joke to you, like Buddy or Sophie or that creep Teddy going after Jonah?”

“You know that I - I’d have knocked his fucking teeth in.”

There’s a pause, and she clearly can’t entirely hide her surprise. “I guess you really don’t like it when someone plays with your toys.”

“Fuck that,” he says, actually angry now (and it’s like a distant part of his brain is trying to stop him from yelling at her, but he keeps going). “That misery-faced shithead hurt you. He fucking hurt you and he scared you and you ran the fuck away from me because of him, so don’t pretend that I would be all right with any of that. I want to tear his fucking head off.”

“And how does that help?” Amy asks, angry in her turn. “You give into your macho fucking fantasy and then what? What happens to Emily, does she just never see you again because you’ve got yourself locked up for the rest of your life? Leon is not important, Dan. And I’m sorry I didn’t react to being sexually assaulted in exactly the way you would have liked, but I couldn’t… I couldn’t… I was barely holding it together, I couldn’t just… and if you have a problem with that, you can go fuck yourself.”

“You should have told me,” he says. And she should have - he doesn’t even know how to explain it to her, how to make her understand that… he’d have jumped ship with her in a heartbeat, he’d have done anything she asked rather than…

She was alone. The whole time, alone with that knowledge, thinking he wouldn’t care, thinking Selina wouldn’t care, thinking it would just make things worse if she said anything, and… he can’t stand it.

“We would have done something about it.”

“Selina would have fired me and you know it.”

“Didn’t you see the statement? If he ever comes within range she’s going to torture him to death with his own glasses.”

“Because it’s a political problem for her - now. If I went to her then, if I told her what had happened, that her super-press man had… what would she have done? Thrown him overboard and kept me or…”

He wants to say yes - he wants to say of course Selina would have canned Leon the moment Amy came to her - but…

“You don’t know any more than I do,” Amy says, and she sounds incredibly weary. “I’ve done an interview with the Washington Post, so…you should tell her it’s coming.”

“Where are you - I’ll come stay with you tonight, I -”

“No, Dan.”

“Why not?”

“Because I can’t deal with you right now.”
“Amy, come on, I need to… I need to see you.”

“I don’t give a fuck what you need. You’re not my… we’re not anything, we’re barely even -”

“That’s not true.”

“Isn’t it? The only reason you care is that it’s going to be bad for your campaign. You’re probably hoping I’ll do a joint interview or something, present a united front for the press so Selina doesn’t get hammered.”

“Amy,” he says, and he doesn’t know how to tell her it’s not true. “I don’t want you to be alone.”

“I’m not. Remember?”

He feels hot inside, in his chest, and for the first time since he was a kid he almost…wants to cry, maybe, maybe that’s what he’s feeling. She’s going through something horrible and she’s with Emily, and she doesn’t want him there, and… he needs to touch her, he needs to hold her, needs to reassure himself that she’s all right, that she’s still Amy.

All he can say is, “I love you.”

“No, Dan,” Amy says, and he can tell she really believes what she’s saying, “You don’t.”

And that’s that.

He winds up in a hotel bar with Ben and Kent, drinking himself almost into oblivion, because he doesn’t want to be with them, he wants to be where Amy is, and he can’t. He’s not about to react to learning that Amy’s been assaulted by ignoring her explicit wishes, but it hurts, knowing she’s somewhere else, knowing that she’s got to find all the press attention a kind of torture, and there’s not a single goddamn thing he can do to stop any of it, she won’t let him near her.

What’s worse is that when he gives them a rough summary of what Amy had said - why she hadn’t told him - Ben agrees that he probably would have made a joke about it (citing the things he said to Jonah when they had to testify in front of Congress). Kent… doesn’t, exactly, though he does observe that Amy was probably in some kind of shock - it’s very common in rape victims after all - and maybe he shouldn’t take it personally, which…

If he ever sees Leon West again, that fucker is going to be picking his teeth out of the next three counties.

The interview comes out the next day, and it’s exactly as bad as he’d feared. Apparently, Tom James sat in on the interview to offer support (though Dan has a feeling it was also to be sure Amy wouldn’t rip him to shreds for making the story part of the campaign), and he can tell, just from how it’s written, that she was having to grit her teeth to get through it.

And the worst part is how… familiar it is. It’s the same story he’s read and shrugged over a hundred times - she was alone with him when suddenly the interaction took an unexpected twist, he laid hands on her, and even as it was happening she couldn’t quite believe that someone would do that to her, and she was scared…scared that he’d hit her, that he’d hit her and hurt the baby, and when it was over… when she got away from him, all she could think was that no one else would believe it either. That no one would help her.

He wants to vomit.

The campaign limps on. Selina takes an aggressive angle on the assault, arguing strenuously that she
should not be blamed for the actions of a sexually abusive fuck-up, arguing that holding her to account for it more than Leon is simply misogyny in action, and...it works. Kind of.

They release the Danny Chung story to the press a week or two later, and that distracts them for a decent number of news cycles. It helps that feminists are starting to tear into Tom James for weaponising sexual harassment against the only female candidate, doing the campaign's work for them. (Dan doesn’t know how, but it seems to have gone round that Amy wasn’t expecting him to use her story - probably her face gave it away - which at least takes some of the heat off her).

Still, they’re weak going into Super Tuesday, and focus groups make it clear that Selina tolerating sexual assault has replaced Tibet as the one thing everyone knows about her. He has a feeling - that he can’t substantiate - that the story has done more serious damage than just a bad headline or two.

The results are inconclusive - no one gets wiped out, and while Tom James wins more states than anyone else, he doesn’t win enough to give him a decisive advantage. Jonah gets a late surge, which splits the vote in a couple of states - as though the electorate have called down a plague on all their houses.

Although Amy has been avoiding the fuck out of him ever since the story broke, she still comes to Florida to meet his parents, though she has to cut the visit short by a day (due to campaign matters, he tells his mother, and hopes that’s why).

It is a complete disaster.

Not that his parents realise. As is traditional, his father barely acknowledges him - barely even acknowledges Emily - and his mother fusses over him and asks when they’re planning the wedding and coos over Amy, telling her how brave she is, how beautiful, how proud her parents must be of everything she’s accomplished.

If Amy’s Dad ever met his Dad, Dan has a feeling they would get on great.

Amy is visibly twitchy under all this attention, and they have… not a fight, but a… he doesn’t even know what to call it the first night. Sure his Dad is a self-absorbed prick, but his mother is trying, and she’s not getting anything back. And okay, bringing up Leon in the first five minutes was stupid, but she didn’t mean anything by it, Amy shouldn’t be so sensitive, she should...

It’s a very good thing that Emily woke up when she did, because he’s fairly sure Amy would have hit him, and he can’t honestly say it wouldn’t have been deserved.

Being back with his parents makes him anxious. And having to go to mass with his mother, and hear the priest drone the fuck on about forgiveness and generosity and all that shit does not help one bit.

Amy meets them for brunch afterwards - before flying back to join the James campaign in Virginia - and that’s when his father drops the bomb Dan had been expecting the entire trip.

His father had a certain…malicious quality, a tendency to poke at people just because he can, and an eye for weakness that... well, Dan had to have gotten it from somewhere. And Dan could tell, he did not entirely approve of Amy - her high-powered career wasn’t the problem exactly, but her assertiveness, her…visibility, bothered him. That she was constantly in the press, that she had ‘tied’ Dan to her by getting pregnant, that you could read her feelings on her face…all of those things were unacceptable.

Dan’s Mom had always dealt with her family’s less…savoury qualities by ignoring them, pretending
they were all the good men that they ought to have been - only his brother even came close to matching the image she had of him, and that seemed mere chance.

So, he shouldn’t have been surprised when, after they’ve wrangled Emily’s flailing limbs into her high chair and placed their orders, his Dad says, “So, are you going to take that CBS offer your mother told me about?”

Bastard.

“I haven’t really thought about it,” he says, “the campaign is still running.”

“Not for much longer,” his Dad says, “Amy saw to that.”

He’s tempted to point out that it was Leon who fucked the campaign, with assists from Selina and Tom James, but he’d rather not get mired in that particular topic (again), and so all he says is, “I’ll think about.”

“I did enjoy getting to see you on TV all the time,” his Mom says, “It made seem like you weren’t so far away.”

“It’s not a sure thing, Brie wasn’t even sure.”

“Brie?” Amy has a knowing look on her face, and this is really not the time.

“They’re looking for new correspondents on the evening news, and… she just mentioned it to me when I ran into her, it’s not… I’m not leaving the campaign.”

For fuck’s sake, he just bought a brownstone in Georgetown - which she would know about if she could bring herself to talk to him for longer than five minutes - he’s not about to…

“I see,” Amy says, though she doesn’t see, he knows she doesn’t see - by sheer chance, he saw Brie at one of the vote counts, she’d mentioned it as a vague possibility, and he’d mentioned it in passing to to his mother because it was something to talk about that didn’t involve Amy not speaking to him.

She spends the rest of the meal focused on Emily, convincing her to eat - she’s almost weaned now, bar the occasional late night feeding, which means pretty soon Dan is going to have the pleasure of entire days with her. (For practicality - meaning, Amy’s access to a nanny and Angela-the-Super-Intern - she’d still be with Amy most of the time, but… at least he’d discovered that Richard is good with kids, which will make things easier).

She has to leave immediately afterwards to get her flight, meaning he’s not able to pull her aside and explain.

But they’re bound to run into each other on the campaign trail, so this state of… misunderstanding isn’t going to persist.

He thinks.

But when, four days later, he gets back to D.C. he finds that Amy’s moved all of her stuff out of his apartment (and presumably into her own). All that’s left is that goddamn engagement ring on his coffee table.

She finally took it off.

It’s either cry or punch the wall, so…
That Selina wins the Virginia primary (by two percent of the vote) is no comfort at all.
Chapter Nine

When the movers are gone, and she and Emily are finally settled back in to her apartment, Amy feels the strangest urge to laugh.

It’s been so long since she’s lived there. She’d moved to Nevada and New York, she’s been engaged (twice) (kind of), she’s had three different jobs, she has Emily…

It barely even feels like it belongs to her anymore. The pristine kitchen and the neat bookshelves - can they really be hers?

Not to mention the clean white walls.

It’s all so…tidy, and just so, and perfect, and… well, no need to worry, Emily will take care of that soon enough.

She’s not sorry for leaving Dan.

Or, if she’s sorry, she’s sorry that she had to. As much as… as much as things were easier when he was around, (so much easier), the lack of stability was ultimately more stress than it was worth. Not to mention that the two of them had spent more time fighting since the New Hampshire debate than doing anything else. It’s not like he’d ever suggested making it a permanent arrangement.

If he wants to run back to CBS and Brie all over again, then fine. Amy’s not putting herself - or Emily - in the path of that train wreck for a second time. She’d learned the hard way that Dan would never choose her, and she wasn’t going to be a fool twice.

But he did give her Emily, and for that reason alone, it’s impossible to hate him the way he almost certainly deserves. More than anything, that was had surprised her about motherhood. She’d spent enough time with Sophie’s kids (or rather, had avoided spending enough time with Sophie’s kids) to be prepared for the shits and the tantrums and the endless demands for food or hugs or toys or whatever… but the raw, animal love, that was brand new.

Not that anyone would think of her as a warm and cuddly mother, she’s sure - if anything, probably the reverse. She made a conscious effort not to talk about Emily too much, not to show off pictures of her or share anecdotes, but all the same… no matter how tired she is, when Emily laughs…

She had to admit, she and Dan had produced one hell of a cute kid. With her wide green eyes and and unkempt hair, she looked like she should be advertising something. And, fortunately for Amy, she’d started sucking her thumb early. She cries of course - and there had been a few nights when Amy nearly started crying herself, because Emily would not calm down - but most of the time if she could jam her thumb into her mouth and have Amy balance her on her hip, she’d soothe herself.

Which was why, eventually, Amy had got into the habit of carrying her around like that when she was working late evenings. Tom didn’t mind, and Colin, his aide from way back when, had even argued that it made the campaign look good to have Emily show up in so many social media posts.

Though Amy cared a lot less about how the campaign looked than she used to. At first it had been a relief - working for someone who listened to what she said, who paid attention, who didn’t need to have his ego massaged every time something went wrong. It had taken a while to get used to - in fact, she wasn’t sure she was used to it. Which wasn’t to say that she and Tom hadn’t disagreed at times, because they certainly had (she still says they would have won the Virginia primary if he’d joined in the Chung pile-on like she’d suggested), but his reasons made sense, oh, at least sixty
percent of the time.

And she’d thought she could live with the other forty percent.

She’d screamed at him the night of the debate - and Colin, whose idea it had been, apparently - because he had no right to do that, no right to fling her to the wolves without even… It would be one thing if they had discussed it, if she’d been prepared, if they’d agreed a strategy for how to take things forward, but they’d just…dropped her in it.

And yet, deep, deep down, there was a part of her that was glad. Not glad that it had happened, and yet glad that… it was out there, at last, that she didn’t have to tell anyone. She’d tried to work up the willpower to tell Dan, or her Dad, and every time… every single time the words stuck in her throat. As much as she’d wanted to explain, to make it clear that she had left the campaign for a good reason, that she hadn’t just flung her career into the air for the sheer hell of it… She couldn’t tell him, it didn’t matter how much she wanted to, the words just would not come out of her mouth.

He’d been an ass about it, of course, but no more so than usual. In fact, she had to admit, she’d been dreading having to hear him laugh about it or joke about it, but… his assholery had taken a different direction.

Which is why she’d arranged things so that it was always her Mom or Angela who dropped Emily off to him. She didn’t feel like being shouted at, again, for not having told him, for not having handled the situation in the precise way he approved of, so she’d just…opted out. (And okay, some part of her was aware that it wasn’t exactly a long-term solution, she’s going to have to speak to him eventually, but given how fucking terribly Selina’s campaign was going, he was unlikely to be in a particularly cooperative mood).

Chung takes far too long to pull out of the race, which… just ruins things for everyone, splitting the vote in the most unhelpful ways possible. As a direct result, Jonah, of all people, wins both Ohio and Pennsylvania, meaning everyone has to pretend to take him seriously. Selina wins California (though only barely), and that just fucks things up even more.

Tom has more delegates than anyone else, but not enough, and they have to launch a charm offensive on the super-delegates in the run up to the convention. At least she can rely on Tom not to pimp her out (she thinks).

The original plan had been for Tom to announce Mattie Baker as his running mate - show that he respected the backbone of the Democratic party by selecting a black, Southern woman for the bottom of the ticket…

But she’s diagnosed with liver cancer three weeks before the convention, which torpedoed their plans entirely. Admittedly, Amy’d never had much fondness for Baker - it took serious chutzpah for a black pro-life Democrat to get herself elected in Georgia, it was true…and Baker never let herself, or anyone else, forget it - but she was definitely the best choice, and it’s a shame to lose her.

There’s some noise about creating a ‘super-ticket’ with Selina, which Amy tries to veto as much as possible. Partly because it would completely unbalance the ticket, bringing Tom’s lack of foreign policy bona fides into unhelpful focus, and partly because…Selina would hate being Vice-President so much she might become an active threat. If they want to use her as an elder stateswoman of the party, there are better ways.

Which means… there’s only one option, even if she really, really doesn’t want to take it. They spend the weekend before the Convention hashing it out, and she gets Tom and Colin to accept her proposal. It might at least…mitigate the damage somewhat.
Fortunately, due all to the delegate bingo going on, no one was expecting them to have the running mate announced yet. And so, on the Tuesday, they call Kent and Ben to Tom’s suite.

She’s stuck having what feels like an endless negotiation with a moronic super-delegate from Nebraska, that started when she was in the bathroom changing Emily, and feels like it might continue until the heat death of the universe. She’s so bored by his matched set of issues that she starts making faces at Emily, teasing her by crossing her eyes and looking at her nose, murmuring responses to the idiot and hoping for the sweet release of death.

Finally, she loses patience, and says, “To be clear, no one remembers the contribution you made as Secretary of Labour, oh, some time in the stone age, but I can promise you, if you don’t get your shit together and vote for the presumptive nominee… we will definitely remember that. Now, I’m going to talk to my daughter - she can’t manage two syllable words yet, but she’s still better conversation than you are.” She hangs up the phone, tossing it to one side, and bends her head to kiss Emily’s face. “Yes you are, yes you are better company than that fucking consumptive gasbag, aren’t you? Aren’t you just?”

Emily’s laughing in that vaguely unhinged way she has, and Amy can’t help it, she laughs too, resting her chin on Emily’s stomach and pinching her cheeks.

“Jesus fucking Christ, you really did catch the mommy gene. I would never have believed it.”

She looks up to see Ben, Kent and Dan standing in the doorway - she was so distracted by Emily she didn’t hear them come in. It’s slightly embarrassing, and it’s made worse when Tom comes in, takes one look at her, and says, “You were making faces at the baby again, weren’t you?”

“She likes it,” Amy says, avoiding Ben’s eyes (and wondering what the hell Dan is even doing there).

Fortunately, the moment Dan comes round to take his seat Emily squeals and starts crawling towards him, all but demanding to be picked up and cuddled. Which is what happens, slightly to Amy’s surprise. Dan doesn’t even seem to mind when she starts playing with his tie, entranced by the bright colour. Kent gives her something that might be intended to be a smile as she watches, and Ben says, “No matter how many times I see that, I still can’t get used to it. it’s like watching a hyena playing with a rabbit.”

“In any case,” Kent says, “Why are we here? We should tell you that President Meyer has no intention of joining the ticket.”

“That’s good to know,” Tom says, “But it’s not why we asked you to meet with us today.”

She can feel the prickle of interest from each man but, to their credit, they maintain their composure. “Even if Selina would agree to come on as Veep, given her and Tom’s past,” she says, “It wouldn’t be viable. There’d be rumours about them even if they never… got it on inside the Washington Monument or whatever.”

“So, then… why the tea party?”

“Well, Ben,” Tom says, leaning forward, doing that man-to-man schtick that Amy hates, “My preferred option can’t join the ticket, and you three destroyed Chung so well he’s not an option either. Which means… the only possibility for Veep is…”

“No,” Kent says, “I have to protest, this is not a good… did you see the chaos he created in Congress? It’s…irresponsible.”
“And only failed white men even vote for him,” Ben adds, actually seeming to agree with Kent.

“Well unfortunately for all of us, there’s a lot of them out there,” Amy says. “And, women aren’t going to have a choice, are they? At least they’ll know Jonah is in favour of abortions. I mean, he’d have to be.”

“Now, Ben, Kent,” Tom says, seeing them still look discontented, “We know what we’re dealing with here. That’s why we’re approaching you first. Amy says you can…if not control him, certainly minimise the destruction. And you wouldn’t be working for him, you’d be working for me. The VP’s office would be purely an extension of the West Wing - working to the same grid, no independent projects. It’s the only way.”

“And what about Dan, does he just fuck off - we are at least technically a team, you know.”

Tom gives her a startled look, and then says, “I’d understood… I was given to understand you were likely moving back to New York for CBS.”

“What?”

Ben and Dan say it simultaneously, and Amy’s not sure who sounds more outraged. “What the shit is this, Danny Boy?”

“We are supposed to be business partners.”

Kent’s tone is deceptively mild, mild in a way that pisses Dan off even more, because he turns and looks right at him, saying, “I have a fucking kid in DC, Kent, I’m not going anywhere. Which Amy would know if she ever answered her fucking phone.”

“You really shouldn’t talk like that in front of the baby.”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Amy says, rolling her eyes. “She already says mama and dada, so…fuck is only a matter of time.”

She takes Emily out of Dan’s lap, and walks to the window with her. She needs a second.

“Perhaps,” Tom says, “You two should take this particular conversation offline?”

Amy doesn’t say anything, playing with Emily’s hands and letting her babble. After a moment, Tom continues, “So, are the three of you ready to ride roughshod over Jonah Ryan’s self-esteem?”

“Senator,” Dan says, “I would genuinely like nothing more.”

“Good,” he says, “Amy assures me that you three should be able to squash at least some of the idiocy out of him. But, before we go any further, there’s something else I have to make clear.”

“We haven’t actually signed the dotted line, you know,” Ben says.

“I’m fairly sure this won’t be a dealbreaker. And if it is… I don’t want to hire you.”

She’s not sure where this is going.

“Your candidate’s campaign was just destroyed by a sexual harassment story. And I know exactly what kind of person Jonah Ryan is. So, I want it understood now… if I find out that there is any of that nonsense, if I hear that you knew about it and didn’t tell me…”

“They didn’t know,” she says, because… they didn’t, it’s not their fault.
“Amy,” Tom says in that tone of voice that makes her feel like a scolded teenager. “Maybe they didn’t know he attacked you, but they knew he acted like a creep around you. They just didn’t think it was important. And this campaign is not getting caught in that trap.”

There’s some more back and forth, but, unsurprisingly, they agree to the deal. Ben and Kent leave - to break it to Selina, no doubt - and Amy busies herself trying to convince Emily not to grab her hair.

It doesn’t work of course - it never does - but it gives her at least a few moments to gather her thoughts. Because Dan is staring at her, and she knows…she knows the second she looks up and makes eye contact, she’s going to get it.

She never thought he’d stay.

“So, pumpkin,” he says at long last, “Guess we’re working together again.”

“Guess we are,” she says, and tries to sound casual. “Why didn’t you take the CBS job?”

“Why did you think I would?”

“Because… because, come on, your fantasy woman offers you your dream job, and I’m supposed to think… obviously you’d take it.”

“And yet, I’m still here.”

“And that’s what I can’t figure out.”

“Amy. You know why.”

She doesn’t know what to say to that, so she puts Emily down on the floor (allowing her to crawl back over to Dan), and says, “Well, you’ll get more time with her now.”

Seeing him hold his hands out to Emily, hearing her giggle when he holds her…it does something to her insides. She looks just like him too, which makes it worse - they belong together. (When they visited his parents in Florida - which was a shitshow - she’d seen pictures of Dan as a kid, and the resemblance was uncanny).

It’s too much, in the end, so she picks up her phone and says, “I’ve got to call some more delegates, but… Angela will help get you all set up on our systems.”

And that’s that.

The campaign is long, and exhausting, and a logistical nightmare, and for the very first time, Amy thinks she understands why Selina tolerates Gary. Without Angela, she probably would have been in an advanced state of insanity by mid-September, but her assistant’s grasp of logistics is unmatched. Living out of a suitcase is hard enough alone, but with a baby in tow… if Angela wasn’t keeping track of when they needed to buy diapers or take Emily for her check ups or the hundred other things that she needs, Amy thinks she might have lost her mind.

And Dan is there. Always.

It’s easier in some ways - Angela no longer needs to keep two campaign schedules in mind - and
harder in others. Because he’s always there, and try though she might, sometimes it’s hard to remember just how much of a shit he is. No matter how hard she tries, he still manages to make her laugh whenever something stupid happens.

He’s not even sleeping with anyone on the campaign staff, as far as Amy can tell (and she really is trying not to think about it).

The night before the election, they all wind up drinking in the bar of the old-fashioned hotel in Augusta that they’re using as a campaign centre, reminiscing about the more lunatic elements of the campaign (and, since Jonah was involved, there were a lot of those). Colin and Kent have struck up some weird bromance, bonding over a shared love of obscure film trivia, meaning he’s invited along.

It’s close to midnight when Ben asks the question he must have been wondering about for months. “So, Amy, I hear you’re the one who vetoed Selina joining the ticket.”

“I didn’t veto anything,” she says, looking at her drink, “But yeah, I advised against it.”

“Why?”

Dan’s sitting right beside her, closer than he’s been in months, and she really doesn’t want to get into it while he’s there. “She’d be a distraction,” she says.

“He’s married - to a younger woman - I think the press would get over it.”

“It wasn’t the press I was worried about.”

“Oh?”

“Come on Ben,” she says, irritated, “You know exactly what I’m talking about.

“Enlighten me.”

“For fuck sake are you all blind? Selina may be a malignant narcissist, but… he is exactly as in love with her as she thinks he is.”

“He’s married to someone else.”

“Yeah, because… it’s not like she’s ever going to change. I mean, we all know what she’s like. So…even with Alicia in the picture, it’s still not a good idea to have her around all the time. At least, that’s what I said to him.”

She doesn’t get into her other plans for Selina, because… it’s all still so up in the air. There’s no point in raising anyone’s hopes, least of all her own.

She goes up to her room not long after, drained from the final day of the campaign and trying to ignore Dan’s eyes on her. Her skin prickles when he stares at her like that, and she gets the urge to wriggle around in her seat, to do...something. Something that would no doubt be very, very stupid. Which means going to her room is the wisest course. It sets Angela free to run off with whichever of the interns she’s dating, and, fortunately, Emily doesn’t even stir when she comes in, lost in sleep and probably dreaming.

Election Day itself is strange - they can’t actually campaign (as such), so the whole day is lost in a kind of haze. Tom doesn’t have Selina’s need for frenetic activity, and he actually tells Amy to take Emily for a walk or something in the afternoon, and try to relax. (She does no such thing. She takes Emily to the soft play area, and sits in a corner checking her phone while Emily bounces off the
walls. Where her daughter got her love of physical activity, Amy doesn’t know).

There’s the usual tense wait for the exit polls, and then the actual counts, to come in… but when it becomes clear that they’ve won New York, Florida, Illinois, Michigan and New Jersey… well, it seems like it’s in the bag. There’s no way on this earth California is going red, and that alone should be enough to put them over the top, even if they don’t win Ohio. (They do).

Montez calls shortly after midnight to congratulate Tom and concede the election, and that done there’s all the usual hugging and cheering. It’s a weird night because… because she’s happy, she’s glad, she finally got to run a campaign the way she’d always wanted to, she finally got her candidate over the finish line, but…

The suite is large, with several bedrooms, one of which she’d claimed as her own - mostly so she’d have a quiet space to yell down the phone when needed.

But even that doesn’t seem private enough for the call she’s about to make, so she steps out onto the balcony (and it is fucking freezing, but that’s Maine in November for you).

Gary picks up on the third ring, and she has to have a…robust discussion with him before he’ll put Selina on the phone. Her old boss isn’t happy to hear from her, if her tone is anything to go by.

“So, Amy, congratulations. You finally made Tom James President.”

“Yes, Ma’am, I did.”

“How does it feel knowing you’re going to have to stare at that smug face every day for the next four years? Did he promise to make you Chief of Staff?”

“Ma’am, I… I didn’t call to gloat.”

“Oh really? Well then why did you?”

“I called because… ma’am, you’re going to get a phone call in the next few hours, and I wanted to be sure you’d give the right answer.”

“You already made sure he didn’t pick me for VP. I heard about that.”

“I did,” Amy says, and braces herself for the inevitable attack. It doesn’t last as long as she’d expected, and when Selina pauses for breath, she says, “You were wasted as Veep, and we both know it. And if anything you’d be more wasted under Tom - you wouldn’t have a chance of doing anything useful, not for another eight years.”

“Oh, is he going to nominate me for the Bench? We’ve done that little dance before, remember Amy?”

“No. Secretary of State.”

“What?”

“Foreign Policy was always your strongest area. And after Tibet… you have a higher international profile than ever before. I know it’s not what you wanted, but I really think… it’s a chance to do something.”

She knows, better than anyone, just how bored Selina was with the Meyer Foundation and giving speeches and the library. Better for everyone concerned if she found something to do, especially
something she was actually good at. And since, as Secretary of State, she’d be out of the country most of the time, it would keep her safely out of Tom’s way.

There are upsides for everyone, if Selina will only see them.

“And why should I sign up to haul my ass all over the globe making Tom look good.”

“Because you’d be serving your country, ma’am,” Amy says, though she knows it’s probably a hopeless angle. “And because… there’s not going to be a better offer. You can have four years of just pissing around on the board of this hedge fund and that pharmaceutical board, or you can make the Meyer doctrine a reality. Besides, if you don’t… he’s going to keep Doyle.”

Which seems to settle the matter as far as Selina’s concerned. Maybe it was what Amy should have gone with first - because getting to fuck Doyle over is almost certainly more appealing than patriotism when it comes to her old boss.

There’s a pause, and then Selina says, quietly, “It should have been me.”

“I know ma’am,” she says, and swallows. “I’m sorry it ended up this way.”

“Yeah, cause that had nothing to do with you.”

“I didn’t… I didn’t feel like I had any other options.”

“Well… I suppose that’s my fault,” Selina says, and Amy can’t even tell if she’s angry or sad or… anything. “I won’t disappoint your shithead President.”

“Thank you, ma’am. I wish… I wish it had been different.”

“Well,” Selina says, “If creepy men weren’t fucking everything up for us, it wouldn’t be politics, now would it? Tell that group of traitors I said hello.”

“Will do.”

She stares out the river for a moment or two, trying to swallow down her feelings. It feels like some knot, deep down inside, has just come loose at long last, and she almost… she almost feels like she can’t stand up straight without it.

When she goes back into the room, Dan is sitting on the bed, talking on his phone. He’s talking to Richard - who was watching Emily for them - checking in on her…

He smiles at her when the call is over, that wide grin that makes him just about the most handsome man she’s ever seen. “We did it,” he says, looking her up and down.

And that does it.

She takes one second to place her phone, carefully, on the chest of drawers where nothing can happen to it, and then she walks to where he’s sitting, takes his face in her hands and kisses him.

At long fucking last, they’ve done it, together, they’ve got a President elected, the two of them, and she can’t, can’t, can’t hold back any more.

The room is quiet, but she can hear the others celebrating in just the other room, cheering and hugging or whatever, just on the other side of the door. And the. Dan pulls her in, sliding his hand up the back of her leg…
When his hand reaches the top of her stocking (because she’d changed into a fucking great dress for Tom’s acceptance, and stockings were needed to keep the line clean), and she feels the tips of his fingers against her inner thigh…she realises what they’re doing.

So, she pulls back, pulls away from him, and turns to walk to the door.

Slightly to her surprise, Dan jumps to his feet, chasing after her. “No, no, no,” he says, “You are not running out on me again, Brookheimer.”

She ignores him, not looking behind her, and turns the key in the lock, taking her time with it, wanting to be sure it is definitely, one hundred percent locked before they take things any further.

Dan’s right behind her, crowding her just a little, and he breathes, “I love you,” right in her ear.

And then they’re kissing again, Amy turning just enough in his arms that she can reach his mouth. She’s trapped almost, between him and the door, and it feels incredible, to be close to him again, to feel his arms around her. His kisses are just as desperate as hers.

Her heart is racing.

She gasps a little, though it’s hardly surprising, when he starts to inch his hands up her skirt. It’s been so long since someone’s touched her like this…

When he slides his fingers into her underwear, she moans out loud and she feels him smile, just a little, against the skin of her neck. But he doesn’t stop touching her, doesn’t let up, no matter what she does, and she can feel herself getting hot, a flush rising in her skin, and she wants… she wants to touch him, but even more, even more, she wants to…

She turns, finally, and being face to face makes it stranger. Especially when Dan rests his forehead against hers and pulls her panties down, keeping his eyes on hers the entire time.

From there, it only takes a moment to open his belt, and then he’s lifting her, pushing her back against the door, and…

It’s not quite as awkward as she’d always imagined, having sex standing up, but it does take them a moment or two to…arrange themselves.

And then he’s inside her, and it feels right, right in a way it never has with anyone else, not really (certainly not with Buddy), and she doesn’t even care when he says, “Look at me.”

Normally she’d start a fight with him for giving her orders, but just this once…she wraps her arms around his neck, one hand snaking into his hair, and meets his eyes. It gives her leverage and lets her look at him, really look at him, and it’s…scary almost, to let him see her like this, but, at the same time…

As he continues to move, she starts to… make noise, she can’t help it, and she realises… if someone was listening to them, it would sound like she was sobbing. And they might not be wrong.

Not that it matters, she couldn’t stop herself, not even if she wanted to, it’s too good, too overwhelming, she wants to grab on to Dan and never let go.

When she comes, she buries her face in his shoulder, trying not to collapse completely until he’s finished. She feels limp.

They stand there for thirty seconds or so afterwards, held up more by inertia and the door than
anything else, and then, eventually, Dan moves to put her down. And Amy must...shake her head or something, because he catches it, and says, “Just for now.”

Maybe she shouldn’t have done this, maybe she should have held back, but... when she’s pulled her underwear back on and checked her stockings are still up, and Dan has done up his pants, he pulls her back into him, his hands roaming over her waist and bottom, like he’s greedy for the opportunity to touch her.

It feels like she’s just erased all the lines she’d drawn between them, and her balance has been thrown off as a direct result. So, with a surge of fear, or something, in her stomach, she kisses him quickly, and says, “Thanks for the quickie.”

And then she unlocks the door and makes a run for it.

Tom and Colin have a dozen things to ask her, and Ben is handing around champagne, and Jonah’s demanding that they all go out and celebrate ‘properly’ (what Jonah considers a proper celebration doesn’t bear thinking about), and she dives back into it, trying to seem like herself, like she’s cool, calm and collected.

It doesn’t help that Dan approaches her after a minute or two, quietly handing her her phone and giving her this… look that… she’s had his fucking kid, he shouldn’t be able to unsettle her with just a look, and yet...

Shortly after two a.m. Tom tells them to disperse - get some rest - they have to fly back to D.C. the next morning, and get to work on the transition. Dan’s at her elbow the moment they leave the suite, and if Jonah hadn’t demanded that they go out and do something involving bitches, Amy’s pretty sure he would have insisted that they have it out right then and there. But letting Jonah loose on the inhabitants of Augusta, Maine without supervision is completely unthinkable, and there’s no way Ben or Kent will go.

She’s relieved.

She’s jittery and nervous and she can tell, from how he’s looking at her, that Dan knows, and so she’s glad he has to leave with Jonah and she can go back to her room and have a low level panic attack about what just happened.

Except she’s a grown woman with a baby in her hotel room, so she doesn’t have a panic attack, she gets rid of Richard, brushes her teeth, showers, and puts herself to bed in a mature manner. She doesn’t even look at her phone, because she kind of doesn’t want to know if Dan’s texted her or not. If he’s out with Jonah, he may well be fucking a co-ed by now.

The next morning is kind of a mess, getting everything packed in time to fly back to DC, and she doesn’t even see him until they’re all on the plane. And Emily is having a fit of clinginess or something, insisting on being held and played with for almost the entire flight.

She gets like this sometimes, and Amy can never work out why. Emily’s temper, the furious way she cries when she doesn’t get what she wants, that hadn’t surprised her. She remembered, when she was small, being so angry, so impossibly angry, and so seeing it in Emily was oddly gratifying, but the clinginess, the neediness that she demonstrated from time to time seemed inexplicable. It’s not as though Emily had been neglected or ignored, and yet there were times when she seemed to actively resent Amy paying attention to anyone else.

By the time they got off the plane, Amy wants nothing more than to get home and collapse on her bed - she doesn’t even argue with Tom when he tells her to take the rest of the day off. She’s
making her way through the airport with Emily in one arm and her carry-on suitcase in the other, when her building’s super calls.

There’s been a power cut in her building, because of course there has, and he’s not sure when it will be fixed and maybe she should consider staying somewhere else for the night.

She wants to bang her head off a wall - the thought of going home to her parents for the night is enough to make her groan out loud.

Which is when she realises that Dan’s been listening in to her conversation, because he swoops down on her, ruffling Emily’s hair as he says, “Might as well stay with me?”

“So, what, you can lock me up in a cage and take my job with Tom?”

“Amy, if I was going to chain you up, do you really think it’d be for a job?” She doesn’t say anything - she doesn’t know what to say - and Dan takes Emily from her, lifting her like she weighs nothing. “Come on,” he says, “You hate staying at your parents’ and you’re exhausted. Come home with me.”

He doesn’t even give her time to respond properly, just walks off with Emily (who’s giggling and grabbing his face the way she does)…and Amy rolls her eyes and follows him.

She’s fairly certain that it’s a terrible, terrible idea, but there’s a small, useless part of her that has to admit… having Dan around to distract Emily, to carry heavy bags and deal with the cab driver… it makes life so much easier.

The cab takes a direction she doesn’t expect, and she’s genuinely startled when they eventually stop at a townhouse in Georgetown. She remembers Dan’s apartments - in DC and New York - and they’ve always been depressing as hell, places he used only to sleep and shower and occasionally fuck in.

It’s gorgeous - bright and comfortable and warm. Admittedly, Emily’s toys are scattered all over the living room, and Dan clearly hasn’t unpacked from whenever he moved in, but all the same…she’s surprised by how much she likes it.

They don’t do much - sitting on the couch, watching Emily play with her fucking…cornucopia of toys, and listening to the news coverage of the election. Dan clearly has more energy than she does, because he gets down on the floor with Emily for a little while, tickling her and teasing her by holding her bear out of view. When he starts playing peekaboo with her, Amy can’t help herself, it just comes out.

“You know you’re just mocking our kid for not understanding object permanence yet.”

“I’ve made fun of kids for less,” he says, grinning up at her, and she grumbles, not really responding. Fortunately Emily distracts him before he realises he’s stumped her.

Dan even puts Emily to bed, carrying her up the stairs in a disconcertingly practiced manner. Emily doesn’t complain, not really, just slumps her head heavily against his shoulder.

It’s fucking weird.

Left alone, Amy wanders into the kitchen. There are large glass doors opening into the garden and every possible gadget a person could need. (She doesn’t know how to use any of them).

It’s freaking her out, and she pours herself a glass of wine in an attempt to soothe her nerves.
None of this is what she’d expected.

And Dan doesn’t help. Twenty minutes or so later, he comes into the room, carrying a baby monitor. “I ordered pizza,” he says, and she nods, glad he’d thought of it.

“Why do you have such a big house?”

He stares at her, and she sees something move in his throat. “You know why.”

“No, I… No, I don’t, I don’t, okay?”

Faster than should have been possible, Dan’s in front of her. He takes the glass of wine from her hand, and takes a drink, swirling it around in his mouth. Nervous, Amy folds her arms, not looking at him, looking at the shiny oven and dishwasher, looking at anything else.

When he kisses her, it’s not really a shock. His mouth tastes of the crappy red wine she’d been drinking, and he’s forceful, pushing her back against the kitchen island.

Always before there’d been some element of… not fight, that’s much too strong a term, but competition, when they’d hooked up, but… she just lets him do what he wants, lets him take her mouth and her body, and when he lifts her onto the island, she goes along with it.

It’s only when he pulls her panties off and sits himself firmly down on a stool between her legs that she realises just what he has in mind.

She genuinely can’t remember the last time someone went down on her - Buddy certainly didn’t (it wasn’t a turn-on for him, apparently), and…

And she can’t hide her reaction, not even close. Her breath comes shaking out of her throat, and she finds her hand in his hair, pushing him into the right spot, pushing him closer, and she does try not to buck up into his mouth, but… she’s not helped by Dan teasing her, and pulling back from time to time to grin right up at her.

“Good thing Emily’s on the second floor,” he says, “I never knew you were so… vocal.”

“Maybe you’re just crap in bed.”

“Oh… want me to stop?”

“Dan!”

She can’t even be bothered with this teasing any more, and tries to actually push his head back into her. He’s laughing when he sets to work on her again, the vibrations of his jaw doing even more to excite her.

It is a good thing Emily can’t hear her, because when Dan starts to finger-fuck her in tandem with his tongue, she makes a sound that might… might make someone think she was being killed.

But then he stops, again, because the door-bell has just rung.

“Pizza’s here,” he says, leaning back in his seat.

“So?”

“So…” He gestures that she should go answer the door. “I can’t do it.”
“Are you serious?”

“You want me to be arrested for sexually harassing the delivery boy?”

He has a point, because he’s got the kind of hard-on that’s impossible to ignore, but… “I should kick you in the face right now.”

“Sorry Ames.”

She slides to the floor and storms out, considering the many, many ways she could kill him and hide the body. She was so close.

She doesn’t even try to be polite, grabbing the pizzas and closing the door, stomping back to the kitchen. Dan looks so amused when she gets back, she seriously considers slapping him, just to make a point.

She flings the pizza boxes on the island, saying, “There, are you happy?”

“Sweetie, don’t be that way.”

“You’re such an asshole.”

“Yeah,” Dan says, standing behind her, bracketing her body with his arms, “But how bout I make it up to you?”

“By what, getting laid? Somehow I feel like you’re the one who benefits from that plan.”

He chuckles then, his breath warming her ear, and try as she might, when he puts his hands on her hips, she sinks into him, moulding her body to his.

He must have opened his jeans already, because it takes him only a moment to slide himself inside her, and then they’re fucking in his beautiful, shiny kitchen. It’s fucking ludicrous, Amy never thought she’d end up like this, and yet she can’t stop herself, she wants more, wants to have him in every single room of the house, wants to exorcise every other woman who ever came (in any sense) there.

By the end, she’s damn near mewling, and Dan saying, “That’s what I like to hear,” in her ear just makes it worse.

She’s waiting for him to say something dickish about it, but once they’ve finished and caught their breath, he just sits and opens the pizza boxes. He refills her glass, and they share it, passing it back and forth as they eat.

It’s all way too domestic, and so she stands up as soon as she’s finished, saying she’s going to take a shower. And he doesn’t even make a comment about her needing to clean up!

It’s freaking her out, and she’s happy to get away from him for a few minutes - and even more happy when it turns out that the upper floors of the house aren’t picture perfect the way the kitchen and sitting room are. (Though the bathroom has a rainfall shower and the kind of water pressure people have fantasies about).

Sleeping beside Dan again after so long is even more disconcerting, and if Amy was honest with herself…she has sex with him again the next morning, climbing on top of him the moment she wakes up, at least partly so things will be less…weird, less comfortable and at-homey.
It doesn’t work, because when Emily wakens she insists on climbing into the bed with them, and Amy has to pull on one of Dan’s shirts in approximately three seconds (she’s not sure if Emily seeing her immediately post-sex is going to mess her up or not, at least, at this age, but she’d rather not find out).

It’s like they’re a proper family.

They go out for brunch, and then take Emily for a walk in the Waterfront Park, bickering the whole time about whether Selina’s appointment will be a struggle to get through the Senate or not, and this is… Amy hates people who go for brunch, and she hates cosy couples with picture perfect children, and she still… doesn’t hate any of this.

She wants to hold his hand.

And she doesn’t, obviously, she’s not gone completely insane, but the urge… the urge is there and it’s damn near impossible to resist. (When Buddy tried to hold her hand without warning she almost dislocated his arm).

All in all, she thinks it’s for the best when her super calls and tells her the power’s back on. She doesn’t want to get too comfortable.

Dan doesn’t say anything, just carries her bag out to the uber for her. She’s not even sure what he could say. The situation is fucked, and they both know it.

Emily fusses a bit, once they’re in the car, and Amy tries to comfort her as they drive away, holding her close, and saying, “It’s okay, baby. We’re going home.”

But she can see Dan in the rearview mirror, watching them go, and the words stick in her throat.
Chapter Ten

They have sex. Again.

They have a lot of sex.

Amy really hadn’t meant to do it. She’d given herself a stern talking to, evaluated the pros and cons, considered the likely impact on Emily if they fought and stopped talking, and decided that it wasn’t worth the risk. For once in her life she was going to act like a mature adult woman when it came to Dan, and not a teenager with a crush.

Her willpower lasts all of five days.

The Thursday after the election, they’re in a meeting on the transition - mostly discussing which poor unfortunate will agree to be Ambassador to the UN - and she’s perched on Dan’s desk as they bat names back and forth. (Jonah, as VP-elect, has some suggestions, which are ignored, naturally). The meeting’s breaking up, and she mentions she needs to talk to him about Emily before she goes, and… and he grips her knee with one hand, saying they can talk right now.

She’d intended to tell him about the toilet training regime - Emily couldn’t stay with Tom James’ nanny forever, and getting her toilet-trained was a necessity if they wanted to send her to daycare - but it all goes out the window when she feels his hand on her skin.

The moment his office door is closed they’re kissing, Dan’s hand sliding further up her leg, his fingers mere inches from…

In only a few minutes, he’s pulled her underwear off, and she’s slid down to sit in his lap, and… (and later that night, when she’s alone, having put Emily to bed, she thinks they were damn lucky both that the chair was strong enough to hold them, and that no one came into the office).

Amy slumps when they’re finished, letting Dan’s weight support her, burying her face in his neck. She’s missed… him, his touch, his smell, his stupid face. She’s missed him so much it made her sad, and… she doesn’t want to look up, she doesn’t want to make eye-contact with him and talk about all the things they should probably talk about… it’s such a fucking mess, and she doesn’t see any way to fix it.

If Dan was just a body, if she could just sleep with him and not put anything at risk, things would be so much easier.

“Ames,” he says, squeezing her bottom. “Do me a favour?”

She leans back on her heels (which is tricky, and he has to steady her), “What do you want?”

“Stay with me this weekend?”

She knows her face must do something odd when she reacts, because Dan laughs out loud, and barely hears her when she says, “That’s it? What do you really want?”

She has to poke him in the chest before he’ll answer. “I want you to move in with me - I want you to put that ring back on - and I want us to do this thing for real.”

Amy looks down, letting her hair hide her face. It’s not that she doesn’t want that too - deep, deep down - but it’s just so hard to believe. If she ever - if she really let herself be with him - what would
he do her? Would he crush her all over again? She doesn’t want to have to block him out for a third time - she’s not strong enough - better to have him only a little than…

She has no idea what to say, and Dan must know it, because his voice is…actually gentle when he says, “Look at me.”

She tries, oh she tries, to look calm and collected when she finally lifts her head, but… but she’s pretty sure it’s a complete failure, and even more so when Dan leans forward and kisses her cheek, pushing her hair back to whisper directly in her ear, “You belong with me, Brookheimer, and you know it as well as I do, you’re just too scared to admit it.”

“So, you’re just going to what, wait around on your fainting couch until I…”

“Well,” Dan says, and his tone is more like himself, sarcastic and wicked and thank god, she knows how to handle this. “For now, I’m willing to settle for getting to take my time when I fuck you.”

“Afraid I haven’t seen your best work?”

She hates the way her voice sounds, like she’s younger than she is or something. She hates that he makes her sound like that. And he knows it too, he knows exactly how little and scared and unsure she is right now, she can tell, which just makes everything worse.

“Something like that,” Dan says, and he spreads his hands out over her hips in a distinctly possessive way. “Stay the whole weekend, you and Emily, let me show you what you’re missing.” She bites her lip, uncertain of what to say, and he adds, “What’s the matter - afraid you might like it?”

She’s not going to let him play with her like this, and she surges forward, pressing her lips to his in a way that’s almost angry. “I’ll tell my Mom she doesn’t have to drop Emily off,” she says, “Try not to have, I don’t know, the Speaker’s chief of staff in your bed when I get there.”

“Deal,” Dan says, and kisses her back, kisses her so that she wants to sink into him, wants to stay forever.

But she has another meeting, and so she climbs out of his lap (which is a singularly awkward thing to do), and picks her panties up off the floor. Her only comfort is that Dan looks even worse than she does, his pants still open, his shirt little more than a collection of wrinkles. She likes the way her lipstick is smeared over his mouth, like a brand.

Which makes it a little easier to take the plastic potty out of her handbag and give it to him, explaining that he’s going to have to start potty training Emily the way she is. (And, more pertinently, the way the nanny is, but Amy doesn’t plan to get into that).

She gets out of there as quickly as possible, racing back to Blair House and wondering what the fuck she just agreed to. She’s supposed to have a strategy meeting with Tom, but it gets pushed back because he’s on the phone with Selina, and she winds up sitting outside his office, looking at her phone and trying not to worry about Dan and Emily and everything.

It doesn’t really work, and the moment Tom is ready for her comes as a blessed, blessed relief. Talking about foreign policy and how they’re going to reorient the US’ position with regards to East Asia is infinitely easier than trying to work out if she’s about to fuck her life up permanently. (Or if she already has).

She’s jittery all the next day, and when she collects Emily from the nanny she decides to go home. Sure, Dan was probably expecting her, but her Mom wouldn’t normally drop Emily off until Saturday and she needs…time, she needs to gather her thoughts. (She’s not even sure what he plans
Tom was insisting that they take every weekend properly off - something they would only get to do intermittently, if at all, once he was in the White House - and so she drove home, reheated food for Emily and poured herself oh, a big glass of wine. She’s distracted, and feeding Emily is even messier than it usually is (and her daughter has no right to look cute when her face is smeared all over with pureed carrot or whatever). She’s just given Emily some apple slices, for dessert, when her phone rings, and...

“Where the fuck are you? I know you finished work.”

“I’m at home,” she says, “Feeding your daughter, what do you -”

“Ames,” he says, and she can hear the impatience in his voice, “finish that, grab a bag of clothes and your toothbrush or whatever and get the fuck over here.”

“I didn’t think - you wouldn’t normally see her until -”

“You really want to spend the night alone, looking at your phone and freaking because Emily breathed too loudly or something, when you could be with -”

“I just - I was going to come tomorrow.”

“Yeah, well,” Dan says, “Stop being ridiculous and you can come tonight.”

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep.”

He snorts, and for a second it’s like he’s right beside her, the warmth of his breath giving her goosebumps. “I’m not worried about that one. Now move your ass.”

“I don’t even know your address.”

It’s a weak excuse, and they both know it.

“Well then I’ll text it to you,” Dan says, “Get a move on.”

“Okay,” she says, and hangs up.

Emily is secure in her high chair (for now, she’ll start demanding attention as soon as she’s finished with her apple slices), so Amy goes to her room and gathers her things, trying not to think too much as she does so. If she thinks, really thinks, about what she’s doing, she’s going to freak the fuck out, and so she tries to focus on the logistics (she’s going to have to come back to her apartment on Sunday night, because she’ll have to wash her hair, and somehow she doesn’t think Dan has a hairdryer lying around).

Still, she realises pretty fast that she is way too wound up to drive - maybe it’s the wine, maybe it’s her nerves, she’s not sure which, but she knows she doesn’t trust herself. So she calls an uber, and carries Emily in her arms. She might feel nervous as fuck, but her daughter is almost urgently relaxed. She snuggles into Amy, burying her head in Amy’s chest, and it’s almost… almost like Amy is a proper mother or something. (Perhaps because she’s spent most of her life on the campaign trail, Emily is almost never phased by new places or people - as long as Amy, or, presumably, Dan was there to hold her hand, she took everything in her stride).

By the time they reach Dan’s house, Emily is asleep. Which means Amy can’t use her as a distraction, somewhat to her disappointment. Instead she has to gesture to Dan to shut the fuck up,
and let her carry Emily up the stairs to the nursery. There’s a moment when, after Amy’s put her down, Emily opens her eyes, but once she sees that Amy’s there, she rolls over and goes right back to sleep.

Which means Amy has to go back downstairs to where Dan is waiting. She takes her time, dumping her bag of clothes in the main bedroom, removing her coat and hanging it carefully in the hall, kicking her heels off, but eventually…eventually she has to join him in the living room. She’s annoyed that she’s so nervous, and tries to scold herself into a more rational frame of mind.

It doesn’t really work.

When she sits beside him on the sofa, they spend maybe fifteen seconds looking at each other, not saying anything, and then Dan’s mouth is on hers, and he’s pushing her back into the couch, and this… this is what she should be avoiding, but…

But he’s pushing her skirt up over her hips, and she’s pulling him closer with his tie, and… and she starts laughing because… they haven’t even exchanged words, and already Dan’s pushed himself between her legs.

He pauses, looking at her, and she manages to choke out, “You said you wanted to take your time.”

"Fuck it. We’ve got all weekend for that,” he says, and presses his mouth against hers again.

She doesn’t resist, no, far from it, she’s arching her back, wrapping her legs around him and trying to twist herself so that every inch of her body is touching every inch of his. There is literally nothing better than when he kisses her, when his warm mouth touches hers, touches her skin. Her nerves are on fire, and when Dan nips at her neck, her breath catches in her throat… which must only encourage him, because he does it again.

He hooks one of her legs over his hip, his fingers digging in deep into her thigh, and Amy whimpers and pulls his head up so she can kiss him again. And that’s what they do for long, slow minutes, Dan’s tongue flicking against hers, his stubble rasping against her skin, and his weight crushing her in the best way.

She’d almost forgotten what he felt like.

He grinds into her, and god, she doesn’t even care, what’s the point in even trying to be sensible when Dan clearly has no interest in any such thing? Maybe, just this once, he wants her as much as she wants him, and…

And she’s been denying herself, holding herself back for so long. Why not just…go with it.

When it’s over, she wants… she’s tempted to try and fucking cuddle, to rest her head on his chest the same way Emily did with her, and… and that’s moronic, so instead she says she’s going to put pyjamas on, and pushes Dan off her.

He doesn’t seem to mind. He does laugh out loud when her stomach rumbles and suggests ordering Thai as Amy climbs the stairs.

By the time she comes back down, she’s got more of a grip on herself, and she’s able to watch tv with him in relative comfort…though it’s kind of odd to be sitting at the other end of the couch from him, when only a few minutes before…

The whole weekend is like that really, swinging wildly from one extreme to the next. When they’re in bed, he’s all over her, spending what feels like hours damn near worshipping her, learning her
body by heart… but when they’re not fucking, they’re distant, focused more on Emily than each other. Amy’s not even sure whose fault it is. She wants to be comfortable with him in that way - wants to hold his hand and lean her head on his shoulder and put her feet in his lap…

But at the same time, she doesn’t. It’s too weird, too unlike them, and the thought of it makes her feel unsteady. Dan’s not Buddy - he doesn’t like pda or acting like a couple - and there’s this clenching fear in her gut that if she treats him that way, treats him like her boyfriend or whatever, he’ll laugh at her, reject her, and then she’ll be the one looking needy and clingy and all that shit.

He’s led her down the garden path before, after all.

It’s not that it’s a bad weekend - not at all - but she’s still kind of glad to get away from him on the Sunday night. She feels…suffocated, more by her own uncertainty than by Dan’s actions, it’s true, but it’s exhausting all the same.

She needs to clear her fucking head.

At least, that’s what she tells herself. But the next Friday she has to attend a dinner party with Tom and Jonah and a passel of oil lobbyists she despises on general principle, and she catches Dan tearing into Jonah in the cloakroom. And it is…hot, she’s not even ashamed for thinking it.

Her interruption breaks up their (rather one-sided) conversation, and Jonah storms away, complaining that Dan has no fucking respect, he’s Vice-President-Elect, doesn’t Dan know that…

And it must show in her eyes or something, because Dan doesn’t waste any time, just pushes her up against the wall, his mouth hot on hers, his hands pulling her so close Amy swears she can feel his heartbeat. When they break apart (because they have to) (because leaving Jonah unsupervised with lobbyists would be catastrophic) he smirks and says, “Coming home with me?”

She can only nod.

By the time they get back to his place, they’re a mess - Amy’s drunker than she should be, and Dan has to half carry her up the stairs, and when she kisses him, it’s… it’s sloppy and messy and perfect.

They’re fucking before he’s even got her dress off, and she bats his hands away when he tries to roll them. She wants to be on top this time. It’s easier, when she’s this drunk, to be the one in control - which probably makes no sense, but what the fuck ever, he should just be grateful she’s granting his skinny dick access, she could have taken one of the less obnoxious lobbyists home, even if he did have hair like an oil slick…

It’s only when Dan starts snorting with laughter underneath her that she realises she’s said, oh, at least half of that out loud. And normally she’d be embarrassed, but it’s not his usual laughter - there’s no malice in it. It’s like he thinks she’s cute.

He helps her get her clothes off afterwards, because Amy is not sleeping in a bra, no fucking way, and she’s drunk enough (or stupid enough) that she forgets herself and insists on using him as a giant pillow.

Not that Dan objects - he just strokes her shoulder, her back, his thumb tracing gentle patterns on her skin. It’s…soothing, comforting, and Amy relaxes, and finds herself saying, “I missed this.”

“Yeah?”

“No this, you’re not exactly a cuddler, I mean… I missed sex.” Dan doesn’t say anything to that - and how could he, he’s probably never gone longer than a week without sex his whole adult life -
and she adds, “I felt like such a… a lump, before, after Emily was born, I didn’t even want to… or I didn’t, I can’t explain, I… I just missed it.”

Dan chuckles. “Glad I could be of help. Now go to sleep.”

She has the worst fucking hangover when she wakes up. A hangover so bad, in fact, that she misses the obvious warning signs, and wanders into the kitchen to find Dan and Emily and Sophie all together. Her Mom must have let Sophie drop Emily off because… because she’s out of her mind, clearly.

She’s wearing one of Dan’s shirts, and her hair is a mess, and she could not be more the morning after the night before if she tried.

And of course Sophie knows it, and of course she says so, because she has the sensitivity of a dump truck.

“So you are boning?” she says, and Amy wants to claw her eyes out.

Can’t she have just one thing that’s not fucked up and twisted and… and she hadn’t wanted anyone to know about her and Dan yet - she wasn’t even sure there was anything to know yet.

She shifts in her seat, not meeting anyone’s eyes, wishing she had her phone, and Sophie continues, “Still as uptight as ever.” She stands, grabbing her purse, and kisses the top of Emily’s head. “I don’t know why you bother,” she says to Dan. “See you soon little sis.”

There’s a long pause, and then they hear the front door close behind Sophie. They still haven’t looked at each other.

She’s not going to cry, not in front of him, no fucking way, but… she really did not need to start her day like this. It’s not worth it.

“I should go,” she says, and makes for the door.

Dan rolls his eyes, and says, “Not this shit again. Why do you let her get to you so much?”

“It doesn’t matter, I need to -”

“Yeah, obviously, it doesn’t matter, she’s fucking irrelevant, why do you -”

“I just… I don’t need the reminder, okay? And it never fucking goes away, every time, I have to remember how fucking stupid I was, it’s humiliating, every time, and you make it worse, and I don’t need to sit here and watch you preen yourself because you got to make me… again.”

Emily’s looking between them in a way that suggests she might start bawling if they don’t get their shit together, and Amy tries to calm herself down, but… she feels like she just got slapped in the face.

“Amy,” Dan says, coming out from behind the counter. “Your fucking sister is not important. You know that.”

“Just another in the long line of women you’ve used and thrown out like fucking garbage, I get it,” she says, and god it hurts to think about. There’s this… ugliness that she can’t stand to look at too closely.

“Now, I know you’re not worried I broke her heart.” He’s closer to her now, stepping into her space
so she has to tilt her head back to look at him. “And don’t pretend for one second that that fuck-up wasn’t mine entirely.”

She shrugs, because he doesn’t get it, and maybe he never will. Every time it gets shoved in her face she wants to…crawl into a hole or something, and she can’t, not with a toddler in tow.

“You do realise you’re giving her exactly what she wants,” he says. “Not that you need me to tell you this, but your sister’s a bitch. She fucked her life up, you have everything she wants - including me - and every time you get upset about this she gets to feel like she won for five minutes. Now calm the fuck down and let me make you french toast.”

“I should really just go home,” she says, thinking longingly for a moment of her home office, of her piles of simple, straightforward political bullshit.

“Yeah, but you’re not going to,” Dan says, “You’re hungry for one. Go play with Emily.”

Which is what she does - kind of. Dan puts on the politico podcast, and it’s kind of a release. She doesn’t have to speak him, and listening to the speculation about just how the lame duck Congress is going to try to fuck the incoming President distracts her long enough that she’s actually surprised when he puts a plate of food in front of her.

They eat, and Emily gabbles at them about Gamma and Giselle and Amy can’t really be bothered to keep track of what she’s talking about, if she ever knew in the first place. The moment she’s finished, Amy runs for the bathroom. She needs to be… away from Dan, for a minute at least. Her stomach is churning, and she honestly doesn’t know if it’s the hangover or the situation or if Dan is just that bad at making french toast. All options seem equally possible.

She’s pulling on her dress from the night before when Dan finds her. He’s carrying Emily in one arm, and seems totally unsurprised that she’s getting ready to leave. But all he says is, “Maybe you should…think about a drawer. You’re the only one who doesn’t have clothes here.”

“I’ll think about it,” she says, “Can you zip me up?”

“Ames.”

“I just have to go, all right.”

Dan doesn’t move, and she decides… fuck it, she needs to get out, and grabs her purse. She drops a kiss on Emily’s head - exactly like fucking Sophie - and makes a run for it.

When she’s at the door, she hears Dan calling her name, and looks up to see him standing at the top of the stairs. “Are you going to run all the way to Nevada this time, or just -”

“I’ll see you round.”

“Amy. I’m sorry.”

“Dan, I just have to - you don’t get it. I’ll see you.”

And she leaves.

It doesn’t last. She knows - she knows - that it’s fucked up, and yet…when he badgers her into going for lunch with him the next week, she goes, and after half an hour or so she finds herself agreeing to spend the weekend at his place.
She tries to rationalise it - Dan’s house is so much nicer than her apartment, Emily clearly likes it better there - but ultimately… she wants to be where he is, even if… even if her better judgement is screaming at her.

She keeps waiting for him to do something to bring her to her senses, and he keeps…not doing it. In fact, he starts coming by her apartment on weeknights, bringing food and helping her put Emily to bed.

It’s partly the sex. She knows that.

It’s been years - literally - since she’s been able to have sex, good sex, whenever she wants it. In fact, when she thinks about it, she hasn’t had sex like this since she was in college, with her college boyfriend, and that… that was different. He’d been sweet and all, but half the fun of it had been… discovering things, learning what worked… it’s not like she’d come every single time.

She has no intention of telling Dan this - but as the weeks wear on, she gets into the habit of calling him, telling him he can come over. (She tries to do this only late at night - she doesn’t want Emily to get used to having him around - but she has to admit she doesn’t really stick to it).

Naturally, Sophie blabs to her Mom about seeing Amy in Dan’s house, and, to her complete surprise, her Dad calls her in early December, saying Dan’s welcome to come for Christmas dinner if he wants to.

They hadn’t talked about it. Amy hadn't even considered getting a Christmas tree, and she’s pretty sure Dan hasn’t thought about it at all, but… jesus, Emily’s going to be fucked up enough by the time they’re done with her, the least they can do is give her a decent Christmas.

She doesn’t tell him immediately. She’s not entirely sure if she wants him there. Having Dan around her Dad is always tense, to say the least, and Sophie is virtually guaranteed to make things awkward.

But at the same time…

She mentions it to him the week before, half-hoping he’s going to say he has plans… but of course he doesn’t. In fact, he gets more into the spirit of the thing than she does. When she arrives with Emily, on the afternoon of Christmas Eve, she discovers he’s put up a huge Christmas tree, and actual Christmas lights. (Or, to be more accurate, he’s paid someone to do it).

Staying with him makes things easier - or, at least, it gives her an excuse to get away from her family. Especially as his parents come to see them the day after Christmas. (By mutual agreement, they don’t mention this to her family… putting them all in the same room is more stress than either of them wants to deal with).

Having them to stay is exhausting, and Dan’s Dad is a dick, and a dick in a relentless, miserable way that wears on everyone around him. Seeing them off on the 28th of December is a relief, and Amy flops down on Dan’s bed at the first opportunity.

She spreads her arms and legs out, enjoying the feeling of the sheets against her skin, and sighs when Dan says, “Sleepy?”

“Not exactly,” she says, “Just glad all our families are far away.”

He laughs, and says, “All right grumpy. I’m going to go shave.”

Since he hasn’t had to work for five days, he hasn’t bothered, and he has a thick, dark beard as a
result (well, calling it dark might be generous). “Really?” she says, yawning. “I kind of like it.”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah, it makes you look a grown man.”

Dan cocks his head, and she realises she’s managed to surprise him. Which is probably why he sits on the bed beside her, stroking her thigh with intent. “Anywhere in particular you’d like to feel it?”

She rolls her eyes, but it has no impact, Dan just bends to kiss her neck, and… his face is rough against her skin, but in the best way, it’s almost too good…

She squirms a little, but because she likes it, not because it’s bad. She pulls him up so she can kiss him, and they make out for a few minutes, Dan slowly insinuating himself between her legs.

She has to bite her lip when he starts sliding down her body, because she wants him to do it - she wants him to do it so much - but she can’t help a slight twinge of… nervousness, or something.

He pulls her pyjama bottoms off and then spreads her open, pressing her down into the mattress with big hands and his face against her is all… bristly and rough and the friction makes her shiver before he’s even opened his mouth.

If he wasn’t holding her down, she’d have moved around so much she might have fallen off the bed. She’d never imagined it could feel like this… and she honest to god comes so hard she can’t even think.

When she comes back to herself (and it takes a minute, or two maybe, she’s not sure), Dan’s lying beside her looking even more smug than usual. She brings her hand up to touch his face and says the only thing that springs to mind.

“I really like the beard.”

Dan laughs out loud and pulls her into him. Usually, usually this is when she’d climb on top of him and go for a ride, but… but this time she wants to do something different. She wants to make him lose it the way she just did, wants to blow his mind, literally.

At least… that was the plan.

And at first, at first it goes fine. She’s done this before, after all, it’s not like she’s some blushing virgin, and hearing Dan groan when she gets her mouth on him…

But at the same time… there’s something in her stomach that builds, and builds, and even though she knows he’s enjoying it, when he gathers her hair up in his hands, there’s a surge of wrongness in her throat, and she has to stop.

It’s the last thing she wanted to do, the last thing she wanted, but… but it doesn’t go away, and she finds herself stumbling into the bathroom, and vomiting, copiously, into the toilet.

She feels awful.

She feels awful, and she doesn’t want to talk about it, and when she goes back into the bedroom and sees Dan, she feels even worse.

“I’m sorry,” she says, yanking on her shorts, “I gotta go.”

And then she’s dashing down the stairs on shaking legs and trying to remember where the hell she
left her shoes and her coat and she has to get out, she has to, she has to.

She’s fumbling with the front door, and, simultaneously, trying to order an uber, when she hears Dan’s voice. “You’re a fucking coward, Brookheimer.”

“What?”

Her voice is weak, and quavery, and she has to get the fuck away from him, right now, she can’t let him see her like this.

“You want to tell me what the fuck just happened?”

“Nothing, nothing happened, I just…realised…”

He steps forward, almost but not quite pinning her against the door, and Amy thinks she might cry. “Woman up, and fucking *talk* to me.”

“I can’t. Maybe, maybe I’m just terrible at -”

“Amy,” he says, and he’s too fucking close, he’s got his hands on her face, and she can’t, she can’t take it, she has to get away from him, she has to yank herself out of his hands...

She’s half way across the room before she even knows what she’s done, and she wants to *scream* because this isn’t… this isn’t supposed to happen, she’s not supposed to let him ruin this, and yet…

“Tell me what is going on with you.”

He actually sounds angry, in a way he never usually does, not with her. Not that it makes any difference. “I can’t explain.”

“I’m not an idiot - you’re freaking the fuck out, and I can guess why, but just…”

“I didn’t mean to -” She has to cut herself off, because she’s so goddamn furious with the whole situation she might cry. “I’m sorry. I should just go.”

“And what disappear for another month? Fuck that. Sit your ass down and use your fucking *words*.”

“I’m too angry to - I can’t. I feel like I need to scream.”

“Go ahead,” Dan says, sitting on the arm rest of the sofa and looking her up and down. “You’ll wake Emily, but who cares about that? She’s probably heard worse.”

Something very like a sob comes out of her throat, and she barely manages to say, “I’ve fucked everything up.”

“Yeah, well,” Dan says, “So what? I never knew you’d get so upset at not sucking dick well enough.”

“Shut up! You don’t understand, it was fine, I was fine, and then… you grabbed my hair.” She turns away, hoping he won’t see the tears in her eyes. “And I couldn’t… I couldn’t keep going, it was like when - I ruined it.”

“Jesus.”

When she dares to look at him, Dan looks… appalled, like she’s punched him the gut or something.
And when he sees her looking, all he says is, “Amy, you know I would never, *never* try to make you
.”

“No, I know that,” she says, and it’s so hard to put this into words, it actually hurts. “I do. But it’s like I know it and I don’t know it. And I don’t want this, I don’t want to be fucked in the head like this…he took so much away from me, I had to leave the campaign, and Selina, and…and you. And now I’m letting him ruin this too. I’m so fucking mad at myself, but I didn’t think I’d still -”

“Nothing is ruined,” Dan says, and she rolls her eyes. “And in case you haven’t noticed, I’m still fucking here.”

“Yeah, for now.”

He waves that comment away, and says, “So, what, you had a fucking flashback or something? It happens - we’ll just…be more careful.”

“But what if I can’t… what if I’m fucked up permanently, and I can’t…ever.”

“That’s not how that works.”

“But what if it is - you don’t know - and you’re not going to want to be with… if I can’t -”

Dan takes a deep breath, and in the pause before he speaks Amy’s stomach rolls again. She should never have told him this.

“If you can’t,” he says, “Then you can’t. We’ll deal with it.”

“And you’ll just, what, give up oral sex for the rest of time? Don’t make me laugh.”

“Why, Amy, I had no idea you wanted to suck me off so badly.”

“That’s not what I meant, dickhead.”

“I know what you meant,” he says, and his face is…soft, in a way it never is, when he looks at her. “Did you like doing it before?”

‘I can’t… tell you that,” she says, and she can feel herself flushing even at the thought of it.

“Amy, don’t be fucking ridiculous. Our DNA mixed to make a kid, I think we can talk about giving head.”

“I…” God she hates this, hates it so much, she never imagined she’d have this conversation with him, of all people. “Sometimes. It depended on the guy. It’s hard to be in to it when someone clearly gets off on the idea that you’re not, you know what I mean? Buddy liked it when I…seemed not to, and it gave me the fucking creeps. But maybe now I’ll never be able to -”

“Well then I’ll manage - don’t…worry about that, jesus christ.”

He actually sounds sincere, and she doesn’t really know how to deal with that, so… “I’m so fucked up.”

“You’re not,” Dan says, “At least, not because of this, you’re just… did you talk to anyone about this?”

“Who was I going to talk to? Not you, not Selina, and my Dad would have put Leon through a wall if I told him. Tom James only knew because I was so upset when I went to meet him and I
couldn’t… hold it in, not really, and… I wanted you.”

“Yeah?”

“I thought about calling you, you know? But you were off with fucking Brie and… and what was I going to do, call you having a meltdown when you were - I couldn’t do it. I wanted to, but I just couldn’t.”

“You know I would have had your back.”

“I do now,” she says, “But I just… I couldn’t be sure, and if I’d told you and you… laughed or made one of your stupid jokes it… it would have been worse than… I couldn’t do it, Dan, I couldn’t.”

He stares at her for a long moment, and finally says, “I get it, okay. You’re a fucking moron for thinking for one second that I would have - your Dad wouldn’t have been able to put Leon through a wall, ‘cause I’d have done it the first second I knew… But I get it.”

“Okay then,” she says, and they can both hear the way her voice is shaking.

“I would have jumped ship with you in a heartbeat. Or thrown Leon overboard - that would have been my preferred option.”

“Only if there were sharks.”

“Or crocodiles,” Dan says, startling a laugh from her. “Let’s go back to bed. You’re exhausted, I’m exhausted, we had to deal with my fucking father all day…”

“Okay,” she says, and she feels drained, like all the energy has been sucked right out of her. She doesn’t even move until Dan takes her hand and pulls, and even when she settles back in beside him in the bed, it takes her long minutes to relax. Even when he pulls her in close, the way she’s never told him she likes, she still can’t…

It’s only when he says, “So, I guess I should keep the beard?” that she feels like herself again. (And yes, he’s definitely keeping the beard).

Well, kind of like herself. She hadn’t expected for her massive fucking trauma to rear its ugly head in the middle of sex like that, and she’s twitchy for weeks afterwards, nervous even though she knows she doesn’t have to be.

There are days when she doesn’t even want to be touched, she can’t explain why, and she starts ducking Dan’s invitations, spending less time with him, because she doesn’t know… she’s not sure…

He corners her in the office two days before the inauguration, and they have a whispered fight in the kitchen, while he demands to know why she’s blanking him. Finally, he irritates her enough that she says it, “I can’t have sex right now, okay?”

“And so what… is that all I’m good for?”

She raises her eyebrows, because… come on, what is she supposed to say to that? But she takes pity on him, and says, “I’m not you, all right? I’ve not had a million and one relationships, and Buddy always used to get really pissed at me when I didn’t want to… and I just don’t want anything touching me right now.”

Dan gives her an odd look and… and she knows it sounds strange, but she’s been like this since
New Year’s at least. It’s like she has a perpetual hangover, or some odd version of the flu. But whatever he’s thinking, all he says is, “So, we’re in a relationship?”

“I didn’t think you had relationships, just you know, people who are momentarily convenient.”

He makes an irritated sound and steps closer to her. “And yet,” he says, “It’s my house you want to come home to every night.”

He’s right of course, not that it makes him any less insufferable. They go to the inauguration together, and they even dance together at the inaugural ball (for about ninety seconds, before Dan has to go put out the latest of Jonah’s fires, and Amy gets sucked into a discussion with the new Speaker).

But that look he gave her lingers, and after dropping Emily off to her daycare, she makes a quick stop at CVS on her way into work.

Naturally, they have a million and one things to do on the first day, and it’s after three before she gets a spare moment to take the test.

And when she sees the result she doesn’t even think, just storms over to the EEOB and demands to see him. Jonah is out traumatising girl scouts or something, fortunately, and Dan takes one look at her and tells everyone else to get out of the office.

Because of course she’d have to tell him this in the Veep’s office, it’s too fucking perfect.

“What’s up?” he says, leaning back against the desk.

“You are getting a goddamn vasectomy.”

“What?”

“I’m pregnant,” she says, and throws the little white stick at him. “Again.”

“You’re on the fucking pill, what are you, the most fertile woman on the planet?”

“Evidently. I must have missed one or taken it at the wrong time or something. This wasn’t supposed to happen.”

She feels…betrayed is the only word for it, like her own body has screwed her over in the most intimate way possible.

“Okay,” Dan says, and she can almost see him calculating his odds. “What do you want to do?”

And it all comes of her in a kind of gush, a flood of information and feelings and vulnerabilities that she’d been telling herself, for years, never to let him know.

“I don’t know - it’s going to ruin everything. I mean, it barely works now, Emily hates it, she’s always asking for you and wondering why you’re not around, and I’m…fucking exhausted just trying to keep track of where we’re supposed to be every night, and adding a newborn to that is… and I’m going to get fat, again, and .”

“Slow down, crazy,” he says, and he’s grinning, what the fuck is wrong with him. “You’re the most fuckable preggo I’ve ever seen and you know it. There’s no need to get in a panic about it.”

“Oh, really? Why not?”
“Because you’re going to fucking marry me.”

“What?”

“You heard me. You’re going to move in with me, this weekend, we sell your apartment or rent it whatever, and use that to pay for an au pair or hell, we’ll pay Sophie to babysit, and you’re going to marry me. I mean, we could wait another ten years or whatever, but why bother? We love each other, we have some brats, what’s the hold up?”

There’s a long pause, and finally she says, half-laughing, half-crying, “Okay, fine.”

“I take it that’s a yes,” Dan says, and she can see the smugness growing on his face already.

“Yes. But I meant what I said, I don’t want any more surprises.”

“Fine.”

“So you’re going to book an appointment for the -”

“As soon as,” he says, and pulls her into him.

“And if I ever find out that you cheated on me, that you had fifty other girlfriends or whatever -”

“Balls, earrings, I get it. Now shut the fuck up.”

And then they’re kissing, and before long Dan’s lifted her on to the desk, and Amy is never, never going to be able to walk into this office again without thinking of what they did there.

It’s only afterwards, when they’ve caught their breath and she’s managed to loosen her grip on his jacket, that she remembers to say, “Don’t tell Jonah we -”

“Yeah, if he knew you’d come on his desk he’d never let anyone clean it.”

She slaps his arm, and Dan kisses her, and… pulls a ring out of his pocket. “You’ll be wanting this.”

“How long have you been carrying that around?”

“Oh,” he says, looking insufferable, “Only since I realised you might be knocked up again.”

“You could have just said something to me.”

“Yeah, but I wanted to see what you’d do”

“I only did the test twenty-two minutes ago.”

“So you came right here?”

She doesn’t bother answering that question, just takes the ring from him and slides it on her left ring-finger. “I’ve got to go back,” she says, “But I’ll see you tonight?”

“Yeah.”

She turns back at the door, and sees him smiling at her… in a way that… it’s too much, she can’t even look at him, his face is so bright.

Her heart feels like it’s going to beat right out of her chest as she walks back over to the White House, and her attempt at composure shatters at the first hurdle when Sue takes one look at her hand
and says, “Congratulations Amy. Dan?”

“Yeah,” she says, and it’s the weirdest thing… she’s so happy, and yet she feels like she might cry. Sue actually stands up to hug her, which is noteworthy enough that Tom pauses on his way out of the office and asks what’s going on.

His congratulations seem sincere (though with Tom everything seems sincere, that’s always been his greatest gift), and there’s something almost wistful in his voice when he says, “Can I tell Selina?”

Oh yes, their weekly phone calls. On the one hand, they’re relatively harmless, but on the other… the amount of time he spends talking to Selina, as opposed to every other member of the Cabinet…

But she’s too overwhelmed to care about that right now, so all she says is, “Yes, you can tell her.”

“Well I know what she’ll say,” Tom says, and kisses her cheek. “I’m glad everything worked out for you.”

And then he’s gone, off to his next meeting, and Amy has to go for her very first national security briefing, and it’s almost eight in the evening before she can leave, between one crisis and another. It takes her longer than it should to drive to Dan’s, partly because she’s distracted by the ring on her finger, and partly… she can’t quite believe all of this is happening.

Something in her stomach settles when she arrives and finds Dan in the kitchen, talking to Selina on speakerphone and keeping Emily distracted with strategically gifted raspberries.

“You fuckers better send me a save the date,” Selina says, “Maybe I can get out of some bullshit trip to Pakistan or whatever.”

“We haven’t actually decided on that yet, ma’am,” Amy says, wondering why Selina called Dan and not her.

“Well get on with it. There’s always going to be some fucking crisis, so just pick a date, buy a dress and ignore everything else.”

“And maybe invite a photographer so we get some decent instagram coverage,” Dan says, and Amy rolls her eyes. Of course he’d want to use their wedding for the maximum public relations benefit.

“Whatever,” Selina says, “Ame, you there?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“I’m only going to say this once. There is nothing worse than being married to a man that doesn’t love you. Nothing. So, you, you only do this if you’re sure, you hear me?”

‘Yes ma’am.”

“And by the way, I don’t want to hear this kind of news from Tom ever again, you understand? I deserve a fucking phone call, and from you, not your flunkey.”

“I’m sorry,” she says, trying to swallow something because… because after everything, she hadn’t been sure if Selina would want her to call. “He asked me if he could tell you, and I wasn’t sure if -”

“Whatever,” Selina says, “I’ve got to go deal with the Singapore ambassador or something. Pick a date, and I’ll do my best not to outshine you at the wedding.”

She hangs up, and Amy sits beside Emily, teasing her with her painted fingernails (Emily loved
shiny things) and watching Dan cook.

(For years she’d assumed he didn’t know how to cook, the same as her, but his punishing fitness regime came with a lot of food requirements, apparently, so he’d had to learn).

It smells amazing, and finally she has to ask, “What’s that?”

“Stir-fried sesame beef.” He grins at her. “If I remember correctly, you probably want to eat the world right about now, and you can’t have a rare steak so, I figured this was a compromise.”

“Feeding me up already?”

He laughs, shortly, and says, “That’s the plan. You’re going to get so fucking round again, I can’t wait.”

“Ass.”

He turns away to get something out of the refrigerator, and on some instinct, Amy stands and wraps her arms around him, resting her cheek against his back. He's warm.

He pats her hands on his chest and says, “What's this in aid of?”

“Nothing. I’m just…glad to be home.”

“Yeah?” There’s a smile in his voice. “Me too.”

And then his phone rings, and he has to talk to Kent for twenty minutes while he’s cooking, and Amy gets to put Emily to bed, and it’s later than it should be by the time they sit down to eat together, and they start arguing about whether or not Jonah should be allowed to have anything to do with the Education Bill, and…

She’s home.

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