Chapter 33

The next morning I was cautiously optimistic. I knew there was a chance that we wouldn't be going anywhere, that he had fled somewhere during the night or early morning without me even noticing. What he did didn't always have an exact schedule. So, before I got too excited, I slipped into my floral robe and walked around the house bare foot, looking for him.

I found him less than twenty feet from my door, walking with a newspaper in his hand and his eyes down.

"Morning," I chirped.

"Morning," he repeated with an easy smile, but when he li ed his eyes his gaze fel into something hard. He examined my exposed legs and the deep opening on my chest that was al too present very suddenly.

"I just wanted to see if you were still home," I began. I think, if I had been a good woman, I would've pulled my robe closed a little more, but having his eyes on me like that gave me confidence I wasn't used to. Sure, Caleb told me I was beautiful, the same way that any boyfriend would, but I had never been the pretty girl. And now, knowing what he had done I hated the idea that he had ever found me attractive. But with Sebastian it was di erent. I was almost tempted to undo the sash that hung around my waist. I gave myself a mental shake and continued. "And I needed to know what we were doing so I could pick out what to wear."

"Right," Sebastian said, snapping his gaze to my face. It was almost comical to see him like this sometimes. When we had first met he had been the epitome of control, but as our relationship progressed there were cracks in the surface. I enjoyed being a part of his weaknesses, though I wondered why he wasn't pushing more. "Something you can move in, probably something you would work out in."

"Do I get to know where we are going?"

"Nope, it's a surprise."

I wasn't someone who was particularly fond of surprises, but when I narrowed my eyes at Sebastian in silent questioning he just smiled brighter. I let it be and went back to my room to find something I would deem workout worthy. I tried to take care of myself by eating well and being active, but I wasn't a gym person. The clothes I usually wore like in was jeans and sweaters for chilly fall walks and tank tops for digging in the garden. I had to dig for quite a while before I found a decent pair of leggings and a shirt that I could sweat in without it showing.

"Are you ready? We have to head out pretty soon," Sebastian hinted from the other side of the door.

"Almost done," I called back, staring at my butt for the thousandth time in the mirror. I certainly didn't look like a fitness model like this and knowing how in shape he was made me a little nervous. I grabbed a sweater and pulled it over my head, satisfied when it covered more of my curves.

I pulled open my bedroom door and found him leaning against the opposing wall.

"Is this okay?" I asked, noticing that he had swapped his usual attire for a university hoodie and a pair of shorts.

His stare moved over me slowly. "Perfect."

We set o for the day in his Nissan SUV and I wondered why he had such a nice car if he never drove it. It seemed like a waste since he always chose this old, bright yellow beater instead.

"What are you humming?" Sebastian asked.

"What?"

"You were humming. I notice that you do it whenever you're thinking really hard, but I can't figure out what tune you're humming," he explained.

"Oh, I didn't even realize that I did that," I muttered, feeling a little red faced.

"I think it's cute," he said, moving his eyes o the road for a split second to smile at me. "It was one of the first things I was able to figure out about you."

"Huh, well, it's the Jurassic Park theme music if you must know," I stated.

There was a moment of silence. Then, hysterical laughter.

"What?" I demanded. "What on Earth is so funny? I thought you liked that movie."

"I love that movie, but whatever you're humming is not from that film," he managed, looking like he was about to brush tears from his eyes.

"Yes it is!" I defended.

"No it's not."

"Then what do you think it is?"

"Some kind of o - key kazoo version, if I had to label it," he answered, them tumbling into another fit of laughter.

"Shut up, you're so mean," I whined, but was unable to keep a straight face.

The rest of the drive was silent until we reached our destination. But it was the comfortable stillness that came with old friendship. Feeling it in such a new relationship was strange and comforting all at once. There were a couple moments when I would see his arm resting on the center console and my hand would itch to rest on top of his. I repressed the urge, not sure how he would react.

Still, the gorgeous landscape was a wonderful distraction. there were moments when I would forget how lucky we were to live in a place like this. It only took a two hour drive to get from dense forests and rolling hills to mountains.

"Where are we?" I asked when we entered an almost empty gravel parking lot.

"At the starting point for our hike," he replied, with a bright smile.

I didn't say anything, but was a little wary. I wasn't sure if I was ready for this. Clearly, Sebastian and I were not on the same level in terms of physical fitness. And, while he was lacing up some neutral toned hiking shoes with ankle support I glanced down at my bright orange Nike sneakers I had bought while in college.

"Are you ready?" he asked, slipping a backpack into place.

"I guess?"

"It'll be great, come on," he encouraged.

I would consider the hike lackluster at first. The path was wide, riddled with horseshoe prints and droppings. Tree towered over us on either side, eliminating the view entirely which made it seem a little pointless to even be in the mountains at this point. And, despite the bell on Sebastian's backpack, I kept snapping my fingers and whistling, hoping it would alert any bears to our presence.

then, the boring flatness shi ed into a steep climb. While I watched my foot placement and began sweating profusely, Sebastian motored on like he did this every day. And, as far as I knew, he did. That man was still a complete mystery to me. There were times when I wanted to stop, but he would surge ahead of me and I would be too embarrassed to quit.

"Here, let's stop so you can take o your sweater," Sebastian suggested, pausing once the ground leveled out.

And with completing the brutal ascent, the world opened up. The tall trees were now behind us, not able to grow so quickly on the mountain side. Before me was a deep canyon carved out by a river that looked minuscule from here and in the distance massive mountains loomed with white powder still on their tops.

I didn't care about any of it. I just sucked in breaths, trying to look as normal as possible while I struggled. I didn't want him to know how out of shape I really was considering he had hardly broken a sweat.

"Let's just keep going," I panted. The sooner we continued on the sooner all of this would be over. And judging by the way my feet and calves were beginning to throb I didn't have much spark in in me.

"You sure?" A dark eyebrow rose, taking in my appearance. "I can wait, I don't think these mountains are going to be moving any time soon."

"Let's go," I pressed.

Sebastian led the way as the trail changed again, no longer going upwards, but now skirting alongside of the mountain. He moved confidently and I followed willingly for the rest part, only thankful that the ground was flatter now and that I could catch my breath.

But once I was able to breathe again I was also able to see how there was no vegetation on my right hand side, nothing to grab onto. Beneath my feet was dead grass and something that looked like it might've been a trail for something able bodied, like a mountain goat, not a clumsy, exhausted human being. And on my le was a steep descent right into that river that looked so small.

"Nope," I announced, freezing.

"What's wrong?" Sebastian asked, turning around.

"I can't," I said.

"Can't what?"

"I can't keep going, we need to go back."

"Are you afraid of heights?" he asked, almost looking amused.

"I'm afraid of falling to my death," I corrected sharply.

"You were doing fine and we already passed the worst of it. It's just another hundred feet to the look out point," he encouraged.

"Sebastian. I can't."

"You're just getting stuck in your own head," he murmured, his voice so ening. "Give me your hand."

"If I take your hand then we are both falling to our death," I snapped.

"Char, I'm not going to let you fall," he stated, extending his hand towards me.

I stared at his open palm for a moment, just glaring at the o ering. If I didn't take it I would have to find a way to pivot around and conquer this walk in the opposite direction. I would return home without the satisfaction of completing this quest.

My hand fell into his and he gripped it just tight enough. Warmth and pleasure spread upwards from my arm.

"I've got you," he assured.

Then we were both shu ling along on the little goat trail until we hit the look out point. Once I hit wider places that had a couple of tree I was able to actually enjoy the view of the mountains and the canyon below. Sometimes I forgot how blessed I was to live in a place like this, even if it came with immense sweating.

Sebastian retrieved some snacks out of the backpack and gave me a water bottle which I instantly downed. We sat on the dusty trail and nibbled on food, talking occasionally, but mostly being quiet.

The way back was less of a challenge and there was no arguing when he o ered me his hand this time. Each time I paused to look at the death trap below he would squeeze my fingers to bring me back to him and we would move slowly again.

By the time we made it back to the SUV I was mentally and physically exhausted. I fell into the passenger side. Sebastian drove back home and when I saw his arm resting on the console I didn't think twice about settling my hand on top of his.

----Distraction Section----

I personally adore Hades. I know that a fair amount of people love wild passion and need, but Hades (now Sebastian) having all this control makes me a little weak in the knees. Refined men are just my weakness.

Question of the Day: What is your dream car?