

Excerpt 2

JUNE 20, 2015

Emily's slender finger drew invisible letters onto the table, nodding along with my voice but unaware of her distracted mind. I sighed, my words fading with unimportance as I tilted my head and narrowed my eyes with a new focus.

"What's wrong?"

"What do you mean," Emily said, slightly confused as her eyes shifted up but her finger continued with the absentminded activity.

I stared back with a knowing look that caused her to shrug.

"I'm not perfect, you know. I'm allowed to have bad days. You're in prison after all."

"True," I said with a nod. "But something tells me there's a reason for this one."

"Well," Emily said, curling her finger into her palm as if it had been beckoned back by her hand to create a frustrated fist. "Since you know so much, maybe you can tell what my problem is."

Her irritated tone was guarded by impatience, but the only thing that caught my attention was the sadness lingering within her eyes.

"Ems," I said with a soft plea.

Emily dropped her shoulders in surrender as she closed her eyes for a few brief seconds as if it were a message for the anger to stand down. Once she had blinked them back open, it was clear the space of her former irritation had been replaced with sadness that had now just doubled its territory. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to snap." Emily shook her head, speaking with a regretful tone. "Really. It's nothing."

My own irritation rose as my need to wrap my arms around her was prevented by the restrictions of the environment surrounding us.

"I know it's not nothing," I said, conveying with my stare that I would sit here, waiting for the rest of the visit, if I had to, until she told me what was bothering her.

Emily relented with a heavy sigh, causing me to lift the left side of my mouth into a victoriously crooked smirk.

"My roommate assignment came in the mail this morning."

Her voice was low and filled with disappointment as her shoulders rose and dropped with another exaggerated sigh. Unable to resist any longer, I quickly looked over my shoulder, happy to see the officer in charge distracted by another inmate interaction, before I took the opportunity and reached across the table to place my hand over Emily's.

"You knew that was inevitable," I said while my thumb soothed the back of her hand with gentle strokes.

"I know," Emily said pausing so that she could turn her hand over and grasp my fingers longingly with her own. "It's just that the reality of it all is still hitting me in pieces. And seeing that this morning just—" Emily shook her head, looking down at our linked hands as if they could give her the strength she needed while she attempted to hold back the crack seeping into her voice. "It just reminded me of what we had lost."

"I'm sorry," I said feeling the uselessness of my words as soon as they left my lips.

I pulled my hand back, ignoring the way my fingers twitched—screaming in protest at the parting from one they were always meant to hold. Emily's disappointment tightened my chest, leaving me desperate to take away the remainder of her pain, if only for a few minutes.

"What?" Emily said with a confused stare as she took in the false amusement now lifting my cheeks.

"Looks like you'll be using a bra on the door after all," I said.

She leaned back in her chair, dropping her gaze to her hands as she dropped them into her lap. "I won't have a need for anything on the door without you there," Emily said with a low enough voice to make me question if she had been talking to them or me.

"Oh, you never know," I said with an added wink, despite her not being able to see it.

"I'm glad you think this is funny."

My head tilted, and my smile dropped as her attention remained on her hands, letting her blonde locks fall forward to unintentionally cover her face.

"Hey," I said tapping my knuckles on the table as a last resort.

Her chin lifted, leading the way for her blue eyes to lock back with mine and effectively leave me with the same thrill I had gotten from the first time they found me. Emily had no idea how much I carried a longing ache for them, and I wasn't willing to let her keep them hostage.

"There they are."

Emily rolled her beautiful eyes but couldn't contain the blush within her cheeks or the toothy grin that formed without her control. There wasn't much I could do while trapped in hell, but at least I could still bring out her smile. For that, I was grateful.

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As I walked through the door, I began squeezing my way between bodies with a groan, not with discomfort but the mere regret of giving in to Emily's infuriatingly, adorable pout. Especially when she was most likely off in some room with her boyfriend while I was left to the awkward possibility of small talk with people I preferred only to see on school grounds.

But if I was irritated at all, it was with myself for having ignored bringing a plus one, someone who could be helping me avoid talking altogether. Emily had even suggested it, despite the small hesitance that followed afterward. But then again why would her hesitance matter anyway? She certainly had no right to judge my love life when she had the worst judgment in boyfriends.

I shrugged—as if I had won my own argument—before I pulled my phone out of my pocket and maneuvered my way across the room, pushing open a door that escaped into an abandoned kitchen.

Max: Up for a party tonight?

I took advantage of the empty kitchen, heading straight for the liquor bottles that were stacked together on the island. My phone vibrated in my hand as I reached out for one of the bottles of vodka, ignoring any interest in the chosen soda mixers.

Caitlyn: That depends...will you be there?

I could feel the victorious grin rise simultaneously with the liquor that I had filled half way up the plastic red solo cup.

Max: Already waiting for you to join me.

Caitlyn: What's the address?

I turned with my back against the island, bringing the rim of my drink up to my lips as I began to type out the address. But I was instantly distracted by the noise of someone bursting through the swing door with a force that was clear they had forgotten how little resistance was needed for it to open.

But where the annoyance should have been I found only amusement as Emily stumbled into the kitchen, confused by the direction as if her feet were being controlled by someone else. She had changed since dropping me off into a pair of tight dark colored jeans and a cream colored sweater that exposed her left shoulder. Unlike the tight bun she had worn at school Emily's blonde locks were down, resting along the front of her sweater in loose curls. My eyes bounced up and down with equal attention to her pink glossed lips and ocean blue eyes that had yet to realize my presence within the room.

I lowered my cup back down to my waist, putting my phone back into my pocket as I instantly forgot about the date I had been luring in seconds before. But I didn't quite have time to register any guilt as Emily finally looked over with a beaming smile of excitement.

"Max, you came!"

I put my drink down behind me as I watched her saunter forward with slightly wobbly legs. It was only a few feet from me when she tripped over her boots, forcing me to instinctively launch myself off the island in time to catch her.

"I did. But I see you started without me."

She didn't answer, but her toothy grin of giddiness was enough for me to understand her state of mind.

"Where's the boyfriend?"

“You know what...?” Emily leaned in close enough to let me unintentionally inhale her vanilla and jasmine scent, forcing me to resist a moan.

“What?”

“I don’t know,” Emily said.

“How much have you had to drink?”

“Umm...” Emily rapidly moved her eyes around as she began to mentally count before bursting into a fit of giggles. “I don’t know.”

“Well, aren’t you helpful.”

“At least this time he can’t leave me because I drove myself,” Emily said whispering out the last word like a secret while nodding in her own approval.

I narrowed my eyes in concern.

“You drove here?”

“Yes. I. Did.”

She tapped my nose with each drawn out word.

“Okay, well you’re not driving home. Give me your keys?”

“I don’t have them.”

“Where are they?”

“In my purse.”

“And that would be?”

“Under my coat.”

“For god’s sake, are you making this into a game?”

“No. Yes.” I rolled my eyes in annoyance despite feeling only amused at the way her brow scrunched in a cute way. “Do you want it to be?”

“Only if it’s a short game,” I said.

Emily smiled and moved so swiftly I hitched my breath as her mouth moved to my ear in order to whisper. “It’s by the front door.”

This girl is going to be the death of me, I thought, as I felt her move back slightly so that our faces were only inches apart.

“You have gorgeous eyes. Did you know that?”

“Yours aren’t so bad either,” I said through a chuckle.

“And your lips,” She raised her finger to gently drag down my bottom lip. “They’re so pretty. I wonder what they feel like. Are they soft...?” Her voice had transferred into a dreamlike trance as her face slowly began to lean in to close the gap between us. My body stood frozen only to squint in confusion as she abandoned her agenda and stepped back with widened eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m—” She turned and ran down the hall before she could answer. I followed on her heel as she opened a door, watching as she fell to the ground and lunged for the toilet before releasing everything that had previously been in her stomach.

I bent down into a squat as I grabbed her hair and pulled it up and away from her neck. I rubbed her back in gentle circles until finally, the purging stopped.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Emily said between two exhausted breaths.

“Do you need to throw up again?”

“No, I’m done.”

“Okay,” I said absentmindedly soothing the back of her head as I stood. “I’ll be right back.”

“I’ll be here,” Emily mumbled with her cheek lying flat against the porcelain seat.

I ignored my need to place my hand against her cheek by swiftly leaving the bathroom and heading off down the hallway. But I released the same groan I had made while entering the house once I saw that everyone had decided on doing the same as Emily by leaving their purses and coats in a large pile on the left side of the door.

“Fuck this,” I said before pulling my phone from my pocket and dialing Emily’s number.

I bent down and began shoving the pile left and right as the sound of Emily’s distinctive ringtone grew louder. After lifting a denim jean jacket out of the way, I reached for the small, black purse I recognized, feeling it vibrating as I stood.

I left the coats for now as I headed back down the hall, searching inside the purse until I found a set of car keys. I had just slipped them into my pocket when I came back to the bathroom. Emily was draped over the toilet, her eyes closed with an odd peaceful glow. I bent down, unable to ignore the instinct as I placed my palm on the exposed side of her face, tensing slightly as she moaned into my touch.

“You didn’t bring a coat with you, did you?”

“No,” Emily said with her eyes still closed.

“You ready to go?” I said moving a piece of hair from her forehead.

“Yeah,” she said groggily.

“Can you stand?”

She lifted her head as she finally opened her eyes before nodding.

“Come on, then,” I said.

She moved her left arm around my neck while I wrapped mine around her lower back until she was vertical again. As I helped her walk through the house, I noticed a few stares but no one offered to help. Not if it meant putting down their drinks.

“Thank you, Max.”

It was barely audible, but I could still hear her small voice once I had started the engine. I looked over with a grin, watching her eyes close and her head slump back against the seat before I could say anything back. I sighed, looking out the windshield as I contemplated what I should do. Taking her back to her house didn’t seem like a good fit in her condition. I could only imagine what her uptight, WASP parents would think about me dropping off their drunken daughter. I shrugged, putting the car in drive as I was left with only one option.

Once I pulled into my apartment complex I left Emily inside the car while I went to unlock the door and check inside. As with most Friday nights, there was no sign of my father, so I turned on the lights before heading back to Emily's car. I opened the passenger door and unbuckled her seatbelt as I squatted down to be able to look up at her slumbering face.

"Ems? We're here," I said lightly shaking her arm.

Her groan made it hard to resist a chuckle.

"Come on. The sooner you move, the sooner you can go back to bed," I pleaded.

"Will you carry me?"

"Seriously?"

"Please?"

I sighed while unable to resist the childish pout she had pulled off while her eyes remained closed.

"You're lucky I live on the first floor," I said, sliding my arms under her thighs and around her back in order to lift her from the seat.

As I walked across the parking lot, my stomach clenched as Emily pressed her face into the warmth of my neck. My lips began to twitch as I led her body through the open frame before lifting my foot skillfully to shut my front door. I moved with a quicker pace as I headed down the hallway and into my room before gently laying her on the bed. I could already feel the sting from her weight that would leave my muscles sore tomorrow, but I didn't mind.

I leaned on my bed with both arms as I lowered my face so that I could whisper once I saw her stir. "Do you want something else to sleep in?"

She nodded without a sound. I walked over to my dresser and pulled out a black t-shirt and a pair of gray sweatpants.

"You'll have to sit up so I can help you put these on," I said.

She groaned unhappily before she sluggishly rose like an awakening zombie. I bent down slightly, pulling the hem of her sweater up until she was only left in her black, lace bra. I quickly slipped my black Beatles t-shirt over her head before I had any time to stare at her beautifully exposed body.

Once she felt the material covering her she flopped back on the mattress but moved her hands down to unzip her jeans. If I had thought dressing her upper half had been difficult, it was nothing to the tension I felt once she hooked her thumbs into the sides of the denim. My mouth felt dry as she lifted her hips from the bed in a difficult struggle, forcing me to take pity and grab the ends of her jeans to help pull. My nostrils flared involuntarily as I found myself unprepared at the exposure of her long, toned legs and matching, black lace underwear. I did my best to move swiftly as I grabbed the sweatpants, but my teeth still clenched as I leaned onto my knees for momentum, leaving my face within inches of her shirt as I pulled them up with one quick thrust pull.

I didn't hesitate to push myself off the bed but watched as Emily rolled onto her side and curled her hands into her chest. I took a grateful moment to escape and walk down the hall,

telling myself it was to grab the small trash can from the bathroom but I knew it was also to give myself a minute to shake away the desire that had built up from our closeness. After a few minutes, I walked back into the room with my composure, sitting the trashcan next to the bed.

“All set. I left a trashcan on the left side of the bed. I’ll be on the couch if you need anything else.”

“Max?” Emily said softly, her eyes still closed.

“Yeah?”

“Where are you going?”

“To sleep on the couch.”

“Why? There’s lots of room for both of us,” Emily said as she lazily patted the small space behind her.

“I don’t mind the couch. It’s pretty comfy,” I said with a small grin before turning back around and heading for the light switch. “I’ll be right outside the door if you need me.”

“Please don’t leave me.”

My body stiffened at the sound of Emily’s small plea. I turned, looking over my shoulder to see her eyes open, waiting with a lingering sadness that caught me off guard.

“Okay. Just give me a second.”

“Okay,” Emily said with a small nod before she laid her head back down on the pillow. I sighed heavily as I headed back out of my room to lock the front door. When I reentered the bedroom I saw Emily had gotten under the covers and scooted over to the left side of the bed in order to make room for me. I quickly dressed into my own comfortable clothes before hitting the lights and making my way carefully to my side of the bed.

I had barely laid my body down when I felt Emily move back until she was snuggled against my front. Instinctively I moved my arm to wrap around her waist protectively, feeling my jaw tense as I waited for her rejection, only to feel her left hand cling to my wrist.

“Goodnight, Max.”

I pulled my arm tighter as a smile formed into the back of her strawberry scented hair.

“Goodnight, Ems.”