

Chapter 6 ~ Sage

For the two months since I'd blocked him, there had been no phone contact with Mason, no texts, no calls, no electronic communication of any sort.

But the letters came, his painstakingly printed letters arriving daily. I gathered them into a cute handled basket I'd picked up at a farmer's market one Saturday, unable to throw the letters out but just as equally unable to open them and read his words to me.

Flowers arrived at the hospital every other day, and if it was a day I wasn't getting flowers, he sent chocolates, or fruit arrangements or cookie bouquets or lunches for everyone I worked with. Every night when I came home, dinner was delivered. I would look out the peephole, and instead of a person, I would see a brown shopping bag with a note that said Kitten's dinner Sage's supper And right below that would be I miss you so much and I love you even more ~ Mason It was the same delivery man -- Carl -- just about every night, and he'd told me that Mason had asked all of the delivery drivers to hold the bag up so his words would be the first thing I saw.

"He tips so good I think we'd all be willing to do cartwheels wearing tutus if he asked us to," Carl had informed me one evening a er refusing yet another tip from me.

Tonight when I checked the peephole, there was my brown-bag o ering: Kitten's dinner. I miss you so much and I love you even more, forever and always ~ Mason

Well, that was a new little twist at the end. Forever and always seemed pretty damn optimistic given that I'd blocked him and hadn't had any contact with him for sixty one days.

And five hours.

And twenty-four minutes.

Or so I was guessing. I definitely wasn't keeping track. That would be pathetic and ridiculous. Although I was many things, I refused to let myself be that girl, the one who was willing to overlook anything just to keep her man.

But the point was, he was being optimistic with his forever and alwaysbusiness and that annoyed me. He had no right to feel that way a er he'd kissed Eva, and I don't care who initiated the kiss. He'd participated. End of story.

All of those thoughts still didn't stop me from opening the door, shooting the breeze with Carl for a few minutes and then eating my dinner while I stared at Mason's sixty-one unopened letters. A er I finished eating, I pulled the basket to me, those letters calling to me relentlessly.

My fingers toyed idly with the edges of the envelopes. The inescapable fact was I missed him. I missed Mason so much I could barely get through my days. Work helped but it wasn't enough. There were still the non-work hours to survive feeling hollow, lonely and sad. It was a fight to get through the days, and an even bigger struggle not to unblock him and send him a text or, even worse, call him directly.

In that frame of mind, I pulled out the first letter he had sent and ripped open the envelope.

Kitten, do you remember the first time we went to the beach? I remember that pink bikini you wore. Holy shit, do I remember it. I also remember wondering if you'd get mad if I covered you up so no other man could drool over my girl. I don't remember much else about that day because you eclipsed everything.

I smiled, thinking about that day. I remembered him shirtless on the beach, water trickling down his chest in rivulets I wanted to trace with my fingers. With my mouthMason was gorgeous, but his chest was the kind of chest that should be on the covers of romance novels. It was thatawesome.

Placing the letter carefully facedown on the couch, I ripped open the second one.

Sage, the first time you told me about your work, I lost the thread of the conversation and just listened to the passion in your voice as you talked about your sincere desire to help people. I watched the way your eyes lit up, the way your hands moved to emphasize your feelings. Your heart for the hurting is a beautiful thing to witness.

He'd looked at me a er I'd stopped talking about my work as a physician's assistant, embarrassed that I got so caught up in describing what I did. Mason had smiled at me and pulled me close. "You're incredible," he'd whispered into my ear and I'd believed him.

That letter went facedown on top of the first one, and I opened the third one.

The first time you told me you wanted five children, I didn't even think about it. All I could picture was you, round and beautiful with my child growing inside you, and I was all hell yes, sign me right the fuck up. Never before in my life had I thought about having children, but suddenly I could picture a noisy house, filled with love and our children and most importantly, you, and it became my dream, too.

Honestly, it had been a test. I'd known since I was a young girl that I wanted a very large family, so I'd told Mason early on in our relationship how many children I wanted. He'd paused for a moment, looking o into the distance as a smile curved his lips, then he'd leaned close and said he'd give me as many babies as I wanted.

I kept opening letter a er letter, all of them short, all of them recalling a di erent memory that made me think about the memory from my point of view.

Remember the first time we tried to make pizza together...

The first time I made love to you,...

A er our first date, I went home and knew my life would never be the same. And I didn't want it to be...

I stayed up past midnight until I'd read each letter, the process slowed by the memories he evoked with his words. Admittedly, I hadn't smiled this much since a certain alleyway incident, and I wasn't sure I should be remembering all of our past fondly. It should all be tainted by what he'd done with Eva -- I had to keep reminding myself of that -- but somehow, she couldn't touch those memories we'd built together.

Every day that week, when a new letter came, I'd eagerly open it, and then I'd add it to the pile of letters, and re-read all of them. Every single night. Maybe I shouldn't have allowed myself to stroll down Memory Lane, but it was the only thing that eased the ache inside of me. Thinking of him writing these, reliving our good times together made me feel closer to him. We had had a beautiful, close, loving relationship...until we hadn't.

Did his one action negate our months together, all of our happy times together? Could a person really make a mistake like he had without it meaning something? Could I ever believe in him, in his love for me, again? Did I believe I was really the woman he wanted, or would I always be wondering if he secretly held Eva in his heart?

He had explained to me why he hadn't deleted her contact, and I found I could believe his reasoning because men could be really stupid -- and honestly, it was a known truth that they didn't think about things the same way we women did.

But did I believe him about the kiss? That it meant nothing to him, that it happened due to a perfect storm of grief and drinking and reliving old times?

I sighed as the doorbell rang and realized it was time for Carl to bring my dinner from Mason. I looked out the peephole and saw the usual note scrawled on the brown paper bag.

Sage's supper. I miss you so much and I love you even more, forever and always ~ Mason

Tonight there was a little heart drawn a er Mason's name, so I was grinning as I opened the door, ready to greet Carl.

But when the paper bag was lowered, Mason stood there, a so smile on his face.

"Hi, kitten," he said.

Every single cell in my body came zinging alive and I think I took an involuntary step toward him.

"Mason," I breathed.

We both stood there like idiots, drinking in the other, taking in the changes from the last two months.

"As much as I like looking at you here in the hallway, kitten, could I come in?"

Still unable to believe he was here, I stepped back without saying a word and he followed me inside, shutting and locking the door a er himself.

"You don't know how bad I want to kiss you right now," he said, his voice husky with longing, his eyes laser focused on my face. At least he could talk. My voice was still lost somewhere, somewhere I couldn't find it.

"I've missed you so much, Sage. It's fucking agony being without you."

I swallowed, not able to doubt the utter sincerity in his words.

He cleared his throat, trying to shake the spell we were under. "I ordered enough for both of us," he told me, holding the bag alo . "Would you let me have dinner with you tonight?"

Nodding, I walked into the kitchen to grab some plates and silverware and began setting them out on my little dining table. When I looked for Mason, I saw his attention was on the co ee table, where I had his letters sitting out looking dog-eared and well-read. Busted

He looked up at me, his eyes intense. "I've wondered if you've been reading them. I was hoping you had, but I had visions of you just pitching the letters in the trash without even opening them."

My mouth opened to say how much I loved the letters, but he stopped me with a smile. "Let's talk a er we eat, Sage. Just keep it simple for now, yeah? Catch up on how you've been doing for the last two months. I want to hear about your job, how you like California, the hospital, what friends you've made."

He set out the food -- steaks, baked potatoes, vegetables, salads -- my absolute favorite meal, and then he got each of us a beer from my refrigerator. We began eating, and I kept sneaking peeks at him whenever I thought he wouldn't notice, but every time I looked up from my plate, his eyes were on me, so , tender, loving. Once we'd finished most of our food, he began asking me questions about every aspect of my life here.

So we talked for hours, exactly as we used to, and he filled me in as much as he could about his work. Since his job was classified, there wasn't a great deal he could share, but he spoke in generalities and got me caught up as much as he could.

Then, a er we finished dessert and co ee, he'd looked at me, his eyes serious.

"Are you happy, kitten?"

"I don't even know how to answer that, Mason."

"I'll tell you my answer: no. I'm not happy, and I'll never be happy again without you. That's not intended to make you feel guilty or pressured, Sage; it's just a fact."

"Mason --" I began, but then I didn't know what to say a er that, so I stopped talking.

"I see all of my letters to you on that table. So many of our memories, but I could write you one letter a day for the next twenty years and I still wouldn't have touched on all of the good things we shared. My memories of us are the only thing getting me through each day, kitten."

"I finally read them all, about a week ago," I admitted to him. "They make me feel closer to you, and I know I shouldn't feel that way --"

"Why, Sage? Why shouldn't you feel that way? All of those memories we share -- do you think they just stopped existing because of my colossal fuck up? Do you think we could get to a point where all of the good we had between us outweighs the one horrible mistake I made?"

"I don't know, Mason. That's the thing. I used to be so sure of you and your fidelity. And now, I'm not sure of either one."

His jaw tightened and his eyes were sad, haunted.

"I'm in town for a week and a half on leave, Sage. My hotel is about a mile away. Would you be willing to see me every day -- a er work on the days you work -- and just spend time with me? See if I can convince you of my love and fidelity? And if it's not, I understand. I came here uninvited because I couldn't go any longer without seeing you, but I knew I had to try. It's up to you, kitten."

And maybe it made me the stupidest person in the world, but I said yes.

"I'm not promising you anything, Mason," I told him when we stood at the door before he le .

He pressed a kiss to the tip of my nose. "Sage, just the fact that you're willing to spend time with me is more than I hoped for. I love you, sweetheart. Lock up."

I locked the door a er he le , and sighed. I was ashamed to say I felt happyand was looking forward to seeing him every day for the next ten days.

My phone chimed, and thinking it was a text from Mason, I ran to grab it. Unfortunately it was yet another spam text from an unknown number. This one was a picture of a positive pregnancy test. I deleted it and blocked the number and didn't give it another thought.

All my thoughts were filled with Mason.