

There's a chapter in *An Emotional Appeal* where Brandon tells Benjamin he ran into Lauryn. This was the chapter detailing that run-in. Although it spoke to Brandon's overprotectiveness, I felt it was a bit too harsh for the overall tone of the story. So I left it out.

*Damn.* I cursed when I noticed the green digital display on my dash read 2:51. I was supposed to meet Ben to watch the game at 3:00. There was no way I was going to make it on time. Thanks in part to this gas guzzling beast. I swear I just spent eighty-dollars on gas two days ago. If I didn't look so good in this Hummer, I'd trade it in and get a Prius. Yeah right, I could just see my big ass stuffed inside of one of those clown cars. Not a good look.

I couldn't totally blame being late on running out of gas. The main reason I was running late is because I couldn't pull myself away from *her*. We lay tangled together in her sheets this morning and I swear to God if I'd never taken another breath, I would have died a happy man. I still couldn't believe how this woman had gotten under my skin. I wasn't sure if it was the amazing sex or if it was because when she talked I actually found myself listening. I met her six weeks ago after a Rockets game. Ben and I were at a bar downtown, getting drunk, when she walked in with a couple of her girlfriends. I gave her my best smile and decided she would be naked in my bed before the night was over.

Man, never in my life have I ever had to work so hard for a piece of ass. I swear. Playing hard to get was an understatement with her. It was as if she really wasn't interested, which totally couldn't have been the case. She was smiling and making eyes at me all night but when I went over to talk to her she started acting like she had a stick up her ass.

"I must really be drunk because I could have sworn the entire time I was sitting over there, minding my own business, you were looking me up and down,"

"Not only are you drunk, you are an asshole. How do you know I wasn't staring at the person sitting behind you?" she smirked. My mouth fell open when I turned and realized she was referring to was another woman.

"Well, damn, baby. I don't discriminate and would love to participate," I smiled.

"I doubt you would know what to do with *one* woman, let alone two," she said coolly as she sipped from her drink.

"I think you'd be pleasantly surprised," I whispered in her ear.

"Or thoroughly disappointed," she said without missing a beat.

"There's only one way to find out," I challenged.

She cocked her head to the side as if she was seriously considering my offer.

"Hmm, you got any references?" she asked.

My eyes widened. "References?" *What the fuck?*

"Yes, someone who can vouch for your skills," she smiled but there was definitely a hint of mischief in those pretty brown eyes of hers.

"So, if I can find a 'reference' then you're willing to give me a *job*?" I asked stressing the job part.

I pulled my phone from my pocket, keeping my eyes on her the entire time. One of her eyebrows arched in surprise.

"Damn," I said with a dramatic sigh as I looked at my watch.

"What's wrong?" she asked, her curiosity definitely piqued.

"I think the convent is closed," I said sadly.

"The convent?" she frowned.

"Yeah, last woman was so thoroughly satisfied she said I had ruined her for other men, so she ran off and joined a convent. Sister Rochelle. I still see her every Sunday at Mass, but it's just not the same," I sighed and put my phone back in my pocket.

She stared blankly and then laughed. It wasn't some fake girly laugh it was a gut busting, head thrown back, *damn-that-shit-was-funny* kind of laugh.

"You're kinda crazy, huh?" she asked after the laughter stopped. She smiled at me and my heart nearly stopped.

"What can I say? Beautiful women decrease my brain function,"

She lowered her head and played with the edge of her napkin. Was she blushing? She raised her head to find me looking at her with a big grin on my face.

"You're a little too smooth for my taste; it's been my experience that men like you are dangerous," she said.

Oh, fuck no! I would not be dismissed.

"Yeah, and it's been my experience that women like you know exactly how to mitigate that danger,"

"Mitigate, I'm impressed that's an awfully big word," she teased.

And I was back in.

"Not the only thing big I possess,"

She frowned.

"What? I have a Hummer and a huge tri-level house I designed myself. What were *you* thinking about?"

She laughed and shook her head. "The name is Cassandra and I'm thinking it's past my bedtime. I should really be going," she looked at me thoughtfully before she reached in her purse and pulled out a card.

"But maybe-what's your name?" she asked suddenly.

"Brandon."

"Well, Brandon, maybe you can call me sometime and we can make plans for you to show me some of your *big* possessions," Her sexy ass voice dripped with innuendo as she passed me a business card.

"It would be my extreme pleasure, Miss. Cassandra,"

I called her an hour later to make sure she got home okay and practically begged her to have dinner with me the next night. She told me some bullshit about not knowing the rules. Apparently, I was supposed to wait three days before calling her? Seriously, where did women come up with this shit? She finally agreed to meet me and we'd been joined at the hip ever since. I still hadn't admitted to Ben about just how much I was falling for her.

This woman totally owned me. She had given me shit about running out on her this morning, but when I told her I was meeting my brother she softened a little bit. I think

the idea of my family intrigued her for some reason. She was an only child and her parents died when she was young. I can't even imagine being an only child, Ben was a play by the rules, emo acting bastard sometimes but I loved him immensely. He was truly my best friend. And my parents, if it wasn't for my mama totally having my back no matter what and my dad kicking my ass when I got out of line-there's no telling where I would be.

I really wanted to introduce her to my mama. Mothers had a sixth sense about whether a woman was worthy of their son or not. But I didn't want Cassandra to think that I was moving too fast. I had never even thought about introducing a woman to my mother and I sure as hell never gave a damn about a woman being comfortable with my intentions. Part of me knew this was a good thing. I didn't want to play around forever. I wanted a family eventually and even a couple of kids. But things just seemed to be happening so fast and if I'm being honest, I was scared. I just didn't want to fuck this up. The only thing in my life prior to Cassandra that I took serious was my job. And now I found myself thinking about her all the time.

"Brandon?" I heard a voice call snapping me out of my thoughts.

I had gone inside the gas station to pay for my gas and get a couple of cans of Red Bull to replenish some of the energy that Cassandra had stolen that morning. The voice belonged to a woman and before I turned around I prayed it wasn't someone I'd left high and dry who had been waiting on a return phone call.

I turned with an irritated look on my face.

"Brandon Fontaine?" she asked. She looked vaguely familiar but I still couldn't place her or that whiny voice. She was average height for a woman, had big titties (seems like I would have remembered those) and her eyes were a greenish gray color.

"Uh, do I know you?" I asked. I hoped I didn't crush her ego too much.

"Yeah, I know it's been a long time but I can't believe I've changed that much. You look exactly the same," she smiled.

I must have been totally drunk and a little high if I slept with her.

"And you are?" I asked not even trying to mask my annoyance.

"Lauryn. Lauryn Simmons. Your brother, Benjamin and I used to date back in college,"

I'm sure my eyes looked like they were about to pop out of my head. Lauryn. Fucking. Simmons. It took every ounce of my depleted energy to refrain from shaking that bitch until her eyes rattled around in her head. I wanted to scream, *yeah, Lauryn Simmons. I remember you, the bitch that broke my little brother's heart. The same woman he was going marry until he caught you fucking his best friend!* I couldn't believe she had the nerve to stand in front of me smiling like the Joker as if we were old friends. I never liked her. I always thought Ben was too good for her and unfortunately it turned out that I was right.

"Oh, now I remember you. Mmph. What brings you to Houston?" I asked taking two Red Bulls from the cooler. I could give a shit why she was here but I had to redirect my anger.

"I just moved here actually, I accepted a job with an accounting firm downtown," she smiled. "So, how is Ben? It's been years since I've seen him,"

Real smooth, bitch. *I don't think so.*

"From what I understand there's a good reason that you haven't seen him. Look, Lauryn let's cut the bullshit okay. I'm sure you moving to Houston was not some random

coincidence. Ben is fine. More than fine actually. He's finally moved on with his life and he's happy. Don't fuck that up for him. You owe him at least that," I spat.

She blinked furiously. For a minute I thought one of her fake eyelashes was going to fall in her eyes. "I-I -I have no intention on trying to hurt Ben. I was just asking—,"

I cut her off.

"And I just told you. Stay the fuck away from my brother," I pushed past her and headed to the front of the store.

Unfuckingbelievable.

I really hoped she heeded my warning but just in case I had to tell Ben. I didn't want to bring up those painful memories, but I also didn't want this bitch to blindside him. I knew things were going well for him and Regina. He deserved to be happy after everything he'd been through. After I paid for my gas and Red Bulls, I felt my phone vibrate. I had received a text.

When I pulled out my phone, it was actually an e-mail. I opened it and in the subject line it said, 'Miss you already'. When I opened the attached image there was a picture of Cassandra with a sheet wrapped loosely around her, biting the tip of her finger and she had this look on her face that screamed sex. Specifically, *Brandon come back and have sex with me.*

I swear I almost called Ben and canceled ,but I knew he was probably already waiting on me and I'd never hear the end of it. I might have to fake an illness or something. There was no way I was going to be able to sit through watching a basketball game with my brother when I had a hot, *naked* woman waiting on me. But family always came first, always.

