

BETRAYAL: ABBY'S GUILT

THE BETRAL SERIES

BY

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BETRAYAL: ABBY'S GUILT (THE BETRAYAL SERIES)

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DEAR READER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chapter I

Abby was frantically typing on her laptop, trying to finish her paper on Nineteenth Century English literature, when a piece of toast landed in the middle of her keyboard. She raised her gaze over the computer screen and glared at her boyfriend Kyle sitting across from her at the kitchen table. Kyle mimicked her expression while shoving a piece of bread in his mouth. His lips curled into a taunting grin.

“Would you stop doing that? This paper is due today, and I have ten more pages to go,” Abby whined.

“What? I’m not doing anything,” Kyle replied, with a shrug and with his tongue firmly planted in his cheek. His gray eyes shone with a devilish twinkle as he tried to stifle a laugh.

Abby pursed her lips, trying not to smile, and narrowed her eyes at Kyle. She wanted to be mad at him for being so annoying at the worst possible time, but she couldn’t get angry at him no matter how hard she tried. She was powerless any time he flashed his gorgeous, crooked smile at her.

Abby picked up the piece of toast and hurled it at Kyle, but he managed to dodge it. The piece of bread flew past him and landed on the floor.

Giggling at Abby’s bad aim, Kyle stuck his tongue out at her as he got up from his chair. He decided to stop annoying the poor, stressed-out girl, at least until after finals. He winked at her while picking up some dirty dishes off the kitchen table and stepping towards the sink.

Abby watched her boyfriend hover over the sink and marveled at how gorgeous he was. They had been dating for over three years, and she still couldn’t get over how strikingly handsome Kyle was. She also wondered why a guy who could’ve had any girl in the world had chosen her. Kyle looked like he came out of an Abercrombie and Fitch catalog-wavy, thick, dirty blonde hair; broad shoulders; a square jaw; elegant, narrow nose; perfectly sculpted lips; flawless skin; and a set of abs that looked as if they had been painted on. And then there was Abby’s favorite feature: Kyle’s smoldering gray eyes. Or was his crooked grin her favorite feature? She couldn’t decide.

When Abby first met Kyle Garrett, she couldn't understand why he had chosen to go to college to study computer engineering when he could have made easy money being a model or an actor. But as she got to know him better, Abby understood why Kyle had chosen academia over the runway. Besides being extremely smart, Kyle was not the type of guy who got hung up on his own looks. He kept himself fit, but he was not obsessed with the gym. He enjoyed the attention he received from women, but he never let it go to his head. He told Abby once that he'd rather be with a woman who could make him laugh and hold a conversation than be with a beautiful airhead. He told Abby that's the reason why he fell in love with her-not that Abby was unattractive. Abby was, in fact, a very beautiful girl, but she was not the type of girl men fawned over. The combination of her long, shiny, brown hair; her almond-shaped hazel eyes; her flawless, ivory skin; and her curvy, petite body should have easily turned a lot heads, but it didn't. The words adorable, sweet, classy, cute, angelic were always used to describe her, but never the words sexy or hot.

Abby considered herself a hardcore feminist, but every once in a while, she secretly wished she was one of those girls who got men to bark cheesy pick-up lines at them when they walked by. Instead, every man in her life treated her as if she was their little sister, like someone they needed to protect. Even though she was invisible to most men, Abby felt overall content because the one man who mattered, Kyle, did find her sexy and reminded her every chance he got. And at the end of the day, Kyle's opinion and approval were all she cared about.

Kyle and Abby met during the first day of freshman orientation at New York University. He's from a small, rural town in the State of Montana, and she's from a tiny city in the State of Michigan. They bonded over their small town roots and learned to navigate the intimidating campus and the even-more-intimidating City of New York together. They have been inseparable ever since. They started dating within weeks of meeting, and after their freshman year, moved in together. They were lucky to find a tiny but affordable apartment nearby the university's Manhattan campus and have lived there ever since.

While she watched Kyle do the dishes, Abby rested her chin on her fist and looked back at their time together. She wondered how she and Kyle managed to get good grades during their freshman year. They couldn't keep their hands off each other back then. They often missed classes because they were always going at it: in Abby's dorm room, at the library, in a bathroom stall at the student union, you name it. But after three years together, things between them had cooled down to normal levels. They were still madly in love with each other and had occasional,

hot sex, but they were no longer all over each other like they used to. Sex in a bathroom stall had been replaced with lazy Sunday afternoons lying on the couch watching Netflix or doing the New York Times crossword puzzle.

Even though Abby occasionally missed all the spontaneous, hot sex she and Kyle used to have, she was glad they were past that phase of their love affair. She felt their relationship had evolved into something much, much better. They had intimacy, understanding, and held very few secrets from each other. They complemented and respected each other, and Abby saw herself marrying Kyle one day. She often caught herself daydreaming about him proposing to her and giving her a ring. She had even begun to plan their wedding in her head.

With wedding bells on her mind, Abby walked over to her boyfriend and wrapped her arms around his waist.

Kyle smiled softly, dried his hands on a rag, and turned around to face the only girl he had ever truly loved. He still could not believe his luck when he met that gorgeous, sweet, angel of a girl and it turned out she didn't have a boyfriend. Kyle did not believe in love at first sight until he walked into that crowded lecture hall and laid eyes on Abigail Sloane three years earlier. He asked her for a pen he didn't need, and she smiled at him. Kyle knew right then and there that he wanted that smile in his life forever.

With the tips of his fingers, Kyle brushed Abby's bangs away from her forehead so he could get a better view of the most stunning pair of hazel eyes he's ever seen. Kyle marveled at how fast the last three years had gone by. His life had been pure bliss ever since that bubbly Michigan girl came into it. When Kyle arrived in New York, he was jaded, disillusioned, and incapable of trusting anyone. People he loved had deceived and manipulated him. He didn't believe there were any good people left in the world, but Abby changed all of that. She was as honest and kind as she was beautiful, and Kyle trusted her with his life. She was perfect and was as crazy about him as he was about her.

Kyle was certain Abby was the one. He had known it for a while and couldn't wait for the day when he dropped down on one knee and asked her to be his wife. With his eyes darting from Abby's eyes to her slightly parted lips, Kyle brought his other hand up to cradle Abby's heart-shaped face. He exhaled softly before tipping Abby's face up and placing a brief but sweet kiss on her ruby lips.

"What was that for?" Abby asked, watching her reflection in Kyle's soulful, gray eyes.

"I love you, Abby," Kyle sighed, rubbing the pad of his thumb over her small but plump lower lip.

Abby's lips curled into the biggest, earnest smile as she remembered the first time Kyle told her that he loved her. It happened during one of the most stressful days of their freshman year at NYU. They were alone in Abby's dorm room, sitting on the floor and studying for their midterm exams. They had stocked up on snacks and energy drinks because they wanted to pull an all-nighter. At around two in the morning that day, and with pizza boxes and empty cans scattered all around them, Kyle decided it was the perfect time to profess his love for Abby.

Abby remembered she looked like a total mess with her hair held back in a fuzzy bun and dark circles under her eyes. She told Kyle she loved him back, and they took a break from studying to have some quick, sloppy sex right in the middle of the dirty and cluttered dorm room floor. It was one of the most romantic nights of their relationship. Kyle has told her that he loves her every single day since, and Abby could see it in his eyes that he has meant it every single time. That morning over the sink was not any different.

"I love you too, Kyle," Abby breathed, pressing Kyle's body against hers and resting her head on his chest.

"How's that paper coming along, Ms. Procrastinator?" Kyle teased.

"It's coming," Abby mumbled, her head still pressed against Kyle's chest. "I just hope I can finish it before tonight's party. I don't want to have to pull another all-nighter since I have to work tomorrow."

"You better get back to it then," Kyle grinned, placing his palms on both sides of Abby's head and tilting her face up. He wished neither he nor Abby had to work in addition to going to school full-time. He wished they had more time to spend with each other. But neither one of them could afford not to work. New York was a very expensive city to live in, and the money they received from grants and loans just wasn't enough to survive on. Asking their families for help was out of the question because the recession had hit them particularly hard. So Abby and Kyle worked to make ends meet. They both held part-time jobs and worked as many as thirty hours a week each while juggling full-time course loads.

"Brianna is going to be there, right? I can't wait to finally meet her," Abby beamed as she watched Kyle's smile disappear from his face. His whole demeanor always changed every time his sister's name was uttered.

"Yes, she is," Kyle grumbled before clearing his throat. He hastily unwrapped Abby's arms from his waist and turned his attention back to the dirty dishes behind him. Turning his back to her was always Kyle's cue to Abby that he wanted her to drop the Brianna subject. Abby knew it but chose to ignore it that time.

“Her flight gets here in a couple of hours. You two haven’t seen each other in such a long time. Maybe you should go pick her up at the airport so you two can spend some time catching up before the party,” Abby suggested.

“Her agency is sending a limo for her. She’ll be fine. I’ll talk to her at the party,” Kyle replied coldly, his back still to Abby.

“I still think you should go pick her up,” Abby insisted. “She’s your sister, Kyle.”

Kyle exhaled sharply and slammed the rag he was holding on the edge of the sink. “I have to go. I’m going to be late for my lab,” he huffed before turning around and kissing Abby awkwardly on the forehead. Abby’s eyes followed Kyle as he practically ran out of the kitchen and towards the bedroom. Seconds later, he reappeared with his book bag slung over his shoulder. He gave Abby a faint smile and a wink before disappearing out the front door.

Abby crossed her arms over her chest and leaned against the kitchen sink. She knew everything there was to know about Kyle Garrett-everything except anything having to do with his older sister Brianna. Every conversation they had about Brianna always ended the same way: With Kyle getting uncomfortable and cagey and walking away from Abby.

All Abby knew about the mystery woman was that she was five years older than Kyle, ran away from home when she was eighteen, moved to Los Angeles, and became a somewhat famous actress. She and Kyle didn’t visit each other, didn’t talk to each other on the phone, didn’t Skype, and didn’t follow each other on Facebook. They only exchanged the occasional email. The last time they saw each other was almost two years earlier when Brianna came to Montana to see their terminally ill father. Kyle didn’t even have any pictures of her. Abby knew what Brianna looked like because she had looked up pictures of her on the internet.

Brianna was what Hollywood calls a working actress. She had had spoken lines in a handful of TV shows and movies and had done a lot of voice-over work. She was coming to New York to audition for the part of Roxie Hart in the Broadway revival of the musical Chicago. She was expecting to be in the city for a few weeks, or longer depending on how the multi-round auditions went.

Abby wished she knew why Kyle and Brianna were estranged. He wouldn’t even pick her up at the airport and chose to meet with her, after two years, at a party where he knew they would have very little opportunity to talk. Abby did not understand why Kyle seemed to hold so much resentment and anger towards his only sibling or why he refused to talk about it. She and Kyle shared everything. Why not this? She knew Kyle was angry at Brianna for skipping their father’s

funeral, but it wasn't just that. Kyle's attitude towards his sister had been the same since Abby met him, long before his father died. There was something else going on, and Abby was dying to find out what it was. She was looking forward to meeting Brianna at the party and getting to know her while she was in town. Abby hoped to learn, once and for all, what happened between her and Kyle.

Chapter II

Later that day, Abby and Kyle were at the birthday bash for Kyle's best friend, Ryan. Ryan, a very popular guy around campus, decided to throw himself a little birthday party to celebrate his twenty-first birthday. It looked as if Ryan had invited the entire NYU student body, judging by the number of drunk coeds stumbling around the apartment he shared with three other students. There was a lot of dancing, drinking and yes, even fucking, going on in that apartment that night.

Kyle was leaning against a wall, drinking a beer and joking around with the birthday boy when he spotted Abby across the room. She was all smiles surrounded by friends and taking selfies with them with her phone. Kyle smiled as he gazed at her and wondered what he had done to deserve a living doll, a flesh-and-blood angel like Abigail Sloane. She looked enchanting that night in her flowered-pattern, royal blue dress. Kyle loved that strappy, knee length dress on her. He loved how its bodice wrapped around her tiny waist and how the flared, knee-long skirt bounced around her with every step she took. She had her luscious, brown hair pulled back into a high, elegant ponytail, and she was wearing no makeup, except for some lip gloss and some eyeliner. She was the picture of loveliness that night.

Kyle glanced at the clock hanging on the wall across from him and saw it was almost ten o'clock. His sister Brianna had not shown up, and Kyle was secretly hoping she wouldn't. He really did not want to see her. Kyle wished he could cut Brianna out of his life completely. But their mother begged him not to and asked him to at least be civil to her. That's the only reason he agreed to meet with her when she emailed him telling him she was coming to New York and wanted to see him.

Kyle had hoped he could've gone all his life without having to introduce his sweet, innocent girlfriend to his deviant, screwed-up sister, but Brianna was very insistent on meeting Abby. He knew Brianna was going to keep bugging him until she met Abby. Kyle realized that with Brianna potentially relocating to The Big Apple for work, sooner or later she and Abby were going to meet. So he decided to get it over with and have them meet at a crowded and loud party where he knew

there'd be little chance of any real conversation between the two girls. There were what Kyle considered shameful secrets about Brianna, and he did not want Abby to ever learn about them.

Just when Kyle thought he was going to get through the night without having to go through the uncomfortable process of introducing his sister Brianna to his girlfriend and friends, the door to the apartment flew open. All the eyes in the room, including Abby's, flew to the stunning woman who had just walked in.

"That's Brianna," Abby remarked under her breath to no one in particular as she gazed, wide-eyed, at the leggy blonde who was scanning the room as if she was looking for someone. Abby had seen pictures of Brianna on Google Images, but seeing the woman in the flesh made her realize those pictures did not do Brianna justice. On a scale of one to ten of attractiveness, Brianna was easily a twenty five. Abby couldn't get over how stunningly perfect that woman was and how much she looked like her brother. Brianna's thick, wavy dirty blond hair; her fair complexion; her almond-shaped, ocean blue eyes; her perfectly sculpted, plump lips; and the seductive way in which she swayed her hips when she walked, had all the men in the room shamelessly ogling her like hungry dogs. Her strapless, skin tight mini dress showed she had curves to go for days. She drew whistles and a handful of dirty compliments from some of the drunk coeds as she slowly made her way to the other side of the living room.

Abby watched Brianna ignore all the cat calls and head over to where Kyle was standing. She saw Brianna place a hand on Kyle's shoulder before leaning in and landing a brief kiss on his cheek. She saw Kyle eye Brianna up and down before mouthing something to her. The lack of hugs or warm smiles made it evident to Abby that Kyle was not happy to see Brianna, but Brianna did seem happy to see her brother. Abby decided to walk over to them and introduce herself.

"Hi..." Abby greeted the mystery woman, her eyes sparkling with curiosity and admiration. She eyed Brianna from head to toe before stepping to stand next to Kyle. She curled one arm behind Kyle's waist and waited for an introduction.

"Hi..." Brianna grinned, curiously scanning the petite brunette from head to toe before returning her gaze to Kyle.

"Abby, this is my sister Brianna. Brianna, this is my girlfriend Abby," Kyle muttered, his eyes looking as cold as that introduction sounded.

"It's so nice to finally meet you, Brianna," Abby beamed, releasing Kyle's waist and stepping forward to wrap her arms around Brianna's neck. Abby hugged her boyfriend's sister as if she had known her her whole life.

Brianna was taken aback by the friendliness of his brother's girlfriend. "Wow. It's nice to finally meet you too, Abby. You are so adorable," Brianna gushed, breaking the hug and scanning Abby from head to toe once more. "You've done good, little bro. She is pretty and gives nice hugs," she joked, gazing at her brother.

Abby giggled at Brianna's remarks, but Kyle did not. Kyle just glared at his sister, incapable of hiding his disdain for her. He didn't like the way Brianna was staring at Abby. He was starting to regret inviting his sick, perverted sister to that party.

"I can't believe I'm speaking to a real-life movie star. I've watched all the movies you've been in. I think you are very talented, Brianna," Abby praised the stunning blonde. She was a little star struck. Brianna had that effect on people even though she wasn't exactly a world famous actress yet.

"Well, thank you, Abby. That's very kind of you," Brianna replied, giving Abby a curt nod.

"Let me get you a beer so we can all sit down and talk," Abby suggested. She had turned on her heel to walk away from the group when Kyle grabbed her wrist.

"Don't, Abby. Brianna and I are going to go have a little chat alone. After that, she is going back to her hotel because she is very tired and has a very busy day ahead of her tomorrow. Isn't that right, Brianna?" Kyle glared at his sister, forcing a smile that did not match the darkness in his eyes. Brianna did not say anything, but her friendly smile disappeared as she listened to Kyle not-so-diplomatically tell her he wanted her gone from that party. Abby could see pain clouding Brianna's gorgeous blue eyes. She felt bad for her.

"Go hang out with your friends, babe. I'll come get you later, okay?" Kyle instructed Abby, almost pushing her away.

"Okay..." Abby said slowly as she searched both Brianna's and Kyle's faces trying to figure out what was going on. She headed back to the couch while she watched her boyfriend and his sister climb out a window and into the apartment's fire escape. Abby sat back on the couch, ignoring all the chatter going on around her. Her eyes were fixated on the window Brianna and Kyle had climbed out of. She wished she was a fly on the metal rails of that fire escape exit. She was dying to know what Kyle and Brianna were saying to each other. She had a suspicion they were not reminiscing about their childhood back in Montana.

About half an hour later, Brianna and Kyle got back inside the apartment. Kyle climbed through the window first. With a flushed face and a tight jaw, Kyle scanned the room looking for Abby. When he spotted her, he headed towards the couch where she was sitting. Brianna climbed in through the window a few

seconds later. She headed straight to the kitchen where the drinks were without making eye contact with anyone. Abby noticed her lips were smiling, but her eyes told a different story. They were shifty and couldn't hide the soul-crushing pain that clouded them. It looked to Abby as if Kyle and Brianna had spent that half hour saying some hurtful things to each other on that fire escape. Abby wished someone would tell her what was going on so she could help. She felt so helpless and frustrated.

Abby questioned her boyfriend when he sat next to her on the couch. "What happened? What did you say to Brianna to make her so upset? What is going on Kyle?"

"It's nothing. It's a family thing. Don't worry about it," Kyle replied, patting Abby's knee. "I'm going to go get us some beers. Stay here. I'll be right back."

On his way to the kitchen, Kyle passed Brianna who was coming back to the living room with a beer in her hand. They gave each other death stares and continued on their way. In the living room, Brianna sat on a different couch than the one Abby was sitting on. She glanced over at Abby, smiled and tipped her beer bottle towards her. Abby thought about going over to Brianna and talking to her, but she didn't get a chance to get near the mystery woman. As soon as Brianna sat down, the men at the party began to hound her. Three of them sat around her, fawning over her and shamelessly ogling her. Brianna giggled and flirted with all three of them while taking small sips from her beer.

Suddenly Daft Punk's "Get Lucky" came through the speakers, and Brianna shot up to her feet. "I love that song. Turn it up," she shrieked before turning her attention to her three admirers. "Which one of you handsome boys is going to ask me to dance?"

All three men almost knocked one another to the ground trying to claim Brianna's hand. Brianna chose to drag all three of them to the dance area. If the men at the party were not going wild for Brianna before, they definitely were when she began to seductively writhe her body and sway her hips to the funky beat of the song. She ran her hands all over her hair and body while her three drooling dance partners fought for her attention. Abby, along with everyone else in the room, couldn't take her eyes off the breathtaking blonde who looked like she was genuinely having a blast dancing to the fun, groovy tune.

Abby stared at Brianna wishing she could be her.

Kyle, who had returned from the kitchen, seethed with embarrassment. While they were out on the fire escape, Kyle asked Brianna to leave the party and stay away from his girlfriend, but Brianna refused to leave. She told Kyle she was

going to enjoy the party and leave whenever she goddamn pleased. Kyle was not amused by Brianna's suggestive dancing. He was convinced she was putting on that little show just to further embarrass and humiliate him.

The night went on, and Brianna continued to dance and flirt with just about every guy in the room while staring defiantly at her brother. Abby could not find a single opportunity to talk to the mysterious sister since the men at the party wouldn't leave Brianna alone for a second. That plus the fact that Kyle barely left her side the entire night.

A few hours later, most of the party guests had gone home. The music had been turned off and the only people left were Kyle, Abby, Brianna, birthday boy Ryan, and his three roommates. All three of Ryan's roommates were shamelessly drooling over Brianna. They sat around her on one of the couches and hung on her every word as she regaled them with interesting anecdotes about her life as a Hollywood movie star.

"So, Brianna, do you have a boyfriend? And if you don't, can I be him?" Matt, one of the drooling roommates, asked a tipsy Brianna.

"I don't have a boyfriend, Matt. As a matter of fact, I have never had a boyfriend in my whole life," Brianna giggled, patting the cheek of the stocky but adorable young man.

"You don't do relationships? That's cool. I'll settle for anything-your boy toy, your sex slave, whatever you want me to be, gorgeous," Matt pleaded as his roommates shook their heads and tried to stifle laughs.

"Actually, I do do relationships. I just don't do them with men," Brianna clarified.

"What do you mean?" Sergio, a Brazilian stud and one of the other roommates, asked. "Wait...Are you saying you're a lesbian?"

Brianna shrugged and smiled coyly at Sergio. "Card carrying member since 1987." She then turned her attention to Kyle and shot daggers at him with her eyes.

Abby's mouth fell open when she heard the startling revelation. She had no idea. Kyle had never mentioned to her that his sister was gay. When Abby googled Brianna, she did not find a single mention of Brianna's sexuality on the internet. She found a couple of pictures of Brianna attending movie premieres, but she was accompanied by men in all of them. Abby was shocked, not that she had any prejudice against gay people. She just found the news surprising given how flirty Brianna was being with all the men at the party. Abby turned her head to face Kyle and found him glaring and huffing at Brianna. His face looked flushed with anger.

Abby was startled by the dark expression on her boyfriend's face. She had never seen Kyle looking that upset.

"Well, that settles it boys," Cody, the third roommate, chimed in. "We can all go to bed now. None of us has a shot with gorgeous Brianna. Nothing to see here."

Sergio and Cody got off the couch and went to fetch more beers, but Matt remained seated, still drooling over Brianna. He was not throwing in the towel just yet. "It's okay if you're into girls, sweetheart. It just means we have something in common. I'm not giving up on you, Goddess Brianna. I believe you're worth the fight."

Brianna giggled. She found Matt's hopeless insistence adorable. "I'm glad you don't have a problem with me being gay, Matt. There are plenty of people who do. And I'm not talking about strangers. I don't give a flying fuck what they think of me. I'm talking about people who are your flesh and blood, people who are supposed to love you unconditionally. But because of their small mindedness and their ignorance, choose to believe lies and shut you out of their lives instead." Brianna said all of this while staring Kyle down.

All eyes, including Abby's, flew to Kyle when Brianna finished talking. Uncomfortable silence filled the room.

"Hey, Ryan, do you want to go shoot some pool?" Kyle asked his best friend through gritted teeth as he shot to his feet. Kyle took a few steps towards the pool table while scowling at his sister. Ryan stood up and followed Kyle, but not before shooting a nervous half grin at Brianna. Abby wanted to go after Kyle, but her phone began buzzing. She looked at the screen and saw it was her mother calling from Michigan. Her mother never called that late unless it was important. Filled with worry, Abby excused herself and rushed towards the fire escape to take the call.

After Abby left the room, Brianna placed her beer bottle on the coffee table and shot to her feet. "How about we all go shoot some pool?" She gestured with her fingers for her three admirers to follow her to the pool table.

Kyle and Ryan were already in the middle of a game when Brianna and the others joined them. Kyle and Ryan stood at one end of the table, and Brianna and her admirers stood at the other. Brianna placed her palms flat on the edge of the pool table and watched the multicolor balls roll across the table and drop in the pockets. "You know, I taught Kyle how to play pool," Brianna informed Ryan and her admirers. "Remember how we used to play each other when you were younger, little bro?" She asked, raising her gaze away from the table and trying to make eye contact with her brother. Kyle ignored her. He took a deep breath and kept his eyes

on the pool table. He was determined not to let her demented sister get under his skin. He figured that if he ignored her, she would get fed up and leave.

“I really hope your game has improved because you really sucked back then, Kyle.”

Kyle glared at Brianna as he walked towards the end of the table where she was standing. He was still not taking her bait. Brianna turned around, crossed her arms over her chest, and leaned her butt against the pool table to block Kyle’s path. She was trying to force Kyle to deal with her or at least rattle him, but Kyle simply walked around her, ignoring her completely.

“How about a one-on-one game between you and me, little bro? Just one game for old time’s sake,” Brianna suggested, hovering over Kyle as he prepared to take his shot.

“No,” Kyle replied coldly after taking his shot. He watched the ball drop in one of the pockets and walked away from Brianna.

Brianna uncrossed her arms and watched Kyle walk towards the other end of the table. “Why not? Are you afraid you’re going to lose to a girl? It’s okay. I understand. I mean, I can easily destroy you at this game, and you don’t want to be humiliated in front of your friends.”

Brianna’s condescending remarks and the snickers coming from Ryan’s roommates drove Kyle to his breaking point. “Fine. You want to play me? Let’s play,” Kyle snapped before gathering all the balls and placing them inside the triangle. “I’ll even let you break. You’re going to be sorry you didn’t leave when I asked you to.”

“Is that so? You think you can beat me, huh?” Brianna grinned, tipping her chin up defiantly. After all the hurtful things Kyle had said to her on the fire escape, seeing him so worked up was sweet payback for Brianna. She walked towards him and got in his face again. “Care to make it a little interesting K-bear?”

“That was his nickname when he was kid,” Brianna explained to the other guys gathered around the pool table before turning her attention back to Kyle.

“How about we place a little wager on this game?” Brianna proposed.

“What do you have in mind?” Kyle asked through gritted teeth.

“NYU is a really expensive school, isn’t it? You must be drowning in debt. How much do you owe in student loans so far, Kyle?”

“What the heck does that have to do with anything?”

“Just answer the question, asshole.”

“Close to eighty thousand. Why?”

“If you win this pool game, I will pay off all of those loans, every cent of it. I will write you a check for eighty thousand dollars. I have my checkbook right here in my bag. I’m not bullshitting.”

“Holy shit, Goddess Brianna. You have that kind of money?” Sweet Matt blurted out before stepping between Kyle and Brianna. “Seriously, marry me? Please? Don’t let the small matter of my penis get in the way of us. Look, if my penis bothers you, I’ll just get rid of it. I don’t care. I don’t even use it that much anyway.”

Matt’s roommates snickered at his hilarious desperation. Brianna shook her head at Matt, not sure if he was serious or joking about the chopping off his penis part. She patted him on the cheek before turning her attention back to Kyle and the wager.

“And if you beat Kyle, what do you get, Brianna?” Ryan, the birthday boy, asked.

“Well, if I win...I don’t know...Let me think.” Brianna turned her back to Matt and Kyle and began to walk around the pool table. “What do I want?” She kept asking herself under her breath until she had completed one full trip around the pool table and was once again in Kyle’s face.

“You know Kyle, that girlfriend of yours... What’s her name again?”

Kyle narrowed his eyes and cocked his head to the side. “Abby. Her name’s Abby. What about her?”

“Right. Abby. She sure is a pretty little thing. I’d love to get a little taste of those pouty lips. If I win the pool game, that’s what I want, Kyle. I want to kiss your girlfriend, and I want you to watch me do it.” Brianna’s face broke into a slow smile as she witnessed rage build behind Kyle’s eyes. She crossed her arms over her chest and waited for Kyle’s response to her outrageous but totally serious wager proposal.

Kyle white-knuckled the pool table as he scowled at his fucked up sister. He had never hit a woman in his life, but Brianna was putting him on the verge of changing that. Once again, dead silence descended over the room. Ryan and his roommates stared at Brianna with their mouths hanging open before their eyes darted to Kyle. They too were waiting with bated breath for Kyle’s response.

“No. No way. That’s not going to happen. Wager something else,” Kyle replied, shaking his head and walking away from Brianna.

“It’s just going to be a quick, innocent smack on the lips, Kyle. What’s wrong, little bro? If you were sure you were going to beat me, that little wager wouldn’t scare you. You’re afraid of a girl. That’s just sad little bro.”

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