

Chapter One: Wednesday, January 2015 Ethan and Becks: Afternoon 1, St. Louis

She couldn't even manage to get herself undressed before she collapsed onto the bed. Theoretically, she should have been seductively waiting for him. But she was just too exhausted by the time she actually made it to the room. She was too exhausted to be nervous; too exhausted to be excited. She was too exhausted to even be baseline horny; which is what had gotten her into this situation in the first place.

She had changed her flight from Lima to be able to make this stop without anyone knowing about it. She'd arrive in New York, just like she was supposed to, on Sunday night. No one, well, besides Ethan of course, would ever know if she didn't want them to know. So no one would ever know. She could keep a secret.

The fact that she was in St. Louis, Missouri, in January, with nothing but hiking sandals for footwear was as ludicrous a situation as she could remember herself in. The cab ride from the airport to the hotel, through the flats of Missouri, past the Waffle House and the mini-malls barely registered in her consciousness. The situation was so surreal that she felt like a walking zombie. It felt like she was watching a movie of this happening to her. Although she had definitely, most definitely, been the one to make it happen. She had very much gotten herself here. It had actually been a tremendous amount of effort to get herself here. She had to book a special van, because the program she was part of in Peru, well... their van to the airport was scheduled for the entire group for Saturday. Saturday was the day that she was *supposed* to start her journey. The van was definitely not scheduled for twenty-one hours ago, when she actually left.

All she had really done was sent off a one-line email from rural Peru in the middle of the night, while drunk on chi-chi. She was lonely after drinking a little too much at a party where her lack of real fluency in Spanish had been devastatingly apparent. She hadn't given it a second thought when she hit, 'send'. A response email came from him within minutes and then it seemed as though within mere minutes more it was all settled. A search for flights for her, to a place he could drive to in less than a day for him. She'd take care of her travel, he'd take care of the rest.

He had booked the hotel and he had, to her delight and profound surprise upon her arrival after the last few days of emotionally roller-coasters, seemingly splurged (or gotten a great deal). He never splurged. He wasn't cheap. He was protective of his time and if he saved as much money as possible then he had more time to read. Money equaled reading to him. And he spent reading on her at this nice hotel. And given how gross she currently felt, she appreciated the sacrifice.

The hotel was right off of a part of St. Louis called, "The Loop". It was a small hotel, but beautifully done. Like an old 1920's brothel; but a very clean brothel. She asked the desk clerk if her boyfriend had already checked in. He hadn't. "You are the first to arrive. But he called and wanted me to tell you he would be here by 6. Your cell phone, he said, was off."

"It died. Yes. You'll give him a key? I think I may be napping when he arrives."

"Of course, Ma'am," he said and smiled at her.

"Thank you," She took the key and her backpack and headed to their room.

When she got into the room she shut the black out curtains and collapsed onto the bed. She didn't shower or even take off her clothes before lying down. All she did rip the bedspread

off, throw it on the ground in an unusual for her, untidy heap, and collapse diagonally on the clean, crisp sheets. She pulled a pillow to herself, cradled it gratefully as the coolness of it hit her cheek. She was asleep within seconds, which she would not have guessed she would have been capable of doing earlier in the day. Part of the reason for her exhaustion was her inability to sleep since this email conversation had started five days prior. But now that she was here, she had tired herself out beyond the skill of her nerves to keep her up.

She woke, slowly and peacefully, to the feeling of Ethan's body on top of hers. He had gently lain on top of her entirely, his arms over hers, his knees fitting into the back of hers. He interlaced their fingers and kissed her neck. It was sweet, passionate and clearly wanting, but not dominating or pushy. It was seductive, but patient and desirous of response rather than of pursuit. The dress she was wearing was ankle length and he made no move to lift it, although he did slide off of her enough so she could turn over onto her back if she so pleased. She turned over, although wasn't exactly pleased about it.

Before they could look at each other properly she grabbed hold of him and began kissing him. He wrapped his arm around her and under her. He grabbed her ass firmly and her whole body responded and she let out a cry of pleasure despite her best efforts to remain silent. He smelled stale from the car and he tasted salty like potato chips and sweet like Pepsi. The tears came instantly, and he didn't seem to ignore them, so much as accept them. "Ethan?" she said, or tried to say. But he didn't seem to hear her.