

Chapter 18 - Cole & Daisy - Happily Ever After

Cole

I've never seen anyone so beautiful as the woman who looks up at me lit by the dappled fluorescent streetlight sneaking through the leaves. I'd never noticed how many freckles she has, speckling over her nose and cheekbones like the sun couldn't resist peppering her with kisses.

I know the feeling.

Daisy

I feel exposed, for the first time with Cole as he looks at me with eyes so dark and receptive I would give anything to know what's going on behind them.

"Are you okay?" My voice doesn't want to rise above a whisper, just in case I startle away the moment. "You look strange."

Cole

I'm not okay. It's been a hell of a day. But I don't want to tell her that. I want to tell her I'm great, that just by looking at her my day looks incredible.

"I've had a weird day."

"Oh? The case?"

It takes me a moment to process that yes, yes, I mean the case. The tip she'd given me about looking for numbers had led to the badge number that had led to DI Coombes and to the revelation that the Heartbreaker might just be the most prolific female serial killer.

"Yeah. Kind of."

Daisy

I frown. Cryptic much?

“So what happened? Did you follow the numbers?”

He nods slowly. “I did, and they were a badge number. Of a cop who linked cases spanning over a decade. His precinct chief shut the investigation down before he could do much with it.”

Ah, Coombes. Nice man. Little old for me though.

Cole and I start to walk, our bodies simultaneously deciding the slow sauntering pace with no need to communicate. It’s nice to see Cole look so happy. I feel like I’ve just given him a little gift, he might actually start making some headway now.

“She must be... forty-five, maybe up to sixty-five years old.”

Maybe not.

Cole

Here I am again talking to Daisy about the case. I really don’t want to trouble her with these. She should be talking about cupcakes and rainbows, not gruesome serial killers. I look at the pack of dogs cheerfully zooming about the park gravel as we walk.

“These guys are all... mismatched, aren’t they?”

This makes her giggle lovingly as she rests her hands on the ends of the bundle of leashes around her neck. “Yeah, like a pack of strays.”

The way she talks about them is so sweet; she gets all soft and loving about them. True love if ever I’ve seen it. I half wonder if she’ll ever look at me like that.

“Do they protect you when you’re alone on your midnight walks?” I scold, raising an eyebrow at her disapprovingly.

She gives me a playful smack on the arm. “Now, now. I told you I wouldn’t walk by myself if you came with me. Isn’t that enough?”

I can't resist the urge to put a hand on her lower back as she steps back from her smack, just to make sure she doesn't step too far from me.

Daisy

Is that deliberate? Is he deliberately touching me?

He makes me feel warm and gooey like a perfect chocolate chip cookie.

I let myself drift closer to him, the only sound the distant movement of cars and the gentle rustle of the nighttime breeze in the trees. He doesn't move his hand from the small of my back.

Jesus, if he doesn't stop touching me, my knees are going to forget how to work. I'm jelly, my brain a puddle, and all I can think about is this heat building between us.

Please don't stop touching me.

Cole

Do I tell her about Eliza? Tell her I want her? That I broke up with Eliza for her?

But that would be a lie. I broke up with Eliza for a huge number of reasons, and Daisy... I want to explore things with Daisy. But I don't want her to feel obligated.

So as we walk in silence for a moment, I let my fingers crawl over the ridges of her spine. My invitation moves her gently, imperceptibly closer, until I can wrap my fingers around her waist. Until I'm holding her.

She looks up at me, a small smile toying at the edges of her upturned lips, her eyes blinking rapidly against the light behind my head.

"I-" I start. How do I say this without suggesting I'm after something?

Daisy

"I broke up with Eliza," he says finally, and my heart and feet both stop in an instant, my eyes staring into the middle distance as I process what he's saying.

“Oh-” I start. How do I show him he’s everything I want without giving my game away? “-kay.”

I turn to look up at him, and my frozen heart remembers itself and resumes a pounding beat. The way he’s looking at me. It’s hungry, searching with a side order of dominance that makes me think of all kinds of filth.

Cole

My stomach sinks. Did I read the room wrong? Isn’t she interested in me? If the only thing she can say is ‘ok’ then maybe my radar is all over the place.

I’m suddenly very glad I had a multitude of reasons for breaking up with Eliza now. My hand on her waist twitches as I consider removing it.

“Cole...” Daisy whispers, turning on the spot and stepping closer, stepping into my personal space.

I look down at her. She’s so close I can hear her breathing hitch.

“Yes, Daisy?”

Daisy

He says my name like it’s a prayer, like he’s invoking me into being. The feeling of his voice saying my name in such a way fills me with a heat unlike anything I’ve ever encountered. I have to close my eyes to feel it fully.

Cole

Her eyes drift closed, lashes fanning out on her cheekbones. She looks peaceful, her lips parted slightly.

My hand moves without my say so- something I’m now used to around Daisy - flattening on her back and pulling her closer, enjoying the feel of the soft curves of her body on mine.

“Keep your eyes closed,” I whisper. As her eyes flutter in surprise, I lean closer, my breath ghosting across her lips. “There’s a good girl.”

Just as her lips quirk up into a bashful smile, I capture them with my own.

My lips press against hers chastely at first, questioning, uncertain of this momentous next step, but as I feel her lips move against mine, I intensify. I pour every thought, every desire I have had about this stunning woman into the kiss. My arms wrap her in a tight, closed embrace. Her hands are feather light yet scalding on my chest as her head tilts for more of my fire.

Daisy

He is kissing me.

It's like the world could stop and I wouldn't care. His lips on mine could heal all wounds, all problems. I melt in the firmness of his arms, putty in his hands, willing and eager for anything and everything he might give me.

I feel his tongue trace the seam of my lips, and I hurry to meet it with my own.

The kiss deepens.

It's like passion made from storybooks.

Like desire straight from pornography.

I need him. The desperate press of our bodies together, separated by clothing, is not enough.

I would let this man devour me if he wanted.

The sound of my following moan only spurs him on as his hands explore my back, my sides, his thumbs brushing the swell of my breasts.

I feel him freeze before I notice why. The tension in his muscles is undeniable as he pulls away from me, the kiss feels like an unfinished sentence left hanging in the air.

My eyes open, my gaze seeking his.

He holds me tighter, his eyes not on me, but on the surrounding air. He's not looking; he's listening. Like prey that can sense an attack.

Cole

It's a shift, not a sound. A sudden stillness in the trees. There's another, a slight, distant, almost hushed, a whisper of a sound. I tighten my hold on Daisy, ready to throw her out of harm's way.

It occurs to me how stupid I am being, kissing a girl in a public space in the middle of the night fully knowing that a sadistic serial killer has me in her sights. Who knows what kind of danger I have put Daisy into.

She's mine, and every cell of my body is on fire with the thrill of keeping her safe.

Saving the self-flagellation for later, I listen deeper into the surrounding wooded area, hearing nothing. But this time, Daisy's dogs react to something; low huffing grumbles start in their chests.

"Get behind me," I command, moving Daisy to my back in one quick movement as I step towards the tree line where the dogs and I can sense... something. "Stay close."

"Cole, I *told* you-" she starts, a giggle captive in her tone.

"Daisy-" I interrupt but then am interrupted myself as the trees part in a blur of movement.

A woman, Caucasian, purple hair, early twenties.

Her movements are clunky and disjointed, as though she's not fully in charge of herself. Like her brain can't keep up with her body. Her left eye looks swollen and red, a line of blood along her cheekbone to her ear as though scratched deeply in a perfect arch.

She stumbles like she's drunk. Or concussed. Or maybe... just not all there anymore.

She stares openly at us, her mouth agape, and she lets out a moan-like scream, her whole body contorting in on itself as she lurches away from us.

"Hey-" I step towards her as Daisy also steps forward.

It's only when she's stumbled back into a light that I see the duct tape on her wrists and ankles.

"Wait-" I say, stretching a hand and, predictably, she turns and runs, bolting towards the edge of the park. "Shit." I turn to Daisy. "Stay-"

But she's running after the woman, her hair and skirts flying behind her. "She's hurt, Cole!" she shouts back at me.

That woman just won't do as she's told!

"Goddammit!" I shout and take off after them both, following the blur of blue and blonde flipping through the trees. Sometimes I catch a glimpse of jeans or purple hair as branches or leaves swat me in the face.

I can hear Daisy calling out after the woman, telling her she's safe. The wind whistles in my ears.

I reach the edge of the park as Daisy reaches the road beyond, the woman a meter in front of her as she turns to look Daisy dead in the face and screams.

The scream that sings in your ears years after you heard it. That wakes you with nightmares for the rest of your life.

Wide.

Pitched.

Terror

A screech of brakes.

Tyres on the tarmac.

Daisy!

I grab her and pull her away from the road, into my arms. I shield her face. Just in time.

The taxi ploughs into the woman, tossing her unceremoniously in a mess of limbs into the air and with a smack on the road behind.

Daisy

That.

That wasn't the plan.