

It Happened One Summer Novel – Chapter 26 -

Brendan couldn't shake the sense that Piper had just slipped out of his reach and it fucking terrified him.

While cologne shopping, she'd looked up at him in a way she hadn't before. Like she was getting ready to lay down her weapons and surrender. He'd never had anyone look at him like that. Scared and hopeful all at once. Beautifully exposed. And he couldn't *wait* to reward that trust. To make her glad she'd taken the leap, because he'd catch her. Couldn't wait to tell her that life before she'd shown up in Westport had been lacking all color and light and optimism.

Her hands smoothed down his chest now. Lower, to his abdomen.

She leaned in and buried her nose in his chest, inhaling, moaning softly . . . Tracing the outline of his cock with her knuckle.

That touch, obviously meant to distract, trapped him between need and irritation. He didn't want Piper when her mind was obviously elsewhere. He wanted those barriers gone. Wanted all of her, every fucking ounce. But there was a part of him that was nervous, too. Nervous as hell that he wasn't equipped to fight whatever unseen foe he was up against.

The latter accounted for his harshness when he caught her wrist, holding it away from his distended fly. "Tell me what the phone call was really about."

She flinched at his tone, pushed away from him. "I *did* tell you. It was nothing."

"Are you really going to lie to me?"

God, she looked literally and figuratively cornered, stuck in the elevator with nowhere to run. Not that she didn't look for an exit, even on the ceiling. "I don't have to tell you every single thing," she stammered finally, punching

the OPEN DOOR button repeatedly, even though they were only midway to the sixteenth floor. "Are you planning on being this domineering all the time?" Her laugh was high-pitched, panicky, and it burned a hole in his chest. "Because it's a little much."

Nope. Not taking that bait. "Piper. Come here and look at me." "No."

"Why not?"

She rolled her eyes. "I don't want to be interrogated."

“Good,” he ground out. “I want the truth without having to ask you for it.”

He caught her audible swallow just before the elevator door opened, and she was off like a shot, speed-walking in the opposite direction of his room, which was where the hell she was going to end up, if he had anything to say about it. Brendan caught up with her right before she could swipe into her own room, wrapping an arm around her middle and hauling her back up against his chest.

“*Enough.*”

“Don’t talk to me like a child.” “You’re acting like one.”

She gasped. “*You’re the one—*”

“Christ. If you tell me I’m the one who wanted a high-maintenance girlfriend, you’re going to piss me off, Piper.” He gripped her chin and tipped her head back until it met his shoulder. “I want *you*. However you are, whatever you are, I want *you*. And I’ll fight to get inside that head as many times as it takes. Over and over and over. Don’t you dare doubt me.”

Her body heaved with two deep breaths.

“Kirby called to tell me I’m on the cover of *LA Weekly*. Okay? ‘A Party Princess’s Vanishing Act.’ There’s a whole story and . . . now I guess, ta-dah, I’m interesting again. After a month of silence, everyone suddenly wants to know where I’ve gone.” She broke free of his grip and pushed away, her posture defensive. “Kirby wants to throw me a big, over-the-top coming-home party. And I didn’t want to tell you because now you’re going to bear down on me until I magically produce answers about what I want—and *I don’t know!*”

Brendan’s pulse ricocheted around his veins, his nerves escalating to full-on fear. *LA Weekly*. Over-the-top party. Did he stand a fucking chance against any of that? “What *do* you know, Piper?” he managed, hoarsely.

Her eyes closed. “I know I love you, Brendan. I know I love you and that’s it.”

The world went momentarily soundless, devoid of noise except for the sound of his heart tendons stretching, on the verge of snapping under the pressure of the wonder she’d just stuffed inside of it. She loved him. This woman loved *him*. “How can you say ‘that’s it’?” He took a giant step and scooped her into his arms, rejoicing when she came easily, looping her legs around his waist, burying her face in his neck. “How can you say that’s it when it’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me?” He kissed her hair, her cheek, pressed his mouth to her ear. “I love you, baby. Goddammit, I love you back. As

long as that's the case, everything will be fine—and it will *always* be the case. We'll work on the details. Okay?"

"Okay." She lifted her head and nodded, laughed in a dazed way. "Yes.

Okay."

"We love each other, Piper." He turned and strode toward his room, grateful he already had the key in his hand, because he wouldn't have been able to take his attention off her to search for it. "I won't let anything or anybody fuck with that."

Jesus. She'd been . . . unlocked. Her eyes were soft and trusting and beautiful and, most important, confident. In him. In them. He'd done the right thing pushing, hard as it had been to see her scared. But it was all right now, thank God. Thank *God*.

He slapped the room key over the sensor and kicked the door open, his sole mission in life to give this woman an orgasm. To see those softened blue eyes go blind and know his body was responsible. Would *always* be responsible for meeting her needs.

"I need you so bad," she sobbed, tugging at his collar, moving her hips in desperate little circles. "Oh my God, I'm *aching*."

"You know I'm going to handle it." He bit the side of her neck, thrust his hips up roughly, and listened to her breath catch. "Don't you?"

"Yes. Yes."

Brendan set Piper on her feet and spun her around, then yanked her skirt up above her hips. "Maybe someday we'll be able to wait long enough to get undressed at the same time," he rasped, stripping her panties down to her ankles, before attacking his zipper with shaking hands. "But it's not going to be today. Get both knees on the edge of the bed."

God, he loved Piper when she was a shameless flirt. When she was pissed. When she was being a tease or making him work his ass off. But he loved her

most as she was now. Honest. Hiding nothing. Hot and needy and real. Clambering onto the very edge of the bed and tilting her hips, begging. "Please, Brendan. Will you, please, will you, *please* . . ."

There was no way he couldn't take a moment to admire the work of art that was Piper. The lithe lines of her parted thighs, the ass that made his life heaven and hell. He gripped the cheeks now and kneaded them, spreading the flesh so he could see what was waiting for him in between. "Ah, baby. I should always be the one saying 'please,'" he said hoarsely, leaning down and stroking his tongue over the tight, gathered skin of her back entrance. She huffed his name, then moaned it hesitantly, hopefully, and yeah,

he couldn't stop himself from yanking her sexy backside closer, burying his mouth in the valley between and tonguing her roughly.

"Oh wow," she breathed, pushing back against him. "What are you—*oh my God.*"

He brought his hand around her hip, trailing two fingers between her soft folds, and enjoyed the act of getting her pussy wet as hell by licking something else entirely. Enjoying her initial shyness and the way she eventually couldn't help but slide her knees even wider on the bed, her hips undulating in time with the hungry strokes of his tongue. By the time he let his tongue travel down and around to her sex, her clit was so swollen; he batted the nub with his tongue a few times, rubbed the sensitive button with his thumb, and she broke apart, hiccupping into the comforter, her delicious wetness coating her inner thighs, his mouth.

She was panting as he rose, dropped his chest down onto her back and pushed his cock inside of her still-contracting pussy. "*Mine,*" he gritted, the tightness of her cinching his balls up painfully, firing every ounce of his blood with possessiveness. "I'm taking what's mine now."

A movement ahead of them on the bed reminded Brendan of the mirrored headboard, and he almost came, caught off guard by the erotic sight of her slack jaw and tits that bounced along with every pump of his hips. His body loomed behind her, damn near twice her size, his lips peeled back from his teeth like he might very well devour her whole. Who wouldn't? Who wouldn't want to gather every part of this woman as close as possible? To consume her fire? Who wouldn't die trying to earn her loyalty?

"Christ, you're so beautiful," he groaned, falling on top of her, pinning her to the bed and bucking, filling her like she was filling his chest, his mind. All of him. Completing him just by breathing. He took her hair in a fist, using it

to pull her head back, locking their gazes in the mirror. She gasped, jolted around his cock, her walls telling him she was as turned on by the movie they were starring in as he was. "Yeah, you like being admired and complimented, don't you, Piper? No better compliment than how hard you make my cock, is there? How rough you make me give it to you? Can't even get my goddamn jeans down." Her breath hitched, and she started to squirm underneath him, her fingers clawing at the comforter as she gave a closed-mouth scream of his name. "Go on. Give me that second one, baby. Want to turn you fucking limp."

Her blue eyes went blind, and she moaned hoarsely, her hips twitching beneath him, spasms racking her pussy and plunging him over the edge. He rocked into her hot channel one more time, spearing deep, looking her in the eyes as he growled her name, letting loose the excruciating pressure between his legs, panting against the side of her head.

"I love you," she gasped, the words seeming to catch her off guard, alarm her, and Brendan wondered if it was possible for his heart to explode out of his chest. How was he going to survive her? Every time he thought his feelings for her had finally reached their apex, she proved him wrong, and his chest grew another size. How could he continue at this rate for the next fifty, sixty years?

"Piper, I love you, too. *I love you.*" Still pressing her down into the bed, he left slow kisses on her temple, her shoulder, her neck, before finally rolling off her to one side, drawing her tight to the place she called the recharging station. And he'd laughed at that name, but when she found her place in his arms, her features relaxed and she sighed, as if being held by him truly made everything okay. Jesus Christ, that privilege humbled him.

"I've never said it to anyone before," she murmured, resting her head on his bicep. "It didn't feel like I always thought it would."

He ran his hand down her hair. "How did you think it would feel?"

She thought about it. "Getting it over with. Like ripping off a Band-Aid." "And how did it feel instead?"

"The reverse. Like putting a bandage on. Wrapping it tight." She studied his chin a moment, then ticked her eyes up to his. "I think because I trust you. I completely trust you. That's a huge part of love, isn't it?"

"Yeah. I reckon it has to be." He swallowed around the lump in his throat. "But I'm not an expert, baby. I've never loved like this."

It took a moment for her to speak. "I'll never keep anything from you

again." Her exhale was rocky. "Oh wow. Big post-coital declarations happening here. But I mean it. No more keeping things to myself. Not even for the length of an elevator ride. I won't make you fight to get into my head. I don't want that. I don't want to be constant work for you, Brendan. Not when you make it so easy to love you."

He crushed her against him, no other choice, unless he wanted to splinter apart from the sheer fucking emotion she produced inside of him. "Constant work, Piper? No. You misunderstand me." He tipped her chin up and kissed her mouth. "When the reward is as perfect as you, as perfect as this, the work is a fucking honor."

Brendan rolled Piper onto her back as their kisses escalated, his cock growing stiff again in a matter of seconds, swelling painfully when she begged him to take off his shirt. He complied, somehow finding a way to kick off his jeans and boxers before stripping her clean of any clothing, too. Satisfied sounds burst from their mouths when their naked bodies finally twined together, skin on skin, not a single barrier in sight.

Piper's lips curved with humor beneath his. "So are we just *not* going to talk about the tongue thing?"

Their laughter turned to sighs and eventually to moans, the bedsprings groaning beneath them. And it seemed like nothing could touch the perfection of them. Not after such hard-fought confessions. Not when they couldn't seem to breathe without each other.

But if Brendan had learned one thing as a captain, it was this: Just when it seemed like the storm was beginning to break and daylight spread across the calm waters? That's when the biggest wave hit.

And forgetting that lesson could very well cost him everything.