

Chapter 5 ~ Mason

"Hello?"

Sage's sweet voice came through the line and I was so surprised she'd taken my call, I almost couldn't answer her.

"Hey, kitten," I tried, but my voice came out in a croak, so I cleared my throat and tried again. "Thank you for answering, Sage."

"What do you want, Mason?"

I want you back. I want to be married to you. I want to beat the shit out of myself for hurting you. I want to have never kissed Eva. I want to hear your voice. I want to have you beside me.

"I have a whole list of things I want, kitten. But the most important one is to know if you're doing OK."

It's amazing how loud silence can be. I had to check my phone to make sure we were still connected.

"I don't even know how to answer that," she said quietly. "My heart is broken, the man I loved betrayed me, my wedding was canceled and I'm sitting here on a beach, alone, instead of walking down the aisle to you because you fucking kissed your ex girlfriend!"

And then came a torrent of words and feelings that she'd been holding in for the two weeks we'd been apart. If anyone was sitting near her on the beach, they were hearing everything because my woman was yelling at me like I'd never heard her before.

"How could you, Mason? How could you destroy everything between us for a woman that supposedly means nothing to you? I'll tell you how! She does mean something to you! You've probably been lying the whole time we were together, maybe even secretly meeting up with her, maybe texting her or calling her even when you said you weren't. I sit here every day and think you've been playing me the whole time, giving me sweet words but your heart was somewhere else the entire time we were together and the first chance you had, the first chance you had you were showing your tongue down her throat and her hands were where no woman's hands should be but mine. Or maybe it wasn't the first time and you were unfaithful to me the entire time we were together. I just don't know what to think any more, but I do know I don't trust you. And I also know you're a lying, cheating asshole!"

"Sage, I want you to know, I only texted her back when she said she was going to be in town and could we get together. And every time I texted her back it was a simple no and nothing else. Nothing else I know you don't believe me, but it's the truth. I was not playing you the whole time, I never once was playing you. When I told you that you owned my heart, you did and you do. Every sweet word I gave you was true. I love you, Sage. I've never said that to a woman until you. I never even considered proposing to a woman until you. You are the only woman I've ever wanted a future with, the only one I wanted to have my babies and start a family with. I never once thought about her like that. She does not mean something to me. I swear to you, she means less than nothing to me."

"How can I believe that a man what I saw in that alley? What I saw was a man into a kiss with his ex."

"What you saw was a colossal mistake that I wish to fuck had never happened. I took her out there to tell her to back the fuck o --"

"Well, Mason, if that's the way you tell people to back o , no wonder they don't get the message."

"I get it, Sage, I do. I understand your anger. I took her out there to tell her to back o , I was drunk, she was drunker, I was grieving Drake, we'd been surrounded by old friends talking about old times all night, and she grabbed me and kissed me. And I kissed her back for a few seconds because I'm a stupid fucking asshole, but also because for one brief moment it was like the time when Drake was alive again. Swear to fuck that's all it was. No latent desire for her, no wish we were still together, and then I came to my motherfucking senses and pushed her away and I le her in the alley. I walked around the city for hours, sick and pissed as hell at myself, and I was digging deep to make absolutely certain there was nothing still there for her. And there wasn't. Not one thing, Sage, not one speck of feeling for her. I don't want Eva, I didn't want her that night, and I do not want her in the future. What I do want is you. All I want is you."

"So I only need to worry about you straying when you're drunk and grieving. Got it."

"No, you do not have to worry about that ever happening again because it won't."

"I thought it would never happen the first time, Mason, so..."

You know you have it bad when you even miss your girl's snark.

"Sage, Nate was sitting here with me all day. He drew the short straw and had to come fucking babysit me because all of our friends have been worried about me in general, but especially today. I've been going insane since you le and I don't know what they thought I'd do today, but I know they thought I might go completely o the rails given my current state of mind and my completely shitty mood."

A er a minute, she said so ly, "Promise me you won't do anything stupid, Mason."

"That's the thing nobody seems to get! I already did something stupid, Sage. I fucking lost you! It doesn't get any worse than that."

"Mason --"

"Kitten, if I wanted Eva, I could have had her. I didn't. I pushed her away. And a er you le , I could have gone to her if I wanted her. But I didn't. I made it clear to her in the alley a er I pushed her away that she's not to attempt any further contact with me, that I wanted nothing to do with her. And I don't. If you think I want her, then tell me, Sage, with you breaking up with me and leaving me to go across the country, now that I'm technically a free man, why haven't I gone back to her or pursued something with her? And the answer is, because I do not want her have the perfect opportunity to start something up with her and I haven't taken it because I do not fucking want her. There is only one woman I want and that is you."

"That's not to say you won't in the future."

"I can't make you believe me, Sage, but I'll keep telling you this until you do: I will not go there with her or any woman now or in the future. You are the one for me. I made a huge, horrible mistake, but I'm hoping that you can see it was just that: an awful mistake that I regret with everything I am."

"If you made it once, you could make it again."

"Absolutely not," I told her with assurance. "When a man fucks up something so precious, so treasured in his life, he's never going to put it at risk again. I will spend the rest of my life showing you that I never make the same mistake twice. Life without you is hell. Knowing I hurt you is tearing me apart more and more every day. The thought that my actions hurt you is killing me, especially when I can't make your pain stop, when I can't take you in my arms and promise you that everything is going to be OK and I'll stand between you and whatever is hurting you."

"You hurt me so bad, Mason. I feel like I'm slowly bleeding out every day."

"I'm so sorry, Sage. So fucking sorry for hurting you like this. Please let me make it up to you."

"I don't think you can."

"That's not a no, Sage. And I'm going to keep at it until you see how much I love you, how you are the only woman I want, and you agree to give me a chance. Just one, and I'll never fuck up again."

"I just..."

I could sense her wavering, which was more than I ever thought I'd get so soon. "Sage, I want you to know something. And I want you to think about what I'm about to tell you. I told you that I ended things with Eva two months before I met you because I was just done with her bullshit and with the rollercoaster we were always on with her volatile moods. And that was absolutely true. But what I never told you was what finally made me end things with her, the catalyst, so to speak. And the day I ended things with her, I was at the hospital, taking in a buddy to get stitched up. We were walking in the doors, and you and a friend were walking out. You had on light blue scrubs, your hair was up in a pony tail and your head was thrown back a bit because you were laughing. You were the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen and in that second, I knew I wanted you, wanted your joy, wanted your laughter in my life. Not just joy and laughter in general but yours! I saw you for five seconds and every single part of me sat up and took notice. It was all I could do not to chase you down and forget my buddy needed some serious medical attention."

"You never told me that."

"That same night, Sage, I ended things with Eva. And I ended things because I needed to be free when I found you again. In those five seconds of seeing you, I realized I never felt for Eva in the years we were together anything close to what I felt for you in just those five seconds. It became clear to me that I was just wasting time with someone who was familiar. In all the times I'd seen her laugh, I'd never thought her laughter was beautiful or something that I had to hear again or I'd be missing something vitally important in my life. But the minute I saw you, Sage, I knew my life would never be the same. I saw you for mere seconds and knew I wanted you in my life permanently."

"Mason, are you saying the day we met --?"

"Was the result of me showing up at the hospital almost every day for two months at lunch time hoping to see you walk out those doors? Yes. It was not a chance meeting, Sage, but I was afraid of freaking you out. How do you tell a woman that the second you saw her, you knew you wanted to marry her and not come across like a creepy stalker asshole?"

"I don't...I don't even know what to say to that, Mason."

"You don't have to say anything to that. It's true and I just wanted you to know."

"Mason, if all of this is true, and you truly wanted me and not Eva, then can you explain why you never blocked her number on your phone? You let her text you and call you and you never blocked her. I'll admit it: I haven't blocked you yet because I can't bring myself to sever that last link between us. So that makes me think you didn't want to sever that link between you and Eva."

I hu ed out a breath, not realizing until she'd brought it up how much something I never thought about had hurt her. "It's nothing that deep, Sage. Guys don't tend to think much about some woman we used to date having our number -- unless they're psycho bitches, and cross the line by blowing up our phones every single day with constant messages. That gets you blocked, and I thought it was the same for women. She texted sometimes, even called a few times, but I ignored them all and only texted her back to say I would not be meeting her and didn't really think about it beyond that."

Just as she was about to protest, I forestalled her. "Looking back, I know it was stupid. I didn't realize it bothered you because you never said anything when I told you she let me know she was going to be in town. I should have been smarter, I should have known it bothered you. I never knew if you had old boyfriends calling or texting you but I figured you'd tell me if you had, like I told you whenever Eva said she was going to be in town. It was just plain guy stupidity, Sage, nothing more than that, no ulterior reasons and definitely not because I couldn't bear to sever that link between us. I have blocked her and deleted her contact now because she did cross the line, but I wish I had done it before anything happened because now I know it hurt you. All I can do is keep apologizing for the stupid mistakes I've made. And I am sorry, Sage. For everything I've done to hurt you."

"I'm going to go now , Mason." Her voice sounded watery, like she was crying and that gutted me.

"Sage, please think about everything I've said. I miss you so fucking much, and I love you more than anything. Can we please talk again?"

I heard her sni le. "Mason, I think I need time. So I'm going to block you."

"No!" I protested. "God, Sage, please don't do that, kitten. Please don't."

"I'm not saying it's going to be forever --"

"Please, I'm begging you not to do this."

"-- but I think I need some space. Good-bye, Mason."

Nate came running into the room right a er I threw my phone into the TV, shattering them both.

I didn't think it was possible to hate myself more than I already did, but I found out just how possible it was.