

What the hell had she done?

It was really all Sutton had been able to think since the previous night.

She was – she was *Sutton Spencer*. She didn't *do* those kinds of things! She didn't just walk into Charlotte Thompson's office and – and... *have her way with her*.

She'd walked right into Senator Charlotte Thompson's office, pushed her against the desk, and – and fucked her. There was no other way to say it. And then – or, at the same time? She should say – Charlotte had made *her* come.

It was all she was able to see, in her mind's eye. Not even just when she closed her eyes and thought about it, but *constantly*. The way Charlotte had moved against her, the heat in her eyes, the way she'd sounded as she'd moved against Sutton's hand. The way she'd *felt*.

The way she'd made Sutton feel... no one touched her like Charlotte did. So knowingly, all confidence and no question.

God. She –

“Sutton, hello?” Regan snapped her fingers in front of her eyes, snapping Sutton out of her thoughts, as she jolted and was brought back to the moment.

Brunch. At the hole in the wall diner down the street from where Regan and Emma lived, that was Regan's favorite place.

She rubbed a hand over her heated cheeks, shaking her head. “Sorry. I'm listening.”

And she *had been*. Listening to Regan talk about the remodel at her café, and it was typical Regan fashion – big gestures, perfect delivery, and normally, Sutton was always listening.

Regan nailed her with a critical look. “Like I don't know when you're zoning out.” Also in typical Regan fashion, she wasn't offended that Sutton had ended up zoning out. Instead, she was studying Sutton so closely, her dark eyes narrowed as she stared across the table...

And Sutton ducked her gaze to intently pick at the pancakes she'd barely taken a bite of, because she *knew*. She knew Regan would be able to read her like a book.

“Something *big* is going on in your head,” Regan muttered, “I clocked *that* when we sat down, but—”

“Babe, if Sutton doesn't want to talk about what's going on in her life, we *don't make her*,” Emma cut in as she came up behind Regan, cupping a hand on her jaw to tilt Regan's head up before she ducked down as she stood behind her to plant a soft, quick kiss on her lips. Sutton watched as Regan so naturally moved with the touch, a warmth lighting up her face as she tugged the chair next to her out just in time for Emma to sit.

“Sorry I'm late, I just had to meet this deadline—”

“For the *Post* article, I know,” Sutton waved her off, smiling at her in genuine happiness at seeing her and in relief. “How did it go?”

Regan shook her head, staring between the two of them. “Ohhh no.” She reached down and took Emma's hand in hers in an easy, natural move, their fingers intertwining on the table, as

Regan used her other hand to point to Sutton. “Sorry, Em, but we all know this is one of my biggest and best life skills! Being able to tell when something is going on with Sutton and getting her to talk about it so that we can help with it.”

“And one of *my* biggest life skills is making you stop,” Emma reasoned, arching an eyebrow at Regan as she tilted her head in challenge.

Regan turned to face her, mouth falling open, “I know it is, but – *look at her!* I’ve tried to let it go for the last half hour, I really have!”

Regan gestured at Sutton who just shot them both a *look*, even as she knew she was flushed. She couldn’t hide things from the people who knew every single tell she had; it just wasn’t possible.

Emma sighed at Regan, squeezing her hand, as she obligingly looked across the table at Sutton. Sutton took a deep breath and met her gaze head-on... and only in a couple of seconds, Emma allowed begrudgingly, “Yeah, okay. There’s clearly something going on.”

Regan lit up, turning to face Emma and leaning in quickly to kiss her cheek. “Thank you!”

“It’s *nothing*.”

“Charlotte,” they both said in unison, Emma matter-of-fact, Regan *gotcha!*

Sutton groaned, because just the *mention* of her name brought back the images. And with the images came all of the messy feelings she had with them –

The aching *want*, the alarm at her own actions – because she hadn’t intended on doing that? Not at *all*. Not one bit. But when she’d been there and overwhelmed at the feelings Charlotte’s kiss had invoked in her days earlier and Charlotte had leaned against her desk looking powerful and sexy and, *ugh* – the embarrassment, the guilt – because, she hadn’t even *asked*. That definitely wasn’t like her.

“Yes, fine, it has something to do with Charlotte, but I don’t want to hear that you knew this would be a bad idea or anything like it!” She insisted, dragging her hands through her hair.

“I can’t *believe* you had sex with Charlotte Thompson! What *year* is it!” Regan all-but shouted, “J’accuse!”

Sutton reached out to knock away the finger Regan was using to point at her, “*Enough!* We aren’t – we – we’re...” God, her cheeks were *burning* and she groaned as she buried her face in her hands. “I didn’t mean to. And I am *not* talking about it, again.”

Regan absolutely cackled at that, and when Sutton looked up, Emma was looking at her in a much more muted amusement.

A minute later, when Regan managed to take a deep breath, she slid the omelette she’d ordered to Emma’s side of the table, along with the orange juice, “I got these for you,” she managed to get out through little bursts of chuckling, before she looked back at Sutton, “So, if you didn’t *mean* to, did you slip and your fingers fell into her?”

That set her off all over again even as Sutton pursed her lips. She *wouldn’t* laugh. She wouldn’t.

“You assume it’s fingers,” Emma murmured as she took a sip of her juice, and –
Fine. Even Sutton had to crack a smile at that, amidst the tumult inside of her.
“You two are the worst.”

Sutton took a deep breath when she found herself outside of Charlotte’s townhouse later that afternoon.

She’d done everything she could possibly think of to keep her busy after brunch. She’d returned to her house, folded and put away all of her and Lucy’s laundry, vacuumed the floors that didn’t need to be vacuumed, graded the remaining two papers she had left in her Victorian Literature intro course to give back, even though the class only had handed them in two days ago. But she’d gotten very little sleep last night, so.

And the entire time, she had vacillated as to what to do regarding – everything with Charlotte.

Sutton hadn’t felt like she’d been on even ground since seeing Charlotte for the first time nearly two months ago. Just *seeing* Charlotte had thrown her off kilter, followed by Charlotte asking Sutton to do her biography, walking on eggshells and trying not to divulge any personal information and stick to *only business*, then the whirlwind of a week they’d had with the kiss and then, last night...

And if she *could*, she would avoid it all. If she could, she would bury herself in anything else to *not* think about this.

“You can do this,” she encouraged herself, trying to shake out her nerves before she rang the doorbell.

The thing was, how everything had played out between them last night was all very, very simple, when it was boiled down.

Charlotte Thompson made her burn up inside. She made Sutton ache and want and desire things that Sutton *never* thought she would want. That she *didn’t* want, not with anyone else, anyway. She made Sutton question her own sanity, with the things she was willing to do to be with her.

It had been like that a decade ago, when they’d been sleeping together.

Charlotte hadn’t been the one to suggest they have sex in the first place all those years ago; it had been Sutton who had shown up at Charlotte’s home, suggesting they sleep together.

It hadn’t been Charlotte who suggested they become friends with benefits in the first place; that had been entirely Sutton, when she’d realized that Charlotte desired her in the same way Sutton wanted *her*.

And even though Charlotte had been the one to initiate... this development in the form of that kiss, it was Sutton who had been haunted by it all week and had been behaving – abnormally.

Charlotte might have initiated a kiss, but she'd behaved like a normal human being after.

She hadn't come to Sutton's office unprompted and fucked Sutton against *her* desk. Nope, she hadn't done that at all. Beyond one of Sutton's wildest fantasies...

Anyway.

Sutton just needed – she needed to face this, apologize, and move on from it like an adult. And that's what she was going to do.

Still, her nerves fluttered in her stomach as she heard footsteps approach from the other side of the door.

And as the door was pulled open, she nearly swallowed her tongue, tangling her fingers in front of her tightly.

There was something... incredibly, completely entrancing about Charlotte in her work clothes. The fitted slacks, the silk shirts, the blazers, the dresses. All of these classy, polished ensembles that bespoke who she was, all she'd accomplished, her status, her power, and... did, admittedly, drive Sutton a little crazy.

But Charlotte at-home was different.

This moment was a stark reminder that Sutton hadn't seen this side of Charlotte since they'd reconnected.

Charlotte who was wearing a comfortable-looking blue Yale sweatshirt and gray cotton shorts, with all of her long, wavy brown hair tossed into a bun, that had clearly been done up hours ago, as tendrils were now falling out.

This Charlotte... did something entirely to Sutton.

It fused with the images Sutton still had in the recesses of her brain from the past, from the nights she would hang out with Charlotte in her apartment after work, when Charlotte would immediately change into comfy clothing.

This was, what Sutton had always felt was – not exactly the *real* Charlotte, because Charlotte at work? There was nothing more real than that, honestly. Sutton knew all too well how highly her career ranked – but this was the Charlotte not many people were able to see. The vulnerable, soft, even sweet Charlotte, and it tripped Sutton up for a second.

God, she looked good.

“Sutton,” Charlotte's surprise was palpable in only her name, in the way big, doe eyes widened and took Sutton in. “What are you doing here?”

“Hi,” she had to clear her throat again. She tugged at her sweater, before brushing her palms down her jeans. “I just – I was wondering if we could... if *I* could talk, about yesterday? Please?”

Both of Charlotte's eyebrows lifted as she took in Sutton's request, nodding slowly as she opened the door wider in invitation, a smile gracing soft, pink lips. “Whatever you'd like. Why don't you come in?”

And well. That was easy. Step one already done...

“Come on, I’ll take you into the sunroom off the kitchen. I think you’ll like it,” Charlotte tilted her head as she shut the door, and started walking down the hallway.

Sutton could only stare around the townhouse. The floors were all beautifully polished hardwood, with large, open arch ways between many of the rooms. The living room they passed, the den, the dining room... she stared into them all, unable to curb her curiosity.

They were all, unshockingly, impeccably decorated with artwork and plants... and she would bet anything Charlotte tended to the plants herself.

“Do you live here alone?” She couldn’t help but ask, as they walked through the rooms and she peered in at vaulted ceilings, and, well, more space than Sutton could ever imagine living in even with Lucy, let alone by herself. She’d *never* lived by herself, and she didn’t think she would enjoy it.

First with her family, then with a roommate in college, then Regan, then Layla, and now Lucy. She found herself without Lucy for only two nights a week and those were the times she had to keep herself busiest.

Charlotte shot her an amused look over her shoulder, wavy strands of dark hair shifting over her shoulder mesmerizingly. “You are writing my biography, what do you think?”

“Ha-ha,” she mock-laughed, even as she inwardly rolled her eyes at herself. Right. Of course, Charlotte lived here alone, who else would be here? Sutton knew damn well Charlotte didn’t have a partner.

Then again... her stomach twisted – she didn’t actually know much about Charlotte’s personal or romantic life. She knew she’d publicly come out, obviously, but there was nothing else about her romantic pursuits discussed in the public eye. And it hadn’t been a topic they’d delved into, yet.

Since they’d agreed to more chronologically through events in Charlotte’s life, that was a topic that they could, blessedly, cover last. Sutton, stupidly, wasn’t sure she was ready to hear about it.

But she – she had to believe Charlotte was unattached right now, right? Charlotte had kissed her, after all. ... but Charlotte hadn’t been the one to take things any further.

God, the idea was making the dread and anxiety claw up inside of Sutton even more sickeningly.

“Caleb and Dean stay here whenever they are in the area,” Charlotte extrapolated, abruptly bringing Sutton back into the moment. She then paused for a few moments and Sutton *knew* there was more coming with the thoughtful look on her face, before she murmured, “And my grandmother, in the last couple years of her life, stayed here when she was in D.C.”

Sutton wondered, unbidden, at the tone of Charlotte’s voice, how lonely she was here. There was nothing *obvious* that made her think it, Charlotte wasn’t giving any big signs or frowning or anything of the sort.

And honestly, unlike Sutton, Charlotte had *always* lived alone. She'd practically lived alone even when she'd been growing up. Living in a mansion with parents who were hardly ever there, her company had primarily been Caleb – until he'd gone to college when Charlotte had been sixteen, and hired help.

Still, though, she couldn't help but empathize.

She couldn't help it. Charlotte's loneliness had been a fleeting thought she'd had in the last month several times – she just often refused to let herself dive too deep into it. Charlotte's life was none of her business, beyond what she was sharing for her biography.

Still, though, as open as Charlotte was being about facts and anecdotes, there was no way Charlotte would ever tell Sutton, in a professional capacity, that she was *lonely*. No fucking way. It didn't matter how long went by since they'd been close; she *knew* that hadn't changed. Charlotte wouldn't want to even admit that vulnerability to someone in her life, let alone the world.

But she thought, as she looked around into the big, beautiful, and well-decorated rooms... it had to be lonely, sometimes. Without her grandmother to provide that constant support and reassurance that she'd given when Sutton knew Charlotte – they'd had weekly tea, back in the day, a tradition Charlotte used to glow when she'd talked about. She used to radiate with a quiet pride every time she talked about her interactions with her grandmother. And now, those moments didn't happen, anymore.

And her closest friends – her *only* friends, back then, other than Sutton, who... well, she didn't think she counted – were Caleb and Dean. Sutton didn't know for certain, but she couldn't imagine that had changed very much.

Charlotte didn't let anyone in, not easily. She'd discussed many times with Sutton that with the people she spent the most time with – her co-workers – she could only let them in at arms-length, because she could never really let herself trust them.

And now, here, without having Caleb and Dean in D.C. as she lived here for eight months of the year, all she had were her work acquaintances and her assistants.

It must have been achingly lonely, Sutton thought again, worrying at her bottom lip as she stared at Charlotte.

Charlotte, who was clearly entirely unaware of the odd direction Sutton's thoughts had turned, as she led them into a dream kitchen.

Sutton's eyes widened at it – at the unexpected warm colors and homey feeling, the wood and marble that mixed in a gorgeous way on the counters and the cabinets, and, "This is amazing," she blurted out, taking it in.

Charlotte turned to face her, amused smirk on her lips, "I am not surprised you think so." She slid deft long fingers along the island counter as she walked by it, Sutton following the motion closely, "As you may remember, though, this kitchen sees very little action."

"That's a crime," she couldn't help but shoot back, because... yes, she would *love* to cook in this kitchen.

Charlotte's laugh was low and floated right over Sutton. "I thought you would think that."

They paused here, as Charlotte to a very fancy coffee press – something Sutton was entirely unsurprised Charlotte had. She poured herself a mug, as she turned to look at Sutton over her shoulder.

"Can I get you a tea? I have – well, just about any kind you'd like," Charlotte chuckled, lightly. "I don't often drink them, but I do have them."

And as the ease and simplicity of this moment hit Sutton, she marvelled at it. At *her*. Because Charlotte did have this uncanny ability to act like everything was fine. Normal. Totally... normal. Like they didn't have sex eighteen hours ago on Charlotte's work desk before Sutton ran away.

Sutton had been agonizing over it, nonstop, since it had happened, and even when she was here to confront it, felt like she wanted to be sick.

Charlotte didn't have that problem.

Then again, when did she ever? Charlotte was always in control, calm, and collected. And if she *wasn't*, then she at the very least knew how to put up the façade like she was. Something Sutton had improved on in the last thirteen years, but would never be a professional at, the way Charlotte was.

This uneasiness, that was all Sutton. Sutton, who wanted Charlotte, lusted for her so strongly she made these – clearly – rash decisions and bad choices that held big ramifications for them.

She blinked widely, coming back to herself at Charlotte's expectant stare.

"No. No thank you." Even though a tea might be soothing, she shook her head. "I don't intend to keep you from whatever you were doing for very long, I swear. I'll be out of your hair soon."

Charlotte accepted her refusal with an easy shrug, before she added a splash of cream to her coffee. "You're not in the way, Sutton. I have a relatively easy afternoon ahead of me; I was just packing for a trip."

"Right. To New York?" She asked, even though she already knew. It wasn't like she had Charlotte's schedule *memorized* – that would be difficult, given how busy it was.

But Charlotte did share her schedule with Sutton and Sutton, obviously, peeked at it. She knew their typical twice weekly meetings for the following two weeks, weren't going to happen, because Charlotte had business in the city.

The smile that played on Charlotte's lips was pleased. "Yes. I'll be in Manhattan for a couple of weeks." She sipped her coffee, before gesturing around them, "Would you prefer to sit in here or out in the sunroom?"

Even though the sunroom did sound very nice and Sutton, honestly, would like to see it, she found comfort in this kitchen. "Here's good."

Charlotte nodded, pulling out a stool from the island, and Sutton did the same, sitting across from her.

She tangled her fingers in her lap, gripping tightly, as the words bubbled up in her throat.

“First of all, I’m sorry. I’m really sorry.” She dug her teeth into her bottom lip, squeezing her eyes closed to push through the nerves and embarrassment, “I should never have done what I did yesterday. It was so wrong – and not just because it was unprofessional, but because I didn’t even *ask* or – or anything, I just,” she broke off, swallowing thickly at the thought.

“It’s all right,” Charlotte broke in, watching Sutton carefully, soft, accepting honey eyes trained on her face.

“It’s *not* all right,” she insisted, shaking her head as she switched from clasping her hands together, to tightly gripping her knees, giving her something to ground herself on. “That’s not who I am.” The words fluttered out, a little desperate. It *wasn’t* who she was. It wasn’t. “I didn’t go there for... that, I promise you, and I don’t...” She shook her head, tightly, voice strained, “It was so disrespectful, to come into your office, without even an appointment or a phone call to let you know, and on top of *that*, I – we—”

She cut herself off, hating how deeply she felt herself blush, but... she was right to say it. She had to have Charlotte understand.

“Sutton,” Charlotte’s voice was both gentle and amused, though, and not at all reflective of Sutton’s apology or the emotions wracking through her. And she waited to speak again, until Sutton took a deep breath and lifted her gaze to really look at her.

There was a small smile playing on her lips, as she held Sutton’s gaze. “It *is* all right. Did it appear in any way that I didn’t,” she coughed slightly, before sipping her coffee, a thoughtful look on her face, “How should I say it... respond in kind, to you?”

Sutton’s breath left her on a sharp exhale as she pictured it so, so clearly. The way Charlotte reacted to her touch, to her kiss, to everything. To how wet she was for Sutton, right away. The heat that slid through her drove her *insane*, because – she was here to apologize for that! Not *feel* it all over again.

Then again, she wondered if she would ever have a time in physical proximity to Charlotte where she didn’t feel this *zing* between them. Honestly, she truly didn’t think that was possible.

Still, she blew out a shaky breath, admitting, “No, you seemed to – respond.” For lack of a better word. For lack of Sutton trying very much to not think about the way Charlotte had responded.

“Exactly. And if I had told you to stop, at any point, would you have?” Charlotte questioned, lacing her fingers around her coffee cup, staring intently at Sutton. As if genuinely expecting an answer.

Sutton, of course, gave it to her. Sitting up straight, appalled at even the insinuation, she nodded vigorously, “I – of course! If you said the word, I swear, I would have stopped.”

Charlotte gave Sutton the slightest of grins. Victorious, almost. “Exactly. And I know you would have.”

The validation did calm Sutton, somewhat. Maybe more than somewhat. The ease which Charlotte had seemed to be rubbing off onto Sutton, inexplicably. Because of that, though, she stared, baffled at Charlotte. “How are you so calm? After what happened? After...” she gestured widely into the air, as if trying to encompass – everything.

“The truth is, Charlotte... I – I don’t know what to do with you. With us,” she confessed, the raw truth of it burning in her throat. The words that she hadn’t vocalized and had tried to push down and not think about for the last six weeks refusing to stay hidden in the back of her mind, anymore.

It was like the snap of their physical draw to one another had released this, too.

“I thought I did? Or, I had convinced myself that I did. I thought – it’s been *thirteen years*. There *shouldn’t* be anything between us that has lingered, in any way, right? So I thought, or – I made myself think? That it could just be simple and straightforward. That we could just exist like any other two people without any history between them. I thought it should be easy to be professional with you and that’s how I was trying to, to be.”

Her heart beat a little too fast as the words rushed out of her, stomach twisting but a weight melting off of her with her inner thoughts finally being spoken.

“But, it’s not?” Charlotte quietly prompted. Her eyes were bright, as she watched Sutton, unreadable, from across the counter.

And Sutton couldn’t help but laugh. “Obviously not! Every time we meet, it’s hard to pretend that I don’t know anything about you? That I don’t... you are telling me all of these stories and these facts about yourself, a lot of it stuff I didn’t even know back then,” because they hadn’t had times where they’d laid in bed for hours, just sharing all of their stories.

God, how Sutton used to wish they would. Even though did they relax together, they did cuddle, they did *share*, but it never quite progressed into the bigger intimacies of a relationship. Obviously.

“And somehow, I have been trying to process it from an angle like I don’t know you? Like you are Senator Thompson, and I don’t know how you were going to take your coffee when you made it just now, and – it’s so difficult.” She swallowed hard, blushing, “And then, with what happened yesterday...” she trailed off, biting at her cheek at the rush of heat mixing with the memory.

“There is clearly a physical attraction between us,” she managed to get out, her voice even as she could make it. “There always has been, and I guess time hasn’t dampened it all that much.”

“I think you’re correct about that,” Charlotte murmured and... yeah, even the tone of that voice sent the shiver along Sutton’s spine.

She pushed through it, sitting up straight and putting her hands out flat on the counter in front of her.

“I guess that’s the thing, though? *That* part of us was never difficult. And maybe that’s why it was so easy to, um, give into it.” She searched Charlotte’s gaze for validation, her heart beating a little faster in her chest.

Because she’d put a lot of thought into this, and that was the conclusion she’d come to last night.

Charlotte nodded slowly, clearly turning Sutton’s words over in her mind. “I can see that. It was very easy to give into this chemistry we have, you’re right.”

“And we *can’t*,” she stressed. “That would complicate everything and make it all so messy. And the truth is... after thinking about this?” She gestured between them, “All night, I’ve been thinking about where to go, from here...”

She paused, taking a deep breath, and it was at all times in this entire conversation that *now*, Charlotte sat up at attention, gaze intent.

“Yes? Are you thinking about *not* working with me, anymore?” Charlotte cut right to the chase.

“Maybe I should,” she shook her head. Because *maybe she should*. That was the easiest way out of all of this. “But, I don’t want that.”

“You don’t,” Charlotte echoed, surprising flashing across her face.

“I don’t,” she confirmed, a disbelieving laugh leaving her, even as the confounding feeling weaved through her. “I thought that would be the best way, logically, but the truth is, I – I like having you in my life,” she admitted, softly. “I look forward to talking to you.”

And damnably, it was true. Even when she was determined to keep things professional, even when she tried to keep a distant mindset.

There was a spot in her life that Charlotte just – filled. She couldn’t describe it, and it wasn’t necessarily in only the physical sense. It was simply *Charlotte*. A magnetism she had, that she had always had, that gave this sense of excitement just being in her atmosphere.

Sutton tucked her hair behind her ears. “I think... being *friends* with you, true friends, can work? Maybe? If you still think so, even after yesterday?”

Charlotte was quiet for a moment, sipping her coffee again, before she slowly set it down and Sutton waited on pins and needles. Yes, they’d discussed this, before. The idea of being friendly, even earlier this week.

But Sutton hadn’t been in the right frame of mind, for that. She had still been trying to deny their spark, deny everything about them that made them who they were.

“And I know we sort of agreed to this, earlier this week. To be – friend-like. I know,” she rushed to say. “But after yesterday, I think we just need to have it all on the table. Our attraction is... out there and acknowledged,” she flushed, because *obviously*. “And I don’t think we can just reach back in time and grab the friendship we had developing before we became – more,” she settled on, rolling her eyes at herself, worrying again at her lip as she tried to figure out what the hell she was trying to say. “It’s just, maybe, we can skip past

where we've been. Maybe we can be done with all of that – the stiltedness or acting like we aren't comfortable around each other or anything like that.”

“So, to be clear, you don't think we should keep things friendly. And you are not quitting. And you would, in fact, like to jump into a true friendship. Because you *are*, in fact, comfortable around me,” Charlotte surmised, her recap sounding a lot more concise and simple than Sutton's ramble.

She drummed her fingers once on the countertop, before she nodded sharply. “I, uh, yes. That's what I'm saying. If that's something you want?”

A whole other set of nerves set in as she waited for Charlotte's response to this...

Before she sat up straight with a smile Sutton wasn't... entirely familiar with? Satisfied, almost? Just verging on giddy?

She didn't quite understand and it sent both a rush of pleasure through her at having caused it and a little caution that skittered down her spine. Because – why?

But Charlotte shook her head slightly, the smile toning down a bit. “Sutton Spencer, I would be *delighted* to be your friend.”

Relief eased through her, as she relaxed and slumped against the counter. “Oh, thank god.”

“Did you think I would disagree? I don't think I have been the one who has been against us being friends,” Charlotte teased, a lightness in her eyes that... honestly? It was nice to see and just be able to relax into it.

And somehow, despite their uneasy footing, despite Sutton's attraction getting the best of her yesterday, this... felt easy?

“You're right,” she rolled her eyes back. “But it's only because – you throw me off-balance! I don't know anyone like you and I've definitely never experienced our relationship before. So, excuse me for having an adjustment period.”

“I can excuse it,” Charlotte allowed after pretending to deliberate for a moment.

“Thank god,” she deadpanned, and let herself actually enjoy Charlotte's quiet laugh. Only for a few seconds, before she cleared her throat. “Should I let you get back to packing?” She gestured vaguely behind her.

But Charlotte frowned. “I mean, if you have something to do, then, sure. But... if you'd like to stay, my flight isn't until ten in the morning tomorrow and I have nothing on my agenda today, for once.”

Sutton sat with the invitation for a second, debating.

On one hand... yesterday, she had fucked Charlotte, without warning and unprompted, because she'd been overcome with how much she just *wanted* her, and something told her to be cautious of spending time alone now. That maybe it was a good thing Charlotte was leaving for two weeks; they could get their bearings and start on this new foot in a couple of weeks time.

On the other hand... she felt at-ease with Charlotte for the first time in over a decade. And she loved this kitchen. And, "I don't really have anything else to do for the evening, either. I think I would love some tea."

That same smile from minutes ago slid over Charlotte's face, bright and blinding. "Perfect. And how do you feel about Indian for dinner?"

Sutton blinked in surprise. It had been such an easy suggestion from Charlotte, she hardly followed, but, "I – sure, yeah, that sounds good."

Charlotte reached out and squeezed her hand. Just once, the contact warm. Comforting. And only left Sutton feeling a little bit warmer, like her hand only tingled a little bit... manageably so.

It made her feel like acknowledging this was the right idea.

Wait –

"Um, just to check, before we – you're not dating anyone right now, are you?" She blurted out, the thought from earlier, about how she didn't truly know anything about Charlotte's romantic life, returning. And needing to make sure she hadn't stepped in the middle of anything with her actions yesterday.

Charlotte's eyebrows winged up, "Excuse me?"

"I just mean – you never have mentioned, and I know you're obviously publicly out, so maybe you do, but we just weren't in a place to discuss it?" God, she could feel her cheeks burning, even as she grimaced with herself but she couldn't help it.

Charlotte laughed quietly, giving Sutton a fond look. "No, I am not dating anyone at the moment."

That was the biggest relief. Maybe too big, but Sutton was *not* giving that too much thought at the moment. No.

"Are *you*?" Charlotte turned on her.

"You think I would – with you – when I was dating someone?!"

"Perhaps you found me simply too alluring to control yourself, Sutton, how am I to know?" Charlotte clearly teased and Sutton –

She almost wanted to continue to be offended, but all she could do was laugh.

Yes. This was the right decision.