

Regan would never forget the first time she'd met Emma, a little over two years ago.

She'd been at Topped Off, the coffee shop she now managed after slaving away there for the last six years, and it had been *slammed*. Don't get Regan wrong; Topped Off was a hipster as hell establishment located right off the corner of Washington Square Park... so it was often slammed. But typically, she wasn't the *only* person working during heavy traffic hours.

On that particular day, though, she was dead-alone and it was the week before fucking finals, so, it went without saying that Regan deserved a medal for handling those coffee addled stress nerds on her own.

They didn't normally offer table service there, either. But when you have a woman who sets up shop to study all day and offers you and you alone a one hundred dollar tip to keep her steaming hot espressos *inside* a large hot coffee coming... well, you keep those steaming hot espressos inside of a large hot coffee coming.

And as she'd spun around from the counter to deliver said steaming hot espresso in a large hot coffee, she'd bumped solidly into a woman.

With said steaming hot espresso and coffee.

Regan had been *horrified*. And she wasn't often horrified. "Shit!" She'd shouted in the middle of the packed café, because she was a professional. "Oh, god! God! Shit!"

While she was yelling, the other woman had silently gritted her jaw and grimaced deeply in pain.

The liquid had been *hot*; it had burned her fingers a little bit, the splash that had landed on her. So she could only imagine how it felt, all over this woman's chest.

Her very ample chest.

A very ample chest, that was only a couple inches lower than eye-level for Regan, who was level with this woman's strong jaw.

And this woman's pale blue long-sleeved button up had already been form-fitting, but it was utterly *soaked* through, now. Regan had been able her bra and how hard her nipples were.

Now that they were *burning*!

Really, what happened next was pure reflex. Regan would be the first person to say that sometimes her... impulsivity got ahead of her.

And so – she'd dropped the cup and reached out, grabbed both sides of the woman's shirt and ripped it open.

The buttons had scattered throughout the café, people had stopped and stared – which wasn't shocking because, seriously, this woman had breasts to die for. And the woman, who'd kept up a tough front until this moment, finally spoke. Or, well, growled, "What the fuck are you doing?"

"Helping!" Regan had still been focused on the task at hand and had grabbed the woman's hand and tugged her into the employee back room.

As soon as they'd been in private, the woman yanked her hand away from Regan and stated – much, much louder, she might add – “What the fuck are you *doing*?!”

Regan shook her head as she started pawing through her locker, looking for a sweatshirt she *knew* she had somewhere. “I saw this totally gross video once about this guy who spilled boiling water on his legs, and basically, he ended up with these sick burns *because* his pants had clung the hot liquid onto his skin, right? And the doctors had said the burns would have been way less severe if he hadn't had the pants on.”

The sweatshirt! Her well-loved, soft, blue and gray Brandeis sweatshirt – from the single year of college that she'd attended – that she kept here just to put on and chill sometimes when the air conditioning was turned up too high.

She pulled it out and turned to give it to the woman, finally taking a good look at her.

First at the skin of her chest. Regan leaned in to examine closer – soft skin with light freckles, that seemed to stand out starkly against the redness of her irritated skin. No blistering, though, which was honestly a *huge* relief.

The woman crossed her arms over her chest, and grit out, “My eyes are up here.”

Which led Regan to look up into said eyes. Ice blue. It was the only way to describe them. Even right now, when they were undoubtedly fiery? Ice blue.

“I see that,” she agreed.

Regan could swear she felt a chill at the base of her spine and the pit of her stomach from the look alone, which fascinated her on a whole other level.

She had dark hair pulled up into a braid that led into a twist, that added onto her previously nice, professional look, with the button-up and well-fitted pants.

“What the hell is the matter with you?” The woman demanded, before she crossed her arms tighter, and then grimaced in disgust at – what Regan guessed was – the wet stickiness of the coffee that still soaked the material.

“I mean, adult diagnosed ADHD. But I don't really like to look at it as something being the *matter* with me.” Genuinely, though.

The set of the crazily strong jaw, along with an entirely unamused sigh told Regan that this woman did not find any levity here. Regan was usually pretty good with levity, too.

She stared up into the woman's eyes, apologetic. “I'm just slammed here, and I didn't look before I turned around, which was a total rookie mistake, and I didn't mean to –”

“No, I got how you spilled the coffee. What I don't get is where the hell you get off, ripping my shirt off *at all*, let alone in front of fifty people!”

“I thought you were going to have third degree burns!” She gesticulated wildly, a curl of remorse sliding through her stomach; that was how it always happened. She acted first and then everything else came later. “I'm sorry! I wasn't thinking.”

“Yeah, clearly,” the woman snapped in her low, clear voice.

“Well. Ouch.” She cradled her sweatshirt in her arms and leaned back on her heels.

“*Well*, now not only do I have my first meeting with my advisor with a coffee soaked and stained shirt, but one that doesn’t have any fucking buttons,” the woman absolutely fumed.

“Oh! Yeah, here.” Regan pushed her sweatshirt toward the woman. “Take this. I mean, it’s no fancy ironed button-up – you know, I didn’t realize twenty-somethings owned irons anymore? I definitely don’t – but it *is* from Brandeis, which is a, uh, really... good... school.”

Her words came out slower as the woman whipped off her shirt, her chest heaving in a black bra as she muttered angry words under her breath, before she grabbed Regan’s sweatshirt and tugged it over her head.

“Well, thank god I like to buy my sweatshirts a couple sizes bigger,” she commented with an appreciative nod.

On Regan, she liked to cuddle into the sweatshirt for comfort and it sat, baggy, low on her hips. On this woman, it hugged her chest and sat flatteringly fittingly on curved hips.

She only realized her words could be taken the wrong way when the woman’s mouth fell open in offense and she gave Regan a look that Regan could only explain as – this woman definitely thought she was legit out of her fucking mind... she was somewhat familiar with it.

“Unbelievable.”

“Not that I’m, like, calling you fat,” she explained, shaking her head, before she thought for a second and wrinkled her nose at herself and added on, “Or that there is anything wrong with being heavy, either, for that matter, I just meant, like, it fits –”

The woman clearly did not want to stick around to hear the rest. She huffed out a breath and balled up her wet shirt in her fist as she cut Regan off, “I’m late.”

She strode to the door and took a noticeably deep breath before squaring her shoulders, and it only then occurred to Regan that this woman was embarrassed to walk back out through the café full of people who’d seen her without her shirt.

“I’m –” she started, stepping towards the woman. Who strode out of the back room without a backward glance, “Sorry.”

She hadn’t gotten a name that day, clearly. But she *had* gotten a name when she’d re-met her, two weeks later.

Sutton had texted to say that her new friend, another grad school TA, was coming over to have dinner and hang out. Regan was totally fine with that, the more the merrier, and she’d ordered pizza for the three of them...

And then Sutton had walked into the apartment, stating, “And this is Emma! My new friend that I’ve told you about. Emma, this is Regan.”

Those icy blue eyes seemed to frost over as they widened, then narrowed. “We’ve met,” she’d muttered, darkly.

And honestly? Things had never gotten any better between them.