

Standing still in an elevator really shouldn't be this hard. The mirrored doors had swooshed closed about five seconds before. Callie stood beside him, leather attaché slung over her shoulder and hands clasped before her, watching the numbers count down, down, down.

Gage resisted the urge to pull at his tie. But counting down the numbers on the elevator screen wasn't nearly as interesting as watching Callie.

He'd been watching her, goading her a little, since he'd realized it was her across the table from him and not a stranger. Not that he could call Callie a friend when he hadn't spoken to her in ten years. She was an acquaintance. That was a good word.

The fact did nothing to temper his response to her. She'd heated up the office. Now she was turning the elevator into a veritable inferno. From the top of her oh-so-blonde head—had her hair always been this shimmery?—to the tips of her oh-so-red toenails, she made him want things.

Drinks on the beach. A quiet dinner by candlelight.

He'd never thought of her this way in the past. She was just Callie. The girl who helped him master calculus, cheered at his football games, and rode her favorite horse beside his lake on hot summer days. The gorgeous woman standing beside him was so different from the buddy he remembered.

The old Callie was smart and tenacious, which made the new Callie a good investment. The old Callie was dedicated to her work—another mark in New Callie's favor. The biggest mark in her favor, though, was the empty space in his new development. A space that would be perfect for Callie's business, while also filling a hole in his.

Plus, under the polish of her suit, he could still see his friend. The mistiness of her gaze when she talked about her parents leaving town, the fierce grip when she squeezed her hands together as she made her pitch.

"Have you been to a Rebels game since you got back?" he asked.

Small talk. He hated small talk.

"I'm not much for basketball."

"It's actually still football season, but the first preseason basketball games start in a couple weeks. We should catch a game sometime."

Shut up, Gage. Just shut up. He didn't ask business associates out. What the hell was wrong with him?

"Oh."

"You love football."

A smile spread across her face. "Mostly I loved the space that cheerleading took up in the 'extracurricular' column of my college applications."

“Oh.” How had he never caught that she wasn’t into sports?

Better question: how had his radar missed Callie, in general, all those years ago?