

“I’m not going to make it,” Marcus told April, hoping his heartfelt regret was obvious in his expression. “Because of all the bad weather, filming is running long, and there’s no way we can finish in time. I’m so sorry.”

Whenever he was on location, away from their home in San Francisco, they made certain to talk nightly, and they always used video. If he couldn’t have her warmth, her soft rose scent and sharp intelligence, beside him in his cold hotel bed, he could at least see her beloved face there, the phone propped up on a pillow so he had his hands free for...various things.

She lifted a shoulder, her coppery ponytail swaying, and offered him a small smile. “We knew it was a possibility. It’s okay. There’ll be other Valentine’s Days together.”

He’d been gone for almost a month now. In general, she coped with their occasional separations better than he did, but whether she was willing to admit it or not, she tended to overwork in his absence.

She looked tired. And despite that smile and her shrug of casual dismissal, sad.

When she hunched in on herself a little, his heart turned over in his chest.

He hated—*hated*—causing her pain. And her absence cast a shadow over his daily existence, even on his brightest days, so the delay made him equally wretched. He wanted to go home with a desperation that probably should have embarrassed him.

It didn’t. She was his home, and she was his sun, and he needed her. Simple as that.

“Mel said Grand Folk Railroad is performing that night at a local café, God help us all”—why any moneymaking institution would give her coworkers’ enthusiastic yet terrible folk band such an opportunity was a mystery to her, if her dramatically bugged-out eyes were any indication—“and we were both invited to come, so maybe I’ll pack some discreet earplugs and hang out with everyone there.”

The performance would distract her from his absence and surround her with friends on a possibly-lonely night, which was good. But—

“Let’s spend the whole evening together,” he said impulsively. “I’ll plan everything.”

“You want a FaceTime date?” She waggled her brows. “A *sexy* FaceTime date?”

“I can neither confirm nor deny its sexiness.” Mostly because he had no freaking idea what he was going to do. That said... “Okay, yes, at some point, sexiness will probably be involved. Because you’ll be involved, and you and sexiness are kind of a package deal.”

Her smile had turned bright and genuine, at long last. “I accept your invitation, kind sir, and will now thank you for it appropriately. Or inappropriately, as the case may be.”

She nudged the thin strap of her floaty nightgown over her shoulder and down her arm, and suddenly the ample curve of one breast appeared, gilded by lamplight.

When she lowered the other strap, he choked on his own tongue.

He still had a few days to work out the details of their date, which was good. He wasn’t capable of higher-order thinking right now, and probably wouldn’t be for some time to come.

Now her smile was bright, genuine, *and* smug. “Shall I put on my glasses?”

Shit, her glasses *destroyed* him, and she knew it.

“Please,” he managed to wheeze, as his decision to keep his hands free became very, very convenient. “Fuck, I love you, April.”

“I know,” she said, and proceeded to blow his damn mind.

“Did you order from every takeout place in the entire Bay Area, or only most of them?” April regarded him with faux-severity from his cell phone’s screen, then turned her camera to pan over the many, many boxes scattered over her coffee table and kitchen counter. “I have

enough here to feed me for a week. Maybe longer.”

It was...possible he might have gone a *tiny* bit overboard. But he'd had his reasons.

“I didn't know what you'd be in the mood for, so I chose all your usual favorites,” he told her. “Plus, some of the restaurants had special Valentine's Day menus, and I figured you might like to try those too, so...”

She couldn't maintain the stern façade any longer. Wiggling a little bit, she clapped her hands and beamed at him. “You're the best husband ever, Marcus Caster-Hyphen-Rupp. This is like my own personal cruise-ship buffet, only with less chance of contracting norovirus!” She paused. “Hopefully.”

“Definitely.” He preened, his chest puffing out a bit. “I only chose restaurants with superior sanitation records.”

“That may be the most romantic thing you've ever said to me, sweetie.” She leaned forward, and paper crackled as she opened a bag. “Are those *cocroffinuts*?”

He grinned, delighted she'd noticed his tribute to their early dates. “No electron is safe tonight.”

She snorted.

His own room service selections arrayed on the table before him, he turned to his laptop. “Go ahead and get our streaming service ready to go on the TV. The time has come, April.”

Her eyes went wide. “You mean...”

He inclined his head. “At long last, we're going to watch *San Andreas*. Together.”

“But—” With her forefinger, she pushed her glasses up further onto the bridge of her nose. “You don't understand, Marcus. There's a reason I haven't let us do this before. I won't—I won't be able to control myself.”

"I certainly hope not," he said, injecting plenty of sly innuendo into the words.

She threw her hands in the air. "But it won't be *sexy*, it'll be *pedantic*! I won't be able to stop myself from delineating every single geological issue in the entire movie! To the point where you won't even be able to follow the story, because I'll be ranting too much!"

"I don't think the story is that complicated." He glanced down at the movie's summary. "Earthquake. Tsunami. The Rock saves his family from certain death while wearing a very tight shirt. Rant away, love."

She slumped on the couch. "But—"

"Are you saying you *won't* enjoy bitching about the faulty geology in the movie?"

They both knew the answer, so she didn't bother lying to him.

"Of course I'll enjoy it. You know I love nothing better than complaining about terrible movie science. And *San Andreas* not only involves geology, but is set in this area, so it might as well have been created in a lab to encourage my particular brand of pedantry." She slumped on the couch. "But *you* won't enjoy watching it, Marcus, because I'll ruin the experience for you. And it's your Valentine's Day too."

"April." He waited until she met his gaze again. "April, do you remember explaining the Loma Prieta earthquake to me at the Cal Academy? On our second date?"

She raised a shoulder, her brow furrowed in confusion. "Mostly? I was kind of distracted at the time. As you may recall, there was a super-hot guy feeling me up in the earthquake simulator."

Oh, he definitely recalled. The things he'd wanted to do to her in that simulator would have forever scarred the children also visiting the Shake House that day.

"I swear to God, if you'd mentioned oblique-slip ruptures one more time, I would have

dragged you to a dark corner of the planetarium and fucked you right then and there, traumatized schoolkids be damned.” He locked eyes with her. “When you get pedantic, you might as well have a hand on my dick, April. It’s the hottest goddamn thing I’ve ever experienced.”

Her mouth, luscious and pink, had dropped open. “Really?”

“How have you not realized this already?” He cocked an eyebrow. “Remember that time you lectured me about shale?”

“I thought...” When she licked her lips, he bit back a groan. “I thought you just liked my dress that night.”

“I did like that dress. But you could have been wearing a sack, April, and I’d still have gone down on you in that restaurant bathroom.”

Her eyes had gone big again. Big and hot. “So if I happened to explain that a 9.6-magnitude quake, like the one in the movie, is virtually impossible, because the San Andreas Fault wouldn’t allow anything higher than an 8.3—”

“I’d get hard.”

“And if I...” Her breathing had quickened. “If I interrupted very impressive CGI sequences of destruction to note how even a small tsunami would be very unlikely, because the San Andreas is both a strike-slip fault and located too far inland, so...”

When her gaze flicked down to his lap, she cut herself off. “Holy shit, Marcus.”

“Start the movie,” he told her, his voice a low rumble. “Then tell me more.”

In the end, it took them all night to get through the first half of the film.

Neither had any complaints.

And when Marcus finally arrived at SFO the following week, the first thing he did was

gather his wife into his arms by the baggage claim, dizzy with love and relief, and tell her about one last Valentine's Day gift.

"I bought a copy of the movie." He pressed closer and nuzzled against her neck, inhaling roses and comfort and *home* with every breath. "Just in case."

Her smile lit her face and his entire world. "How soon can we get out of here?"

"Not soon enough," he said, and meant it.