

A man with short, styled hair and a light beard, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and dark tie, stands against a backdrop of a city skyline at night. He is looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. His hands are clasped in front of him.

HIGHEST BIDDER CLUB

AUCTIONED
to the
BILLIONAIRE

CASSI HART

Auctioned to the Billionaire

—
Highest Bidder Club

Cassi Hart

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The book cover features a woman with long, wavy red hair, wearing a grey crop top, posing with her hands behind her head. The title 'The KINGPIN'S Obsession' is written in a mix of white and gold fonts, with the author's name 'CASSI HART' at the bottom.

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Dedicated to the feral men out there, I'm so glad you stepped up. Cheers!

Thank you for your support, enjoy!



Cassi H♥rt

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Prologue

Felicia

I get off the bus in the swanky part of downtown.

Everything is so clean, I hardly want to walk on the sidewalks. When I get to the building I'm looking for, it's so tall I have to crane my neck to see the top of it gleaming against the blue sky and puffy white clouds. The equally impressive buildings all around mirror it with their endless rows of windows.

It's like being in a museum. Immediately, I feel like I don't belong, but I can't let that bother me.

I straighten my nice dress. I feel silly for wearing something so fancy. It's Saturday, so I don't have a reason to wear my school uniform, but most of my clothes didn't feel nice enough for this. I'm supposed to be tutoring a classmate for some extra cash, but I'm still not sure if the money is worth it.

I doubt Olivia will even be dressed yet. I think she went to a party with some of the more popular students at our school last night. If I didn't have to be here, I'd be in bed too. I'd worked more after my shift at my job was over—my neighbor needed a babysitter and I need the money, so I couldn't pass up the opportunity, tired as I was.

My head swims as I look up at the high-rise again. I steel myself and head inside.

Unlike my run-down building on the other side of the city, this massive building has one of those fast elevators that makes getting to the highest floors a snap. I do a double take when I see that my destination floor is actually the topmost floor. But the doorman, a severe looking man who eyes me suspiciously, assures me that it really is the floor that the Harlow's live on.

My nerves kick in as I step off the elevator.

The Harlow's.

It's silly, but I'm hoping I'll see Olivia's father today. I'm sure a man like him has better things to do on a Saturday morning than wait for his kid's tutor to show up. He's half the reason I'm doing this, if I'm being honest.

Mr. Harlow is an active donor to the school, and I've actually met him before because his donations fund my scholarship. He was one of my interviewers, but his face has stuck with me ever since. Each passing glimpse I've gotten of him at the school conducting business or whatever it is he does there fed my crush, and now I'm here. If I'm being honest, the real reason I took on this tutoring job isn't just the money. It's getting the chance to see him more regularly.

Even so, I'm trying to squish the hope rising in my chest. There's no way he'll be home. He's probably working or whatever it is that people with this kind of wealth do on weekend mornings. Even my dad's working, though I'm not sure people would consider his job real work. While he got home late—drinking with his buddies or something—he was up early to go shake down whoever his boss needs to be shaken down for the debt they owe. He'd left me cash and told me to get groceries for us for the week.

There's not much I can get with what he gave me, but the cash from tutoring will more than help me stretch it.

Anything extra will have to go to our utilities, which my dad forgot to pay yet again. Between keeping my grades up to keep my scholarship to my high school, putting in volunteer

hours so that I look better for colleges, and working real jobs so that we can make ends meet, I'm beginning to run out of patience about my dad forgetting to do something as basic as make sure our bills get paid. He's always told me that school comes first, but I'm, beginning to think he's just saying that.

When I knock on the door to the Harlows' apartment suite, I expect a maid or a butler or someone else in a uniform to answer and escort me to Olivia's room. Instead, Mr. Harlow himself swings open the heavy door. My cheeks heat instantly.

While I've only ever seen him in suits (which makes me even more insecure about how ridiculous this crush is), he's dressed casually in a faded Ivy League college sweatshirt and jeans. I'm suddenly very aware of how overdressed I am. My dark hair, the curls unruly on a good day, suddenly feels like a frizzy mess. I have a zit coming in on my chin and as my heart starts to race, I can almost feel the pressure in it pulsing along with it.

None of the boys my age look like Mr. Harlow, and that's the problem.

Even though he's old enough to be the father of my classmate, he's built solidly, like he takes care of himself. He's not wiry or lanky like any of the athletes at school, and he's not trying to show off like them either. He has a bit of scruff on his usually clean-shaven jaw, and his skin is clear, with only a few wrinkles creasing the corners of his eyes. The crinkles make his gray eyes almost sparkle as he smiles at me welcomingly.

"Felicia?"

It's a question, as if he doesn't recognize me. My heart gives a disappointed pang. It's silly, but I was hoping he'd remember me from my interview. Considering how awkward I feel right now, it's probably better that he doesn't remember who I am.

"Yes, sir. Nice to meet you, Mr. Harlow," I rush out, feeling starstruck.

He shakes his head, which makes a lock of his light brown hair to flop down across his eyebrow. He absentmindedly runs his

fingers through his hair, combing the strand back. My heart aches to do the same.

Yeah. This man isn't just another dad. Not to me, silly as it feels still.

"Call me Brock," he smiles at me.

My brain stutters to stop, frozen by the idea of being so casual with my crush. I try to say something, but nothing comes out. I'm too caught off guard.

He steps aside and waves for me to come inside.

The inside of the apartment—no, it's definitely a penthouse—has my mouth dropping open in awe. High ceilings, expensive marble floors, shining windows, and luxury furniture greet me. Paintings that look like they belong in museums hang on the walls. Stainless steel appliances shine from the kitchen, reminding me that the open floor plan is really actually a place people live.

"Come on back, I'll show you to Olivia's room."

His voice is smooth and rich like maple syrup. My poor brain wants so badly to come up with something witty or charming to say to him, but all I can get myself to do is smile at him. As he leads me across the penthouse to an adjoining hallway, I stop in my tracks.

I've lived in this city all my life, but I've never seen it like this before. The floor to ceiling windows look out over the hustle and bustle, making everything seem small and inconsequential as it happens way below us. It's like I'm on top of the world.

I feel a hand at my elbow and look up to see Mr. Harlow. My face goes so hot I worry that it'll catch on fire. It's an innocent touch, he means nothing by it at all, but it makes me feel like I'm burning up anyway. He guides me over to the window gently.

"You can see the ocean on days like this," he says, sounding almost excited. "It's right over there."

He drops my arm as he leans to point where he wants me to look. The sight's impressive, but I have a hard time focusing

on it when he's standing so close. He smells so good that I have to fight taking deep breaths of his scent. It's almost overwhelming how happy it makes me to be close to him like this.

"Thanks you," I finally say, my voice almost hoarse with nerves. "For this job, I mean."

And for two hours of getting to see how the other half lives, and for the extra cash, and for being my crush—

"You came highly recommended," he says with a reassuring smile. "Olivia's a smart girl, but she takes after me when it comes to algebra. Hopefully, she's less hopeless than me."

"Dad," a voice calls out sharply from behind us. "Stop being embarrassing!"

I jump with a start. Even if he literally just mentioned it, I still managed to completely forget that I'm not here to see him. Nodding at Mr. Harlow, I rush after Olivia as she turns and disappears down the hallway.

"Sorry about that," she mutters as I follow her through an open door. "He's been trying to make me feel better about being stupid."

Olivia's room feels more like its own apartment. It's huge, and she has the space for a pale pink couch and cream armchairs surrounding a glass coffee table. Through another door, I can see a big, canopied bed decorated with a mountain of frilly pillows and a satin bedspread.

She stomps over to a desk in the corner, which has a huge computer monitor flashing different pictures of her and her friends on it. Off to the side, a laptop and an iPad sit among a number of pretty notebooks and fancy gel pens. Nearby, her closet door hangs open, showing off a spacious walk-in closet filled with clothes and shoes.

I've only ever dreamed of having a space like this to myself. My room is nowhere near this size, and I've had the same rundown furniture for as long as I can remember. A twin bed with worn sheets, a dresser handed down from my dad, a cheap desk I had to pinch pennies to afford. I don't have a

computer, and all of my notebooks and school supplies were bought with coupons.

“I’ll never get this,” Olivia sighs, pulling her school bag over the sitting area. She ignores the couch and instead plops on the floor before pulling out her textbook and notebook. “But if I don’t pass this time, I’m off the dance team.”

“If it helps, we’ll probably never use it in real life,” I say as I sit down beside her, hoping the joke helps ease the tension.

Olivia has always intimidated me. She’s got a larger than life personality and is friends with the coolest and most popular people. She’s pretty and carefree and always seemed to do fine in class, so that I’m here to tutor her is making me even more nervous. If someone as perfect as her is struggling with math, what does that mean for a someone like me? What am I failing at?

“I know, right?” Her genuine smile puts my heart at ease almost immediately. “Here, let me make some room for you.”

She pushes the coffee table back a little to make room for us to stretch our legs out. Just as she pushes her things aside on the table so that I can pull out mine, her phone’s screen lights up with a text.

Her background picture looks recent. Olivia and an older woman with the same shade of blonde hair and blue eyes smile at the camera, the Rockefeller Center ice rink in the background. Instantly, I know it’s her mom. It’s never occurred to me that Mr. Harlow might be married, which makes me feel foolish. My wishful thinking let me get carried away. Of course he’s married. My stomach sinks.

“Is that your mom?” I ask, just to make sure.

Olivia rolls her eyes with a huff. “On her annual visit to her first child, yeah. She lives in Los Angeles now with her new family—the *upgrade*.”

“Upgrade? From *this*?” I ask incredulously. Why would anyone need to upgrade from this? Mr. Harlow is perfect. This apartment is perfect. What more could anyone possibly want?

My heart gives a sad pang for Olivia as I watch multiple emotions cross her face.

“Her new husband is a movie exec,” she explains. “Caroline craves the spotlight and now she gets to go to red carpet events and host parties at a huge house that celebrities show up to. App developers and tech execs are too boring for her. What about your mom?”

This is a lot for a Saturday morning, but she’s sharing things about herself with me, so the least I can do is do the same.

“She died when I was five.”

“Oh, shit. I’m so sorry.” Olivia’s pretty face flushes. “My mom’s absent, but she’s still here. I should be more grateful, huh?”

“I hardly remember her,” I shrug. It’s the truth, but that doesn’t make it ache any less. I decide to change the subject.

“Anyway, algebra’s not so hard. We’ve got this.”

“I hope so,” she says.

I want to suggest that she study more, but I don’t think that’s the problem. The academic requirements for extracurriculars at our school are really high, so even one class can affect your eligibility. As we get to work, it quickly becomes clear that she just doesn’t have a math brain. That’s okay, not everyone does, but her frustration gets worse and worse as she keeps getting practice equations wrong. After an hour, tears are starting to gather in her eyes.

“Sorry to tell you that you’re going to end up a failure like the other tutors. I’m just a dumbass I guess.”

“No, you’re not,” I suddenly snap. I *hate* it when people think that about themselves just because they don’t get something academic. “Don’t put yourself down like that! I should say something nice about yourself just for doing that.”

Olivia looks at me with wide eyes. “I, um ... I’m really good at percentages,” she says with a snuffle. “I can even do them in my head sometimes.”

“See? You’re not a dumbass at all. That’s actually useful. You can figure out tips and what sale prices will be.”

She laughs. I realize belatedly that she's probably never bought anything on sale in her life, but at least she's smiling now.

"Thanks for trying, I guess," she says as her face begins to fall again.

I hate seeing her so down on herself. Lucky for her, and for my employment prospects, I'm way too stubborn to give up on her yet. "Look, there are other ways to do these problems. Between you and me, they don't do a good job explaining this. I can teach you a few tricks so you can at least pass the test, but you'll have to be careful to show your work the way you're supposed to," I tell her.

For the next hour, we hunker down. By the end, we're both exhausted, but Olivia's a lot more optimistic about her skills.

"You're a genius," she says, marveling at her set of correctly completed math problems. "Thanks for not making me feel like an idiot."

"You're not an idiot at all," I reassure her. "You just needed a different explanation to get the same answers."

"It's only because of you that I know how to even get that right answer," she smiles. Suddenly, her expression becomes curious. She looks at me intently. "Are you allowed to wear makeup?"

I blink at her. Am I *allowed*? I have to fight snorting with laughter. My dad doesn't care what I do with my face. Honestly, I don't know think he'd even notice if I came home painted green like Shrek.

Still, the truth of it is that I just can't afford makeup. Not even from the drugstore. All of the money I make is spoken for before it even hits my bank account. "Yeah. I just ..."

Before I can find a way to explain that I'm too broke to buy products, Olivia is pulling me to my feet. "Oh my god, you *have* to let me do your makeup. Pretty please?"

She pouts at me cutely and bats her lashes. Her enthusiasm is so off-putting that I'm almost offended. Is there something

about my face that needs fixing? The zit rearing its ugly head on my chin must be more obvious than I thought.

As soon as I tell her yes, she pulls me into her ensuite bathroom with a delighted squeal.

“My dad’s got high hopes for me going to his alma mater and getting a business master’s or a law degree, but honestly, it doesn’t really excite me,” she explains as she starts pulling different products out of her drawers.

“What do you actually want to do, then?” I ask her.

“Right now, I just want to go to cosmetology school and become a makeup artist.”

“Elle Woods went to law school, you know. She’s good at makeup.”

Olivia’s eyes light up as she starts to pat a product onto my skin. “Oh my god, you’re totally right.”

“You don’t have to choose makeup or law school,” I shrug.

“Stay still,” she scolds me. “Shit, you’ve got such nice skin.”

“That’s a total lie. I’ve got a zit the size of New Jersey coming in on my chin.”

“Nothing a little concealer can’t fix!” she says with a knowing smirk. “Maybe we’ll do a bold lip to distract from it though.”

In the blink of an eye, Olivia works her magic. After she’s done, I barely recognize myself, but in a good way. I mean, I have to get super close to the mirror to even see that chin zit!

I almost feel like a real adult. I feel confident and pretty, neither of which I’ve really never felt about myself before.

“You’re amazing,” I gasp. “A total miracle worker.”

She shrugs. “You’re a good canvas.”

My heart sinks as I look at the time. I have to leave soon if I’m going to get home in time to change and get ready for my next work shift. As she starts walking me out to the living area, I think about how much fun it was to talk to her as she did my

makeup. I'm not good at making friends, but ... I feel like I've made one today.

Mr. Harlow stops us before we get too far. He gives his daughter a knowing look.

"I hope the makeup came *after* the studying," he says with mock suspicion.

Olivia rolls her eyes. "The makeup was a reward for myself to finally getting some practice problems right. Felicia was super helpful and I thought we both deserved a treat."

"Really? That's good to hear." He turns to me. "Was she a good student?"

"Dad! I'm right here!" Olivia protests.

"She was great," I answer honestly, feeling shy beneath his gaze. "She just needed a confidence boost. And different explanation."

"Glad to hear it. I'll walk you out."

When we're at the door, he pulls an envelope out of his pocket, opens it, and counts out the cash inside for me before slipping it back into the envelope and holding it out.

My brow furrows.

"Um, sir, it's supposed to be only seventy," I say as I take the envelope from him. I start to fish the cash back out to give back the extra. "I think I can give you change, let me—"

He stops me. "Keep it. Please. You had to travel, consider the extra for that."

I look up at him, feeling my face heat underneath Olivia's carefully applied makeup. "Mr. Harlow—"

"Felicia, call me Brock. And if you'd rather, think of it as a bonus for doing a good job. It's the first time I've seen Olivia actually *happy* after a tutoring session."

I glance between him and the cash. The deal was for seventy dollars, and I didn't really do anything differently for her than I'd do for someone else. But ... the extra thirty would be really

helpful. Against my better judgment, I nod at him and swallow my emotions as I tuck the envelope into my bag.

Suddenly, Olivia calls to us from the kitchen. “Wait! Can Felicia come back tomorrow for another study session? That test is on Monday and I want to make sure I’m really ready.”

Mr. Harlow looks at me with a raised eyebrow, as if giving me permission to answer yes. I don’t work tomorrow night, so ...

“I can do that,” I nod. “Is that okay?”

When he says yes, Olivia cheers and rushes over to squeeze me with an excited hug. I’m glad she’s excited, because if I’m being honest, I’m excited to. I get to make a little extra cash and hang out with her again. On top of that, I get to see my secret crush again. What is there to lose?

What I didn’t know that day is that Olivia and I would quickly become inseparable. After years spent feeling like a lonely outcast because of my financial situation, I now had a best friend. She was my support system, and I was hers.

At the time, I figured I’d grow out of my crush on Brock Harlow eventually. I thought that I’d find out he was some tyrant parent or that he was as irresponsible as my own father in some way. The silly little crush I’d nursed until then couldn’t possibly stand the test of time, right?

I couldn’t have been more wrong if I tried.

Chapter 1

Brock

Five years later ...

When I finally leave the airport, I'm exhausted.

I was in London for business, and while everything went exactly to plan, the travel always takes it out of me. The lucrative acquisition is worth it, though. The company I just bought on behalf of my own business is a perfect fit for the plans I have for the future, and well, the financial benefit means we'll all get to grow over the next few years as well. Digital security is a booming industry and it's only going to get more profitable from here.

Security isn't my first love, but it pays the bills and more. I got started developing social media algorithms, but security has been a lot more stable, even with the changes in technology. Getting into programming for security is what allowed me to pay for my home, after all. I've got the head and business sense for it, and the industry has rewarded me handsomely for staying ahead of the game.

As exciting as my work can be, I'm glad to be back home. I grew up in this city, fell in love here, raised my kid in the middle of all the hustle and bustle. Even though I was born into comfort, New York has a habit of keeping you on your toes. I've had to work my ass off to get where I am and I've relished every single challenge that's come my way. Even though I'm into my early forties, I don't feel the need to slow down at all.

Not that the city would ever let me—that's why I love it here so much.

As I step into the car I had my assistant order for me, I find myself thinking about my legacy. I got married young—which proved to be a mistake, but we can't have it all, I suppose. Fresh out of college, Caroline and I decided to go for it, and soon after, we had Olivia. She's in her first year of college already. Perhaps I should be more worried about her—she does have more than a little bit of her mother's wild side in her—but at heart, she's a good kid.

Uh, *person*.

She's nineteen now, not really a kid any longer. To me, however, she'll always be my kid. I've done a lot of stupid shit in my life, but I've never regretted having her. Not once. Even when we argued about her post-high school plans, we were both stubborn enough to finally find some common ground. In that regard, she definitely takes after me.

As I enter the code to get into the penthouse, I brace myself for the silence I know will greet me. I'm still not quite used to her being out of the house yet, but such is the life of a new empty-nester. While she's going Columbia and lives in the dorms there, she still comes home when she can, but her spring break just started, so she's probably off partying with her friends or something.

When I open the door, however, I hear laughter instead.

I pause after I step inside, letting the door close behind me with a soft click. I didn't realize how much I missed this, coming home to someone making noise and living where I live.

And then I recognize the other voice laughing. Felicia, my daughter's best friend.

I take a deep breath.

Not only is my own child a grown woman now, so is her best friend. Unlike my own daughter, however, I don't need any reminding that she's an adult. She somehow does that all by herself.

Smart, driven, quietly tenacious—Felicia works harder than most of the people working for me. I was stunned to learn that

she'd deferred the scholarship she'd been working towards for her entire high school career. Instead, she decided to take a gap year and started working at a market full time.

At the time, I'd wanted to pull her aside and get to the bottom of her decision, but it felt like an overstep.

Everything has always felt like an overstep of some sort with her. She was so young when she first started tutoring Olivia, running across the city all by herself like she was. It was all I could do not to send her home every time she was here in a cab, instead of letting her fend for herself.

And now that she's an adult?

God knows I cannot let myself overstep. I can't start down that dangerous road. It could lead to other things. It *would* lead to other things. I don't even know what things she herself wants, but I *cannot* be the one to give them to her.

"Olivia?" I call out as I make my way toward the kitchen. "I'm home!"

The laughter dies down a little and suddenly, Felicia appears from around the hallway. My heart gives a traitorous flip in my chest.

Her riot of curly dark hair has gotten long enough to bounce around her slender shoulders. The shirt she's wearing shows off inches of creamy, soft skin, drawing my eyes to her collarbones and the delicate tendons of her neck. My mouth waters at the thought of tasting her, of sliding my tongue against her delicate flesh, making her shiver and sigh in my arms.

"Hi, Mr. Harlow!" she says, her face bright enough to blind.

I sigh inwardly. It's probably better that I still haven't gotten her to call me by my first name, but I can tell she seems to think it's a joke at this point to defy my wishes. It's almost like she's teasing me, acting out to see how far she can push me before I bend her over and—

"How did the business deal go?" she asks. "Did you conquer London?"

She's standing far too close, looking up at me with wide, innocent eyes that can't hide the strange glint in her eyes.

I've known for years that she's got a crush on me. She probably thought she was being subtle, and at first I didn't think anything of it. But over time, it became more and more obvious. None of Olivia's friends, even the ones she's had much longer than Felicia, look at me the way this little girl does.

If she hadn't been such an incredible influence on my daughter, I might have done more to discourage the affection. In the end, it was too important to me that Olivia finally get the chance to have someone build her up like Felicia does. She's never been catty or cruel, even when they have the fights that all friends do sometimes. I'm certain that even if I wasn't around, Felicia would be as true a friend to her as she is now.

But then the schoolgirl grew up. She traded the dowdy school uniform for the tasteful vintage finds she and my daughter went all over the city looking for. She grew out of the occasional acne break out and into lush skin and wild hair. When she looks up at me through her long, dark lashes with those fathomless green eyes of her, the longing is still there.

It's been absolute hell, resisting her like have.

As much as I want to get my mouth on her, to sink my cock into her tight little body and give her what she's so clearly wanted from me for the past several months, I can't. She's utterly off limits. My kid's best friend? How could I do that to either of them? She's fucking nineteen—just a little less than half my age. I'm not old, and I certainly don't consider myself as such, but she's still got so much of life ahead of her.

"Can I help you?" she asks, following me to the kitchen.

"What do you want, Mr. Harlow? What can I get for you?"

Her voice is a soft purr as she draws close to me at the counter, her eyes locked with mine as she waits for my answer.

Thank god I've got a practiced poker face and can remain outwardly stoic, even though the heat radiates off her, making the scent off of her shampoo that much headier. Already I can

feel my cock strain against the fly of my trousers. I know she struggles with self-confidence in her appearance, but she's beautiful. That's the only thing she's foolish about—she doesn't recognize how gorgeous she is. I tear my eyes away from her and reach for the cannister of coffee beans on the counter.

Jet lag is the perfect excuse I need to get out of this situation, but not before I get some questions answered.

“Why are you two still here?” I ask. “Isn't it spring break? Don't you have partying to do?”

She pulls a face. “Most people don't get spring breaks, you know. I certainly don't, at least.”

That again. She isn't most people, contrary to what she may think. I want to ask her why she never followed through with that scholarship. It was a full ride and everything, and she'd worked so fucking hard for it. I was there when she opened her acceptance letter with Olivia, and I'd never seen them scream with excitement like that before. Then out of the blue, she said she was going to defer the offer to take a gap year, and got a job after graduation instead.

“Well, I'm glad you're keeping Olivia company,” I say, distracted as she leans across the wide counter to plug in the coffee grinder for me.

Her full breasts strain against the fabric of her bra, printing against her shirt lushly. The hem of the shirt rides up a little, revealing just enough skin at her little waist to make my head swim. My fingers curl around the cannister in my hands to keep themselves from reaching for her.

This is too much. *She's* too much.

“Honestly, she's keeping *me* company, not the other way around,” Felicia says as she straightens back up. “Olivia had like six offers to join people on trips but she stayed here instead because she thinks it's more relaxing. I think she's being ridiculous but ...”

Our eyes meet as I scoop out coffee beans to grind and she shrugs at me.

I can't do it, I can't avoid it any longer. "Why did you give up the scholarship, Felicia? You should be on your break now too. You could have gone to those parties together."

I have to admit, the idea that they'd be at some wild college party together makes my blood boil. My daughter in the arms of some handsy asshole? Felicia in the arms of some tiny twirp? While the anger on behalf of each of them is different, I can't help it in either case. It all makes me want to put a dent in the stainless steel front of my fucking fridge.

But still. She's young. She should be out there being young and doing foolish things while she still can, not working however many hours it is that she does at that grocery market she works at.

Felicia bites her lip and shrugs, trying to seem nonchalant. "It's personal. The experience is still valuable, you know? And the admissions department said I could defer the scholarship for a few years, so it's not like I can't still go in the future."

"What happened to pursuing library science? I thought you wanted to get a literature degree and then pursue a masters."

The noise she makes is too hollow to be a laugh. "In retrospect, that doesn't feel really practical, does it?"

"Librarians are nothing but practical. And you seemed so passionate about it—"

"Real life doesn't give a shit what I'm passionate about," she snaps.

"Felicia ..." I've never heard her speak like this. I'm not sure what to say or do as she registers what she just said. She shakes her head and steps back, her chest heaving. When I meet her eyes, I see that she's got tears beginning to gather at her lashes.

Something dark and strange kindles within me.

I want to pull her into my arms and wipe the tears away. Tell her that she shouldn't have to work so hard, whatever her reasons are. Soothe the anger and hurt on her face, show her what it would be like to be loved like she deserves.

If only I could spirit her away and do just that.

She's often gone on short trips with Olivia and I. Nothing longer than a week usually, because of their school schedules and the needs of my company. While she always seemed to enjoy them, Felicia would start getting antsy to return home after a few days. I never knew why, but now I'm beginning to wonder if it's the same thing that's keeping her from pursuing her dreams.

"Felicia," my daughter suddenly calls. She's standing in the hallway entrance, scrolling on her phone. "Stop helping my dad make coffee and come pick a movie for me to buy us tickets to."

The longing look that Felicia gives me as she starts walking back to her friend sets my blood on fire.

No longer does she seem to be pining for me like she did when she was younger. The heat in her eyes is real and stronger than ever.

I remind myself as I watch them disappear back into my daughter's room that nothing can ever come of me pursuing her like I want to. Even if her situation, as mysterious as it is to me still, fills me with rage, I can't do anything about it. She has too much life ahead of her to get wrapped up in some torrid love affair with a man over twice her age.

She's far too precious for me to rob her of her innocence like that.

Chapter 2

Felicia

After spending my afternoon with Olivia, I head back home to rest up before my opening shift. She'd invited me to come to a party at some art gallery with her this evening, but I just can't risk missing my alarms by staying out late.

Thankfully, I ate while I was out, because I know for a fact that there's nothing in the fridge. I make a mental note to pick up some basics for my father and I after work, because I know he won't.

My mind flits to Brock, wondering what it must be like to be taken care of him.

My crush never went away. Instead, it just grew into the inescapable ache I feel even now as I pull my shoes off at my apartment door. With as busy as I am, it's a wonder I even have the time to think about him. I know I probably shouldn't, he's my best friend's father, after all. At this point, I can't help it. Pining for him is as natural to me as breathing.

I didn't expect to see him today, but I'm glad I did. He looked tired from his trip, which makes me worry a little. When he asked me about my scholarship out of the blue like that ... I don't know. I wish I'd handled it better. How am I supposed to tell him, the perfect man, the present father, that my own dad is a deadbeat that can't take care of himself?

I sigh as I shrug off my jacket and pad further into my tiny apartment. I plop down on the couch and stare blankly into space. Even if I turned on the TV or listened to music, the only think I'd have in my mind's eye is Brock.

It's just—he's everything I've ever wanted in a man. He's kind and self-assured. He works incredibly hard for his company and takes pride in taking care of his staff members. Not to mention he's attractive. I feel like he hasn't aged at all since Olivia and I first became friends.

What would a life be like with a man even half as perfect as him?

I shift on the lumpy couch, wondering what it would take to get him to think of me as more than just his daughter's best friend. No one my age, or even close to it, has ever appealed to me. I don't want a man that's only half as perfect as Brock is, and no one else compares. I only want him.

In my heart, I know that it'd never work. I'm too young, too naïve, even with all of the struggles I've faced so far. Instead of going to parties and art galleries and museums, I'm working at a glorified grocery store. Instead of going to college and making something of myself, I'm making sure the bills get paid so that we don't lose this shitty little apartment.

My eyes drift shut and my dingy apartment drifts away. Just once I'd like to be able to tell Brock how I feel, show him that just because I'm not cultured or college-educated I'm just as worthy of his attention as any other woman.

Before I can slip into a daydream, the apartment door flies open.

Flustered, I jump up and see my dad stumbling into the apartment. My dad gives me a wild look as sweat beads on his brow. He slams the door shut behind him before throwing the deadbolt.

"Get a bag together, Felicia," he barks, eyes darting around the room. "Go stay with that friend of yours for the night."

"What? Dad, I have to open the store tomorrow," I protest as I watch him fumble with his jacket, searching through the pockets for something. He's always a little manic, but this is new, even for him. "What's wrong?"

"Don't go to work. They know—" He stops himself and takes a deep breath. "It's probably better if you don't know more than that."

My brow furrows. Is he in trouble again? He told me that he'd left his old job working for some minor player in organized crime. But now I'm wondering if he lied to me. Again. "What

do you mean? Dad, have you started drinking again? How much have you had?”

“I haven’t had a drop, sweetie. Now go pack a bag before—”

There’s a loud banging on the door, and then it shudders in the frame, as if whoever’s outside just kicked it hard.

My father scrambles away from the door, his face blanching white as a sheet as he steps in front of me. As if he can whatever’s come knocking from hurting me. “Felicia, do as I said, then take the fire escape out.”

My heart starts to race as I hear disgruntled shouting from the other side of the door. Before I can even think of running to my room, the old door finally flies open. The deadbolt giving way under the force of the banging sends splinters flying everywhere.

Suddenly, three massive men push their way inside, looking at my father sinisterly as they survey our little apartment with distaste.

One of them steps forward, giving my father a wicked smirk. “Did you really think you could outrun us, Ron?”

Before my father can answer, one of the other men steps forward and grabs him by the collar and slamming him into the nearest wall. My father huffs in pain, the wind clearly knocked out of him.

I’m rooted to the spot, so scared I can’t hardly think.

“Scrubs like you don’t just walk away, man. Not with what you owe the boss,” the third man says as he watches my dad fight to catch his breath. He’s not an especially small guy, but next to these thugs, he looks tiny and weak.

“We hate to have to make an example of you, and in front of your little girl, too, but goons like you gotta know what happens when they cross the wrong people.”

“W-wait!” I finally sputter. I have to do *something*. “Whatever he did, whatever he owes you, I can pay for it!”

I can’t. I’m just as broke as my dad. But they don’t know that, right?

“We’re way, way beyond a little thing like you being able to pay off his debt, sweetheart,” says the first man. He looks like he might be the leader, so I turn my full attention to him as he gives me a once over. “Pretty little girls like you ain’t good for anything but one thing.”

“That’s my daughter, you prick,” my father spits.

The man holding him slams him against the wall and he wheezes weakly as the air is pushed from his lungs again. I watch in horror as the third man pulls a knife out and thumbs the edge to check its sharpness. Dad’s eyes bulge at the sight of the blade.

“Felicia, get the fuck out of here,” he coughs.

“Stop,” I shout at the men. “I’ll do anything, just—Please don’t do this!”

The man who has my father by the collar scoffs. “Your pops owes the boss over two hundred grand, sweetheart. He’s long overdue for this visit. There’s nothing you can do.”

Before I can fall to my knees and truly start begging, the leader gives me a peculiar look, his eyebrows raised. “Well, that’s not entirely true, now that I think about it. That auction’s tonight.”

“No fucking way,” Dad protests, kicking limply at his captor. “Absolutely not—”

“What auction?” I rush out. My head is swimming. Two hundred thousand dollars? My dad is that deep in the hole? How on earth did I not know this? I don’t know what I have that I could auction off, but there has to be something I can do. And if there’s something I can do to save my dad from whatever demise these men have in mind, then I have to do it.

My dad may have been absent, even neglectful, but he’s still my dad. He still matters to me, as frustrated as he makes me so much of the time.

“Let’s just say that a sweet little thing like you could probably pay us back after a night’s work and then some,” the leader says, a strange smile twisting his face.

Oh my god.

Everything suddenly clicks into place. It's an auction, but it's not for antiques or artwork—it's for people. I don't even have to confirm the suspicion; I know that my dad's involved with criminals, and I know they deal in all sorts of dark and depraved things.

"Don't do it, Felicia," my father says, tears beginning to well eyes even as he struggles against the goon's hold.

"If you're willing to come downtown with us and negotiate, we may be able to let your old man continue being the miserable sack of shit he is," the leader explains to me, his ugly smirk making my stomach curdle. "It might be an illegal establishment, but it's very expensive. Very exclusive. No one's gonna hurt you. They have to ask for permission first."

I meet my father's eyes as my blood runs ice cold in my veins.

Like so many times before, I can feel my dreams beginning to crumble beneath my feet, but like every other time, I already know what I have to do. My father's life isn't worth me passing up the chance to save it. I straighten my back and stand tall before looking the leader in his beady eyes.

"I'll do it," I say, sounding stronger than I feel. "Take me downtown."

Chapter 3

Brock

As I make my way through the darkened club, I can't help thinking how much I'd rather be at home.

The jetlag is really kicking my ass. It might be late here, but it's the earliest hours of the morning in London. My body thinks I should be dead asleep right now, but unfortunately, that's not happening.

Warranted, it's not like I wanted to go out tonight. I'm not really one for clubs of any kind, but associates of mine wanted to celebrate the company's acquisition, so here I am, walking through a gentlemen's club ominously named The Black Door.

I'd heard of it before now, but I've never actually been here before. I didn't even know places like this even existed anymore. It's decorated like an underground Prohibition Era speakeasy, but it has the city views that the rich and famous have come to see as a mark of their status.

I can't lie and say it's not beautiful, but this sort of establishment really, *really* isn't my speed. I might have more money than I know what to do with, but blowing it all on a night at an intensely exclusive club like this one isn't what I'd spend it on. Too many charities need money before I'd even think of blowing it all here on a few expensive cocktails and a night in a back room spent with a woman I don't know.

I know what happens in places like this. I might be a bit of a homebody compared to my wealthy peers, but I'm not so out of touch to think that the women milling around, flirting with the men that have paid truly exorbitant amounts of money to be here, are here just to look pretty.

One of my associates, Phil, spots me and starts to wave, drawing my attention to him as he stands at the bar with the rest. He claps me on the shoulder as I approach.

“Brock, thank fuck you’re here. I thought you’d bail,” he says, eyeing me over his snifter of amber liquid. Cognac, knowing him. “What’ll you have? Tab’s on me tonight.”

I glance behind the bar at the dozens of bottles on display. Feeling smug, I order a rare scotch from a bottle that looks like it hasn’t even been opened. I know for a fact that it’s exceedingly rare *and* exceedingly expensive. Maybe ordering it will teach them all a lesson about them to dragging me out to party with them. I don’t even care if it’s good at this point, as long as it makes Phil’s wallet hurt a little.

Maybe I’m grumpier about all of this than I thought.

When the rocks glass slides across the polished wood surface of the bar, I pick it up and take a long drag of the scent.

Oh yeah. This definitely smells like a hellish tab. Perfection. The best part? It doesn’t taste half bad.

“So, what’s going on tonight?” I ask after taking a languid sip.

“Best night of the month,” Phil smirks at me, nodding at a stage across the room from the bar. “You won’t be disappointed.”

Just as he says that, an announcement crackles over the speakers above. The voice is that of a woman, silky smooth and low as it hums through the air. “Gentlemen, we are mere moments away from the show you’ve all been waiting for. If you would like to participate in our signature monthly auction, please make your ways to the stage.”

My brow furrows as the men inside the club erupt into cheers. An auction? Surely they don’t mean ...

Distaste roils in my gut. What else *would* they mean?

I’m not against sex work or sex workers. While it’s never had any appeal to me, the people who work in the world’s oldest profession deserve the same rights that any other worker does. The rumors I’ve heard about this place in that regard are

actually really good. The girls here are taken care of and well-protected by the people who run the establishment.

But an *auction*? Really? What the hell does that even mean?

Within moments, club members are pressing forward against the stage, milling around as they wait for the even to start. I can't help looking on with curious eyes.

Suddenly, the club lights dim even further, and the stage lights come up, illuminating a luxurious velvet curtain. A woman steps out wearing black Louboutin pumps and tasteful black gown. She's older, but still attractive, her smile wide as she holds a microphone up and begins to speak.

"Gentlemen, welcome to The Black Door's monthly Parade of Vixens," she purrs into the microphone. Her voice is the same as the one who'd made the earlier announcement. "Thank you for supporting us tonight."

Cheers and claps rise up from the crowd as she explains the rules and etiquette for the auction. Finally, she gives them a coquettish smile, looking every bit like the cat who caught the canary.

"Now, I have a very special surprise. Our first vixen has a delightful little detail that I'm sure will have you all chomping at the bit for a chance to spend some time with her."

A murmur passes through the gathered men. I barely manage to hold back my eyeroll. This all seems like a really tacky way of conveying the fact that this first auctionee can bend in weird and exciting ways or doesn't have a gag reflex.

"It's been a while since we last had one, boys. That's right, our first vixen is a virgin!"

My heart sinks. Some poor girl is about to get bid upon like she's nothing more than a fancy vase. I can only hope she's doing this because she wants to, not because she's been coerced into it. Again I remind myself that this club has a good reputation, if only to put my mind at ease.

As the curtain parts, the stage lights flicker to illuminate a figure standing on the stage. Her pale skin gleams under the

harsh light, her long legs made to look longer by a tiny skirt paired with impossibly high heels.

And that's when my eyes flicker upward to look at her face.

My vision goes red.

It's not just any virgin up there, auctioning off her first experience with sex for who knows what kind of profit.

Felicia. My guilty attraction. My secret treasure. The god damned best friend of my only daughter.

I start to shake with fury. How the hell did she end up in a place like this, wearing nothing but the tiniest, tightest little dress I've ever seen in my fucking life?

As the eager crowd erupts with shouting, I realize with horror that they're bidding on her. They're bidding on the little girl I've coveted for months. She's like a lamb being led to slaughter, and the thought that one of these bastards will take her from me makes me surge forward.

I will not let them pull her from my grasp.

Not today, not ever.

Felicia is mine, and everyone in this fucking club is going to know it by the end of this auction.

Chapter 4

Felicia

Who knew that auctioning off my virginity was going to involve signing so much paperwork?

I've signed multiple different confidentiality agreements and consent forms, not to mention a contract for payment. Not even applying for college involved this much red tape.

Then again, I don't think applying for college involves illegal activity like this does.

Just before stepping onto the stage to wait for the curtains to draw, the announcer, Stella, asks me one last time if I'm sure I want to do this. She towers over me in her fancy heels, but she's not as intimidating as I thought she'd be when I first met her. When I assure her that yes, I really do want to do this, she gives me a small smile and tells me good luck before taking her microphone from a stagehand.

Just because I *want* to do this, doesn't mean I have to particularly like it. And it doesn't mean I don't *have* to do it as well. At this point, I don't have any other options. I need the money now, and when the chance to pay it all off in one fell swoop falls into your lap, you take it.

I just wish I wasn't in this situation to begin with.

When the curtains fly open, the lights are so bright that I can't see out into the club. Nonetheless, I hear men shouting out numbers that don't make sense, laughing and ribbing each other as they bid on me.

It's just one night, I remind myself as I smile mindlessly at the crowd. One night to save my father's life. It's worth it. Virginity's just a concept, anyway. Losing it or not doesn't

mean anything about me or my moral standing. That's what Olivia always tells me when I get self-conscious about my inexperience. I find myself clinging to her words for strength as I listen to Stella run the bidding.

Relationships and intimacy are just things I never really had the chance to explore, even in high school. I was always working hard to keep my scholarship to private school, or working to make sure that my father and I kept our apartment for another month. Even when I went to the very occasional party with Olivia, I never got past trying to awkwardly flirt with anyone. It's not like I was ever interested in the guys we'd meet. Mr. Harlow—Brock—is still the only man I've ever been attracted to.

I guess my inexperience is working in my favor now, though. Who knew that men would go wild for the chance to deflower a virgin? All this time I've been a hot commodity, and I didn't even know it, but the irony isn't lost on me.

My mind floats to Brock again, and I can't ignore the way my heart sinks. I'll never be able to face him after this. What would he think if he saw me on this stage, selling what I'm selling?

Suddenly, the crowd falls silent. All I can hear is the blood rushing through my ears. It almost drowns out Stella's voice as it rings out across the room. "Going once, going twice ... Sold, to the gentleman in the blue Tom Ford!"

My heart leaps up into my throat. It's over already? How long have I been up here? What do I do now?

Breathe, Felicia. Just keep breathing.

Time seems to slow down as the curtain suddenly pulls shut once more. I didn't catch the final price, but I'm sure it's enough. The goons that had come for my father had made this sound lucrative on the way here, like it was a forgone conclusion that I'd fetch a high price.

One can only hope, I guess.

I barely register being ushered off the stage, teetering in the insane heels I borrowed from the costume room at the behest

of one of the girls who works here regularly. There are murmurs of congratulations from other women, smiles of reassurance from people whose names I don't know, a gentle pat at my jacket is placed on my shoulders. It's all a blur.

Someone guides me through a maze of hallways, and suddenly, I'm placed in a comfortably furnished room and told to wait for the winner. I stare numbly at my feet, wondering how much these shoes cost their owner.

Then I wonder how much I fetched.

Suddenly, the door slams open.

"Jesus Christ. Felicia—"

My head whips up at the familiar voice. Immediately, my face starts to burn. Even when he's furious, Mr. Harlow is devastatingly handsome as always.

"Mr. Harlow?" I breathe. "What are you doing here?"

"What am *I* doing here? What the hell are *you* doing here?" he says, his voice so strangely quiet that I can't help shivering. I'm not sure if it's with fear or desire.

"It's not what you think," I sputter. "I'm here of my own free will. I'm just waiting for—"

"For who? The winner?" he growls as he stalks over to me slowly, a dark look in his eyes as he visibly fights to keep his rage reined in.

"Y-yes," I stammer as he draws close enough for me to feel his body heat radiating through his suit.

He takes a deep breath as he looks down at me, his broad shoulders rising and falling as he gathers his thoughts. I can smell his cologne, the spicy scent of it making my nose tingle.

What he says next has me fighting for my balance.

"You're looking at him."

Chapter 5

Brock

As I lead her out of the building and into the car I ordered, I'm silent. I can't get myself to ask her why she did this, why she put herself in a situation like this. Her hand is small in mine but she doesn't let go once, not even after I slam the car door closed behind us.

"Airport," I say briskly to the driver. I don't recognize him, but I'd prefer that. Had the concierge service I'm a member of sent a driver I *do* know, they might also know Felicia. This is complicated enough without curious eyes.

Once the driver nods at me, I thank him and press the button that raises the privacy divider. After checking my phone to make sure that my assistant got started on requisitioning my a private jet. The confirmation text makes me breathe a sigh of relief.

I glance at Felicia sitting next to me, curled into herself and staring out the darkly tinted window. She doesn't ask why we're going to the airport, and I don't offer a reason.

The little minidress she's wearing is covered almost completely by her jacket—it's that tiny. I can see the goosebumps rising on the velvet soft skin of her thighs. Fire surges through my veins as I fight the urge to pull her into my lap and sooth her.

I've always had a soft spot for her, but what I'm feeling now is different from what I felt even earlier today.

Some beast lurking in the back of my mind reminds me that she's mine now. I've bought her time, paid for the pleasure of taking her virginity. Every inch of skin she's showing is mine to feel and stroke and kiss.

I should take her home. Tell her to borrow clothes from Olivia and just spend the night. I'm sure this has something to do with her fucked up home situation—what else would make her do something like this?

And yet, all I want to do is slide my hands across her skin. Warm her up with my fingers both inside and out. Make her ready for my cock so I can sink into that tight little hole and make her beg for more.

Instead, I'm doing none of that. I'm taking her to the airport, because deep down, I'm still the guy that runs away from choices when it comes to my personal life.

Deep down, I want to see where this leads.

Before I know it, we're pulling into the private airfield's loading zone. Minutes ago, I got a ping from my assistant, telling me that the private concierge service as a jet ready and waiting for me. When I look over at Felicia, her eyes are wide. She's been here before because she's gone on trips with me and my daughter over the years, but she's never been here with me and me alone.

"Are we going to the Hamptons house?" she finally asks.

"The Colorado house," I reply.

The first hint of a real smile, rather than the strange, stoic silence she's had since we left the club, takes over her face. "I love it there."

"I know," I say, just as the car gets thrown into park. I can't risk us being somewhere where I'll be interrupted. Not only could Olivia suddenly show up, but my assistant could track me down to sign something. Worse yet, I know for a fact that I've got dozens of texts from my associates, asking where I am and how my "conquest" is going. Knowing them, they'd track me down, and they'd be sure to go to the Hamptons house just to spoil ... whatever it is I'm going to do with Felicia.

As we walk through the airport, I rest my hand against her waist and pull her close. as we go up the steps into the jet. She leans into the touch. It feels almost too natural.

"Is that why you're taking me there?"

I nod, unable to speak otherwise. She's ahead of me on the stairs up to the plane, and her sumptuous ass in that tight little dress has wiped my brain of the ability to think coherently. Even securing ourselves in seats for taxi-ing to the take-off lane is a blur because all I can think about is flipping that tiny little skirt up and fucking her over the side of the plush plane seat.

Fortunately, her hand settling on top of mine as we take off breaks me out of my fantasy. Thank god something in me fired right and I was able to slip the flight attendant a rather stupidly large bill to make herself scarce. I don't know what's about to happen, but I will not tolerate an audience.

Once we're at altitude, I finally let myself speak. "I suppose you probably don't want me to ask why you were in that auction."

The last thing I want to do is sound fatherly. I don't feel fatherly toward her at all. Haven't for months and months. But I have to know why she was there and why she risked belonging to anyone else but me.

She gives me a long look, her eyes flitting over my face searchingly. "I suppose you don't want to tell me why you were there."

There's a hint of challenge in her tone, just enough of one to make me want to shut her up. With what, I'm not sure. My lips? My fingers?

Dare I think it—my cock?

Hungry heat stirs in my gut, making my cock twitch with interest. Her green-eyed gaze makes it worse as she refuses to break her eyes away from my own.

Finally, her cheeks dusted the softest pink, she looks away and out the window. I don't miss the way those god damned legs of her cross, making her dress ride up and show even more skin.

Fuck.

I shift in my seat, my cock so hard I know I can't hide it any longer. "I can't look at you in that thing," I say.

She pulls her jacket tightly around her self-consciously, looking crestfallen. “Why not?”

I can’t fucking take it any longer.

“Damn it, Felicia,” I growl. In an instant, I’m on my knees in front of her. “Do you have no idea what you look like in this dress?”

Her breath catches as I brush my fingertips against the delicate skin of her ankle. Carefully, not letting my eyes stray from hers once, I start to undo the buckle of her strappy heels. Once it’s free, I lift her ankle to my lips, nipping at this skin once, twice, before doing the same with her other ankle. Slowly, I begin to trail my lips up her leg, relishing the way she whimpers and parts her legs to make room for me.

“You sure you want this, little girl?” I rasp at her. My mouth waters as I see up her skirt. Her pussy is covered by lacy panties, and I can’t wait for the chance to unwrap her like the gift she is.

“Please,” she breathes. “Mr. Harlow, you—” I suck a little mark into the inside of her thigh and her hips buck forward as she gasps. “You bought me. I’m yours.”

“I did, didn’t I ...” I pause in my ministrations, my hands running soothing touches up and down her legs. “But you’re only mine if you want to be mine. Tell me the truth—do you really want to be mine?”

She whispers as her eyes pierce mine, “I’ve always wanted to be yours.”

I surge forward, slipping my hands up her skirt to grip her ass and pull her closer to my mouth. I groan against her when I realize it’s not panties she’s wearing but a thong.

“Did you wear this for me?” I ask as I start to pull at it. “Or did you wear it for all those assholes who thought they could have you?”

As she lifts her hips to let me take the thong off down her legs, she shakes her head. “Only ever wanted it to be you.”

“I should punish you for doing something so foolish with this tight little pussy of yours. Letting men bid on you like that.” She whines at me as I run a finger through her folds. Her arousal coats my fingertips, proof that she wants me as much as I want her. “You’re mine. No one else gets to have you like this.”

“You won, didn’t you?” she huffs impatiently. “Are you going to do something with me or not.”

Well, since she’s trying to be a brat about it ...

She squeals as I wrench her hips forward, meeting her clit with my lips. I groan as her taste begins to coat my tongue. As she starts to press her hips into my mouth, my grip around her thighs tightens.

I could die happily between her legs like this. She’s everything I’ve ever wanted and so much more.

The seconds blend into minutes as I start to suck on her clit. Her body pulls tight and her fingers thread themselves into my hair. When she pulls at the strands, arousal surges through me.

“That’s it,” I purr. “Doing so good for me, baby.”

All of a sudden, her back arches as her mouth falls open in a silent scream. I coax her through her orgasm with my tongue, relishing every shiver and sigh she gives me in return.

How I’ve denied myself this for the past few months, I’ll never understand. Now that I have her, I’m never letting her go.

Chapter 6

Felicia

It's odd, isn't it ... the way fate works?

When I auctioned my virginity off, I thought I was kissing any future I had with Brock away. Instead, he's the one who won me.

It has to be fate, right?

The way Mr. Harlow—erm, Brock—makes me feel can't be anything but that.

And yet, I can't help feeling concerned. What's going to happen when we land? I know what I *want* to happen, and I can't help thinking he wants the same thing as I do. Men don't just go down on women in private planes on the way to their vacation homes, right?

I hope so. Now that I've had him close, I don't want to let go. It's like he's the forbidden fruit and now I've finally had a taste, I can't go back. I don't know what this means for me, and I certainly don't know what this means for my friendship with Olivia. Even if Brock and I continue down this path, I can't just give her up. Not when she changed my life for the better.

But I also know that I won't be able to be around her father if I can't keep touching him. Despite their differences, Olivia and her dad are close. A real relationship between he and I could destroy not only my friendship with her, but it could destroy their family relationship too. We'd all end up heartbroken.

For the first time since stepping in to protect my father, I wonder if this is all worth it. The auction, the escape with Brock, the moment we shared on the plane—all of it.

When we land at the Denver airport, a car is waiting for us. We start the drive up the mountain to the cabin Brock keeps. I've been to a few times before, just never alone with him.

As we get into the car, I finally turn my phone back on. Soon, it's pinging with missed calls and texts, mostly from my dad. He says the funds have arrived to his old boss and he's now off the hook and back in good standing. A series of thanks and apology messages follows but I don't bother looking at any of them. While things could have turned out way worse and I'm glad I was able to save him, I'm still not sure how I feel about talking to him right now.

Not to mention that I know I'll soon be getting calls from the market, asking where I am. If I didn't have a big chunk of cash headed my way even after getting my dad's debt paid off, I might be more worried. As it stands, I have more than enough for us to make it by for a few months, if not more.

When the lights of the cabin come into view up the road, I can't help sighing in relief.

I've always loved secluded mountain hideaway. The views are stunning year-round, and even though I know it cost a ton of money, it has always felt so homey and welcoming, much more so than the Hamptons house or the penthouse in the city.

And now we have it all to ourselves.

Brock leads me through to the living room, before disappearing to his bedroom for a moment. I make my way to the window and stand by the window and gaze out at the vast, dark forests before looking up at the stars, but they're obscured by clouds. It's still dark—the trip from New York to Denver is long, but it wasn't long enough to give the sun time to come up. I'd smelled rain on the air on our way inside, but the flash of lightning that lights up the face of the mountain confirms that there's a storm on the way.

I sense Brock behind me just as the crack of thunder sounds in the distance. It's closer than I thought.

"Seems like there's a storm on the way," he says, sliding my jacket off my shoulders.

I shiver at his touch, hot despite the fact the fact that the air in the house is cool and fresh from being so high up in the mountains. I turn to face him, only to be enveloped in a thick bathrobe that smells like him as he wraps it around me.

When I look up into his eyes, they look as dark and cloudy in the dim light as the weather outside.

He makes a point to look past me out the window. "I don't know about you, but I love listening to a storm as it rolls in." His face is illuminated briefly as lightning flashes again, showing me just how hungry he is when he looks back down at me. "Now's your chance to back out of this. You still have the option run away and to go lock yourself in Olivia's room. I could even fly you back today, if you want."

Hearing her name makes me flinch. It feels like he's saying it to remind me of what's at stake. But he doesn't let me go. His arms stay wrapped around me protectively, making me feel safe in a way I've never felt before. His gray eyes blaze in the darkness.

"What if I don't want to run?" I ask him, smoothing my hands over the front of his suit. His chest is hard and warm, the expensive fabric soft against my palms.

Suddenly, he tangles his fingers in my hair and pulls, moving my head to bare my neck to him. My breath catches in my throat. "If I kiss you, little girl, I won't be able to stop, little girl."

My body arches toward him, aching for his touch, to feel his mouth on mine. Everything disappears from my mind except Brock. I stand on my toes and close my eyes. "Kiss me," I plead. "And don't stop."

His mouth crashes onto mine as he surges forward, pressing me against the floor-to-ceiling windows. At the same time, thunder rumbles deeply. The glass vibrates against my back as he pushes himself between my legs, lifting one of them so our hips can meet.

"This what you do to me," he growls, nipping at my bottom lip as he starts to desperately rip at the little dress I'd borrowed

from the club. He bucks his hips into mine and I feel how hard he's become. "Feel how hard I am? You did that, little girl."

The storm behind me picks up, the lightning and thunder coming faster, brighter, and louder. Just as my hands finally start working at the buttons of his shirt, the few lights on in the house flicker and then go out.

He smirks down at me as my fingers fumble with nerves, and takes my hands in his. "This dress has been torturing me for hours. I think it's time to get rid of it."

He helps unwrap me from his robe and steps back to run his eyes up and down my body, letting his eyes linger on my legs. He looks ravenous, like a predator ready to chase its prey.

"Turn around," he murmurs darkly.

When I do, I feel his heat instantly at my back. His hands trail against the hem of my short dress, then trail up to the back where I know the zipper is.

And then I hear a loud tearing noise.

I gasp as my dress suddenly begins to slip away, revealing my body to him. His sharp intake of breath is audible, even over the storm brewing outside.

"Fuck," he swears. "I knew you were beautiful, but ..." His hands wrap around my waist and pull me back into the warmth of his chest. "You're fucking unreal, little girl."

I sigh and lean into his touches as he slips his hands down to the apex of my thighs.

"Whose pussy is this?" he breathes into the shell of my ear.

"Yours," I whimper as he runs a finger over my clit.

"That's right. I bought this pussy. I bought getting the chance to sink into your tight little hole and fuck it like it deserves."

My head drops back onto his chest as he continues to tease my clit and slip down into my silken hot folds. He grinds his erection into my ass, softly groaning praise into my neck as he starts to fuck his fingers into me.

Abruptly, he pulls his fingers out of me. The loss makes me whine wantonly, but he just chuckles.

“Bend over, baby. Hands on the window.”

Goosebumps erupt up and down my body. I hear the sound of his belt being undone followed by a zipper lowering. My body’s so hot I feel like I’m going to start fogging the window up.

“I’m going to take this slow for you. Want to make sure it feels as good as you deserve.”

I gasp when I feel the head of his cock at my entrance, pushing into my wetness carefully. My voice catches in my throat as I fight back a scream of pleasure.

I’ve never felt so full, and he’s not even all the way inside. It’s ecstasy. Pure indulgence. He rocks his hard, hot length into me so slowly it almost hurts. I’ve wanted him for so long that I can’t hardly wait to feel the whole of him.

“P-please, Brock,” I stammer, breathless.

“‘Please’ what, little girl?” he growls. His hands are strong as they grip my hips, holding my body still.

“Please just fuck me already, Brock,” I moan, bucking against his hold weakly. “You’re driving me insane.”

The man laughs. “Needy little thing. Have it your way.”

The pace he sets is punishing. He impales me over and over again with his massive cock, relishing each and every noise I make as I take it. Heat pools low in my belly, trickling through my veins and making my entire body sing with pleasure. It feels like I’m being wound tight, just like when he had his mouth on me on the plane.

“God, you’re so fucking tight. This pussy was made for me,” he mutters, slapping his hips into mine hard and fast.

“Feels so good,” I whine, tears beginning to gather on my lashes. The bliss is so intense, I’m beginning to get overwhelmed. The tight feeling makes me feel like I’m about to snap. “I think I’m going to—”

“Gonna come on my cock? Gonna show me how good I’ve made you feel?”

I nod my head. I can’t even speak. All I can do is take it as suddenly, every nerve ending in my body explodes. My vision goes white as my orgasm overtakes me, sending me into a deep abyss of warm, syrupy pleasure.

Behind me, Brock is breathing hard. His large hands press into the flesh of my hips and ass as he suddenly gasps. He lets out a soft groan as his hips stutter and finally stop. There’s a burst of wetness between my thighs as he fills me to the brim and then some.

I relish the feeling of being marked as his. Probably more than I should.

As he pulls out of me and turns me around for a searing kiss, I wonder how long this can really last. This is the best I’ve ever felt. It feels too good to be true.

When he picks me up and carries to his bed, I push the insecurity away. The soft kisses he gives me as we settle under the covers wipe away the worry. I find myself giving in to the moment.

If this is all I’m destined to get, I’m going to make the most of it.

Chapter 7

Brock

The power still hasn't come back on several hours later. Roughing it, while not ideal or what I envisioned when I spirited Felicia away, is plenty easy because of the generator I equipped the cabin with. To conserve fuel, I take our emergency camping stove and a cast iron pan out to the deck when there's finally a break in the rain allows me to make us a decent breakfast with ingredients I had my assistant arrange with my groundskeeper to pick up just before we took off from New York.

The rain is just starting up again as I step back into the house from the deck. In my time outside, Felicia has gotten up. She's sitting at the kitchen island, wearing my bathrobe and staring out the window at the landscape.

Even with some of the most beautiful scenery around us, I'd still rather stare at her.

I still haven't asked her why she'd been in that auction last night. I know I should, but the very idea that something made her feel like she had to do something like that makes my blood boil. Did she not know she could come to me? That no matter what the trouble is, I will always be ready to help her?

Perhaps I hid my true feelings too well. If I'd made my attraction known when I first felt it a few months ago, perhaps we could have avoided this. I could have eased Olivia into the idea while letting Felicia know that she's not just young arm candy for me.

She's so much more than that.

"Good morning, baby," I greet her. Bringing the platter of eggs, bacon, and fried toast to the counter, I lean in to kiss her

on the cheek. She flushes pink, and looks up at me through her lashes shyly.

“Morning,” she smiles. “Did you sleep well?”

“Like a baby,” I say as I hand her a plate filled with breakfast. I even made sure to make her bacon extra crispy, just like I know she likes it.

“Me too.” I watch her as she starts to eat, her plush lips moving as she chews intently. She groans in pleasure and it makes my heart soar. “God, I didn’t realize how hungry I was.”

“A wild night of sex does that to you,” I smirk.

And what a wild night it was. I wasn’t expecting us to feel so compatible right off the bat, but we are. The age difference between us feels like nothing. She makes me feel two decades younger whenever she bats those dark lashes of hers up at me.

I realize it as if I’ve been struck with lightning—I love her.

I mean, I always have in some sort of way. For so long, I cared about her because my daughter did. Now it’s grown into something so much more than feeling for her as a person and a family friend.

What I’m feeling now, though? It blows every single romantic relationship I’ve ever had out of the water. She’s turned my life upside down in ways I could have never anticipated.

It’s thrilling. And fucking terrifying.

What am I going to do? She’s my daughter’s best friend. Olivia’s always been a dreamer, a free spirit who thinks for herself and loves unconditionally. How will she take this change in my relationship with Felicia?

Will she understand why I can’t give this up? Why I can’t walk away from this young woman we both love deeply in our own, different ways?

The decision is almost paralyzing, but in my heart, I know the answer already. Olivia may be stubborn like me, but unlike both her mother and I, she’s quick to forgive. Even if she doesn’t understand it now, she will eventually. This all

happened so fast that she'll get why Felicia and I didn't tell her anything.

"So what's the plan for the day," Felicia asks me as she starts dragging a piece of toast through the yolk of an egg.

"We can stay as long as you want," I tell her.

I already had the next few cleared on my calendar to get back on Eastern Standard Time after my trip, but if Felicia wants more time, I'll keep having my assistant adjust my schedule to give it to her.

I glance out the window at the rain beating against the mountainside. "The power isn't back on yet, but the generator is keeping fridge going. I wanted to take you into town to get you some fresh clothing and more groceries, but it's probably not the best idea to head down in this weather."

She frowns even as her eyes soften. "I don't need more clothes," she shrugs. "And I'm perfectly happy to eat eggs and toast if that's all we have. You always get the perfect runny egg."

I raise an eyebrow at her. "Is that a euphemism?"

Her face instantly flushes scarlet the prettiest pink as she looks away, flustered. "No! I'm being serious!"

"Sure. You're always very serious about breakfast food."

Her cheeks go from pink to red as she bites her lip, trying to think of something to say. Finally, she says, "I just mean that it's thoughtful that you know how I like my breakfast. You've always taken care of me."

"It always felt like the right thing to do," I say with a shrug. "And then suddenly I wanted to start doing more than just that. I want to give you everything you've ever dreamed of."

I picture draping her in so many jewels that she'll sparkle in the candlelight while I kiss my way down her body to spread her legs and eat her pussy. I think about what she'd look like on my arm at company events and trips. What it'd be like to wake up next to her every day for the rest of our lives, age

difference be damned. I want to make sure she never has to worry about money ever again.

To love her like she's never been loved before.

"But what are *you* dreaming about?" she asks.

Her question makes me pause. How could she not know?

"You," I say simply.

Her lips part in surprise before she presses her full lips into a hard line. "You don't really mean that ..." There's a deep sadness in her voice that wasn't there a few seconds ago.

"This doesn't have to end," I explain. "I know this won't be easy, but we have each other to get through it."

"But what about ..." She trails off, looking at her half empty plate, worry creasing her brow.

"Are you thinking about what got you into that situation last night? Or are you thinking about Olivia?"

"Both. But mostly her."

"I've thought about it a lot, too," I admit.

"She'll hate me. She won't be able to forgive me for doing something like this."

I reach forward to take her hand and squeeze it. "Never. I don't think she could ever hate you. She may hate me, though. She's had a lot more practice at that."

"She's never said anything like that to me," Felicia murmurs, squeezing my hand back. Her face is still downcast and uncertain, and I yearn to put her at ease. "Even when she was furious with you. She sometimes thinks you don't understand her, but she knows that you always want what's best for her even if you don't agree about it."

Sometimes, we all need the reminder that our kid doesn't hate us.

And sometimes we need the reminder that our friends have our back as well.

“Felicia, I don’t think you understand the difference you’ve made in her life. In both of our lives. Olivia is confident in herself because you’ve helped her learn how to be kind to herself. And you’ve made me realize that I’m capable of loving someone again, even though I thought I was long past feeling like this ever again.”

Her green eyes are shining with emotion when she finally looks up at me. I bring her hand to my lips and press a kiss to her knuckles to reassure her.

“Everything’s going to be fine. We’ll figure it out. It’s not going to be easy, but the best things in life are always worth whatever challenge they give us.”

“You really think so?” she asks, her voice quiet but strong, just like she is.

I lean forward and press a kiss to her temple. “I know so.”

Chapter 8

Felicia

The days have passed in a wonderful blur. I couldn't have asked for a more perfect getaway. It's like a dream, almost too good to be true.

But it's not. It's real.

Not even the thought of returning to our regular lives can get me down.

I watch him as he starts cracking eggs into the pan for dinner. He didn't judge me at all when I asked him to make them, even though we had the same thing for breakfast. Something about doing something so homey like breakfast makes me incredibly happy, so I can't help requesting it for dinner. He looks so domestic in his apron and gray sweats—how could I resist?

Thunder abruptly booms outside, making me jump with an undignified squeak. Brock turns and gives me a knowing smile. As the eggs begin to sizzle in the pan, he leans across the kitchen island to pull me in for a reassuring kiss.

"So much for our hike after dinner," he says, glancing out at the gathering storm.

"I don't mind," I say. "I love the storms up here."

"Just glad you're not getting bored yet."

"Never," I say teasingly. He gives me a much longer kiss, one that has me sighing. "Or at least not any time soon."

"That's more like it."

His smile warms me through even more than the fire in the fireplace on the other side of the living area. It's spring, still,

so being at such a high altitude means there's still snow clinging to the ground in some places. With the rain not popping up at random times as it likes to do, it can get even chillier in the blink of an eye. Brock jumps at any chance to build a fire so that we could cuddle in front of it.

It's been nice to pretend the outside world exists, if even just for a few days. I know it hasn't been the easiest for Brock, considering he's an influential and important man in the tech industry. Unlike me, he's been sure to keep up on his texts and emails.

For my part, I've continued to ignore my dad's texts and calls. And the ones from work.

And Olivia.

As long as I'm not thinking about it, it isn't stressful. When I do think about it, the guilt threatens to overwhelm me. I've been doing everything I can to avoid my phone. I'd much rather keep living this fantasy with Brock while I can.

Because I know I won't be able to do it much longer.

No matter how much he's reassured me, I can't help wondering if our days are numbered. Something like what we have can't possibly work outside of the little world we've made for ourselves over the past few days.

Brock suddenly slides a plate across the counter to me, before topping up my glass of orange juice to complete our breakfast for dinner.

As if sensing my unease, he tries to break through the tension. "What would you say to staying longer than a week?"

My brow furrows. "How much longer?"

"A month, two months ..." He shrugs as he takes a sip of his own orange juice. "A year? As long as we want. I don't want to give you up, Felicia. Ever."

His deep, rumbling voice makes his reassurance much more effective. The tension eases in my shoulders instantly. I hop off of my stool and round the kitchen island. He folds me into

his arms without prompting, brushing my hair out of my face to take my lips with his.

Do I want to stay longer? Could I really just let my old life fall to the wayside like that?

More importantly, could I live with myself for doing that to Olivia?

I wake up shivering.

It's early in the morning, and it seems I rolled away from Brock at some point in the middle of the night. Blearily, I sit up and throw my feet over the edge of the bed before reaching for Brock's robe. I pull it on before making my way to the bathroom in the half-light of dawn.

As soon as I shut the bathroom door behind me, I realize that the robe's pocket is vibrating. I pull it out to see a fresh stream of texts and calls from Olivia. As I start to glance through them, my heart drops to my toes.

Apparently after not hearing from me for the last few days, my dad decided to escalate things. He assumed I was hiding out with Olivia, and reached out to her. When they learned that neither of them had heard from me, they went to the green market I work for.

And when they found out that I hadn't been there for several days ... Well, it's all gone downhill from there. But it's her last text is what really has my stomach roiling.

I'm freaking out! Where are you? I'm calling our PI if I don't hear from you soon. Please answer me, we're all scared that you're not okay.

I know she's serious about it. She once had their private investigator look into a boy in our pre-calculus class that kept hitting on her during our passing periods in high school. I've never lied to her once but at this point, this is a lie of omission.

I feel like I've betrayed her.

Abruptly, reality starts to cave in on me.

I scroll through the recent messages from Olivia, then all the way back. Years of messages, laughter, and tears alike. She's never been anything but the kindest friend I could ever ask for. In return, I've been hiding out in her dad's vacation house, fucking him behind her back. Loving him without a care for her thoughts or feelings.

There's no forgiving something like that.

My stomach churns once more. I feel like I'm going to throw up because of the stress rocketing through me.

Did I really think that I could keep this secret for the rest of our lives?

I knew the moment I gave Brock my consent that I'd have to live with the consequences, but this is harder than I thought it'd be. I don't regret my choices, but I do regret that I haven't been forthcoming to the truest friend I've ever had.

Can I fix this?

Will she forgive me?

Tears stream down my cheeks as I grip the sides of the sink. I feel powerless, frozen with the weight of making a decision about what to do.

Finally, I manage to shoot Olivia a text saying that I'm safe and that I'll be home soon. My fingers shake as I tap out the words, but I manage to get it out to her so that I can tuck my phone back into the pocket of the robe.

After using the bathroom, I tiptoe back to the bedroom to see Brock still sleeping. Already he has stubble coming in on his chin, his hair falling across his forehead as his chest rises and falls in deep slumber.

I take a deep breath.

I want him so badly it feels like my heart is being crushed under the weight of the feelings. Silently, I slip on a pair of his sweats and a shirt, before slipping back out the bedroom door. Already, Olivia is trying to video call me, but I don't answer until I'm outside, standing on the deck.

The air is cool and refreshing, humid against my skin. I'm sure I'm going to look a bit unkempt for the inevitable call, but there's nothing I can do about it now. She needs to know where I've been. I can't hide it from her any longer.

As soon as I connect the video call, Olivia starts scolding me.

“Thank fucking god, it's really you. Do you have *any* idea how worried I've been? How worried your dad's been?? We were ready to call the cops, Felicia!” Her eyes look red, as if she's been crying. There are bags under her eyes that she hasn't bothered to even try covering with makeup. My best friend looks like she's gone through hell, and I'm the one that's made her feel like this.

“I know,” I say, feeling small and fragile under the weight of her disappointment already. “I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you all.”

“Where the hell are you?! Are you in the city? Drop your location and I'll come and get you. I won't trust that you're okay until I can my hands on you and pinch you for doing something so fucking stupid!”

I take a deep breath.

This is it.

“I'm not in the city, but I'm okay, I promise.”

“Are you shitting me?” she practically screams. “Where are you, Felicia?”

I bite my lip. Olivia takes my silence as reason for concern.

“Your dad said you'd done something stupid. Why won't you tell me where you are?”

I'm starting to think I don't have the guts to tell her that I'm in love with her father, that he bought my virginity at an auction held in an illegal-but-otherwise safe sex work establishment, and that he's the love of my life and can't make myself give him up. “I'm fine, I'm just out of town—”

Suddenly, I feel a warm hand on my shoulder. I jump, startled so much that I drop my phone. It falls down to the wooden

planks of the deck with a clatter. Before I can pick it up, Brock's reaching for it.

He faces the screen with a neutral look. I hear Olivia on the other side of the call, sputtering in confusion. He waits for her to be silent before giving me an even look over the top of my phone.

I can't read his expression at all, but my heart stops when he starts to speak calmly to his daughter.

"Olivia, sweetheart, we need to talk."

Chapter 9

Brock

Waking up without Felicia in the bed was jarring, to say the least.

And then when I didn't find her in the house, it went from jarring to terrifying.

It wasn't until I heard a tinny but familiar sound of my daughter floating on the air that I realized Felicia was standing outside, talking on the phone. My world tilts on its axis as I hear Felicia trying to assure my daughter that she's okay and safe.

I don't expect her to jump like she does when I put a hand on her shoulder. I only meant to let her know I was behind her. It backfires so badly she drops her phone with a squeak.

I school my features as she looks at me, even though my heart is racing just as much as hers must be.

It's now or never.

I need to talk to my daughter about what I feel for her best friend.

"Olivia, sweetheart, we need to talk."

"Dad? What the fuck? What are you—*Why* are you—"

I watch as her expression changes between shock, confusion, and fury.

Finally, she says, "I've been texting you for days. I've been worried about Felicia. She's been with you this whole time?" Her voice is almost terrifyingly calm, but the anger is evident on her face, even over the video call. Over the top of the

phone, I see Felicia shift her weight guiltily from one foot to the other.

“It’s been a hectic few days,” I say, sticking as close to the truth as I can without giving too much away too soon.

“That’s not a good enough excuse,” Olivia snaps. “Why didn’t you tell me you were with her?”

I take a deep breath. “Because we haven’t figured out how to tell you what’s happened.”

“Tell me what? What could possibly have happened that’s so important you had to ignore me??”

I reach for Felicia, enveloping her small hand in mine, before pulling her into the video call’s frame with me. I look at down at her—her eyes are glassy, her hair still unkempt with sleep—then look back to the image of my daughter on the phone screen.

“Felicia and I are together right now because we are together romantically,” I say simply.

Olivia’s mouth falls open in shock. “I’m sorry, what?”

“It’s a long story,” Felicia explains. Her voice is steady, but I can tell she’s nervous because of. “But fate just kind of ... pushed us together.”

The background of Olivia’s side of the call swivels as she suddenly falls back onto a couch I recognize as mine. At least she’s still in the penthouse. Being somewhere familiar might make this easier for her to stomach.

“You’re together. Romantically.”

“Yes,” I confirm.

“Like hell you are. Is this some kind of a joke?” she says weakly, her eyes vacant as she tries to process the revelation.

“No,” I assure her. “We didn’t mean for this to happen. But it happened. I’m in love with Felicia. Have been for a few months. She means the world to me.”

It’s not easy to convince her that there’s nothing strange or untoward between me and Felicia. As much as it hurts, she’s

concerned that I coerced her friend. I can tell it dismays Felicia to be asked if she seduced me. Olivia is thorough as she grills us, and by the time she's done, hours have passed. The sun is already peaking over the tops of the mountains, and I can hear Felicia's stomach rumbling weakly by the end.

But, by the end, my stubborn, beautiful daughter proves to be just as loyal as I thought she'd be. She tells us that it'll take a bit for her to truly warm up to the fact that her best friend and her father are together.

"Tech tycoons have dated further from their age," she quips at one point, using her sardonic sense of humor to cope. It's a big adjustment for everyone, I'll admit. But I'm so fucking proud of her for being open to this new relationship of mine.

After we end the video call, Felicia and I head back inside, and I start to make us breakfast. The power came back overnight, so I'm able to plug in the coffee maker and get it started brewing as I wait for the skillet to heat.

When I glance at Felicia, she's frowning at her phone.

"Olivia is resilient," I say. "I trust her when she says she'll work on warming up to us."

"Yeah," she says, clearly distracted.

I raise an eyebrow. "Everything okay?"

She purses her lips before putting her phone down and crossing her arms. "I'm fine. Just ... trying to decide if I should talk to my dad about us is all."

"Do you not want to tell him about us?"

"It's not that," she suddenly rushes out. "I'm not ashamed of you."

"Good. I'm not ashamed of us either."

However, when she finally tells me about the situation as we eat, I feel shame regardless. How did I go so long without realizing how bad her home life was? *Is??* Her father had them so far into debt that she had to resort to the auction. All this time, I knew there was something up, but I never knew what.

Now that I know, I wonder if I'm really the man for her. How could I care so much about her and miss something like this?

It's no wonder she deferred her scholarship. It's no wonder she's worked so much for someone her age. And the scholarship to the private school ... Everything.

Finally, I tell her, "You don't have to call your father if you don't want to. We've already told Olivia. We can be done for the day."

She sighs and nods at me, unshed tears clinging to her lashes as I pull her into my arms.

"I need you to know, however, that I do want to talk to him at some point."

Felicia pulls her head back, looking at me with wide eyes. "Why?"

"Come with me," I say, leading her to back through the house to the bedroom.

I sit her on the bed and go to the dresser, rummaging in the top drawer until I finally find the little velvet box. I hold it in my hands carefully as I kneel in front of her. When she sees it, the unshed tears start to trickly down her cheeks.

I don't let myself waver. I need to do this. I need to show her I'm serious about us, that I want to prove that I'm worthy of her, even when I've failed her.

I want to make sure she'll never want for anything again.

"Brock, what are you—"

"Felicia," I say softly. "My mother died shortly after I got divorced. She told me that if I was patient, I'd find love again, and she gave me her engagement ring, telling me to give it to the love of my life when I met her."

She chokes back a sob as I open the box to reveal a ring, elegant in its simplicity, with nothing but a white gold band and a flawless diamond.

"I didn't think I'd ever get to say that she was right," I continue. "I love you. I don't want to ever be parted from you."

I want to call your father and tell him that he doesn't get to treat you that way, because you belong to me. You don't exist to make sure he has a roof over his head."

I take the ring from the box and slip it onto her finger as she sniffs, her bottom lip quivering with emotion.

"Felicia, will you marry me?"

She bursts forward, throwing herself into my arms. Her lips meet mine as she knocks me back onto the soft carpet. Her kiss is heated and fervent, and it takes my breath away as she pulls at my shirt to hold me as close to her as she can.

"Yes," she pants. "I'll marry you. Of course I'll marry you."

I smile against her lips. "Really getting my money's worth out of that successful bidding. I love you."

The knowing smile she gives me as she kisses me again makes everything we've gone through to get to this point worth it.

"I love you, too."

Epilogue

Felicia

Ten years later ...

As I end the call with my best friend, finalizing the details of the baby shower we're having next weekend, I marvel once again at what my life has become.

Not only is Olivia my best friend, she's also my stepdaughter. While I've never thought of her that way, she insists on teasing me about it every once in a while. I smirk to myself about the joke she made over the phone as I head toward her old bedroom, where my children—her half-sisters, technically—now share the space.

Six-year-old Clara is messing around with the makeup kit Olivia gave her for her last birthday, and her eyeshadow technique is surprisingly good. She's definitely got the flare, but only because Liv showed her how to do it. She may be a lawyer “doing that Elle Woods thing” now, but she never lost her passion for makeup artistry.

Across the room, eight-year-old Chantal has her nose buried in a book, only looking up after I say her name twice.

“Are we going to the library?” she asks eagerly, noticing I'm wearing my usual Sunday work costume.

When I tell my daughters yes, they both dance around excitedly, scrambling to find their shoes and book bags. I can't help but smile, pleased they love coming to work with me.

Right after our honeymoon ten years ago, Brock drove me to the admissions department of the college I'd deferred a scholarship from. He explained to me that he wanted me to still have the chance to pursue my dreams, even if I was

married to him. I didn't have to work, he said, but he also mentioned that I didn't seem like the kind of woman who just wanted to be arm candy for her rich husband.

He was right. With his encouragement and support, I completed my undergraduate degree in literature, and then received funds from the college to get a master's degree in library science. Even though I was pregnant at certain points in time, I managed to graduate with honors.

I couldn't have done it without Brock's support, or Olivia's help. Because of them, I now work at the public library, specializing in children's literature. And I love every second of it.

Over the years, I've really grown the department. I've turned the children's wing into a wonderland for kids of all ages. It's got books for every child's interests, and I've made sure to design nooks for the adults who bring them here to sit in as they watch their kids develop a love for reading.

Some days can be hard, but Sundays are far and away my favorite. It's the day I dress up in a costume to match a storybook and read it to the children who come and sit in the reading circle I set up. With my girls in tow, I make my way to the library, excited for what the day has in store.

Without Brock's love and support, I wouldn't be doing this every week. He's truly shown me what it's like to show up for one's children, especially because that's something I never had growing up.

Ever since the fateful night of the auction, my father has been fighting tooth and nail to make up for his mistakes. After Brock and I told him we were getting married, it took him some time to warm up to the idea. It took even longer for Brock to warm up to him right back.

Now, he attends meetings for his alcoholism and gambling addictions. He knows recovery is a long road that has its ups and downs, but he's fighting for himself. He also volunteers at community centers, helping men who've gotten involved in the wrong crowds get out of them.

I never thought I'd say it, but I'm proud of him and the work he's doing for both himself and others. While it's a shame it took me selling off my virginity at an auction to pay off his debt to get him to see that his hard living wasn't sustainable, I'm glad that he finally saw it.

Not to mention that it's worth maintaining a relationship with him just to see his eyes light up when he sees his granddaughters. I can see he wants to stay on the straight and narrow for them. He's working hard to keep my trust, along with Brock's respect. And he's doing so well at it.

I take my daughters' hands as we walk up the steps to the library. The girls are soon running ahead of me up to the main doors, greeting the person at the information desk politely as they wait for me to catch up. I sigh deeply as I finally crest the stairs. You'd think I'd be used to getting a little out of breath because of pregnancy after two kids, but alas, every pregnancy is both different and the same. This specific baby loves to tire me out, and I'm sure they'll do the same once they're born.

One of the regulars compliments my witch costume as I walk to the reading circle and sit down in the rocking chair at the front of it. After a few minutes and a lot of excited squeals, I get started on reading the book I've picked out for the day—a cute story about a little witch and the adventure she goes on with her cat.

By the end, the kids, mine included, are all getting antsy, but they all clap enthusiastically and ask for another story almost immediately.

“You'll have to come next week for the next story,” I smile at them.

As soon as I dismiss the children, I look up to see that my husband, Brock, is standing at the back of the reading circle, looking decadent in his well-tailored suit. He's got that sly, playful look I know so well and love so much.

“Yes, sir?” I smirk, standing carefully. “Can I help you?”

His lips curl in a mischievous grin and he slips a hand around my waist and pulls me in for a kiss. Without a word, he pulls

me toward the hallway my office is down and closes the door behind him before adjusting the shades to block the view from my window out to the hallway.

I raise an eyebrow at him as he approaches.

“My assistant’s watching the girls, don’t worry,” he assures me.

“Oh?” I say to him, running a hand up the front of his suit to adjust his tie. “Are you paying her overtime to work on a Sunday?” I pull gently on his tie, making him step between my legs as I sit on my desk.

“Triple time, actually,” he says, pulling me close as he meets my lips with his own.

He yanks me close, our bodies colliding deliciously. I gasp, never getting tired of the hard feel of him against me. He has strands of silver at his temples now, plus a few more crinkles around his eyes, but to me, he’s never looked better.

I sigh and pretend to push at his chest. “Paying your assistant to babysit while you romance me in my own office?”

I try not to giggle as he grips me tighter, his cock pulsing against my dress’s skirt. Ever since I donned the first costume to make the weeks of a few kids feel a little more special, he’s gotten more and more wild at the sight of me in the different outfits and gowns. I know for a fact that he particularly loves this witch costume because of the striped thigh-high stockings I wear with it, complete with a little garter to hold them up and everything.

In fact, he’s already reaching down, gathering my long skirt in his hands and pulling it up to reveal the stockings.

I wriggle in his arms, my fingers tightening their grip on his suit as my panties dampen with his touches.

“You did the same when you asked Liv to babysit a few Saturdays ago so you could interrupt my meeting with the London office,” he tells me, his grin making his eyes glint mischievously. “I’m just paying back the favor Mrs. Harlow. Take you right here on your desk.” He draws my hand down to

his bulge. “Show you what it’s like to get fucked when you’re trying to work.”

I finally break down into giggles, in spite of how hot this all is. The laugh turns into a gasp when he gets his fingers between my legs and plunges them inside me. He pushes deeper with a groan, already eager to move past the foreplay.

“Still as tight and wet as the first time I made you mine,” he says, leaning down to kiss me.

I melt against him, my hips moving as he slides his fingers in and out of my body. His erection strains against his suit pants, desperate for relief. I drag him toward me until I can feel the outline of his hardness at my center.

Never once breaking his searing kiss, he reaches behind me to sweep on top of my desk aside. He gently lays me out on the cleared surface, throwing my skirt up and dropping between my legs to nuzzle me through my panties.

“You’re dripping wet for me, baby,” he says. “Admit it, you love this.”

“Of course I love it,” I say, gasping as he shoves my panties aside and swipes his tongue across my swollen clit. I slap my hand over my mouth to stifle a scream. I swear, pregnancy makes me more sensitive, but I’ll never complain about it. I can only hope the soothing chamber music we keep piped into the main library covers the sounds that Brock keeps dragging out of me.

“Holy fuck,” he breathes. “You look so good like this. Spread out for me, swollen with my child. I’ll never get enough of you.”

The first orgasm wracks through me, making me grab at his hair. He keeps going, driving me over the edge until I clamp my legs around his head and have to bite down on my costume’s sleeve to help me hold in the moans.

Even as I’m still pulsing, Brock stands and hurries to get his pants down far enough for his cock to spring free. Pulling my hips forward so that my ass is at the very edge of my desk, he

wraps my legs around his waist and plunges deep inside me without any warning.

With gasping groans, he pumps hard and fast until he comes, growling against my throat and collapsing against my chest, taking care to keep his weight off my belly.

“I love fucking you at work,” he sighs, kissing the side of my neck.

“Don’t get too used to it,” I warn. “We have to keep it special, you know?”

He chuckles, his breath tickling my ear. “Of course,” he says. “Plus we have to make sure we keep the costumes in good condition.”

After a few minutes of catching our breath after our fast and furious romp, Brock straightens up and pulls my skirts back down over my stockinged legs. He helps me sit up and strokes his finger down my jaw.

“I love you so much.”

If he didn’t tell me that every day I might worry about his serious tone, but I feel exactly the same way. What we have is special. It feels infinite in a way I will never be able to describe.

I wrap my arms around his neck, happy and grateful that even after ten years we still want each other as much as when we first got together. I know he was worried that I’d feel like he was keeping me from being young and wild and free. I worried that he’d grow tired of me since he was so much more mature and sophisticated.

But we’ve only grown closer over time, finding new interests to share while raising our wonderful daughters. And now we have a third one on the way.

More importantly, he’s going to be a grandfather. He doesn’t know it yet, but Liv’s pregnant. She told me on the phone earlier. Even though I’m only twenty-nine, I’m ready to rock being a step-grandma.

Neither of us can wait for that adventure to begin.

“So, no buyer’s remorse?” I tease as I straighten his tie for real this time.

“Best money I ever spent,” he tells me, making sure we both look presentable before he takes my hand and leads me to the door. “Now let’s go get our girls and head home for dinner, shall we?”

I nod, ready to return home and cuddle up on the couch with he and the girls for a relaxing evening. Sunday afternoons are slow, so I’m sure I can leave early without causing any problems for the other library staff members. “What’s the special occasion?”

He kisses me and smiles. “Every damn day with you is a special occasion, baby.”

~The End

Up Next...



Molly

Navigating my freshman year at Capon Valley High was daunting, especially with my brother's shadow looming. He was the golden boy and liked by everyone.

My bestie moved away and I felt alone. My family suggested I join clubs so I joined the cheer squad in the hopes of making friends. It didn't turn out the way I had hoped.

I was tormented until my hero stepped up to defend me. He was like a god. From the first time he saved me, I had a crush that never went away. The only problem... He's my brother's best friend and completely off-limits.

To get over my unrequited crush, I went on a match-making getaway weekend. Boy did that weekend does not go as planned.

Forbidden Match shows how a forbidden love can lead to happiness despite everything.

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Free Book

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The Kingpin's Obsession

Alice

I saw something I shouldn't have, and my life is in danger.

The police won't listen, and I have no choice but to seek help at Benedetti's, a bar known for its criminal clientele. But I'm barely inside the door before a dark eyed devil drags me back out and demands to know why I'm there. I shouldn't trust him, but I don't have a choice when he's the only one willing to help me.

Too late, I learn who he really is, and now I'm left to wonder... when this is all over, will he save my life only to break my heart?

About the Author

Cassi lives to write brazen OTT, insta-love, short stories, about possessive alphas and the women they love. Stories that will leave you satisfied, and maybe blushing a little. Cassi loves pedicures, being pampered in any way possible, her darling golden Princess, amazing coffee, and traveling too anywhere warm.



Cassi H♥rt