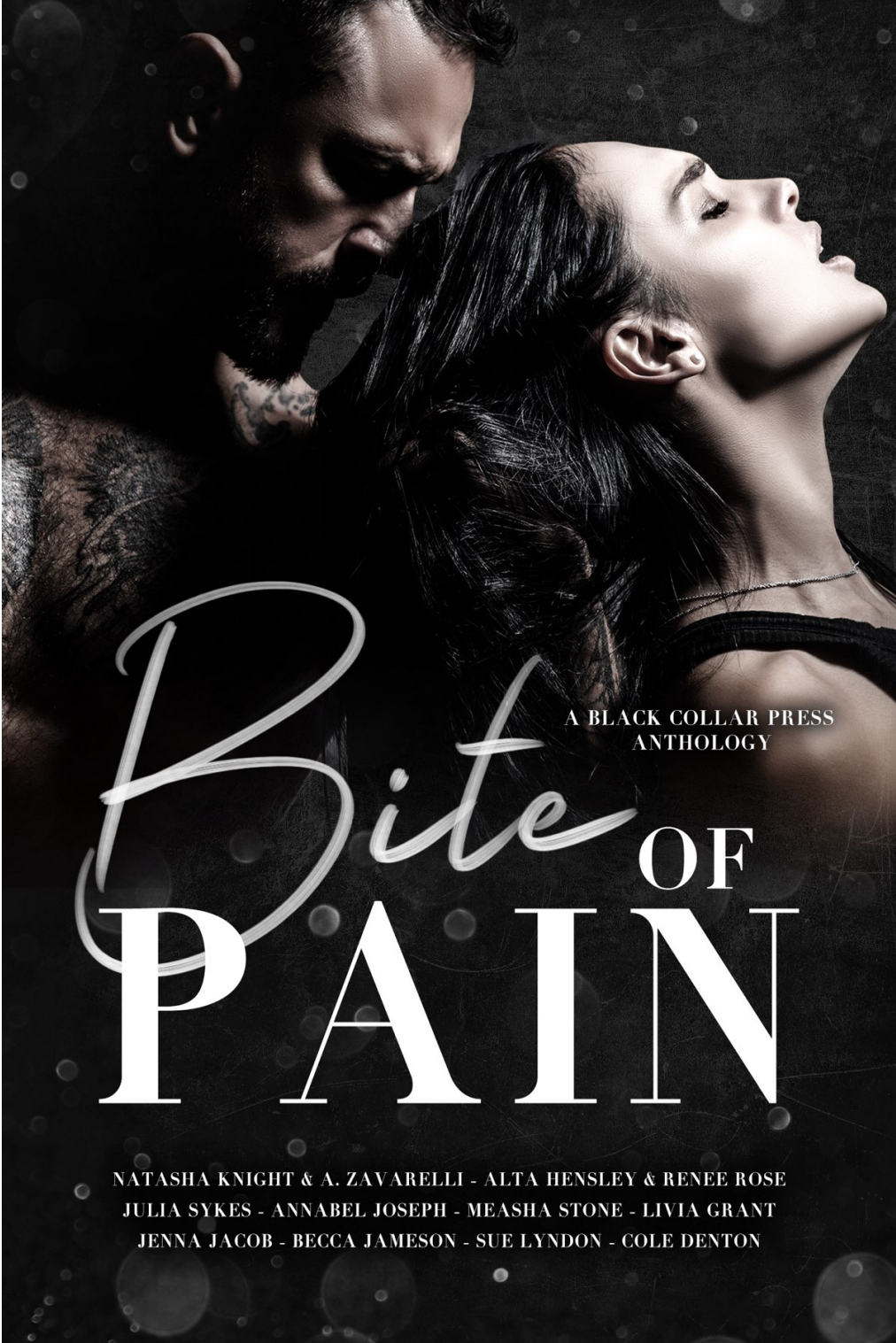




A BLACK COLLAR PRESS
ANTHOLOGY

Bite OF
PAIN

NATASHA KNIGHT & A. ZAVARELLI - ALTA HENSLEY & RENEE ROSE
JULIA SYKES - ANNABEL JOSEPH - MEASHA STONE - LIVIA GRANT
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Bite of Pain

Alta Hensley, Renee Rose, Natasha Knight,
A. Zavarelli, Annabel Joseph, Becca Jameson,
Measha Stone, Livia Grant, Cole Denton,
Jenna Jacob, Sue Lyndon, Julia Sykes

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Publisher's Note: The *Bite of Pain* Anthology contains brand new material never published before. It is the perfect chance to

revisit series you already love and also find new authors you will enjoy reading.

TASTE OF SIN



By

Renee Rose & Alta Hensley

Bless me father, for I have sinned.

Instead of rescuing the damsel in distress, I struck a bargain
with her.

I won't make her reimburse me for smashing into my car if
she gives herself to me for three nights at Sins, the BDSM club
where she works.

She'll be mine to tie up. Mine to kiss.

Mine to give a *taste of sin*.

CHAPTER 1



TAYLOR

*M*y feet are killing me, my ears ring, and I'm dying of thirst.

Pretty normal after a seven-hour cocktail shift at Sins.

I wince as I walk out to my car in the dark parking lot, balancing two plastic cups of ice water in one hand, along with my purse and keys. I can't believe I forgot my water bottle—not that there's ever a free moment to drink it.

I'm in a pair of high heeled stilettos. Yeah, they bring the tips in, but damn, do they hurt!

You would think for someone pursuing an education in physical therapy I would take better care of my body. But then I wouldn't bring in the big bucks. And Lord knows, I need the money. I'm still paying down the loans from my undergraduate education, living on ramen and mac and cheese. If I didn't have the job at Sins to supplement my student loans, I wouldn't be able to afford the gas in my car.

The club closed an hour ago, but there is still a smattering of cars in the parking lot, including a slick BMW that can't possibly belong to any of my co-workers.

Must be one of the customer's then.

Probably mafia-owned.

My lips quirk as I think about the hundred dollar tip in my pocket from one of them.

Marco. He and his brother Leo come in here with different women on their arms every freaking weekend.

Tonight he had the nerve to ask me if I'm ever tempted to come on my nights off.

"Never."

He flashed that cocky smile. "Never, ever?"

"No," I told him. "I don't like pain."

"Do you like pleasure, angel?" He arched a sexy brow.

I roll my eyes as I open my car door. I would've told him I'm not his angel, except I like his money way too much to draw that line in the sand.

I groan when I drop to the driver's seat and take the weight off my feet. I set the water cups down on the center console and lean down to unbuckle the ankle straps on my heels. "Ow, ow, ow," I mutter. I can't stand another minute with these torture devices affixed to my poor throbbing feet.

As soon as I get them off, I start my old Honda Accord and back out.

When I turn to drive out of the lot, one of the water cups careens off the center console and dumps ice and liquid into my lap.

"Ack!" I accidentally twist the wheel when I grab for it and try to shake the ice from my already-soaked dress. One of my heels tumbles under the brake pedal.

Fuck.

I try to kick it out as the second cup of water tumbles all over me.

I reach down to grab the shoe, but my foot jams onto the gas pedal and the car lurches forward.

I plow straight into a parked car.

I scream. There's a sickening crunch of metal and plastic, and I still can't get the shoe out from under the brake! The engine revs as I continue to shove against—oh God.

It's the BMW. Of course it is.

Fuck, fuck, fuck!

I kick the shoe out and press the brake, gripping the steering wheel so hard my knuckles crack.

What do I do? I'm in a total panic. There's no logic running through my brain at all.

Or very little, anyway.

I look around quickly for the crowd of observers, but no one's here.

That's when I make the dumbest mistake of my life.

I throw the car in reverse and hit the gas. After a few excruciating moments of engine grinding and breaking parts, my car pulls free of the wreckage.

I straighten the wheel and flatten the accelerator pedal to the floor.

There's a screech of rubber on asphalt as I tear out of there.

Away from the scene of the crime.

Straight toward consequences I'm not even remotely equipped to face.



MARCO

What. *The fuck?*

I reach for a piece, but I'm not wearing one.

Weapons aren't allowed on premises at Sins.

"What is it?" Leo's instantly at my side, moving his body protectively in front of his date for the evening.

"Some asshole just smashed into my car."

My brand new BMW.

"Did you get a look at him?"

The club bouncer beside us clears his throat.

"What?" I snap. "Do you know who that was?"

He rubs his nose, looking uncomfortable. "I, uh, think it was just an accident."

I fist his shirt and push him back against the wall, even though he's bigger and brawnier than I am. "Who was it?" I snarl. "What do you know?"

He doesn't resist, because he knows I'm fucking dangerous. He lifts his hands in surrender. "It was a *her*, not a *him*."

I loosen my grip.

Maybe it was just an accident.

Some drunken club-goer?

She's still going to have to answer to me.

“Do you know her?” I demand.

“What are you going to do?”

Okay, he definitely knows her.

“I don’t hurt women,” I assure him, then glance over my shoulder where our dates for the night are standing, looking glassy-eyed and thoroughly pleased. “Except when they like it.”

“It was Taylor,” the bouncer admits. “The cocktail waitress?”

I release him, completely relaxed now.

Taylor. The adorable little blonde who looks far too innocent and wholesome to work here.

“Text me her address.”

“What are you going to do?”

I glance in the direction she sped off.

“Tomorrow, I’m going to pay her a little visit.”

CHAPTER 2



TAYLOR

The next morning I pace through my one-room apartment, gnawing on the inside of my cheek.

What I did last night was unbelievably stupid.

Not only did I break the law, but the car I hit is probably owned by someone dangerous. They only have to ask the owner of Sins, Jack Lindstrom, to pull the security video feed from the parking lot last night to get my name and address.

Which means, instead of facing a possible ticket and jacked up insurance rates, I'm probably now going to be wearing cement shoes in Lake Michigan.

I wipe the clammy sweat from my palms on my pajama shorts.

I should preemptively call Jack and confess. Maybe he can tell me who owns the car and I can try to make things right. That's what a sane person would do.

Of course, a sane person wouldn't have sped away like a coward.

That's where I really screwed myself.

Okay, I need to call Jack right away. It's the only answer. I hunt down my phone, which is still in my purse from last

night. Of course, it's dead. When I plug it in, it dings showing fourteen text messages. The knot in my stomach tightens.

Before I can open the messages to read them, a heavy pounding sounds on my door.

The tight band around my temples cinches, sending blinding pain between my eyes.

This is it. I'm a dead woman.

For one stupid moment, I consider climbing through the window and down the fire escape, but that would be making the same choice I did last night. That kind of cowardice is what got me into this in the first place. No, I need to just face this head on.

I walk to the door, square my shoulders, and throw it open, pretending I'm not terrified of what I will find on the other side.

My belly flips at what I see, but not entirely from fear. Because the man on the other side of the door is my heavy tipper.

Marco.

The very hot mafia player who was hitting on me last night. He leans against the doorframe in a deceptively casual pose, his hands shoved in the pockets of his thousand dollar Italian suit pants.

"Hello, Taylor." There's a smirk on his face and a *Gotcha* look that makes my tummy flutter even more. Heat floods between my legs—even more when he takes a slow perusal of my body.

I realize I answered the door in nothing more than a flimsy, spaghetti strap bralette and thin pajama shorts. My nipples

bead up under the top.

“You don’t look surprised to see me.”

“Marco, I’m so sorry. I panicked last night after I hit your car. But I was about to try to make it right this morning, I swear.”

He arches a brow. “Were you, Angel?”

“I swear,” I repeat, backing up as he advances through my threshold and shuts the door.

He makes a tsking sound. “Leaving the scene of an accident is a crime, Taylor.”

“Are you going to turn me in?” I hope my voice sounds more flirtatious than dry.

We both know he’s not going to call the police.

He’s mafia. They handle their problems personally. Usually with violence, not that I’ve ever seen that from him.

His lips quirk. “Nah, I’m not here to turn you in. I’m here to give you a spanking.”

I blink, trying to figure out if he means metaphorically or literally.

For some reason, my body takes him at his word and my ass clenches. I grow hot and tingly everywhere. A slow pulse starts up between my legs.

As if he somehow realizes the effect of his words on me, his smirk grows. He advances another step, invading my personal space. His hand settles lightly on my waist. I have to work to lift my eyes and meet his gaze.

Very gently, without insisting, he tugs me forward until my body is flush against his. He brings a knuckle under my

chin and lifts my face even more. “Are you ready for your punishment?”

I attempt to swallow and fail. “M-my insurance will cover it.”

His grin widens. He has one dimple on his left that melts my panties. “I saw your car out there, angel, and I see the size of your apartment. I’m guessing you can’t afford the insurance hike.”

My heartbeat is wild and irregular. I think I know where he’s going with this and I’m not sure I mind.

“What are you suggesting?” I attempt to keep the wobble out of my voice.

“I’m not suggesting anything.” His hand drifts from my waist southward. His tone holds notes of black velvet and Scotch. “I’m here to take you to task for leaving without making things right.” His palm lightly molds around the curve of my ass. “And then we’re going to talk about *how* you’re going to square things up with me.” My core clenches.

His fingers close and he squeezes my ass.

“Do I have a choice here?”

Why does my voice sound so husky?

“Do you *want* a choice?”

I stare up at him, trying to decode that reply. It’s hard when he’s kneading and massaging my butt. I’m not wearing panties under the pajama shorts, and my own arousal is leaking onto my thighs.

“Or is it better to pretend you don’t?” He shifts his knuckles from under my chin to brushing across my cheek.

I'm still not sure what he means. But he said pretend. So that means I *do* actually have a choice. Right?

"I've seen you watching the scenes at Sins. You say it's not for you, but your expression tells me something different."

I'm trembling now. Not from fear.

From anticipation.

Arousal.

The possibility of something dark and dirty happening between us.

I'm also stunned to hear he's watched me. Especially considering he always has a gorgeous woman on his arm.

"What about your girlfriend?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "You know I don't have a girlfriend."

He's right. I do know. Because he never brings the same woman to Sins twice.

"Enough stalling." He walks me backward, toward my bed. "It's time for your punishment."

When my thighs hit the bed, he stops. Holding my gaze, he slowly pulls the bralette over my head.

"What are you going to do?" The question comes out as little more than a whisper.

"I told you what I was going to do." His response is a warm rumble. More like a purr.

I catch his hand when his thumb tucks into the waistband of my shorts and he stops. He doesn't say anything, just waits.

He just proved my consent matters. He's waiting for me to decide.

And that's when I throw reason to the wind.

I release his hand. "Okay."

CHAPTER 3



MARCO

Oh damn.

My dick is so hard right now at the prospect of spanking Taylor.

She's beyond adorable in her miniscule pajamas—the ones presently dropping to the floor at our feet.

Her body is small and she's fit, like a lean athlete. I think she told me once she's studying to become a physical therapist.

“You have a beautiful body, Taylor.”

She steadies herself as she steps out of her shorts by catching my forearms, and I feel the tremble in her limbs.

I suddenly get the idea she's not all that experienced. Not like a virgin, but more like she hasn't had many partners.

She doesn't play the field.

That thought produces a surge of protectiveness in me. This may be punishment, but I'm going to make damn sure it's good for Taylor.

Show her what she's been missing out on at Sins.

“Come here, pretty girl.” I sit on the bed and tug her hips until she stands between my legs. “Were you drinking last

night? Is that why you ran?”

She covers her breasts with her hands, and I allow it for now.

“No,” she groans. “I ran because I was stupid and panicked. And the accident happened because I spilled my water and my shoe got caught under the brake pedal and then my foot accidentally hit the gas. It was a total calamity.”

I nod, rubbing her back and tracing soothing circles on her skin. She’s actually...cute. Sexy as fuck, but she also has this endearing innocence to her. It’s clear she simply panicked and didn’t act out maliciously at all.

Her big eyes connect with mine. “Are you really going to sp—spank me? Like... over your knee?”

I reach behind her and pinch her pretty tight ass. “What do you think?”

She gasps.

Her skin is warm against my thigh and I breathe her in, letting the scent of her shampoo and perfume wash over me. Her pussy is pink and bare, and I love that I don’t have to avoid staring at it.

I’m a fucking goner.

I settle a hand on her lower back and tilt her forward over my lap.

“Is this your first spanking?” I ask.

She nods.

I pat her ass and she instantly jerks forward. I reach around her tense body and pinch her nipple, and I’m rewarded with

her sharp intake of breath. “You need to be a good girl and take it.”

I give her five hard swats right off the bat. She cries out and then goes still, like I’ve effectively rendered her motionless. It’s a sight to behold, her skin pinkening, her breast still protruding, and her body bending to my will.

My hand rubs over her, soothing her, teasing her, making her believe the pain will all go away. I’m a bastard, because I know the next smack will sting more.

“Oh, god,” she cries.

I spank her harder.

“Marco, please, I’m sor—”

I cut her off with a quick smack to her ass, and then another. I spank her harder this time, making a point to cover the entire bottom half of her ass cheeks.

I’m hard as fuck, my cock pressing against my pants—so fucking hard, it hurts. I want to do more than spank her. I want to thrust deep inside her pussy and just pound her until she screams, but when I have a mission, I stick to it.

She whimpers, but I know the tears will be coming soon. I can’t wait to see them. I want to see her release those tears, the ones she is trying so hard to hide from me.

I rub her ass and then deliver another, harder spank, again and again.

Her noises are soft, but when I run my fingers down the seam of her ass and find her wet pussy, she not only moans, she also releases a sob at the same time. The breath releases from her lungs in a whoosh.

She's so fucking wet, and I know she wants this. Her body can't hide the fact from me. I rub her clit and then press a finger into her pussy.

"Oh, fuck," she groans.

Her pussy is tight, and I find a spot that makes her cry out again, only louder this time.

"Oh my god," she moans. Her body shudders.

"You're going to be a good girl now, aren't you, Taylor?"

"Yes. Yes, I'll be a good girl." Her voice is raw.

I pump my finger in and out of her, driving her closer and closer to the edge. "*My good girl. You are only going to be good for me.*"

"Yes."

As much as I want to fuck her, I need to stick to my plan. She's going to learn a lesson, a lesson that will make her see how fucking sexy she is and that she should never resist her true desires.

I won't let her refuse them again.

And after this, I won't let her fuck anyone else again.

I'll make sure she's mine.

I've never been possessive like this before.

And never had a girl get under my skin in such a short amount of time, in such a powerful way. Not by simply spanking her ass. There's something about Taylor. Maybe it's knowing she doesn't belong in my world. She doesn't even belong in the world of Sins. And yet, that's where I found her. An innocent, ripe for my corruption.

Something shiny in a world of darkness.

And I don't want to tarnish her shine. I just want her to discover what drew her to Sins. What drew her to me—because I know she's turned on by me. She flirts with me. I'm sure she told herself it was for tips, but her nipples got hard every time I held her gaze for longer than I should.

The fact that I finally have her where I've wanted her for the last six months? Fuck me, this girl has me by the dick right now.

I pull her up to standing, back between my legs where she was before the spanking.

“Oh, god,” she cries out, and it's the cutest fucking thing I've ever seen.

She collapses forward, her face buried in my shirt.

She's breathing hard, her body full of tension, but she's fully relaxed, too. I stroke her hair and then run my hand down her back.

“Are you okay?” I ask.

She nods against me and stays where she is.

Naked.

Vulnerable.

Submissive.

I smell her arousal, and I know I'm leaving her on edge. But I have a plan. I have to wait.

“That was your punishment for leaving last night without making things right with me,” I say as I kiss the top of her head. “And now we have to discuss the repair of both our cars.”

She pulls away, her face flushed, her eyes dilated. “Okay.” She pushes her hair from her face.

“I will cover the cost. We don’t need to involve the insurance. And in exchange, I want you for a night at Sins. For one night, you will be mine. You’ll be protected by the rules of the club, of course, but other than that, you are to do whatever I ask.”

“I—I can’t,” she says. “I have work every night and—”

“I’ll take care of that.” I slide my hand from her back to her neck, my thumb tracing circles on her skin. “You’ll have the time off. And don’t worry about the money, I’ll pay you. A lot. More than you’d make.” I smile at her horrified expression. “I’m not asking you to do anything you don’t want to do, angel. You’re free to say no. But I know you won’t. And every night we play, you could say no... but I also know you won’t.”

I squeeze her heated ass and move her to the side, ignoring my cock that is demanding to be inside her. I’ve never been a patient man, but right now, I’m going to be.

“This is crazy,” she whispers.

The look of panic and confusion in her eyes makes me hard. I want to fuck her, but this is more important. I need her to understand that.

“Tell me you want me to spank you again,” I say. “That you want more. That you want to see what Sins is truly all about.”

She shakes her head, but her eyes are full of lust.

I grab her chin and tip it up. “Tell me.”

I lean toward her, my mouth inches from hers.

“Maybe... yes. I want you to spank me again. I want more.” Her voice is raspy and honest, and it makes me throb for her.

I grip her hair and tug her head back, giving me an amazing view of her breasts. I want to suck on them, bite them, but I need to leave.

I release her and then turn and head for the door with her eyes burning into my back. I open the door and stare back at her. She’s so fucking hot right now—naked and punished—and I want her so fucking bad.

“Meet me at Sins tonight at eight,” I say. “I’ll be waiting for you.”

She swallows.

“Don’t worry—I promise I’ll make it good for you.”

She licks her lips, her gaze dropping to my tented pants.

Fuck.

But no, I’m going to make her wait for it. I need to ensure she doesn’t chicken out tonight.

“I know you’ve got an ache between those sweet thighs right now, angel,” I tell her. “Show up tonight like a good girl, and I’ll take good care of you.”

CHAPTER 4



TAYLOR

For a moment after Marco leaves, I just stand naked in my living room, trembling.

What just happened?

That was crazy.

Seriously.

Insane.

I go to the bathroom and twist to look at my heated, tingling ass in the mirror. Marco's handprints are still all over my lower cheeks.

Wow.

I'm wet—*beyond* wet—and slightly delirious, almost as if I have a fever. This must be the female equivalent of blue balls.

I feel needy and impatient and a little pissed off that Marco left without getting me off. But I'm sure that was his intention.

He's making sure I don't chicken out tonight. Making sure I actually show up.

I will. I don't want the huge insurance hike from reporting the accident, and I don't even have coverage on my own car, so I'd be out the full cost of a repair on that.

But who am I kidding? It's not even about the money.

After what just happened, I *want* to go tonight.

Yeah, I want to pretend he's making me, pretend he forced me into this, but that's because I don't want to admit the effect it had on me. How addictive I found Marco's attention. I definitely want more of what he's dishing out.

I turn on the shower and step under the spray.

Maybe this is the perfect excuse. I get to try out the dark and dirty things I've seen at Sins without admitting this might be what I really like. If I'm super honest with myself, it might be the reason I took the job at Sins. Yeah, the money is great, but I also was fascinated by what I saw there—from the safety of my position. I could hide behind the cocktail apron and tray and know I never had to try anything myself.

I take my time in the shower, shaving everywhere, shivering when I realize my body will be on display tonight. Not for everyone—unless Marco chooses that. But Marco will see me again.

You have a beautiful body, Taylor.

He made me feel beautiful. He made me feel free—like I could explore my body and sexuality in a complete judgement-free zone.

I mean, I guess that's what Sins is supposed to be, but I never gave myself permission to try anything there. I just needed to be coerced.

And I'm definitely not sorry that Marco is the one pushing me. I always had a fascination for dark villains—not that Marco is so villainous. He's usually a gentleman.

He always tips me well and treats me with respect. Although there is also always the undercurrent of sex. He gives me the appreciative up-and-down sweep of his gaze when I approach. Speaks in a sexy, low rumble, and lets his lids drop to half-mast when he smiles or flirts. You might say he is respectfully disrespectful toward women.

I finish my shower and step out, wrapping a towel around my body.

Marco and the guys he comes in with are mafia, though, for sure, so that makes him the villain. But it's not his Family ties that bother me.

What bothers me is knowing I will be one of at least three dozen different women he's scened with at Sins this year.

The guy is a total player.

Which, I guess, is fine. It means he's experienced. He will know what he's doing. I believe him when he said he would make it good for me.

Anyway, it's not like I'm thinking this will go anywhere.

It's not like I'm going to date the guy.

I just have to show up and let him do depraved things to my body.

It's not a bad trade, so long as I prevent myself from wanting more.

Because with Marco, that's an impossibility.



MARCO

That afternoon Don Pachino leans back in his chair and considers me, my brother, Leo, and my cousin, Armando.

We're on the outside patio of Tony's, the sidewalk cafe with the best calzones in Chicago. This is where the don likes to conduct business.

"I need you guys to take care of something."

"Of course," Armando says, but then his phone buzzes on the table where he laid it facedown. He jerks and looks at it guiltily, but doesn't move to pick it up.

"Am I interrupting something?" The don doesn't like to be disrespected, and he especially doesn't like anyone touching a phone while he's talking.

Armando's throat bobs. It appears to be taking all his effort not to flip the phone over and take the call. I don't know what he was thinking, leaving it out on the table. He's usually smarter than that. Lately, his head isn't in the game though because—*Oh*.

"Could that be about Hannah?" I ask, trying to have his back.

"Oh, yeah," Leo catches on.

"Yeah." Armando flips his phone over so fast Don G instinctively reaches for his gun.

The moment Armando reads his screen he shoots to his feet. "It's time! Her water broke. I have to go." Then, collecting himself, he looks to the don. "I'm sorry, Don G. No disrespect."

The don waves a dismissive hand. "Go. Be with your wife. Let us know how it goes."

He waits until Armando is out of earshot before he chuckles and shakes his head. “I remember when Summer was born. It’s not a fast process for first babies. I doubt that baby will be born before sunrise.”

“Yeah?” I say. What do I know about babies?

“But, of course, he needs to be there for Hannah.” He steeples his fingers together. “I can’t rely on Armando having any focus for the next year. I need you two to stay sharp.”

“Of course, Don G.”

“Absolutely,” Leo says.

He sits back and pulls a cigar from his inner pocket. “As soon as a guy gets married and has kids, he goes soft. Suddenly, all they can think about is how precious life is.” He snips the end off his cigar.

“Well, we have no plans to marry any time soon,” I say.

“True story,” Leo agrees. “You probably don’t ever have to worry about Marco in that department. He hasn’t dated the same girl twice since third grade.”

The don chuckles.

I smile, but I’m thinking about Taylor. How she surrendered to me this morning. How much I fucking loved it.

She’s the kind of girl I would date twice. She’s the kind who would be worth keeping.

Forever.

I can’t wait until tonight when I get to reward her for her submission. Get to show her everything she’s been missing while she skirted around the BDSM scenes at Sins and pretended she wasn’t into it.

And now I'm thinking about sex in front of the don.

I clear my throat. "So what do you need us to take care of?"

"I need a message sent to the *stronzos* moving in on my Saturday card game."

"Who is it? The Russians?" There's been a tentative peace between the Chicago bratva, the Pachinos and the Tacone Family for the last ten years, but everyone knows those kind of truces can easily go south.

Just a few years ago Junior Tacone, head of the other Italian mafia family, single-handedly wiped out an entire bratva cell at an Italian deli. There were no complaints from Ravil Baranov, the boss of the opposing bratva cell.

"No, the Russians can have their game. This is a couple of drug dealers looking to supplement their income." He shows me the Instagram page of a guy posing with a flashy Corvette. "Find out where the game is this weekend. End it. I want them out of my fucking town."

"Consider it done."

Leo cracks his knuckles. "The guy is toast."

Don G slaps a meaty hand down on Leo's shoulder and stands. "Good. Let me know when it's done."

"Absolutely," I say, also getting to my feet.

Acting as enforcer for the boss is our regular job. This won't be a problem. I'm just relieved it can wait until Saturday, because I wouldn't want anything to interfere with my plans tonight with Taylor.

Of course, Leo reads my mind. He knew where I was headed this morning when I went to Taylor's.

“How did it go with the cocktail waitress?”

For some reason, I’m annoyed by the question, even though we usually banter about our latest conquests without filters.

It’s because Taylor doesn’t feel like a conquest and I don’t like Leo even talking about her.

“Her name is Taylor. And I took care of it.”

Leo’s brows rise at my business-like tone. “It sounds like you didn’t enjoy it.”

“Oh, I enjoyed it. I just don’t want you disrespecting her.”

“Huh. It’s like that.” Leo looks at me like I’m a new person.

Hell, maybe I am. Taylor’s someone special.

“Like what?”

Leo’s lips quirk, but being my younger brother, he’s smart enough not to poke the bear. “Nothing.” He holds his hands up in surrender. “Never mind. I’m glad you took care of it.”

The image of Taylor standing naked before me pops into my mind and my nostrils flare at the reminder of how incredible she looked bared to me. How much I loved the feel of her skin, the sound of her little cries when I punished her.

I can’t fucking wait until tonight.

By the end of the night, *Taylor will be mine.*

CHAPTER 5



TAYLOR

I'm trembling when I arrive at Sins. I sit in my semi-wrecked car and try to work up the nerve to go in.

I'm wearing black thigh-highs with the seam up the back and little satin bows at the top, a short black skirt, and an asymmetrical top that's sleeveless on one side and strappy on the other. I'm not sure how to play this. My co-workers will think I'm coming in for my shift. When they see me with Marco, I will never hear the end of it. Everyone is going to want to know how he broke down my resolve to never play at my workplace.

A light tapping at my window makes me scream.

"Oh! Marco!" I struggle to open my door with trembling fingers, but he gets it open first.

He's in dom mode, wearing one of those commanding, unforgiving masks the doms put on for their submissive. It's different from the indulgent charm he uses when ordering drinks from me.

Whatever he sees in my face makes his expression soften.

"Hi." He cradles my cheek with his hand—like a lover, not a master—and slowly lowers his face to mine.

His lips brush over my open mouth, then he tastes me. The kiss grows, starting soft, ending with his tongue deep in my mouth, his teeth scraping over my lips and me soaking my panties.

“You look beautiful, Taylor,” he murmurs, still cradling my face with one hand.

I’m breathless. “Thank you.”

“Thank you, Sir,” he corrects but his lips quirk at the corners. “Tonight you’ll follow protocol. You’ll address me as *Sir* or *Master*. You’ll do nothing without permission or my command. Any hesitation or disobedience will be punished. Are we clear?”

My palms are sweaty and my heart hammers against my ribs. My head bobs my agreement.

“Yes, Sir,” he corrects.

“Yes, Sir.” It sounds like I’ve just run a hundred yard dash.

He kisses my forehead. It seems like an oddly tender gesture and I try to remember if I’ve seen him do it with his submissives before. “Good girl.”

I’m not working for his tips tonight, but it seems I still love to earn his approval, because the words enter my chest and send warmth cascading down to my toes. I relax and allow him to usher me out of the parking lot and through the back door.

“I’ve arranged for a private room upstairs,” he says, guiding me to the back staircase.

I’m instantly relieved. He seems to understand that I don’t want to be observed by my co-workers while we scene. The private rooms upstairs cost five grand a night. I’m sure Marco

can afford it, but he usually chooses a more public play area downstairs, so I'm gratified he was willing to make this consideration for me.

His hand rests lightly at my lower back as I hike the stairs in my stilettos, distinctly aware of everything around me—the deep, grinding pulse of the music, the shimmer of red and blue light, the distant crack of a paddle and a resulting scream.

Landon, one of Sins' dungeon masters stands in the hallway, monitoring.

Even the private rooms are supervised at Sins with black curtains instead of doors and a one-way mirror in each area for observation. My boss wants to ensure everything remains safe, sane, and consensual.

I know that if I said "Red" and Marco didn't respect it, Landon would step in. He and I once had a conversation about the fact that Marco and his buddies were probably mafia but that wouldn't stop him from protecting a submissive from one of them if he had to. He also said that the guys had never once given him any trouble, which has been my experience, too. In fact, I feel like they're more respectful than a lot of the guys who come to Sins.

Landon points us to our reserved room and Marco holds the curtain back for me to enter.

It has a leather loveseat, a spanking bench and a small table with an array of implements neatly arranged. I see a paddle, hairbrush, leather slapper, cat o'nine tails, and soft red ribbon.

My knees buckle.

Marco loops an arm around me from behind and pulls me against his body. "Don't be scared, angel." His breath feathers

hot against the shell of my ear. “I won’t use the wicked ones unless you misbehave.”

My pussy clenches.

“But you’re not going to misbehave, are you?”

“No, Sir.”

“Good girl.” His hand slides lower, down my thigh to the edge of my skirt, then back up the inside. He traces the top of my thigh-high with a light touch. “I like these.” He turns me to face him. “Let me see them, properly.” His voice takes on the deeper tenor of a command.

My hands fly to the waistband of my skirt, but then I hesitate. Does that mean take off my skirt? Is this like Simon Says? He told me I shouldn’t do anything without permission or command.

Amusement flickers over his face. I see the trace of indulgence that he wears that makes him so sexy to me when he flirts.

“Take off your skirt, angel.” His tone is milder now.

I’m grateful he’s not going full dom on me right now. I’m way too nervous to handle it.

I shimmy out of my skirt.

Marco’s lids droop as he takes in my see-through lace panties that match the black thigh-highs.

“Fucking gorgeous. Lose the top.”

I pull off my top. I’m not wearing a bra, so I’m now in nothing but my panties, hose, and heels.

“Good girl. You’re perfect. Absolutely perfect.” He takes my upper arm and leads me to the side of the sofa, where he

bends me over the overstuffed arm. “Let’s see how your ass fared from this morning’s spanking.”

He runs a hand over my skin. He left marks this morning—nothing terrible. Some red blotchy marks. They don’t hurt anymore except for a twinge or two when I squeeze them.

He gives my ass a couple of light slaps, then strokes a slow circle around the globes of my ass. “I think a submissive should always have a red, hot ass while we scene. It helps focus you, reminds you who is in charge and that there are consequences for disobedience.”

“I’m not going to disobey,” I say tartly.

Seriously.

There’s no way I’d disobey. I have no interest in experiencing a spanking from anything other than his hand.

He delivers three hard spanks and I yelp. “You just did, angel.”

Moisture leaks between my legs. My mind races to understand what I did wrong so I don’t repeat it.

“I’m not going to disobey, *Sir*,” I correct. “I mean, I won’t disobey again, Sir.”

Apparently, he’s not mollified, because he holds my hip with one hand and starts spanking me steadily.

Already sore from this morning, I squirm and try to dodge his hand, but he doesn’t relent until my ass is burning and I’m whimpering from the sensation.

“Mmm.” He strokes his palm over my heated skin. “That’s better.” He leans down and kisses one cheek. “You’re going to be my good girl?”

“Yes, Sir.”

He helps me to stand upright and turns me to face him. “Do you want to use the standard safe words of *red*, *yellow*, and *green*?”

I nod. “Yes, Sir. I mean, whatever you want.”

This earns me a sexy smile. “Good girl. On your knees, Taylor,” Marco commands as he takes a handful of my hair and lowers me to where I’m at eye level with his hard cock.

I want to taste, swirl my tongue, devour his length, but I wait for his command as he has taught me to do.

He pulls my hair back. His hold is firm.

“Open your mouth,” he says.

I do as he says... slightly.

His cock slides between my parted lips, and he rubs it over my tongue.

He pulls my hair back and thrusts his cock deeper and deeper, sliding it into my mouth, and I suck him all the way down, cutting off my air supply.

His dick pulses, and he groans as I lick the underside of his smooth skin.

“So good, Taylor. Lick it. Swirl it.” He guides my mouth up and down his shaft. “Now tighten those lips around me.”

I do as I’m told, hollowing my cheeks to suck, squeezing and releasing as I bob up and down on his cock, trying to suck him as hard as I can.

“That’s it. You’re such an eager little cock sucker,” he groans. “Such a good girl.”

I'm consuming his cock, pushing through my throat, taking as much as I can.

"Good, girl," Marco praises me more as he yanks on my hair again. "I am going to teach you to be the best submissive you can be."

My body trembles as my orgasm builds simply from his praise and knowing I'm pleasing him.

"Enough." He pulls his cock out of my mouth, and it is glistening with my saliva.

He rubs the head over my lips, and I simply look up into his eyes and wait for my next command.

"Stand up. Then go bend over and put your hands on the couch."

I obey, my head a little dizzy, as I rise to my tiptoes and bend over.

"Spread your legs."

I widen my stance, biting my lip when I feel his hand on my ass.

He reaches around my body, and I gasp when he slaps my pussy, the sting sending shivers down my spine.

"I didn't give you permission to bite your lip."

"I'm sorry, Sir," I apologize quickly, enjoying the feel of the word *Sir* and how it flows from my mouth with ease.

He rubs his hand over my ass, and then spanks me hard. I lower my head and try to calm my nerves. My mind screams *no*, my body demands *yes*, and the confusion nearly buckles my knees.

"Open your legs wider."

I do as I'm told, and then feel his hand on my ass. He spreads my ass cheeks with his thumbs.

"Has anyone fucked this ass before?"

I shake my head. "No, Sir."

"Good." He then lowers his hand to my pussy and spanks it again. "Is this *my* pussy?"

I nod again.

"Say it."

"This is your pussy, Sir."

"Good girl. If you continue being a good girl, then I might fuck this needy pussy tonight, my cock stretching your tight, little hole. And tomorrow night... I may just fuck this ass of yours too."

I'm trembling even more now, so turned on by it all. "Yes, Sir," I moan.

"Put your finger in your pussy, Taylor. I want to see you make it nice and wet for me. Stretch it for my cock."

Holy hell, the way this man speaks to me is... everything. So demanding. So powerful. And so damn sexy.

I place my finger in my pussy, slowly moving it in and out, knowing he's watching every move I make. I like putting on a show for him, knowing his eyes are watching my every move.

"Such a pretty, pink pussy," he says as I continue to finger fuck myself in front of him.

I've never done anything like this before. I've never been so bold, so free, and so absolutely turned on. I don't even try to hold back the moans. I know better than to try to hide my emotions from this man.

“Is your pussy wet, Taylor? Add another finger.”

I slide in a second finger and push deep inside, gasping as I do. “Yes, Sir.”

I keep fucking myself with my fingers, knowing that it’s not going to take much to push me over the edge.

“When you’re ready to come... stop.”

Whimpering as I quickly pull my fingers away in fear of coming without his permission, I await his next command.

“Does my angel want to come?”

“Yes, Sir. So much, Sir.”



MARCO

I have always been a fan of edging. Taking someone to the final point of a cliff and delightfully hanging her over, only having me to hang on to. But with Taylor... I am losing control. I have never wanted to be buried balls deep inside a person in my life as badly as I do now.

I need her.

I need her now.

“Taylor, say it out loud. Tell me.”

“I want to come, Sir. I want your cock. Please fuck me,” Taylor whimpers.

God, she is a natural submissive. How did I not see this before? Her body is so responsive and my body reacts to every mewl, every cry, and every pant she gives.

I kneel down beside her, watching her intently as I rub the side of my thumb over her pussy lips, her legs still spread wide in front of me.

“You’re so wet, Taylor. You are so fucking beautiful. Perfect. I think I’m going to come just from the sight of you.”

I place my other hand on her pussy and begin to rub her clit in circles while I still rub her pussy. “So swollen, Taylor. So wet.”

I love saying her name. It feels right.

“Oh, fuck, Sir,” she moans as she grinds her pussy into my hand. “I’m gonna come. Fuck, I’m gonna come!”

When she reaches the edge and is ready to fall off, I stop touching her and watch her back arch.

I’m a fucking asshole, a tease, a tormenter, and she’s going to learn to love that about me.

“No, please, Sir. Please let me come.”

I reach for my pants and pull out a condom from the pocket. I can’t torture her anymore, because I’m damn near killing myself. I rip open the foil, roll the condom down my shaft, and then stand behind her, rubbing up and down her slit with the head of my cock.

“Is this what you want, Taylor? You want my cock, huh? You want me to fuck this tight pussy?”

“Yes, Sir. I want that so badly,” she says as she rocks her hips back and forth.

“You are so fucking wet,” I grunt as I impale her with my cock. She gasps, and the sound sends a shot of lust straight to my cock.

I begin to fuck her slowly at first, holding her hips as I thrust deep inside her. All I can see is her ass and her pussy, and I can't imagine going another minute not being inside her. I don't ever want this to end. I can't get enough.

“Does my angel want me to fuck her?”

“Yes, please, Sir. Fuck me, Sir,” she begs as she pushes her ass back against me.

I spank her ass, and she gasps, arching in the perfect most fuckable pose. Her pussy tightens around my cock and I'm nearly undone, but I'm a man on a fucking mission.

I squeeze my eyes shut, trying to hold on to my release just a little bit longer.

“Do you want to come, my angel?”

She whimpers as she claws at the couch, a clear indicator she's close. “Y-yes, Sir.”

“Beg me to let you come.”

“Please, Sir. Please let me come. Fuck me. Spank me. Anything. Just allow me to—”

I reach back and give her ass a hard slap, and she cries out.

“Such a good girl. I'm going to let you come now.”

“Thank you, Sir. Oh, fuck, thank you, Sir.”

I pump in and out of her as fast and hard as I can, giving her exactly what she's so desperate to take.

I thrust into her a few more times before I tighten my hand on her hips and release inside the most perfect pussy I've ever experienced. Her cunt tightens even more around my cock, and I know she's going to come again.

I hear her cries and watch the orgasm roll over her body, and I know that I'm, without a doubt, lost to her.

For the first time—ever—I wish I were somewhere more intimate. More private. Like in my bedroom, not a BDSM club.

I suddenly hate all the structure that allows a safe distance between partners. Allows for exits and endings. I don't want to walk Taylor back to her car at the end of the night, give her a kiss and tell her to send me the bill for her car.

"I changed my mind," I say, attempting to sound in control when my body feels anything but. "One night is not enough to cover what you owe me."

"What?"

"I need more of you."

I'm telling her. There's no choice. No option. And as her body collapses beneath me, her breath escaping her pouty lips in gasps, I don't believe she's going to argue.

CHAPTER 6



TAYLOR

“Don’t even think about getting dressed,” Marco growls at me from his bed. He’s naked and glorious—all cut muscle with a tattoo of a snake and flowers winding around one shoulder.

After declaring he needed more of me last night at Sins, he brought me home where we had a second round of the hottest sex of my life.

Now we’ve just finished round three and I’m coming back from using the bathroom.

I drop his T-shirt back on the floor. “Yes, Sir.”

“Mmm,” he rumbles, reaching for me. “You are such a good little submissive, aren’t you?” He tugs me over his body.

I fall on top of him, laughing. My body is buzzing—warm, and sated from all the attention he’s given it.

He holds the back of my head and thrusts his tongue in my mouth as I squirm over him seeking pleasure when my clit finds the root of his cock. Marco’s phone buzzes from the nightstand. He ignores it, kissing me, deeply, but it buzzes again and then again.

“Sorry, angel.” He reaches for the phone. “I just need to check this.” After quickly scanning the screen, he exclaims,

“Oh, damn!” but there’s a ring of joy in it.

“What?”

“My cousin had his baby!” He quirks a boyish grin at me and my heart squeezes. He’s no longer the powerful and dangerous mafia boss, but a three dimensional person with cousins and babies and ordinary joy.

“Your *cousin* had the baby?” I tease.

“Well, his wife did.” Marco’s grin is infectious. “I’m so fucking happy for him. The last five years of Armando’s life have been pure misery and then he meets this girl—under terrible circumstances—and knocks her up, and suddenly... well, she changed him. It’s amazing to see what love can do to a man.”

I sit up on the bed, leaning on one hand and drinking in the sight of him in his naked beauty. “I love that,” I say.

Marco’s eyes lock on mine, and for a moment, I wonder if he’s thinking the same thing I am—whether love could change him, too.

“Hey, do you want to come with me to the hospital to welcome the new baby? Her name is Daisy Jane.”

My heart skips a beat. He’s asking me to do something that isn’t just about sex. It’s not even somewhere you would take a new date. It’s the kind of activity reserved for a steady girlfriend or partner.

I hop off the bed. “I would love to meet Daisy Jane!” I throw on a pair of jeans and a top.

Marco puts on his clothes from last night, minus the jacket and we head out to his car. It’s a rental he’s using while his is getting fixed—a sweet convertible Mercedes.

“So why were the last five years so bad for Armando?” I ask after we hit a drive-thru coffee shop for bagels and coffee.

Marco gives me a sidelong glance, like he’s deciding whether to tell me the truth or not. “He was in prison,” he says after a moment’s hesitation.

“Oh, wow.”

“And when he got out, there was a hit out on him. He holed up at Hannah’s place until he straightened things out.”

I don’t ask how things were straightened out. I have a feeling that even if Marco told me, I wouldn’t want to know. I’m just honored he’s being real with me. I like him as the demanding dominant, but I like this glimpse into his ordinary life even more.

We get to the hospital and Marco buys a huge flower arrangement from the on-site florist.

“Hannah’s going to kill me for this,” he says.

“Why? Is she allergic?”

He grins. “No, she’s an award-winning florist. She’s going to be insulted I brought her flowers.”

He laces his fingers with mine on the elevator ride up. “Thanks for coming with me.”

I step closer to him so he can wrap an arm around me. “I’m actually surprised you asked me.”

“Why?”

“I thought you’d be the type to leave my place before dawn.”

The elevator doors open on Armando and Hannah’s floor but Marco prevents me from getting off. “Hold up, angel.

What do you mean?”

I shrug. The elevator doors close and we start to ascend further. “I mean you’re a player. I work at Sins—I know you have a different girl every weekend. So you don’t strike me as the *let’s-get-breakfast-together* on the morning after type.”

“You’re right, I’m not.”

A sick feeling starts in the pit of my stomach and I suddenly wish I hadn’t come along. I’m starting to really fall for this guy and he’s clearly not a safe choice for me. I hit the button for our floor again, over and over again.

“Hey.” Marco catches my arm and pulls me back against him. “I don’t usually spend the night.” He looks down at me, his warm brown gaze searching mine like he wants to be sure I catch his meaning.

I want to be sure, too. “Why did you spend it with me?”

He lowers his head and nuzzles his nose along mine. “You’re special, Taylor.”

The elevator dings and this time, Marco moves to exit. His words ricochet around my head as we walk down the sterile hallway to find Armando and Hannah’s room.

I’m special.

I’m almost afraid to admit how much I hoped that was true.



MARCO

“I hope I look that good after being in labor for sixteen hours,” Taylor says as we leave the hospital room and head to

the elevator. “She was simply glowing.”

Pulling Taylor against my side, I kiss the top of her head. “I can’t imagine you ever looking anything but stunning.”

The thought of her pregnant with a baby—*my* baby—has my cock hardening. I don’t want a baby *yet*, but I sure as fuck want to practice baby making. And the idea of Taylor having *my* baby—

Jesus. Who the fuck am I? Soft kisses, loving compliments, and feeling as if I can’t get enough of this woman is just not me. Never has been, and yet, here I am.

The surprised look on both Armando and Hannah’s face when I entered the room with a *girlfriend*, reminded me of the fact that I was acting completely out of the norm for me. Luckily for me, they were both so wrapped up in the baby that I didn’t get interrogated, but I’m pretty sure it’s just a matter of time until I do.

But fuck it. I like it. And I really like her.

The elevator opens and the don steps out with Leo by his side. They are both carrying a bouquet of pink and yellow flowers and look as out of place in the hospital hallway as I’m sure I do.

I immediately disentangle myself from Taylor. Leo knows I didn’t spend the night at home, but the don doesn’t need to find out.

“Oh hey. You coming from Mando’s room? How’s the mama?” Leo asks.

Trying to avoid the narrow-eyed scrutiny the don is giving Taylor, I answer, “Great. I’ve never seen her so happy. And wait until you see our cousin. He’s grinning from ear to ear. Fatherhood looks good on him.”

“The delivery went well? The baby?” the don asks.

“Everything went smoothly. They’re also enjoying the larger suite you arranged for them. Armando is very appreciative.”

Don G’s gaze is still locked on Taylor, and without thinking about it, I take a step away, opening the space between us. It’s probably too late to give off the appearance that we aren’t anything more than friends, but I’d rather avoid a conversation about it.

“Who’s this?” the don asks.

So much for avoiding the conversation.

He isn’t exactly being rude, but he isn’t being friendly either. I know the don well enough to know he’s not happy to see me with a girl after I just promised I’d never have a girlfriend and would keep my head in the game.

I distance myself a little more. “My car’s in the shop, and I needed a ride,” I say. “She works at Sins.”

Taylor’s eyes dart to me, and I see a flash of pain, but then it’s quickly replaced with anger. She then plasters a smile on her face, turns to the don, reaches her hand out to his, and says, “My name is Taylor.” She then glares at me again and adds, “We should get going. I need to get back *to work*.”

Fuck.

I totally fucked up.

“Yeah, definitely.” To the don and Leo, I say, “You both should get in there. Visiting hours are almost over.”

Seemingly satisfied with my answer, the don and Leo head to the hospital room, and I silently hit the elevator button

trying to think of a way to soothe the stormy waters that I obviously caused.

“I can explain,” I begin.

Taylor raises her hand as the ding of the elevator fills the silence. “No need. I’m just a girl who works at Sins.”

Her words ooze from her lips like venom, and I know I just fucked myself.

“Taylor—”

She steps into the elevator, not saying another word.

CHAPTER 7



TAYLOR

I shouldn't be mad. We had one night together. That was my only commitment to Marco.

He made absolutely none to me.

We're not a couple. We technically haven't even had a date. I traded my body for car repairs.

Ugh. It sounds horrible when I put it that way.

No wonder I feel sick to my stomach right now. I walk quickly through the parking lot, wanting to leave this all behind me as fast as possible. In fact, maybe I'll just Uber home.

Yeah. I should definitely—

“Taylor, hold up.” Marco catches my arm to stop me.

“Don't touch me,” I snap and I'm gratified when he immediately drops my arm. I turn to continue.

“Hey.” His voice is coaxing. He keeps pace with me, trying to catch my eye from the side. “Taylor, listen. I fucked up. I need to see your face right now. Please.”

I stop and whirl. “*What?*”

He jerks his thumb in the direction of the hospital. “That was the don. My boss.”

I raise my brows and fold my arms over my chest. I don't care if it was the freaking pope. What matters is that the truth came out. Marco pulled a *one-and-done* with me and now it's over.

“He just made me promise I wouldn't get a girlfriend and lose focus like my cousin has. So I panicked when he saw you here.”

It takes great effort for me to force some breath out of my chest.

“But you're *not* just some girl who works at Sins to me.” He reaches for my hand and squeezes it. “Last night was special. I don't usually go home with women.”

I purse my lips.

“I don't. Leo can attest to that. But last night, when we were through, I didn't want it to end. And I still don't.”

I look up at him, my throat closing.

“Taylor, I was going to ask if I could see you again.” He picks up my other hand and holds both of them between us, like we're a bride and groom at the altar.

Damn my eyes for getting wet.

“You were?”

“Definitely. You weren't just a good lay to me—excuse the expression. You're smart, you're hot. You're ambitious. I know you're getting your PhD in physical therapy. You're going places, Taylor. I'm probably not the kind of guy you were looking to date, but damn, if I don't want to be.”

He remembered what I'm studying. And he thinks I'm hot.

“Okay,” I say softly.

“Yeah? You’ll let me take you out? It will be on a proper date, with dinner and flowers, and the whole thing.”

I smile. “That sounds nice,” I manage to say. “I would like that.”

He pulls me closer, tugging our joined hands right up to his chest. When he lets my hands go, I slide them up over his pectorals and around to the back of his neck.

“I want more of you, Taylor. *A lot* more.”

I tip my face up to his and rise up on my toes to mate his mouth with mine.

He smiles against the kiss, then takes over, catching the back of my head with his hand, and sweeping his tongue between my lips.

We kiss in the parking lot for a solid two minutes before Marco breaks the kiss, and picks me up with his forearm beneath my ass to straddle his waist.

“What are you doing?” I laugh as he walks toward the car.

“Claiming you.”

I glance up at the hospital windows. “What if the don sees you?”

Marco sets me down beside the car and kisses me again. “Well, I’ll just have to prove to him I can have a woman in my life and still stay focused.”

My heart thuds against my chest. Marco really does want more.

With me.

I don’t know what it means, or what it would look like, but I know one thing for sure—

I want it, too.

Last night Marco rocked my world. More than that, I love the way I feel with him. Safe. Excited. Sexy and smart. Respected and objectified all at once.

Yes, I want more than just a taste of what he has to offer.

I want the whole thing.



WOULD you like more than just a Taste of Sin from Renee Rose and Alta Hensley? Be sure to read [DEN OF SINS](#) and meet not only Marco, but Armando, Hannah, Leo, and more. This is a mafia romance you won't want to miss.

ABOUT ALTA HENSLEY

Alta Hensley is a USA TODAY bestselling author of hot, dark and dirty romance. She is also an Amazon Top 100 bestselling author. Being a multi-published author in the romance genre, Alta is known for her dark, gritty alpha heroes, sometimes sweet love stories, hot eroticism, and engaging tales of the constant struggle between dominance and submission.

She lives in a log cabin in the woods with her husband, two daughters, and an Australian Shepherd. When she isn't battling the bats, and watching the deer, she is writing about villains who always get their love story and happily ever after.



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I was going to ruin her.

I knew it the moment I laid eyes on her. She was too naive, too innocent.

I would wrap her in the darkness of my world till she no longer craved the light... only me.

I should walk away, leave her clean and untouched... but I won't.

I hold her delicate heart in my scarred fist and I have no intention of letting go.



It all started with a book... doesn't that sound crazy?

For your entire world to come crashing down around you over research for a book?

But that is what it felt like the moment I met him.

My world tilted. Nothing made sense any more.

I only know he became like a drug to me... and I shook with need till my next fix.



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ABOUT RENEE ROSE

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR RENEE ROSE loves a dominant, dirty-talking alpha hero! She's sold over a million copies of steamy romance with varying levels of kink. Her books have been featured in USA Today's *Happily Ever After* and *Popsugar*. Named Eroticon USA's Next Top Erotic Author in 2013, she has also won *Spunky and Sassy's* Favorite Sci-Fi and Anthology author, *The Romance Reviews* Best Historical Romance, and *has* hit the *USA Today* list seven times with her Wolf Ranch series and various anthologies. For free Renee Rose books, go to <http://subscribepage.com/alphastemp> to sign up for her newsletter. In addition to the free books, you will also get special pricing, exclusive previews and news of new releases.

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GEMMA'S RELEASE



By

Becca Jameson

PROLOGUE



Three years ago...

Gemma wanted to die.

She squeezed her eyes closed and willed herself to suffer a heart attack or a stroke.

She'd done so every hour of every day for...how long had she been here? She'd lost track of the days. A week? Maybe.

The fight was running out of her. Part of her was already dead. Her soul. Her will to live.

She'd cried rivers. She'd begged and pleaded with the stranger holding her prisoner. Every time she did either of those things, her situation got worse.

Master J, as he insisted she call him, was a vile cruel excuse for a human being. She hoped he rotted in the fifteenth circle of hell when his day of reckoning came. She didn't care that Dante hadn't extended hell to fifteen circles. He should have.

Once again, she was alone in the dark in this godforsaken dank basement. She hadn't seen daylight since she'd woken up scared, groggy, naked, and restrained to an uncomfortable cot.

God, how she wished she were currently restrained to that cot right now, legs forced open, arms secured above her head. Even if he wouldn't give her the scratchy, disgusting, moldy blanket, she would be more comfortable than in her current situation.

She'd lost track of the number of times she'd been shoved into this kennel for punishment. Ten? Twelve?

Part of her couldn't stop fighting Master J, disobeying his every order, trying to hold on to her humanity.

What Master J didn't understand was that she didn't want to live. She didn't care if he strangled her or stabbed her to death as long as he put her out of her misery.

How long had she been in his dog kennel this time? It wasn't big enough for a human, not even a small one like her. She felt like a contortionist every time she crawled into it. The only way she fit was on her hands and knees.

Simply shoving her into the kennel wasn't enough for Master J though. He also secured her wrists and ankles to the four corners, which meant the only position she was capable of maintaining for hours on end was with her forearms flattened to the metal tray, her forehead resting against the cold metal between her arms, and her knees forced wide open. Her fully exposed ass was the highest part of her body even though she rested most of her weight on her folded legs.

Her face was tight from the stream of tears that had fallen for the first hour. She was dehydrated, and there were no more tears. She couldn't even turn her head sideways to lower her cheek to the metal tray because she'd peed herself over an hour ago.

It was one thing to kneel in her own cold urine for hours on end, but she hadn't reached the stage where she would want it in her mouth.

If she'd simply been kidnapped and brought to this living hell, she might have still had the will to survive. But that's not what happened. Before she'd been taken from the compound where she'd lived with her father and every employee who resided on the estate, they had all been murdered in a raid.

Gemma had no one. No one was looking for her. No one cared she was gone. With the possible exception of the one man her father employed who hadn't been home at the time of the raid.

Damon Albertini.

She drew in a breath and tried to imagine him in her mind. Tall, dark, and handsome. That's how she'd thought of him for the past year since he'd come to work for her father in his inner circle.

Gemma had lusted after him absurdly. But she was twenty years old, and he was over thirty. It was unlikely he'd ever noticed her, or if he had, he'd surely thought she was a bratty little girl.

Gemma had no way of knowing if Damon was even aware she'd been kidnapped and not found among the dead. If he was smart, he hadn't even returned to the compound to realize her absence.

It was foolish to think he was looking for her. Beyond foolish. Ludicrous. And yet, it was her only hope. The only thing that kept her from...from what? She didn't even have the means to hang herself. Master J had cameras aimed at her

from every corner of the basement, and he never left her unattended when she wasn't restrained.

For the first several days, all Gemma had done was cry and beg and plead. She wasn't sure if she was begging for her life or her death. It didn't matter.

The sound of the basement door opening and closing at the top of the rough wooden steps made her suck in a breath. The return of Master J wasn't necessarily a good sign. He might decide her punishment was over and let her out, but what awaited her outside the kennel wasn't much better.

She held her breath as he stepped to the side of the kennel. Out of the corner of her eye she could make out his wide stance. He was in his usual black slacks and expensive dress shoes. If she was daring enough to lift her gaze up his body—which would add several hours to her punishment—she would find him in a starched white shirt, the top two buttons undone, and the sleeves rolled up to his elbows as if dealing with her was dirty work.

The sound of more footsteps coming down the stairs was all she needed to know that once again Master J would be instructing other men to deal with her. Trainers. The men he'd hired to train her to be the best virginal sex slave alive, preparing her for auction.

Gemma's arms were shaking. Her head hurt. Her toes were numb. The smell of her own urine was nauseating. She'd reached the point that whatever awaited her outside this kennel would be preferable, which meant she had to find a way to demonstrate some level of obedience so this fucking dog scum would let her out.

“Are you ready to behave, Marigold? Or would you rather I give you a few more hours in the kennel?” His deep

demeaning voice annoyed the fuck out of her.

She had no choice but to swallow her pride and obey him. “Yes, Sir,” she muttered.

“Louder,” he boomed. “I can’t hear you.”

She cleared her throat, lifting her forehead off the hard metal. Urine dripped down into her eyes. “I’ll be good, Sir,” she stated with more force.

“What’s your name, slave?”

“Marigold, Sir.” She hated the name, and she didn’t understand why he’d insisted on calling her that.

“What are you?”

“A slave, Sir.”

He kicked the side of the kennel, jarring it so that her urine sloshed up around her knees and elbows and splashed against her face. “You pissed yourself.”

“I’m sorry, Sir.” It was hard to keep her voice from wobbling, and she hated for him to see her weak.

“Do you think my men enjoy cleaning up your piss, slave?”

“No, Sir.” Did he think she enjoyed peeing on herself? The fucking asshole.

“I’m going to release you. I expect you to back out of the kennel and crawl over to the drain. Do you think you can do that without backtalking or lifting your insolent gaze?”

“Yes, Sir.” She pursed her lips. Her feelings about that fucking drain were mixed. On the one hand, she didn’t want to spend any more time with urine dripping off her hair and down her face. On the other hand, she knew what awaited her at the

drain. His men would force her to stand, yank her aching arms over her head, cuff her wrists to chains hanging from the ceiling, and then douse her with cold water from a garden hose.

If only they stopped at that, maybe she could hold on to a shred of dignity, but Master J would watch while the men ran their fucking hands all over her body, soaping her up before rinsing her off in the cold water again.

She needed to keep her eyes closed and think of anything else in the world while they touched her. While they forced her nipples to grow hard and her pussy to get wet. While they tormented her and humiliated her and broke her.

As Master J unfastened her wrists, she drew in a slow deep breath and made a vow to herself.

Live, dammit.

Live.

She only had one hope in the world.

Damon.

She chose to pretend he would come for her. It was madness, but it was all she had.

Live.

Don't let them break you. Dissociate. Think of anything else but their fucking hands on you. Endure the washing.

She could do it. She could eat the cold oatmeal that had been sitting just out of reach for over an hour. She could drink the glass of water to wash it down. She could crawl over to her cot, spread her legs, and let them restrain her.

Let sleep take her under.

Endure. Fight. Live.

CHAPTER 1



GEMMA

Three years later...

Gemma bolted awake, jerking her arms to her chest, gasping for oxygen.

A hand landed on her hip. “You’re safe, baby.”

Her heart was racing, but she drew in a deep breath as she remembered where she was and who was spooning her from behind.

She let the breath out slowly and snuggled deeper into his embrace as the love of her life pulled her in closer and held her tighter.

She was warm. The bed was soft and expensive. The sheets had a ridiculously high thread count. The pillow beneath her head was like a cloud.

And his arms. God she loved his arms.

And his smell. His cologne. His personal musk.

And his voice. The deep timbre. Rumbling and sexy.

And...wait for it...

She smiled as he nuzzled her neck with his nose, inhaling her scent before kissing her behind the ear. “You’re safe,” he

repeated. “I love you.”

She'd been with Damon over a month now, and nearly every morning began like this—her panicking as she surfaced from sleep, him reminding her with his body that she was no longer a slave and his words that she was safe and loved.

She hated that she couldn't wake up pleasantly like a normal person, but her psychologist, Dr. Carol Langston, insisted it was normal. It could take months or years for the fear and panic to subside, and chances were she would always wake up occasionally scared out of her mind.

Sleep was her enemy. It dragged her back into that basement, into that hell, into the place where she'd spent three years barely holding on to her sanity, hoping, wishing, praying.

When she'd found out she'd been sold in an auction a month ago, she'd nearly slipped into a new level of despair, all hope evaporating that Damon would ever find her.

She'd been blindfolded when she was paraded onto a stage and forced to demonstrate her impeccable slave skills to her buyer. Scared out of her mind like never before.

When she'd knelt in front of her new Master and owner to demonstrate her prowess with her mouth around a cock, she was convinced her mind was playing tricks on her. She was certain the scent filling her nose was Damon's.

It hadn't been possible, but she'd used the trick her mind was playing to pretend it was him while she sucked him into her throat and swallowed his come.

She still hadn't been able to believe it was him even after he removed her mask an hour later, or after he brought her to

his home, or after he held her and reassured her for hours and days.

Gemma had been afraid to sleep for fear she might wake up and find this had all been a dream.

But it wasn't. Damon had found her. He'd bought her. He'd taken care of her every need for the past month.

He loved her.

A tear slid down her cheek. She hated the roller coaster of emotions that often consumed her first thing in the morning. Fear. Elation. Gratitude. Sorrow. Relief.

The bombardment of emotions often overwhelmed her and led to stupid tears.

Damon rolled her onto her back, gently wiped her cheeks with his thumbs, and smiled at her. "You're safe. I love you."

She swallowed back the overload and cupped his face. "I love you too." She might not have fully understood her feelings for him three years ago when she'd had a twenty-year-old's crush on a man twelve years older than her. A man her father had forbidden her to even glance at.

But she understood now. Her love for him was deep and powerful and all-consuming.

And tonight, she was going to put all her trust in him and show him with her actions what she felt was inadequately demonstrated with words alone.

He kissed her gently before staring down at her face. "We don't have to go to the club tonight, baby."

She drew in a breath. "Yes, we do. Stop trying to get out of it. I want to go. I want you to show me your world."

He stroked her cheek, his brow furrowed. “There’s no hurry, you know. We can go to Roses and Thorns any night of the week. What’s the rush? We could wait a month or a year or never go if you don’t want to.”

She shook her head. “Damon, I want to go. I want to know what it’s like to submit to you in a safe, sane, and consensual environment. You keep telling me that’s what real Dom/sub relationships are like. I’m ready.”

She knew he was concerned. After all, they’d tried this one other night and it ended in disaster. Much to everyone’s shock—Gemma, Damon, his friend Jagger who worked for the FBI, and the club owner, Robert—Master J had been at the club that night.

When Gemma heard his voice, she’d nearly died on the spot. Apparently the motherfucking piece of shit had never in a million years expected any of the six slaves he’d trained and sold to become members of the local Denver fetish club.

He was wrong, and it had cost him his freedom. He would never see the light of day again. That fact alone had settled in Gemma’s chest and alleviated some of her stress. She would never be fully free from her demons, but knowing the man who’d trained her and treated her like she was worth less than a dog for three years was behind bars and could never train another woman and sell her into sex trafficking, helped.

That night had been cut short. Gemma had gotten a tour and watched a few scenes, but she hadn’t submitted to Damon. Granted, he hadn’t intended to fully introduce her to his Dominant side that night anyway. He hadn’t felt she was ready. He’d brought her there to acclimate her because she’d insisted.

She was insisting again now. She flattened her palm on his firm chest and stared into his eyes. “Don’t try to talk me out of this, Damon. We’re going. It’s all arranged. The club isn’t even open tonight. It will only be you, me, Robert, Ella, Boyd, and Macy.”

He stroked her cheek again. “And you’re okay with that?”

She nodded. “Yes. I want them there. Moral support.” Ella, Robert’s wife, had been a godsend since Damon rescued Gemma. She was also a lawyer, so if anything ever creeped up to bite them in the ass, Ella would be there.

Boyd and his girlfriend, Macy, had also been members of Roses and Thorns for a long time. Boyd was one of the key FBI agents working with Damon’s best friend Jagger to find and rescue the rest of the women who’d been sold that night.

They were the perfect people to have present at the club to support Gemma tonight. She wouldn’t have it any other way.

Gemma rolled onto her side, facing Damon. She set her hand on his hip and smoothed it down to his cock. She’d gotten bolder with him every day. As she palmed his rigid length, he moaned.

His hand slid over hers as he narrowed his gaze at her. “You’re not very submissive, naughty girl.”

She giggled. “Maybe, but that doesn’t mean I don’t like it when you spank me.”

He chuckled. “That’s an understatement. My palm is sore from spanking you every day.” He lifted his hand between them and flexed his fingers as if they ached.

Master J had not struck his slaves. He tortured them in many ways, but impact had been strictly forbidden because the

slaves were to be delivered to their masters unmarred. And virginal.

It was confusing, but between Damon and Dr. Langston, Gemma was growing to understand why she so enjoyed impact play. It made her feel alive and it held no triggers.

Damon tugged her hand away from his cock and brought it to his face to kiss her knuckles.

She pushed out her bottom lip in a pout, making him chuckle again.

“Listen, naughty girl. I’ll give you what you crave. But let’s get something straight. If you’re going to go to Roses and Thorns with me, you need to submit to me in the club.” He lifted a challenging brow.

She nodded. “I will, S...” She bit back the word. He didn’t permit her to call him Sir when she wasn’t submitting. It had been difficult at first. After three years of having it ingrained in her to always refer to her owner as Master or Sir, she still struggled to stuff that rule in the trash.

Damon did let her use it when she was submitting. When he spanked her. When he dominated her. But only then.

“I will,” she repeated. “I’ll submit to you at the club.”

He squeezed her hand. “You’re sure you want this experience?”

She knew he was concerned, but she was ready. “Yes, and I want it to be authentic. Don’t dumb it down or baby me. I want you to dominate me like you would anyone else.”

He shook his head. “We’ve talked about this. You’re not anyone else. You’re mine. I will never restrain you, understood?”

She nodded, even though she wasn't sure the experience could be fully authentic without restraint.

He tipped her chin back and set his forehead against hers. "Trust me. You can have a fully submissive experience without restraints, and I expect you to obey me and defer to me when we're inside the club walls."

"Yes, Sir," she breathed out, heart racing. She squirmed against him too. She was on fire. She always got that way when he dominated her so intently. She loved the way he looked her in the eye, but more than that, she loved the way he forced her to look *him* in the eye.

After three years of being trained to keep her gaze down and never look at any man, she still struggled to meet people's gazes, but not Damon's. She trusted him. She could look at him and reassure him she was with him.

"Your breathing is heavy," he commented.

She nodded and rubbed her thighs together. Another new luxury. Touching herself or rubbing against something.

"What do you need, baby?"

She swallowed. "Your cock, Damon."

"Where do you need it, Gemma?"

She trembled under his scrutiny. He could make her melt with his deep voice and demands. He loved to make her spell out her needs. Verbalize them. It helped her get over her belief that she was his slave, meant to service him without considering her needs.

"In my pussy." Her face flushed as she said pussy out loud. She'd certainly heard vile disgusting men refer to her private parts as her pussy many times in the past few years, but she

hadn't ever said that word out loud. She wouldn't dare. She could add that to her accomplishments since Damon had rescued her.

He pulled her chin closer and kissed her deeply before rolling to his back and grinning at her. "Take off that shirt and climb on top of me."

She still had an aversion to wearing clothes, but she didn't mind wearing his T-shirts. She pulled it over her head and straddled him. She'd done this a few times, and it felt powerful.

Though she understood intellectually from his constant reminder that she held all the power in their relationship, nothing made that more obvious than when she mounted him.

He gripped her hips. "Rub your pussy against my cock, baby."

She did as he told her, dragging her folds over his impressive length. She stared down at him. It was hard to believe she was really here. She wasn't sure how many months or years it would take before she truly believed she was free. She was with the man she loved. She was his. And he was hers.

"God, that feels good, Gemma." A vein throbbed on his forehead. She loved when he got all hot and bothered for her. "Rub your clit for me. I want to watch."

She licked her lips as she brought her fingers to her pussy and stroked herself. Another difficult thing to do after being told a million times she was never allowed to touch herself.

He slid his hands up and down her back. "You're so beautiful. You take my breath away."

She whimpered as her arousal grew. Her boldness grew too. She ground her clit over his erection, arched her chest forward, tipped her head back, cupped her breast with her free hand, and pinched her nipple.

Damon groaned. “So fucking sexy. Ride me, baby. I can’t take the suspense anymore.”

She lowered her gaze slowly, dropped her hands to his chest, and smirked at him. “You don’t honestly believe I’m falling for your story about me being in control when I’m on top of you, do you?” The man controlled her even when she mounted him.

He chuckled. “Ride my cock, woman, before I change my mind, flip you over, and spank your bottom before taking you from behind instead.”

She lifted her brows. “Is that supposed to be a threat?”

His smile grew. “More of a promise.”

Keeping her hands planted on his chest, she lifted her hips so that his erection could rise up between them. She didn’t have to look away from his face or reach down between them to lodge his cock at her entrance and slide down over him.

His eyes rolled back as he gripped her hips again. “Jesus, Gemma...”

The power she felt in that moment was all-consuming. She loved the way he filled her. They’d had sex more times than she could count in the past few weeks since he’d taken her virginity, but it still felt like heaven every time.

The stretch. The friction. The tightness.

She might have lost three years of her life to a level of hell she wouldn’t wish on her worst enemy, but at moments like

this when she watched Damon's face as he filled her...she thought maybe it had all been worth it.

She ground her clit on the base of his cock until she shuddered with the growing need to come. She was tormenting him by not lifting back up and instead enjoying the way he filled her so full.

There was no way to describe the peace and total bliss she felt when he was buried deep inside her. Sometimes, she wanted him to stay right there, deep, thick, hard. Not moving. When she lifted up, she would lose that intense connection.

She hated being separated from him for even an instant from the moment he'd rescued her. She hadn't even been able to pee by herself or bathe. She'd needed him in the room, his hands on her. But ever since she'd had his cock inside her, buried to the hilt, she'd developed a new obsession. She craved him embedded deep like a drug addict.

She licked her lips while she twisted on his cock, still holding his gaze. "Does it bother you?"

He gripped her ass cheeks. "Does what bother me, baby?" His voice was low and gravelly. Sexy.

She rocked her hips back and forth, getting more friction against her clit without rising above him. "When I hold your cock hostage in my pussy without moving," she murmured.

"Never. It feels so good. *You* feel so good wrapped around me. I could spend hours inside your pussy without movement." His strained voice told her he was dead serious.

"You feel closer when you're deep inside me."

He smiled. "I *am* closer, baby. Consumed by you in the best imaginable way."

She gripped his cock with her channel.

“Jesus, Gemma. When you do that...”

“What?” she teased. “When I do that, what happens?”

“You drive me mad with the need to possess you. I want to flip you onto your back and fuck you into the headboard. I want my seed inside you. I want it spilling out of your pussy. And I don’t want you to wash it off. I want it to run down your legs and dry on your thighs.”

She groaned. How could he manage to make such filthy words sound so damn sexy? “I want that too,” she whispered as she finally lifted up slowly until just the head of his cock was lodged inside her. She held his gaze, waiting, prolonging both their needs before slamming back down over him.

He arched his hips off the bed, thrusting deeper.

“Hey...” she complained. “Who’s in charge here?”

He gripped her hips to hold her steady and held her above him a few inches before lifting his cock up into her. “Me, baby. Always me. I might humor you, but I’m still in charge.”

She shuddered and moaned as he fucked her from below. Damn, but he was good at this. It was a power exchange. In a way, there was no denying he was bigger than her and a dominant man. On the other hand, he liked her to feel like she had choices. Both of those realities felt powerful. She could be both in control and turning herself over to him at the same time.

Delicious.

Gemma dropped her palms flatter on his chest and leaned forward to get more friction against her clit. She groaned so loud the sound vibrated in the room.

Damon slid a hand around, found her clit, and pressed against it. “Come for me, baby. I need you to pulse around my cock before I’ll let myself go.”

She did as instructed, unable to hold back any longer, her release all the more intense with his erection buried so deep.

A moment later, he cried out with his own release, gripping her hip tight while still rubbing her clit.

She was panting, but a huge grin spread across her lips at the same time. “How is it always that good?”

He eased his hand around and gripped her ass. “Because I’m so in love with you I can’t see straight.”

She gave him a slow smile. “Yeah, that’s it.” She dropped down over him and brought her lips to his. “God, I love you.”

CHAPTER 2



DAMON

Damon was one lucky bastard. It sure hadn't seemed like it three years ago when he'd returned to the compound where Gemma lived to find every single human murdered and Gemma missing.

He'd thought he might die that day, and he'd dedicated every fucking moment of every day for the next three years to finding her. Success seemed incredibly unlikely as the weeks and months went by, but he never gave up hope.

When he'd finally recognized her body up for auction on the dark web, he'd had to blink several times, thinking his mind was playing tricks on him. But she was real, and he secured a bid, and now, he never intended to let her out of his sight again as long as he lived.

They could do just that—never separate—if they were so inclined. Lord knew he had enough money from his father's estate to live comfortably well past one hundred if he chose. So far, that's what he'd been doing with Gemma for the past month. Living. Enjoying every moment with her.

They'd slept hard. Neither of them had gotten enough sleep for three years. Now that he knew exactly where she was every night—wrapped tightly in his arms—he could finally rest.

She had demons. They would be battling them for the rest of their lives. But with every passing day, she was shoving them deeper into a corner.

Tonight, she was miles different from the frightened, panicked slave he'd brought home with him. For one thing, she hadn't been able to tolerate clothes touching her body at all. Not for days. Gradually, she'd grown accustomed to being covered, but she rarely wore a bra or anything itchy. She hated tags. She hated seams. She hated tight confining garments.

Before she was taken, she'd lived a life of luxury as the daughter of an Italian mob boss. Her father hadn't been the worst sort of mafia boss, but he still lived below the law.

Damon certainly couldn't judge the man. His own father hadn't been much different. Nor had Robert's, for that matter. Now all three of those men were dead. All three murdered. It couldn't be a coincidence.

Damon had taken a step back from his ten-year obsession with nailing bad men to the wall to live a little and enjoy his woman. Tonight was no exception. And, God almighty, Gemma looked like heaven.

He'd purchased the clothing she wore, but he hadn't been sure if she'd like it, nor could he have fully appreciated what it might look like on her until she stepped out of the bathroom and into his line of sight.

Damon was staring at her from across the room. He'd been putting on his shoes, but the second one fell from his hand and landed with a thud on the carpet. He sat up straighter, not blinking, swallowing hard.

She bit her lip as she strolled toward him. "What do you think?"

He nearly choked. “I think we should stay home.”

She giggled. “Not a chance. We’re going to Roses and Thorns. That’s what you bought this outfit for, remember?”

He slowly shook his head, never letting his gaze slide away from her. “No. I don’t even remember my name, and if I bought that for you to wear out of the house, I must have been out of my mind.”

She glanced down, and when she looked back at him, the smile on her face was worth every single star in the sky. She hadn’t worn anything except modest sweaters and leggings since she’d been here. This was a drastic change.

Absolutely none of her attributes were left to the imagination. The dress—if it could be called that—was black. It consisted of crisscrossing pieces of material that hugged her tits and ass, leaving her back and her tummy bare. It barely covered her ass at all.

There was no way to wear a bra with this dress, and her pert tits were pushed up and out by the stretchy material. He lowered his gaze to her pussy. “Please tell me you’re wearing the thong I left out.”

She lifted the hem seductively. “Yes, Sir,” she sassed.

“Turn around,” he growled. “Lift the back of the skirt.”

She did as instructed, showing him her fine ass cheeks. “Happy?”

He growled again. “Not really. I was definitely out of my mind.”

She continued forward, set her hands on the arms of his chair, and leaned over until her amazing tits hung in front of his face. “Don’t growl. It’s perfect. I feel like a princess. I

haven't felt sexy since before I was abducted. Not sexy like this anyway. Everything important is covered. We'll be with your closest friends. Tuck that scowl away, please."

He sighed and ran a hand down his face. He'd been incredibly possessive of her since he'd gotten her back. It wasn't Gemma who didn't like to be exposed. She hardly cared if anyone saw her naked. Her nudity barometer was broken from years of being kept naked while the scum of the earth stared at her body.

Nope. It was Damon who didn't like anyone to see her. She was his. His alone. Didn't matter that he'd dominated naked women many times in the past at Roses and Thorns. He had no intention of ever baring Gemma to a living soul. He wasn't even fond of doctors and nurses seeing her skin during checkups.

"Damon..." she warned. "I'm yours. I'll always be yours. I went to Roses and Thorns with you. Half the people there were naked. You've told me yourself you've done scenes with naked women before. There won't even be guests there tonight. The club isn't open. It will just be the six of us. You know Robert and Boyd are totally in love with their wives. They won't be ogling my body."

She was right. He still felt like a caveman. "The thong stays on at all times, got it?"

"Yes, Sir."

"And I don't want your nipples popping out either. No one can avoid seeing your globes, but the nipples and the pussy are mine. No exceptions."

She nodded. "Yes, Sir." She wasn't mocking him. She was serious.

He lowered his gaze down her legs next. Her tanned skin was smooth and toned and made his mouth water. But the fucking black heels she wore made him nearly swallow his tongue.

He'd seen her dressed scantily many times when she was twenty and tormenting him around her father's pool, but that was a long time ago. This Gemma was not the same woman. This Gemma was not a flirty girl just out of her teens. She'd been through things most human beings couldn't imagine and survived.

Ignoring the dropped shoe, he grabbed her hips and hauled her forward until she was plastered against him between his spread thighs. They were nearly eye-to-eye. "You're gorgeous."

She set her hands on his shoulders and glanced down. "You don't look so bad yourself, Sir."

He wore all black like her. Black dress pants, a black button-up shirt, black socks and black dress shoes. He thought they looked stunning together.

Gemma lifted her hands to his hair. It was still slightly damp from his shower. She leaned in, buried her nose in his neck, and inhaled deep and slow.

"I love the way you smell," she whispered. "I never forgot your scent. I never will. I want to wake up to this scent and go to sleep to it every night of my life. Promise me I will."

"I promise." He pulled her closer and nuzzled the space between her breasts before setting her back a foot. "Let me put my other shoe on, temptress. If we don't get out of here soon, I'm going to change my mind, strip this dress off, and fuck you in this chair. To hell with the club."

She giggled. “I can keep the shoes though?” She lifted one and angled it back and forth.

“You can keep the shoes.” He couldn’t think of anything sexier. “I’m impressed with how well you can walk in those spike heels after all this time,” he remarked as he tied his second shoe.

“I guess it’s like riding a bike. Plus, my thighs and calves are strong from...” She drew in a breath and shrugged, not finishing her sentence. She didn’t need to. He was well aware of the high protocol she’d been forced to endure as part of her slave training. Hours of practicing slave positions would leave anyone fit.

Never again. Never again would she ever be forced to perform like that. He just hoped to God he knew which things would be off limits in her submission and which things would be fair game. The last thing he wanted was to trigger her. Not ever. That’s why he was so damn concerned about this visit to the club.

After three years of searching, hoping, waiting, she was under his protection, in his home, in his life. She was his. But he still worried every day if he could keep her. He’d only had her a month. She had a long way to go in her recovery. Years. Probably her entire life. Three years in captivity as a slave was more than most human beings could endure and come out on the other side intact.

Gemma was strong. She’d proven that. She was showing progress every hour of every day. But taking her to the club to play? That was a step that concerned him greatly. It was risky. If he triggered her, she could take a turn for the worse. She could turn away from him.

Damon had several pieces of information in his arsenal though. Most importantly, Gemma had never been struck in captivity. Because of that, she had responded positively to spankings from the day he'd rescued her. It was unconventional to say the least, but it worked for her.

At first, Damon had used spanking as a way to remind her of two important rules: She was not permitted to call him Sir or Master, and she had to look him in the eyes.

It hadn't taken long for it to become apparent that she craved the spankings. She longed for the contact. It made her feel alive. So he had to adjust. Ever since then, he used spanking as a reward. The ante for the reward went up every day.

By now, they'd reached a point where she could earn spankings by going into the backyard alone and staying there for ten minutes, bathing or showering alone, choosing her own clothes and dressing herself.

Baby steps. Regular things people did every day that were taken for granted. But for someone who'd spent three years always naked, trained to service a future master, and tormented with orgasm denial, every tiny step mattered.

The important thing was that Dr. Langston, though initially skeptical, was now in agreement with the unconventional methods Damon and Gemma were using to help her reclaim her life.

Armed with this knowledge and the way she reacted to impact play, Damon felt confident that introducing her to other implements of impact would likely be safe. He would never restrain her. She'd experienced that every day of her life in a traumatic fashion. He would never put her in a cage. He would never deny her food or clothes or privacy.

He would also never expose her to other people. This was more a result of the intense possessiveness he felt toward her than her own need for modesty. The truth was she had come to him with a warped sense of modesty after years of parading around naked, an aversion to having clothing touching her skin, and a complete lack of touch with reality.

Damon rose from his armchair and cupped her face. “You are so unbelievably gorgeous both in and out of this dress. Please don’t ask me to remove it in front of other people. Call me a jealous boyfriend, but I’m not sharing you with another human being. Ever.”

She leaned into him and gripped his biceps. “Okay,” she said softly. A slow smile grew. “I think I like this possessive side of you. It makes me feel warm and fuzzy.”

“Good. Get used to it.” He leaned down and kissed her. “Ready to go?”

“Yes, Sir.”

If nothing else, Gemma absolutely knew when it was appropriate to call him Sir. He would never ever permit her to call him Master. That was out of the question. She was not his slave. She would never be anyone’s slave, and he didn’t want her to think that for one second.

Sir he could tolerate when she was submitting to him as long as that didn’t extend to all the time. Perhaps at one point in his life he’d visualized a Dom/sub relationship with a woman that extended outside of a club setting, but this would never be appropriate for Gemma. She needed to spend most of her time grounded in her own autonomy. If he let her submit to him and refer to him as Sir with regularity, she would lose herself to a slave mindset that didn’t work for someone who’d survived what she’d been through.

He lifted her hand, kissed her fingers, and led her out of the bedroom.

He sure as fuck hoped he wasn't making the biggest mistake of his life.

CHAPTER 3



DAMON

Thirty minutes later, Damon led Gemma into Roses and Thorns. Robert, Ella, Boyd, and Macy were already there. After quick hugs of greeting, the six of them entered the main floor of the club.

“It’s so bright in here. The lighting was dim the night I visited last time,” Gemma commented.

Robert nodded. “I turned the lights up so you could see everything more clearly. We can dim them again in a while if you’d like.”

“Oh.” Gemma had a tight grip on Damon’s hand.

He squeezed her fingers. “If you get uncomfortable at any time, tell me, and we’ll leave.”

She tipped her head back. “I’m fine.”

He narrowed his gaze. “I can see you’re fine now. But if that changes...” He gave her a stern glare. “If I think for one moment you are—at any point—enduring something you don’t like without using a safeword, I will withhold spankings from you for a week. Understood?”

She nodded. “Yes, Sir.”

When Damon turned around, he found both Ella and Macy looking at their husbands with wide eyes. Wide mischievous

eyes.

Robert groaned before he tugged Ella's hair back, forcing her to pay attention. "Opposite rules apply to you, Ella. If I ever caught you holding back on your safeword..." He growled. "Actually, maybe Damon is on to something. I'd find a far more powerful way to punish you than spanking. I wouldn't even let you set foot in this club again for a month."

Ella grinned and shrugged. "Just checking."

Boyd snagged Macy at the back of her neck and set his forehead against hers. "Same goes for you."

"Yes, Sir," she breathed.

Damon stroked Gemma's cheek with his thumb. "The only safeword we've discussed is *red*. Would you rather use something more creative?"

"No. Red is fine. Do people really use them?"

Damon's brows shot up. "Yes, baby, they do. No matter how seasoned a Dom is, he can't know the mind of every single submissive he scenes with. He can follow every instinct and watch her as closely as possible, but sometimes, the submissive needs the scene to stop for any number of reasons."

Robert nodded. "He's right. Often whatever triggers a submissive might not be something they were even aware of. He or she might not realize until the middle of a scene that blindfolds make them panic or they don't like everyone staring at their nudity or caning is far too painful. Using a safeword doesn't in any way indicate a sense of weakness. It just represents your limits. If, for any reason, you realize you don't like something, never endure it. Use your safeword."

Damon cupped her face. “This is the most important part of BDSM, baby. I will never ever be mad at you for using a safeword. We’ll learn together, take a step back, and try something else that makes your blood pump. Got it?”

“Yes, Sir.”

He hoped to fuck she wasn’t humoring him. “You’re new to the BDSM world, Gemma. Playing at Roses and Thorns is nothing like the slave training you endured. You get that, right?”

She nodded. “Yes, Sir.”

“Safe, sane, and consensual,” he reminded her. “Always. Everything that happens in this club is for your pleasure. If you’re not receiving pleasure, we move on to something that titillates you.”

She nodded again. “Okay.”

Damon turned her around so she was facing the others before wrapping his arms around her below her breasts and nodding toward Ella over her shoulder. “Ella likes to be restrained. I’ll never do that to you.”

Macy grabbed Boyd’s arm and leaned against him. “Boyd likes to torment me sadistically with orgasm denial.”

Gemma shuddered in Damon’s arms.

He kissed her cheek. “See? You’d hate that too.”

“Yes.”

“So, those won’t be your kinks. We’re going to explore other means of impact play since you like being spanked so much,” he informed her.

“Okay,” she murmured.

He knew she had to be nervous. This was a huge step. It also wasn't necessary. He turned her back around and held her shoulders. "I want to make sure you fully understand that my heart belongs to you no matter what. I do not need to dominate you to be happy. You will not force yourself to endure something you don't like in an effort to please me. You please me by existing. Any fetishes we take part in will always be for your pleasure. If I detect you aren't fully engaged or enjoying yourself, we're done."

He couldn't state any of that enough times. He wanted to be certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that Gemma wanted this for herself. Not for him.

She wrapped her arms around him. "I get it, Damon. Show me your world."

For the next hour, they moved around the room from one apparatus to the next. Robert and Boyd used Ella and Macy to demonstrate various benches, the St. Andrew's Cross, a spider web, and several other pieces of furniture.

At first Gemma was stiff and nervous, but she gradually relaxed. It was easier to fully grasp the types of play people enjoyed with the lights turned up and a more clinical demonstration.

Finally, he led her to a spanking bench. He patted it. "Are you ready to try a few things?"

"Yes." She nodded eagerly.

He lifted her and arranged her on the bench so that her knees and forearms rested on the padded sections. The vinyl center was wide enough to support her but narrow enough that her breasts hung partly off the sides. There was a horseshoe-

shaped padded leather extension where she could comfortably rest her face and still breathe easily.

“Don’t you usually restrain people to these?” she asked, her voice cracking. She hadn’t lowered her face yet, and she looked so fucking sexy already that Damon’s cock strained against his pants.

“Yes, but not you. There is something worse than bondage, baby.” He ran the tips of his fingers up the back of her thigh.

Her breath hitched.

He smiled. “Many submissives find the honor system of restraint to be far worse than if they are actually strapped down.”

“The honor system?” She swallowed.

“Yep. I expect you to consciously keep your knees and elbows on the padded sections at all times. If you lift an arm to reach back and cover yourself, the play stops. If you lift a knee to avoid contact or kick out, the play also stops.”

“What if I do either of those things by accident? Instinct?”

“Play stops,” he reiterated. “It’s unsafe for you to move. Reaching back with a hand could cause me to injure you if I strike your fingers or your wrist or your arm. Same goes for trying to jerk to one side or the other, causing me to strike the wrong part of you.”

“Oh.”

“Are you comfortable?”

“Yes, Sir.”

He leaned over and kissed her. “Rest your forehead against the padding. Keep your arms and legs where they are. I’ll try

out several types of impact toys, and we'll figure out what you enjoy."

She smiled before lowering her face.

He could feel her excitement. Most people would be scared. Not Gemma. She was intrigued. She trusted him. It was humbling.

Boyd gathered several floggers, paddles, crops, and canes and lined them up on another bench out of her line of sight.

Damon reached for the first, most supple, flogger and carried it toward her head. "Lift your head for a moment, baby. I want you to see what I'm going to use first."

She tipped her head back and stared at the flogger as he stroked the leather strips.

"This one is very soft. I'll start slow and build up. It will feel like a massage. It will help you relax and calm you. When we move on to some more painful implements, you'll be prepared."

"Yes, Sir."

He cupped her breast through the stretchy black material. She was fully covered, but her nipples were hard points under his palm. When he stepped behind her, he eased the short, tight skirt over her ass so it settled around her waist, leaving her tanned cheeks exposed. The thong he'd provided her covered her tight rear hole and her pussy well enough.

He cupped her bottom and molded his hand to it, squeezing her soft skin before releasing it. He wasn't nervous about the flogger. He knew she would enjoy it. She would probably squirm and beg him for something more painful. After all, his palm had more impact than this flogger.

After swinging it through the air a few times to establish a rhythm, he let the soft leather strips tease her bottom, enjoying the way she flinched. He didn't stop because he knew he wasn't causing her any undo stress. She just needed to get used to the feel of the flogger.

Back and forth, right and left, lower on her thighs and higher on her bottom. As her skin pinkened, he could hear her breathing heavier. Her butt cheeks clenched several times. She was aroused.

Damon increased the speed of each swat, causing a slight bite from each of the leather tails.

Gemma groaned. It was the sweetest sound. His girl really did like her impact play. He was glad, but he still wanted to be careful not to trigger her. Especially when it came to the crop.

Though Master J and his trainers had not struck the slaves hard enough to leave a mark or risk permanent lines on their skin, they did use crops to correct behavior, usually on the nipples or directly on the pussy. Damon would strike her harder than she'd been struck in the past because she enjoyed the bite of pain, but he needed to be very careful not to trigger her.

When he nodded toward Boyd, his friend handed him another flogger, one with heavier leather falls. Damon swapped it out and slowed his swings.

Gemma lifted her head, not looking back. She kept her gaze straight ahead. "Oh God, that feels so good."

Damon continued, glancing at Robert every few strokes.

Robert was standing close to Gemma's head, all of his attention on her expression and demeanor, making sure she wasn't in distress. Damon welcomed the second set of eyes.

Gemma was not like any other submissive any of them had ever scened with.

Finished with the flogger, Damon handed it back to Boyd and stepped closer to set his hand on Gemma's lower back and rub her warm cheeks. "How are you doing, baby?"

"So good." Her body was relaxed and limp. He took that as a good sign. She might not know what subspace was, but she was slipping in that direction. He needed to be cautious about that too.

When he slid his fingers between her legs to check her thong, they came away soaked. She also arched her head back again and whimpered. All good signs.

Next, Boyd handed Damon a wooden paddle. He brought it around to show her. "I'm switching to a paddle now. The sting will be more intense. You ready?"

She licked her lips, nodded at him, and lowered her head again. "Yes, Sir."

Once again, Damon started slow, tapping her bottom and the backs of her thighs as gently as possible before building up the intensity. He loved the way her skin was growing redder with every passing moment.

After giving her a firm swat, he paused and stepped closer to her head to stroke her neck. "How are you doing, baby?"

"So good. That feels amazing."

He smiled. There was now very little doubt his girl enjoyed a certain level of pain beyond spanking. The question was how much could she endure?

Robert nodded at him, his way of letting him know he also believed her words and thought it was safe to continue.

Damon increased the pressure, the sound of each slap reverberating in the large space. With only four spectators standing close, none of them making a single sound, the paddle strikes seemed much louder than usual.

Since Gemma was still relaxed and showing no signs of using a safeword or moving her arms or legs, he swapped paddles with Boyd and changed the sensation a bit. This one would deliver a harder thud.

The first strike made her cry out.

Damon hesitated, his heart racing.

And then Gemma lifted her head and twisted around to look at him. “Don’t stop.”

He smiled and struck her again several more times, watching her sexy ass turn a darker red. He didn’t want to break the skin, but if she enjoyed the sting, he would be happy to swat her sexy bottom as often as she’d like.

In his mind, he immediately took that thought back. If Gemma had her way, she’d probably insist on him paddling her three times a day. That wouldn’t be safe. Her skin would need to heal for a few days after this level of impact play.

Finally, he returned the paddle and picked up the crop. He needed to test her ability to recognize the difference between Damon using it consensually and her former trainers using it for evil intent. There was no guarantee she could tolerate the crop, but that would be okay too.

CHAPTER 4



GEMMA

Gemma's heart was racing. She'd never felt so alive. She knew she craved impact play on some level, but this was more intense and amazing than she'd anticipated.

Maybe she was wired this way. Maybe she would have loved impact play even if she'd never been abducted and trained as a slave, but it was also possible she was starved for the intensity of the contact after years of denial. Dr. Langston had helped her recognize the need.

When Damon stopped paddling her and slid his hand up her back, she whimpered. She lifted her head and turned toward him, thinking to beg him not to stop.

She opened her mouth, but he immediately tapped her lips with a leather flap, making her breath hitch.

"I want to try a crop on you, baby," he said gently. "It might trigger you though. It's important that you tell me if you don't like the sensation. Remember, what happens between you and me is consensual."

She nodded. "Yes, Sir."

"I'm not using the crop to correct your behavior. I'm not going to strike you anywhere near your nipples or your clit.

I'm going to use it to make your bottom sting just like the paddles and the floggers.”

She bit her lip and held back her response. Part of her wanted to tell him to go ahead and swat her clit. The crop was not going to trigger her. It was in Damon's hand instead of the hand of some evil motherfucker. She could probably come if he tapped her clit with it. But she didn't tell him that.

Her breath hitched when he dragged the soft leather tip across her heated skin. Every inch of her butt was on fire, a delicious sensation that was even better than any of the times he'd spanked her. Hot. Tingly. Every touch made her eyes roll back.

When he suddenly smacked the bottom swell of her ass cheek with the square flap of leather, she flinched. It hurt so good. She wrapped her fingers around the padded armrest to remind herself not to move. Her toes curled in her stilettos.

Damon was right. It was intense, reminding herself not to move. Harder than being restrained. He was also right that she probably shouldn't ever let anyone restrain her. It might cause her to panic.

A long moan escaped her mouth when he swatted her other cheek in the same spot, shocking her as she realized the sound was coming from her. She held on tight to the armrests, but she felt herself oddly slipping into a strange place as if she were detaching from her body.

Two more swats dragged her deeper. She was tumbling into a weird state of bliss. All her focus was on the pain. It felt euphoric. It felt like something was lifting from her. Floaty. Several sensations at once. Like she was being exonerated for something. Like the times her mother took her to confession when she was a kid.

So odd. Confusing. And her pussy was throbbing. Her nipples were so hard and tight against the straps across them. She wanted to wiggle so she could abrade them against the elastic, but she wouldn't risk them popping free and upsetting Damon.

Damon was adamant about not sharing her, and she would respect that because it was important to him and because his possessiveness was sexy as fuck.

“Do you know what this is, baby?” Damon's hand was on the back of her head, stroking her hair. When had he stopped swatting her with the crop?

Her head was still down. She didn't have the will or the energy to lift it, but she didn't need to. He was holding something beneath the bench in her line of sight. A stick?

“No, Sir,” she murmured.

“It's a cane.”

She shuddered. Right. A cane. She swallowed hard. She'd seen videos of every type of toy on porn sites before she was abducted. She'd watched with her friends. If she remembered correctly, a cane could leave a long welt across the skin. In the videos the submissive always screamed and tried to avoid the strike of a cane.

Gemma wanted to experience it. She wanted to know. “Please show me, Sir,” she whispered.

He continued to stroke her hair. “One strike, Gemma. Afterward, you're going to come so hard for me that your screams will vibrate all over the room.”

She moaned. Her pussy clenched. She wanted what he was offering more than anything. “Yes, Sir.”

Damon rounded behind her and then set the cool cane against her thighs, stroking her skin, teasing her with the promise of its kiss. She knew it would be a wicked kiss. She was ready. Salivating.

The cane disappeared, and a moment later, she heard the whistle of it rushing through the air a half second before it contacted her skin, making a long line across both butt cheeks right at the juncture with her thighs.

She screamed. The pain was intense. She never released the armrests though. She held on tight as the waves of pain spread through her body. It felt like he'd flayed her skin open. She'd never experienced anything that intense before in her life.

It felt like paradise. She left her body for a moment as she absorbed the bombardment of sensation. Intense release. Validation. She was alive. Real. Human. She was on fire. Redeemed. Released... Released from her prison, released from her mind, released from her body.

A clanking sound followed, and she assumed Damon dropped the cane, and less than a second—and an hour—later, his fingers were between her legs, cupping her pussy. He reached under her thong, trust two fingers into her channel, and found her clit with his thumb. “Come, Gemma.”

She did. She came so hard her entire body shook from the intensity. If he hadn't used his other hand at the small of her back to anchor her, she might have slid off to the floor.

Her ass was on fire. Was she bleeding? She didn't even care. He could make her bleed every day if it felt this euphoric. And her orgasm wouldn't end, mostly because he didn't stop fingering her. He pushed harder on her clit, added a

finger to her pussy, and pressed his pinky against her tight asshole.

“Give me another one, baby. Come, Gemma. Again.”

His command was all she needed. As if her body was not her own but his. It obeyed his demand.

The sounds coming from her mouth were inhuman. After screaming, she started crying, an ugly cry that wasn't from pain but from release as if her entire world had just righted itself as all the pieces fell into place.

Tingles covered her skin like electrified goosebumps, causing her to start shaking violently.

Damon pulled his fingers out of her. A moment later, he wrapped a blanket around her and lifted her off the spanking bench to cradle her in his arms.

She couldn't open her eyes. She was trying to catch her breath.

He kissed her forehead and then all over her face. “You're safe. I love you.” Those were the same words he said to her every morning when she woke up. She felt them deep in her soul. His reassurance. His reaffirmation that she was alive and free and his.

Free. There was so much freedom in what they'd just done. Why did that word come to mind?

She didn't pay attention to where they were going, still unable to lift her eyelids, but soon Damon lowered to sitting, rocked her closer to his body, and kissed her face again. “I need you to drink some water, baby.” He tipped her back. The top of a water bottle touched her lips.

She whimpered and tried to turn away, uncertain she could swallow.

“Open those pretty brown eyes, Gemma. Look at me.”

She blinked several times before focusing on him.

“You need to drink, baby,” he repeated, bringing the water bottle to her lips once more.

She tried. For him. Because it seemed important to him.

After a few sips, she realized she was thirsty and managed to remember how to swallow. The cool liquid felt so good running down her throat as if she'd been screaming for hours. Maybe she had.

“Good girl,” he praised.

Eventually, he removed the water bottle. He continued to hold her though, stroking her body everywhere except her ass which he was carefully not touching. He had his knees parted wide and was keeping her skin off his pants. Her skirt was still up around her waist, leaving her butt bare to the cool air.

She had no idea how much time went by before she took a breath and looked at him again. She said the first pressing thing on her mind. “Am I bleeding?”

He shook his head. “No, baby. I'd never break your skin. It just feels like it.” He stroked her cheek with his thumb.

She glanced around. “Where is everyone else?”

“They went upstairs to the offices to give you some privacy. How do you feel?”

She gave him a slow smile. “That was the most intense, amazing experience of my life. Is it always like that?”

He smiled in return. “It might be even more intense next time because you’ll know what to expect and won’t be afraid to let yourself slide into subspace.”

“Subspace...” She’d heard of it, maybe.

“Yes. That disconnected feeling you experienced. I could practically see the exact moment when you floated out of your body. It scares some people.”

“I loved it.”

“I thought so.”

“Am I strange?”

“Not at all. There’s no such thing as strange anyway. Everyone is different. You’re a bit of a masochist, Gemma. I suspected as much every time I spanked you, especially considering how often you wanted me to do so. But adding other toys that are more powerful than my palm pushed you further.”

She kept grinning. “Will you do it again?”

He chuckled. “Yes. If it’s something you need and enjoy, but not often. It’s going to be a few days before I’ll be willing to spank your bottom again. You need a bath with Epsom salts, and then I’ll rub a salve into your skin. You’ll probably want to sleep on your stomach tonight.”

“Mmm.” Sounded like heaven. “Can I see it?”

“When you’re ready. I’ll take you to the full-length mirror in the locker room.”

“It felt like there was surely a long cut across me. I didn’t even care. It felt so good. Like a boulder lifted off me. I can’t describe it.”

He nodded. “Lots of people describe it similarly. You’re not alone.”

She drew in a breath. “That’s a relief.” She chewed on her bottom lip for a moment and then released it to ask him more questions. “Do you think I would have been like this if I hadn’t been abducted? Am I broken?”

He inhaled slowly too. “It’s hard to say. I presume you probably had a submissive side, but I can’t know if it would have extended this deep. Like Dr. Langston has told you, the pain and impact are life-affirming for you. It’s just how you’re dealing with the aftermath of your captivity. You might not always need this sort of release. It’s impossible to predict.”

“It hurt so good,” she told him. It still hurt. She kind of didn’t want it to stop. “Thank you.” She lifted her arm from under the blanket and cupped his face. “I love you so much. Thank you for giving me this experience. I know it was hard for you. I know you were nervous.”

“You’re welcome, baby. It will always be my pleasure to dominate you any way you need. As long as you remember to use your safeword if something ever feels off, I’ll be honored to take you to the moon and back.”

“I promise.” She understood how important the safeword was now. Especially after that intense scene. She held his gaze to reassure him. “Can you do that at home?”

“I can.” He leaned forward to kiss her lips. “You do not have permission to start badgering me to cane your ass every day, my insatiable pain slut. I meant what I said. The skin has to heal several days. A scene this intense should be done sparingly. Did you not like doing it at the club? Or maybe you’d rather not have an audience?” His brow was furrowed.

She shook her head. “I didn’t mind the club. I probably don’t mind the audience either. Your friends didn’t bother me. I forgot anyone was even in the room besides you and me. But I’d love for you to paddle and crop and cane me totally naked.”

“Mmm. We’ll do it at home next time then.” He kissed her nose now. “Your aversion to clothes is sexy as fuck, but my aversion to sharing your fucking sexy body reaches caveman proportions.”

She giggled. “Have you always been this possessive with all the women you’ve dated?”

“Never. I told you I’ve dominated many women here at Roses and Thorns. A lot of times they were naked.”

“Why am I different then?” she asked.

“I wasn’t in love with them. They were not mine. Not my submissives. I wasn’t their Dom. I didn’t make nudity choices for them. I just gave them what they craved.” He kissed her lips gently. His voice was lower when he spoke against her mouth. “You’re mine. I’m not sharing you with anyone.”

“Okay,” she breathed. His possessiveness didn’t bother her at all. She loved it. He even added a growly caveman tone to his voice. “I promise to keep my clothes on in front of other people if you promise to bring me to that blissful spot in heaven naked at home.”

“It would be my pleasure.” He rose to his feet, holding her against his chest.

“Where are we going?” she asked, holding on to his neck.

“To the locker room so I can inspect your adorable ass and let you see it. After that, we’re going home where I can inspect it again, bathe you, and rub that ointment on you. I wasn’t

kidding about any of that. Afterward, you may sleep as naked as you want in our bed in our home.”

She smiled as he headed for the locker room.

Our bed. Our home.

Most days it was hard to believe he was real. Impossible to grasp that she was not only free but with Damon Albertini, the man she'd lusted after for a year before her abduction.

Her heart was filled with love.

CHAPTER 5



GEMMA

“*M*mm.” Gemma’s body was so sated she couldn’t move a single muscle.

By the time Damon got her home, bathed her, patted her dry, and lowered her onto her stomach on the bed, she hadn’t had a single ounce of energy left. And he’d done most of the work.

The skin of her ass was still hot and the nerves on fire, but the ointment he was carefully rubbing into her skin felt amazing.

She’d been surprised when he’d stood her in front of the mirror in the locker room to prove to her not a single millimeter of her skin was cut. She wouldn’t have believed him if she hadn’t seen it with her own eyes.

“Spread your legs, baby,” Damon ordered as he continued to rub her bottom.

She used the last ounce of strength she could conjure to obey his request. “I’m gonna need a few minutes if you want to have sex. I’m a liquid.”

He chuckled. “We’re not having sex, baby. I prefer you be awake when we fuck.”

She twisted her head to look at him.

He was smiling though. “I had the most powerful orgasm of my life, and you got nothing.”

“That’s not true.” He shook his head. “For one thing, we had sex this morning. For another thing, my greatest pleasure in life will always be to give you pleasure in whatever form you need—both impact play and orgasms. And right now, what I really want to see is you giving me one more orgasm before I let you sleep. I want to make you squirm. I want to hear you scream. I want to feel your tight pussy gripping my fingers so hard they hurt. Then, I promise to let you sleep.”

A shudder wracked her body. Suddenly, she wasn’t nearly as tired as before. Her pussy was soaked. Her nipples ached against the expensive sheets. She slid her hands up to clasp the sides of the pillow. “Please,” she begged.

That was all the permission Damon needed. A moment later, his fingers were at her entrance. His other palm was on her lower back, holding her steady so she couldn’t buck away from him.

He didn’t tease her. He fucked her fast and hard with those fingers, his thumb once again pressing against her clit while his pinky tapped her tight hole.

She moaned, a deep tone she didn’t recognize. Maybe it was him?

“I want to take this ass someday,” he informed her.

She whimpered and found herself nodding. She wanted that too. It was so dirty and taboo. Delicious.

Still steadying her with his other hand, he slid his pinky into her bottom, slowly pushing deeper until his palm was flat against her ass.

The next moan definitely came from her. “God, that feels good. I had no idea...” Somehow this man of hers always knew exactly what she needed and when she was ready for it. He was never wrong, and she was one very lucky recipient of his dominance.

Damon was giving her the moon, somehow managing to erase all the years of horror and replacing them with experiences that made her heart race and her blood pressure spike.

“Please...” she begged.

“Come for me, baby. Let me watch you unravel for me one more time.”

Disobeying him wasn’t an option. Her body followed his orders as if it had no other choices.

Her eyes rolled back and her mouth fell open, and she let herself be fully present and enjoy every single moment of the orgasm that claimed her body and zapped the last remnants of her energy.

Finally, fully spent and unable to open her eyes, she breathed heavily while Damon headed for the bathroom. She heard the water running, and then he was back. He dropped onto the bed, his hip next to her body, and pulled the covers over them.

His lips lingered on her temple. “I love you,” he told her for the millionth time. “You’re safe.”

She’d never get tired of hearing it though, nor would she tire of saying it back. “I love you too.”

Heavy and happy and sated, Gemma let sleep take her under.



I hope you've enjoyed *Gemma's Release*. This novella gives a taste of the full-length novel in the *Roses and Thorns* series, *Marigold*. To read more about Gemma, Damon, and the rest of the women who were trained and sold as sex slaves, check out my latest series, *Roses and Thorns*. Each book tells the story of another woman's escape from hell. They stand alone, but the underlying story about the sex trafficker who kidnapped and sold them extends throughout the series

ABOUT BECCA JAMESON

Becca Jameson is a USA Today best-selling author of over 125 books. She is well-known for her Wolf Masters series, her Fight Club series, and her Surrender series. She currently lives in Houston, Texas, with her husband and her Goldendoodle. Two grown kids pop in every once in a while too! She is loving this journey and has dabbled in a variety of genres, including paranormal, sports romance, military, and BDSM.

A total night owl, Becca writes late at night, sequestering herself in her office with a glass of red wine and a bar of dark chocolate, her fingers flying across the keyboard as her characters weave their own stories.

During the day—which never starts before ten in the morning!—she can be found jogging, running errands, or reading in her favorite hammock chair!

...where Alphas dominate...

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PROTECTED BY HIM



By

Measha Stone

CHAPTER 1



ALEKSANDRA

Taking a job at a bar owned by one of the most powerful Polish families in Chicago was the first mistake I made. The second was not quitting after the first poker game. Powerful men gambling away thousands of dollars with each hand tip damn good. So, I overlooked the guns. I pretended not to understand their conversations. I did everything I was paid to do: keep my eyes shut, my ears deaf, and my mouth closed.

But then I made my third mistake.

“Hey, watch it, Aleksandra!” Janusz Staszek chastised, shaking off the droplet of whiskey that landed on his hand as I put his glass down in front of him.

“Sorry,” I muttered. Maybe if he kept his hands from flying around while he was talking, he wouldn’t have hit my tray and spilled on himself. But not my place.

I moved around the table, handing out drinks and clearing away empty glasses.

“Bring more pretzels.” Henry Kozar said, pinching my ass when I turned away from him. I gritted my teeth. “Sure.”

“Henry.” Dmitri, one of the Staszek’s men leaning against the wall watching the game, spoke up. “Hands off if you want

to keep them.” He spoke in Polish, still under the delusion I didn’t speak the language.

From the corner of my eye, I watched him point a long finger at Henry. Dmitri was the only one who put a stop to the guys who got handsy.

“You don’t allow us any fun, Dmitri. Look at her, at that ass, how can I not touch?” Henry answered in rapid Polish. I handed out the last drink and grabbed the empty bowl for the pretzels from the middle of the table.

“She’s too young for you. What would she want with an old man like you!” Janusz laughed.

Feeling my cheeks start to heat, I hurried from the room. If they could see me blush, they’d know I understood them.

When I returned with a full basket of pretzels, Dmitri stopped me at the door. “Stay clear of Henry. He’s had too much to drink tonight.” He plucked a pretzel from the basket and popped it into his mouth.

“He always has too much to drink when he’s playing cards.” I looked at the table, around Dmitri’s hulking form. “I’ll be all right. But thanks.” I couldn’t quite bring my eyes up to meet his. Whenever I did, my cheeks burned red, and I was tired of the arrogant grin he’d flash when it happened.

I maneuvered around him and brought the pretzels to the table. Walking behind Janusz, I noticed his hand. Full house, ace high. Great hand. Curious, I made my way around the table as they placed bets and jibes at each other. Henry’s hand, a pair of sixes, wasn’t worth meeting the ante, but he threw in a hundred dollars, then more.

“See your hundred, Janusz, and raise a thousand.” He arched his back and grinned.

I snorted. The idiot was trying to bluff these guys.

Janusz's eyes darted up to my face, then looked back at Henry.

Oh shit! I moved back away from the table, hurrying to the corner table in the room to grab the ice bucket.

"I don't believe you have anything. I see your thousand. Raise two more." Janusz upped the bet.

"I'm out." The other four players fell away, but Henry stubbornly remained.

"You have that Staszek stubborn blood. Don't know when to quit." Henry laughed. "Fine. I'll see you. Raise another three."

"Henry, that's all your cash." Stephan, the man to his right, cautioned him.

Janusz looked up again at me, tapping his cards on the table. My nerves danced beneath his stare. Getting involved in the game would be a stupid thing to do, dangerous and stupid. So fucking stupid. My eyes swept the room. Finding Dmitri, I kept my gaze settled on his chest.

"Stop looking at her. Is she some sort of fortune teller?" Henry laughed, more uncomfortable this time, as he twisted in his seat to find me. I was against the wall, doing my damndest to ignore the game. All I wanted to do was get out of the room and hide. Henry never took losing well, and that was when he was sober.

Dmitri moved to my side. His arm brushed against mine. A simple touch, but enough to calm the nerves ramping up again as Henry made his disastrous bet.

"Stay here, by me," he said.

“I have to get ice.” I showed him the empty bucket.

“Stay put.” There was a strong warning in his tone.

“Go on, what do you have?” Henry poked at Janusz.

“Full house.” Janusz grinned, laying out each of his five cards. “Aces high.” He tapped his fingertip to the cards. “Now you.”

Henry’s smile fell.

“Go on, Henry. Show your cards.” Stephan nudged him.

“I’ll show them,” Henry growled, throwing his cards down. “You cheat!” He pointed a long, crooked finger at Janusz. He’d broken it in a car door – or rather he had it broken in a car door.

“You had too much to drink.” Janusz gathered up the cash in the middle of the table.

“No.” Henry turned on me, his chair falling to the ground as he jumped to his feet. “You!”

Dmitri moved to stand in front of me.

“Henry. Enough,” he barked in Polish.

“She told him my cards. She made a noise. I heard it!” Henry shouted.

“Oh, shut up, you old man,” Janusz chastised. “Sit down. We’re not done playing.”

“He is. He’s out of cash.” Stephan chuckled.

“Because of that bitch!” Henry raged on. I pressed myself against the wall. “Get away, Dmitri. Let me deal with her.” He stumbled forward. Dmitri moved to intercept him, and I rushed to the door. The ice bucket slipped from my grasp, hitting the floor and rolling away.

A gunshot rang out. Wood splintered from the door frame just as I reached for it. With a scream, I jumped back.

“Henry!” Someone bellowed. “Fuck!”

“You cheat!” Henry yelled.

Another shot.

A chair scraped across the linoleum floor, and Janusz fell back in his chair with a bullet in his forehead.

I froze. His body was only a few steps from me. Blood pooled on the floor, running toward me. When I looked up, Henry had his gun pointed at me. He pulled the trigger. Dmitri tackled him. The bullet hit the wall.

I covered my head.

“Fuck, Henry,” Stephan yelled. “He’s dead.”

I swallowed back the bile rising up in my throat.

“Over cards?”

“Can’t hold his liquor.”

The other men scrambled. I was shoved away from the door as they bolted from the room.

“Aleksandra.” Dmitri’s hands gripped my arms. “Look at me, Aleksandra.” He shook me, rattling my attention until I brought my eyes to his.

“He’s dead,” I whispered. Ice ran through me. I swallowed hard. He was dead.

“Yes. He is.” His lips pressed into a thin line. He cursed under his breath in polish, wiping something from my cheek. Blood. Janusz’s blood.

“Aleksandra.” His voice broke through the shock barreling down on me. “I have to deal with this.”

“It’s all her fucking fault! Not mine!” Henry raged as two more of Staszek’s men wrestled him against the wall.

“Go to the office. Wait there for me.” Dmitri knuckled my chin until I moved my gaze from Henry to him. “Do you understand? Wait in the office. Do not leave.”

“I have to get out of here, Dmitri,” I tried to pull from him, but he only held tighter. Ice ran through my veins. Janusz was dead, and Henry blamed me.

“So, help me, Aleksandra; if you do not listen to me, you will be very sorry.” His jaw clenched when he spoke, like he was doing his best to keep his temper in check and was about to lose.

“Dmitri, what do we do with him?” A voice came from somewhere behind Dmitri. I could see around him. He’d become a wall, separating me from the violence and death on the other side.

“Go.” He ordered and jerked his head toward the door. “In the office.”

I nodded until he let go of my arm, and I took an unsteady step away from him. With one last look at the blood on the floor, I ran out into the hallway.

The bar was already closed for the night. No one other than the manager in the back.

“I’ll get her. I swear it!” Henry’s voice trailed out of the back room. “This is her fault!”

I stopped outside the office door. Looking back down the hall, I heard the grunts of a man in pain. Were they beating

him? Would they kill him right there?

I'd seen it all.

I was a witness.

And I knew how the Polish mafia dealt with witnesses.

I ran to the break room, grabbed my purse, and bolted. I'd made enough mistakes already.

Sticking around to see what they were going to do to me wouldn't be another. I made my first wise decision in months.

I ran.

CHAPTER 2



ALEKSANDRA

Henry Nowak returns home after spending two years on a sabbatical in Europe. Possible run for Mayor in his future.

I gripped my phone, staring at the headline glaring up at me. Slowly, the thump of the club music came back from the fog, and the colored lighting swirling over the dance floor became vibrant again.

“Hey, Alex, your drinks are up.” Kristov, my manager, leaned into my ear. “You okay?”

I swiped away the news app and shoved my phone into the back pocket of my jeans.

“Yeah. I’m good.” I pushed a smile on and lifted the tray of drinks from the bar. “Thanks.”

“Sure.” His brow wrinkled. “You sure you’re good?”

“Perfect.” I made my way from behind the bar toward the VIP lounge in the corner of the club. Enigma reserved tables behind a red velvet rope, making those with the cash to blow feel even more special. Keeping them roped off from the other customers seemed more like a favor to the general population, but I wasn’t going to verbalize my thoughts on the matter.

They may be a bunch of pricks, but they had the cash to back up the attitude.

And I needed the money.

Anton, the bouncer stationed at the VIP entrance, nodded as he unhooked the rope for me to get past.

“Alex.” He grinned. “You’re looking good tonight.”

I laughed. “You say that every night.” I moved past him, balancing the tray on one hand. “Still not gonna date you.”

He feigned heartbreak, and I moved through the high-top tables toward the booths on the edge of the area. I found my table, a group of girls in their early twenties laughing and cheering as three of them held the left hand of the fourth. As I rested the tray on the edge of the table, I got an eyeful at the star of the show. A huge ass diamond sat on her ring finger.

“Oh, our drinks!” The bride-to-be pulled her hand free from her friends. “We should have ordered champagne.” She pouted.

“I can grab a bottle if you want,” I offered as I dealt out their wines and frozen margaritas.

“Yes! The most expensive one!” She waved her hand at me. “We’re celebrating.”

I pretended to take inventory of the obscene rock on her hand. “Wow. It’s gorgeous.” I tried to push my smile up higher, to give some resemblance of sincerity, but it wasn’t really in me.

“Make it two bottles!” The redhead in the corner added. “And strawberries. Do you have strawberries?”

“You’ve been watching *Pretty Woman* again, haven’t you?” The bride laughed.

“It’s a great movie.” The redhead sank a little lower in her seat. It wasn’t hard to figure out the hierarchy of these little groups.

“Two bottles of our most expensive champagne and strawberries if we have them.” I tucked the empty tray beneath my arm. “Anything else, ladies?”

“Oh! Daddy’s already putting the announcement in the Times!” The bride flashed her phone at her friends, leaving me completely forgotten.

“Two bottles of Dom Pérignon Oenothèque.” I slid my tray on the counter.

“Two?” Kristov’s eyes light up. It’s a ten-grand bill just for those bottles.

“Yeah. You can probably slip them some Brut, and they wouldn’t know the difference.” I pressed my hip against the counter. My feet ached from the long shift, but one more hour and I’d be able to get out of there and go home. Just in time to overthink and worry and obsess a little more about that headline and what my next steps were. Was I still safe here?

“You have another table that was just seated.” Kristov waved toward the few tables outside the VIP section given to me.

“Right.” I pushed off the counter. Saturday nights never stop, but I was distracted. “Looks like there’s another being seated now. I’ll get them both. Get those bottles for me?”

“Be ready by the time you get back.”

“Oh! Strawberries, too.” I called back to him as I backed out of the bar area, immediately bumping into a brick wall.

Strong hands wrapped around my arms, steadying me before I fell backward onto my ass on the edge of the dance floor. Once back on my feet, I turned around and came face to face with the fiercest frown I've ever seen.

Or recognized.

Ice shot down my spine, freezing every nerve on the way down. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe that news article messed with my brain.

But then he spoke, ruining my momentary delusion.

“You should watch where you're going,” With one long finger, Dmitri lifted the name tag on my blouse. “Alex?”

I frowned right back at him. It had been two years. Surely, he'd forgotten all about me by now.

“Thanks.” It's all I could figure to say. His eyes narrowed slightly.

I stepped back, away from his touch.

“If you want a drink, you'll have to go to the bar.” I pointed to the crush of people waving their hands, vying for the attention of any bartender in their area.

His left eyebrow arched; thick and black, just like the beard covering his jawline. He looked exactly the same. My insides clenched. Even the same heat touched my cheeks as his stare lingered.

“That won't be necessary,” he said.

“Okay.” I shook my head. I needed to get away from him before he realized who I was.

As I started to move away from him, he grabbed my arm again, this time pulling me around. His eyes move to my hair,

then my eyes.

“Alex,” he said my name like he was trying it on for size. I wondered if it fit.

“Yeah.” I yanked my arm free. “I have to get my tables.”

“You look familiar,” he said, narrowing his eyes again. My mouth dried beneath his inspection.

“No, I don’t,” I said and pushed past him as quickly as I could. Fighting the growing crowd, I managed to get away from him before he was able to grab me again.

I only had another forty-five minutes. I needed to get my tables squared away, try not to obsess over the new information I received, and, most importantly, I needed to avoid Dimitri at all costs. He disappeared into the crowd once I was away from him, but that didn’t mean he’d left.

I took the orders from the new tables and brought them back to the bar, first making sure the big Polish guy was gone.

Finally, with a full night’s tips in my pocket, I punched out for the night and grabbed my purse from my locker in the back. I made another month’s rent. At least that’s one less thing I had to worry about.

I headed out to the side entrance of the club that led out onto a side street. After stepping over a passed out twenty-something-year old and around a small group of assholes trying to sneak their way into the back of the club, I rounded the corner to my bus stop.

“Aleksandra!” A dark voice called out as the bus doors opened. The hair on the back of my neck stood up, but I forced myself to step up onto the bus and not look back.

As the bus pulled past the club, I looked out my window. Dimitri stood on the corner. His hands were tucked into the front pockets of his leather jacket; his dark eyes met mine through the window. Electric fire erupted inside my chest.

He recognized me.

Fuck.

I pulled the wire on the bus to get off at the next stop. I'd need to make a quick trip to the pharmacy before heading home. It was probably for the best. The blonde never really looked great on me. Maybe black would be more my style.

Finally getting home, I dragged my tired ass off the bus and headed to my basement apartment. Even at one in the morning, there were stragglers walking the streets. After making sure the gate was locked, I headed down the four steps to my apartment door.

Inside, I took a long breath.

Henry was back in the country.

And Dimitri Staszek had found me.

Grabbing the hair dye from the bag, I marched on exhausted feet to the bathroom.

New York had been fun, but it was time to go.

CHAPTER 3



ALEKSANDRA

Where the hell did I put my computer charger? I threw the cushions off the couch, which led to the discovery of eighty-five cents in change and three pens but no charger. Leaving the cushions, I went back to the kitchen to check the junk drawer. Again.

I had the damn thing two nights ago when I was streaming a movie, but did I put it back on my nightstand where it's supposed to be? Nope. Growing more panicked by the moment, I yanked the drawer open, spilling takeout menus onto the floor.

“Dammit!” I marched back into my bedroom, where I had two suitcases splayed open on my bed with the contents of my closet and most of my dresser shoved into them. Time was ticking. I had to get going. I had a ticket waiting for me at Penn Station, a one-way to St. Louis. Not my first choice, but it was the first train leaving that morning. I didn't have time to keep looking. I'd just have to buy a new charger when I got there. I'd already risked too much by taking the time to dye my hair.

I zipped up the first suitcase just as banging started at the front door. It could just be the tenants upstairs. It was three-

thirty in the morning. Maybe they were just getting home from a night of partying.

The gate to my door was locked. No one would be able to get to the door to knock on it.

Banging started up again, more urgent this time. I reached beneath my pillow, grabbed the hammer I kept there, and slowly crept through the short hall and through the micro kitchen toward the living room space. My front windows pointed at the street, but I didn't see any feet. The gate was still closed.

“Aleksandra. Open the door.” Dimitri demanded. I gripped the hammer tighter. How did he get past the gate?

I moved to the door, pressing myself against the wall next to it, ready to do as much damage as I could if he busted the door down.

“I'm losing my patience.” Yeah, well, so had I— about a year and a half ago. I clenched my jaw and raised the hammer. If he broke through, his skull would pay.

A low growl seeped through the door.

“Have it your way.”

The frame and the door splintered as it burst open into my apartment. I closed my eyes, shielding myself from the flying wood. It took a second before I remembered my weapon and swung it toward the door.

His insanely large hand easily caught it, fisting the hammer before it made contact. Seriously, who just catches a swinging hammer like it's a tennis ball?

“That was a bad idea.” He pulled the weapon from my hand and, with his free hand, wrapped it around my throat,

pushing me against the wall.

“Dmitri, stop!” I tried to yell, but his hand pressed against my throat, cutting off enough air to muffle my sound. No one on the street level would even hear me if they were right outside my gate. And even if they could, it’s New York, who would bother to get involved?

He lowered his face to mine, and a familiar warmth coursed through me. He wasn’t in my apartment to catch up on old times, yet the sight of him still made my insides stir.

“So, you did recognize me at the club.” He lessened his grip on my throat but still held me captive.

“Just leave. Go. Leave me alone!” I continued to struggle. I didn’t get this far away from Chicago and stay hidden for two years to just give up now.

“Not going to happen, Aleksandra.” He made a point of turning to look at the hammer he held in his other hand. A grin tugged at his lips when he brought his attention back to me. “You tried to hit me with this.”

“You broke down my door!” I argued, desperately trying to pull his hand away from my neck. I might as well have been a gnat with the difference between our strengths. A difference I had found so welcoming only a few short years ago.

“I did ask you to open it.” He leaned in closer, enough that his aftershave hit my nostrils. Someone so evil shouldn’t smell so damn good.

“Please, just go.” I dug my nails into his hand, but he didn’t even flinch.

He looked at the hammer again. “Do you have other weapons around here?”

“No.” I tugged on his hand. “Please. I can’t breathe.”

His eyes, a caramel brown, narrowed on me. “You can breathe fine.”

Arrogant asshole!

The front door was open. Only five steps between me and the street. If I could get up there, I might be able to get away from him.

Summoning up the last bit of nerve I had, I thrust my foot out, catching him in the groin. He grunted and loosened his grip on my throat, just enough that I was able to shove away his hand and make a break for the door.

One step.

I managed one step before his tree trunk of an arm wrapped around my middle and hauled me off the floor.

“Help! Someone! Help!” I screamed, but let’s face it. New York on a Sunday morning in this part of town? No one was coming.

“You’re only making things worse for yourself. Aleksandra.” He kicked the door closed as best it could close, given he’d busted the doorknob and frame with his entrance.

“Please. Please, just let me go!” I wiggled, throwing myself from one side to the other, but he had a firm grip. He carried me through my apartment, straight back to my bedroom. I dug my nails into his forearm, but all he did was tighten his hold. Two years ago, I’d fantasized about him carrying me to the bedroom.

He took in the two suitcases on my bed.

“Going somewhere?” He asked.

I sagged in his grasp. I needed to get away from him, which meant I needed him to let go. The more I fought him, the tighter he held onto me.

“I’m not going anywhere with you,” I said.

He chuckled a soft sound that sounded more like annoyance.

“We’ll see, Aleksandra, we’ll see.” He carried me over to the bed and pointed at it. “I’m putting you there. You will stay there. Yes?”

“No,” I answered right away.

“You will stay there because you already have one severe punishment coming, and you don’t want to add to it.” He shoved the closed suitcase out of the way.

“Punishment?” Had he gone completely crazy? What the hell was he talking about?

“Yes. The last time I saw you, do you remember?” He swung me around like I was some errant toddler and plunked me on the edge of my bed.

I blinked, sorting through all the bullshit back home that made me get on a one-way train out of Chicago. The last thing he said to me was in the poker room.

“And what did I say? What instructions did I give you?”

My eyes went wide. He was serious.

“So, you’re not here to kill me?” Wasn’t that why he found me? To take care of the loose end after Janusz Staszek was murdered right in front of me?

“Kill you? No.” He snorted. “What did I promise if you didn’t stay in the office?” His lips tugged a little on the side.

Apparently, finally getting his hands on me was making his day.

“You said you’d make me sorry.” My mouth went dry on the words. “You came all this way to yell at me for not staying put?”

He frowned. “No. We’ll get to the other details later. Right now, you have a punishment coming. Better you know what will happen when you disobey now, to make things easier later.”

I had no idea what he’d been talking about two years ago, but now, looking into his dark eyes, I knew exactly what his intentions were.

A long finger pointed in my face.

“Stay here.”

The only way out of my bedroom was through the door, which his entirely too-large frame was blocking, or the window, which was high up and too narrow for me to wiggle out of. I wasn’t going anywhere just yet.

He moved the closed suitcase to the door, then zipped up the second suitcase and put it beside the first. Once the bed was cleared, he looked around the room.

“Is there anything else you need to bring with you?” He asked, noting the empty closet.

“I’m not going anywhere with you.” The amount of bravery in my voice did not quite match the lack of it inside me. “I’ve done just fine on my own. I don’t need your help. Or your protection.”

He hooked his hands on his hips while staring down at me as though he wasn’t quite sure what to do with me. I knew

what he could do with me. He could let me go. That's what he could do with me.

"Why are you doing this?" I finally asked when the silence started to ramp up my anxiety.

"Later." He put his hand up. "First, your punishment."

I laughed. Not that he was funny, but I was astonished the man had said the sentence out loud.

"Yeah, that's not happening."

His eyebrow arched again; such precision with that peak. But something else made me shudder. The pure joy that crossed his features at my unwillingness to participate in his crazy.

"Yes, Aleksandra. It is."

"No." I shook my head just in case he needed the visual aid. "I will fight you tooth and nail every step of the way. Every chance I get, I will find a way to get away from you." I'd spent two years getting away from the Staszek family. I wasn't going to get anywhere near them now.

More joy lit up his eyes.

Slowly, he pulled his leather jacket off, righting the sleeves before draping it over my suitcases. My mouth dried when his hands went for the buckle of his belt. Maybe I'd been a little hasty with my bravery.

I backed up on the bed, scrambling to get away from him before he even reached for me. The headboard, a flimsy, compressed-wood thing, hit my back.

"You will learn from this, so we don't have to repeat it." He fisted the buckle and yanked the entire leather belt free of his jeans in one smooth whoosh. My ass clenched.

“You’re nuts.” I put one hand out to ward him off. “Don’t you dare!” I slid to the side, trying to get off the other side of the bed, but he grabbed my wrist. With one yank, he had me off the bed. I barely had my footing before he twirled me around and planted me face down over the side of the bed.

His knee planted in my back, making escape impossible. I waved my hands behind me, but with his positioning, there was nothing to hit.

He snapped the elastic of my leggings, making me deeply regret taking the two minutes to change out of my waitressing uniform for something more comfortable. They wouldn’t offer me any protection against that belt.

“Do you have panties on beneath these?” He asked, snapping them again.

I closed my eyes, not sure if the impending pain was going to be worse than this conversation.

“Yes,” I muttered, sure he’d only add to things if I remained silent.

He lifted his knee for a brief moment, just long enough for him to grab hold of my leggings and my panties and yank them below my ass.

“Fuck you!” I yelled, having no other outlet to show my anger. I bucked, but he wasn’t going anywhere. A cement truck weighed less than him.

“And now she curses,” he said to himself like I wasn’t right below his damn knee. The jangle of the belt buckle caught my attention, and I froze. I twisted my head to the side enough to see him folding the strap twice, tucking the buckle into his palm.

Begging him to reconsider was an option, but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

But then the first lash hit and my entire body jerked in reaction. The second smack landed, then the third. By the fourth, the pain registered, and I fought like hell to get out from beneath the belt. He wasn't holding back anything.

Over and over again, he laid into my ass. The belt, even doubled over, lashed at me with a sharpness, unlike anything I've ever felt. I'd been spanked before, even slapped in the ass during a good fucking, but this wasn't anything like those times. This was white hot pain that seared into my brain.

"Stop! Please!"

"Are you ready to behave?" He laid another lash across my ass.

"Fuck!" I screamed as the pain ricocheted through my entire body.

"Another curse!" Another lash.

"I'm sorry! Okay, I'm sorry!" I clenched my eyes, fighting back the tears, trying to escape. I would not give him my tears. Fuck him.

"You'll behave?" He rested the belt on my sore, surely swollen ass.

"Yes. I'll behave." Whatever the hell that meant.

"No swearing." He brushed the belt off to the side and ran his fingertips over my cheeks. "No yelling." He adjusted his positioning enough to pull my leg toward him, opening my thighs. "No trying to hit me or hurt me." His fingers slid along the seam of my ass, down further, between my legs.

I tried to snap them closed when he got close enough to feel the betrayal there, but he pinched my ass cheek.

“No hiding from me.” He continued his exploration, easily finding the slickness between my thighs. His fingers glided easily through my wetness, straight down to my wanting clit.

I bit down on my lip, trying to keep myself under control. So, he made me wet with his overbearing assholeness and that damn belt of his. It had nothing to do with me and everything to do with my body. I couldn't control what my body reacted to.

His fingers swirled around my clit, harder and faster, making my body cater to his attention.

“You follow my rules, and you won't have a sore ass the rest of the trip. But if you break them, if you act like a naughty girl, I will punish you again.” He pressed harder on my clit, driving me straight to an orgasm that my body desperately wanted.

“I already said I would,” I breathed, fisting the blanket on my bed. Just a little more pressure, and I'd unravel. Just a little more. I bit down on the inside of my cheek, channeling all of my attention to the way his fingers made me feel. Even the throb of my ass couldn't tear me away from the impending orgasm.

I could waste time feeling bad about it later, but right now, my body was screaming for release. It had been so long since anyone had touched me there; it was no surprise how easily he was able to bring me to the brink.

“Good. And when you are a good girl, you'll be rewarded.” He yanked his hand away just as the first wave

began to crest. “But not until then.” He patted my ass, then yanked up my leggings over my hot ass.

“I hate you,” I said between clenched teeth. I would get away from this man the first chance I had. I couldn’t believe I’d nearly fallen for this guy two years ago. His dominant traits, his good looks, the way he commanded any room he walked into clouded my judgement of what an ass he really was. But my eyes were open now, and I would get away from him.

“That’s fine. Now, let’s get your things. We have to get going.”

I needed to figure out how he was getting us there, and then I’d figure out a way away from him.

Throbbing ass or not.

CHAPTER 4



DMITRI

“Who else has been here?” I stopped in the kitchen with her bags. A drawer hung open with items thrown on the counter. In the living room, it looked as though someone had turned the room upside down.

“No one,” she answered, her voice tight. I peered at her over my shoulder. She stood with her arms folded over her chest and her eyes aimed right at me. If she could shoot me with them, I think she would have.

“What happened in here?” I moved into the living room.

“I was looking for my charger.” She toed one of the cushions. “I didn’t find it.”

She pushed the newly dyed dark black hair from her face, tucking it behind her ear. I preferred the soft chestnut coloring of her natural hair, but the black was a step up from the blonde mess I’d found her with at the bar. Her cheeks were still flushed, but her eyes were hard again when she looked up at me.

“We’ll get one for you.” I gestured toward the door. “Let’s go.”

“Wait,” she said. “Just.” She scrubbed her hands over her face. “What is going on? Why are you here?” Frustration

seeped into her voice.

“Henry is home.” I’d been looking for her since she’d taken off two years ago. I’d found her a few months ago, but only when Henry made it known he was coming home did I get in my car and head to New York. Henry held grudges and being delayed two years gave him time to fester.

“I know. I saw the news,” she said. “But why are *you* here? You don’t work for Henry. You work for Dominik Staszek.”

“I do.” I gave a curt nod.

“So why would Dominik Staszek give a shit if I’m in New York?” She folded her arms over her chest. “I never spoke about what happened that night. And I never will. Why waste time on me?”

“First,” I put up a finger. “Watch your mouth.” Archaic, I know, but something about such vulgar words coming out of that sweet mouth of hers made my palm itch. “Second. I’m not here on Dominik’s order. Now, if there’s nothing else you need to get, let’s go.”

She huffed a little laugh. “Dominik didn’t send you? But you’re here, ruining my apartment with your ninja skills and spanking—.” Her mouth snapped shut. “Then why are you here?”

Because I was done waiting.

I’d waited, given her space for two fucking years telling myself to stay away from her. She didn’t need the danger that came attached to a man like me. But enough was enough. I’d kept my hands off her while she worked at the bar, tending to those pricks who liked to play cards in the back room. Babysitting them wasn’t usually my job, but once I noticed her being scheduled back there, I made it a point to be there.

She needed protecting then, and she needed it now. Even if she was too stubborn to admit it.

Catching her gaze, I lifted a shoulder. “Henry might still be holding a grudge. He spent two years away from Chicago because of that night. Until I know for sure he’s not gunning for you, you’re not safe.”

Her eyes widened.

“Why do you care?”

Because for the past two years, the image of Janusz ‘s blood splattered on her haunted me. The fear raging in her eyes consumed me. I barely slept until I knew she was safely out of Chicago. And once I found her, it still wasn’t enough to relax.

“You were innocent.” I shrug. It’s barely an answer. “And it’s my job.”

“What’s your job?”

“Finding people who don’t want to be found.” I pulled the door open. It wouldn’t close properly or lock again after I broke through it, but at least it was still on its hinges. “We need to go. I found you easily enough. He will, too.”

“It took you two years.” She grabbed her purse from the counter and slid it over her shoulder. She used snark to cover up her fear, but I could still see it in her eyes and hear it in her voice.

“Let’s go.” I motioned for her to go ahead of me. A trail of vanilla spice followed her as she passed me. Some things hadn’t changed since I’d seen her last. Every time the scent hit my senses over the past two years, I looked for the source, hoping for it to be her.

Once we were up on the sidewalk, I herded her to the car. I dropped the suitcases at the curb and opened the passenger door for her. When she was settled, I squatted down to her eye level.

“I’m going to put these in the trunk. If you so much as put a foot out of this car, it will be you traveling back there instead. Yes?”

She rolled her eyes. ”Yeah.”

Grabbing her chin, I thrust it back. “No eye-rolling. It’s for children, and you are no child.” From the curves I witnessed beneath those leggings of hers, there could be no dispute. She was all woman.

“Fine.”

“Behave yourself, Aleksandra. It will be easier for you.” I released her chin and went about putting her suitcases in the car. She never even looked back at me through the side mirrors. Good. Maybe she’d smartened up.

I gave her too much credit.

As soon as I opened the trunk, her door flew open, and she jumped out. The streets were nearly empty at this time of night. Did she think she’d just blend in with a crowd?

I grabbed my kit from the trunk after tossing in her bags. She had a good thirty-second start on me, but she wasn’t getting away. I unzipped the black pouch and got the cloth ready, checking on her progress. She had more speed than I thought she would.

But I’m faster.

I tossed the kit back in the trunk, then turned my sights on her, taking off in a run.

I gained on her just as she reached an alley. She shouldn't have looked over her shoulder. The second she did, she stumbled on her own feet. She regained her footing and took off again, but it was too late. It was exactly the precious seconds I needed to catch up to her.

“No!” She yelled.

I wrapped my arm around her waist, hauling her off the ground and carrying her into the alley in the same movement. Damn, the girl could wiggle.

Not enough, though.

“I did warn you.” I pressed her against the brick building, sandwiching her between me and the wall as I wrapped my hand around her head, covering her mouth and nose with the cloth.

She screamed, but the thick cotton muffled the sound. Besides, it was good for her to make as much noise as she wanted. It would make her breathe heavier, and the medicine would work faster.

It only took a few moments, then she went slack. I lifted her into my arms, carrying her back to my car. A man walking his dog passed me, but when he met my gaze, he went back to his own business.

Once at my car, I pulled her door open and gently settled her in the passenger seat. Since she'd be asleep for the rest of the way, I didn't feel any need to carry out my threat about the trunk.

With the trunk closed and my passenger sleeping soundly beside me, I turned the car on and pulled away from her building.

She had no idea how much trouble she was in.

And not just with Henry.

CHAPTER 5



ALEKSANDRA

I woke up to the smell of sugar cookies. Slowly, I opened my eyes and grimaced as the light from the window hit my face. Another sniff and my stomach rolled. Not sugar cookies. Had I dreamt that?

Pushing myself up on the bed, I rubbed my temples. Whatever he'd used to knock me out at least didn't leave my head in a complete fog.

The door to the small bedroom opened and Dimitri stood in the doorway, blocking out the light from the hallway behind him. I tilted my head to the side, trying to get a clearer view of his face.

Yeah, the same annoyed look as before.

"You need to drink this." He brought a glass of water to the table beside the bed.

I laughed.

"I'm not drinking anything you give me." I shook my head. He must have thought I was the stupidest woman in the world. He'd already proven he wasn't opposed to drugging me.

He stood over me, hands on his hips. It was maybe six feet from the bed to the door. I kept my head down, counting in my

head. Ten, nine, eight...

“It will help clear the drug from your system. I didn’t give you much, but it could make your stomach woozy for a while. Drink the water.” He nudged my foot with his boot.

Seven, six, five...

“Here. I show you.” He grabbed the glass and downed a sip, giving me the perfect chance. I bolted for the door.

The door slammed before I even got there. My momentum kept me moving, and I smacked right into it. My feet were too heavy. I should have made it out of the door.

He caged me from behind, pressing his chest against me. Nuzzling his chin against my shoulder, he pushed my hair from my face. His lips touched my ear.

“You have to stop trying to run, Aleksandra. You’ll only earn a harsher punishment each time.” His breath brushed along my jawline while his hand moved down my body, to my ass. He grabbed my ass cheek, squeezing until I shot up onto my toes.

“Stop.” I tried to shove away from the door, to knock him off balance. He pinned me with his other arm draped across my shoulder blades.

“You lied to me. When you promised no more trying to get away.”

“You had just spanked me!” I argued, still fighting against his hold. “You drugged me. You kidnapped me. I will never stop trying to get away from you!” Maybe the drugs gave me bravado.

Letting go of my ass, he slid his hand up my shirt to get to the elastic of my leggings. Feral mode activated; I squirmed

even harder.

“No! No!” I kicked my leg out, but I was no match for him. His hand wiggled into my pants and slid over my ass cheek.

“Shhh,” he cooed in my ear as his hand worked its way between my legs. “Calm yourself.” His finger glided through my folds, my wet folds. How could this man make my body react to him so easily?

“Please.” I whimpered as his fingers circled my wanting clit. It had been way too long since a man touched me; that had to be the reason my body so easily betrayed me.

“It’s all right, Aleksandra.” He moved his hand from my back, and wrapped it around my middle, pulling my ass out toward him. “Let me make you feel good.” His hand slid up beneath my shirt. Pulling the cup of my bra downward, he freed my breast.

“You shouldn’t...” I lost my train of thought as his fingers tightened around my nipple, twisting it as he plunged two fingers into my pussy. All the fight went out of me. I leaned against the door, too wrapped up in the sensations he delivered.

“That’s a good girl.” He kissed my cheek. “See, being good has rewards.” He thrust his fingers in faster, curling them in exactly the right spot.

I moaned, moving up to my toes again. This time from utter pleasure.

After releasing my nipple, he lightly rolled it between his fingers, mixing the burn from the blood rushing back in with the sweet sensation of his soft touch.

“You like the pain,” he whispered into my ear just before sinking his teeth into my earlobe. Proving his point, I whimpered. It all melted together, the sweetness of his fingers, the depths of his thrusts, the sharpness of his teeth. I was lost to it.

“Please.” I arched my back, needing more, wanting more.

“Please what? You need to ask me. Ask for what you want.” He scraped his teeth over my neck.

“Harder. Please, harder.” Chasing my freedom forgotten, all I wanted to find now was my release.

“Such a good girl.” He bit down on my neck, harder than my ear sending a spike of adrenaline through me at the same time, he forced a third finger into my passage, fucking me there with more force.

“Do you want to come?” He licked the spot he bit.

“Yes!”

“Ask, Aleksandra, just ask.”

“Please, I have to. Please?” It was as coherent as I was going to get with my body wound so damn tight.

He pressed his lips to my ear. His fingers tightened around my nipple again, twisting and pulling at the same time. While his fingers drove in and out of my pussy, his little finger brushed against my clit, driving me even closer to the explosion that would finally give me peace.

I curled my fingers, my toes grabbed hold of the carpet beneath me.

“Come.” He dropped the word in my ear like a grenade, setting off explosions throughout my entire body.

I screamed.

Not for help.

Not to be rescued.

But with pure pleasure as my body unraveled beneath this barbarian's ministrations.

I slapped at the door as the waves of my orgasm crested and crashed over and over again. I hadn't experienced such an intense orgasm in forever.

Slowly, it ebbed, drawing me back to reality. My heels pressed down on the floor, my hands uncurled, and I pressed my cheek to the door, drawing in long breaths.

Dmitri's hand slid down my stomach, out of my shirt. His fingers withdrew from my pussy. The elastic of my pants snapped against my back. From the corner of my eye, I witnessed him shove his three fingers, glistening with my own juices, into his mouth.

He caught my stare and grinned.

"Sweet." He winked. *Winked!*

I closed my eyes, trying to shut out what just happened. How easily it had happened.

What the fuck was wrong with me?

He swept me off my feet, literally. In a groom-like fashion, he carried me back to the bed and gently placed me in the middle. I rubbed at my eyes.

"Now, drink this." He handed me the glass again.

He'd drunk from it, so I knew it wasn't laced. But the idea of being his docile little captive gave me pause.

“Stop being so stubborn. Drink this. I don’t want you to get sick.”

I took the glass from him, intending to only take a sip. But once the water touched my tongue, I realized how thirsty I really was and drank it down in three large gulps.

“Good.” He took the glass back from me. “We’ll have food soon. Stay in here and relax. The drugs will make your muscles weak for a little while. By this evening you should be ready.”

I looked up at him.

“Ready for what?” I asked.

“Your next punishment,” he answered firmly. “You didn’t think I forgot you running away from the car, and now, again, you ran again.”

I swallowed. “But just now...you...” I wasn’t going to put words to what he’d done. How easily he’d done it.

“I gave you pleasure to calm you.” He raised a brow. “Now you’re calm. You drank your water. You stay here while I make a few phone calls and get you something to eat. When you have your strength back, then we’ll deal with your punishment.”

“You’re going to hurt me?” What a stupid question, of course he was. And he looked like he was going to enjoy it.

“I’m going to punish you. How much it hurts, depends on you.” He opened the door.

“Wait! Where are we?” I asked, suddenly realizing I had no idea where we were.

“In a cabin,” he said.

“Where is the cabin? Are we still in New York?” The sun was shining outside, so it had to be morning, maybe early afternoon. But how long had I been asleep in the cabin?

“No, we aren’t in New York,” he said. “No more questions. Rest.” And with that, he turned on his booted heel and marched out of the room, shutting the door behind him.

I leaned back against the headboard of the bed and closed my eyes. He was right, my legs felt heavy. My eyelids, too.

Scrubbing my face with my hands, I sank back down on the pillows.

The scent of pine hit me. I glanced out the single window of the room. We were in the woods.

Alone in a cabin in the woods with a man who looked like he’d just as easily kill me as he would make me orgasm. And if he was as good at the former as he was at the latter, I was a goner.

CHAPTER 6



DMITRI

A rabbit darted along the back fence before burrowing between two wooden slates and ran off into the woods. If I'd had my rifle, I would have had a clean shot at it. Rabbit stew had been a childhood favorite of mine, and I hadn't had it since my mother passed away. No one could make it as well as she could.

I scrubbed my face with both hands, rubbing away memories as well as the tiredness from my eyes. I'd slept like shit. Getting up to check on the sleeping woman beside me had stolen most of my sleep. She'd slept so deeply; I doubt she realized I had even climbed into the narrow bed with her.

As she slept, she'd wiggled her way up against me, sighing once her ass hit me. Only once my arm draped over her waist did she stop moving around. My cock had been a steel rod most of the night. What sleep I was able to get was laced with dreams of what I would do to her if she continued rubbing her ass against my cock.

Just thinking about her soft curves, her sweet scent, made my dick stiffen. I adjusted the rod, keeping it tucked behind my zipper. I still had to get through her punishment before I would sink my cock into that tight cunt of hers.

I wasn't letting her get away this time. But first I had to be sure she was safe from Henry and any of his henchmen. Then, I'd make her mine.

Memory of her reaction to the little bites of pain I gave her, made my balls ache. This woman was too much of a distraction.

"Fuck." I growled to myself. I had to keep my mind on the danger ahead. On keeping her out of Henry's crosshairs.

Thankfully, my phone went off, pulling me away from such lustful fantasies.

"Dmitri." Dominik didn't waste any time on pleasantries. "You have her?"

"Yes." I leaned over the rail of the small deck to peer into the bedroom window. She was still burrowed beneath the comforter.

"I thought you were overreacting, running off to New York, but it seems you were right," Dominik said. "Henry's already talking about her, concerned that now he's home, she'll come out of hiding to make trouble."

"She won't." I leaned over the rail again, looking in on her. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, running her fingers through her messy hair.

"I don't think so either, but he's obsessed." Dominik sighed. "It wasn't bad enough he killed one of our men, and we had to clean up the fucking mess, but now he's on my back about getting this girl out of the way."

I glanced back at the window. She stood, looking out. Her eyes caught mine, and I clenched my jaw.

"What are you going to do?"

“I’m not handing her over to him,” Dominik answered. “But we have to handle this. Has she given you any trouble?”

I grinned. “I have her handled.”

Dominik chortled. “I can imagine. I didn’t know her, but from what you’ve said, she doesn’t sound like a woman who gives up easily.”

“No. She doesn’t. But she’s also not a stupid woman. She wants nothing to do with Henry or with us.” Too bad on the second account.

“I’m going to see him tomorrow for a breakfast meeting. I’ll do what I can to get him to let it go. I’ll call you after.”

“I’ll wait to hear then,” I said.

“Dmitri.” Dominik paused. “It might make it easier if we sent her away. Now that you have her. We could put her on a plane and send her to Poland. My father and my sister are there. She could work on my family estate. She’d be protected and away from Henry.”

My fingers gripped the phone.

“No.”

“It’s an option.” He pressed.

“Not a good one.”

He sighed. “All this trouble for a girl.”

“Let me know what he says,” I said, keeping my tone in check. I’ve known him my whole life; we share blood, but he was still my boss when it came down to it.

“Tomorrow.”

I slid my phone into my back pocket and knocked on the bedroom window. She jerked her head up toward the noise.

“There’s food in the kitchen.” I gestured toward the kitchen. She nodded but didn’t move.

She rolled her eyes and stepped back, pushing the curtain in front of the window.

Eye rolling. I made an addition to the list of reasons she would be meeting my belt before she ate.

Then, after she ate, I would, too.

CHAPTER 7



ALEKSANDRA

“Where’s the coffee?” I picked up the empty carafe from the coffee maker. “I’ll get it started.”

Dmitri took the carafe from me. “Not yet, Aleksandra.” He cupped my chin, turning my face up to him. “You are all better now.” He narrowed his eyes, inspecting.

“I don’t feel like my feet are made of lead, no.” I tugged, but he held fast to my chin. “You said there was food.”

He ran his thumb over my lower lip. My eyes went straight to his mouth, to his full lips framed by the dark stubble of a beard he hadn’t bothered to shave in a few days. Slowly, his lips crept into a grin.

“There is. For later.” In one quick motion, he released me, only to have me up over his shoulder in the next breath.

“What are you doing?” I swung my fists into his back as he carried me to the back door.

“It is time for your punishment,” he announced. He dipped us as he carried me out the door into the backyard.

“No. No. No!” I hit his back harder, but all I connected with was more muscle. “Dmitri, please.” My ass wasn’t sore anymore from the spanking he’d given me at my apartment, and I wanted to keep it that way.

“Begging gets you nowhere, Aleksandra.” He smacked my ass. “At least not for a punishment. If you beg me for an orgasm, I might give in easier.”

Was he laughing?

He carried me clear across the yard to a shaded corner before he put me down on my feet again. As soon as my toes touched the grass, I bolted. And he had me caught in the next step.

“See. You still haven’t learned your lesson.” He picked me up off the ground and put me down, facing the fence. It was a wood-planked fence that came up to my chest.

“I’m sorry. I am.” I locked my knees and tensed my body, an old habit from a lifetime ago. Lock everything down to keep it all in.

“You’re not. But that’s all right.” He pulled out a small coil of rope from his jeans. “Give me your hands.”

“No.” I put them behind me.

He frowned.

“Don’t make it harder, or you’ll be cutting your own switch.” He gestured toward the tree line that started just on the other side of the fence. “I promise you a harsh lashing with my belt is nothing compared to what a switch will feel like.” He brought the rope up again. “Hands.”

Giving in would be surrendering to him, but I’d seen the bloody mess a switch could make. Shaking the memory from my mind, I raised my wrists to him.

“Good girl.” The approval in his tone somehow made it less of a betrayal on my part with my cooperation.

Quickly, he had me bound, wrist to wrist, then slipped the slack rope over the fencepost, pulling me up slightly on my toes when it snagged on a hook.

“There.” He leaned a shoulder against the fence, brushing my hair from my face. “You won’t be able to go anywhere.”

“You didn’t have to bring me out here for a spanking,” I muttered.

He raised a brow. “Have you ever had a belting?”

“You used your belt at my apartment,” I reminded him.

“This is different. You’ll see.” He moved behind me. Slipping his hands into the elastic of my pants, he dragged them down to my ankles. Then, picking up each foot, he pulled them free. He draped them over the fence a few planks away from me.

Next went my panties, but he didn’t give them the same treatment. He ripped them from my body, dropping the shredded material to the grass at my feet.

“Look at me, Aleksandra.” He ordered, and I turned my face to him, watching him over my arm. My shoulders were getting sore from the position.

His massive hands went to his thick, leather belt. He worked the buckle open, then zipped the belt from the loops. He tucked the metal buckle into his palm, letting the rest of the leather strap dangle from his fist.

“Learn from this. No more running away.” He stepped around me, behind and a little to the left. I turned my face the other way, trying to find him, but the blinding pain caught me off guard as the tip of his belt lashed against my bare ass.

I howled, rising further up on my toes. This wasn't a spanking.

Another lash landed, then another.

This was a whipping.

I screamed. I twisted, but the ropes dug into my wrists.

Another lash struck, and the belt wrapped slightly around my hip.

"I will bind your feet if you don't stop wiggling so much." He threatened as his belt came down harder, this time to the upside of my ass.

"Dmitri!" I bellowed his name until my throat was raw, but I might as well have been begging the birds to help save me. He wouldn't be done until he was done.

"You enjoy the pain, Aleksandra." The belt struck my thighs.

I shook my head.

His body pressed against me in the next moment. "Don't believe me?" His hand slid between us, nails dragging over my raw ass, then glided over my inner thigh. "Your pussy is dripping down your thighs already."

"See?" He put his hand in front of my face. A few blinks to clear my vision, I saw the evidence. His fingers glistened with my juices.

"It's not my fault," I whispered.

He pressed a kiss to my cheek.

"I'm glad the pain makes you wet." He wiped his hand across my lips. "Your pussy is hungry. Your clit wants to be teased, to be played with."

He was right. As he pushed into my ass, I felt the length of his erection, and I shoved back at him. I wanted him. Right there, tied to the fence, my ass burning hot, I wanted him to fuck me until my throat split with my screams.

“And that’s where the rest of your punishment comes in,” he whispered into my ear, nipping my earlobe. “Your pussy will starve; your clit will go ignored. There will be no release for you again until I say so.” He shoved off of me, leaving me cold and wanting.

Another lash to my ass. Fog rolled in then, clouding my thoughts, forcing me only to feel the harshness of the leather, the wet trails my juices left on my thighs.

“So good.” His voice seemed to come from far away as he removed the rope from my wrists. “Good girl.” He kissed the marks on my wrist. “No more running away.”

“No. No more.” I lifted my eyes to his. “I promise.”

He studied me for another moment, then grunted. “We will see.” He grabbed my leggings from the fence, then lifted me into a bride’s carry.

“Where are you taking me now?” I asked, leaning my head on his chest. I hoped the bedroom. The ache between my legs was worse now that he was so close.

“To the kitchen. You need food. And coffee.”

What I needed was an orgasm. But I wasn’t going to argue.

Yet.

CHAPTER 8



ALEKSANDRA

The cabin smelled fresh. Surprising for a cabin settled in the woods. There was also not a single bit of dust or dirt anywhere. It was like the entire place had been scrubbed right before we arrived.

After scarfing down some food and a huge cup of coffee, I'd taken a long, hot shower—mostly sure Dmitri wasn't going to sneak up behind me and kill me. If he wanted to do that, he hadn't needed to get me out of New York. Or my apartment, for that matter.

I pushed the curtain to the side and looked out the front window. His truck was parked in front of the cabin. There was a long drive that turned into the thick trees. If there was a main road nearby, I couldn't see it from the window.

“What are you doing?” Dmitri's voice cut through the air.

“Just taking a tour.” I let the curtain go. The throbbing in my ass had finally calmed to a low heat. I wasn't going to risk getting his ire up because I was assessing the situation.

“There's only one bedroom,” I said, the thought just hitting me. I glanced around the living room. A rocking chair, a leather recliner, and two armchairs. No couch.

“Where did you sleep last night?” I asked, whirling around to face him.

“In the bed,” he answered, hooking his hands on his hips. “The front door is locked. You won’t be able to open it. If you want to go outside, we can go for a walk. There’s a path out back that leads further into the woods. There’s a waterfall not too far away.”

“Hold on.” I put my hand out. “You slept in the bed? The one I was passed out in?” I’m a lightweight when it comes to drinking and any sort of medication. Whatever he gave me knocked my ass out for way longer than it was probably intended.

“Yes.” He nodded. “Did you want to go outside? The television doesn’t work unless you want to watch an old movie.” He jerked his thumb at the pile of VHS tapes lined up in the TV stand.

I shook my head.

“I’m not walking off into the woods with you.” I shook my head. “If you want to kill me, you can do it right here in the cabin. Get my blood all over this place.” I waved my hands in the air. “Oh my god. Is that why it’s so clean? Is this a...oh my god, you brought me to a kill house?” My imagination was really getting the better of me.

His head tilted to the side like he wasn’t sure what I was talking about.

“You did!” Panic started to build up in my chest, and I searched the room for an escape. I needed to run. I had to try again to get away from him.

“Aleksandra. Calm down.” He crossed the room in two long strides and pressed his hands onto my shoulders. “You’re

in no danger from me; I've told you this."

"But this place."

"It's a family cabin. We've had it in my family since we came from Poland. It's a hunting cabin."

"Hunting. Like you hunting me." Was I even making sense anymore? Maybe those drugs did more than I thought they did to my brain.

"No." He rubbed my shoulders gently, and slowly, the panic ebbed. "Like deer and turkeys. There is another bedroom upstairs." He pointed to a ladder that led to a loft area. I hadn't seen it.

"Why didn't you sleep there then?"

He arched a brow. "Leaving you down here all alone? No." He shook his head as his thumbs rubbed circles into my neck.

"Henry's looking for me, isn't he?" I softened beneath his big hands. Those same hands had been used to hurt me. But then they'd taken away the ache, too.

"He's asking about you, yes," he answered. "You're safe here with me. Until he's taken care of."

I closed my eyes and took slow breaths. "How did Dominik get him to leave town for so long?"

"The man he killed was related to Dominik. A distant cousin, but blood all the same. In exchange for his life, Henry agreed to a long vacation."

"But Dominik still needs him? Now that he's back and wanting to run for office?"

Dmitri nodded. "That's for Dominik to deal with. My job is to keep you safe."

“Why?” I stepped away from his warm hands. They clogged my thinking when they were on me. “Why didn’t Dominik just have me killed? I was a witness to a murder he wanted to cover up.”

“Get your shoes on. We’re going for a hike. You’ll get fresh air and feel better.” He pulled me toward him, then gently propelled me toward the bedroom.

“You’re not going to tell me?” I asked.

“You are no threat to the Staszek family,” he said simply. “And you are an innocent. I won’t let harm come to you because of that bloated politician who couldn’t keep his temper over a card game.”

I stared at him for a long moment, unsure exactly what I was seeing in his eyes. Whatever it was, it was gone in the next moment.

“Shoes.” He pointed a finger at me.

“Fine.”



WITH MY SHOES ON, I stepped back into the kitchen where Dmitri was retying his boots. When he looked up at me, my insides heated. His forehead wrinkled, and for a moment, he looked almost casual. Instead of death-black eyes, they’d softened to a warm caramel, and a thick lock of hair fell over his eyebrow before he wiped it back.

This man kidnapped me not twenty-four hours ago, and there I was, fighting the urge to smile down at him. And what the hell was with the tingly feeling in my stomach?

Maybe my brain needed some rewiring once this was all over with. Maybe once Henry wasn't an issue anymore, I could actually get back to my old life, get a better job with benefits that would pay for me to lie on someone's couch, and go over all the fucking trauma of the last two years.

Dmitri pushed up to his feet, swiped his phone from his back pocket, and checked the screen. His frown was instant.

“What's wrong?” Worry cascaded through me.

He shook his head, typed a message, and put the phone away.

“Nothing that concerns you. Let's go.” He grabbed a shoulder bag from the table and slung it over his chest. Instinct kicked in, and I took a step back. “Water bottles, that's all.” He assured me and unzipped the bag, exposing four bottles of water.

“Right.” I shrugged and walked past him to the back door. He stepped out behind me on the porch and pulled the door shut, checking the lock before joining me at the bottom of the steps.

“The gate is at the back of the yard.” He pointed to the corner of the small yard. Opposite the spot he'd had me tied a few hours before.

Once out of the yard, we passed a shed, then another shed, before finally reaching a walking path that led into the thickness of the woods. He stepped ahead of me but waited for me to follow before continuing on.

It didn't take me long to realize, even if I got away from him, I had no idea where I was or how to get back to civilization. The entire cabin was surrounded by forest. I'd be eaten by some woodland creature before I found a road.

Dmitri stopped a large boulder and put his foot up on it. Slinging his bag over his head, he handed me a bottle. “Drink some.”

I thanked him and gladly tore into it, downing a quarter of the bottle in three swigs.

“Slow down, or you’ll get sick.”

Too late. My stomach swirled, but nothing I couldn’t handle.

“You don’t listen to anyone, do you?” He sipped his own water.

I slid my nail beneath the label on the bottle and ran it along the circumference.

“I’m pretty good on my own.”

“Hm.” He rolled his shoulders. “You’ve been on your own for a long time. I suppose that will do it.”

“Two years isn’t that long.”

“You’ve been on your own for longer than that.” He pinned me with a hard look.

“Did you go digging into my life?”

He nodded. “The best way to hunt your prey is to know your prey.” He screwed the top of his bottle back on. “A lot of your past was sealed, but I know your mother passed away when you were seventeen. You ran away instead of staying with your family.”

“I didn’t have family.” I shot at him, then took a slow breath, looking up ahead at the trail. “You said there’s a waterfall?”

He stared at me for a long moment, like he was deciding if he should push me or not.

“Yeah. Another ten-minute walk. You ready?” He reached for my bottle, but I held on to it.

“I’ll carry it,” I said and started walking up the trail.

The path narrowed after the next hill, and Dmitri walked behind me. Birds flew through the treetops, and small critters scurried through the underbrush. The fresh air filled my lungs.

“Just around the bend here, it opens up to a small pool with a waterfall.” Dmitri pointed over my shoulder when I stopped walking as a light breeze crossed my face.

I nodded and pushed through, already hearing the cascading water ahead of us. Just after the turn, the foliage and trees spread further apart, opening to a scene I had read about in books but never believed actually existed.

Wildflowers grew everywhere. There was greenery around the clear pool of water being poured from a wide waterfall. A mist carried from the falls, wetting my cheeks. Sunlight streamed through the opening of the trees as though to put a spotlight on nature’s beauty.

“Where does that cliff go?” I pointed to where the waterfalls began.

He took his bag off and dropped it. “There’s a stream up there that’s fed by a larger river. Never bothered following it, though.” He took out another bottle of water and unscrewed the cap.

I moved closer to the pool. It looked almost manmade in nearly a perfect oval shape of large boulders before it narrowed. The water poured out into a thin stream.

Squatting down, I scooped up some of the clear, crisp water and splashed my face to cool off.

“It’s not deep, maybe up to your chest.”

“I know how to swim,” I said, looking at him over my shoulder. Getting me into the water could be step one. The next step could be to push me under it and let nature take its course.

“I’m not going to kill you. Stop looking at me like that.” He ordered, stashing his water back in the bag.

“You’ve killed before, though, right?”

His exasperation arched his eyebrow. “C’mon. We swim.” His shirt dropped on top of his bag. When I looked back at him, he was already stripped down to his boxers.

And holy hell, and fuck. No wonder I couldn’t fight him off. The man was nothing but hard muscle. A family crest covered his left pec muscle that rippled with his movements. When he hooked his thumbs into the waistband of his boxers, I turned away, my cheeks once again hot.

“Strip down, Aleksandra,” he ordered.

“That’s all right.” My voice barely made it out of my mouth.

“I’m not asking.” The underlying threat was well understood: if I didn’t do it on my own, he’d do it for me. He moved past me to a narrow opening among the bushes and flowers to sink into the pool. My eyes fixated on his ass, his thighs, the movement of his back muscles as he lowered himself in. I could stare at him all day and all night and still not get enough.

“Aleksandra!” He called to me once in the water.

“Fine.” I grabbed hold of the hem of my shirt and made fast work of stripping out of my clothes, keeping myself folded over to hide as much as I could. Once I had everything off and folded on top of my shoes, I made my way to the same opening he’d used.

My foot slipped across the rock, and I ended up gliding right into the water, dunking myself completely before finding my footing. Dmitri grabbed my arms, pulling me back up to the surface.

“I got it.” I sputtered, blowing out the water I’d sucked in. Nothing like a graceful entrance. I swiped the wet mop that was my hair from my face and blinked away water droplets.

“You should be more careful.” He frowned.

“Yeah.” I nodded, easing myself out of his grasp. Even with the sun beating down on the pool, the water was cool. If I stood, the water wouldn’t have covered my breasts, so I kept crouching and maneuvered toward the waterfall.

Once I was on the other side of the falls, I stood up, crossing my arms over my chest. Dmitri’s eyebrow arched even higher when our gazes met.

“I’ve seen breasts before.” He walked through the pool. Droplets of water slid down his muscular chest and over his washboard abs.

“Yeah, but not mine.” I retorted.

“True enough.” He stood on the other side of the falls, peering at me. “So show me. Let me see you. Then you won’t be so skittish about it anymore.”

I looked away. This was stupid. He was my kidnapper. The butterflies in my stomach should not be fluttering for a man like him. He’s dangerous.

“It’s not...” I took a deep breath. I wasn’t going to be able to hide myself from him forever if we were going to be swimming for a while. And it was boring as fuck in the cabin.

I dropped my arms to my sides and stepped forward, letting the waterfall rain over my head. The water from the falls was colder than in the pool, making me suck up my breath and hurry forward out of the cold stream.

He grabbed hold of me, laughing.

“The river is cold.” He pushed all of my hair from my face and wiped the water from my cheeks.

Once I had my breath again, he held me at arm’s length and had a good look at my exposed chest and stomach. Not wanting to see the disgust in his eyes, I turned away.

With a feathery touch, his fingertips trailed each ugly scar. I clenched my jaw as he continued his exploration.

“Who did this to you?” The question was so guttural, so raw, it shook me. Rage filled his tone. No one had ever been so angry on my behalf.

I brought my gaze back to his.

“I know it’s gross.” I pushed his hand away, but he grabbed my wrist.

“Nothing about you is gross.” He corrected me, tightening his hold on my wrist. “Who did this?” He asked again.

I swallowed.

“My stepfather. With his cigarettes.” I looked away again. It had been three years, and the scars were slightly faded, but the puckering of the skin remained. “He found me tanning out in the backyard. He was drunk and got mad because I was wearing a bikini, so he pinned me down and...” I didn’t finish.

He knuckled my chin until I was looking at him again.
“This is why you ran away from him.”

“The court was giving him custody of me. Since I was almost eighteen, they didn’t want to put me in the foster system, and he was willing to take me.” I clenched my teeth, trying to keep the tears from coming. “I couldn’t live with him.”

“Your mother didn’t know he’d done this?” His eyes went black.

“She was real sick at the end. He was drinking more. She didn’t know, and I didn’t tell her.” She’d been too weak to do anything about it, and all I could do was wait it out.

He leaned down, kissing each scar softly. “I will make him pay for this.” He vowed to me with each new kiss.

“I really don’t want to talk about this anymore,” I said softly when he stood back up.

He looked like he wasn’t sure if he should push me for more or not.

He knuckled my chin until my eyes lined up with his.

His mouth crashed down over mine.

CHAPTER 9



DMITRI

She tasted like honey. Like sweet, tangy honey that I never wanted to stop tasting.

The tip of her tongue darted out, running along her lips when I broke the kiss. Sliding my hands along her jaw, I sank my hand into her hair. She winced when I fisted my hand but made no attempt to pull away.

“Are you going to be a good girl for me today? Is it time to end your punishment?” I asked, brushing another kiss across her lips. A drop of water rolled down from her wet hair, dripping off the tip of her nose.

“Depends.” She gave a soft smile.

“Hmm. Then maybe I should give you a reason to always be a good girl for me.” I let go of her hair and picked her up, wrapping her long, toned legs around my waist. Wading through the pool, I took her to a large, smooth boulder just beside the waterfall.

Sliding her on top of the boulder put her at my chest level. I wasted no time, bending over and taking one nipple in my mouth. Her little gasp stroked my cock as well as her hand could. Flicking my tongue over the peaked bud, I scraped my teeth over her. Another gasp, this time sharper. My eyes practically crossed with the sound.

“You like my teeth on you,” I muttered before placing a kiss in the valley of her breasts on my way to the other nipple.

“I do.” She whispered, laying back on her elbows. “Pretty sick, huh?”

I froze, looking up at her. “No sicker than me. I love the sweet sounds you make when I hurt you.”

She bit down on her bottom lip while a blush swept over her soft cheeks.

Keeping my eyes locked on hers, I took her nipple between my teeth and bit down, harder and harder, until she gifted me with a squeal she tried to hide.

“Don’t keep your noises from me, Aleksandra. They belong to me.” I instructed, grabbing her hips and dragging her along the boulder until her pussy was close enough for me to get to. “Understood?”

“Noted.” She nodded with all the snark I expected from her.

“Hmm.” Stepping back a few steps, I was able to bend over her body, getting to the place I’ve wanted to put my face since her apartment.

“Dmitri.” She breathed my name as my tongue swept over her pussy lips. Fuck, this woman tasted like heaven.

I wrapped my arms around her thighs, pulling them apart further as I dove into her. Sinking my tongue into her passage, licking her clit, there wasn’t an inch of her sex I didn’t taste. I flicked her clit with the tip of my tongue. She loved that. A shiver ran through her body. I did it again and again before slowly dragging the fat of my tongue up her pussy and over her clit.

“Fuck.” Her thighs tightened around my head.

“Not yet,” I muttered before biting down hard just over her sex. She screamed. Probably more from the surprise of it, but it only made me bite harder. I was going to leave marks on her. Nothing permanent, and nothing that would harm her. But fuck, I was going to hurt this girl.

“Again.” She commanded when I let her go.

“You think to order me?” I raised a brow as I moved up to my full height. She lowered her lashes, a facade if I’d ever seen one.

I delivered five hard smacks to her pussy, just over her clit, and had her squirming beneath the little punishment.

“Still think you’re in charge?” I asked, pinching her clit between my fingers.

She yelped, squeezing her thighs together. It only took a small lift off my eyebrow to make her open them again.

“No. I’m not.” She shook her head. “Please, Dmitri.”

“Please, what?”

She laughed. “I don’t know! Please stop, please don’t? Please fuck me? I have no idea, but hurry.” She reached up and touched my cheek. “Please?” She asked with more sweetness, her eyelashes fluttering. No more faking it. This woman would take what I gave her happily. And she wanted more of it.

I dragged her to the edge of the boulder, lining my cock up with her entrance.

“Tell me you’re on the pill.” I reached up and fisted her hair again, pulling it until she winced.

“No.” She shook her head. “It’s been years since...” her eyes darted away, embarrassed at her lack of experience.

I leaned over, licking her cheek. “Tomorrow. We’ll get a pill tomorrow.” I assured her as I thrust my cock into her. She groaned with the invasion.

Fuck, she was tight. So fucking tight and hot. And wet. The woman was built for me.

“Hard, Dmitri.” She grabbed hold of my shoulders as I began pumping into her.

“There is no other way, Aleksandra,” I took her mouth in a deep kiss, thrusting harder and harder. Her ass scooted along the boulder. My thighs hit the hard rock, but I didn’t give a fuck, I needed her, all of her.

Twisting my hand in her hair, she gasped, pulling away from me.

“Come for me. Come now or not at all.” I wasn’t going to last much longer. Her body was too welcoming, too demanding.

She reached between our bodies, rubbing her clit while I kissed her again.

“Rub faster,” I ordered her, sinking my teeth into her bottom lip.

She thrust her hips at me. Her chest heaved with her breath.

“Oh god. Oh! Oh!” She threw her head back and screamed my name over and over. Her body clenched around my cock, harder and harder, until my own pleasure washed me away.

“Fuck! Fuck!” I grunted, thrusting hard once, twice, then stilled as my orgasm ripped through my body.

When my vision cleared, she came into view, staring at me with those big, beautiful eyes of hers. I captured her face with both hands and kissed her deep, so fucking deep I wanted to imprint my entire being on her soul.

No woman had consumed me in such a way, so quickly, so unexpectedly.

“Dmitri.” She breathed my name when I broke away, leaning my forehead against hers. “Let me get in the water.”

I nodded, understanding her meaning, and helped her into the pool so she could wash away my seed. I’d still need to take her for a pill in the morning. But I wasn’t sure I wanted to.

After, she smiled over at me.

“Are you all right?” I asked, realizing she’d been rubbing against the hot rock the whole time I fucked her.

“Yeah.” She nodded, walking over to me and pressing her hands to my chest. “It’s really fucked up. Especially after what my stepfather did. I like when you hurt me.” She scrunched up her lips.

I shook my head. “You’re not fucked up. I wouldn’t hurt you like that, ever. There’s pleasurable pain, and then there’s just pain. What he did, that was just pain.” I brushed away the wet locks of hair from her pretty face.

“Yeah. It was.”

I kissed her forehead. How the hell had she twisted me up in her web so easily?

“Let’s get you back to the cabin.” I picked her up and carried her from the pool. She rested her head on my shoulder. “Don’t get too comfortable. I’m not carrying you all the way back.” I teased.

“Sadist.” She teased back.

CHAPTER 10



ALEKSANDRA

I traced the angry welt across my ass cheek with my fingertip, biting back a hiss. Twisting to the side, I strained to get a better look in the mirror at my ass in the bathroom.

“It will heal.”

“It hurts.” I pulled on my panties and the pair of leggings I pulled out of my suitcase this morning.

He stepped into the bathroom, taking up nearly the whole damn space with his bulk, and wrapped his arms around me from behind. Through the mirror, he locked gazes with me as he lowered one hand to my ass, squeezing until I was up on my toes in a whine.

“A punishment is supposed to hurt. You didn’t learn from the first lesson, so I needed to be firmer with you.” He let go and kissed my cheek. “Another lesson to learn, don’t make me repeat lessons.”

Fucking him had been a mistake. But I couldn’t conjure up any shame over what we did by the waterfall. Or what we did when we went to bed afterward. Or what we did this morning in the shower. I’d never been so excited, satisfied, and exhausted all at the same time.

“What happens next?” I asked, peeling his arms away and turning to face him.

“What next?” His brow furrowed.

“I mean, after this mess with Henry is over, what happens then? I can go back to New York?” Without him. I leaned back against the bathroom counter, feeling the pressure on that damn welt. A reminder of his brutal authority and a taste of what pleasures he could offer as well.

“Do you want to live in New York still?” He brushed my hair back over my shoulders. “You should go back to the chestnut brown. I don’t like this black. It’s too dark against your skin.”

I pushed his hand away.

“Answer me, or I’ll go back to blonde.”

His eyes went wide, and he scrunched up his nose. “Absolutely not. I forbid it.”

“Forbid? You can’t forbid me anything.” I laughed.

He pulled me against him by my hips. Through his jeans, his steel rod pressed against me.

“There are a lot of things I can forbid.” He leaned down, kissing my cheek, then my throat. “I can forbid orgasms. You wouldn’t like that.”

“You’re avoiding the topic on purpose.” I tried to sound annoyed, but his tongue swept along my earlobe, and it was all I could do to keep standing.

I moaned as his teeth scraped along my neck.

“Fuck.” He growled, jerking away from me and pulling out his phone. “It’s Dominik.” He pressed the phone to his ear and

stalked into the bedroom.

I gathered my brush and toiletry bag, quietly following behind him.

“And he agreed?” He walked out of the bedroom. I tossed my stuff on top of the open suitcase lying on the bed and went into the kitchen.

“No. I don’t like that arrangement.” He stood at the back door, glaring out at the backyard. “Then I will keep her—” Dominik must have cut him off because he pinched his lips together in an angry line, shoving his free hand through his hair as he turned around.

Leveling me with a hard stare, he started talking again, but this time in Polish.

How long was I to be his prisoner in this cabin? He never did answer my question about what would happen to me once Henry agreed to back off.

I moved back to the bedroom.

He was distracted with his call, pacing to the front of the cabin. It was the perfect chance to get out of there. The keys to the truck were in the bedroom on the dresser. How easy it would be to grab them and go.

I chewed on a nail debating it. On foot, I wouldn’t be able to get anywhere, but with his truck, I could get to a main road, leaving him stranded at the cabin.

I had only a few minutes to decide.

What the hell was wrong with me? I shook my head. I had to snap out of it. I had to stop thinking and just go. Just because we’d fucked a few times didn’t mean there was anything between us. It didn’t matter if he’d stepped in to keep

Henry from finding me first. I didn't want to be part of this mess. I needed to get as far away from Henry, Dmitri, and all the Staszek's as fast as I could.

I grabbed the keys and ran for the back door. I hit the ground hard after jumping off the deck and rounded the house. The gate opened easily, and I took off running.

"Aleksandra?" His voice carried out of the small cabin.

My stomach twisted, but I had to go. I had to.

As I rounded the front of the house, the front door swung open.

"Aleksandra."

I stumbled. It wasn't Dmitri's voice.

A hand grabbed hold of my sleeve, yanking me backward. I fell on my ass, gravel digging into my skin.

"Stay there."

I looked up, confused and scared, to find a man with clear blue eyes staring down at me. He was thinner than Dmitri, a little shorter, too. His sandy blond hair was cut high and tight, giving him a much cleaner look than Dmitri with his longer dark hair and tattoos.

"Who are you?" I scrambled back, trying to get away from him, but he reached down and grabbed my elbow, pulling me to my feet.

"Let her go," Dmitri demanded. He stood on the front porch, which was only a cement slab, in a pair of black jeans and bare feet.

"I will. I will." My new captor waved a hand at Dmitri. "But you and I need to come to an agreement, Dmitri." He

pulled me closer to him.

I tried to shove him, but the scrawny asshole was sturdier than he looked.

Dmitri leaned against the doorframe like this entire thing bored the hell out of him.

“Sure, Zigmond, an agreement. You let her go, and I let you live.” Dmitri shrugged.

“I don’t have time for this.” Zigmond pulled a gun from his waistband, pressing it against my temple. “I’m taking her back with me, Dmitri. Henry will pay top dollar for her.”

“Henry will pay you nothing. He’s a lying cock sucker who doesn’t give a shit about you.” Dmitri shot back. “Let her go before you get yourself killed.”

“Go back inside,” Zigmond yelled.

Dmitri shook his head, dropping his hands to his sides. “Do you really think you’d come up here and just take what’s mine?”

“She’s not yours.” Zigmond’s voice trembled.

“You really suck at this,” Dmitri said from the porch.

“You know she has to go. She knows too much. No loose ends.” Zigmond urged. The tip of the gun shook against my temple. Clenching my jaw, I tried to keep as still as possible, not wanting to give him any reason to squeeze that trigger.

“I’ll give you a head start. Get in your car and go.” Dmitri straightened from the door frame.

“What? No. I need that money. I have to have it.” The man looked ready to cry. I almost felt bad for the bastard. I’ve felt that sort of desperation before.

“Not gonna happen.” Dmitri stepped off the patio.

“Don’t come over here, Dmitri. I’ll take her out. I swear it.” He shuffled in his step. Nervously readjusted his grip on the gun. “Henry doesn’t care if she’s dead when she arrives or not.”

“Hurt her, and you won’t make it off the property,” Dmitri warned, but he was lying. I couldn’t explain it, but I knew Dmitri had already made his decision. Zigmond wasn’t leaving this place in one piece.

“Just give her to me!” Zigmond jerked his arms. The gun went off. A bullet dug into the dirt an inch from Dmitri’s bare foot.

Another gunshot rang out. Zigmond dropped, yanking me down with him. I landed on top of him. The gun flew away.

I shuffled up to my elbows. Zigmond’s eyes were open, vacant of life.

“What the fuck!” I cried out, scrambling back and getting to my feet. Dimtri stood at the porch, tucking his gun back into the waistband of his jeans. Cold eyes met mine.

“Pick up my keys and get inside.” Any warmth I’d enjoyed from him earlier was gone.

“Dmitri.” I swallowed. “Who is he?” I pointed at the dead man on the ground.

“An asshole who owed a lot of people a lot of money. Get in the house. Now.” He picked up the gun on the ground then put his hand out to me. “My keys.”

“I—” My words cut dead when my eyes met his. A chill ran through me.

I dropped the keys in his palm.

“I’m going to take care of him, then we’re leaving.” He jerked his head to the front door. “Step one toe out of that cabin before I say so and I’ll tie you hand to foot and throw you in the trunk.”

I swallowed back the apology dancing on my tongue. He wouldn’t accept it, and really, did I owe him one?

I left him to his work and went back into the cabin, pacing until he finished.

An hour later, when he came inside, he walked past me to the bathroom, shutting the door behind him. I sank on the bed and stared at the closed door. The shower turned on. Of course, he’d want to wash off the blood and dirt.

When he came out again, he was dressed in a clean shirt and jeans. Silently, he made his way around the room, grabbing his boots and socks. I scooted over on the bed, giving him room to sit, but he left me and went into the kitchen. A second later, a chair scraped against the floorboards. I took a long breath.

“Let’s go.” He grabbed my bag from the dresser.

“Where?” I twisted my fingers together.

“Chicago.”

“Dmitri, look. I had—”

“Not a fucking word. Get in the truck and keep your mouth shut.” He jerked his head toward the door.

Silently, I walked out of the cabin. I passed the spot where Zigmond had fallen dead. There was no sign anything had happened. His car was gone too.

“You’re good at your job, huh?” I tried to smile, but he said nothing, just pulled the truck door open for me and waited

for me to get in. Once I was settled, he slammed the door and threw my bag into the bed of the truck.

When he climbed in with me, he turned the ignition and took off, away from the cabin.

“I’m sorry.” I said after we reached the main road.

He turned the radio on, twisting the volume dial. I took the hint and shut my mouth.

It’s not like we were a thing for fuck’s sake.

He was my captor.

I was his prey.

CHAPTER 11



DMITRI

Dominik's house came into view as I drove up the drive. Aleksandra fidgeted in her seat. Other than asking to stop for the bathroom, she'd stayed silent for the three-hour drive.

"When we get in there, you need to let me talk. Don't say anything. Until I find out what's going on, you stay quiet." I kept my eyes firmly set ahead of me after putting the truck into park.

"Yeah. Okay," she said. The fire was tempered in her tone. She could be planning to bolt again, but the gates locked behind us when I drove through them. She wouldn't get anywhere.

I grabbed my keys and climbed out of the truck. Her door slammed shut a moment later and I waited for her before heading to the front door. She tucked herself just behind me, using me as her shield.

No matter how pissed she made me, I could be that for her. At least until this meeting was over.

The front door opened, and Dominik's brows shot up. His expression darkened a fraction when his eyes moved to Aleksandra.

“Come in.” Dominik gestured. “Let’s go to the kitchen.” He held the door for us then led us to the back of the house to the kitchen overlooking the vast yard. “You were going to wait for my call.”

“Couldn’t wait.” I brought Aleksandra to the breakfast nook and pointed for her to sit. “Zigmond paid us a visit at the cabin.”

Dominik’s brow furrowed. “What?” Nothing about his reaction felt off. “What the fuck was he doing up there?”

“You don’t know anything about that?” I turned my back to Aleksandra, facing off with him.

“You think I had something to do with it?” His chin lowered.

I fisted my hands at my side. I’d known this man for as long as I could remember. I had to trust that history, at least until he gave me a reason not to.

“Dmitri. Are you seriously accusing me of sending that prick up there? If I wanted her dead, wouldn’t I just tell you to take care of it?” Dominik took a step toward me. “That’s what you do, right, Dmitri. You take care of problems.”

My jaw tensed. I’d never been ashamed of my choices before. I did what I did to survive. The men he sent me after were men deserving of the fate they found. But Aleksandra wasn’t like that.

“I’m not accusing you of anything. I’m only stating what happened. How did Zigmond know where to find us?”

“He was around when I was talking to my father on the phone. He must have heard me.” Dominik dragged his hand through his hair. “You took care of him, I assume.”

I cocked a brow. “Of course, I did.”

He nodded. “Zigmond was a traitor. If he went behind my back to help Henry in any way, he betrayed our family. Whatever you did was too kind.”

“And Henry?” I relaxed my fists. Dominik was still on my side on this.

“I spoke to him an hour ago. He’s willing to make an agreement.” Dominik stared at me a beat, then gestured for me to move to the side so he could see Aleksandra. “This is her?”

“Yeah.”

Aleksandra rolled her shoulders back. Her eyes wide, her face flushed, the woman still thought she was about to be murdered.

“You’re not in danger.” He glanced at me. “Didn’t you tell her that?”

“She doesn’t listen so well.” I stepped away from her.

“What’s the deal?” Aleksandra asked, keeping me in her side view.

“He’ll stay away from you so long as you stay out of Chicago. If you step foot back here after today, you’re fair game.” Dominik turned his eyes on me. “I already agreed.”

“You didn’t wait to talk to me.” I clenched my jaw to keep my tone even.

Dominik cocked a brow. “It’s the best you can hope for.”

“How do I know he won’t go back on his word?” Aleksandra asked, getting up from her seat. “I mean, what if he just gets paranoid one day and finds me?”

“It’s not impossible, but he’s aware that you are protected by my family. Should he go against our agreement, there are consequences.”

“What consequences?” She pushed.

Dominik’s neck tensed. He wasn’t used to being questioned. I’d been the same way, before Aleksandra. Dominik would ease up once he found his own girl to drive him mad.

My chest pulled at that thought. She’d proven she wasn’t going to stay with me. I was just the hunter as far as she was concerned. I would protect her with my life, but I would not force her to be with me. She deserved better than that.

“Consequences that keep him from breaking the agreement.” Dominik stated flatly. “So, you’re free to go anywhere, just not here.”

She wiped her hands over her face, taking in a breath. “I can go back to New York?”

“If that’s what you want.” Dominik looked at his watch. “I’ll have the jet on the runway waiting for you, just tell the pilot where you want to go when you two get there.”

“I can go on my own,” Aleksandra said, avoiding my stare. “I mean, Dmitri’s been away from home for so long already. I don’t need a babysitter now. You say I’m safe, right?”

Dominik turned to me. “You good with that?”

Of course fucking not!

But my job was over. She was safe from Henry.

“Yeah,” Aleksandra answered when I remained silent. “It’s fine.”

“All right.” Dominik kept his eyes on me. He grabbed his phone and shot out a text. “My driver is outside; he’ll take you to the airport.”

“He’ll need to get her bags out of the truck,” I said.

“We can handle it,” Aleksandra said, already at the back door. Before she could reach for the handle, the door opened, and Dominik’s driver peeked inside.

“Get her bags from Dmitri’s truck, then take her to the airport. No stops, understand?” Dominik ordered.

“You got it.” He held the door open for Aleksandra. She paused in the doorway for a beat, and I was sure she was going to turn around. So sure that I took a step in her direction. But in the next instant, she was gone. The door shut behind her.

“All this for that girl?” Dominik asked, checking his phone.

“You’ll understand one day,” I muttered.

“Hmm, doubtful.” He looked at me. “You stay away from Henry, got it? I don’t want any more drama with him. There are enough problems with my father taking off to Poland.”

“He left already?” Bogus charges were being considered against Joseph Staszek. It had been decided he’d hide out in Poland until it calmed down.

“Yes. And he took my sister with him.”

“She can’t be happy about that.”

“She’s never happy with what’s decided for her best interest.” He grumbled, looking at his phone again. “In the meantime, I have a meeting. I’m picking up my bride tonight.”

“Your bride? Does she know?” I hadn’t heard that he’d sorted out details about a marriage since the woman he’d agreed to marry had passed away.

“She’s going to find out tonight.” He shook his head. “I hope she’s less trouble than your woman has been.”

“Good luck with that.” I slapped his back and turned toward the front door. She’d been right about one thing: I’d been gone from home for a while. It was time to get back to my life.

“Dmitri,” Dominik called as I opened the door. “If her leaving causes you to look like a train ran over your face, why do you let her go?”

I looked over my shoulder at him. “Because it’s what’s best for her.”

Pain ripped through me as I shut the door behind me. I paused a moment, only a breath, before forcing myself to get in my truck and drive away.

CHAPTER 12



ALEKSANDRA

Two months later...

“Table fifteen needs maple syrup.” Carol tapped my shoulder as she squeezed past me. The morning rush packed the diner, making small spaces even smaller.

“Thanks.” I scribbled down the last of my table’s order, refilled the coffees, and went to put the order in the kitchen.

“Table ten is asking for you.” Marcus, my manager, popped up at our service station. “It’s not your table, but he won’t listen.” He narrowed his eyes and leaned a little closer with a hushed voice. “He looks sketchy. Get his order fast.”

“He’s sketchy, so you want her to serve him?” Carol laughed. “Don’t be too protective of the staff, Marcus.”

I leaned to the side, peering around him to table ten.

“Shit.” My breath caught.

“What?” Carol raised up to her toes. “Oh.” She wiggled her eyebrows at me.

“Who is it?” Marcus asked, suddenly looking for gossip. I was lucky to get this job so fast when I returned to New York. The pay wasn’t horrible, and the people were actually pretty cool.

“Go on.” Carol nudged me with her shoulder.

“Shouldn’t you be warning me away from him?” I smirked.

“No way. He messed up, sure, but that’s what groveling’s for. Though he doesn’t look much like a groveler.” She tapped her chin.

“No. He’s not. He’s more the demand you forgive him type,” I said.

It had been eight weeks since I last saw him. I’m not sure what I thought would happen when all the drama ended, but it still hurt when he just let me walk away.

“Just don’t give in the first time he demands.” Carol looked at him again and sighed. “He’s here, right? He didn’t just move on and forget you. If he’s here, and he’s the kind of guy you painted him to be, you’ve been on his mind since you two broke it off.”

Dmitri was definitely not the kind of guy to do anything he didn’t want to.

“Fine. I’ll hear him out.” I grabbed the coffee pot from the warmer and made my way to his table, feeling his eyes on me the moment he lifted them from the menu.

“Coffee?” I asked, hovering the pot over the empty cup in front of him.

“No.”

I put the pot down and grabbed my pad of paper. “Can I take your order, then?”

“Aleksandra.” The way he said my name, with determination and passion, sent a bullet straight through my anger. But I wasn’t letting go of it just yet. Just because he

could make me feel more with just one word than any man had ever before didn't mean I was going to jump back in his lap.

I clenched my jaw, raising my gaze to his. "Pancakes?"

"Sit." He gestured to the seat across from him.

"I'm working." I pointed out. "If you don't want pancakes, what do you want?"

"To see you."

"You saw me."

"Aleksandra." A warning, and damn if my body didn't immediately melt to it.

"Dmitri. I can't do this. I finally got my life back to normal," I dropped my hands.

"I know." He nodded. "I'm not here to ruin it."

"You're not?"

"No." He reached over and picked up my hand, his thumb running over my knuckles. My toes curled in my shoes; it wasn't fair how attuned my body was his to touch.

"I'm not leaving either."

"Then...what?"

"I was an asshole."

"Yes, you were." I nodded, suddenly feeling all the emotions I'd stuffed down over the past two months.

"You've done well here." He said, squeezing my fingers.

"Dominik offered to help me get a job at club one of his associates owns, but I said no. Better to stay away from all of them." Did that include him, though? Damn, I was starting to think I'd made another mistake. The longer I looked down into

his eyes, the more I wanted him to wrap his arms around me and carry me the hell out of that place.

”I should have come to you sooner.”

“You don’t live in New York, I thought.”

“I’m in New York now. Permanently. I’ve been here since you came back.” He arched an eyebrow. “Your apartment has more secure locks now, yes?”

“That was you? I thought my landlord did it.” I should have known. I don’t live in the best apartment, but the locks are top-of-the-line. Fort Knox would be easier to get into.

“He did. At my direction.” He pulled me into the booth with him, too close to him to not feel the heat coming from him.

“Dmitri. You have a whole different sort of life than me. We’re never going to work.” I’m not sure who I was trying to convince, but I don’t think either of us really wanted to believe it.

He slid his thumb over my bottom lip and then yanked it away as though touching me hurt.

“Your world and my world can become our world.” He frowned. “That wasn’t good wording. I’ll get better at it.” He decided.

“Better at what?”

“At us.” He brushed a hair from my cheek. “I’m going to take you on a date.” Another announcement.

“You are?” He could use some work on the whole asking a girl out thing.

“I am. Tonight. We’ll go to dinner. I made a reservation. Then we’ll go back to your place.”

“What makes you think I’m going along with this?” I leaned back.

“Because you didn’t send over another waitress when I asked for you. You didn’t hide in the back, or in the bathroom. You came over.”

He had very good points. If I really didn’t want to see him, I probably could have figured out how to get away. “So, what now? You want to date me?”

“We’re going to do more than that, but I thought you might want to date first.”

“You’ve just decided our future?” I wasn’t shocked in the least.

“Yes. But I’m willing to let you take some time. Without being kidnapped.” He grinned.

“How nice.” I laughed. How easily his smile just melted everything inside of me.

“So, we’ll date for a while, and then what?”

“Then you’ll move in with me, we’ll get married, then we’ll have lots of babies.” His eyes lit up when he mentioned babies. “Unless.” He looked at my stomach.

“I’m not pregnant. We got lucky.” I shook my head.

He grunted. “Soon enough.”

“Because you’re going to date me, then marry me, then put babies in me?” I couldn’t help smile while repeating his words. I really needed to get my head checked.

“Yes, but first things first.” He cupped my cheek and leaned into me, kissing the breath right out of my body.

When he pulled back, an arrogant smile crossed his lips. “And the second thing.”

“What’s that?” I asked, trying to find my bearings again.

“Before our date, there’s one thing we’ll have to take care of.”

“What’s that?” I brushed my hair behind my ear.

“Your punishment.”

My stomach flipped.

“What?”

“You stole my keys, Aleksandra. You don’t think I’ve forgotten, do you?” He cocked an eyebrow. “Now, back to work with you. I have a meeting to get to. I’ll be at your apartment at seven o’clock. I wouldn’t bother wearing any panties if I were you.” He shooed me from the booth, moving to his feet right behind me.

“Because you’re...”

“Going to punish that sweet ass of yours before we go out to dinner.” He whispered in my ear. “Now, back to work.” He pinched my ass and kissed my cheek.

I stood watching him make his way out of the diner.

“What was all that about?” Carol asked, watching him with me. “Shit, your face is beet red.”

I touched my cheeks.

If she thought that was telling, it was a good thing no one could see my panties.

Dmitri was back.

And he was mine.

And I was his.



WE HOPE you enjoyed Aleksandra and Dmitri's story! If you'd like to read more about this exciting world, check out the *Mafia Brides* series. Start with book one, *Taken by Him*.

ABOUT MEASHA STONE

USA Today Bestselling Author Measha Stone is a lover of all things erotic and fun who writes kinky romantic suspense and dark romance novels. She won the 2018 Golden Flogger award in two categories, Best Advanced BDSM and Best Anthology. She's hit #1 on Amazon in multiple categories in the U.S. and the U.K. When she's not typing away on her computer, she can be found nestled up with a cup of tea and her kindle.

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THE CEREMONY



By

Natasha Knight & A. Zavarelli

CHAPTER 1



RAVEN

Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.

My heart picks up speed as voices filter through the cracked door. Unrecognizable voices, but unmistakable all the same.

Those are the voices of the Delacroix men. The men who have come to upend our lives and rain down misery upon another generation of the Wildblood family.

As if she's reading my thoughts, Willow reaches for my hand, squeezing it in hers. It isn't to give me strength. She's seeking strength from me. Because we all know she's the only Wildblood to bear the crescent moon-shaped birthmark that she had the unfortunate luck of being born with.

It's the same mark of our ancestors. Of all the Wildblood women before us who had the misfortune of being ensnared by the Delacroix family. The first was Elizabeth. She was hanged on accusations of witchcraft from the ancestor of these very same men who will dare to take another Wildblood life. Because we all know the fate of any Wildblood caught in the clutches of a Delacroix. It always ends in tragedy.

I sneak a glance at my sister, giving her a reassuring squeeze while I hold back the urge to vomit. Or run. Or

perhaps pick up a blade and lodge it into the flesh of the first man to walk through that door.

Only I can't.

There is a tithe to be paid. A treaty between our families enacted after what can only be described as a generational slaughter. And if the sacrifice of one Wildblood daughter isn't made tonight, there will be far more bloodshed to come.

We have been raised with the understanding that our fates will always be intertwined with the Delacroix family. It was settled as soon as Elizabeth Wildblood cast a curse from her lips before they hanged her. The Delacroix family fell upon hard times, and tragedy after tragedy tore through their lives, leaving a path of destruction that couldn't be denied. There was only one acceptable solution.

They'd either murder every last Wildblood to walk this earth, or they would take what they believed was owed.

Tonight, they are coming to collect on that debt.

I suck in a sharp breath as I glance at each of my sisters. Though pale to begin with, tonight we all look ghostly. Our faces have drained of color as we stand side by side, hand in hand, dressed in black silk robes with black silk chemises beneath them. An act of defiance.

The Delacroixes have always wanted to cleanse us of our evil. The Tithing has well-established rules and expectations. All Wildblood daughters should be presented in white— a representation of our virginal purity to be pillaged at their discretion. In addition, our long red hair— an identical trait we share— should be pulled back into a neat style. But tonight, it falls in waves over each of our shoulders, dipping low to the arches of our backs.

Our faces were instructed to be free of makeup, so naturally, we're all wearing winged eyeliner and blood-red lips. A silent fuck-you to the man who will come to pick us apart. We may have no choice but to make the sacrifice, but it doesn't mean we will bow down. A Wildblood woman can be broken in many ways, but never in spirit.

I don't even realize I spoke the words aloud until my sister Willow turns to offer me a nod. And then, on cue, she steels her spine as the door creaks open.

A second passes, followed by another as two men filter into the room, flanked by our teary-eyed mother and somber father.

At first glance, I can't tell which of the dark overlords is the eldest brother. They are both alike in many ways. Looming. Imposing. Inhumanly tall, with otherworldly eyes that seem to spear right through us.

I wanted to believe that the stories I'd heard of them were exaggerated somehow. But as my eyes take in the details of their god-like features, I can't say that they were. Both brothers seem to be carved from marble, as I can't find a single imperfection between them, try as I might. They each bear dark hair, worn slightly longer than most of the men in my acquaintance. Their jaws are strong and well-defined, their noses straight, and their lips full. And their eyes—while equally piercing—are the most distinct feature between them. One has golden eyes that almost seem to glow, and the other possesses a haunting shade of silver I'm quite certain I've never seen before.

It's the second man's gaze that performs a quick sweep over my sisters before settling upon me. A shiver rolls down

my spine as he silently dissects my features, his eyes narrowing slightly.

Caught up in the moment, I begin to question everything. Is this Azrael, the eldest brother? And is it possible he may choose me rather than my sister after all?

I swallow past the knot in my throat and tilt my chin defiantly. Perhaps he should. I would gladly go rather than allow them to take any of my sisters. But he doesn't yet know that I'm not the one who bears the mark.

Willow's hand tightens in mine reflexively, as if to protect me somehow, while we wait with a silence that feels suffocating. In the end, it's not the man with the silver eyes who steps forward, but rather, the man with the golden eyes.

Azrael Delacroix, the eldest brother. Which means the other man can only be Emmanuel.

He watches impassively as Azrael begins at the end of the line, bypassing my sister Cordelia with barely a glance. She is too young to even be considered. And while he inspects Aurora, I find my gaze drifting back to Emmanuel, feeling his on mine.

He's still studying me, and I can't figure out why. He tilts his head to the side slightly as I curl my lips into a taunting smile. I don't know why I do it. Only that I can't seem to help myself.

The man may be beautiful. He may very well be descended from fallen angels if the lore surrounding his family is correct. But it doesn't change the fact that the blood running through his veins is evil. He's tainted merely for being a Delacroix, and I can hate him for that reason alone.

But it isn't hate I feel when his lip tips up slightly at the corner in response to my defiance. I can't tell if he's mocking me or if there's something else lurking in his dark thoughts as he examines me. I only hope he can't recognize the quickening of my heartbeat or the flush creeping over my skin.

I straighten my spine, too distracted to realize it's almost my turn. It's only when Azrael's imposing frame stands before me, blocking his brother from view, that I'm able to draw a breath. I don't meet the eldest brother's gaze as he stares me down, lifting the sleeves of my robe silently to inspect my arms. When he doesn't find what he's looking for there, he loosens the knot on my robe with a flick of his fingers, allowing the fabric to fall apart. His knuckle drags the hem of my chemise down, baring the upper swells of my breasts enough to satisfy him with the knowledge that I am not the one who bears the mark.

With this confirmation, he dismisses me without a glance and moves to Willow, where he will assuredly find the mark on her breast. I want him to fail in this mundane task, to save her somehow, but I know I can't. So, instead, I squeeze her hand and stare straight ahead, my eyes settling on the other evil lurking in this room.

Emmanuel is staring back at me with an icy expression that wasn't there a moment ago. His jaw is clenched, spine rigid, and something terrifying lurks in his eyes. Something that looks as if he wants to possess me. And it takes me a moment to put it together. To understand what's happening. But even as I think it, I don't want to believe it.

There's no way he could actually be... jealous. But as his eyes flick to his brother's back, and then to my nipples poking through the fabric of my chemise as my chest heaves, I realize

that's exactly what he is. And as determination settles into his features, I come to a horrifying realization.

Perhaps one Wildblood daughter isn't enough. Because right now, it looks as though Emmanuel Delacroix wants to own me too.

CHAPTER 2



EMMANUEL

“*I*t is tradition! You cannot forego tradition! There will be consequences!” Grandmother’s voice still rings in my ears, and I know from the way my brother is walking, every muscle on his back tensed, he still feels the fury in her words.

It’s the masks. Tradition states that we wear the masks of The Society during The Tithing.

“There are always fucking consequences! To hell with them!” Azrael had barked back. “And with you.” He hurled the black mask across the room and marched out of the house and into the waiting car.

My brother is plagued by demons. And, although Grandmother would rather die than hear it, he has a shred of decency even when it comes to the Wildbloods. Not that they’d believe it, not after tonight’s ceremony. But he is torn between his duty to his family and the reality of what it means to sacrifice the Wildblood girl.

The cost of walking away, though, is too high. Our brother, Abacus, taught us that much.

At the thought of Abacus, I swallow down my emotion, gritting my teeth and dropping my gaze to the hardwood floor. I follow Azrael through the hallway of the Wildblood house.

It's been their home for several generations now. I glance around, take in the cozy furnishings, family photographs, the tidy mess of a lived-in place. A bright place. A loved one. I can't help but note how very different it is from the Delacroix estate.

Azrael stops at the door of the room where the ceremony will take place. His back heaves as he forces a deep breath in.

I move to stand beside him, press my hands to his shoulders. He turns to face me, and, in his eyes, I see the rolling of storm clouds.

“You ready?” I ask him.

It takes him a long minute to speak. “She was right about one thing,” he starts, and I know he's referring to the conversation with Grandmother. “Abacus couldn't do what I'm about to do. He wouldn't.”

There it is. The pain of the loss of his twin.

Azrael is right. Abacus was too gentle to do what needs to be done. Too good.

“He was born into the wrong family.” I say, and I mean it. I know what we are. The things we're capable of.

It was after Abacus's death that Azrael changed. We all grieved, but Azrael, he grieved differently. He withdrew from us, almost as if trying to figure out how to live with the missing half of himself.

It was then that we stopped talking about anything that mattered. We used to be so close, all of us. Now, he keeps his secrets.

Although to be fair, so do I. The thing that will happen tonight, the choosing of the Wildblood sacrifice, he thinks I

don't know what will come of it. The consequences both Wildblood and Delacroix will bear.

He's wrong.

Footsteps sound from down the hall.

"Are you ready?" I ask in a low voice.

Azrael's jaw tenses as he steels himself. His eyes narrow, the storm clouds in the strangely bright shade of gold quieting. Cooling. Icing over. It's the strangest thing to watch.

He nods, straightens to his full height, and I do the same, flanking him, as the parents of the girls who wait just behind the closed door enter the corridor. The mother, Clara, is practically leaning on her husband, her eyes wet with tears. Is he more accepting of his unfortunate daughter's fate? There is no way out of it, no way around it.

Azrael takes them in, doesn't utter a word but gestures to the servant standing at the door to open it. He does, albeit slowly as if he, too, will protect the Wildblood sisters from us.

I follow my brother in, picking up the earthy scent in the strange room overcrowded with plants and books, shelves stacked with bottles and jars and is that some sort of fucking altar? Hell, if I believed witches existed, I'd have no doubt this is where they'd live.

But it's not the trinkets in the room that draw my attention. It's the Wildbloods.

I turn my gaze on them, and, unexpectedly stop short. I almost snort.

Oh, if Grandmother could see this.

I guess the Wildbloods, too, have decided to hell with tradition because rather than the virginal white robes they're to

be presented in, all five of them are draped in black silk. Black silk against pale, vulnerable flesh. Their eyes are lined with an inky black and their lips painted blood-red. Harlots lips, Grandmother would hiss. Their faces should be bare of makeup, pure and virginal, but to be honest, I prefer this. And then there's that hair. That vibrant red hair that should have died out generations ago according to science, tumbling wild down their backs.

It's a sight to see and my brother doesn't miss the low rumble in my chest. I know it in the sideways glance he gives me. But it's not just that the Wildblood sisters are beautiful. We already knew that. That's not it. There's something about this room or them. There's almost a hum, a low vibration all around us. I can feel it through the soles of my feet, the softest sound in my ears. Maybe it's their witch's trinkets. Or maybe it's their defiance as they stand holding one another's hands in solidarity against us, those who've come to collect what we are due.

Hell, maybe they are witches.

I'm sure Azrael has noticed they've broken the rules, but he won't punish them all. The Sacrifice, yes, but not now. I know my brother. He'll wait. Savour the moment.

I grin at the thought and casually let my gaze sweep over the sisters, purposefully not lingering on any one in particular when the blazing blue eyes of the fourth girl collide with mine. For a moment, I'm caught, that subtle hum intensifying, morphing into pure electric fire.

My grin vanishes, my heart races and hot blood rushes my veins as I memorize her.

She is similar in looks to the others but this one dares to meet my gaze. And, as if that weren't enough, she raises her

chin in defiance. The instant she does, I know exactly which witch she is. I know it without a doubt.

Raven Wildblood.

My lips twitch. My eyes narrow. I let my gaze sweep over her slowly and watch how her nipples stiffen beneath the fine silk fabric. A slow flush creeps up her neck and blooms across her cheeks. The little witch may believe herself immune to us, but her body is not. She hates me, I know, but a hate fuck is not out of the question, certainly.

Besides, her insolence demands correction.

Unless, of course, she is the one with the mark. Then it will not be me who delivers her punishment.

My hands fist at my sides.

My brother steps to the first of the sisters and Raven's gaze falters. Her shoulders shudder momentarily, betraying her fear.

Yes, little witch, this is real, and it is happening.

Azrael barely pauses at the first girl. She's clearly too young.

Four to go.

Raven Wildblood swallows. I get the feeling she's steeling herself.

As my brother inspects the second and third sisters for the mark, I keep my eyes on Raven and cannot deny that I don't want it to be her.

I don't want her to bear the mark.

I don't want her to be chosen.

Because I don't want him to have her.

My hands are so tightly clenched that my fingernails cut into my palms.

In that moment, Raven's eyes meet mine once more and, to my surprise, her mouth curves into a taunting smile as if she can read my fucking thoughts.

Before I can decide how to react, it's her turn. My brother's broad back blocks her from view and my heartbeat picks up, my gut tightening as he takes one arm, pushes the silk back to look at her wrist, her hand tiny in his. My teeth clench as I wait for him to complete the ritual. As I try to decide what I will do if she is the one.

Because if she is marked, she will be his.

And I'm not sure I can allow that.

I don't have to think about it for too long, though, because he abruptly moves to the next girl. The instant he does I exhale.

Raven Wildblood doesn't bear the birthmark. She is not meant for him.

It takes all I have to drag my gaze from Raven to her sister as my brother pushes the black silk of the robe apart and there, on the swell of the last girl's breast, finds the small crescent moon.

A birthmark.

A birthright.

The Sacrifice.

CHAPTER 3



RAVEN

Tears streak down every last remaining Wildblood face as we stand outside the gate of our home, watching the taillights of Azrael's car disappear with Willow inside.

She's gone, and it feels like my heart has been wrenched out of my chest. We all know what's to come. There will be a wedding. An indoctrination into The Society. A new role for my sister as Azrael's wife. Expectations. Rules. An entirely different life. One we're all secretly afraid she won't survive. History of the sacrifices who came before her have dictated as much.

As if her thoughts match my own, my mother releases a horrific sob before nearly collapsing into my father's arms.

"Come, Clara," he murmurs. "Let's get you inside."

"We've got you, mama," Aurora says, gently supporting my mother as they help her along.

Cordelia and I watch them go before turning our gazes back to the empty street.

"Is mama going to be okay?" Cordelia asks.

I stare down at her freckled face, the picture of innocence, and swallow the agony of my response. Cordelia is the youngest, at only twelve, and she couldn't possibly understand

the full weight of what's happening. But she feels it as deeply as we all do. To lose a sister in this way— to have her ripped from our lives so cruelly— I'm quite certain there is no greater agony.

“I don't know,” I answer honestly. “But we'll do our best to make sure she is.”

“And Willow?” Cordelia whispers.

I take her hand in mine and offer her a watery smile. “Willow is strong. The strongest of all of us. She has a warrior's heart and Wildblood in her veins. Remember that.”

Cordelia nods, a glint of pride beaming from her eyes for our sister. I don't know if she felt the tremor in my hand or heard the crack in my voice, but she accepts what I tell her. We both know it's the only option we have.

“You should go on up to bed,” I tell her. “It's getting late.”

“What about you?” she asks.

“I'll be in later.”

“Okay.” She squeezes me in a hug and darts inside the house, leaving me to lock the gate.

I glance down the street as an eerie feeling creeps over my skin. I get the sense I'm being watched. I don't know if it's the foreboding energy of what's to come, or perhaps something more sinister afoot. Because as much as I hate the Delacroix family, they aren't the only enemies we have.

Modern-day witch hunters still live and breathe. Religious zealots would gladly bring back the witch trials if they could. But they don't need permission to wreak havoc on our lives. They've already done enough of that.

I shake off those thoughts and check the line of black salt scattered across the sidewalk. Of course, Azrael and his brother tromped right through it. With a sigh, I retreat to the greenhouse and gather a fresh supply to restore the protective boundary around the property, walking the length of it to ensure the salt is intact.

When I am satisfied with that task, I wander to the backyard pool and stare up at the starry sky. It's a tradition Willow and I often participated in together. I wonder if there will ever be any more of those nights together. If I will ever sit beside her in the darkness of night as we share our deepest secrets.

Pain lances through my chest at the loss of her, and it's almost too unbearable. There is only one thing to be done, she would tell me.

I squeeze my eyes shut and draw in a deep breath before sliding the robe from my shoulders, followed by my chemise. The silk fabric falls around my feet, and a shiver moves over my naked flesh as the moonlight bathes me with its restorative energy.

I dip my toe into the stillness of the blue water, testing the temperature. It's a humid night, and the water is warm. But another chill moves over me as I lower my naked body onto the concrete, slipping into the water completely.

Dark energy lurks around me, and I can't shake the feeling as I glance around the backyard. Everything is still and quiet. But I feel like I'm going crazy as I clutch the opal pendant around my neck, directing the negative energy back to whatever source it came from.

A minute passes in which I absorb the energies around me. The warmth of the evening air. The moonlight upon my skin.

The light breeze through the bushes. The chirping of the crickets. Everything is as it should be, and yet I am not.

Another tear slides down my face, slipping into the water as I draw in a long, deep breath. And then I do the only thing I can to temper my simmering rage and agony. I dunk my head beneath the water and scream until there's nothing left in my lungs.

When I emerge again, I feel lighter but still unsettled. And I know the truth is I will be for a long time. Until I know my sister is okay, this feeling will live inside me, and I must find a way to make peace with that.

I wipe the mascara bleeding down my face and swim to the edge of the pool, hoisting myself up onto the concrete. Water drips from my body as I wring out my hair and stare up at the moon, wondering if Willow sees it too. Is it bringing her any peace tonight?

I close my eyes and fall into stillness, focusing on my breath. Allowing my skin to dry. My heart to slow. My head to clear.

I don't know how long I remain there that way, but I know instinctively I am not alone anymore. Perhaps I should be afraid, but I'm not. Because this energy feels familiar as it draws nearer. It feels like *him*. And I would rather die here on the spot than show weakness in the face of a Delacroix.

"Have you come back to punish me?" I ask without opening my eyes.

There's a moment's pause before warm fingers settle beneath my chin, tilting my face up. "And why would you think that?"

I open my eyes to meet his, still as vivid beneath the moonlight as they were earlier. My memory didn't alter that over the space of an hour. I also didn't confuse what I thought I saw in them. The same hunger smolders in the depths of those eyes as they travel the length of my naked body before flaring slightly at the edges.

"It was written all over your face," I tell him. "The same way it is now. Your bloodline is quite infamous for inflicting punishment, in case you haven't heard. You say it's about a war. A curse. A treaty. There's always some excuse. But it's okay because I know the truth."

Amusement flickers in his eyes as he humors me with an arch of his brow. "By all means, enlighten me."

I lean closer, like he isn't my mortal enemy, settling my hand on his chest sweetly as I lean up on my toes to whisper my response. "Your kind have been obsessed with my family since the first time they laid eyes upon us. You couldn't bear our rejections, so you took your Wildblood women the only way you could. By force."

His eyes flash with irritation as his fingers tighten on my face, and I know I've struck a nerve. I'm feeling pretty good about it for all of two seconds.

"If I wanted you." He leans down, bringing his face to within an inch of mine. "There is no amount of salt or stones that could save you from me. Remember that next time you try your magic to banish me."

I swallow instinctively, allowing his threat to loom without challenge. He wants me to know he's been here this whole time... watching me. Perhaps he wants me to tremble before him. Perhaps I should be, but I'm not.

Silence consumes the space between us, and neither of us backs down. My feet burn from standing on my toes, trying to appear even a fraction intimidating to his unyielding frame. The man is quite simply a behemoth. He's well over a foot above my head, and I know he finds me as intimidating as a kitten, but I still refuse to falter.

"Do you make a habit out of greeting company naked?" he clips out as my nipples scrape against the fabric of his sweater.

I arch a brow at him, unashamed. "I wouldn't exactly call you company. More like... a pest that simply won't die no matter how often we exterminate them."

My observation stokes a fire in him. One I know lives in every Delacroix. They blame us for all their problems. They want our repentance. Our submission. And most of all, they want our blood. It has been the same for every generation. And yet, they can't stay away from the Wildblood women. Something calls them back to us, time and time again. A desire that can't be muted, no matter how many of us they sacrifice.

"I could have been anyone lurking out here." His voice dips an octave as he releases my face, only to retrieve my robe. "You should be more careful."

"I'm not afraid of men." I tilt my face up further as an antagonistic smile curves my lips. "Nor monsters."

"You Wildblood women are always brave." Emmanuel circles around me, draping the robe over my shoulders. "Until you're on your knees, begging for our mercy."

I tell myself it's the silk against my skin making goosebumps rise and not the graze of his fingers on my bare arms as he dresses me like it's his right. He gathers my tangled wet hair and drapes it over one shoulder before leaning closer,

his arms coming around my middle to knot the robe far tighter than it needs to be. As if to keep himself out. As if to resist temptation.

His breath skitters over my ear, warm and deadly as he murmurs against me. “You’re lucky you aren’t the one to bear the mark.”

I know I shouldn’t ask, but I can’t help myself.

“What would you have done if I was?”

He’s silent behind me, but I can feel the heat radiating from him. The strength and intensity rolling off him in waves. He wants me, and he hates himself for it.

“Would you go to war to have me?” I question. “Would you fight your brother to the death? Or would you let him take me every night while you lie in your room and listen?”

“Enough,” he growls, tangling his fist in my hair and tightening his grip. “Watch your mouth, girl. My patience is wearing thin.”

“Why are you here?” I snarl back at him. “Why are you watching me? The sacrifice has been made. The deal is done.”

He laughs cruelly as he releases my hair and turns me in his arms, and it prickles my senses.

“You’d like to believe that.” He reaches down and drags his thumb across my lipstick, painting it across my skin. “Tell me, Raven, have you broken the rules?”

“What rules?” I grind out.

His eyes dip to my nipples scraping against the fabric of my robe, and flames lick along my skin even as he responds in a grating tone.

“Have you ever been touched by a man?”

I open my mouth to respond, to bite out a sarcastic reply, but the words dry up in my throat, and I don't know why. I can't find it in me to lie in this moment, and it's the worst way my body could betray me. Because I hate him. And if Willow knew what was happening between us right now, she would hate me too.

It doesn't matter that I don't answer his question because he can see it in my eyes. And it seems to satisfy the demon in him as he drags a knuckle down along the seam of my robe, just grazing the swell of my breast. The same as his brother did, only this time, my heart is beating faster. Wilder. So out of control, it feels like I can hardly breathe.

“Keep it that way,” he decrees.

I blink, and in the span of that second, he's stalking away. I watch him go, my mind still reeling from what just happened. And as I reach up to clutch my opal pendant, I realize he didn't just steal my voice.

He stole my necklace too.

CHAPTER 4



EMMANUEL

*I*walk away before I do more than what I've already done.
Because I've already broken the rules.

The Wildbloods are safe from us. The decree only entitles us to one sacrifice, and it's been made. Raven is right about that. The rules protect them. They know if they don't submit to the Tithing, hell will be brought to their doorstep.

But there are consequences for both sides, even the victors. We all have to abide by the rules. And I can't touch Raven Wildblood.

To hell with consequences.

My brother's words echo as I step over the salt I watched her pour. Neither Azrael nor I had bothered to take care with it when we first came. We stomped right through it. Now, though, I am careful to leave it intact. Her witch's spells have no power over me but I'm not the only monster in the world. I wonder if they'd protect her against another predator. I'm not so sure. Although I have a feeling she'd give anyone a run for their money. The thought makes me grin, but I make a mental note as, my hands in my pockets, I make my way through the quiet streets of the Garden District to the French Quarter. As quiet as the Garden District is, so is the French Quarter throbbing with life. It's where, in the small hours, the uglier

side of humanity shows its face. It's where I feel most at home.

Once Azrael settled his Wildblood witch in the Rolls Royce, I told him I'd walk home. That I needed the air. Truth was, I wanted to see Raven. To watch her for a little while. I expected to remain in the shadows. To see but be unseen. But when she stripped off her clothes and slipped into the pool to swim naked in the moonlight, that pull I'd felt inside the house, that strange sense of wanting, of possession, it became more powerful somehow. An urge I could neither ignore nor control.

The act of covering her nakedness, of not touching, not tasting, not having it took all my self-restraint.

I push my hand through my hair and draw in a tight breath meaning to banish the image of her naked body in the moonlight from my mind.

Azrael and I used to come to the French Quarter together often. We'd walk the streets, take in the depravity around us. I think he felt at home here, too.

As I walk into Bloody Mary, the obscure little bar with its secret entrance in an alley just off Bourbon Street, I wonder if my brother and I will become even more strangers to one another than we already have. He'll be occupied with his Wildblood witch. With what comes next. I know he'll do everything in his power to keep the rest of us out of it. He'll try, at least. I won't make it easy for him. I'm not ready to lose my brother.

Mary, the old bartender and proprietor, nods in greeting as I make my way to my table. I take my usual seat and she sets two tumblers and my bottle of whiskey before me.

“Just the one tonight,” I tell her.

“Been a while,” she comments on the absence of Azrael but takes the second glass and walks away.

I glance to the empty chair. It has been a while.

Reaching into my pocket, I take out Raven Wildblood’s opal pendant. I couldn’t walk away empty handed. I hold it for a moment, still feeling the heat of her on it before setting it on the table and swallowing down my first drink, grateful for the distraction.

I’m not sure why I took it. Why I wanted something of hers. I shouldn’t see her again, I know that.

I study the opal. Aren’t these bad luck? It’s pretty, if an unusual choice. And I sense that same humming energy radiating subtly off it as I’d felt in that room. Almost as though it were looking for its mistress. And when I touch the tip of my finger to it, it gives off a spark of weak electricity. I smile, pour myself a second whiskey and this time, when my mind conjures up the image of her naked, I don’t attempt to banish it. She bore no witch’s mark, this one. No imperfection. Not that I have seen. But I haven’t had a close enough look yet. And I want to. I want to study every inch of the defiant witch.

I am bound by the treaty, though, as much as the Wildbloods are. If I break the rules, if I take her, then Azrael’s sacrifice will be for nothing. Another generation of Delacroixes will suffer if I go near Raven Wildblood. But as the opal glows beneath the dim light of the candlelit bar, I feel it like I did her gaze. Her grin. Her dare.

I remember the feel of her hair in my palm. Her hand small on my chest as she stood on tip-toe to tell me off. I remember the feel of her skin cool and damp when I lay the robe over her

shoulders and close my hand over the opal. And as I swallow the last of my whiskey and stand, I pocket Raven Wildblood's opal pendant and make my way back out into the night.

To hell with consequences, Azrael had said.

I agree.



WE HOPE you enjoyed The Ceremony, a short prequel to The Sacrifice Duet, which tells Azrael and Willow's story. You can find book 1, The Tithing, by [clicking here!](#)

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PUNISHING HIS WAR BRIDE



By

Sue Lyndon

*A short story featuring Fiona + Ambassador Merokk, the main characters from *Surrender (Kall Alien Warriors, Book One)**

Blurb

In the aftermath of a great battle, Merokk is ravenous to claim his wife and satiate his dark urges. He won't be gentle. He'll make her sore, and he'll make her beg for mercy.

CHAPTER 1



FIONA

Fiona startled at the sight of her husband, Merokk, dressed in his full Kall warrior's uniform. He stood in the doorway of the library, gleaming black armor affixed to his arms, legs, and chest. A sword, an ax, and numerous knives adorned his thick weapons belt. His visage was set in a contemplative scowl that deepened the lines on his face, making him appear much older than his forty-six years, though he was still as handsome as ever.

Her mouth went dry, and worry tightened in her stomach.

She set the book she'd been reading aside as he entered the library. His gaze burned into her with an intensity that sent quivers of awareness through her body, and his approaching footsteps echoed in the cavernous room, drowning out the crackle of the fire she'd just started in the hearth.

She rose to her feet and endeavored to calm her racing heart. The vision of him wearing his full uniform, complete with armor and weapons, was unsettling.

Normally, he wore the basic gray and black Kall warrior uniform and only carried a small knife. No armor. No surplus of weaponry.

At present, he looked ready to charge into battle, and she suppressed a shiver at the thought.

Please don't let there be another war.

Nearly five years had passed since Earth leaders had surrendered to the Kall, but she still had nightmares about the war. Nightmares that featured thousands of Kall warriors dressed like her husband as they decimated human cities, leaving death and destruction in their wake.

She pushed away the memories and reminded herself that Merokk would never truly hurt her or anyone she cared about. He'd promised to always protect her.

“Good evening, Fiona.” His deep voice vibrated through her.

“Good evening, Merokk. Is something wrong?” She allowed her gaze to wander up and down his armor-clad form, then held her breath as she awaited his answer.

His frown deepened. Firelight glinted upon the strands of white that peppered his otherwise black hair. He glanced at the flames before returning his focus to her.

A low growl escaped his throat. “It is probably nothing, little one, but I have been summoned to the Kall military base in Virginia. Thousands of warriors have been called up and ordered to arrive within the hour. We were also ordered to wear battle gear. Beyond that, I know nothing of the situation.”

Her breath caught, and her worry deepened. “Technically, you're a *retired* warrior. Surely they can't expect you to drop everything and leave your ambassador posting in DC. What if you're needed here?”

He closed the distance between them and placed his hands on her shoulders. She craned her neck to stare up at him, this seven-foot tall former Kall warrior she'd been forced to marry after the war. In his culture, she was considered little more

than his property, but that knowledge no longer filled her with fear. He could be strict and heavy handed, but he could also show her tenderness when she needed it most.

The love they shared hadn't come easily, but she cared about him deeply, and she knew he harbored the same intense affection for her. She despaired over the thought of him getting hurt, or worse.

“Even if I weren't under orders to report to the military base, you know I would still go,” he eventually said. “If there's to be a battle, my presence will be needed. I'm an experienced commander, and a contingent of new warriors would likely be assigned to me during an emergency.” He cupped her face in one hand, and she sighed and leaned into his touch, wishing she could freeze time and prevent him from leaving.

“Yes, I know.” A dark thought entered her mind, and a wave of horror promptly washed through her. “The Kall occupation of Earth is nearly at an end. Just two more months and most of your people will be leaving Earth to return to the Kall homeworld. Unless, of course, humans violate the treaty. But why? Why would any rebel groups threaten your people and risk everything when the occupation is almost over?”

“As I already told you, Fiona, I don't know why I've been summoned to the military base. I don't know for certain that it's a rebel threat.” He straightened. “Now, it's getting late. You should go to bed, and perhaps I'll be here in the morning when you awake.”

She gave an irritated huff. She didn't appreciate his evasiveness and she was also miffed that he was trying to send her to bed. How could he expect her to sleep at a time like this? If Kall leaders were calling up retired warriors, the

situation must be serious. Aside from an impending attack by another alien race, which she highly doubted, she couldn't fathom a scenario that didn't involve human rebels.

Merokk leaned down and pressed his lips to hers. She melted into the kiss that was soft and gentle at first, only to turn savage by the time he pulled away from her, leaving her breathless and flushed and aching between her thighs.

"I won't sleep a wink while you're gone." She swallowed past the burning in her throat. "Promise you'll stay safe? Promise you'll return as soon as you can?"

He emitted a lustful growl and kissed her again, grasping her bottom and pressing his armor-clad body to hers. A sheathed knife dug into her hip.

"I promise I'll return soon, little one, and when I do, I'll attend to you properly. When I get back, your tight little pussy and that adorable puckering hole of yours are mine. Maybe your mouth, too. I'll claim one orifice after another."

A flush swept through her, and she struggled for air as the warm pulses between her thighs intensified. But a fresh surge of worry soon tamped down her carnal urges. She trembled in his grasp.

Her spirits sank when she heard the telltale hum of his personal airship landing in the backyard.

"Take me with you," she begged. "I'll stay in your room aboard your vessel, and I promise I won't get in the way."

"Absolutely not. I will not risk your safety. Besides, if you did come with me and we were gone for longer than a day, your mother would miss you and be confused by your absence."

She sighed. He was right. Her mother, Janie, who suffered from early onset dementia, not only lived with them, but she was used to spending time with Fiona every day. Thanks to the top-notch medical care Merokk provided, Janie had more good days than bad, but if her routine was disrupted, it might lead to some setbacks.

“I don’t like this.” Fiona blinked back tears. “I have a very bad feeling.”

He pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead and stroked her hair. The flames from the hearth danced in his dark, otherworldly eyes.

Why was he looking at her as though he wished to memorize her features one last time? She didn’t like it. Not one bit.

Was he honestly worried he might not come back?

She wanted to cling to him and beg him not to leave, but she knew the stubborn, proud male wouldn’t listen. If there was a battle to be fought, he would want to be in the thick of it. He was a warrior down to his bones.

His expression turned more serious. “Until my return, you will remain inside. I don’t want you on the balconies or the porches, or even in the greenhouse. Just in case there is indeed a rebel threat. I’ve ordered Rentzaq to put the house in lockdown during my absence.”

She almost gasped. “Lockdown? Is there something you aren’t telling me? You’re scaring me, Merokk.”

“It’s not my intention to scare you, little one.” His face softened. “I mean to keep you and your mother safe. I mean to protect my family.”

His family. Her throat burned so severely she couldn't speak. The reminder that he considered both her and her mother his family filled her with soul-deep joy, even though her heart was also breaking.

The prospect of anything happening to him...

She couldn't complete the thought.

Once, he'd been her enemy. Once, she'd feared him.

But after she'd been forced to marry him, he'd gradually earned her trust. Over the years, he'd shown her that not all Kall warriors were coldhearted brutes.

You have become my whole world.

About five years ago, he'd uttered that phrase to her during the early weeks of their marriage, taking her completely by surprise. He'd just finished punishing her, having spanked her to tears after she'd risked her safety, only to stun her with the bold declaration of affection.

Her chest tightened at the memory.

He kissed her lips one last time before backing away.

"Behave in my absence, little one, or I'll beat you. Severely." His footsteps once again drowned out the crackling fire as he edged toward the doorway. Though she hated to see him leave, her heart buoyed at the slight twinkle in his eye.

"I'll gladly take a beating from you, husband, if it means you'll come back to me in one piece."

He paused in the doorway and shot her a dark, predatory grin. "I suspect you'll regret those words upon my return. Hasn't anyone ever told you how ravenous a Kall male becomes after battle?" He chuckled. "Rest while you can, wife, because the next time we see one another, I intend to

make you very sore. I intend to make you beg for mercy.” He turned on his heel and departed the house.

CHAPTER 2



MEROKK

Merokk inspected the young warriors assigned to his contingent, walking up and down the line of armed Kall males. He inhaled deeply of the smoky air, feeling a sense of excitement he hadn't experienced in ages.

A true battle.

For the first time in years, he would step onto a battlefield.

Foolish humans.

He suppressed a laugh. He'd just received a briefing on the situation, and he could scarcely fathom what the rebels were thinking. Their misguided need for vengeance would likely result in the extension of the Kall occupation on Earth. Humans had breached the treaty many times over the years, minor violations they'd paid for in renegotiated interplanetary trade deals, but today's breach was the worst to date.

As far as Merokk was concerned, it was a blatant act of war.

He climbed halfway up the retractable ramp of his airship and faced the two thousand warriors he was about to lead into battle. The setting sun glowed orange on the horizon, then disappeared over a snow-covered mountain. He thought it fitting that most of the rebels, as well as the Norfozzian

mercenaries they'd hired, would perish in the cold darkness of a winter night.

Holding a voice amplifier to his lips, he drew in another deep breath as he prepared to address his warriors. He waited until a series of booms in the distance faded and a fleet of airships finished zipping by the edge of the military base.

“The humans have violated the Kall-Earth treaty,” he began, and a multitude of vicious growls echoed through the clearing. “The Kall occupation of Earth would've ended in two moon cycles, yet they have decided to attack our military bases around the world. They have hired Norfozzian scum in the hopes of slaughtering us. Tonight, we fight back. Tonight, we'll be victorious against the treacherous humans and their fledgling mercenaries. Humankind surrendered to us once, and they will surrender again. They will tremble before our power.”

The males roared and lifted their weapons high, sharp white teeth flashing, eyes gleaming with bloodlust. It was a beautiful sight, and Merokk withdrew his ax from his belt, held it above his head, and joined in their battle cry. His duties as commander included giving them orders and personally leading them into battle, but he was also charged with mentally preparing them for the fight. He was charged with whipping them into a murderous frenzy.

Once the cries quieted down, he said, “An army of fifteen thousand Norfozzian mercenaries and two thousand humans are attempting to reach the heart of our largest East Coast military base. Just as our weapon suppression technology prevents humans from firing guns and other artillery, the Norfozzians are unable to use any high-tech weapons against us. They must all face us in hand-to-hand combat, and we will

savor their blood and screams of pain. We will send them to their graves!”

His warriors broke into another roar, this one longer than the first. In a matter of moments, he would lead the charge onto the battlefield, and his people would destroy the enemy using weaponry and skills the humans and mercenaries no doubt considered archaic. But it was the Kall way. While his people possessed powerful bombs and laser blasters, sophisticated weaponry which they could easily use to vanquish the enemy in a flash, they still preferred hand-to-hand combat.

Violence hummed in his blood as he peered to the west, where the first units of Kall warriors were clashing with the enemy. Merokk savored the dark energy that rumbled over the land, anxious to join his comrades who were already fighting.

A horn blared nearby, the signal he'd been waiting for. The order for him to lead his contingent to the back of the enemy's army, where they would meet three other Kall units as they fought to cage the humans and mercenaries in from all sides. The great Kall army would swallow the enemy, leaving naught but blood and guts and bones.

“To your airships!” Merokk bellowed into the voice amplifier.

He moved aside as dozens of warriors bolted onto his airship, then watched as the remaining warriors boarded other nearby vessels, small but fast ships that would carry them quickly to their destination. Once the last warrior finished boarding, Merokk headed for the bridge. He took position behind the pilot and peered out the viewscreen that showed the two armies clashing in the distance.

“Now,” he gave the command.

The pilot's hands danced over the controls, and before Merokk could take his next breath, his ship had already crossed the battlefield and was hovering in the desired position. A quick glance at the radar display showed all the airships under his command had followed. The pilot landed the ship with a soft thud.

Merokk fell back into his previous role as a commander with ease. He issued orders and continued to rally his warriors for the impending fight. They disembarked the airships and marched in perfect formation toward the rear of the enemy's forces. As they drew closer, their cries for blood faded and their footsteps became near-silent thumps in the snow. Darkness shrouded their battle march.

Merokk's sensitive ears picked up on faint footfalls to the left and right, and when he inhaled deeply of the air, he realized it was the other units coming to join them. In the darkness, with the lights completely extinguished on the airships, he hadn't been able to detect the reinforcements drawing near until now.

The sickly-sweet scent of death reached him on a cold wind that swept through the valley. He savored the aroma of human and Norfozzian blood. If any Kall blood had spilled on the battlefield, it was so small an amount that he couldn't detect it.

He sent up a prayer of thanks to the ancient gods for Fiona's safety. Before he'd departed DC—before he'd been briefed on the situation—he'd personally studied the radar displays and verified that no enemy forces were encroaching on his home. Nevertheless, he'd ordered his Head of Security, Rentzaq, to keep the house in lockdown until his return. No one could enter or leave, and if security systems detected the

slightest danger, Fiona and her mother would be relocated to the fortified bunker beneath the abode.

But even if it would've meant disobeying orders, he wouldn't have left his female unprotected. If necessary, he would've evacuated her and gotten her to safety before reporting for duty. She was everything to him, the light to his darkness, the sweetness that tempered his ferocity, and he hoped he didn't scare her too badly upon his return.

He recalled how unsettled he'd been after the final battle of the Earth-Kall war, when he'd had no wife to satiate his dark urges, the lingering bloodlust that had fueled his savage needs for a female. He'd nearly killed several warriors on the training grounds in the days that had followed humankind's surrender.

The cloud cover suddenly cleared, revealing the shapes of thousands of Norforzzian mercenaries and humans at the back of the army. A general's horn sounded in the distance—the signal he and his men had been waiting for.

Thousands of Kall warriors lifted their weapons and charged toward the enemy, Merokk among them. And thousands of Kall battle cries pierced the cold night, a chorus of thunderous shouts and growls.

CHAPTER 3



FIONA

Fiona cursed under her breath as she shook the television. The blasted thing wouldn't turn on, though she noted the power source was still in place. A shadow passed by the living room doorway, and she glanced over to see Rentzaq walking by. None of the video comms in the house would work either. She suspected Merokk's Head of Security was behind the outages. Or rather, the security chief had done it at his master's command.

"Rentzaq! Wait!" She rushed into the hallway.

The huge Kall turned to greet her, though there was a hesitance to his demeanor, as though he didn't really wish to speak with her. Probably because he knew she was about to make a request he couldn't grant.

"How may I assist you, Mistress Fiona?" He inclined his head slightly.

"You can get the television, video comms, and other communication devices in the house working again." She kept her chin held high and tried to evoke the haughty tone Merokk often used on the servants, though she instantly felt guilty for it. She considered most of the servants, including the security officers who often thwarted her freedoms in Merokk's absence, to be her friends.

“At your husband’s request, all news and comm devices in the house have been temporarily disabled.” Rentzaq gave her a regretful look. “Apologies, but I cannot turn the devices back on until Ambassador Merokk gives the order. Forgive me for being so bold, but I believe he wants to keep you from worrying.”

Fiona crossed her arms over her chest, her fury rising. But she wasn’t mad at the Head of Security. She was outraged by her husband’s actions. She wanted to know what was going on, and surely if there was to be a battle between Kall warriors and human rebels, the news would be quick to report it.

“I would like to know what’s happening in real time, Rentzaq. I don’t want to hear about it later.” She cleared her throat. “Do you know why Merokk and other warriors were called to the military base in Virginia? Please, if you know anything, please just tell me. I appreciate that Merokk is attempting to keep me from worrying, but cutting off all knowledge of the outside world, even temporarily, is only going to cause my worry to deepen.”

Another regretful look passed over Rentzaq’s features. To her dismay, he shook his head in a very human gesture. “I’m not certain what is happening at the military base. However, even if I knew, I wouldn’t be able to tell you.”

Frustration burned through Fiona. For the briefest moment, she considered picking up the blue vase that rested on a nearby table and hurling it into the wall. But no. That wouldn’t solve anything, and then she would just be creating more work for the servants. Even if she tried to clean up the mess, they’d gently push her aside and insist on doing it themselves.

With a deep sigh, she turned away from Rentzaq. She didn’t offer a reply to his refusal, not trusting herself to remain

civil. Sometimes Rentzaq's complete loyalty to Merokk made her want to scream. On more than one occasion, the security chief had reported her misbehaviors to her husband. For example, the few times she'd left the house without an escort. *Ass kissing tattletale.*

She clenched her jaw and made her way to the second floor, where her mother's room was located. Padding down the hallway, she paused at Janie's door.

A nurse sat on a chair in the hallway, a book in her lap. The young human woman, a recent hire named Leticia, looked up and smiled at Fiona.

"Good evening, Leticia. How's my mother this evening? Did she have any trouble going to sleep?"

"She seems to be doing well tonight," the nurse whispered with a glance at the video monitor next to the closed door. "She took her meds without a fuss, and she fell asleep quickly."

Fiona nodded and peered at the screen. Though she couldn't help but worry for Merokk, watching her mother slumber peacefully brought her a sense of calm.

After the start of the war, she'd been unable to procure the medication her mother desperately needed, and the older woman had suffered from delusions that used to leave her confused and even screaming at times. Fiona used to live in fear that a bloodthirsty Kall warrior would mistake Janie's unusual and sometimes violent behavior as a threat. She'd been terrified her mother would be killed by a refugee camp guard during one of her outbursts.

That was why she'd married Merokk in the first place. To guarantee her mother's safety.

“Thanks for all your help, Leticia. My mother really likes you. When she has trouble remembering your name, she calls you ‘the sweet purple-haired girl.’”

Leticia laughed and touched her bright purple locks. “Yes, I know. I was thinking about going green or maybe even blue the next time I get my hair done, but I think for now I’ll stick with purple. Your mother is a lovely woman and a joy to be around, and I wouldn’t want to confuse her.”

Fiona gave the nurse another warm smile and placed a hand upon her shoulder. “Whatever Merokk’s paying you, I’m going to have him double it.”

Leticia’s eyes practically bugged out of her head. “I—you shouldn’t—I mean...” Her voice trailed off and she took a few deep breaths before finally collecting herself enough to form a proper sentence. “What I mean is, this the best paying job I’ve ever had, and I really appreciate your offer, but I wouldn’t want to upset Ambassador Merokk.” She paled and cast a furtive glance down the hallway, as though to make sure no one would overhear her next words, which she uttered in a barely audible whisper. “I mean no offense, but he’s kind of intimidating.”

“No offense taken,” Fiona was quick to assure her, “but I promise you don’t have to worry about my husband. He will be happy to double your salary once I finish singing your praises to him. My mother’s had less outbursts since your arrival, and I’m sure he’s noticed it too. You have a special way of talking her down when she’s experiencing a delusion.”

Tears brimmed in Leticia’s eyes, and she blinked rapidly. “Wow, I’m not sure what to say. With that sort of income boost, I’ll be able to pay for my younger brother’s schooling.”

She rose to her feet and enveloped Fiona in a tight hug. “Thank you.”

Fiona hugged the young woman back. When they finally pulled apart, she found herself blinking back tears as well. They chatted for a few more minutes before Fiona made her way to her bedroom on the third floor.

Movement by the door nearly startled a scream from her, and she spun around to find Chrisna making frantic hand signals for Fiona to keep quiet. Chrisna, a young Kall woman, was a valued servant in the household. She also happened to be Rentzaq’s wife.

Fiona finished closing the door and spun to face Chrisna. “What is it?”

Chrisna held up an old, battered tablet. Where she’d gotten it, Fiona hadn’t a clue, but it appeared to be human technology rather than Kall. Chrisna pressed a button on the tablet, and it flickered to life, immediately displaying a selection of news channels.

“I overheard your conversation with Rentzaq, and then I remembered I’d come across this tablet in storage a few moon cycles ago. It still works. I realize your husband doesn’t want you to know what’s going on, but if I were in your place, I’d be going crazy with worry. If you really want to know, you can take a look.”

Fiona drew Chrisna deeper into the room and they sat on a sofa near the window. She accepted the tablet and peered at the list of live video feeds. Nearly all of them showed scenes of battle. Her stomach bottomed out.

“Thank you, Chrisna.” She forced back the tears that wanted to stream down her face, then she picked one of the

channels at random and watched the horror unfold.

CHAPTER 4



FIONA

Fiona could hardly believe the news. Not only had human rebels decided to attack every Kall military base around the world, but they'd secreted over two hundred thousand Norfozzian mercenaries to Earth.

She watched every news report she could find, Chrisna nestled beside her on the sofa. The two women occasionally gasped at the footage. About half the videos showed politicians and Kall experts giving commentary on the unfolding situation, while the other half showed footage from battles taking place around the world.

"This is insane," Fiona whispered. "How could the rebels do this? *Why* would they do this?"

As if in answer to her questions, the next video she clicked on featured a retired human general being interviewed by a prominent reporter. She tensed and peered closer at the screen, anxious to discover the truth. Also anxious to learn whether Kall forces were experiencing high casualties. She knew very little about Norfozzian mercenaries.

"We believe the rebels sneaked the Norfozzians to Earth during the last few weeks on trading vessels," the general said. "Most likely, the rebels installed interior cloaking devices on the ships that concealed certain rooms and perhaps even large

sections of cargo areas. The cloaking devices would've made it difficult for Kall inspectors to detect the huge numbers of Norfozzians that are now on Earth."

"That's incredible," the pale-faced reporter said with a shake of his head. "It sounds as though the rebels have been planning this attack for a while, however, it seems reckless to provoke the Kall and break the treaty with only two months left in the occupation. What do you know about the rebel's motives?"

"Oh it's quite reckless, indeed," the general replied in a grave tone. "Human officials all around the world have condemned the rebels' attack and many countries have offered to set their own military forces against the rebels and mercenaries. But, as you might imagine, the Kall are suspicious of human help and have declined all offers of assistance."

"And what about the rebels' motives?" the reporter pressed. "Or rather, their end game. What is it you believe they hope to accomplish?"

The general steepled his fingers on the table, a troubled look crossing his visage as he appeared deep in thought. Weariness suddenly ravaged his features, making Fiona wonder how many soldiers had perished under his command during the war. "The rebels want revenge for the millions of human lives lost during the war, of course, but I believe they also want to capture Kall technology. Think about it. If they get their hands on Kall weapon suppression technology, they could likely figure out a way to thwart it, thus posing a real threat to our alien conquerors. Furthermore, though the Kall prefer to fight their enemies in hand-to-hand combat, they still

possess powerful high-tech weaponry. The rebels probably want to get their hands on this technology as well.”

The reporter’s eyes widened, and he shifted in his chair. “Do you believe the rebels will prevail over the Kall?”

“No, I do not,” the general replied in a bitter tone. “The rebels are fools who have damned us all. Two hundred thousand Norfozzian mercenaries might sound like a lot, especially when added to rebel forces, which are estimated to be about seventy-five thousand worldwide, but the Kall are skilled warriors who turn into... depraved monsters on the battlefield. The bloodlust they are filled with is unlike anything I’ve ever witnessed. During the war, it wasn’t uncommon to see a single Kall warrior take down twenty or thirty human soldiers within a matter of seconds.”

Fiona and Chrisna exchanged a worried look. The reporter gaped at the general, and Fiona didn’t know what to think. She was loyal to her husband—she loved him very much—but she despaired over the prospect of more human blood being spilled. She cared about the fate of her people, and the war was supposed to be over.

Fucking hell, why did this have to happen?

“Do you believe the Kall will hold Earth leaders responsible for the actions of the rebels?” the reporter asked. He looked so pale Fiona feared he might pass out. “Will there be retaliation, and if so, of what nature?”

“Yes, I think the Kall will hold Earth leaders responsible to a certain extent. They will likely extend their occupation of our planet and force humankind to sign another treaty, one that is even more in their favor than the first one. They will demand financial compensation as well as human brides. I fear

the daughters and sisters of world leaders will bear the brunt of Kall vengeance.”

Fiona zoned out for a few minutes as the interview continued, her thoughts traveling back five years ago. After the war, nearly every world leader was forced to sacrifice at least one young female relative to the Kall. She wasn't the daughter or sister of a world leader, but she'd had the misfortune of bearing a striking resemblance to former First Daughter, Betsy Carson, who'd run away rather than face marriage to Merokk.

And so, after being spotted by government officials who were desperate to pass off another woman as Betsy, Fiona had agreed to pretend to be the First Daughter. She'd had little choice. Not if she wanted to help her mother.

In the end, Janie was sent to a luxurious health resort in the Caribbean, while Fiona married the fearsome Kall warrior in Betsy's place.

Shivers rushed through her as she recalled the day Merokk had learned of her deception, the day he learned he'd been tricked into marrying her. He'd been livid, radiating white-hot fury, and she shivered again at the memory of him wielding a thick leather strap across her bottom as he demanded the truth. As he demanded her real name.

But once she'd made a full confession, he not only calmed down, but he announced that he still wanted her. That he was keeping her. Hearing him use her real name for the first time, uttered with tenderness, had brought tears of happiness to her eyes.

A familiar voice brought Fiona's attention back to the tablet that still rested in her lap. The interview with the general had ended, replaced by a live video feed. She gasped and

covered her mouth as she saw Merokk standing on the ramp of his ship, addressing a contingent of Kall warriors.

“Again, I’d like to remind our viewers that this is live footage from the Kall military base in Virginia, which is one of their largest bases on Earth,” a trembling human voice narrated, briefly drowning out Merokk’s voice. “Fighting is already underway, and the rebels are taking heavy losses, as are the Norfozzian mercenaries. What we are seeing here, folks, is Ambassador Merokk, who is a former Kall commander. It appears he’s been assigned a contingent of warriors and is preparing to lead them onto the battlefield. Let’s listen in.”

Merokk’s voice came back, a thunderous boom across a snow-covered clearing filled with armor-clad warriors. “Tonight, we’ll be victorious against the treacherous humans and their fledgling mercenaries. Humankind surrendered to us once, and they will surrender again. They will tremble before our power.” The English translation of his speech flashed on the screen, though she knew enough Kall to comprehend most of what he was saying.

Fiona felt cold all over. Oh God. Oh no. Her worst fears were being realized. Merokk was about to lead a large unit of warriors onto a dangerous battlefield, and more human blood would be spilled. She hated the thought of more of her people perishing—yes, even the foolish rebels—but she absolutely despaired over the prospect of harm coming to her husband.

The tablet suddenly went dark, and Chrisna gasped and jumped to her feet as she cast a wary glance toward the door. Heavy footsteps sounded in the hallway, and Fiona’s stomach plummeted.

Rentzaq. Shit.

Somehow, the Head of Security had learned about the tablet and managed to turn it off remotely.

Fiona stood up and looked around the room for a hiding place. She dashed over to a plush chair near the closet and shoved it underneath the cushion, then straightened the decorative pillows so nothing would appear amiss. “There,” she said, brushing her hands together as she faced a worried Chrisna. “It’s hidden and he’ll never find out. You won’t get in trouble.”

Chrisna didn’t appear convinced. The heavy footsteps continued echoing outside the door. Rentzaq was pacing up and down the corridor, clearly waiting for his errant wife to emerge from Fiona’s room so he could catch her red-handed. Catch her and punish her, no doubt.

“I’m so sorry, Chrisna,” Fiona said, now wringing her hands. “I-I fear I’ve gotten you in trouble again.”

The young Kall female gave her a reassuring smile. “It’s not your fault. Besides, it’s not as bad as the time we sneaked out of the house without an escort to attend a music festival. Or the time we brought a pregnant Horrffollian feline into the house, against our husbands’ wishes, and she birthed a litter of two hundred little kittens in the library. Pah! I still don’t care that Horrffollian felines are considered an invasive species on your planet, they are so adorable I’d do it all over again if one followed me home.”

Fiona smiled at the memory. “I was so sad when they had to go live in the wildlife refuge, but I’m glad they got to stay with us for a few weeks.”

The footsteps got louder, as though Rentzaq were intentionally stomping right outside the door, and Chrisna blew out a quick breath. “He knows I’m in here, but he won’t

knock because it would be considered rude to intrude upon his master and mistress's bedroom. I suppose I ought to go out there and face him." She sighed and retrieved the tablet from its hiding place, and Fiona didn't have to ask what she was doing.

If Chrisna feigned ignorance over the location of the tablet, Rentzaq would likely interrogate her until she confessed, and Fiona knew from experience that Kall husbands weren't gentle when they questioned their wives.

She followed Chrisna to the door and poked her head out once her friend exited the room. She shuddered at the fury in Rentzaq's dark eyes as he glared at his wife. A growl emanated from his throat when he noticed the tablet.

"It's not her fault, Rentzaq," Fiona blurted, desperate to save Chrisna from her husband's wrath. "Chrisna had no idea the technology in the house had been turned off intentionally, and as the mistress of this house, I ordered her to assist me by retrieving the tablet from storage."

Rentzaq narrowed his eyes at Fiona. "In case you've forgotten, Mistress Fiona, there are security cameras throughout this house. I know the full truth."

Busted. Fiona's mouth went dry, and she shot Chrisna a remorseful look. But Chrisna's head was lowered as she passed the tablet to her husband.

Guilt settled over Fiona. Though she hadn't asked Chrisna to fetch the tablet and go against Merokk's orders, she still felt responsible for the situation, and she wished there was something she could say to prevent Rentzaq from punishing his wife. But she came up empty, and she knew there was no point in telling more lies.

“Forgive me, husband.” Chrisna lowered her head further, appearing thoroughly repentant.

Rentzaq growled again and pulled his wife close. He placed his lips at her ear and said something in the Kall tongue that Fiona didn’t quite catch, his tone harsh and clipped. Chrisna nodded and scurried down the hallway, and Fiona suspected the young woman had been sent to her room to await her punishment.

“She was only trying to help. She knew how anxious I’d be about Merokk’s safety, and she wanted to help assuage my worries. Please go easy on her. She’s a gentle soul and she’s my friend and I care about her very much.” Fiona ran a trembling hand through her hair.

Merokk. At this moment, he was leading his warriors onto a battlefield. Would he survive? Would he suffer any injuries? How many humans would he slaughter in a bloodthirsty rage?

The Head of Security’s expression softened ever so slightly, as though he sensed the dark turn Fiona’s thoughts had taken. “You needn’t concern yourself with Chrisna’s punishment. She will survive it, and it’s my hope the pain and humiliation will help her become a more obedient wife.” He turned to leave. “Goodnight, Mistress Fiona.”

She watched him walk away and disappear down the stairs, then she retreated into her bedroom. It didn’t take long for the tears to come, and she sank to the floor and buried her face in her hands.

It was all too much. Merokk was currently fighting human rebels and Norfozzian mercenaries. Thousands of her people would likely die tonight. After the Kall’s victory, of which she had no doubt, they would lengthen their occupation and demand recompense from humankind. They would demand

more war brides. And at this moment, Chrisna, one of Fiona's dearest friends, was probably enduring a severe punishment from her husband. All because she'd wanted to help Fiona.

Fiona wiped away her tears and stood up. She walked to the window and took a seat, her gaze on the backyard where Merokk's airship would land after he got back from battle.

She would keep vigil until his return.

CHAPTER 5



MEROKK

Less than three hours after he'd led his warriors onto the battlefield, Merokk stood on the ramp of his ship, surveying the field of human and Norfozzian corpses. Bloodlust still hummed in his veins, and he took great satisfaction in yet another Kall triumph. He watched as Kall warriors walked the battlefield, stabbing anything that still breathed.

There were very few survivors on the enemy's side; Kall forces had only taken a handful of rebel leaders captive. Just enough for a sensationalized trial that would be broadcast around Earth. The terrified rebel leaders were already spilling their secrets, revealing their nefarious but foolish motives for attacking his people—revenge as well as a lust for Kall technology.

The days that followed would be tense, but the humans had no one to blame but themselves. If Earth leaders had done a better job of keeping their own people in line, this would've never happened. All around the world, Kall forces had destroyed the rebels and mercenaries.

Merokk attended a short debriefing with other commanders and a few generals, then he boarded his airship and ordered the pilot to take him home.

His cock thickened as he imagined slamming into Fiona's slick heat and pounding her hard, fucking her with so much brutality she begged for mercy. He suppressed the lustful growl that built in his chest, not wanting the pilot to worry he was about to be mauled.

A message came through on his wrist comm, and he settled into a chair just before the ship took off, frowning at the news Rentzaq was sharing. Apparently, the security chief's own wife had defied Merokk's orders to disable the televisions and other communication devices that could be used to watch the news. *Fluxx*. He hadn't wanted Fiona to catch any glimpses of a battle, nor had he wanted to cause her extra worry.

Would she be afraid of him upon his return?

Would she despise him for slaughtering her people?

Merokk finished reading Rentzaq's full account of the situation, including the lie Fiona had told when she claimed to have ordered Chrisna to retrieve the old tablet from storage. He found himself holding back another growl.

Fiona knew better. She knew his strong disdain for lies.

She wasn't allowed to lie to him or, by extension, the guards who worked for him. A rule he'd put in place long ago to establish trust in their marriage. Lying to Rentzaq wasn't acceptable, and she would answer for her misbehavior.

He couldn't fault her for watching the news reels on the tablet, which Rentzaq had detected and disabled after conducting a final sweep of the house, but he could fault her for lying and no doubt putting Chrisna in an awkward situation with her husband. No female servant wanted to be caught between her duty to her husband and loyalty to the mistress she served. Again, Fiona ought to know better.

His palm twitched as he imagined spanking her bottom bright red, then finishing her punishment with a severe strapping.

He pulled up the security footage from inside the house, watching and listening to his errant wife commit her misdeeds. He'd informed her from the start of their marriage that he had no tolerance for untruths of any kind, that he wouldn't be played for a fool.

By the time the airship touched down in his backyard, he was seething with fury. But he was also throbbing with need. His cock was so hard he had difficulty walking, and he fought the urge to readjust himself in his pants. At least he'd already taken the armor off.

He stormed off his airship and entered the house, scanning the foyer for any signs of his wayward wife, but she was nowhere to be seen. At this hour, so early in the morning the sun hadn't yet risen, he supposed she might be sleeping. He would find her and rouse her from her slumber and make use of her body. He would take any orifice he wished as many times as he desired. Then she would face his wrath. She would tremble and plead and ultimately surrender to the punishment he saw fit to give her.

Rentzaq appeared in a doorway, though he kept his distance. "I would like to apologize for my wife's unacceptable behavior, Ambassador. I have already dealt with her, and she will apologize to you herself tomorrow."

Merokk was so focused on getting upstairs and confronting his own wife that Rentzaq's words barely registered. But he nodded and mumbled something about accepting the apology before dashing upstairs to the third floor.

He burst into his bedroom and released a thunderous growl, his vision blurring as all the blood in his body rushed to his steel-hard cock.

Fluxx, he needed to be buried inside Fiona now.

He would scold her and thrash her later.

A petite form unfurled from a sofa near the window, and Fiona peered at him with wide, frightened eyes. Her gaze swept up and down his body, her face going pale.

“Merokk. You’re back. I-I must’ve fallen asleep.” She tried to rise to her feet, but he placed a hand on her shoulder and prevented her from rising. “Are you injured?” she asked in a trembling voice.

“I’m fine, and my people were victorious.” His reply came out in a deep raspy tone that sounded foreign to his own ears. He wound his fingers through her soft, auburn hair and gave a harsh yank.

Fiona gasped and placed her hand atop his, but he didn’t loosen his hold on her locks. Instead, he tightened his grip and released a feral snarl as her feminine scent assaulted his senses. Beneath the pungency of her growing slickness, he detected her fear, a cold sensation in his nostrils. It made his cock harder.

He pulled her from the sofa and let go of her hair, only to take a firm hold of her arm. Without a word, he dragged her to the bed. She whimpered but didn’t dare resist. He ripped every stitch of clothing from her body and tossed the remnants of fabric aside. Lifting her up, he arranged her bent over the bed.

After spreading her thighs wide, he delivered two sharp slaps to her slick pink folds. Despite the coldness of her fear, she was aching for him, her nether area plump and glistening

under a healthy sheen of arousal. She made a pitiful keening noise and tried to rise on her toes, but the new bed he'd recently purchased didn't allow her to reach the floor in such a position.

He growled and withdrew his cock from his pants, fisted it once, then plunged deep into her welcoming heat. Tight. By the ancient gods, she was so *fluxxing* tight. Or rather, she was a tiny creature, and her pussy was barely able to accommodate his girth. Her insides clamped snugly around his shaft, causing another growl to rip from his throat.

He pulled out of her slick hole only to slam back inside a moment later. He pounded her with all the fury of the bloodlust that lingered in his psyche, the residual violence that had morphed to primal desire.

She continued whimpering and gasping and even moaning, and the scent of her fear-tinged arousal remained heavy in the air. Sweet and cold and so *fluxxing* delicious.

As he pounded her faster and deeper, the edges of his vision darkened, and waves of heat pummeled him. Sensation zipped up his thighs, and his scrotum tingled and tensed as he conquered the little human who belonged to him.

He was mad for her. *Fluxxing* deranged.

Fisting her hair in one hand, he leaned down and placed his lips at her ear, not pausing the rapid plunges into her pussy. "Who owns this tight, slick hole of yours, little female?"

She whined and clutched at the covers. "You-you do."

A growl of pleasure escaped him, and he twisted her hair until tears sprang to her eyes. He could smell them, just as he could smell her arousal and her fear. "That's right, Fiona. Your pussy belongs to me, and I will fuck it for as long as I wish.

You're going to be a good wife and take every hard thrust I give you, aren't you?"

He emitted a snarl, let go of her hair, and straightened to take hold of her ass. He spread her bottom cheeks wide, exposing her shy pucker, driving home again and again.

CHAPTER 6



FIONA

Tears streamed down Fiona's face as Merokk pounded her with fast, brutal thrusts. But she wasn't crying from the pain or the immense pleasure. She was crying because he'd returned to her unharmed. Relief overwhelmed her, as did the inexorable desire to submit to his savage needs.

His scrotum impacted against her clit with each quick plunge into her depths, bringing her to the edge of mind-numbing bliss. His animalistic growls vibrated through her, an enticing sensation that traveled to her heated core.

There was a sudden explosion, and Fiona cried out as the pulsating waves of pleasure descended. She undulated her center against Merokk's, and a second later, his ferocious roar echoed in the vast room. He pumped faster, tightened his grip on her ass, and spurted his seed into her depths. Whimpers left her throat as the warmth of his seed coated her insides.

His parting words from last night returned to her.

Hasn't anyone ever told you how ravenous a Kall male becomes after battle?

Rest while you can, wife, because the next time we see one another, I intend to make you very sore. I intend to make you beg for mercy.

A shiver rippled through her. Ravenous, indeed.

She was sore, too. Incredibly so, she realized, now that she had a moment to take stock of her body.

But he hadn't made her beg for mercy. Not yet.

Her stomach fluttered with nerves and her well-used pussy clenched with need. Would he take her a second time with more force? Would he perhaps claim her ass?

She swallowed hard and fought back a shudder. He'd trained her to accept his girth in her bottom hole, but she still found the lascivious act to be a challenge. In his current mood—while he remained feverish from battle—the idea of him claiming her back hole filled her with apprehension.

Finally, Merokk withdrew from her pussy. She made to turn on her side and look at him, but he lifted her off the bed and placed her in the center of the bedroom. Before she could inquire about his intentions, he pushed down on her shoulders, forcing her to kneel.

It took mere seconds for his semi-erect cock to swell again, his massive erection glistening in the overhead lights. Glistening with her arousal. How drenched she'd become as he manhandled her. As he'd pulled her hair and forced her to bend over the bed without any preamble.

He'd pounced on her like a rabid beast.

And what fitting prey she'd made. Even if she'd wanted to resist, she wouldn't have stood a chance against him.

Was it wrong that she had no desire to fight him?

Was it wrong that she craved him beyond all reason, despite knowing he'd killed thousands of her people during the war?

She was his war bride.

His possession.

As she peered up at him, her scalp ached from how harshly he'd grasped her hair earlier, and her pussy pulsed with a mix of soreness and renewed arousal. Her breath caught. She was getting wet for him all over again, her feminine essence merging with his seed that steadily trickled down her inner thighs.

He cupped her face and loomed over her like a conquering giant. His eyes darkened with lust and his nostrils flared. "Tell me, wife, is your pussy sore? Does it hurt?"

Does it hurt?

She whimpered at his choice of words and the effect they had on her. The heat undulating in her core kept increasing, and her nipples tingled and finally tightened to hard peaks.

She nodded. "Yes, Merokk, my-my pussy is sore. It hurts."

Dark pleasure flashed in his eyes. "Good."

He spent a full minute stroking her hair with such exaggerated tenderness, it started to make Fiona tremble with nerves.

"In case you were wondering, little one, your mouth is next." He dropped his hand from her hair and backed up. One second, he was wearing his Kall uniform and boots, and the next second, everything was in a pile near the bed. She'd never seen him disrobe so quickly.

Somehow, his cock seemed larger and more intimidating now that he was naked. Her trembling increased, but so did the heat gathering between her seed-coated thighs. There was no kindness in his gaze as he fisted his cock in one hand and

stared at her, his corded muscles tensing as a growl rumbled from his chest.

Mercy.

She almost blurted the word, but something held her back.

A combination of her immense desire to please him as well as her inquisitiveness over how far he would take her. Her curiosity over how much pain he would inflict alongside the pleasure.

He encroached upon her space and angled his cock to her lips, pinching her jaw until she opened her mouth. His woodsy masculine scent left her quivering with need, and she flushed when she smelled her own slickness on his length.

“Keep your mouth open and your teeth tucked away, little one. Don’t give me another reason to whip you.” He shoved into her mouth, and she struggled not to gag. He didn’t ease her into it. Instead, he grasped her head and held her in place as he fucked her, treating her mouth as another hole that belonged to him. The wide bulbous tip of his shaft hit the back of her throat with each rapid plunge.

Wait. He’d said something that didn’t make sense. Not really.

Don’t give me another reason to whip you.

Another reason.

Her heart hammered in her chest, and she placed her hands on his thighs, trying to push away from him. Merokk only snarled and fucked her mouth faster, his fingers digging into her scalp.

In her peripheral vision, she spotted the thick leather strap that hung on the wall near the bed. He’d specifically said he

would whip her, and her stomach bottomed out. That meant he would use the dreadful strap.

She whimpered and took deep breaths through her nose, timing each one as Merokk withdrew slightly from her mouth. Soreness panged in the back of her throat, though it didn't compare to the ache between her thighs. He'd pounded her pussy so hard she had feared she might pass out.

The orgasm that had swept through her had stolen all her energy, and it was a challenge to remain on her knees. She very badly wished to collapse on the floor. She also wanted to beg Merokk for a glimmer of kindness, a soft touch, or a reassuring word. But she doubted there would be gentleness anytime soon.

She didn't fully understand the Kall need to fornicate in a savage manner after battle, but her husband showed no signs of calming down, and she suspected there would be more roughness to endure before his senses returned.

He tensed and growled, and she shed a few tears of relief when he finally spurted down her throat.

“Swallow, Fiona. Swallow everything I give you like a good little female.”

She endeavored to please him and gulped down his seed. When he withdrew from her mouth and stepped back, she gasped for air and finally collapsed on the floor.

“I'm not finished with you yet, little one.” Barely winded from his exertions, he gathered her up and carried her to the bed. As he placed her upon the covers, he peered at the tear tracks on her cheeks, and to her shock, he leaned down to lick them away with a warm caress of his tongue. His eyes flared with heat and his erect cock brushed against her thigh.

“Please,” she whispered. “Please tell me why you’re going to whip me. I-I know Rentzaq likely informed you of what happened in your absence, but I don’t understand how my actions would warrant a whipping.” Her gaze darted to the strap, and she shuddered, nerves swarming her even as heated pulses quaked in her center.

He reached between her thighs and sought out her clit, stroking her to near bliss only to slow his ministrations the instant she hovered on the brink of release. Dark pleasure continued flaring in his gaze, and Fiona wished he would stop tormenting her. She wished he would answer her question. She hated the strap. Hated it. But more than the pain... she despaired over the prospect of displeasing her husband. Whatever she’d done to provoke him, if he intended to use the strap, he must consider her offense to be a serious one.

“My little wife,” he said, still caressing her clit, “it alarms me that you’ve seemingly forgotten my disdain for lies.”

“But I haven’t lied to you.”

He clenched his jaw, and a vein in his temple pulsed. She tried to shrink away from him, frightened by the anger radiating off him, but he laced his fingers through her hair again, his other hand still buried between her thighs. “You lied to Rentzaq. Just as you aren’t allowed to lie to me, you aren’t supposed to deceive Rentzaq or any other guards. They are charged with keeping you safe, and lying to them is completely unacceptable. You know this. We’ve discussed it. Yet you behaved very, very badly, little one, haven’t you?”

Rentzaq. Oh fuck.

She felt the blood drain from her face.

It was true. She'd told the security chief a bold-faced lie. And Merokk... well, he harbored an intense dislike for untruths particularly when it came to her.

Probably because for the first few months of their marriage, he'd believed her name was Betsy Carson. He'd believed she was another woman entirely.

Their marriage had *started* on a lie. Fixing that mistake after the truth finally came out hadn't been easy.

Merokk rose from the bed and retrieved his clothing from the floor. She watched with a sinking stomach as he got dressed.

And just like that, the balance of power shifted even further in her husband's direction, as he was now fully clothed while she remained stark naked and trembling. She had the sudden urge to dive under the covers and hide, but she became frozen with fear when he removed the strap from the wall.

"I'm sorry, Merokk." She bowed her head in a show of penance, just as Chrisna had done earlier in the hallway as she'd faced Rentzaq. "Please, please understand that I only lied to help Chrisna. I felt terrible knowing she would be punished. She knew how worried I would be for you, and she wanted to help me. So, I figured it was only right if I helped her in return, even if it meant lying to Rentzaq."

"I appreciate your explanation, wife, as well as your apology, however neither will save you from the whipping you have coming."

"Please," she begged, still not daring to look up. "Please not the strap. Please just use your hand."

"You know you did wrong, Fiona. I sense the waves of guilt rolling off you. You need the strap." He cracked the

leather across the palm of his hand, making her gasp. “Bend over the bed. Cooperate, and I’ll only give you fifteen lashes. Fight me, and I’ll double that number.”

Thirty lashes. God, that would kill her. Okay, not really, but she could scarcely fathom it. Coldness gripped her, and she glanced at her husband’s stern face, praying she would manage to give him her full cooperation. Fifteen sounded terrible, but she would survive. Oh how she hoped he got it over with quickly.

She took a deep breath and got into position, bending over the bed. She gripped the covers and closed her eyes.

His footsteps sounded behind her, and the heat of his massive body wafted over her prone form. He cupped her bottom and gave it a firm squeeze.

“You will never lie to the guards again, Fiona, just as you will never lie to me. I cannot fault you for watching the news reels, but when you lied to Rentzaq after you and Chrisna were caught, you put them both in an awkward position, but most especially poor Chrisna. If Rentzaq hadn’t already known the truth, she would’ve been forced to decide whether to call her mistress out as a liar or follow your lead and deceive her own husband. As the mistress of this house, I expect better from you. As my wife, I expect better from you.”

Guilt ravaged Fiona’s conscience. She hadn’t considered the uncomfortable position she’d put Chrisna in, but now she was glad Rentzaq had already known the truth. It was no wonder Merokk was furious with her. It was no wonder he thought she deserved the strap. She’d behaved badly, and she was deeply ashamed.

“You’re right, Merokk, and I’m so sorry. I-I will apologize to Chrisna and Rentzaq tomorrow, and I will try to remain in

place and accept my punishment.” She shivered and gripped the covers tighter, a sob building in her throat. She feared the pain, but worse than that, she was sorrowful over Merokk’s disapproval, and she longed to be back in his good graces. She longed for the rift between them to be mended.

He placed the strap on the bed and rubbed her bottom, moving from cheek to cheek, his touch suddenly gentle. It made her want to weep and fall at his feet and beg for forgiveness. But she remained bent over the bed, determined to take her punishment.

His caressing hand stilled. “I’m going to redden your cheeks with my hand before I take the strap to you, little one. Keep your bottom soft and accept each blow. If you clench your cheeks during your punishment, I’ll insert a large plug coated with a stinging lubrication into your ass.”

She whimpered and resolved to obey his orders. The last thing she wanted was a stinging, punishment plug pushed deep in her bottom. He lifted his hand and struck her left cheek with a resounding slap, and the pain took her breath away.

CHAPTER 7



MEROKK

*M*erokk set a fast rhythm of smacking his wife's cheeks, alternating from the left one to the right, covering her bottom in its entirety and even striking the backs of her thighs on occasion. She whimpered and squirmed slightly on the bed, but she didn't attempt to evade the swift blows, and her obedience pleased him.

He gave her about twenty smacks before he paused to rub her punished flesh and admire his handiwork. His cock thickened and pulsed, and he growled at the sight of her gleaming, pink nether lips. She was in pain, on the verge of tears, and the coldness of her fear kept reaching him, but she was also soaking wet. Her pussy was hugely swollen and her inner thighs glistened with his seed. Gods, she was lovely and perfect, his sweet little war bride.

He delved a hand between her legs, stroking her moist folds. She moaned and lifted her hips, eager for his touch. He paid just enough attention to her clit to drive her into a whimpering frenzy but removed his hand before she managed to come.

"No," she whimpered. "*Please please please.*"

With a quick flick of the wrist, he swatted her drenched pussy with his flattened fingers, causing her to cry out.

“Behave, little one, and perhaps I’ll take mercy on you and allow you an orgasm after your strapping.”

Her continued noises of distress made his cock harden further, making him want to pounce on her again and fuck her senseless.

But he needed to finish her punishment first.

Once her bottom was covered in red lines from the strap, he would claim her. Perhaps he would take her pussy a second time, or maybe he would claim her ass. His blood heated at the prospect of shoving inside her tightest hole, riding her to completion, then keeping her cheeks spread wide as he watched his seed trickle from her pucker.

He picked up the strap and stepped into position at Fiona’s side. She sniffled and the scent of her tears reached him, not dissimilar to a sea-kissed breeze. He trailed the strap over her reddened ass. She shivered and inhaled a shaky breath. He brushed her hair from her face, and she peered back at him with an uncertain look.

“Keep your head turned to the side, wife. No hiding your face in the covers. I want to see your tears.”

“Yes, Merokk.” She blinked and another tear cascaded down her cheek. She fisted the covers, her knuckles turning white.

He drew his arm back and struck her with the strap, landing it in the center of her already punished cheeks. Her face twisted in pain and her lips parted on a soundless cry. A red line appeared on her flesh, and he was quick to place a second lash directly below it. She made a choking noise, and a sob soon broke from her throat.

He gave her five more blows in quick succession, painting her bottom with red lines. The sound of the strap impacting her flesh echoed in the room, merging with her cries, gasps, and whimpers.

“That’s seven,” he announced. “We’re about halfway done.” He traced the marks on her bottom with a gentle touch. “I hope you’re learning something from this, little one. I hope you’ll think twice before you lie to me or any of the guards in my employ. As my wife, you’re subject to my rules and discipline, and I expect your obedience.”

“I-I am learning something, I promise.” Her face crumpled and more tears escaped her eyes.

“I’m not angry with you for watching the news reels, Fiona,” he said. “That’s not why you’re being punished. You’re being punished for the lies you told. You-you know how I feel about lies. I cannot abide the smallest untruth from you.”

Apparently, her sins of the past hung between them, forgiven but not forgotten.

“I understand.” She sniffled and readjusted her grip on the covers. “But why-why did you order Rentzaq to put a damper on the technology in the house? I-I was so worried about you, and I don’t understand why you wanted to keep me in the dark.”

Merokk brushed a hand through her hair and waited until she met his gaze. “You still have nightmares about the war. I didn’t want the violence on the news to worsen those nightmares or cause them to come more often.”

“Oh. That makes sense.” She sniffed. “That’s actually very considerate, Merokk. Thank you.” A wary look entered her

eyes. “I saw you on the news. I saw the speech you gave your warriors before you led them into battle.”

He cursed under his breath in his native language. He hadn’t imagined she might hear his speech, and he regretted that she’d witnessed him talking about slaughtering her people. She had a soft heart, and she’d endured many frightening experiences during the war.

“I wish you hadn’t seen that,” he said quietly, still stroking her hair. She leaned into his touch, and he sensed her melting at the sudden gentleness he was showing her. He resolved that after her whipping and after he claimed her one last time, he would hold her and kiss her and make her feel cherished.

“I’m not sorry I saw it. This might sound strange, but I was proud of you. Your people were under attack, and you helped lead them to victory. I know I’m your war bride, and I know I’m considered your property, but I am proud to be your wife, Merokk.”

Her confession not only surprised him, but he found his throat was suddenly burning. He leaned down and placed a kiss upon her temple and nuzzled his face to hers. “I am proud to be your husband, Fiona. I know you think I behave like a possessive brute sometimes, but I adore you, and I will never let you go. I’d raze the galaxy to get you back if someone took you away from me.”

A tiny smile played across her lips. “Be still my heart,” she said, using a human phrase she often employed when he said something heartfelt.

He kissed her again, then finally stood up, preparing to administer her remaining lashes. He resolved to make them quick, and he was relieved she didn’t aim a pleading look at him. Yes, they’d just shared a tender moment, but she

understood it didn't mean he would forgo the rest of her punishment. She expected him to finish.

“Promise you'll never lie to me or my guards again, little one. *Promise me.*”

“I promise.”

He wielded the strap across her bottom eight more times, harsh but rapid blows that caused her to whimper and cry out. More tears ran down her face. And the scent of her feminine essence? It grew so strong he struggled to apply the final lashes, so great was his need to be balls-deep in her slick pussy. Or her ass. *Fluxx*, he still hadn't decided which hole he would claim. A growl left him. Maybe he'd take both.

“Shh, it's over, little one.” He tossed the strap aside and proceeded to massage her welted bottom cheeks as she wiped at her tears. “You took your punishment well, and I'm pleased with your obedience.” He trailed a digit through her slit, a light teasing caress. “Would you like to come?”

She mewled and bucked her hips. “Yes, please. *Please.*”

After stripping off his clothing, he spread her wide and mounted her, pushing his cock into her swollen center. “Then be a good girl and come as I ride you. In fact, you may come as many times as you wish while my scrotum smacks against your pretty little clit.”

CHAPTER 8



FIONA

Fiona cried out during yet another orgasm. She'd lost track of how many times she'd climaxed as Merokk ruthlessly pounded her. Each deep plunge into her center filled her with a mix of pleasure and pain. God, she would probably be too sore to walk when he was finished with her.

She breathed a sigh of relief when he tensed and growled and finally released torrents of his essence inside her. *Thank the heavens. Now we can clean up and fall asleep in one another's arms.*

But to her shock, after he withdrew his thick appendage from her pussy, he reached for the lubrication that was kept in a nightstand drawer. Her heart skipped a beat, and a shiver seized her. The lube was used solely on her asshole.

"Merokk, please." She peered over her shoulder and watched as he splayed her punished cheeks apart with one hand.

With a dark smirk, he trickled the lubrication down her crevice and massaged it into her pucker. He met her eyes as he rubbed a generous amount of lube onto his hugely erect cock. "Your ass is mine, little female, and I intend to ride you hard." Tossing the bottle of lube aside, he positioned his shaft at her snug entrance.

“Please, Merokk. Please have mercy.” Though she trusted him not to take her past the brink of endurance, in her nervousness, she couldn’t help but beg for leniency.

An alien snarl resounded throughout the room as he pressed his cock to her pucker and stretched her uncomfortably wide. “I like it when you beg, little one. I like watching you struggle to take my cock in your ass.”

Though he’d promised to ride her hard, he pressed forward with slow pushes, gentle nudges as he worked his way inside. He groaned and grasped her hips, digging his fingers into her flesh.

Her mind whirled and heated pleasure swept through her. The fullness was overwhelming, but she managed to accept every inch of his sizable length. He remained submerged in her for a few seconds, then he withdrew nearly the entire way and slammed back inside. She gasped for air as his balls struck her clit, and she pressed back against him, desperate for another release.

True to his word, he rode her hard and fast, claiming her ass with fervent thrusts as he growled deep in his throat.

She moaned through a thunderous climax, and she sobbed with relief when he spurted into her ass a second later. She sniffled and wiped at her face, and she mewled as he withdrew his spent cock from her ass. Her face flushed when he kept her bottom spread wide for a few moments longer than necessary, and she felt the trickle of his seed leaking from her pucker.

“Beautiful,” he murmured, and she flushed again.

The rest of the morning passed in a blur of tender words and comfort. He carried her into the bathroom, and they showered together. Her legs were so weak she struggled to

stand, so he held her under the water spray. He was merciful enough not to make the water too hot, though it still stung a bit when it cascaded over her welted bottom.

After the shower, he tucked her under the covers next to him, drew her close, and cupped her ass. He traced the marks from the strap as he stared at her, his eyes brimming with affection.

“What’s going to happen with the treaty and the occupation?” She shuddered. “Will there be more fighting?”

He kissed her forehead, and she melted at the tenderness he was showing her. She soaked it up and nestled deeper in his arms, even as her ass ached inside and out.

“You needn’t worry about the rebel conflict,” he said in a reassuring tone. “Their forces have been decimated, and those who were captured will face trial. I doubt there will be any additional fighting. But as I said, you needn’t worry. You’re safe with me, little one. I promise to always protect you.” He hugged her tighter.

She blinked back tears. “I’m so thankful you returned to me unharmed.” She sighed with contentment and placed her head upon his chest.

He released a purring growl and squeezed her welted bottom. “We’ll grow old and gray together, little one. I promise.”



IF YOU ENJOYED this short story featuring Fiona + Ambassador Merokk, go back and read their story from the beginning in

Surrender (Kall Alien Warriors, Book One).

ABOUT SUE LYNDON

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR SUE LYNDON writes naughty, heartfelt romance filled with sexy discipline, breathless surrender, and scorching hot passion. Hard alpha males, strict husbands, fierce alien warriors, and stern daddy-doms make her go weak in the knees. She also writes vanilla sci-fi romance under the name Sue Mercury—but no matter the genre or pen name, her books always have a swoon-worthy happily ever after.

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ALSO BY SUE LYNDON

SURRENDER

(Kall Alien Warriors, Book One)

The spoils of war are being divided...

As Fiona struggles to survive in the aftermath of a brutal war, she worries her sick mother won't make it long without the medication she so desperately needs. When turncoats offer a way to keep her mother safe, she can't refuse—even though it means marrying Merokk, a fearsome Kall warrior, and posing as the First Daughter, Betsy Carson. The turncoats assure her the marriage will be in name only—but she soon learns Merokk not only intends to consummate their union, but he expects her to share his bed nightly. Furthermore, she will be subject to his rules and firm discipline.

He's been given a human female...

Kall warrior Merokk has mixed feelings about retiring from battle and marrying a human woman, but it's his duty to his people and he can't refuse. One look at Betsy and he's filled with the powerful urge to conquer the beauty who's been given to him as the spoils of war. He enjoys taming the headstrong human female and, as the months pass, discovers his feelings for his little wife run deep. But when he learns of her deceit after the real Betsy Carson surfaces, Merokk's new world comes crashing down. Can he learn to forgive Fiona, or will he spend the rest of their lives punishing her for a crime she never wanted to commit?

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COMMANDER'S SLAVE

(Kall Alien Warriors, Book Two)

She's given to a savage alien warrior...

Sentenced to a lifetime of slavery on the Kall homeworld, First Daughter Betsy Carson expects the rest of her days to be a constant struggle for survival. She's stunned when a wiseman purchases her from the auction block as a gift for his younger brother - a savage Kall warrior named Edek who loathes humans with his every breath. Her hopes to be left alone by her new master are dashed when he orders her to sleep in his bed, and she soon discovers disobedience will be met with firm consequences.

The little human consumes his thoughts...

Commander Edek is still grieving the loss of his wife and sons. He blames humans for the accident that stole his family, and he shouldn't feel such an intense attraction to the little human slave his brother has thrust upon him. Though he tries to build up walls around his heart, Betsy's sweet presence gradually calms the storm raging within, and he becomes fiercely possessive of the small female. But can a Kall commander and a human slave share a future that doesn't end in tragedy?

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RETRIBUTION

(Kall Alien Warriors, Book Three)

Her life belongs to him...

Renowned Kall expert Layla Remington is horrified when her estranged husband, Michael, murders a Kall female named Shessema in cold blood. She knew he was sympathetic to the human rebel cause, but she never believed he'd take his hatred for the conquering aliens so far. When she's summoned before a Kall court, the ancient Custom of Retribution is followed—Layla is given to Shessema's grieving husband, General Zamek, to do with as he pleases.

His mercy comes with a price...

General Zamek arrives at the courtroom, intending to exact his vengeance immediately and take Layla's life. But one look into her soulful dark eyes and he

falters. Instead of driving a sword through her heart, he carries her off, telling himself he'll avenge Shessema's death by making Layla suffer before he eventually kills her. But the first time he hurts her, nothing goes as planned, and he soon finds himself becoming fiercely possessive—and protective—of the little human female whose life will forever belong to him.

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TOP



By

Cole Denton

CHAPTER 1



ANDREW

Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

It's better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all.

Whoever said that shit can fuck the hell off.

I exhaled slowly to steady my trembling breath. As if I needed another reminder of how I felt. I swallowed past the lump in my throat and took a deep, unshakeable breath as I rolled over to face the clock.

The bright red numbers displayed that it was going on five... in the evening. I managed to stay in bed nearly all day, and I was fine with that. This week had been absolute hell, and today, I was barely hanging on by a thread.

Today was the two-year anniversary of my mother's death. Two days ago was the two-year anniversary of my oldest brother's death. And two days before that was the two-year anniversary of my other brother's death. My dad and I had lost all three of them in a matter of days.

Dad and I were still trying to work things out and move forward, but it was so hard. We struggled to talk and take care of each other. Since their deaths, I'd walked around with a

permanent lump in my throat and a constant ache in my chest. I didn't doubt that Dad felt the same way.

He was trying.

I was trying.

It was impossible for either of us to come together and talk. It wasn't for a lack of trying. We just didn't know how to get through this.

Both of us found solace in things that didn't involve the other one. Dad turned to the bottle after trying to be strong for me, and I turned to other activities for comfort. Things that I couldn't talk to him about in a million years. They were things that would turn his stomach and make him sick to know what his one remaining son enjoyed.

I had practically become invisible to him, and we were going through the motions of pretending to be aware of one another. He'd ask how my day was. I'd say fine and ask how his day was; it was a vicious, never-ending cycle.

I couldn't stand being around Dad when he drank. I hated to see him drink himself into a stupor and pass out. I wasn't emotionally strong enough to help him either; I had my own problems.

Shortly after losing my brothers and Mom, I'd discovered bottoming. Specifically, I had tried being on the receiving end of impact play and instantly fell in love. It was the only thing that made me feel a little better and eased my heartache. At least for a while. I sought it out as if it were a drug that I craved.

Did it take the pain away? Absolutely.

Did I really understand it? Not at all. I knew enough though to keep my mouth shut and just say yes when asked to

do something.

But even I was cognizant of the path I was on. I was a freight train heading toward another train on the same track. Eventually a derailment was coming. My time with Tops was no longer enough for me. The pain they inflicted wasn't as effective at taking away my pain anymore. After trying it a few times, I developed an ache in the pit of my stomach.

Was it guilt? Maybe.

But I was pretty sure it was loneliness. It was hard to go from being important, making someone happy, and having all my aches soothed, to being alone and insignificant.

There were a lot of kink clubs in the Los Angeles area, but being twenty-one and on a barista's salary with no one to put in a good word for me, I could only get into one club over in Hollywood... the slummy side of Hollywood. Each time I went there, I looked at the corkboard in the hallway where people posted about private parties. I needed to be able to get into some private parties to meet other people from the better clubs, like Club Oxygen. I was aiming high with that, but hey, why not?

I dreamed of one day getting into Club Oxygen. It was *the* club of clubs, and I was desperate to be under a Top there. Since I'd discovered that being hit took away the pain over the loss of my family, I only looked at parties that were looking for masochist bottoms to attend.

Months ago I'd signed up for a private party that I'd overheard some other bottoms discussing. I was intrigued, so I asked about it. Apparently, not only was the host phenomenal, but the Tops were too, many being members or having connections to the elite clubs. I was told these parties were for the Tops who couldn't take these parties into their clubs. One

of the guys had told me that the key to getting invited back was to just say yes. Saying no would get you on the banned list. When I signed up and noticed what date it fell on, I thought it would be perfect.

I needed to start getting ready for the party. The expectation was that if I played my cards right by the end of the evening, I'd feel some relief from this agonizing week. I pushed myself upright and picked up my phone. I had seven missed messages, all from my dad. I'd avoided them all day and took a deep breath to steel myself for them. I pressed play and held the phone up to my ear.

“Hey, Andrew. It's Dad. Call me when you get this.”

Delete.

“It's Dad again. Just wanted to tell you I love you.”

“Love you too, Dad,” I murmured under my breath as I hit delete on the message and moved on to the next one.

“Andrew.” There was a long pause and then he said, “Call me.”

Dammit, Dad. I could tell he'd started drinking. I hit delete and moved on.

“An-drew. It's Dad.”

Delete.

“Remember when you, Adam, and Allen all played outfield in baseball? I was so proud and would tell people the outfielders are all my boys. You guys were all so good. Numbers one, two, and three.” He was congested on top of being drunk.

The pain in my chest was getting worse, and I didn't think I could handle listening to any more messages. I took a deep

breath as I deleted that one and then pressed play on the next.

“Two years ago, I lost your mother. She was my best friend, Andy. Lost my boys too.”

I took a deep breath as I pressed delete and then started the last one.

“I miss them so much,” Dad sobbed.

I pulled the phone away from my ear and deleted that one too. I went to take a shower and get ready for the party. I dressed in a pair of jeans and a gray Henley shirt. I wouldn't be in clothes very long tonight and these would be fine. Before I grabbed my keys, I pulled on my navy jacket and zipped it up. By the time I left my apartment, I was more than ready for what was to come.

The party was being held in Brentwood, and I followed the directions from the email. As instructed, I parked my car along the street and then made my way to the door. I was a little nervous since this was a private party at a stranger's house, but I reminded myself that anyone who posted about parties in clubs must be a decent person. Even if that wasn't the case, I told myself it was.

With my heartbeat pounding wildly, I rang the doorbell and waited. A man wearing a tight black t-shirt and black leather pants opened the door. His biceps bulged from the sleeves of his shirt and could quite possibly be the size of my head.

“Hi. I'm here for the party,” I said.

The man picked up a spiral notebook and pen from a table in the entryway and looked up at me.

“Are you Andrew?” he asked.

How did he know?

I nodded and then quickly added, “Yes, that’s me. How did you know?”

“There’re only three bottoms on the invite list. The other two are here, and something tells me you’re the third.”

“I could be a Top,” I joked.

He laughed out loud and marked something in the notebook.

“You must be a very new bottom. Let me see your driver’s license. I’m Stuart, by the way.”

I decided to shelve the jokes and reminded myself to keep my mouth shut and follow instructions. I handed him my license and waited while he copied something from it into the notebook. He handed me back my license, set the notebook on the table, then grabbed a clipboard from the table.

“This is a waiver.” He handed me the clipboard and a pen. “You consent to activities taking place on this property. If you recognize anyone at the party, you will not bring light to it outside the party. In other words, everyone you encounter tonight is anonymous. Sign on the line.”

I quickly scribbled my name and handed him the clipboard and pen. He opened the door wider to let me inside. I could hear a mix of male and female voices, and somewhere faintly was the sound of a paddle hitting flesh. I started to get hard standing in the entryway as I listened to someone getting their ass beat. The urge to touch myself was too much to ignore, and my hand naturally gravitated toward my dick.

The man looked down as I slowly stroked the outline of my erection over my pants. My eyes gazed down the hallway at the intense sounds happening somewhere in the house. The

man cleared his throat, and I quickly looked at him. His huge arms were crossed over his chest, and his eyebrows were lowered as he stared at me.

He gestured at my hand and asked, “Is that something you should be doing?” His tone was harsh and stopped me dead in my tracks. I pulled my hand away and shook my head. “I ought to take your ass over my knee for being so indulgent with your little cock.”

Fuck yes. Beat me and tell me how terrible I am. That's what I came here for. That's what I need.

I didn't think he'd actually do it, though, because it wasn't something we'd discussed or agreed upon. Wasn't there supposed to be a discussion? Even the shitty club I went to in Hollywood had Tops who would talk to me about a session first. I'd read somewhere online that Tops and bottoms were supposed to talk about this stuff beforehand. That was supposedly a rule.

Under the pressure of his stone-gray eyes, I began to crack. I swallowed hard and shifted my weight from one foot to the other. A small smile managed to spread across my face in hopes that his glare would relax.

Only it didn't.

Stuart roughly grabbed my upper arm and took me farther into the foyer. He steered my body so I faced the wall and took hold of the collar of my jacket.

“Get these clothes off, boy,” he instructed as he tugged on my jacket.

I quickly removed everything except my boxer briefs and dropped them in a heap on the floor beside the table. With my heart pounding, I stood facing the wall. Stuart's fingers

snatched the waistband of my underwear and yanked them down.

Weren't we supposed to talk about this?

“Are you hard of hearing, boy?”

“No, Sir.”

“Well, I said everything, and you couldn't seem to handle that. If you can't handle those simple instructions, the people down the hallway are going to eat you alive,” Stuart yelled next to my ear. “Hands on the wall and part your feet, boy.”

Without hesitation, I did as I was told. Just as I looked down at my erection, Stuart grabbed a fistful of my hair, tugged my head backward and slapped at my hard-on a few times.

“I don't know who you think you are, boy. You get invited to one of these parties and walk in like you own the place with your little pecker.”

Stuart let go of my hair but continued to slap and swat at my dick. Out of the corner of my eye, two men had stepped into view at the end of the hallway. Both were shirtless and wore black pants, so I assumed they were Tops solely based on their attire. Stuart continued to reprimand me while the thrill of the moment raced down my spine. My dick only got stiffer from me being punished in front of others.

“What do you have over there, Stuart?” one of the men called out.

“Our third bottom.”

“Nice and fresh,” the other man said.

“A little too fresh. Get me my strap,” Stuart told one of them as he grabbed and squeezed my ass cheeks repeatedly.

While I was looking forward to being on the receiving end of this man's belt, warning bells went off in my head because we were supposed to talk about this stuff first.

At least I thought we were.

Right?

The man returned with Stuart's leather strap. Stuart stopped slapping my dick, and the other man wrapped his hand around my shaft and cupped my balls firmly. As Stuart's strap made contact with my ass, it took my body a moment or two before the sharp sting of it registered. It was so painful but felt incredible. Though this was what I came for, I also didn't know how it would stop. *Would Stuart just know when to stop?*

"This boy just might be a masochist," the man with his hands around my dick and balls said. Each kiss of the leather made my body shudder in a good way. Stuart really knew how to use that strap.

"Good. He'll be much more tolerant of his evening, then," Stuart said as he continued to whip me.

Another man had stepped closer and leaned with his back against the wall beside me with his shoulder touching my hand. He had a determined but dazed look on his face, and his shoulder moved slightly. My eyes roamed down his body only to discover he was stroking his dick.

The heat on my ass was starting to mount, and I finally spoke up.

"Should we have talked about this before starting?" I asked. Stuart stopped for a moment and then laughed with the other two men. I chuckled with them and then added, "You didn't ask me for my safe word."

"Safe word, Stuart," the man jacking off said.

Stuart went to the table close by and picked up the clipboard.

“Is this your signature?” he asked.

“Yes.”

He held it against the wall in front of me and, with a fistful of my hair, pushed my head against the clipboard.

“That’s your consent, boy. There is no need for a safe word here,” Stuart said.

Oh.

“You trust us to let you know when you’ve had enough,” the man with his hand around my dick said. Just then Stuart began slapping my ass with his bare hand.

This went on until my breathing became labored from grimacing and concentrating on not moving my head. Otherwise, the clipboard would crash to the ground, and I didn’t think that would go well.

Stuart’s hands roughly grabbed my ass cheeks, tugged them apart, then spit on my hole. *Was he going to...?* Seconds later, Stuart pushed a finger inside me while the other two men encouraged him. The fucking motion of his finger set off a burning sensation at my entrance; however, when his finger moved deeper, the ecstasy was almost blinding. Being my first experience with this, my body and mind weren’t in sync as one said yes while the other said no. My only reaction was to squirm and wiggle some at the intrusion.

“What, boy? First finger?” Stuart asked.

“Yes.”

The men laughed, and as Stuart finger fucked my ass, the other man started to stroke my cock faster. My body felt like it

was on fire from a mixture of pain and humiliation. I had broken out in a sweat and thought my forehead might be sticking to the paper on the clipboard.

I tried to keep the panting and heavy breathing down to a minimum as these men worked me over with this new experience. The longer I was stroked and finger fucked while others watched, the higher I got. I badly needed to come and couldn't control it much longer with them teasing me like this. The combination of what they were doing had ignited the fire within.

“You going to come out of that tiny dick?” Stuart asked. “Huh?”

“Yes.” My voice sounded rushed, as if talking would prevent me from coming.

I tried to nod, but the clipboard against the wall started to slide. I strained my neck to press my head tighter against the clipboard to keep it from falling. After all, it was my consent.

The man who stroked me started to tease me more by pinching the head of my dick some and then pressing a finger under it.

“Then come with that little dick. Let's see what you have, boy,” the man encouraged as he pumped my cock in his hand.

Stuart's finger slowed, but it felt like it was buried deep. I stopped worrying so much about Stuart's finger and let go. Sounds of my whimpers and moans filled the air as my body unraveled. I felt like the only things keeping me on my feet was Stuart's finger embedded in me and the stranger's hand around my dick.

“Fresh sounds from a fresh boy,” the stranger who was stroking himself said. The other two laughed and agreed.

“With a really tight ass,” Stuart said. He moved his finger a little more, and the pleasure caused me to close my eyes. Everything felt too intense.

“So much to experience,” the other added.

As the gobs of cum started shooting out of my dick, my ass felt like it was going to squeeze Stuart’s finger off. It felt intrusive, and the only way my body seemed to know how to react was to keep coming. The stranger rubbed cum along my shaft before he reached up and smeared some on my face.

“There, now you’re ready to party,” he said.

Stuart pulled the clipboard away, set it on the table, grabbed my shoulders to turn me to face them, then pushed me to my knees. *Fuck, they weren’t going to...* Stuart undid his pants while the man who jacked me off unsnapped the material at his groin. The other stranger already had his cock out and was slowly stroking himself.

As my heart pounded wildly while I tried to catch my breath from coming so hard, the three of them stood beside one another and jacked off in front of me. These guys had no shame and didn’t care who heard them.

“Open your mouth, boy,” Stuart instructed.

Ugh, no. I didn’t really want anyone’s dick near my face. If we’d been in the club, I wouldn’t have negotiated this. *But I wasn’t in the club.* I’d willingly signed up to come to this party. And I did sign the form at the door. I did want to get into the better kink clubs, and I knew that this party could pave the way for me by word of mouth. I was aware that if I were a bottom in a nice kink club, this would be something almost expected of me. But I could have worked toward this slowly

and not under these circumstances. Suddenly, one of the other men grabbed a fistful of my hair and tugged my head back.

“You sure seem hard of hearing for someone so young. Don’t fuck this night up for yourself, boy. Open your fucking mouth.” He didn’t let go of my hair even when I opened my mouth.

As the man who jacked me off stepped closer to me, I closed my eyes. He grunted as his warm cum hit my cheeks. The other two men’s voices grew louder as the man who came on me pushed the slick head of his dick in my mouth. My pulse raced as the taste of his cum hit my tongue.

“Close your mouth and lick the head clean, boy.”

Fuck.

I slowly closed my lips around his length and ran my tongue over his head. The taste was enough to make me gag, which made the three of them laugh. I opened my eyes when I was sure I heard more than their three voices. Two other men and three women had all stepped into the large entryway to watch me get used.

“Open,” the other man said as he stepped closer.

I swallowed hard, and when I didn’t open my mouth right away, he slapped me twice in the face. I opened my mouth, and he pushed his dick in. Hoping I wouldn’t taste his dick, I tried lowering my tongue. That only worked for a moment or two as he started to thrust in and out slowly. Without any warning, his salty cum hit the back of my throat, again making me gag. He pulled his cock away, and his cum spilled out of my mouth and dribbled down my chin. I coughed hard.

“One more load, boy.”

Stuart stepped closer and shot some cum on my face before he pushed the tip of his cock between my lips. I began to think these guys just wanted to see me gag on their cum, because even though Stuart knew I obviously was very inexperienced with this, he still shot cum like a bullet in my mouth. Stuart patted the side of my face as I coughed. I was hot with embarrassment.

“We’ll get you broken in tonight. Relax, boy,” Stuart said as he turned to leave.

I remained kneeling on the floor, sitting back on my heels as I coughed and continued to gag. My stomach hurt from gagging, my throat burned, and each time my tongue touched the roof of my mouth, I felt like throwing up. I stared at the floor and thought about what had just happened.

I’d been stripped, spanked, fondled, finger fucked in my virgin ass, been ejaculated on, tasted cum, and had three dicks forced into my mouth. Well, they didn’t really force their way in. I could have said my safe word... if they would have acknowledged it.

Just as my mind started to get lost deep in thought, movement caught my eye. One of the onlookers walked toward me. He was tall and had dark hair and what looked like a couple days’ worth of hair growth on his face. His expression was unreadable. I swallowed hard and almost threw up at the taste in my mouth as he crouched in front of me.

“You okay?”

I nodded. “Yes,” I answered as his eyes roamed my body. I silently begged he’d just leave me alone. I needed a few minutes before being “broken in.”

“First time at a party like this?” he asked. My answer was a nod. “Are you sure you want to be here?” His voice was calm, and for some reason, I didn’t think he was going to do anything to me.

“I do. Yes.”

“Did you want what those men did?” he asked quietly.

Did I?

I swallowed and gagged again. He put his hand on my upper back, causing me to jump a little.

“Want some water?” he offered. I nodded. He stood and left me. While he was gone, I prayed no one else would come over to me. As he walked toward me with a bottle of water, I overheard two other guys talking.

“What are you doing, man?” a man asked him. He kept walking toward me and ignored the men behind him.

“Garrett’s playing the Daddy Dom role,” the other man said. They disappeared when the man crouched in front of me.

He held up the bottle so I could see the lid and he pointed to the seal.

“Water is safe. It hasn’t been opened.” Breaking the seal, the man twisted the cap off, then handed me the bottle. I sipped eagerly and almost drank the entire bottle.

“Thank you,” I said.

“You’re sure you wanted what those men did?” he asked again.

I nodded and then looked over my shoulder at the clipboard on the table. I gestured toward it with my head.

“I consented,” I explained.

The man looked at the table in the entryway and then back at me.

“With your voice?”

I frowned.

“My signature.”

The man stayed near me while I finished the water and then he took the bottle from my hands.

“You can leave anytime you want,” he said as he stood. I nodded, and he walked away, leaving me to my thoughts.

While Stuart’s finger was almost too much for me, the spanking felt incredible. I had desperately needed that. Part of me loved the way he took control and embarrassed me in front of others. This was kind of like it was in the clubs but different. Especially since we hadn’t talked or negotiated it beforehand. But I supposed that was part of the thrill.

Stuart said they’d break me in tonight. What did that mean? What else was coming my way? The door was right there. I could leave. But did I want to?

CHAPTER 2



JAMES

I slowly took a deep breath as I leaned against the wall and watched a group of people playing. By day, this was probably a formal dining room, but tonight it was a room for raunchy play. The young man was bent over and carelessly restrained to the long oak table. He took whatever he was given and thanked each Top who'd played with him.

With my arms folded across my chest and hands gripping my sleeves, I looked at how impetuously this young man had been laid out on display. One of my eyes twitched as I focused on his restraints. It appeared heavy twine was used to restrain his legs to the table legs. Even from a distance, I could see that the twine was digging into his skin. His arms were stretched out in front of him with the same twine wrapped tightly around his wrists, keeping his hands together. Attached to the twine between his hands was the hook to a bungee cord with the other end dangerously lodged at the end of the table.

As the man was paddled, I watched the bungee hook move. Just about any jarring movement could cause it to come loose and snap back to hit the young man in the face. I stepped forward and pulled the bungee hook from the edge of the table it had been teetering on. I set the end on top of the table and left the room. At least the bottom would most likely leave with his face intact.

Some private parties in the area were really good.

And some were like this.

I made my way to the kitchen and living room area, wondering how much longer I'd be able to stand being here. I'd agreed to attend because the host, Stuart, had been a long-time member of Club Oxygen. His attendance had become sparse as of late, and when I asked him about it, he mentioned he preferred hosting private parties. If he didn't employ someone with their head firmly on their shoulders to monitor these parties for safety, he was going to end up in a lawsuit.

After grabbing a bottle of water, I leaned on the kitchen counter and looked into the living room. In the center, a bottom was being attached to the large St. Andrew's cross.

"Hey, James." I looked at Garrett as he walked toward me with a bottle of beer in his hand. It was as though he knew what I was thinking. "Don't worry. I'm not participating. I'm just here to watch," he added.

"Find anything exciting?" I asked him.

The handful of times I had seen him in Club Oxygen, he was always a voyeur. Aside from Club Oxygen, he belonged to another group that participated mainly in consensual non-consensual play. It was a tight-knit group, and with that type of play, they had no choice but to abide by the rules.

"No. Not really. I think there are three bottoms here."

"And what, five or six times as many Tops?" I asked.

"Something like that."

I exhaled loudly and pulled my eyes away from Garrett to the sound of skin being slapped repeatedly. The young man they'd restrained to the cross was fidgeting around and had

earned himself some harsh bare-handed slaps from the four men and one woman who stood by. Garrett made a noise and then pulled his beer bottle away from his lips.

“That guy is new, and I don’t think he really knows what end is up,” Garrett said quietly.

“Yeah?”

“Mmmhmm. I saw Stuart and a couple of other guys messing with him in the entryway. I don’t know what he did, or didn’t do, but I walked in on them slapping him, and Stuart had his finger up his ass. They each eventually had their dicks in his mouth, and the guy couldn’t handle any of them. He repeatedly gagged, but they all continued.”

“What makes you think he’s new and clueless?”

“Come on, James. You know how male bottoms are at these parties.” Unfortunately, I did. Even if they weren’t bi, or gay, they still all knew how to perform orally. Unless they were new. “Anyhow, after they had their fun with him, they left him in the front room covered in their cum. I went over to him, and he had this look in his eye that told me he didn’t enjoy it. When I asked him if he had wanted what happened, he nodded and said he consented. He thinks his signature on the waiver to enter the party was his consent for anything.”

“How did he even end up here?” I wondered out loud.

“I have no idea. He probably knows someone here from another club where the party was posted.”

“And it probably had an email address to get on the invite list.”

I shook my head at that practice. Randomly inviting complete strangers to these types of parties where mind play took place was somewhat predatory in my eyes. On the other

side of that coin, attending power exchange parties where you didn't know the host, or some of the guests, was dangerous.

"I'm going to head out. This party sucks," Garrett said.

"It's still early. Go to Club Oxygen. There should be something going on there for you to get excited about."

"I might. I'm only slightly hesitant to leave, though, because of him," Garrett said as he looked at the young man restrained to the cross.

"Go. I'll stay and keep my eye on him."

"You sure?"

I raised an eyebrow and tilted my head to the side to look at Garrett. He knew what the look meant and knew that I never offered to do anything that I didn't do to the fullest. Garrett grinned and then nudged my arm with his fist.

"Thank you. Text me later or tomorrow and let me know how it all goes."

I nodded. As soon as Garrett left, I glued my eyes to the bottom on the cross. As the people around him took turns paddling him and using a belt on his ass, it shocked me that no one had the decency to check on him. His flesh was different shades of red and blotchy in spots, and I knew some areas were going to turn into welts.

Stuart grabbed him by the hair to keep him still while he got close to the young man's ear. I couldn't hear what either of them had said. Stuart let go of the man's hair, and his facial expression was troubling, almost evil looking. He had a huge grin on his face and was nodding, as if delivering news that he found more appealing than the young man did.

As the men took turns using a combination of impact tools on his ass, I shook my head. There was no way the young man's body could react with any pleasure to all of the different sensations. A wooden paddle was used, then a belt, then someone used a crop on him, then someone else stepped up and had used their bare hand. It was simply a mess. And as if all of that wasn't enough, the woman stood in front of him and pinched or tweaked his nipples while telling him how worthless he was.

I understood that some people were into humiliation and degradation play. This young man could very well be turned on by it. But any responsible Top knew that in order for this kind of play to not be damaging, there had to be some care and thought put into it. Some discussions needed to be had, which appeared to have never taken place.

I reminded myself that these people weren't from Oxygen. The common sense to check on your bottom was lost on these people. Or perhaps, they never cared in the first place.

The men were starting to rub their erections against the young man's bright red ass cheeks after each of them struck him. The woman kept reaching between her legs and then would push her fingers in his mouth, or she'd smear her fluids on his face.

The young man was in way over his head, and it wouldn't be long before these men attempted to fuck him. And I wasn't convinced he wanted that. His hands were wrapped around the wood of the cross, gripping it tightly. Though his feet were restrained, he still had some free movement of them. His feet and lower half would shift to the left as someone to his right struck him. Then he'd move to his right as he was hit from his

left and look over his shoulder. Clearly, he was trying to move away.

I took a few steps to the side so I could see the front of him. With his height and the build of this cross, if he was erect, his cock would be against the pad in the center. I was almost hoping that I wouldn't be able to see his cock and that the pad would conceal it. He appeared semi-erect; however, that wasn't a solid sign that he was enjoying this. That could be nothing more than his body reacting.

The man looked over his right shoulder at the other men gathered behind him. Another man touched his leg with an electrical wand, and as the young man cried out, I'd had enough.

CHAPTER 3



ANDREW

*B*eing broken in was a good thing... right?

At least, that was what I kept telling myself. The possibility of getting into Club Oxygen was what had me agreeing to whatever these men and women wanted to do to me. That was where I wanted to be. I wanted to be under those Tops. Wishful thinking.

As my ass was beaten to a pulp, I got lost in my thoughts about everything going on. Before tonight, I thought I wanted to feel physical pain, but while my ass was tormented, I was seriously second-guessing that. I'd enjoyed the physical pain and humiliation from Tops in the club I went to, but this was so very different. The other Tops had talked to me about things. They knew my safe word and seemed to respect it. And maybe I felt a sense of security with that practice.

The thing that bothered me the most about tonight was that the waiver did not state what I was agreeing to. But I knew there was something unspoken here. Being compliant at the party could be the gateway for me to get to access to a higher level and better club. The worst feeling that I had right now was the worry of what would happen if I asked them to stop and they didn't.

Stuart leaned in and pulled my head close to his mouth.

“We’re going to turn you into a little cum slut, boy. There’re some nice thick cocks that are ready to feel your tight hole.” As he wrapped his hand around my throat, I felt a man press his dick against the crack of my ass. “Word of warning, though, the more you resist, the more it encourages them. The more you cry out, the more turned on it makes them. I assume you like it rough, so feel free to make your noises.”

I quickly shook my head. *No, not rough.* Stuart was smiling at me, which gave me a sinking feeling. I needed out of here. As I opened my mouth to ask him what to do if I needed to stop, a sharp pain in my leg tore my thoughts away from being broken in, to *what the fuck was that?* One of the men had some sort of stick that made me feel like I’d been zapped or stung. It didn’t hurt terribly, but I was definitely curious about it.

“Remember, you know where the front door is. But if you ever want to step foot in one of those nice, cushy clubs, you just keep yourself still.”

“Stuart, if you don’t mind, before you and your friends have your fun, I’d like a turn with the new bottom,” a man said from behind me.

He walked around the cross to stand in front of me, and I noticed right away that this man was different from the others. For one, he was completely dressed, whereas most of the other Tops were shirtless. His mannerisms were also calmer. He looked me in the eye, and I quickly looked down.

The woman who had been feeding me her pussy juice had stepped out of his way. I could hear the other men behind me grumbling before it sounded like they were walking away. I looked over my shoulder to see if they were actually leaving or if my mind was playing crazy tricks on me. *No, they were*

walking toward the kitchen and hallway. *Who was this guy and how afraid of him should I be?* All that remained in front of me was this man and Stuart.

“Of course, James. Have at him. He’s a cock-sucking novice for sure, but he’s got a real tight hole.” Stuart reached out and slapped my face a few times before he roughly gripped my jaw. “I’d guess it was a virgin hole. Am I right?” Stuart asked.

I nodded as best as I could and then quickly added, “Yes, Sir.”

The man he called James cleared his throat, and Stuart let go of my face. He took a step back and gestured toward me as if offering me up to this other guy.

“I’ll be around,” Stuart said before he walked away.

Now all that remained was this James guy. My heart pounded hard in my chest. I could hear it thumping in my ears. I lowered my eyes and stared at the floor. I prayed this guy wasn’t going to be as bad as the others were. He took a step toward me and spoke up.

“No. Please don’t do that.”

Fuck, what? What did I do to piss this guy off?

Wait... Did he say please?

“Sir?” I asked for clarification without looking at him.

“Don’t avert your eyes,” he said.

Was he kidding me? Or was this a test to see if I knew my place?

His laugh was gentle and only loud enough for me to hear it. It didn’t sound like he was angry or unhappy, so I took a

chance and spoke up.

“Aren’t I supposed to keep my eyes down in the presence of a Top or Dom?” I cautiously asked. *I was... wasn’t I?*

“Look up, please.” I looked at him as ordered, and he smiled at me. “I prefer to see the eyes of the person who places their trust in my hands. When I play with a bottom, I need to see their eyes because it helps me meet their needs.”

The bottom’s needs? My needs? James’ eyes moved slightly as he looked into mine. Then another smile spread across his face.

“And maybe some of their wants. Eyes will tell me things a bottom might not feel comfortable vocalizing,” James said as his eyes looked upward at my hands that dangled from the metal restraints.

“Have I thoroughly confused you?”

I nodded. “Yes, Sir.”

“Let’s see if I can clear some of this up for you. What’s your name?” His eyes moved to mine.

“Andrew.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Andrew. My name is James. May I have your permission to touch you?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you. What did you come here for tonight, Andrew?”

“Um... What do you mean?” James reached up and touched the back of my hand and then my fingertips, then he wrapped his hand around each of mine before speaking again.

“You came here seeking something, Andrew. What did you need or hope to receive?”

“Oh... um... well. I wanted to be hurt. I mean, I thought I did.”

“Does the pain help you get off sexually, or does something else drive you to seek out pain?”

Whoa. I wasn't expecting such a heavy question. I thought about it for a moment. I thought I knew why, so I took a chance and spoke up.

“It does something else.”

CHAPTER 4



JAMES

*I*t sounded like Andrew was getting an emotional release from the physical pain he received. A Top he'd play with would need to understand that in order to properly meet his needs, otherwise damage could be done. And Andrew needed to understand this so he could convey this to his Top. Just as Garrett suggested, I had a feeling that Andrew didn't know what end was up.

“Do you relay that to your Tops?” I asked.

His blank stare was all I needed to feel confident that Andrew was lost in the kink world and feeling his way around in the dark. And unfortunately, he'd indeed found the dark.

“Do you discuss the type of session you're looking for with the Top?” I clarified.

“I talk to them and tell them I'm looking for pain. Either physical pain or humiliation. I try to find sadists to partner with, or I sign up for parties that are seeking masochists.”

“Why? Why do you seek out the sadists?”

“They're best suited to handle me since I'm a masochist.”

He had no clue. The internet could be so helpful yet so damaging. Since he sought physical pain to soothe an emotional ache rather than a sexual need, I was nearly positive

he wasn't a masochist. But dissecting that would be for another time.

"Did you consent to the play in the entryway tonight?" I gestured to the cross that Andrew was restrained to. "Did you tell them this was what you were looking for?" I asked.

"I signed the waiver."

"The waiver to enter the party?"

"Yes. Wasn't that for pretty much whatever?"

"Andrew, did you really want men to use your mouth?"

"No. I didn't know they were going to do that."

"Did you agree to render yourself helpless and be restrained by this group of people for *whatever*?"

"No. I kept thinking that someone was going to talk to me and go over stuff before play started. Warning bells were going off from what I'd learned so far. But then I was starting to doubt myself. They didn't ask me for my safe word, and when I asked Stuart about it, he said the waiver was my consent."

"Andrew, why did you walk willingly with those men to this apparatus?"

"I wanted to play. I wanted to endure pain."

There was desperation in his voice. This was exactly how novices got hurt or trapped by predators.

"Did you want to have sex with four men who were nothing but strangers to you? Because you were minutes away from that happening."

"No, I didn't want that." Andrew swallowed and looked over his shoulder briefly. "Stuart said if I ever wanted to be

able to play in good clubs, parties like this were how I could be recommended.”

I took a slow, deep breath. I didn't want him to think I was frustrated with him, because I wasn't. I was frustrated and angry with Stuart for throwing parties like this where they were manipulating bottoms into relenting consent.

“Out of curiosity, what makes you think he has any say in where you can play?”

“He said so.”

“And do you know him?” Andrew shook his head. “Do you have any close, personal friends you trust who can vouch for Stuart and his credibility?” He shook his head again. I reached over the middle of the cross and put my hand on his stomach. “Trust yourself and your gut. You said that warning bells were going off. You ignored them. Don't ignore those. Trust those, Andrew. Because no matter where you're playing, your instincts are your most reliable source.”

“Okay.”

I reached up and felt his hands again. They were starting to cool, and it was time for him to be let down before he went numb.

“I'm going to undo your restraints because your hands are starting to get cold. You've been restrained with your hands upward as long as they can be without cutting off circulation.”

I undid the restraints, and when his arms came down to rest at his sides, I rubbed my hands up and down his biceps.

“Do you want to remain at the party, Andrew? I have no right to prevent you from doing what you want. I just couldn't stand by and watch a group of people possibly wreck any enjoyment you get from this lifestyle.”

“Thank you. I don’t want to stay. I just thought maybe it’d help me get into better clubs.”

Andrew still looked somewhat dazed and shaken over the events of tonight. He kept looking over his shoulder toward the kitchen. Stuart was walking toward us with his hands turned over and palms up.

“What’s this?” Stuart asked.

“Andrew has had enough for the night. You, of course, can easily see that by the marks on his body.”

Stuart laughed. “Come on, James. For real?”

“Yes. For real. His lip is cut, his ass is a mess, and clearly, he hasn’t received even a moment of care. He’s had enough, and he’d like to leave.”

Stuart stared angrily at me and then glared at Andrew.

“Get the hell out, boy. And you can fucking forget about ever being able to step foot into any good clubs!” Stuart yelled as Andrew and I walked toward the entryway.

Andrew hurried and pulled on his underwear and jeans before he stepped into his shoes. I picked up his jacket from the floor and held onto it.

“No, James, you don’t have to go. I just want this prick out,” Stuart said.

“Thank you, but I’ve had enough as well.” I opened the door for Andrew to step outside onto the porch. As I stepped out of the house, I turned to face Stuart. “And as a matter of fact, *you* can forget about ever stepping foot in those good clubs.”

“What? You can’t be serious, James.”

“I am.”

The door slammed closed behind us, and I handed Andrew his jacket as soon as he put on his shirt.

“I’m sorry if I got you kicked out of the party,” Andrew said while he zipped up his jacket.

“It wasn’t a party that I needed to be at. I don’t need to be associated with him.”

“Yeah, me either.”

I was a bit concerned about Andrew going home with his head so full and without any sort of care or attention given to him.

“Do you have a cell phone?” I asked.

“Yes.” He dug into the pocket of his pants and pulled it out. “I had it turned off during the party,” he explained and pointed to the phone as he powered it back on.

“I’d like to give you my number. Anytime you have questions or want to talk, I’m more than happy to help you navigate these waters.”

“I would really like that.”

I took Andrew’s phone from his outstretched hand and entered all of my info into his contacts.

“We can meet anywhere you’d like and talk, or we can talk over the—”

“Want to go get coffee?” Andrew blurted out.

I handed him back the phone and smiled. He needed time with someone. I was more than happy to be the one to give that to him.

“I’d love to. Are you familiar with the area?” I asked. I didn’t think he’d find it very comfortable to sit for a long drive.

“Yes. I know the area.”

“At the end of this street, if you make a right and follow it past two stop lights, there’s a shopping area. It’s well lit, and there are some restaurants and bars. There’s a coffee house, and we could either sit there or walk around and chat.”

“I know the place you’re speaking of.”

“You lead the way, and I’ll follow you.”

CHAPTER 5



JAMES

I parked near Andrew and got out of my car. He smiled when he approached with his hands in his pockets.

“Hi, James.”

“Hello, Andrew.”

We walked side by side at a leisurely pace toward the shops, bars, and restaurants.

“This place has some really good restaurants. I hear the bars are great too, but I think perhaps something calmer is better suited for us tonight.” I paused as we climbed the handful of steps leading from the parking lot to the shopping plaza.

“That sounds fine to me,” Andrew said.

“Coffee?” I asked and gestured toward the coffee house that was only a short distance away.

“Yeah. I love coffee.”

“Is this place okay?” I asked him as we approached Three Brothers Coffee.

Andrew laughed, and a huge smile spread across his face. “I happen to love this place,” he said.

“It’s not too late for you to have caffeine?” I teased.

“No, caffeine is in my blood.”

“Mine too,” I said as I pulled the door open for him.

Though it was close to nine p.m., the coffee shop was bustling. As we stood in line, I noticed that several people behind the counter waved at Andrew and greeted him by name when it was our turn to order.

“Just a black coffee for me,” Andrew said and then gestured to me. “Go ahead, James.”

“I’ll have the same, please.”

Before I could pull out my wallet, Andrew had already handed the cashier a ten. He generously deposited all of his change in the tip container.

“There’s a patio out this door with tables and heat lamps. It might be better for us to sit out there because it’s kind of loud in here.”

“That sounds perfect. Come here often?” I asked.

“A couple times a week,” he said. He quickly stepped forward to collect our coffee cups.

“Thank you,” I said and took the cup from his hand.

Outside, we found a table away from most of the patrons and took a seat. We turned our chairs to face the shops and people walking on the other side of the patio’s iron fence. We sat quietly and people watched for a bit. I glanced at Andrew and could tell by the way he leaned forward over his knees that a lot was on his mind. His eyes moved from side to side as they latched on to people or objects randomly. *Heavy mind*. While he seemed content with sitting quietly, I wanted to at least talk to him about this evening.

“Earlier you mentioned that you seek out impact sessions because they do something for you. May I ask what benefit it is that you receive?” I paused to give him a moment to indicate that I had the green light to proceed or tell me he didn’t want to talk about this.

Andrew nodded, set his coffee cup on the table, and leaned back in his seat.

“I get this really good feeling after I’ve had one of those sessions.” He ran his hand through his hair and then turned his chair to face the table. “It gives me a sense of relief. I don’t know why, really. It just takes some of the stress away.” He brought the coffee cup to his lips and took a quick sip before pulling it away. “I guess...” He ran his hand through his hair again and looked me in the eye for a fleeting moment. “I don’t really know how to explain it, I guess.”

“You did just fine. You explained that you feel good afterward and that it’s a stress reliever. Let me ask, do you have a lot of stress in your life?”

Andrew brought his eyes up from his paper coffee cup and held my gaze. It could have been the angle of his face, but his eyes appeared to be glassy. Andrew had a traumatic evening, so it would have been easy for me to pass his demeanor off as still reacting to the events at the party. But I felt that this young man was in desperate need of a friend. His response to my question was a nod before he looked down.

“Today is the two-year anniversary of my mother’s death,” he said, shoulders sagging.

“Andrew, I’m sorry to hear that.”

“This week is the two-year anniversary of the deaths of my two brothers too.”

Shit.

“I’m sorry. Losing someone is very difficult. I imagine losing three loved ones in such a short time is beyond difficult.”

“It’s been really hard. We were triplets. I’m the youngest. Allen, the middle one, died in a car accident. A few days later, Adam, the oldest, hung himself in the garage.” Andrew took a deep breath. “Then a few days after that, my mom overdosed on pain pills. My dad found her in the bathtub.”

My throat had gone dry. So much loss in such a short amount of time.

“My dad drinks a lot. Since their deaths, this time of year is almost unbearable for us. For me. I found that by feeling some physical pain, I end up feeling better afterward. It helps me get some stuff out, I guess.” Andrew huffed out a laugh and shook his head. With red eyes and a red nose, he took a deep breath and sniffled. “Does that even make sense?”

“It makes perfect sense.”

“It does?”

“You get a cathartic release from it.”

Andrew sat up straight and kept his eyes on me.

“You understand?”

“I do.” I put my forearms on the table and leaned forward. “Do you convey this to the Tops you negotiate sessions with?”

“I just tell them I want to be hit. I never really knew how to explain it exactly, and I figure that even if I get some relief, it’s better than nothing.”

“I get that. I do. But you’ve got to be honest with them. Without honesty—without fully understanding your own needs—you’re setting yourself up for disappointment. Disappointment that could potentially be dangerous.”

Andrew nodded.

“I just kind of thought, if I could get into one of the good clubs, the Tops would be more experienced at impact sessions and then I’d feel good.”

“Andrew, there is a safe way to do this sort of thing. A responsible way that won’t harm you.”

“I don’t know how!” He groaned in frustration. “I thought the good clubs would have people who’d understand. But I can’t get into them, and I don’t know how to ask for this stuff the right way.”

“I will teach you.”

His eyes met mine again.

“You... You’ll teach me?”

“Yes. If you’re truly interested in learning to negotiate your sessions safely and communicate your needs to your partners, I will be more than happy to mentor you.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really.”

“Thank you. And yes. Yes, I’d like that. I’m interested in learning.”

“Good. It’s getting late. Do you happen to have some aloe at home?”

“Yeah, I use it for sunburns.”

“Try to put some aloe on those ass cheeks when you get home. It’ll reduce the swelling of the welts.”

“It’ll be okay.”

“Remember, you need to be able to take care of yourself too, Andrew.”

“Oh, got it.”

We tossed our empty coffee cups into the trash bin before making our way to the parking lot.

“Do me a favor tonight,” I said as we reached his car.

“What?”

“If you wouldn’t mind, text me when you get home so I know you made it okay.”

“Okay, I will.”

“If you’re not busy tomorrow night, why don’t you meet me at my club, and I’ll show you around.”

“I’d really like that, yes.”

“Good. Seven?”

“Seven works for me.” Andrew pulled out his cell phone and opened up a screen to take down my club info. “What’s the address?”

I smiled at him and patted his upper arm as I started to walk toward my car. “I already entered it when we were standing on the porch,” I called over my shoulder.

“Oh,” I heard him say. I had just opened the door to my car when I heard him holler excitedly. He ran over to me. “Club Oxygen? No way... No way! Club Oxygen is the best club in Southern California!”

“I’ll meet you in the lobby at seven,” I said.

“Yes! See you tomorrow!” Andrew jogged to his car. “I’ll text you when I get home!”

And so it began.



READY TO JOIN CLUB OXYGEN? Check out the [series](#).

ABOUT COLE DENTON

Cole Denton is a USA Today Bestselling Author of Dark Romance. His passion for writing began at a young age and followed him through college in Southern California where he he majored in screenwriting.

After moving to Sin City, Cole put his knowledge and talent as a writer to work by pursuing a career as a Dark Romance author. He finds enjoyment creating dark, sinful, and taboo characters and stories for his readers to devour.

Cole revels in testing his kinky side, in pursuit of all things pleasurable. When he isn't writing or spending time with his readers in Cole's Den, you can find him swimming, eating sugared treats, or counting the days down until he can catch waves on the Pacific Coast.

Stay connected with Cole so you never miss out on his adventures. Keep up with Cole by signing up for his newsletter <http://bit.ly/ColesNewsletterSignUp>.

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Plaything

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Black Run

The Redemption Series

Caught

Captured

The Sanguine Series

Hate (novella)

The Queen

Hybrid

DANGEROUS PROFESSIONS



By

Livia Grant

CHAPTER 1



RANDY

Randy didn't have time for this shit. He'd been waiting several minutes at the empty reception desk for someone to meet and greet him. He assumed the assistant was just in the bathroom since the PC was still logged on. Eventually losing patience, he pressed forward through the small reception office toward the one and only closed door. After weaving through a waiting area filled with ugly-ass furniture, Randy approached the office to find the door ajar.

“That-a-girl. Nice and deep now. Just like I like it.”

He had arrived for an unannounced visit hoping to catch Bobby by surprise. By the looks of the deep-throat blowjob in progress, he'd succeeded.

Randy couldn't see the woman behind the gagging and slurping sounds coming from behind his cousin's large wooden desk. Leaning back in his chair, head back, eyes closed, Bobby enjoyed the attention his assistant paid to his favorite body part. She must have tried to take a break because Bobby reached forward and yanked her back to his cock. Randy worried the poor girl was going to puke she was gagging so hard.

“God dammit Patty. Stop trying to push away. You know that pisses me off.”

Randy contemplated allowing his cousin to shoot his wad before interrupting, but remembering the purpose of his visit, decided it was best to catch him with his pants down—literally.

“I see you’re getting a lot of work done this afternoon, Robert.”

The eyes of the man in the department-store suit flew open. Randy was happy to see the panic there. Maybe his cousin was taking his situation more seriously than it sounded like over the phone yesterday.

“Randy. What the fuck are you doing here?”

The slurping from under the desk hadn’t stopped. Bobby tore his eyes away to look at his lap. “That’s enough Patty. Come out of there and get back to work.” He tucked his softening cock into his slacks as the source of the gagging crawled from beneath the desk, pulling herself to her feet. Her clothes were disheveled, but it was the state of her smeared makeup that told Randy she’d been at it for a long time.

As she glanced up, he saw embarrassment laced with relief when their eyes met. She lifted her arm to swipe self-consciously at the remaining spittle on her face. Randy approached the coffee table, grabbing a few tissues and handing them to her.

“Go clean yourself up, honey, and get back to work. I need to talk privately with your boss.”

She tentatively took the tissues but didn’t bother using them before she excused herself. “Thank you, sir.”

Randy waited until he heard the door close before he addressed his nervous cousin. “I would have thought you’d be taking your situation a bit more seriously, Robert. You think

choking your assistant with your pathetic excuse for a cock is going to raise the half a mil you owe me faster?”

“Hey, you have no right to come in here like this. I don’t know what the fuck you’re playing at Randy, but this is still my office. My business. You can’t just waltz in here like you own the joint.” His cousin’s words may have sounded strong, but the men had known each other their entire lives. He saw the sweat building on the older man’s temples and didn’t miss the trembling of his cousin’s hands as he attempted to nervously pick up a few files.

“Let’s get a few things straight here, cuz. I can guarantee you I’m not playing, and I rarely waltz. More importantly, since I’ve invested heavily in your business and have yet to see any meaningful return on my very generous investment, I’ve decided that I actually *do* own the joint.”

“What the fuck! That wasn’t part of our deal. You don’t know shit about the adult entertainment business, anyway.”

Robert’s anxiety grew exponentially as Randy remained cool as a cucumber. “You know what I remember about our deal? I distinctly remember you promising to start paying back the two-million you borrowed long ago. In fact, I think we were supposed to be over halfway done with the repayments by now and yet you’ve barely kept up with interest payments.”

“Hey, it’s not my fault the film project we invested in was a flop. We took a loss.”

“Correction. *You* took a loss. I didn’t make an investment in a film. I gave you a loan. A loan for which you promised repayment. Period.”

The man behind the desk paled as reality closed in. “Hey, you don’t need to go all mobster on me. You’re acting like

you're here to break my legs if I don't pay you back.”

Randy laughed a foreboding chuckle that had his cousin shaking. “You crack me up, Bobby. I'm no mobster.” He paused ominously before adding, “But I am a retired MMA champion who hasn't been able to beat the shit out of anyone for a couple years now. Don't tempt me.”

“Christ, Rambo. Don't try to shake me down.”

Christ, he loved to hear his old nickname from his fighting days being uttered out of fear.

“Or what? You gonna tell your mommy on me? Aunt Rita already knows you're a waste. You think she's gonna be happy to find out about your latest fuck up?”

“What the hell do you want from me?” Bobby's arms were flailing, his eyes wide with panic. “I'm gonna need some more time to get the money flowing in. I've lost several of my top performers this last year.”

“Don't you mean your top performers are ditching you because you don't have what it takes to get them the good jobs anymore? You're an agent. You're supposed to be getting porn stars roles in top erotic films. The last report you sent had nothing but second-rate productions on the docket.”

“So, I've had some trouble getting directors to invest in my talent, but things are looking up. I've signed a couple new actors that are very promising. In fact, the best one, Kayla Black, is out on her first job for me today. I was just gonna head over to the set to watch after Patty... er, now. Maybe you should head over there with me.”

“Maybe I should. The real question is why the fuck you aren't already over on the set if they've already started

filming?”

“Listen, don’t tell me how to do my job. You know jack shit about the adult film industry.”

“I know this. I picked up the phone and called some of the directors who’ve stopped working with you in the last year. Every single one of them told me the same thing. Your guys are pussies; the women are spoiled prima donnas who are more trouble than they’re worth.”

“Who the hell told you that?” Bobby’s face grew darker with his growing anger.

“The better question is who didn’t?” Randy replied, keeping his voice deceptively calm.

The office phone rang. Patty had put herself back together enough to answer the call. The men didn’t even have time to resume their conversation when the assistant knocked lightly on the door. When Bobby ignored her, Randy called out. “Come in, Patty.”

The ex-porn star turned administrative assistant poked her head in. “I have Butch Jensen on the phone for you, Mr. Ortiz. He says it can’t wait.”

Randy recognized the name of one of the most successful directors in the adult film industry. He watched Bobby become even more nervous before picking up the call from his desk phone. “Hey, Butch. How’s my girl doing?”

His cousin’s face turned beet-red. Randy could hear the screaming man at the other end of the phone through the receiver pressed to Bobby’s ear. The director was furious.

Randy stood and reached for the phone, pressing the speakerphone button. The pissed off voice of the director bellowed throughout the entire office. “I can’t believe you

screwed me over again, you bastard. I told you this was your last chance. This bitch is gonna be lucky to get a fucking Viagra commercial by the time I'm done with you."

Before Bobby could respond, Randy took control of the call. "I'm so sorry to hear there were problems today, Butch. This is Robert's new partner, Randy. I'm still trying to get up to speed. Would you mind laying out what went wrong today? I give you my word that while Robert may be lax in his management style, I can assure you I have a much more hands on approach to fixing personnel problems. I'd love to understand what went wrong today and what I need to do to prove to you I'm gonna make it right."

"It's too late. I told your partner this was his last chance. There are plenty of other agencies that actually groom their talent to be professionals. I called personally so I could tell Robert to his face what an asshole he is. Not only will I not pay a dime for Kayla today, but I'll be sending you a fucking bill for the thousands I lost because of the bitch."

"Whoa... Let's not get ahead of ourselves here. Let's start with you laying out what went wrong first."

"What didn't go wrong? She showed up forty-five minutes late. She took another thirty minutes to shower so she could shave her snatch. She bitched because she didn't have her own dressing room. She bitched because there was anal in the script, and she doesn't do anal. She had to run out to her car to grab her ID even though she knows we can't start without it. The topper was a few takes in when she pushed the lead off her announcing he was taking too long to come. Her pussy was worn out from her boyfriend, and she needed a damn break. Can you believe that fucking shit?"

Randy gave Robert a look that could kill. “What if I could come up with a win-win solution to our problem? Would you give her another shot?”

“I can’t stand the sight of her and even if I could, I don’t have anything coming up that would be right for her. The crew on this film won’t have her back and she has a hard-list longer than my dick.”

“You let me worry about that. What else you got coming up?”

There was a long pause before Butch answered. “I did have the lead pull out of a BDSM shoot the day after tomorrow because her grandma died or some shit like that. You get Kayla onboard, personally escort her on-set, babysit her ass, and I’ll give her a shot. She’d actually be a good fit for the role because there’s a non-con element, and I’d love to turn the guys loose on her. They’ll have her shitting herself.”

Randy chuckled. “You gonna have a problem with her showing up with bruises or welts?”

“Hell no. In fact, it will save on some of the make-up. Just don’t mark up her face.”

“Got it. I’ll give you a call back after I have my coaching session with her.”

“Don’t leave me hanging.” The disgruntled director hung up.

CHAPTER 2



KAYLA

Kayla was at a stop light a few minutes from her apartment when her phone lit up. She recognized the ring. It was her no-good agent, Robert. She'd expected his call but had hoped she would have made it home to her bottles of painkillers and wine before dealing with him.

She let it roll to voicemail, but his text arrived next. When the phone rang again, she was aggravated.

“Jesus, Robert. Stop calling! I’m driving.”

She was greeted by silence. Kayla thought the call was dead and was about to press END when she heard him.

“Ms. Black. This is your new agent, Randy Ortiz. I’m glad to hear you are still in your car, because your presence is required at our office. I’ll expect you here within the next thirty minutes.”

More silence.

Kayla’s pulse was racing at the menacing undertone of the caller. She managed a feeble response. “I think you have the wrong number.”

Her brain knew he didn’t. He was calling from Robert’s office. He’d called her by name. Still, whom the hell did he

think he was ordering her around? He worked for her, not the other way around.

His answering chuckle unsettled her more. “You may wish I had the wrong number by the end of the day, but I can assure you, you’re the only one I’m interested in talking to right now. Now hang up and pay attention to your driving. Thirty minutes. You’ve already been late once today. I’d suggest you not repeat that error with me.”

The call dropped.

“Shit.”

Kayla whipped into the gas station she was passing. She needed to think. Her mind raced with the possibilities for why her agent wanted to see her so urgently. None of the reasons were good. She should have known that asshole director from today would have called Robert to cover his own ass.

Only two years ago she was one of the most prolific talents in the business, but she’d been in a slump the last year for personal reasons she hated to think about. She recently signed with Robert’s agency because he promised he had the connections to get her the respect she deserved while reviving her career with meatier roles. So far, his promises hadn’t been worth the paper their contract was written on.

Knowing he had the ability to fuck up her career royally if he wanted to, Kayla put the car in drive and turned back toward Burbank. Despite the warm weather, she shivered thinking about the confrontation ahead. She’d started the day being manhandled by her no-good boyfriend she had already decided needed to get booted to the curb. She’d then gone to work and had been treated like shit on the set by every man there, and now she was about to go head-to-head with not one

but two alpha male agents. It was days like these that Kayla wished she had listened to her mom and stayed in college.

CHAPTER 3



RANDY

Randy had just enough time to drive down the block to the local sex shop to pick up a few important items and get back to the office before his newest project arrived. He'd rather have taken the time to run home to grab his black play bag he used to take to Black Light, the private BDSM club. It was fully stocked with all of his favorite punishment implements, but he hadn't wanted to risk being late for his important appointment.

He chuckled at how excited he was to be taking a more hands-on approach to his newest investment. He wasn't going to tell his cousin, but he'd never expected Bobby to be able to repay the outstanding loan. The truth was, Randy was bored. Jumping into the billion-dollar porn industry sounded like an excellent cure for the monotony.

He'd set things in motion months ago when he hired a lawyer to rewrite the contract the talent signed when joining their agency. As he had expected, Robert had been too lazy to notice the changes he'd injected regarding not only royalty rights, but also acceptable codes of conduct and corresponding punishments for failure to comply to the contract demands.

Kayla Black doesn't know it yet, but she's going to be the first actress to be intimately introduced to the consequences

for not reading a contract thoroughly before signing.

Passing by the receptionist's desk upon his return, he asked, "Patty, please pull Kayla Black's file and bring it to me right away."

"Yes sir, Mr. Ortiz."

Robert may not be thrilled with his cousin's interference, but his admin seemed pleased with the change in leadership.

Like earlier, he didn't bother knocking and was happy to find his cousin's office vacant. Patty had followed and set the thin manila folder in front of Randy as he sat behind the only desk in the room.

She was just leaving when Robert emerged from the executive bathroom attached to the office. His face transformed to fury seeing his cousin in his chair.

"I don't know what the hell you're playing at, Randy, but I've had enough. Get the fuck out of my chair and out of my office. I'll have a check to you by the end of the month."

Randy grinned. "I'm done waiting for checks." He said, sliding the folder across the desk to the older man seething on the other side. "I suggest you read the new contract you've had everyone signing for the last six months. I think you'll find that I have every right to be sitting here. Next week we'll look for new office space. I predict we're going to be very busy."

Robert didn't answer. He was too busy flipping through Kayla's folder. Randy knew the moment he got to the changes he had his lawyer make. The folder started to shake in the older man's trembling hands.

When his cousin looked up, Randy saw a mix of hatred and excitement staring back at him. "You'll never get away with this. This is against the law."

“The hell it is. This is a private contract. She’s not an employee, she’s a client.”

“It doesn’t matter. You don’t know the first thing about the adult entertainment industry.”

“What is it you think I don’t know? It’s a business. We’re all in this to make money. Clients stick with me and I’m going to make them rich. They cross me and they won’t work in this city again.”

“No one is going to ever work with you.”

“We’ll see about that. I’m gonna build a stable of talent who will play by my rules, and in return they’ll be rewarded with more work than they can handle.”

“And just how do you plan on delivering all this phantom work?”

“Simple. Directors hate working with undisciplined prima donnas. They want to work with professionals. Starting today we are going to start grooming our clients to be the professionals directors want to work with. I’ve already reached out to several of the top directors and let them in on my plan. They’re willing to give me a few weeks to work some magic, then they’re all going to give us another chance.”

His cousin was getting pale. “Who did you talk to? I’ve been working in this industry for years. I know what they want.”

“Apparently not since they all had stopped working with you. Every single one of them said you were a blow-hard who allowed your clients to walk all over you. The changes I made to the contract are going to fix that.”

“It won’t fix shit. I won’t do it.”

“You don’t understand. You don’t need to do a damn thing except get out of my way. I’m going to take care of everything.”

The words were hanging in the air when Patty knocked on the door. Before Randy could answer, a tall blonde in a snug yoga outfit pushed her way into the room, nearly knocking Patty over. Even without heavy makeup, the woman was beautiful by most people’s standards. The only thing detracting from her appearance was the scowl on her face.

“You shouldn’t frown like that, Ms. Black. You’re going to get wrinkles.”

“Who the fuck are you and why do you care?”

Randy quietly excused his new assistant. “That’ll be all Patty. Why don’t you go home early today?”

Her face lit up. “Really? That would be great. Thank you, Mr. Ortiz.”

She was turning to leave when Randy tacked on his next request. “Before Patty leaves for the day, I’d like you to apologize to her, Ms. Black, for pushing her when you came in the office.”

Randy watched the porn star’s reaction carefully. The tone he had used left no room for ambiguity. It was an order. Would she comply?

“Fuck you. The only person who is going to be doing any apologizing around here is you for dragging me all the way back down here.”

Randy was a large, muscular man, but he had the body of an athlete, and he kept it well tuned. He was up on his feet and around the desk before Kayla knew what was happening. He wrapped his hand behind her neck and squeezed hard, pushing

her face in the direction of a stunned Patty. Her long blonde ponytail was tangled in his fingers, and he knew it had to be pulling at her scalp.

“We seem to have a bit of a misunderstanding going here. When I tell you to apologize for being a rude and vulgar bitch, I want you to apologize. Now.” He tightened his grip on her neck.

“I’m sorry.” It was lame, but it was a start.

“Tell her what you’re sorry for.”

“I’m... sorry... for...” He could feel her pounding pulse against his fingers. “For pushing you.”

He made her wait a few long seconds before he released her. “Now, take a seat. I have some important matters to talk with you about.”

Patty retreated, closing the door behind her as Randy’s new client rounded on him.

“Who the hell are you exactly?”

“I’m your new agent and I’m the person who is going to teach you how to be a professional.”

“No. You’re a lunatic and I’m leaving.”

Randy didn’t hesitate. He grabbed her biceps and pushed backwards until she sat down hard in the chair in front of the desk. Once he was relatively sure she would stay put, he returned to the executive chair on the other side of desk. When their eyes met, he could see her debating her options. That’s when he saw the first flicker of fear.

He decided to reward her for keeping her ass in the chair. “That’s a good girl.”

Her pupils flared at his condescending comment. Interesting. He liked watching her response to his dominance.

Throughout the entire exchange his cousin remained on the periphery, watching with fascination. Randy motioned him to take the chair next to Kayla.

When they were all seated and had sat in silence for almost a full minute Randy finally addressed them both. “Now, Ms. Black, let’s start over, shall we? It’s nice to meet you. I am Randy Ortiz, Robert’s financier and cousin. I am now his partner and effective immediately, I am taking over the day-to-day management of the talent.”

“Listen. The only management you two need to do is get me bookings. You should just do your job and let me do mine.”

“Like you did your job today for Butch Jensen?”

He saw the guilt in her eyes. Good. That meant she knew she fucked up. That would work in his favor.

“I don’t know what that jerk told you, but it’s all lies.”

“Really? So, you didn’t show up forty-five minutes late to the set?”

“Well... yeah... but... I had a few problems at home this morning. It wasn’t my fault.” Randy watched her closely and didn’t miss her shifting uncomfortably in her chair. She was holding back something, and he wanted to know what it was.

“Every other person involved in the production managed to get there on time, so I beg to differ. I can assure you, today

will be the last day you ever show up late to a shoot. How about showing up unprepared to film?”

She crossed her arms defensively. “What’s the big deal? Lots of girls take their showers to clean up after they get to the set.”

“And that would have been fine if you hadn’t already been forty-five minutes late. And then there is the constant bitching over not having sparkling water, not having your own dressing room, and refusal to follow the direction during an anal scene.”

She jumped up out of her seat. “Listen, you try being on display 24x7 with the leaches they employ in this industry. Every asshole thinks because I’m a porn star I automatically want to suck them off. I deserve some privacy for at least a few minutes. More importantly, anal is on my hard-list!”

Randy gave her his best dominant glare until she slowly sank back into her chair. He purposefully made her wait for his quiet response. “And yet you signed the contract for the film. A contract that clearly outlined the requirements of the shoot, including anal sex.” He opened her file and handed her the contract for today’s film. “Is that your signature, Ms. Black?”

“Yes, but...”

“There is no but. You signed it. You do the scene.”

“I don’t do anal!”

“Correction. You never used to do anal. From now on, you will do anal if and when the script calls for it.”

“You don’t understand. I just can’t... I mean... please, just trust me that I can’t do anal.” She was pleading.

Randy had been looking forward to intimidating the beautiful client so he should have been happy to see her hands shaking as she wrapped her arms around her middle, self-consciously rocking back and forth. Her actions told him there might be more to her reluctance than she was disclosing. Regardless, he had to lay down the rules.

“Ms. Black, if the script calls for anal, you’ll do anal. It appears you may need some anal training to be prepared and lucky for you, I’m up for the job.” He tried to keep from grinning at her widening eyes. Before she could retort, he continued his interrogation. “Next, what is the meaning of pushing the lead off you in the middle of a scene?”

That question got her animated. “Hey, that dick on the set was taking forever to shoot his wad. He’d fucked me for almost two hours. Anyone’s pussy would be ready for a break after that long.”

“Maybe, but you’re an actress. That means you act. Earlier, it meant you should have kept acting like he was the world’s best fuck and you wanted it to go on forever. That’s your job.”

“You’re insane.” For the first time she turned to address his cousin. “Why are you letting him talk to me like this, Robert? I didn’t sign with him. I signed with you. You promised me I was going to be treated with the respect I deserve.”

Randy interrupted. “As far as I can see, you haven’t earned jack shit. You’re a spoiled prima donna and are in need of someone to take you in hand and get you back on track.” She sat with her mouth open in shock so he kept talking. “Now, I think it’s time to review the contract you signed with us just last month, Kayla.” She was about to sass him back, but he

held up his hand to stop her. “I strongly suggest you stop talking. You are only digging yourself into deeper trouble every time you open your mouth.”

“Screw you.”

“No, you’re the only one who is going to be getting screwed today, but that will come later. We have a few other important things to take care of first.”

He saw the confusion in her eyes before he broke their connection to read from her contract. “Let’s review section five on page eight of your contract. It’s the section titled ‘Conduct Rules and Consequences.’” He glanced up to see he had her full attention now.

“Rule one is to show up on the set no less than thirty minutes before scheduled start time. Talent is to arrive well rested and prepared for all aspects of the shoot, including but not limited to, shaving of body hair and cleansing internal body cavities scheduled for sexual encounters.” He looked up to lock eyes with Kayla. “Looks like you failed every aspect of that rule today. Let’s move on to rule two. Talent will act professionally at all times and refrain from making out-of-the-ordinary requests while on set.”

“I acted professionally.”

“So, you didn’t bitch about not having your own dressing room?”

Silence.

“You didn’t bitch about there being no sparkling water?”

Silence.

“As I thought. Moving on. Rule three. Talent agrees to submit to monthly blood tests for STDs and will carry both

their photo ID and most recent blood test results at all times, presenting them to the director when reporting for a shoot. How did you do with this rule, Ms. Black?”

He decided to give her some rope to hang herself. “He was being an asshole. My blood test is only thirty-five days old. I’m going in for an update tomorrow.”

“Interesting. Butch didn’t even complain about that one. He just said you held up filming to run to your car for your documentation. Never again. You will go no longer than twenty-eight days between tests and you’ll carry it with you at all times. Clear?”

“Listen, I tried to go get the test last week, but my credit card was maxed, and my no-good boyfriend cleaned out my bank account again.” Her voice cracked with emotion.

Randy noticed her tears threatening. She looked remarkably vulnerable. He had to harden his heart to stop from going soft. “This is not just my rule, Ms. Black. This is a state law. If you have trouble paying for the required tests, then you need to alert me, and I will help you. Understood?”

“Fine.” She sounded like a sulking teenager.

“There are other rules here. By the time I see you on Thursday, I’ll expect you to be able to recite these back to me. You’ll not like the consequences if you fail.”

Her intoxicating blue eyes met his as she tried to regain some control of the situation. “You know, this goon routine isn’t gonna fly with me. You can’t treat me like a child.”

The hard-on pressing for release from his designer suit pants was proof he was acutely aware she was anything but a child. Still, he had to maintain control. “Oh, Ms. Black, I assure you that by the time you leave this office, it will be

abundantly clear to you that I don't think of you as a child. Now, let's move onto the consequences portion of the contract." Randy found the section he was looking for, and decided reading it word for word would have the desired effect.

"Should the talent at any time fail to comply with the aforementioned code of conduct, disciplinary measures will be taken by the managing agent in order to punish the client for poor choices. During the resulting punishment session, the agent will coach or instruct the client on better behavior for the future. The level of discipline will be commensurate with the severity of the infractions and is to be meted out at the discretion of the managing agent. Should the talent wish to lodge a formal rebuttal, the matter will move to arbitration. The talent will be suspended from all assignments until the matter is resolved to both parties' satisfaction. Should infractions be repeated, or the talent refuse to go to arbitration, the managing agent reserves the right to consider the contract null and void..."

Kayla jumped to her feet, suddenly looking more confident. "Fine! Consider your damn contract null and void!"

Randy grinned his most menacing smile. "I wasn't finished. Perhaps you'd like to hear the rest of the paragraph before you tell me to shove the contract up my ass."

She remained standing, an expectant look on her face. "As I was saying. The managing agent reserves the right to consider the contract null and void. The departing talent will be responsible for reimbursing the agency for all outstanding fines or costs associated with their departure."

"That's great. I'm outta here." She had reached down to grab her big bag but froze as Randy continued.

“Sounds good. I’ll have Patty type up the invoice then for the five thousand in fines we received from Butch Jensen for the time wasted on today’s shoot and I already have you booked for another gig on Thursday. It will cost me a premium to find someone to fill in at the last minute. It looks like you’re anxious to leave though, so perhaps you don’t mind the ten grand fee. Oh, and good luck finding someone else to represent you. If my research is accurate, we are already your third agency. You have a reputation of being difficult to work with. But maybe it’s best that you leave and pay the fine, because I’m not sure you’re up for the training if you stay.”

“You sonofabitch, I’m not paying you a damn dime. I’m gonna sue your ass.”

“So, you are denying this is your signature on this document?”

“Well... no.” Her confidence was crumbling again. He knew he had her.

“Then it’s game over, Ms. Black. You’re either in and you play by my rules and become a big star and make a lot of money, or you walk out, get fined and have trouble booking Viagra commercials. It’s your call.”

Her reply was barely a whisper. “This is blackmail.”

“No. It’s business.” Randy resisted the urge to soften his message, knowing she needed to hear the hard truth. “You work in the porn industry. Maybe this kind of contract wouldn’t fly in corporate America, but here in the porn capital of the world, this is business as usual. Take it or leave it. There are thousands of young women flocking here each year with dreams of becoming a star. I don’t need to waste my time on people who aren’t willing to do what it takes to be the best.”

She shuffled her feet, rocking unconsciously as she weighed her choices. She glanced at Robert to see if he would be of any help and snorted a frantic laugh when she realized he was as surprised by the turn of events as she was.

The silence stretched out awkwardly as Randy gave her time to contemplate her next move. He knew the longer she took, the better the chance she would be staying. He really did want her to stay, and not only because his cock was straining against his zipper at the thought of her upcoming training session.

Kayla finally sank down into the chair, falling hard as if she'd let her legs collapse under her in defeat. "So, if I stay, what exactly is this talk of discipline all about?"

"I'm glad you asked. You are a very beautiful woman, Kayla. I think you can be one of the top talents in the industry within the year. I'm happy you're considering staying and letting me groom you."

His compliments softened her. He went in for the kill. "In my experience, the only real discipline is physical in nature. Therefore, you will first be punished for the broken rules and then we'll get started with our first training session."

Her eyes were wide, her mouth open in stunned silence. Randy decided they'd talked enough. He stood, crossing to her chair, and held out his hand. "Take my hand, Kayla. Let's get started."

CHAPTER 4



RANDY

She moved on autopilot, taking his hand and letting herself be dragged to her feet. He could feel her trembling, and her palm was sweaty in his hand. He towered a full foot above her, adding to the feeling of his authority over her. They stood, hands linked as he gently swished a stray hair from her face. The gentleness seemed to calm her. Once again, Randy recognized how attractive she was. The vulnerability in her eyes drew him in further and the sadist at his core was thinking the only thing that could make her more beautiful was to see her bare ass red and her face streaked with hot tears.

For the first time that day, he found himself wishing Kayla Black wasn't just business. How much fun could they have if she was his submissive and that they were at Black Light right now, ready to start a fun, sexy scene?

He pushed down the sliver of guilt he felt when he realized the club would never condone the plan he had for Kayla today considering he knew without the shadow of a doubt he would be skirting a few of the safe, sane, and consensual rules of a true BDSM lifestyle in leu of his more direct dominance approach.

“First things first. Strip.”

“Excuse me?” Her voice squeaked in surprise.

“Oh, come now. You’re a porn star. You aren’t going to get shy on us now.”

“I’m not shy. I just don’t understand...”

“My rules. My discretion. Punishments will always be delivered while naked.”

“Jerk.”

“I think you mean, sir. From now on, during all training sessions, you will refer to me as sir. Failure to remember will only add additional consequences.”

“You’re serious?”

“Always. Now. Any further delay will result in stronger punishments.”

Kayla slowly lifted the snug V-neck T-shirt off first, exposing the curve of her generous cleavage camouflaged by her thin sports bra. Randy took the protruding nipples poking through the bra as a sign of her growing excitement. Her hands moved to her pants, sliding them down and off, but leaving on her matching bikini underwear. The only other clothes remaining were her ankle socks.

Instead of asking her to continue, he reached out and lifted the bra up and off her body, springing her heavy breasts free and on display. Only now did Randy wish he’d bought a pair of nipple clamps at the store. He made an internal pledge to stock up on all of the tools of his new trade as soon as he could.

“Robert, I’ll have a punishment bench installed in our new office, but for today, I’m going to need your help. Take a seat behind the desk.” His cousin looked like he was about to refuse any request to help, but he clearly liked any idea that had him returning to his desk. He went without complaint

while Randy went to grab a throw pillow from the nearby couch.

After placing the square pillow at the edge of the desk, he maneuvered a shell-shocked Kayla so she was only inches away. He silently pushed her to bend over the desk. As it became clear what he was up to, she balked and tried to pull away, but he anticipated her move and forced her to sprawl across the hard surface, her ass in the air courtesy of the pillow under her hips.

“Robert, reach out and hold Kayla’s forearms. Grip her hard and don’t let go of her for any reason. If she pulls away we’ll have to start all over again and believe me, she’s not going to want that to happen. You may think you’re hurting her, but I assure you that by holding her in place, you are helping her get her correction over as quickly as possible.”

Before she could wiggle out of place, Randy bent to grasp her left ankle, slipping the leather cuff on that he’d bought at the store only an hour before. He buckled the restraint to her tightly and pulled the attached flat rope wide, dragging her left leg with it. He tied her restraint to the left leg of the large desk, making sure to knot it securely to prevent her yanking free.

As expected, Kayla began to struggle vigorously to free herself from the precarious position she found herself in. At the sound of her strangled cry Randy threw Robert a warning glare over her bare back. He’d half expected his cousin to come to the starlet’s defense, but instead found barely concealed lust on Robert’s face. He may be protesting verbally to Randy’s plan, but the predatory glint in his cousin’s eyes made it clear he would not be interfering on behalf of the sexy woman now sprawled across his desk.

Randy made quick work of securing her right leg to the other side of the desk. It was a large piece of furniture, so her legs were splayed open an indecent width. Only the thin bikini panties protected her modesty in any small measure. Randy needed to remove her last protection to complete his preparations.

The panties were surprisingly easy to rip off her body. The lacy thinness fell to the floor, exposing to his scrutiny her bare, damp, and red pussy. It was easy to see her private flesh was already irritated from its earlier pounding. He'd been looking forward to punishing the already irritated cunt exposing him as the sadist he was. It was the growing inkling of guilt he felt for pushing her so hard and fast, that surprised him.

Randy moved to the side of the desk so he could watch Kayla's face as he spoke to her. The unexpected defiance he saw through the tears in her eyes challenged him. Guilt aside, he knew he wouldn't be stopping until those expressive eyes were filled with regret and humility.

“It's time to get started with your first of what I suspect will be many training sessions, Ms. Black. We will be spending quality time together as I groom you to be the perfect porn star. You'll be rewarded with money, fame, and respect if you stick with me. If you continue to defy me, you'll find yourself rewarded with intense pain instead. The choice will be yours.”

Randy reached for the buckle of his belt. Without breaking eye contact, he unbuckled his belt, slowly pulling the wide leather from its loops with a swoosh. By the time it was free, shocked awareness filled her face.

“You barbarian. You can't be serious. You're going to use your belt on me?”

“I’ve planned forty-five lashes, one for each minute you were late to the set. I’ll add ten more for not using the proper title. My name is, sir. Let’s see if my belt can help you remember.”

He may be a hard-ass but even Randy knew a novice like Kayla deserved a warm-up before submitting to a severe punishment. Her cute yelps of pain as he used the flat of his palm to warm the milky skin of her bottom turned his cock to steel.

Once her ass was a nice shade of pink, he wasted no more time. Stepping back to angle his body, Randy pulled his arm back and delivered a strong strike directly in the middle of her creamy white ass. Her surprised squeak tweaked his cock, but he didn’t give her time to recover. Randy landed the first strokes in a fast flurry, moving from one blazing strike to the next, quickly building a fire across her ass.

By the time he took a break after the first ten lashes, Kayla was screaming louder than if she’d been cast as the lead in a horror movie.

The only reason Randy took a break at all was to inspect his handy work. Doubts about her questionable consent aside, he was still a dominant and that meant he would never do anything that would truly hurt someone in his care. Seeing the fiery splotch on her right hip, he knew the flick of the end of the belt was delivering the hardest punishment. He moved to her right and began the next set of ten from the other side of her body to ensure the pain was evenly distributed across her entire ass.

Kayla was still struggling like a mad woman to escape. Her toes didn’t even touch the floor, but she was jerking her body so hard in her attempt to escape the bite of pain his belt

was delivering that the entire desk had moved from its original spot.

Through her sobs, she finally spoke. “Oh, God. You have to stop! It’s too much. You’re killing me.”

“No, Ms. Black, I’m training you. What lesson have you learned so far?”

“That you are a deranged asshole!”

He was glad she couldn’t see the smile that came to his face with her insult. He honestly admired her spunk and more importantly, appreciated the challenge of taming the wild beauty.

Randy had been holding back some of his strength for the last set, but with her continued sassy defiance, he decided ten full-force slaps with the belt were just the attitude adjustment she needed to start dousing her insolence. For several long minutes, the only sounds in the office were the stern strikes of his leather belt striking flesh followed by Kayla’s wailing sobs. He settled into a steady pace that allowed her to feel each full-force lash as it seeped into her body. Then, just as her panic would douse, he struck again, never letting her fully recover.

He lost track of the strike count. Several times, her pleas tugged at his conscience enough that he hesitated, yet he pushed forward knowing he couldn’t stop until she surrendered to his authority. Only then could they move on to the next phase of her intimate training.

It took five long minutes for Kayla to stop her manic struggles and lay limp across the desk, moaning, crying, and

hiccupping as she finally resigned herself to her fate, turning herself over to the pain.

Kayla didn't seem to notice when he let the belt fall to the floor. His inspection with his calloused palm confirmed the globes of her ass and tender sit-spot were beet-red and fiery hot to the touch.

The well roasted bottom he'd expected, but it was her dripping wet pussy he was not entirely surprised to see. Her brain may have hated what he'd done to her, but her body was primed and ready for much more intimate attention. The sexy scent of her open core called out to him like a siren, begging for him to shift his focus to her pleasure next.

Testing his burgeoning theory, Randy slid two fingers through her sopping wet slit. The erotic moan filling the room confirmed Ms. Black may protest his treatment with words, but her body was telling him the truth. The slow rotation of her hips as she wiggled seductively in her restraints was a clear sign of what she wanted. And who was Randy to deny her body what it clearly was aching for?

"It seems your body is enjoying your first training session." He slid a fingertip over the puffy hood of her clit, pulling a groan of need from his captive. "What do you have to say? Would you like me to continue with your training today or would you prefer to go home and lick your wounds... figuratively of course."

Randy paused before going in for the kill. "Before you answer, you should be aware that I'll be putting you in a chastity belt before leaving today. Until further notice, you'll be saving all of your sexual encounters for training sessions and for when you're in front of the camera. Never again will

you complain to a director that your pussy is too sore from having sex outside of work, is that clear?”

Randy spanked her red-hot ass to make his point.

“You can’t do that! My private life is my own.”

“Correction, you have no private life anymore. You want to be a star? Well, there are sacrifices that must be made to make that happen. If you are unable to abide by my rules, your free to leave, of course, but you can kiss your career in Hollywood goodbye.”

She might hate his words, but Kayla’s humping against his hand, doing her best to increase the friction against her pussy, told him she wanted... no needed... his continued attention.

Randy stepped away from her long enough to unzip his pants and pull out his erect cock. He palmed his rod stroking himself slowly, enjoying the moment. His eyes met his cousin’s over Kayla’s prone body. Robert licked his lips as if to whet his appetite for what was to come.

“Answer me, Kayla. I’m about to bury myself inside you. Speak now if that’s a problem.” It took all of his control to give her a choice. He was self-aware enough to know he could be a dominant asshole, but he refused to cross the line into straight up non-con.

“Please... “ she begged as his fingers teased her clit lightly.

“Please, what?” he taunted, pinching her hard enough to deliver a zing of pleasure.

Long seconds passed until he was finally rewarded with her begging plea. “Fuck me... I need it.”

Randy stepped up to his protégée and lined up the head of his cock with her wet sheath. Her sharp intake of breath when he gripped her hips reminded him that no matter how much she was going to enjoy the ride he was about to take her on, she would also be thrown back into pain as their bodies slapped together at the point of her recent discipline.

Randy impaled himself balls deep in one forceful thrust. Kayla's resulting cry confirmed he had her full attention. He set a fast pace, fucking her pussy with the same punishing speed he had belted her with, never giving her time to catch her breath. The result was an almost immediate orgasm from his star pupil. He loved the feel of her pussy lips hugging his rod tightly as her core contracted with her pleasure. He was grateful for his stamina because he wasn't close to completion.

Slapping sounds from the hard fuck in progress filled the room; the smell of sex was in the air. His cousin released Kayla's arms to pull out his own cock. Bobby began to stroke himself to the same dirty rhythm Randy set for their tryst.

Randy felt himself ready to explode just as the woman under him was recovering from her third orgasm. His balls tightened as he picked up the pace of his thrusts. His dominating drilling of her body tipped him into his own pounding release, spewing hot cum deep in her snatch with a grunt. A second groan announced his cousin's own climax. Randy watched in fascination as white cream juttled out of Bobby's tool, showering Kayla's tanned back with his jizz. The last spray didn't shoot as far and landed in her sex-mussed blonde hair.

The three occupants of the room collectively froze, enjoying the aftermath of the impromptu scene. Eventually Randy's cock softened. As his shaft slipped from the porn

star's body he stepped away. The sight of his essence dripping from her puffy pussy lips filled him with an intense satisfaction he hadn't expected.

It only took a minute to untie her legs to release her from her restraints. Randy was surprisingly gentle with her as he guided her feet to the floor, allowing her time to get circulation going again in her limbs. He used the ripped panties to swipe up the cum on her back and in her hair as she silently reached for her clothes. With each passing moment, she looked more desperate to leave.

"I think you're forgetting something," he said, walking to the bag of goodies he'd purchased at the sex shop earlier. He'd bought the best chastity belt they'd had, which wasn't saying much.

"You were serious about that?" Kayla complained, some of her earlier anger flashing in her eyes.

"It's time you realize that I am always serious. This isn't the best design, but it will have to do until I can have you fitted for a custom belt. I'll have Patty let you know when and where you'll need to go for the fitting."

"I'm not wearing that," she said, backing away toward the door, clutching her clothes in front of her chest.

He sighed, shaking his head slightly as he cautioned her. "And here I'd thought you'd learned your lesson today. I'm happy to tie you back down and deliver a second round, this time with the wooden paddle I bought earlier today. Of course, that might leave bruising that would interfere with your shoot schedule."

Kayla's eyes grew impossibly wide as his threat. The tears threatening to fall down her cheeks re-lit the fire in his shaft

getting him hard all over again.

Randy waited for her to close the distance back to where he held out the metal belt that would prevent her from touching herself. It was an asshole move, but it wasn't her own fingers he was trying to keep off her snatch. It was the asshole boyfriend he was cockblocking.

As soon as he had her locked into the belt, Kayla silently started to get dressed and Randy didn't stop her, although he fought his urge to comfort her. The dominant in wanted to provide her with tender aftercare. She looked vulnerable as her hands quivered while pulling on her clothes.

Despite knowing she'd deserved to pay the price for her earlier fuck up, Randy stepped closer into her personal space. Kayla rewarded him by falling into his arms, allowing him to wrap his arms around her. He felt her shudder with emotion as she surprisingly clung to him — momentarily forgetting he'd been the one to deliver the pain in the first place.

He knew the moment she realized where she was. It was the second she pushed him away with more strength than he knew she could muster and resumed her preparations to leave.

All in all, it had been a successful day, even if she refused to look him in the eyes as she readied herself.

It wasn't until she was at the door about to leave that he finally spoke. He didn't want her to go. "Aren't you forgetting something, Ms. Black?"

She froze, her hand on the doorknob, not turning to face him. When she didn't speak, he continued.

"I think you owe me a thank you for spending so much time coaching you this afternoon. I'm going to be spending a great deal of time and money making you a star. I'd think

you'd at least say thank you." He was purposefully testing that she was appropriately humbled from his training session. He didn't have to wait long for his answer.

She spun on her heel to shoot daggers at him with her once again sassy glare. "Thank you? You want me to thank you for beating me and manhandling me, you jerk?"

Randy wasn't surprised at her accusation. Even though her body had clearly loved what had happened between them, her brain was still revolting at the idea of submitting to his rules.

"Now, Ms. Black. I'd be careful if I were you. I'd thought you'd learned your lesson about what happens to naughty girls who call their agent names."

She looked him straight in the eyes. He saw her sassiness warring with her submissiveness.

Sassy won.

"Fuck you."

"Oh Kayla, honey, you have it all wrong. You're the only one who is gonna get fucked around here."

CHAPTER 5



KAYLA

*K*ayla's heart was racing. Why the hell was she picking a fight with the devil?

Hadn't she learned first-hand that Randy Ortiz wasn't the kind of man that took kindly to being challenged? The misogynistic adult entertainment industry was full of egocentric assholes, but her new agent was in a class all his own. She'd never had someone take her in hand like he just had and she didn't know what to make of it. The fact that she'd had the most glorious orgasms in her recent memory at his hands was freaking her out. She wanted to get the hell out of the office so she could think.

She turned again to grab the doorknob, but he was on her before she could escape. He slammed the door closed as he crushed his muscular body against her back, pressing her hard into the unforgiving wood of the door, ensuring she wouldn't be able to leave until he allowed it.

"Let me out of here, you asshole."

His lips whispered gently against the shell of her left ear sending shivers through her body. His tone was soft, but his words were harsh. "Seems you are in need of another lesson. You need to know this about me, Kayla. I was an MMA champion for years. I have incredible stamina and most

importantly, I'm the strictest of trainers. I'd get your head wrapped around that quick if I were you. You will play by my rules. The only question is how many painful and humiliating sessions will it take to get through to you?"

Kayla's breath came in short gasps at his threats. She wasn't prepared for Randy's hands on her shoulders, pushing her to her knees hard. She was thankful for the carpet that helped cushion her crash to the floor. He was so strong as he wrangled her to face him. Even though she fought to push away from his body, she was no match for his strength. He didn't even use two hands to subdue her. Instead, he used his right hand to unzip his pants and pull his already semi-hard cock from his pants again.

Before she knew what was going to happen next, his hand was tangled in her hair, pulling her forward. His penis was shoved into her face. She could smell the remnants of herself just before he mashed his package against her flesh. She pushed against his thighs with both her hands, attempting to escape, but he wouldn't let her budge. She refused to open her mouth to take him inside, yet he continued to hold her tight with both hands on her head like a vice grip.

"I can wait you out, Kayla. You will learn this isn't about the sex. It's about following directions. It's about you taking my direction and showing me the respect I deserve. Most importantly, it's about learning to be a good little porn star who can show up, do as you're told, and make me proud."

She couldn't answer him. His dick would be at the back of her throat the second she opened her mouth to speak. They were locked in a tight embrace, her on her knees, lips pressed against his growing tool. Things got worse when he was successful at pressing her against him so hard that her ability

to breathe through her nose was cut off. She scratched at his legs, but his pants protected him from her digging nails. When she started to see spots, she knew she was going to run out of air. She used the only weapon at her disposal... her mouth.

She opened wide, letting him slip his flesh between her lips. He was at the back of her throat on his first thrust. She had managed to gasp in some air, but once again, her airflow was being cut off, this time by his expanding shaft.

She had just started to bite down when he pulled out completely, moving both hands around her neck to hold her immobile. He leaned over her, angling her head back, their faces inches apart. He looked so fucking smug, and ruggedly handsome. She hated the growing throb between her legs his dominance produced.

“Don’t think for a minute I don’t know what you are thinking. Let me warn you that should a single tooth connect with my cock at any time during your next training session, you will be spending the next twenty-four hours in this office regretting your life choices. Is that clear?”

His thumb tenderly caressing her chin as his hands constricted her throat was in direct conflict with his harsh words. Their eyes were locked and she felt her body bending to his will. He prompted her again. “I asked you a question, Kayla. The correct answer is yes, sir.”

She finally croaked out her “Yes, sir.”

“Good girl. Time for your next lesson.” He slipped his hardening cock back in her mouth, choking her. He set a steady pace as he held onto her now messy ponytail, using it as a handle to control the blowjob action.

Kayla considered herself a BJ pro, so it was more than a bit disconcerting that he had her gagging with each thrust. Within minutes her exertion had tears flooding her eyes and streaming down her cheeks as he used her mouth for his pleasure. Despite herself, her body was responding to his dominance in a way that panicked her. When she tried to push him away again, he gave her more directions.

“Hands behind your back, baby. Don’t touch me again until I finish. You need to learn to hand over control. When you are in this office, I am your master. When you are on a set, the director is your master. You will do as you are told or you will be punished. Is that understood?”

Her heart lurched. Her brain shouted at her to hate him, but as their eyes locked during this intensely intimate act, she felt tethered to the dominant man in a foreign way that felt much deeper than mere sex. In that moment, he was her master and surprisingly, she felt connected to him in a way she rarely achieved with men.

He removed his dick long enough for her to inhale a ragged breath and whisper a short “Yes, sir” before her mouth was filled again. She could taste herself on his manhood.

The face-fucking went on until her jaw ached. As if he could read her, he would stop to let her breathe when her lungs began to burn. Each time he removed himself from her mouth, more snot and phlegm spilled down her chin until she felt the wetness dripping down to her chest. After one particularly deep thrust it took all of her effort to stop from throwing up. Her gagging went on while his lecture continued.

“I hope you’re learning, Kayla. I am going to get my way. The sooner you accept that, the easier this will be on you. Now be sure to get my cock nice and juicy since I’m going to be

training your ass next. It's going to go a lot easier on you if you submit like a good girl and say you're sorry. Are you sorry, Kayla?"

Once again he pulled out long enough for her to gasp and utter a hushed, "Yes, sir."

Kayla wasn't sure how it had happened, but there on her knees, she found herself turning her body over to the man who had dared call himself her master. Later, she hoped to rally her anger again, but for now her body and mind had been whipped into submission by the authoritative man using her throat for his pleasure.

When she risked another glance up at him, the intense look of domination on his face heeled her. A foreign feeling of complete submission to the moment invaded, producing a strange peace she didn't have time to evaluate.

She wasn't ready for him to yank his cock away from her. He pulled her up, taking time to steady her. His eyes never left hers as he silently bent her to his will. Kayla warmed at the small smile that played on his lips.

He eventually moved them back into the room and toward the desk. She saw Robert sitting there palming his dick in his hand. He had obviously been enjoying the show.

Her ass was so sore from the belting that she dreaded another punishment. For that reason, she was relieved when Randy laid her across the desk on her back. He hooked his fingers in the waist of her pants, yanking them down and off her body to expose the hated chastity belt.

Robert pulled the key from his pocket, releasing the lock he'd secured just moments before.

“Only I control access to this pussy. Say it,” he demanded as he pulled the metal away from her body.

“You control access to my pussy,” she parroted, unwilling to anger him again. Once again she was bare to his heated scrutiny as he spread her legs wide open before shoving them back over her head.

His eyes bore into her own as he spoke to his cousin. “Robert, you have another job. This time hold Kayla’s legs wide open. Just like that.” Her pussy was on display. Her brain told her to fight him... to try to get away, but the rest of her body was reacting to his dominance. Memories of her orgasms mingled with his threats kept her lying obediently awaiting his next direction.

Kayla was lost in thought as the man who claimed to be her master secured her wrists in the leather cuffs. This time he pulled her right arm wide, tying her wrist to the decorative edge of the desk. She tried to prevent him grabbing her left hand, but it was futile. Within minutes, she was once again secured to the heavy wood furniture.

Randy stepped close to her, his rock-hard cock jutting proudly from his body. Kayla shivered with anticipation as she witnessed his gaze fall on her exposed sex. She reveled in the desire she saw reflected there and for the briefest of seconds knew that despite being tied down and at his mercy, she still held power over him. She sensed his trademark control was slipping.

Their eyes locked as he thrust into her pussy. Despite being sore from his already hard use, the sudden fullness felt amazing. Kayla shut her eyes as he pounded her flesh, enjoying the angle of entry as he slammed her g-spot with

each thrust. There was no stopping her moans of ecstasy as he tipped her over the edge into a strong climax.

She was still lost in bliss when she felt his fingers exploring, finding her puckered anus and pressing inside. Panic rose up, tightening in her chest. Years ago she'd had a bad experience with an old boyfriend who had hurt her repeatedly with forced anal sex. It was the reason she had anal on her hard-list. Opening her eyes to see Randy looking down on her with concern calmed her.

Her new master surprised her by pulling out of her body to take a knee in front of the desk. The last thing she expected him to do was kiss her tightest, puckered hole. Despite being a porn star, no one had ever kissed her there. Kayla wasn't prepared for the wave of pleasure when she felt his tongue laving her most private body part. Once he had her wet, he inserted first one, then two and eventually what felt like three fingers into her ass, taking time to stretch her. His tender patience was unexpected and Kayla rewarded him with mewling coos to let him know what he was doing felt good.

When he leaned away from her, Kayla regretted he had stopped. As he stood, however, she saw the bottle in his hand and watched him apply a thin film of lubricant to his thick tool. As he wiped his hand on a nearby towel, his eyes sought her out again.

“You know what's going to happen next, don't you, baby?”

Her heart contracted at his use of the endearment. It helped her stay brave. “You're going to fuck me again.”

“I am. Tell me where I'm going to put this cock, Kayla.”

He was rubbing the tip of his now slippery penis up and down across her puckered hole, waiting for her answer. She

suspected the minute she said the word he would be pressing inside. She was at war with herself, unsure if she wanted him to stop or proceed. They waited in a showdown as her breaths came in short spurts. She saw his face hardening at her delay.

“My ass.”

“That’s right. It’s going inside your ass. I’m going to train you not only to take it, but I’m going to make you like it. You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very good.”

She felt the blunt end of his thick cock pressing against her tight ring. Her body clinched tight.

“Open up for me, baby. I’m going inside you one way or the other. It’s your choice how this is going to go. Relax and I’m gonna make you wonder why you’d been saying no all these years. Keep resisting me and I’m going to have to ram in and hurt you. I know you think I’m the enemy here, Kayla, but I really do want to train you to be the best. Do you believe me?”

The odd thing was, she did believe him. “Yes, sir.”

“Then open up and take me. Bear down.” Kayla focused on relaxing her sphincter and the head of his cock slipped past the tight ring. “That’s my girl.”

Warmth coursed through her as he slowly pressed deeper, stopping to allow her body to grow accustomed to the intruder stretching her obscenely. He took his time, easing in and out, pressing deeper with each insertion until she thought he was

surely going to split her open. She felt relief when his body slapped against her as he completed his possession of her.

Time stood still as their bodies remained linked in the most taboo way. She was almost relieved when he started moving inside her. He began slowly, but with each long stroke, his need pressed him to go faster and harder. She couldn't say he was hurting her, but the fullness felt foreign. For that reason, Kayla was barraged by confusing feelings when Randy started rubbing her clit with the pad of his finger.

Unlike their last coupling, she had a front row seat to watch the emotions on Randy's face as he fucked her ass. The pleasure she saw in his eyes filled her with pride. She wanted to hate herself for her feelings, but when he grinned a sexy grin, her insides melted.

What the fuck was this man doing to her? The fact that this wasn't in front of a camera in a room full of production crew made it oh so real. This wasn't a pretend scene. She didn't need to act. The sexual excitement he was wringing from her was intense.

Pleasure with a bite of pain. It was consuming. It took all her concentration to listen to his words as he paused, still buried inside her, linking them intimately.

“Here is how this is going to go, Kayla. You will be here at the office Thursday three full hours before you are due on the set. I will personally administer two soapy enemas to get you squeaky clean and ready for your on-camera ass fucking. In order to show you I'm committed to you, I'm going to splurge and have a stylist here to do your hair, makeup, and give you a mani/pedi before we head over to the set.”

Randy stopped talking long enough to renew his thorough thrusts, using his talented fingers to bring her so very close to

her own orgasm, before continuing on with his lecture.

“From now on, I’ll drive you to all of your shoots. I’ll stay on the set with you at all times. I’ll be taking notes about your performance, and when the session is done we’ll return here to the office. You’ll either be rewarded or punished. The decision between the two is really up to you, baby. I’ll promise you this. If you turn yourself over to me completely, you’ll be on the stage in Vegas next January accepting your own AVN award.”

Another break for faster fucking. Anal sex had never felt like this for Kayla.

His hard squeeze of her breasts through her thin T-shirt had her attention. “These tits are mine, Kayla.” He spoke with complete authority. His hands moved to her clit possessively. “This pussy is mine.” He yanked her body hard against him, impaling himself in her ass deeper than ever to make his point. “This ass is mine. From now on, I’ll decide who gets to touch you and where. This body is even off-limits to that asshole you live with. I’d love you to kick him to the curb, but regardless, he’ll need to prove to me he’s worthy of tasting this body before he gets inside you again, got it?”

She couldn’t form words through her sexual haze, but she managed a slight nod of her head. His corresponding smile was almost gentle. It was in direct conflict with the punishing pace he kept in her bowels.

“Now, I trust you are learning your lesson in obedience. Just to be sure, Robert, use your iPhone and Facetime Butch Jensen. I want him to watch our girl here as she is punished and promises she is going to be a professional on the set

Thursday. Keep in mind; if I don't like your answers, we'll just have to keep training until I do. Got it, baby?"

He accentuated his statement with an extra fast volley of pounding into her ass. When his right hand cracked down on her exposed ass cheek, she yelped. "Yes, sir. I got it."

Their eyes connected, his dominance piercing her as deeply as his cock. She felt herself falling deeper under his spell until she heard Butch Jensen's voice in the room. An uncharacteristic shyness washed over her as Randy allowed the director to witness her humiliation.

"What do we have here, Ortiz?"

"A training session. We were just explaining to Kayla how things are going to be different for her going forward. I think she has a few things she'd like to say to you."

Randy reached out to grab the cell phone from his cousin. He angled the phone so the camera had an up close and personal view of the action in progress.

"Nice. I see you're training her ass for her anal scene on Thursday."

"Yep. Now Kayla, I think you have something to say to Mr. Jensen."

Her heart raced. She'd been fucked in front of sets full of people, yet she had never felt as exposed and vulnerable as she did in that minute being asked to apologize like a naughty girl.

Her eyes connected with Randy's again as his cock continued to fuck her tightest hole. Instead of anger, she saw pure dominance there and she reacted to it.

"Mr. Jensen... I'm so sorry I was late today... I promise it won't happen again in the future."

“That’s good to know, but that wasn’t our only problem was it?”

The pace of their coupling was slowing down. She could see the sweat beading on Randy’s brow.

“No sir, but I’m going tomorrow to get my blood work done.”

Randy’s continued hard pace made it hard for her to think coherently. Butch took the opportunity to direct the scene from afar.

“I will accept her apology after I’ve seen that she’s been properly punished. From the looks of things she is enjoying herself entirely too much. I want to see the bitch in pain.”

Kayla was surprised at the flash of anger in Randy’s eyes at the older man’s words. He paused his thrusts to stare into the phone. “I realize Kayla owes you an apology, Butch, but I’d appreciate it if you’d refrain from calling my girl a bitch.” Randy moved the phone at a new angle so he could display her red, spanked ass. “As you can see, my belt has already had a nice long training session with her butt and she has paid the price for her mistakes. As soon as I come in her ass, her slate will be clean with both of us.”

Kayla was flabbergasted that Randy would defend her in any way with the angry director.

Unfortunately, Butch Jensen wasn’t having it. “That’s all well and good but I want you to belt that pussy of hers for me and then we’ll call it even.”

Randy’s surprised grimace told Kayla he wasn’t in favor of the director’s request. He paused and for the first time, Kayla thought she saw a crack of vulnerability shining through his

hard veneer. His eyes never left hers as he weighed his options.

“What’s the matter, Ortiz? You losing your nerve?”

Anger sparked in Randy’s eyes and Kayla watched him harden. Her new master turned his hardened glare toward the phone.

“No one tells me how to train my girl. I promised to punish her and I have. I promised to train her so she never disrupts a future shoot, and that is what I’m doing. One day, I will whip her pussy, but it will be when I decide she needs it and not a minute before. Do you have a problem with that, Jenson?”

Kayla’s heart pounded hard in her chest. As hard as Randy had been on her, that he was standing up for her against the tyrant of a director meant the world to her. Was it possible he was telling her the truth that he really did want to help make her a star?

In the long silent showdown, Randy finally added, “Or would you like to watch as I finish off her anal training?”

No longer waiting for an answer, the hard shaft in her ass moved into a higher gear, pistoning in and out at a brutal speed. She had a front row seat to watching the man buried inside her chasing his pleasure. His dark eyes bore into her soul as his fingers found her clit.

“You’re gonna come on my cue, baby. Got it?”

Kayla nodded, unable to formulate words as he violently claimed her, pinching her clit as he called out, “Now!” Threads of hot jizz filled her back hole, spurting out around his shaft as he let the final shudders of pleasure spill out of him and into her.

She lay limp on the top of the desk — their bodies still linked, each breathing heavily with fading arousal and exertion. Butch's voice brought them back to the present.

“I think I'm going to like working with you, Ortiz. I can see you and I see eye to eye on how we need to manage our staff. I look forward to meeting you on Thursday. We'll have some fun directing your girl there through her first non-con film.”

The call dropped. Through the sexual haze, alarm bells went off in her mind as she heard his scary description of her next film,. Randy releasing her arms and helping her to her feet pushed her fear down.

His tender bear hug against his muscular chest confused her. The warm cum dripping down her inner thigh pleased her. His gentle stroking of her back comforted her.

After a quiet minute, he pulled back enough to peer down into her eyes. His dark eyes mesmerized her. She didn't resist when his mouth latched onto her own in a violent kiss. Like everything else he had done to her, it was full of dominance and power, as his tongue possessed her.

When he pulled out of their kiss, he smiled a smug grin. He'd won this round and he knew it.

“Now be a good girl and go into the bathroom and take a hot shower. I've decided to escort you home to make sure you get there safely. I'll even help kick your no-good boyfriend out if you'd like.”

For some strange reason his promise pleased Kayla. She was trying to figure out why when his next request came.

“But before you go to the bathroom, I want you to thank me for taking the time and putting in the energy to train you.”

Their eyes remained locked as this time she bent to his will. “Thank you for the training session, sir.”

His sexy smile had her heart fluttering. “You’re welcome, Kayla. I can tell I’m going to love working with you. Now go get cleaned up so I can get you home, baby.”

It was crazy that her heart did a flip-flop at his endearment for her. She shuffled off toward the bathroom before she could examine her feelings too closely.

Kayla was just about to close the door to the small room when she heard Randy addressing his cousin in the same menacing voice he used with her at the start of their training session.

“Now, Robert. Let’s get back to discussing what the appropriate punishment is for failing to repay a two million-dollar loan on time.”

Kayla shivered as she closed the door.

She wouldn’t want to be Robert.



I HOPE you enjoyed this naughty little story. While it is not part of the Black Light series, if you’d like to learn more, grab a FREE copy of book one in the series, ***Black Light: Rocked*** and get a hot dose of bad-boy rocker Cash Carter!

ABOUT LIVIA GRANT

USA Today bestselling author Livia Grant lives in Chicago with her husband and furry rescue dog named Max. She is fortunate to have been able to travel extensively and as much as she loves to visit places around the globe, the Midwest and its changing seasons will always be home. Livia's readers appreciate her riveting stories filled with deep, character driven plots, often spiced with elements of BDSM.

Sign up for [Livia's newsletter](#) to make sure you never miss a new release.



Livia wants to share a FREE book with her readers. Grab your copy of *Infamous Love* today. <https://dl.bookfunnel.com/79tyw4b2cz>



Did you know Livia has a private Facebook reader group? If you'd like to hear about her upcoming projects and talk about the BDSM lifestyle, please check out Livia's Passion Vault at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/296689347184223>



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ETERNAL OBSESSIONS



By

Julia Sykes

CHAPTER 1



SOFIA

“*M*ateo, we don’t have time for this.” My protest was far too breathy to hold any real force. When the man I loved held me with such harsh passion, I could barely remember where I was, much less what we should be doing.

I shook my head slightly as he kissed his way down the column of my throat. Little sparks of pleasure pinged over my skin everywhere his lips brushed over my flesh. They were so soft for such a hard man, a contrast that would never cease to enthrall me.

“Mateo,” I whispered, his name a plea. I was no longer certain if I was begging for him to relent or for his sinful mouth to move lower. “I have to get ready.”

I couldn’t show up to Carmen Ronaldo and Stefano Duarte’s party with my curls askew from Mateo’s possessive, grasping hands.

Even if the thought of him leaving me aching and empty before we had to be parted made my thighs clench in protest.

Mateo would have to guard Adrián at the party, leaving me to circulate with the other guests. There would be no danger, not when we were within the secure walls of Duarte’s imposing high rise in Mexico City. But it was Mateo’s job to stand at Adrián’s back and look intimidating as hell with all

his massive muscles. He couldn't spend all evening by my side, not when he was expected to be at his post.

I didn't know anything about the cartel's business, and I didn't want to. I held little affection for Mateo's boss, an infamous drug lord. But I did love Adrián's wife, Valentina.

And I loved Mateo.

My feelings about their business were complicated, but I chose to love the people who mattered in my life. They loved me unconditionally, and I would never reject them.

"Seriously," I panted. "I want to look good for the party." Carmen intimidated the hell out of me. The beautiful, sharp-edged queen of the Mexican cartel was wickedly smart and shrewd. I wanted to make a good impression.

"You'll be the most stunning woman there, *dulzura*," Mateo murmured against my skin, lips skimming over my collarbone.

He nipped at my shoulder, and I squirmed, not quite trying to evade him. One of his big hands grasped my hip, squeezing hard enough to draw a gasp from my chest. His other tangled in my hair, fisting the glossy curls. He tugged my head back sharply, granting him better access to my neck. His low growl rolled over my flesh, making me shiver.

"Don't fight me," he warned, a dark edge to his deep, rumbling voice. "Once we leave this suite, I won't get to touch you for hours. I'm going to taste every inch of you before then. I'm going to mark you so that everyone knows you're mine. You'll feel me between your legs with every step you take on the dance floor tonight."

"Mark me?" I asked, too low and sultry. "But everyone will see—"

“I want them to see.” His teeth sank into the tender spot where my neck met my shoulder.

Pain flared, making me cry out. But pleasure pulsed between my legs. I’d always been helpless to resist the allure of his dominance, his uncompromising ownership of my entire being.

Instead of pushing him away, my fingers curved into his broad shoulders, my nails digging in as I clutched him impossibly closer.

He released me from his bite and pressed a tender kiss over the throbbing mark. “Good girl.”

I shuddered at the words. They flowed over my skin like honey, warming me from the spot he’d bitten all the way to my fingers and toes.

“I love you,” I breathed, my hand moving to the back of his neck so that I could pull his face to mine.

He could’ve easily resisted my much weaker efforts if he’d wanted to, but his lips crashed against mine. He took his time, claiming me with teeth and tongue until I was dizzy and breathless.

I might be helpless to resist him, but this powerful man was vulnerable with me in a way he’d never be with another. He lived a life of violence and brutality, but he would never let that ugliness touch me. He would never handle me with anything other than fierce reverence.

“And I love you, Sofia,” he swore. “You’re mine.”

“Yes,” I pledged. “All yours.”

“So, you’ll be a good girl and do as I say.” He pulled back just far enough that his dark eyes stared down into my soul,

the inky depths swallowing me whole. I would happily drown in him.

I nodded in wordless agreement, my swollen lips parted on little panting breaths.

His head canted to the side, his square jaw anvil-hard beneath his close-cropped black beard. A shiver of pleasurable trepidation raced over my skin, desire building at my core in response to that domineering stare.

Despite his hard expression, his calloused fingertips were as gentle as a tender kiss as he traced the line of my cheekbone, memorizing the shape of my face. His strong hand was still firm on my hip, pinning me against the wall, but his other trailed over my features as carefully as though I was made of porcelain.

It had always been this way between us, ever since he'd taken me as his hostage and caged me in his home. The power play between Adrián and my father that had led to my kidnapping was long over. That had been nearly three years ago, but Mateo had never let me go.

I never wanted to be free of his covetous embrace. He'd saved me in so many ways, and I would never allow us to be parted any more than he would release me. I'd given Mateo my heart. In return, he had entrusted me with his.

And my body...he'd owned that long before I'd fallen for him utterly and completely. I'd never been able to resist his allure, and what had started as a girlish crush had only been magnified when he'd kidnapped me. I should've been repulsed and horrified, but he'd always known exactly how to handle me to make me melt.

Now, I was more vulnerable to his skillful touch than ever. I reveled in it, abandoning my pride and protests. I gave myself to him fully, just as he gave his entire soul to me, trusting in my love and devotion.

I alone had the power to break this impossibly strong man, but I would keep him safe at any cost. Just as he would always protect me. He would kill for me. I knew that from firsthand experience.

The brutal, merciless hands that'd once been coated in the blood of his enemies now roved over my body, ripping at my clothes with a ferocity that would've alarmed me if I didn't trust him so implicitly.

Heat bloomed beneath the surface of my skin, fire coursing through my veins. I kissed him in a frenzy as he stripped me like a man possessed, tearing away my pretty summer dress and destroying my white lace underwear. I frantically tugged at his fitted black t-shirt, wishing I could bare him as easily as he exposed me. My mouth watered at the feel of his bulky muscles flexing beneath my fingers, his abs rippling as I raked my nails along his taut stomach.

Once I managed to strip off his shirt, I fumbled at his belt. Already, my pussy was slick and wet for him, my core throbbing with need.

His thick fingers encircled my wrists, capturing them like iron manacles. I whined into his mouth and jerked against his hold, desperate to get to his cock. His answering growl—half warning, half lust—vibrated against my stroking tongue.

Suddenly, he tore his lips from mine, and his hands bracketed my waist. He lifted me as easily as through I were a doll, tossing me over his shoulder so that he could carry me to the massive four poster bed. His grip on my upper thigh was

tight and possessive, his thumb dipping between my legs to tease at my core. He hummed his approval at the wet arousal that coated his finger.

I squirmed in an attempt to rub against his thumb, but the world tilted. I dropped onto the soft mattress, and a delighted, giddy giggle bubbled from my chest.

The grin he shot me was equally intoxicated and more than a little savage. He loomed over me like my own personal, powerful god, his muscular body intimidating in all the right ways. He could do anything he wanted to me, and I would be helpless to resist.

But I didn't want to resist. I craved every depraved, wicked torment he might devise for me. I was Mateo's good girl, and I melted every time he praised me. His approval was addictive; I lived for my next hit. I would do anything to please him. And I knew the reward would bring me transcendent pleasure.

He shackled my wrists once again, guiding my arms over my head. I hadn't noticed the soft leather cuffs he must've put in place before I arrived. They were secured to the bedposts by short chains. He made quick work of trapping my wrists before moving to my ankles, spreading me wide so that I was utterly vulnerable to him.

I didn't try to struggle or play games. I wanted this as badly as he did. I would suffer for him, and he would give me ecstasy.

Once I was laid out before him, completely exposed, he paused to drink in the sight of me—naked and powerless to resist him.

He touched two fingers beneath my chin, tipping my head back gently so that I was captured in his fierce black gaze.

“You are so beautiful,” he murmured with awe, as though seeing me like this for the first time. His touch trailed lower, calloused fingertips skimming my neck before tracing the line of my sternum. “And all mine.”

Despite the hungry tension in his jaw, his corded muscles relaxed. Having me trapped and at his mercy calmed my beast of a man like nothing else. He felt most at ease when he knew I was utterly in his power, under his control and his protection. I was completely vulnerable in this position, but nothing bad would happen to me as long as Mateo was watching over me, his dark gaze studying my body like I was the only thing that mattered in the universe.

He palmed my breasts, teasing my nipples to tight peaks. Pleasure began to build between my legs, a throbbing ache deep inside me.

I’d been so focused on him ever since he’d first swept me up in his demanding, searing kiss that he hadn’t allowed me time to fully take in our surroundings. He’d clearly planned this wicked scene for us.

He shocked me again when he picked up something silver from the nightstand. I recognized the delicate clamps instantly, and I squirmed in anticipation.

“Calm, *dulzura*,” he urged in a low, velvet tone. “You know you like them. You can take it for me.”

I licked my lips and arched into his hand, which was still teasing my breasts. “Yes.”

He didn’t need my verbal agreement; my body showed all the signs of erotic craving. He knew exactly how badly I

wanted him to toy with me, to touch me with harsh passion. The slightly cruel twist to his lips told me he was attaining his own high off our power play. I found release in surrender, and he found peace in control.

The first clamp pinched my nipple, and I sucked in a sharp breath. Twin pain flared on the opposite side of my chest when he captured the other tight bud between the matching rubber-tipped clamp. Mateo hooked a finger through the chain that connected them, drawing it slowly upward until I was forced to arch my back in an attempt to alleviate the pressure. But with my limbs cuffed to the bed, I had nowhere to go, no way to escape the bite of pain.

Even as I cried out, lust pulsed low in my core. Hot lines of dark pleasure zinged from my trapped nipples to my clit, and I mindlessly tilted my hips in wanton invitation.

“Please,” I begged, breathless. “Please, Mateo. I need you inside me.”

My skin was too tight, my flesh too hot. His skillful, merciless hands would drive me into a frenzy if he didn’t ease the ache inside me soon.

But the glint that flashed over his dark eyes told me that he wanted me to come undone; he intended to shatter me tonight.

A shudder rolled through me, and the tension on the chain tugged at my nipples.

“Please,” I whined, not caring that I was shamelessly begging for his cock.

His low chuckle rumbled over me, the sound of slightly cruel amusement going straight to my head. My lashes fluttered as pleasure washed through me.

“Such a greedy girl. You’re going to suffer for me before I give you what you really want. You do suffer so beautifully.” He released a low hum, considering me with ferocious intensity. “I love when you beg, my sweet Sofia. But until I’m ready to fuck you, all you’ll do is whimper and moan.”

He shifted his hold on the chain, lifting it to my lips. I parted them without thinking, accepting the delicate gag gingerly between my teeth. The chain was just long enough that I had to keep my chin tilted towards my chest if I wanted to ease the worst of the pressure on my nipples. Holding the careful position would be a wicked challenge once he truly started tormenting me.

Satisfied that I was rendered more helpless than ever, he retrieved the next item for my torment from the nightstand. He positioned the small pink, egg-shaped device against my pussy, rubbing it over my aching clit for a cruelly short moment. He studied my sex with intensity that bordered on obsession as he coated the device in my slick arousal.

I wanted to ask what it was exactly, but the chain between my lips prevented me from speaking.

He pressed it into my tight channel, keeping a small loop of rubber around his forefinger so that he could retrieve the toy when he was finished playing with me. It slipped deep inside my core, bumping my g-spot. I gasped, and the chain tugged at my trapped nipples. The flare of pain and answering pulse of pleasure in my pussy drew a groan from my chest.

The device in place, he paused again to simply study me with that rapt focus that should’ve been unnerving, but all I felt was the heat of pride flooding my entire being. This strong, slightly savage man was completely fixated on me. He was all mine, even though I was the one utterly at his mercy.

“You like your new toy?” he asked, swirling his thumb around my throbbing clit without making direct contact.

I could only whine in response. I could feel it inside me, but it wasn't what I truly wanted: his huge cock stretching me, driving so deep that I saw stars.

Then he grabbed a small black remote control from the nightstand, and my whine morphed into a shriek. The device buzzed to life, vibrating directly against my g-spot. The shock of the sudden stimulation caused my entire body to jerk, the chain tugging at the clamps that trapped my throbbing nipples.

Sparks crackled and danced through every inch of my flesh, making me jittery. Sensation threatened to overwhelm me, and only Mateo's black eyes on mine kept me grounded to reality. He watched me suffer for him with savage hunger burning in the depths of his dark eyes like white hot flames. His worshipful devotion was heady enough to send me flying impossibly higher. My rational mind became clouded by primal lust and desperate need for the man who owned me.

He pressed a button on the remote again, and the vibration in my core changed to an oscillating, unpredictable pattern. It ebbed and flowed in uneven waves, driving me close to orgasm before dropping back down to a soft buzz, denying me.

Mateo watched me struggle to remain still and not yank on the clamps by writhing in response to the erotic torture. His massive muscles flexed as though he was restraining himself from reaching for me, resolved to indulge in my suffering rather than claiming me with feral lust.

“You're being such a good girl for me,” he praised, and I moaned in delighted reply.

My eyes threatened to roll back at the wash of pleasure elicited by those words. I blinked hard and forced my gaze to focus on him, not wanting to lose sight of him for even a moment: my dark, hulking god.

“Let’s see how much more you can take.”

A soft sound of protest slipped between my lips. I couldn’t take any more intense sensations. I would come apart completely.

My small noise of distress only made his mouth curve in a wicked smile, and he picked up another item for my torment that he’d tucked away beside the bed. I shivered at the sight of the long, black leather crop in his meaty fist.

I’d been right: he didn’t intend to stop until I shattered.

The realization made my stomach drop even as my blood sang in my veins.

I craved more of this cruel game, but I needed to be composed later tonight. I couldn’t afford to embarrass myself at the party with Carmen, and—

Fire licked my inner thigh with the first lash of the crop.

“Surrender,” he demanded, no room for argument or resistance in his rumbling tone. “I’m all that matters to you right now. I’m all that matters to you ever.” He brushed the smooth leather tongue over my brow. “You’re not going to worry or even think about anything else. Stay right here with me.”

I released a shuddering breath, relaxing into his control. It was such a sweet release to be freed of my anxieties and responsibilities. I could trust in Mateo to keep me safe and sane.

I nodded my agreement as much as I could without torturing my nipples. As it was, the slight movement elicited the sweetest edge of pain that danced along with the pleasurable vibrations against my g-spot.

The crop smacked against my tender flesh, peppering my sensitive skin with little pops of pain that morphed into heat deep inside me. All the while, the vibrator continually drove me to the edge of orgasm before cruelly denying my release.

“You want to come, sweet girl?” Mateo’s tone was low, his lids heavy as though he was intoxicated, too.

I tried to beg for my orgasm, for him to relent and end my suffering, but my pleas were garbled by the chain between my lips. I could easily release it and cry out his name, but his control kept me utterly submissive to his erotic torment. He wanted me to suffer, and I was his good girl. I would take everything he desired to do to me, give him everything he demanded of me. The complete sense of surrender sent me flying high, even as my sex ached with painful pleasure.

“Come for me.” He snapped the crop directly against my clit, and he set the vibrator to buzz against my g-spot with ruthless intensity.

Ecstasy detonated deep in my core, and my back arched as my orgasm ripped through my body. My head tipped back, pulling at the chain that abused my clamped nipples. The added hit of pain only heightened my pleasure, prolonging the cruelly intense release. Tears burned the corners of my eyes, and Mateo stroked the wetness on my cheeks with reverence as the last of my orgasm ravaged my psyche, deeper than simple physical sensation. Bliss sang through my soul, his power over me granting me the sweetest high.

He stripped off his pants, and his massive body settled over mine. I shuddered in satisfaction at the intimate contact, reveling in the feel of his big muscles surrounding me even as he handled me as carefully as though I was a kitten.

His lips caressed mine, his tongue toying with the chain that served as a delicate gag. The light tug on my nipples sent fresh sparks of pleasure crackling down to my core, and I whimpered into his mouth. I felt his wicked smile just before he reached between us to remove the clamps.

I cried out at the sting that pulsed through the abused buds, but he quickly soothed it away with his clever tongue, teasing my nipples until I squirmed beneath him. Overly sensitive after my intense orgasm, I wasn't sure if I wanted to evade him or if I wanted more.

He didn't give me a choice; he wasn't nearly done with me.

He kept me trapped beneath him, cuffed and spread so that I was utterly vulnerable to him. The sense of helplessness in his possessive hands sent a fresh wave of desire rolling through my heated flesh, and I writhed, mindlessly seeking more stimulation.

His dark chuckle rolled over me, and I hungrily caught the sound on my stroking tongue, kissing him as deeply as I could manage in my bound position.

I shuddered in lustful anticipation when his hard cock brushed my sex, teasing at my slick opening. The vibrator that'd tormented my core was suddenly pulled free, and his thick length drove into me in one brutal thrust, rocking my entire body with a shockwave of harsh pleasure. He stretched me to the edge of pain, but the sweetness of being joined with the man I loved drew a moan from my chest. My inner

muscles contracted around him, greedily pulling him deeper, welcoming his cock.

He snarled against my lips, finally surrendering to his most savage nature. With each harsh thrust, he laid claim to my body, my soul. I would feel the ache of him inside me all night, ensuring that I was keenly aware of our connection even when we would inevitably be separated for a few hours. Despite the fierce way he was handling me, he was taking care of me, ensuring that I would feel his devotion and protection long after he finished making love to me.

Mindlessly, I rocked my hips against his, reveling in the primal lust that transcended words. Our connection was soul-deep, and I would never stop craving him. I kissed him as though I needed his touch more than air, and he plundered my mouth with his tongue, making me dizzy.

The sweet ecstasy of being trapped in his ruthless arms built at my core, making my entire body coil tight. He stroked deep, his cockhead dragging over my g-spot as he reached between us to rub my clit.

I screamed out his name as I came, and his lips crashed down on mine once again with a snarl. His hot seed lashed into me, branding me as his. Our souls were entwined even more tightly than our bodies, an irrevocable and eternal bond.

I would always belong to Mateo, and he would always be mine. I sealed the wordless, possessive vow with my lips on his, laying claim to him with a devastating kiss. Even though I was the one who was often in bondage, Mateo would never be free of me. I didn't intend to ever let him go.

CHAPTER 2



SOFIA

“Sofia!” A familiar voice exclaimed on a delighted laugh, and I was swept up in a warm embrace.

“Valentina.” I breathed her name on a soft sigh of relief, some of my budding anxiety melting away. I didn’t have to be anxious when the boss’ wife had my back.

I would never quite understand how this sweet, good-hearted woman was in love with sadistic, fearsome Adrián Rodríguez, but right now, I was grateful for her show of support. I could practically feel Carmen Ronaldo’s keen eyes on me from across the room, assessing.

“Don’t worry about them,” Valentina said in an undertone so that no one would hear over the pulsing music that emanated from the club below the mezzanine level where we were all gathered. “We’re going to dance tonight while they take care of business. We can have fun. Stefano and Carmen always have the best music playing at these events. They know how to throw a party.”

I swallowed hard. Mateo had warned me about the Mexican drug lord’s infamous charisma. Stefano Duarte would slide a knife into your heart with a stunning smile and then continue dancing with Carmen, his fiercely beautiful partner. His charm masked his sociopathy and ruthlessness, a

distraction to put people off-balance, whether they were enemies or allies.

His loyalty and alliance to Mateo's boss, Adrián, made working with the dangerous man a necessity. He controlled the cocaine trafficking route through Mexico from Colombia, and Adrián relied on their partnership.

Usually, Mateo kept me completely removed from knowledge about these business dealings, but he'd decided that warning me about Stefano was too important to shield me from it. And I still experienced a shadow of fear around Carmen, who had once kidnapped me and delivered me to her cruel brother in a power play. She hadn't known about his vicious plans for me, and she'd tried to make amends. But I didn't think I'd ever be able to fully shake the remembered terror of that awful night when Mateo had cut his way through a small army of men to save me.

But she was now a trusted ally, and Mateo had grudgingly forgiven her. Still, he'd made sure to thoroughly distract me from my fears tonight with his wicked, brutal seduction.

Heat bloomed in my cheeks at the fresh memory of how he'd claimed me thoroughly, making me forget about everything but him. I was completely safe in his strong arms, and there was nothing for me to fear at this party. Even if we did have to be separated while he stood at Adrián's back, his massive body and menacing scowl making any potential enemies think twice before they betrayed his cold-blooded boss.

I sighed again and forced my attention from where he stood with the cartel bosses in a shadowed back corner. They would conclude their more serious business eventually, and he

would be able to join me again. For now, I would dance with my friend and avoid Carmen for as long as possible.

Valentina threaded her slender fingers through mine and tugged me toward the dance floor. There were only a handful of revelers on this level of Stefano's club, which was located in the high rise building he owned in the heart of the city. He kept tighter security up here, shrewdly protecting his business interests—and Carmen—while maintaining that unnerving façade of a jovial, hedonistic host.

Everyone on this level would be personally connected to the cartel, trusted by Stefano and Carmen. I didn't have anything to worry about, despite being surrounded by criminals.

I shook off the uneasy thoughts. When I'd chosen Mateo, I'd chosen to be part of this world. I'd always been a part of it, even if I hadn't known about my father's criminal activities as a child.

And there hadn't been a choice when it'd come to Mateo. And not only because he'd kidnapped me. I'd been obsessed with him ever since I'd first laid eyes on him at fifteen. When he'd taken me as his hostage, I'd been helpless to resist him in every way.

I was his now, and he was mine. There was no going back or escaping this underworld, and I could live with that.

So, I forced myself to relax and followed Valentina onto the dance floor. It only took a few swaying steps for my muscles to become fluid, the hypnotic beat soothing my frayed nerves. Music was my passion, my purpose. My soul soared as I lost myself in the rhythm, and an ecstatic giggle bubbled from my chest when Valentina tugged on my hand and urged me to twirl.

I wasn't sure how much time passed; I was thoroughly absorbed in the addictive beat and the dance with my friend. Waiting for Mateo was much easier when I allowed myself to let go and live in this sweet moment with Valentina.

My contentment shattered when a masculine presence pulsed into my personal space, a strange man dancing inches too close for comfort. There were few enough people in the club that there was no reason for him to crowd us.

Valentina's delicate features pinched in a small frown, and she spun me away from him.

He followed in a few lithe steps, long fingers capturing my wrist in a loose shackle. His dazzling smile was sharp and a touch predatory. My stomach flipped at the keen light in his pale blue eyes. The flashing club lights played through their icy depths, chilling me despite the heat in his appreciative gaze.

"*Ciao, bella.*" His deep, rich voice rumbled over the music, and he shifted his gentle grip on my hand to lift it to his lush lips. They brushed my knuckles as his thumb caressed my palm, an act of practiced seduction by a man who was fully aware of his own beauty and sensual allure.

My breath caught, and I stopped dancing, freezing like a spooked doe. He wasn't threatening me or groping me, but those sharp eyes tried to peer straight into my soul.

I blinked hard to shut him out, taking a step back. I bumped into Valentina's petite frame, and she wrapped a protective arm around me.

"Who are you?" she asked him, her usually soft voice uncharacteristically hard.

His gaze flicked to her before fixing on me again. “My name is Massimo.” His thumb caressed my palm again. He was still holding my hand in that gentle but sure grip. “I haven’t met you yet, Valentina, but Adrián spoke highly of you.”

No wonder he didn’t even dare to look at her; Valentina’s fiercely possessive husband must’ve forewarned the guests to stay away from his beloved wife.

His stunning grin tugged up at one corner as he studied my face, as though my features fascinated him. “But you haven’t told me your name. I’d like to know who I’m dancing with.”

“You’re not going to dance with her,” Valentina declared. “Sofía is with me until the meeting is finished. And you’d better let go of her hand right now if you don’t want Mateo to rip it off.”

Massimo’s smile didn’t waver, but he released my hand, slowly sliding his fingers along mine before breaking contact.

“If you’re spoken for, what man would be foolish enough to leave your side?” he asked, all seductive charm. “If you were mine, I wouldn’t be able to stay away for a moment.” He cocked his head at me, making the club lights play over his defined cheekbones. “Italian men know to treasure a beautiful woman.”

Valentina’s chocolate eyes narrowed on him. “Keep flirting with her, and it’s your funeral.” She nodded in the direction of the meeting. “You see that man guarding my husband? Mateo will kill you slowly if you don’t step away right now.”

Massimo’s gaze finally left mine to assess her statement, turning his head to look back at the cartel bosses. One glance at Mateo’s massive body and enraged features, and the Italian

stepped back. He offered a deferential nod in Mateo's direction before shooting me an apologetic smile.

“My mistake. Have a beautiful evening, ladies.”

I drew in a shaky breath as he sauntered across the dance floor, very obviously putting space between us so that there could be no question of his withdrawal.

Valentina released a small hum. “I wonder what he's doing here. I've never seen him before, but he must have business with Stefano if he's been invited to this party. I'm going to speak to Adrián about him.”

“There's no need to do that,” I said quickly, knowing that the handsome Italian would likely end up dead if Valentina so much as whispered the man's name with disapproval. “He's gone now. It was just a misunderstanding.”

I looked to Mateo, noting the tension that made his bulky muscles swell. He hadn't liked the way Massimo had lingered, and I knew it'd probably taken every ounce of his limited restraint to prevent himself from abandoning his post and coming to break the flirtatious man's fingers for daring to touch me.

But Valentina continued to glare at Massimo, keeping him in the men's crosshairs with her displeasure. If I didn't distract her, Adrián would be sure to eliminate whatever—and whoever—so much as irked his wife.

“I'm hungry,” I announced, issuing a little white lie. Mateo had insisted on feeding me in his lap, naked, before finally allowing me to get ready for the party. He would never neglect my needs and allow me to go hungry, but we had missed the formal dinner. “Want to raid the kitchen with me?”

Valentina's tilted, reluctant smile told me she was well aware that I was trying to distract her and spare Massimo from the men's retribution. "Okay, let's see if there's any dessert left."

She looped her arm through mine, and we walked off the dance floor, heading toward the elevator that would lead us down to the ground floor, where we could make our way to the kitchen. I shot a final reassuring smile in Mateo's direction along with a little wave to let him know I was all right. He wouldn't be happy that I was leaving his sight, but we both knew Stefano's building was secure, and I wasn't foolish enough to leave the building or even venture into the public part of the club on the level below the mezzanine.

Mateo offered me a tight nod of permission in return, but the tension in his big body told me he wasn't happy about my absence. Not after he'd been forced to watch the encounter with Massimo while he was occupied with Adrián's business. I would probably get a sound spanking for this later, but rather than experiencing a thrill of fright, my core pulsed at the prospect. I loved Mateo's possessive hands on my body, even when he disciplined me.

Within minutes, Valentina and I had made our way to the huge kitchen that was equipped with a full, bustling staff. They were all thoroughly occupied with cleanup after the lavish dinner party that Stefano and Carmen had hosted for their guests, but a kind server spared a moment to get us two thick slices of chocolate cake.

We were halfway done with our indulgent late-night snack when another server approached us. The man was clearly nervous to approach Adrián Rodríguez's wife, running a shaking hand through his sandy blond hair.

Valentina offered him a sweet smile, trying to put him at ease. “Hello. Can I help you with something?”

The man’s furtive blue eyes glanced around the kitchen, noting a handful of staff members busily going about their tasks. When he was satisfied that they were thoroughly occupied, he leaned in and spoke in a hasty undertone.

“My name is Agent Crawford. I’m with the DEA. You two are coming with me.”

He flashed a badge, and Valentina recoiled.

“Don’t make a sound,” he said quickly. “Or I’ll call my team to raid this place. You don’t want that to happen, do you?”

Fear twisted my stomach into knots and the flavor of chocolate turned to a buttery, copper tang on my tongue.

“Leave us alone,” I demanded in the fiercest whisper I could muster, sounding much braver than I felt. My heart hammered in my chest, but I wouldn’t allow the rush of terror to overwhelm reason. Mateo was the strong one, but I wouldn’t betray him. This man and his associates would not arrest the man I loved. Not if I could do something to prevent it.

“Get out of here right now if you value your life,” Valentina warned him, voice low and sharp. Fury burned in the depths of her dark eyes, and her lush lips pinched in a tight scowl.

The man—Agent Crawford—ran his hand through his hair again, but his jaw firmed with determination. “I intend to leave, but you two are coming with me.”

I crossed my arms over my chest, applying pressure to my racing heart in an attempt to soothe its pounding rhythm. If we

remained calm, Crawford would leave. Or we could stall long enough for Mateo and Adrián to come looking for us.

But then, our men would murder a DEA agent. If the authorities realized they were responsible for the death of one of their own, the might of their entire organization would rain down on the cartel. There would be a bloody war, and the men we loved might die.

Mateo might be killed.

I couldn't allow that to happen.

“What do you want with us?” I demanded. Maybe they would just try to ask us a few questions. We didn't have to answer. Valentina and I were American citizens. We might be on Mexican soil, but we had our full rights in the eyes of the law, and we weren't directly involved in any cartel activities. I didn't even know anything about the business. I had no valuable information, even if I was somehow coerced into speaking.

Crawford's blue eyes narrowed. “If you two aren't outside with me in the next three minutes, my team are coming in.”

Valentina's narrow chin tipped back, and her white teeth flashed as she defied him. “Let them come.”

“No!” I grabbed her hand, squeezing hard. “We don't want that.” I fixed her with a pleading stare. “He's an agent of the US government. He won't hurt us. He can't.”

We don't have to say a word. We don't have to answer his questions. I tried to convey my desperate thoughts through my tight grip on her hand and my wide gaze.

Her jaw firmed, her dark eyes going hard with resolve. “Fine,” she hissed. “We'll come in for questioning. But you will regret this.”

My fingers tightened around hers in warning. Threats wouldn't help our case.

Her lips pressed to a thin line, and she managed a tight nod of understanding in my direction.

We both stood and followed Agent Crawford through the kitchen, my feet heavy as though lead weights were attached to my high heels. Each step away from Mateo ratcheted up the tension in my body, the invisible tether between our souls drawing tight in protest of the increasing distance.

I sucked in a breath and straightened my spine, gathering my courage. I could do this. I had to protect the man I loved.

Warm night air engulfed us when we stepped out the back door into the narrow alley behind Stefano's building. My hands began to shake as Agent Crawford typed a quick message into his phone. I wiped my sweaty palms on my dress, struggling to match Valentina's icy composure.

Tires squealed, and a sleek black SUV filled the mouth of the alley. The doors flung open, and three armed men crowded into the alley. They were protected by bulletproof vests and equipped with rifles, stalking toward us with swift efficiency. Within a few heartbeats, they were on us.

The burliest man at the front of the trio grabbed my upper arm and yanked me toward him. I stumbled on my high heels, shocked at the sudden violent way he was handling me.

My stomach lurched, fear detonating deep inside me. Their vests weren't emblazoned with any official lettering. They didn't announce their affiliation with the DEA. They didn't read us our rights.

"What is this?" Valentina demanded, smothering a wince as her arresting officer's thick fingers dug into her slender

arm.

“We wanted Carmen Ronaldo.” The man holding me growled at Agent Crawford. “Where is she?”

Agent Crawford swallowed hard, cheeks paling. “I couldn’t get to her.” He gestured at Valentina. “This is Rodríguez’s wife. She’s even more valuable than Ronaldo.”

Bile burned the back of my throat at the dawning realization that these men weren’t government agents. The bruising grip on my arm told me that they didn’t care about my status as an American citizen with rights in the eyes of the law.

The thug holding Valentina fisted her hair, yanking her head back so that he could study her face. She swallowed a sharp cry, blinking back tears of pain and fear as she glared up at her captor.

“We want leverage over Stefano Duarte,” the third man seethed, pointing his weapon at Agent Crawford. “Go back in there, and get us Carmen.”

The blond man who had deceived us shook his head wildly. “I have to get out of here, and so do you. Rodríguez is Duarte’s boss. Having his wife gives you even more leverage.”

My assailant pulled me closer, and the scent of his rank body odor permeated my senses, increasing my nausea. “And what about this one?” he asked. “Who is she?”

“Does it matter?” Crawford replied quickly as he hastened towards a waiting motorcycle. “Take them both. Or kill her if you want.”

“No!” Valentina shouted, twisting against her captor’s cruel hold. He slapped his hand over her mouth, silencing her defiant cries.

Crawford's motorcycle roared to life. "I want my money," he called to the other men.

The one who wasn't holding us tossed him a thick roll of US dollars. Crawford caught it, got on his bike, and peeled off into the night.

The smell of stale beer wafted over me as my captor leaned in close, his yellowed teeth flashing in a sickening leer. "I guess that means you're mine to play with, slut."

His fingers tangled in my curls, and he yanked me toward the SUV. I screamed and thrashed, pain lighting up my scalp as he tore at my hair.

"Shut up, bitch."

A meaty hand lashed out at my face, and pain exploded through my skull. The world flickered, and my knees cracked against the broken pavement. The rough asphalt scraped my skin as he dragged me inexorably toward the waiting vehicle. The dark interior loomed before me like a shadowed cage.

I couldn't let him put me in there. I couldn't let them take Valentina.

My friend writhed in her assailant's cruel grip, his thick arm a restraining band around her middle as he hauled her away, his other hand still clamped over her mouth. Her eyes were wide with panic, terror twisting her beautiful features.

My heart clenched to the point of pain. I knew my friend had suffered in the past at the hands of cruel men. The fear in her fevered, desperate gaze made my stomach lurch. She knew what would happen to us if they got us in that SUV and drove us away from our men. There was nothing to stop them from abusing her to send a message to Adrián, even if they were keeping her as a hostage. And as for me...

My captor's groping hands on my breasts as he hauled me away told me what he intended to do to me. Toxic panic pulsed through my veins, pulsing through my body like fiery poison beneath the surface of my chilled skin.

Despite my dizziness from the vicious blow to my face, a raw scream tore from my chest, burning my throat.

Stinging pain seared my cheek when the man slapped me to the ground again, the world reeling around me.

A feral roar resounded through the cramped alley, and my captor's hand fell away from my hair so that he could reach for the rifle at his shoulder.

He never had a chance to get off a shot.

Through my watery vision, I could make out Mateo's massive form barreling into the man who'd hurt me. His scream wasn't loud enough to fully drown out the sharp *crack* of his arm breaking. The guttural cry ended on a sickening crunch when my rescuer's heavy fist pulverized his nose.

I was dimly aware of Adrián's animal snarl and a spray of dark blood as he went to work with his wickedly sharp knife, slicing up the man who'd dared to touch his Valentina.

My assailant wheezed and spluttered for breath through bloody lips, his eyes wild with the knowledge of his impending demise. Mateo's massive hands clamped around his throat, hauling him up into the air. The man's feet drummed against the side of the SUV, fruitlessly flailing as though he could run from death.

Mateo growled in his purple face, a brutal beast with his enemy's blood splattered on his cheek.

My tormentor went limp, and his lifeless body dropped to the ground like discarded trash. Mateo's dark eyes were wild

with bloodlust as he spun around, searching for more enemies to destroy.

“Wait,” Stefano barked. The calculating drug lord held a gun to the third attacker’s head, and the man held his hands up in surrender. “This one is mine. I’m going to cut some answers out of him before I give him to you and Adrián.”

Mateo couldn’t seem to manage more than a grunt of agreement before he was on his knees beside me, his full attention fixed on me now that the threat was eliminated.

“I’m okay,” I promised on a ragged whisper, my throat sore from screaming. “I’m okay, Mateo.” Despite my babbled attempts to reassure both of us, his name left my lips on a whimper, and my eyes burned with tears as residual terror rushed through my body.

His rugged face was a mask of pure rage, but his hands were achingly gentle on my stinging cheeks. He growled at the red flush where my attacker had hit me, seemingly enraged past the point of speech. Raw, feral energy had taken hold of the man I loved, anger that edged toward madness.

I lifted a shaking hand to the tight slash of his lips, trying to ease the tension there. My trembling fingers against his skin caused his eyes to darken further, driving him deeper into the most savage aspects of his nature.

Despite the way his massive muscles rippled with the need to tear through more of his enemies, his arms cradled me with care as he lifted me to his corded chest. He petted my tangled, broken curls before burying his face in my hair, breathing in my scent to reassure himself that I was safe and whole.

I tore my eyes from his granite face to search for Valentina, finding her safely caged in Adrián’s possessive

arms.

“I’m okay,” I whispered again, voice hitching on a soft sob of visceral relief.

His low snarl rumbled over my skin, warming some of the chill from my skin as icy terror ebbed away. I tucked my stinging cheek against his neck and curled my fingers into his shirt, clinging on tight as tears began to stream down my face.

My fierce protector had saved me once again. Nothing bad could touch me now. I belonged to Mateo, and he would end anyone who tried to take me from him. The dead man behind us was bloody proof of that.

I closed my eyes and leaned into his broad chest, trusting the man I loved to carry me away from the violence and take my pain away.

CHAPTER 3



MATEO

I wasn't sure how long I held Sofia before the red haze that fogged my mind fully cleared. I petted and caressed every inch of her, only soothed when her sobs finally quieted and her chilled skin flushed with its usual soft warmth.

The unnatural flush that darkened her cheeks kept my teeth on edge, despite my ebbing rage. I was no longer consumed by the need to storm into the basement and tear apart the single surviving attacker, but the desire to punish him still clawed at the back of my mind like a ravenous, vengeful monster.

I mastered my base urges for her. Sofia needed me to hold her more than she needed me to avenge her. There would be time for the man's screams later, once Stefano was done questioning him. Then, Adrián would give me a turn before taking long hours to finish the bastard. He wouldn't even be capable of begging for death by the time we finally let him die.

Sofia's soft fingertips trailed over my tense jaw, my sweet girl trying to soothe me. But she was the one who had suffered, not me.

I brushed a careful, featherlight kiss over each of her reddened cheeks. That fucker had hit my Sofia. He'd hurt her.

I needed to kill him all over again. More slowly this time.

“I’m okay,” she whispered, bravely reassuring us both.

I swallowed hard and shoved back my more feral nature so that I could finally manage to speak like a rational man.

“You’re safe,” I promised, cradling the back of her head in my hand so that I could cuddle her more closely to my chest. “I’ve got you, *dulzura*.”

“I know,” she squeaked, burying her face in my chest. “I know you’ll always come for me.”

“I should’ve been there sooner.” I couldn’t quite keep the growl from my voice. “I never should’ve let you leave my sight in the first place. When I saw that Italian bastard touch you in the club, I should’ve taken you away right then.”

She would be safely in my bed, completely unharmed and sleeping peacefully in my arms after a rough, possessive fuck so that she forgot all about that motherfucker who’d dared to flirt with her right in front of me.

Instead, she’d been attacked by a true enemy. They’d hurt her. They’d almost taken her away from me.

The fear I’d been struggling to suppress ever since I’d heard her scream threatened to rise up and strangle me like a choking vine. We’d been lucky with our timing to even discover that our women were in danger. At Adrián’s request, Stefano had called his staff when our meeting ended in order to locate Valentina. We hadn’t been concerned about their security until one of Duarte’s people reported that the women were no longer in the kitchen, their dessert abandoned.

Adrián and I were both paranoid about the women we loved, so we’d gone to find them and haul them back to the club with us, where we could keep an eye on them. Then I’d heard Sofia scream, and protective, animal fury had overtaken

my entire being. I barely remembered killing the bastard who'd tried to take her from me; my memories were a blur of terror and rage, fear for her blotting out reason.

“Massimo didn't know that we're together.” She tried to defend the Italian, not realizing that the sound of another man's name on her lips right now threatened to drive me back to that purely primal, murderous headspace.

I gritted my teeth and shoved down the impulse to hunt down the man who'd kissed her hand so that I could break his fingers.

Massimo wasn't my enemy. The man who was currently confessing in the basement beneath Stefano's knife was the one who would suffer tonight. I would have my turn soon enough. Getting answers was more important than satisfying my most savage urges right now. We had to know who had tried to kidnap the women so that we could hunt down anyone else who might've been involved. We would go to war if we had to. I would end anyone who threatened Sofía, and Adrián would make them scream for daring to take Valentina from him.

“I'm taking you back home,” I promised. “We're never coming here again.”

She'd be lucky if I ever let her leave our house again, much less the country. I would chain her to our bed and never let her go. I would lock her away so that no one would ever be able to get to her. I'd pamper her and keep her drunk on so much pleasure that she wouldn't mind living in a cage. She'd never want to leave me.

She brushed her fingers over the furrow in my brow as though she could clear it away. “What are you thinking?”

“Nothing,” I lied, not wanting to scare her with my darkly possessive thoughts.

She eyed me doubtfully, so I kissed her forehead to soothe any worries that might buzz through her mind.

“I’ve got you,” I promised again, giving her the only truth I could.

I had her, and I wouldn’t let her go. Not ever.

“I love you,” she said with the weight of a vow, reassuring me with the promise.

“I love you too, my sweet Sofia. I’ll never let anyone take you from me.”

She nodded, her eyes wide and trusting as she stared up at me with devotion that took my breath away. This perfect, stunning woman was all mine. She’d given herself to me, and I was selfish enough to keep her despite my unworthiness.

I cupped her nape and held her in place, trapping her in my careful embrace so that I could claim her lips in a fierce kiss. My mouth was a brand on hers, and she opened for me on a shuddering sigh, inviting me to take more. Offering me everything, just as I offered my whole self to her.

Sofia owned me, body and soul.

CHAPTER 4



MASSIMO

I waited in George Crawford's apartment, lurking in the shadows. The corrupt DEA agent was working with Stefano Duarte's rivals, and the bastards had been bold enough to try to kidnap his partner, Carmen. They'd almost succeeded in taking Valentina and Sofia.

Anger tightened my gut at the thought. The women were innocent. We lived in a bloody, unfair world, but they didn't deserve to suffer. I would do what I could to make the fuckers who'd hurt them pay.

And if capturing Agent Crawford and delivering him to Adrián strengthened my new alliance with Stefano, all the better. I needed a direct link to the Mexican cartel to open a new trafficking route back home to Naples. If I could cut out the middle men who demanded an extortionate cut from our organization, I'd be richer than I'd ever dreamed. And powerful enough to finally exact my revenge, to see through my lifelong vendetta against my worst enemy.

George Crawford was the key to getting everything I wanted. I would happily handle this problem for Stefano, my new friend and business associate. And if a rogue member of the Camorra was rumored to be responsible for the

disappearance of a DEA agent, that kept the heat off Stefano and Adrián.

But I didn't intend to leave any evidence for such a rumor. I'd been in the business of kidnapping and killing since I was thirteen years old. I knew how to make a man disappear without getting caught.

The knob on the apartment door turned, and I pressed deeper into the shadows of the kitchen, keeping my body cloaked in darkness while maintaining my vantage point of the small living room.

I smothered a frustrated sigh when I took in the slim, pretty woman who slipped through the door before shutting it quickly behind her, turning away from me to immediately slide the lock in place. She was clearly safety conscious. Her caution told me that she must be aware that there would be men hunting her lover, Agent Crawford. I'd seen the smiling photos of the happy couple on the bookshelf while I'd waited. If she was so spooked, she was probably complicit with his crimes.

Too bad for her, I'd already broken into the safe haven she shared with him.

It seemed I would have a beautiful hostage to use as leverage against my enemy.

I took a moment to appraise her, noting her lightly toned physique. The pretty blonde was clearly fit, with a runner's build. But she was slender and petite, no match for my superior strength. She would be easily subdued.

Before she could turn away from locking the door, I pounced, wrapping my arms around her from behind and clamping my hand over her mouth.

“Don’t scream,” I warned, pulling her tightly to my chest. Her sudden struggles were laughably weak. She wouldn’t give me any trouble.

“You’re coming with me, *bella*.”



THANK YOU FOR READING! I hope you loved this steamy story about Mateo and Sofia. Want more of their dark romance? Check out their love story in *Pretty Hostage!*

Curious about what happens when Massimo kidnaps innocent Evelyn? Read their twisted, kinky romance in *Tainted Obsession*.

ABOUT JULIA SYKES

Julia Sykes is a USA Today bestselling author of edgy, emotional romance. When she's not writing, she's usually reading.

Other than reading, her obsessions include iced coffee, unicorns, charcuterie, aged Manchego cheese (or any cheese, really), fancy dresses, and Roman empresses.

An American expat, Julia now lives in her adopted, beloved home of York, England. Most days, you can find her wandering the cobbled streets and daydreaming about her next novel.

Find out more about Julia's current and future projects at julia-sykes.com.

ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT



By

Jenna Jacob

CHAPTER 1



MIKA

“Who owns this club, *pet*?” I asked, struggling to tamp down my anger.

Minutes ago, Dungeon Monitor Dalton Barnes, aka Sir Ink, had escorted Julianna—my beautiful, headstrong slave, and mother of my children—to my office above the dungeon of Club Genesis, to ‘*keep her safe*’. While grateful for my friend’s intervention, I was beyond pissed my girl had potentially put herself in harm’s way by going toe-to-toe with a new Dominant club member.

Now, sitting across the desk from me, alone, in my office, I was determined to get some answers from her.

“You’re not even going to let me explain, are you?” Julianna huffed, tossing her hands in the air.

“*I’m* asking the questions, *pet*. Who owns this club?”

“You do.”

“You do, *what*?”

“You do, *Master*.”

Her derisive drawl and the mulish press of her plump lips made my palms itch.

It had been a long time since she'd displayed such bratty rebellion. I didn't like it then, and I certainly didn't like it now. But Julianna wasn't completely at fault. Sadly, I was partially to blame for her recalcitrant behavior and malevolent mood.

I'd unwittingly let work take precedence over my duty to provide her with the attention and structure she needed. My gut told me she wasn't acting out on purpose—*this time*—simply searching for her place. No doubt, I'd help her find it. I'd provide the peace, security, and love she craved, while wielding a fiery reminder there was no room for rebellion in our relationship.

But first, I had to help her find a sliver of submission again.

“Yes, I do. When a problem arises in *my* club, who handles it?”

“You weren't *there*,” she sneered. “You were up here, in your office, working *again*.”

“Actually, I was observing the dungeon and private rooms,” I replied, nodding toward the bank of monitors across the far wall. “Rather, I *was* until I saw my stunning slave ball up her fist to *hit* a Dominant.”

“Trust me. Elliott is no Dominant. He's an asshole,” Julianna spat.

It wasn't the first time I'd heard the man termed that.

Three hours ago, while the staff and volunteers prepared the dungeon before opening, Moses, aka Daddy Drake—my best friend and right-hand man—called an impromptu Dominant meeting at the bar.

“*Everyone keep an eye on the new guy, Elliott,*” Drake muttered. “*I've gotten tons of complaints from the subs about*

him. He's an asshole."

"What kind of complaints?" I asked.

"Let's just say he's less interested in helping the subs fulfill their desire to please and more focused on filling them with his cock."

"Great. Another player," drawled the club's resident shrink and former sadist, Tony Delvaggio.

"Has he broken any rules?" Dalton—my second in command—asked.

"Not yet."

"He will. It's only a matter of time," grouched long-time friend, Judge Kellan Graham, aka Sir Justice.

Sadly, experience had taught me His Honor was probably right.

Even so, that didn't excuse Julianna from confronting Elliott.

"That may be, but it's the DMs job to deal with assholes in the dungeon. Not. My. *Slave!*" I growled. "If Sir Ink hadn't intervened, would you have honestly punched Elliott?"

"You bet your ass. I would have knocked him out, then kicked him in the balls," she replied, defiantly lifting her chin.

Biting back a curse, I stood and rounded the desk. Since verbally reminding Julianna of her chosen status wasn't working, I opted to try to visually prompt her. Pausing beside her chair, I squared my shoulders, widened my feet, and tucked my hands behind my back. But instead of acquiescing to my Dominant stance, and lowering her lashes, she obstinately held my gaze.

My little hellcat didn't want to surrender...she wanted to fight.

“Why did you want to assault a *Dominant*?”

“He's not a Dominant, he's a pig.”

“Why. Did. You. Want. To. Hit. Him?”

“Because I couldn't stand listening to the cockbag—”

“Language,” I barked.

“Fine. I couldn't stand listening to the scrotal sac with lips talk trash about how he'd never scene with Gypsy because she was ugly and overweight.”

“So, you took it upon yourself to defend her?”

“You're damn right I did,” Julianna spat, bolting from her chair.

Consciously or sub-consciously, she moved in close to face-off with *me*.

Biting back an evil grin, I darted a glance at the chair, mentally calculating how many seconds it would take for me to snag her waist, drop to the cushion, and turn her over my knee. Unfortunately, her behavior required more than a private punishment.

“Exactly what did you say to him, pet?”

“I shouldn't have said anything. I should have just punched him in the jaw.”

“*What* did you say to him, Julianna?”

“I told that misogynistic piece of shi—dog poop that a chubby submissive's gifts are just as special and fulfilling as a skinny ones. But instead of even considering that fact, he

laughed in my face and told me I knew nothing about submission.”

“Did you correct him?”

“I didn’t get the chance.”

“Why not?”

“Because he tapped my collar and told me if I couldn’t keep my opinions to myself, he’d shove something better than a ball gag down my throat. Then he grabbed my hand and wrapped it around his cock and told me he could shut me up.”

Rage, white and hot, singed me from the inside out.

Resisting the impulse to sprint to the dungeon and rip the prick’s spine out by his throat, I clenched my jaw. The cockbag had non-consensually forced an owned slave...*my slave*, to grope him.

“That’s when I lost my shi—my *composure*. And, well... you saw the rest,” Julianna murmured, glancing at the monitors across the room.

Still seething, I bit back a growl and sank my fingers into her hair. I’d deal with the player in the dungeon after I persuaded—or if necessary, forced—Julianna to find her place.

Gathering her silky curls, I clenched my fist tightly.

She gasped and shivered.

Her pupils instantly dilated, and the tension melted from her body.

The demand to draw every precious drop of surrender from her soul surged through my veins, shoving the rage from my system. Obviously, she’d forgotten I could compel her

submission with a single phrase. While I didn't use it often, I had to lash her with it now. Not for my sake, but for hers.

Leaning in close, I brushed my lips over the shell of her ear and whispered, "I'm deeply disappointed in you, slave."

Julianna reared back as if I'd slapped her.

Physically, I hadn't touched her.

Emotionally, I'd landed a brutal blow.

A submissive's heart beats for only one thing...to please their Master, Dom, or Domme.

Julianna's shoulders slumped as defiance bled from her system.

Tears filled her eyes, and sorrow lined her face.

"I'm sorry, Master."

Her contrite whisper made my heart soar and my cock turn to stone.

As she lowered her lashes, I watched her sweet submission conquer her ugly rebellion.

The fight was over.

Unfortunately, Julianna's lesson had just begun.

"I believe you, pet," I murmured, using the pad of my thumb to wipe a tear from her cheek. "I understand the need to defend yourself and Gypsy, but you *will* make amends for your behavior."

Julianna's eyes flew open in horror.

"I will *not* apologize to that chauvinistic pig." *I'd never ask you to, sweet slut.* "You can bind and beat me until I'm black and blue, but I will never—"

“Strip,” I growled, releasing her hair and taking a step back.

Instead of heeding my command, Julianna blinked at me in bewilderment.

“Why are you hesitating, slave?” I arched a brow.

“Because I’m confused. I don’t understand why you’re punishing me for sticking up for myself and Gypsy.”

“Because that’s not your job. It’s mine.”

“But you weren’t there,” she bit out, anger rekindled.

“It shouldn’t matter,” I barked. “I’m your *Master*. You’re my slave. You walk away and find *me*. You don’t stand up to a Dominant and undermine my authority.”

“I wasn’t trying to undermine your authority, I—”

“But you did,” I challenged, impatiently glancing at the little red dress hugging her lush curves.

“Mikaaaa,” she moaned.

“Is that how you address me, slave?”

“No, but...you don’t have to punish me. Let me make it up to you,” she purred as she lowered to her knees and reached for my zipper. “I’ll give you a blow job.”

“Indeed you will...eventually.” I chuckled, then quickly sobered and brushed her hand away. “Naked. Now!”

CHAPTER 2



JULIANNA

Heaving out a heavy sigh, I stood and toed off my shoes, then peeled the thin straps off my shoulders.

It had been ages since Mika had punished me—for storming out of the house during an argument. Yes, lifestyle couples argued just like vanilla ones did from time to time. The fight had been stupid and petty, but at the time, I'd been so pissed at Mika, I'd left in the middle of our quarrel to take a drive, cool off, and clear my head. When I'd returned, he'd paddled my ass purple. Not for needing space to sort my emotions, but for leaving in anger, not answering my cell phone, and needlessly worrying him I'd been in an accident. But mostly, he punished me for taking away his ability to protect me or take another bullet for me.

Though the circumstances for my pending *attitude adjustment* were much different—and unwanted—deep down, I knew Mika was right. Submissives—especially collared ones—should never confront a Dom...even a player like Elliott.

Instead of attempting to punch the asshat, I should have marched to Mika's office and allowed my Master to set the ignorant prick straight. But I didn't. I let anger and outrage get the best of me. The only thing I accomplished was

disrespecting my Master, his authority as a Dominant and owner of the club, and tarnishing my submissive reputation.

Yes, I had earned a punishment. But that didn't mean I had to like it.

Since I wasn't allowed to wear panties, the silky red fabric slid over my hips and puddled to the floor at my feet. My mouth went dry as Mika raked a hot stare over my naked flesh. Though he hadn't even touched me—he didn't have to—my body responded as if he'd caressed every inch. My nipples tightened and throbbed in time with the growing ache between my legs. As he continued drinking me in with a hungry gaze, embers of hope flickered to flame.

Maybe he wouldn't punish me after all.

Maybe he'd drag me to his desk, bend me over, and fuck me until I couldn't walk straight for a month.

That sounded a shit-ton better than sitting on a pillow for a week.

Eyeing the erection tenting his jeans, I licked my lips and flashed him a coy smile.

“Like what you see?” I taunted, rubbing my thighs together to alleviate the ache of my swollen clit.

Inching in closer, he cupped my heavy breasts and scraped his thumb over each stony peak. I sucked in a gasp and moaned as tremors skipped through me.

“No, pet,” he murmured. “I love it.”

Dipping his head, Mika opened his mouth and engulfed my right breast before viciously sinking his teeth into my pale flesh.

Pain like lightning streaked through me.

Clutching his steely, bronze biceps, I tossed my head back and shrieked.

As Mika laved his tongue over the blazing bite to ease the fire, I knew—based on this little precursor—he wouldn't go easy on me. A fact driven home further when he lifted his head, pinned me with a stern glare, and smirked.

“Trust me, pet. I'd rather punish you with my cock,” he assured as if reading my mind. “But your unruly behavior will be paid in pain.”

Like smoke on the wind, all hope of sexing my way out of his punishment vanished.

When he extended his hand, I placed my fingers in his palm and started toward his desk.

But Mika stayed me, and furrowed his brows. “What are you doing, Julianna?”

“Bending over your desk so you can—”

“No, pet. You're not getting off that easily.” He scowled. “Since you disregarded my authority in front of everyone in the dungeon, you'll take your punishment in front of them as well.”

Lovely!

Not only would I have to apologize to Elliott, but the lecherous bastard would get to watch me get punished for nearly knocking his lights out, and he'd probably enjoy the hell out of it.

Asshole.

As I bent to retrieve my dress and shoes, Mika shook his head. “Leave them.”

“What do you mean, leave them? You’re not taking me to the dungeon naked, are you?”

“As the day you were born, slave.”

As Mika turned and radioed Dalton to come up and take over monitoring the security feeds, panic crested through me.

Though nudity was common in the dungeon, Mika always possessively shielded me with his muscular body when we scened in the club. He’d even drape a blanket over my shoulders when our session was through, before uncuffing me from the equipment. When I had asked him why he went to such great lengths to hide me, he said, *‘I don’t like others gawking at what’s mine.’*

The fact he was willing to let the members gawk all they wanted made my heart sink. I’d done a lot more than challenge his authority and disappoint him; I’d subconsciously ripped my submission from Mika’s hands.

While guilt and shame were flooding my veins, Dalton stepped through the door. After a brief and surprised double-take of me in my birthday suit, the big, tattooed Dom schooled his expression and respectfully averted his gaze toward my Master.

“Thanks for taking over for me,” Mika murmured.

“No problem, boss,” Sir Ink assured. Keeping his back to me, he slid into the chair in front of the monitors.

I was grateful for the modicum of modesty he granted, but knew it would be short-lived. As soon as Master and I entered the dungeon, all eyes would be on me...or rather, on my naked flesh.

Cupping my elbow, Mika snagged his toy bag from the closet, then wordlessly guided me from his office. I swallowed

the ball of shame lodged in my throat as we descended the stairs. I tried to tamp down my angst while we strolled past the private rooms lining the long hallway. Making our way toward the wide archway of the dungeon, muted voices and sounds of play filled the air.

Beside me, Mika tensed. I peered up and saw the muscles in his jaw ticking like Morse code.

The only reason he was forcing himself to conquer one of his hard limits—yes, Dominants have hard limits, too—was because of my stupid temper. The remorse and regret gnawing inside me was a million times more agonizing than any paddle, whip, or crop he could wield.

Guilt wasn't going to buy me a *get out of jail free card*, but I couldn't stop myself from remorsefully whispering, "I'm truly sorry, Master."

"And I'm giving you the chance to prove it, slave," he replied.

Pressing his wide hand to the base of my spine, Mika ushered me into the dungeon. Instantly, heads turned our way and the hum of members' voices fell silent. As their stares seared my flesh, I lowered my lashes and focused on the floor. My heart bounced off my ribs and echoed in my ears, drowning out the slap of paddles, the crack of whips, and submissive's cries and moans. Angst climbed down my spine and embarrassment warmed my cheeks.

"Chin up, eyes open," Mika bit out. "After our friends saw your pride in action, you won't insult them by donning a cloak of submission now, sweet slut."

As I raised my head and lifted my lashes, I realized Mika wasn't leading me toward any of the stations, but toward the

members crowded around the bar. Fear he'd set me on top of the damn thing and make me formally apologize to the entire club made me tremble. But when a low growl rumbled in the back of his throat I darted a sidelong glance at him, and followed his line of sight—locked on Elliott.

The wannabe Dom was all but salivating and blatantly eye-fucking Leigh—Dungeon Monitor, Tony Delvaggio's submissive wife—standing beside him. She wasn't aware the pig was eyeing her; Leigh's focus and concerned stare was locked on me.

Mika cursed under his breath as he slid his hand up my spine and tightly cupped my nape.

When I realized he was directing me straight toward the cocky prick, dread, thick and oily, filled my veins. Suddenly, standing on the bar and offering an apology to everyone seemed like a walk in the park compared to forcing the lie of an apology to Elliott. My stomach twisted. Every muscle in my body turned to stone. My mouth went dry, and my heart rate tripled.

“Please don't make me do this, Master,” I begged in a whisper. “I can't apologize to him. I just can't.”

“Who do you serve, girl? Me or your pride?” he growled between clenched teeth.

Before I could answer, Mika paused in front of Elliott and lowered the toy bag to the floor. As if sensing our presence, the perv peeled his eyes off Leigh's pert little ass, then raked a gratuitous gaze over my naked body with a sleazy smile.

“Mika, my man,” the cockbag bellowed, clapping him on the back. “I've been truly impressed with your club, but

bringing me this succulent sub to defile and set straight goes above and beyond my wildest expectations.”

“Defile and set straight?” Mika asked, forcing a smile so brittle I feared his lips would shatter.

“All night long. I’m gonna tie her to my bed and fuck her hot, little cunt until she can’t talk, come, or scream my name anymore. Not only will I shut her up, but I’ll also teach her how to act like a real submissive,” Elliott promised, staring at my bare pussy.

“Oh, shit,” Leigh whispered before darting away.

CHAPTER 3



MIKA

Body trembling with a level of fury I'd never felt before, I released Julianna's nape and stepped into the cocksucker's personal space.

"She's not a sub, she's a slave. An *owned* one," I added, pointing to her collar.

"Well, whoever *owns* her is doing a piss-poor job of keeping her in line."

"Why is that?"

"Because she's a sassy cunt. No worries, I plan to put her mouth and every other hole to good use. Her pussy-whipped *owner* can thank me later," he gloated with a cocky grin.

Flames of fury licked my spine.

His condescending tone and the fact he hadn't stopped eye-fucking Julianna since I'd approached him made me want to gouge out his eyes, rip off his dick, and shove it down his throat.

"Such sweet gumdrops," he murmured.

As the prick reached for her nipple, my control snapped off its chain.

Striking like a rattlesnake, I gripped his wrist. Pressing hard on his median nerve, I flashed an ugly sneer.

“It’ll be a cold day in hell before he *thanks* you.”

“Why?” Elliott winced, trying to wrench from my grasp.

“Because *I’m* her owner, cocksucker.”

With a feral roar, I twisted Elliott’s arm behind his back, then shoved him face-first over the bar. Ignoring his yelp of surprise and the collective gasps and screams rippling around me, I forced his face to the slab of wood, pinning him in place.

“I-I’m sorry, man. I-I didn’t know she was *yours*,” the fuck-nut whined as he struggled to get free.

“It doesn’t matter *who* she belongs to, asshole. You forced a sub...a *collared sub*, to grope your pathetic dick,” I growled. “Your membership is revoked. If I see you near this club again...I’ll fucking kill you.”

“Need some help, boss?” Drake asked, easing in alongside me.

Darting a glance at the big man’s intimidating scowl, I watched him protectively ease Julianna behind him, blocking Elliott’s view of her with his big, tattooed body. Next to Drake stood DMs Tony, James, and Ian; each glaring daggers at Elliott as he continued cursing and struggling for freedom.

“Yeah. Grab my toy bag and cuff Julianna to a cross while I haul this piece of shit outta my club.”

“With pleasure,” Drake replied.

“Be careful, Master,” Julianna whispered, darting out from behind Drake.

“Don’t worry about me, sweet slut.” Grabbing Elliott by the back of the collar, I yanked him upright from the bar and flashed her a wicked grin. “Worry about what I’m gonna do to you when I get back.”

Julianna blanched and nodded. “I already am, Master,” she replied, nibbling her bottom lip.

As Drake snagged the bag and led her away, relief wended through me. I trusted the man, not only because he was a gay Leather Daddy, but because he’d been Julianna’s mentor until I had pulled my head out of my ass and finally claimed her—thanks to a near death experience.

Ironically, it took dying and coming back to life for me to put things into perspective and finally start living again.

“I can walk out of this shithole by myself, fuck-face,” Elliott snarled.

“I know, but it’s more fun this way,” I sneered, gripping his wrist and collar tighter before shoving him forward.

While the prick cursed, insulted, and lobbed threats at me, the members parted like the Red Sea. Tony, James, and Ian’s footsteps echoed off the tile floor as they followed behind me. When we reached the wide, red velvet curtain—separating the dungeon from the lobby—James and Ian sprinted past me. James parted the heavy drapes while Ian jogged to the front door and held it open.

Still ignoring Elliott’s threats and snarls, I shoved him out onto the sidewalk and pinned him with a deadly glare. “Get the fuck out of here and don’t come back, or I’ll kill you like I did the last prick who touched my slave.”

I slammed the door and locked it, then leaned against the cool wood and closed my eyes.

Trying to dislodge the blood-chilling images of the past now assaulting my brain, I blew out a deep breath.

I could still feel the weight of the gun in my hand. See the venom and rage in the crazy man's eyes. Hear the dual shots splintering the night. Feel the burn from the bullet punching through my skin. And hear Julianna's chilling, frantic screams echoing in my ears.

"Elliott isn't Jordon, man," Tony assured, gripping my shoulder.

With a nod, I opened my eyes. The two of us were alone in the lobby. "I know, but..."

"The similarities are too close for comfort. I get it, I do, but don't worry, man. He's not gonna get the chance to follow through with his threats. We'll all watch over you and Julianna like a pack of rabid wolves. Just don't bust our balls when we insist on escorting you two in and out of the club. All right?"

"I won't. Thanks, brother. I appreciate it."

"No problem. Forget about Elliott and go help Julianna. She needs to find her place as much as you do yours."

"Is that your professional opinion?" I scoffed at the psychologist.

"Nah. I just know Drake. He might get tired of waiting for you and decide to punish Julianna without you," Tony teased, clapping me on the back. "You know how that big bastard loves whipping ass."

"I do, but he won't touch her."

"I know. I'm just trying to help you refocus... professionally speaking." Tony grinned as we headed toward the dungeon.

“Thanks, Doc, but the minute I start marking her sweet ass, I’ll be completely focused.”

“So will she.” He chuckled.

“Damn straight.” I grinned, then sobered. “Do me a favor?”

“Anything.”

“Dalton’s upstairs manning the security station. Will you tell him to pay close attention to the outside feeds, especially the parking lot?”

“Absolutely.” Tony nodded.

When I parted the curtain and stepped inside the dungeon, the buzzing voices of the members fell silent. The only sounds filling the air were the Dominants still spanking, flogging, and whipping their subs. The fact that the Doms, Dommies, and Tops trusted me and my security staff to provide for their safety—during and after my altercation with Elliott—enough to continue scening, filled me with pride.

Shoving all thoughts of the wannabe Dom from my mind, I locked my gaze on Julianna.

Across the dungeon, she stood bound to the cross, staring over her shoulder at the entrance. The instant she saw me, the fear glistening in her eyes vanished and her shoulders sagged with palpable relief.

Glancing at Drake—beefy arms crossed over his chest, wearing his usual *don’t fuck with me* expression—my heart sputtered. He stood in front of Julianna, blocking her with his big body. Though he’d stopped being her mentor years ago, he was still providing her safety. While most simply saw the glower on the big man’s face, those of us who knew Drake well simply observed him display his big ol’ teddy bear heart.

We'll all watch over you and Julianna like a pack of rabid wolves.

Tony's promise gonged through my brain. Then, like a kick to the balls, I realized the only way to truly keep Julianna safe was to wrap her in Kevlar and place her inside a bubble of bulletproof glass. Of course, that was impossible. As impossible as trying to figure out if Elliott was simply a horny player, or a certifiably insane, dangerous nut-job plotting revenge.

Not knowing the answer ignited sparks of impotence that quickly grew into flames of fear.

Heart pounding, I clenched my jaw and charged across the dungeon.

When I reached the cross, a tear slid down Julianna's cheek as she sent me a watery smile.

Drake simply studied me, scowl deepening before he leaned in close and murmured lowly, "Find someplace to cool off. I'll stay with Julianna."

I reared back and gaped. As his outlandish assumption that I was too angry to safely scene with Julianna plowed through my brain, I shook my head.

"I'm not pissed," I softly replied, pulling the single tail from my toy bag on the table beside the cross.

"Right," he drawled, rolling his eyes. "I've known you over twenty years. I *know* when you're pissed."

"What you're seeing isn't anger," I murmured.

The hard lines of his face slowly softened in understanding.

“Stop worrying, man, no one is going to get to you...either of you,” Drake assured. “None of us will ever let that happen.”

I wanted to remind him there were no guarantees in life, but instead, I nodded. This wasn't the time or place to start dissecting past demons.

“We don't have to do this right now, Master,” Julianna murmured as Drake strode away.

Like a shot of morphine, her loving gaze and compassionate tone surged through my veins, melting the spikes of fear and warming my soul. She wasn't trying to escape her punishment. In fact, Julianna wasn't thinking about herself at all. She was focused on me and my needs.

As her innate desire to please roared to life, I eased in behind her and sank a fist into her thick, crimson hair. Brutally tugging her head back, I savored her sharp gasp of pain. When I raked my fingernails up the cheek of her ass, Julianna whimpered and bit her bottom lip as she lifted to her toes.

Gorging on her sweet submission, the ache to command her swirled like a cyclone, chasing all my worries—past and present—away. Centered and at peace again, a thunderous growl rumbled from deep in my chest. Confident and in command, I leaned in and scraped my tongue up her slender, warm neck.

“Oh, but we do, sweet slut. Right here. Right now,” I murmured, sinking my teeth into the soft flesh beneath her ear while dragging the cool leather whip over her lush ass.

A quivering moan spilled off Julianna's lips as a tremor quaked her body. Inwardly smiling, I released her hair and eased back. I took my time rolling up my sleeves, purposely driving her anticipation—and mine—higher. It was then I

noticed the dungeon had turned eerily quiet. Skimming a glance at the other stations, they were all abnormally empty. Then again, I'd never punished Julianna in public before.

A quick dart over my shoulder confirmed my suspicions. All the members were gathered at the bar, or sitting at the numerous tables in the center of the room, watching and waiting for me to mark the pristine white canvas of Julianna's ass.

Stepping in beside her, I squeezed my thumb and finger against her jaw, and forced her gaze. "There'll be no warmup, pet. You haven't earned it."

Julianna blanched and swallowed tightly.

"Are you ready, love?" I asked, skimming a knuckle down her cheek.

"I-I think so, Master."

Her uncertain stammer, and the anxiety shimmering in her green eyes, went straight to my cock. Every cell in my body screamed to unzip and drive balls deep into her hot, tight cunt.

Pain before pleasure, I inwardly reminded myself.

"Who am I, girl?"

"My Master," she whispered in a shaky voice.

Sinking my fist into her hair again, I tugged her head back and aligned her lips beneath mine.

"I'm far more than your Master, precious. I'm your salvation. The one who makes your dirty dreams come true. The one who treasures you above all else. The one who pushes your limits. The one who drives your cries of pleasure. The one who sips your tears and savors your screams of pain.

Scream for me, sweet slut. Scream loud and hard,” I commanded, before pressing a punishing kiss to her lips.

CHAPTER 4



JULIANNA

*P*rickles of painful pleasure skittered over my scalp and gathered at my clit. Mika dipped his chin and claimed my mouth with a kiss so raw and brutal a carnal hum reverberated through my body, shoving all fears of him not warming me up away. My pussy wept and clutched the emptiness inside me while my nipples throbbed in time with my swelling clit.

It felt like forever since he'd flexed his Dominant muscles and reacquainted me with my submission. It wasn't his fault. Keeping a club like Genesis running took as much of his time as kids, laundry, groceries, and bills did mine. Still, I'd rather he punished me at home, alone in our bed. But as my gorgeous Master loved to remind me: *Submission isn't about getting what you want, sweet slut. It's about getting what you need.*

It was too late to tell him what I *needed*—more than a red ass—was a few hours on my knees, worshiping his cock, followed by an all-night orgasm-fest. But I suspected Mika already knew that. Since day one, he'd been able to read me like a damn book.

He tore from my mouth with a low growl, leaving me drunk and dizzy. Flashing an evil smile, his amber eyes

sparkled in delight as he flicked his wrist, unfurling the whip with a deafening snap.

Goosebumps peppered my arms.

“In case you don’t remember, your safeword is mercy. Use it if you need to,” he said before stepping behind me.

A foreboding chill slid down my spine.

After our son, Tristan, was born, I’d rescinded my safeword as an anniversary present to Mika. It wasn’t a big gift, considering I’d never had to use the word. But handing it over to him had been a mammoth declaration of trust. I’d willingly ripped away my safety net, granting him *carte blanche* to do any and every thing he wanted during a scene.

I knew in my heart Mika wouldn’t punish me beyond what I could mentally or physically handle. Still, the fact he’d given me back my safeword terrified me.

Anxiety spiked, and anticipation pinged.

When the crack of the whip split the air again, I sucked in a startled gasp. Then I squeezed my eyes shut, gripped the edge of the cross, and tensed for the first searing lash. But instead of igniting my ass in a streak of fire, Mika landed the popper—the tip—over my flesh with a gentle, breezy kiss.

The second caress surprised me.

The third confused me.

As the tension bled from my body, I struggled to come up with a reason why, after warning me there’d be no warmup—

The popper bit into my flesh, stealing all questions from my mind and sending a fiery blaze streaking down my legs and up my spine. With a wail, I tossed back my head and gripped the cross again. Clenching my teeth, I struggled to rise

above the blistering sting rippling through me, but before I could climb the pain, Mika landed another brutal lash.

Again and again, he sent the whip ripping across my flesh.

Curling my hands into fists, my fingernails bit into my palm.

I clenched my jaw to hold back my screams, but my resolve was no match for the pain Mika delivered.

As an inhuman cry tore from my throat, he paused and pressed his wide, hot body against my back. After brushing the sweat-soaked strands of hair from my neck, he nuzzled his lips to my ear.

“That’s it, girl. Don’t hold it in. Scream for me, precious.”

When he stepped back and landed several more white-hot lashes, I did exactly as he’d instructed...I screamed.

Tears dripped from my face.

Sobbing and trembling, I continued trying to rise above the pain. But just when the fringe of subspace was within reach, Mika stopped and melded his hard body against me again.

“Who do you serve, slave?” he growled in my ear as he raked his fingernails over my inflamed flesh, yanking me away from my blissful refuge.

“You, Master,” I sobbed in pain.

“How do you serve me?”

“W-with all my heart.”

“What else, sweet slut?” he asked, raking his teeth over my shoulder.

“M-my mind, b-body, and s-soul.”

“Then serve me, girl. Serve me with all of them...Now!” he bellowed.

When he stepped back, severing our connection, my mournful groan morphed into a shriek of pain as the whip scorched my flesh. Abandoning the methodic cadence of one stroke after the other, Mika threw the single tail in a sinuous, serpentine fashion that ignited my ass with a forward and back swing. He didn't pause for me to catch my breath, didn't offer me an ounce of mercy.

The pain was so intense, it stole the air from my lungs.

Agony expanded, consuming me in a conflagration of pulsing fire I couldn't process.

Instead of conquering his pain, I crumbled beneath it.

Frantically tugging on my cuffs, I tried to climb the cross to escape the flames as I screamed and begged him to stop.

“I'm sorry, Master...I'm sorry,” I wailed, sobbing uncontrollably.

Mika fisted my hair and yanked my head back before sinking his teeth into the side of my neck. Gasping, my eyes flew open as a new kind of pain consumed me.

“For what, slut? Sorry you forgot your place and challenged a Dominant?”

“Y-yessss.”

“Sorry for undermining my authority?”

“Yes...y-yessss...for e-every t-thing,” I cried.

Mika drew back his hand and slapped my welts...hard.

Howling in pain, sparks ignited behind my eyes as I bucked against the cross. White-hot flames seared my bones,

making me quake uncontrollably. Sobbing and panting, I focused on conquering the blistering sting. But when Mika softly stroked his palm over my screaming flesh, the contrasting sensations were too much to handle. He was either trying to force me to use my safeword, or make me crawl out of my skin. My knees buckled as another cry tore from my throat.

Banding his thick arm around my waist, Mika pressed me to the cross, then nuzzled his mouth close to my ear. “Breathe through it, pet.”

“I’m fucking trying to,” I sobbed.

“Language,” he growled, brutally pinching my raw, throbbing ass.

More lights ignited, colorful ones, as a silent scream lodged in my throat.

“Despite my love of protocol,” he snarled. “I love you a million times more. I don’t give two fucks what anyone thinks of me, you, or our relationship. The only thing I care about is keeping you safe...safe and *alive*, baby.”

The desperation in his voice pierced my pain. And as his words slowly snapped together, long-ago memories—of a different wolf in Dom’s clothing—roared to life in my brain.

After finally telling me about his tragic past, Mika and I left the club. As we strode across the parking lot, we saw a figure standing at the edge of the building.

Eyes filled with pure, unadulterated hate, there stood Dennis—the beast who’d attacked me weeks earlier. The lone streetlight barely illuminated the parking lot, but I couldn’t miss the shimmer of the gun in his hand. My heart drummed in my chest as my stomach swirled and knotted.

“No,” I murmured, unable to peel my eyes from Dennis’s advancing form.

“You’ve fucking ruined my life, you whore!” Screaming in a demented tone, he stalked toward Mika and me. “My wife left me. My children think I’m a monster! It’s all your fault, you fucking cunt!”

His gun was pointed at me. I wondered if I should dive for cover or remain frozen in place. Both options had the potential for catastrophic outcomes. Even in the dimly lit surroundings, I could see a look of demonic hatred reflecting in his eyes. It was more frightening than the weapon in his hand. His lips curled in an almost inhuman snarl as my heart continued to hammer in my chest, reverberating in my ears. Unable to look away from the deranged man, I sensed movement. Mika was reaching for something behind his back.

“You’re going to pay for this, you fucking bitch!”

Time slipped into some lethargic, sluggish dimension. Everything moved in slow motion, as if some higher power flipped a switch, commanding time and space to unravel a millisecond at a time. Dennis’s manic screaming continued as his wide strides ate up the distance between us. The barrel of his gun remained pointed straight at my face.

Mika banded a muscular arm around my waist before he slung me to the ground behind him. He’d placed himself between me and the crazed lunatic still approaching. Gravel pierced the thin fabric of my gown and stung as it dug into my knees. Raising my eyes, I watched Mika crouch low to the ground in a fighting stance. The muscles in his shoulders and arms bunched as he leveled a dull black handgun and steadily aimed it at Dennis. Undaunted, the maniac continued to advance, the frightening gleam in his eyes now clearly visible.

“Mika!” I choked out softly.

“Stay down!” he roared. His voice was loud, flat, and unwavering.

“Get away from her, motherfucker! You can’t protect her this time!” Dennis screamed.

“Not happening! Put your gun down,” Mika warned.

“Fuck you!”

Simultaneously, two shots split the night. Blood-curdling screams filled the air. My screams. Mika’s body lifted off the ground and slammed back against the Escalade. Then, like a rag doll, he slid to the ground. Dennis fell backward with a sickening thud. Blood poured from Mika’s chest as I scrambled across the gravel, kneeling next to him.

Shoving the horrific memories from my mind, I pressed my cheek to Mika’s chest and savored his warmth and the sound of his beating heart. He was alive and with me...but for how long?

A sob of guilt and fear exploded from my chest. “No. No, it can’t happen again. It can’t,” I wailed.

“It can, and if it does—”

“No,” I whimpered. “You can’t die on me again.”

“Sweet pet,” he murmured, sipping the tears streaming down my cheeks. “You should know by now; I’d take a million bullets to keep you safe. If anything ever happened to you, I’d die anyway...die inside.”

Moving in front of me, Mika wrapped his arms around the cross. As he clutched me tightly, he pressed his mouth to my quivering lips with a desperate, passionate kiss. I slumped against the wood and part of his wide chest, drinking in his

warmth and strength as I kissed him back with all the love in my heart and soul.

Aching to touch him...to hold him, I tugged on the cuffs and whimpered in frustration. Long seconds later, Mika grudgingly ended the kiss and eased back just as Trevor—Drake's long-time lover and submissive, and my best friend—appeared beside us with a cup of water.

“Daddy asked me to bring this to your slave, Mika Sir,” he respectfully announced.

“Tell your Master thank you, boy.” He nodded, taking the cup from Trevor's hand.

“Yes, Sir.” He smiled, then leaned in close to my ear and whispered, “Your marks are gorgeous, you lucky little bitch. I'm jealous as hell.” After planting a quick kiss on my cheek, Trevor scurried away, giggling.

Mika rolled his eyes and shook his head as he tilted the cup to my lips. I hadn't realized my throat was as sore as my ass from screaming until I gulped the cool water.

When Mika lifted the cup away, I peered up at him and whispered, “Can we go home now, Master?”

Without answering my question, he placed the cup on the table beside us and readjusted the whip. Lowering his hand, Mika dragged the plaited, leather handle between my wet folds. As the braided edges scraped my clit, shocks of electricity splintered through me.

Moaning, I rocked my hips and clutched my pussy around the warm leather.

“Not yet, sweet slut. I want to watch you soar.”

My heart sputtered. “Y-you mean...my punishment is over?”

“Unless you need more pain to clear your conscience. Do you?” he asked, tapping the handle against my clit.

Jolting from the sting, I sucked in a hiss and adamantly shook my head.

CHAPTER 5



MIKA

As the familiar scent of Julianna’s feminine musk filled my senses, my cock grew harder—throbbing in time with the beat of my heart. Mouth watering, I drew the firm handle of the whip to my mouth, breathing in the familiar scent of her spicy juices. I locked a hungry stare on her red-rimmed eyes, extended my tongue, then licked her slick, tart nectar from the leather. My tastebuds exploded and blood surged hot through my veins as a shuddering sigh spilled from her lips. She was like a drug, and I was permanently addicted. Every cell in my body screamed to drop to my knees, part her swollen folds, and feast on her succulent cunt.

Later, I inwardly promised.

After taking my pain—more than I’d ever given her—so beautifully, Julianna had earned a reward...several, in fact. But I was a greedy bastard. I refused to make love to my girl in front of an audience. While I was willing to share her screams of agony, her cries of ecstasy were for my ears only.

When I finished licking her juices from the whip of the handle, I stepped from behind the cross.

“Master?” Julianna whispered.

“Yes, precious?”

“I love you.”

Her voice was so fragile and contrite, my heart clutched.

Stopping dead in my tracks, I cupped her chin and studied the insecurities swirling in her red-rimmed eyes. Instead of allowing Julianna to sail off into subspace, I’d purposely kept her grounded as part of her punishment. I knew the endorphins and dopamine storming her system were so overwhelming she couldn’t process or compartmentalize the deluge of chemicals.

“I love you, too...love you so much, you’re fused into my bones.”

Desperate to calm Julianna’s fears and erase her insecurities, I gripped her nape and captured her lips before drowning her with a fierce, feral kiss. Her moan, a mixture of relief and gratitude, vibrated my tongue as I swiped the seam of her lips. Without hesitation, she parted on a soft whimper and welcomed me in. Sweeping deep, I claimed every hot, wet crevice while she tugged on the cuffs again, mewling in frustration.

Though I, too, craved to feel her hands on my body, I denied my wants to fulfill her needs. Feeding off the nirvana of keeping her helpless and at my command, I ate at her like a ravenous beast. Our tongues tangled in a slick, urgent dance as I devoured her needy whimpers and moans.

My love, desire, and respect for Julianna defied words. So did the depth of our connection. She was unequivocally my soulmate, my life force...my destiny.

The first time Julianna stepped into the dungeon; she stole my breath. I never saw her coming—never saw *any* woman strong or alluring enough to drag me from the grief and guilt of my past. But Julianna completely blindsided me. It wasn’t

until I'd died and had been brought back to life that I realized forces beyond this earth had set her on my path for a reason—to teach me how to live and love again.

Once I finally stopped denying myself, and pushing Julianna away, I learned how to let go of the past.

Learned how to embrace life and love on a deeper level than I ever imagined.

Learned how quickly and undeniably she completed me.

With a tiny whimper, Julianna wrapped her tongue around mine, clinging to it like a lifeline—silently affirming I was her strength, hope, and salvation.

My chest tightened as pride and lust exploded through me.

Sliding a hand between her legs, I thumbed her swollen clit and swallowed the mewls of desperation rolling from her throat. Her earthy scent filled my senses while her slick nectar—spilling into my palm—seared my skin. I fought the urge to release Julianna from the cross, toss her over my shoulder, and storm to my private room to pillage her sweet pussy as I slowly eased from her mouth. Her lips were red, wet, and swollen as if she'd spent hours worshiping my cock. The sight had my willing and ready appendage screaming for relief. I swallowed back a groan and sank my teeth into her bottom lip before releasing her plump flesh with a feral tug.

As Julianna's yelp of surprise and hiss of pain slid down my spine, I flashed her a wicked grin, then lapped her spicy nectar off my palm with a growl.

Her pleading stare left no doubt, my impatient slave wanted to go home.

“Not yet, precious. You're going to sail for me first.”

Gripping the whip, I moved in behind her again and paused. Pride swelled as I admired the angry red and purple welts covering her pale flesh. I'd spent decades in the lifestyle wielding nearly every toy ever made. But my preferred instrument of pleasure and pain was, and always had been, the single tail.

Compared to the cat-o-nines, the whip—with its plaited leather handle, flaccid braided tail, and frayed nylon popper—appeared innocuous. But looks were deceiving. Depending on how the toy was thrown it could gently kiss the flesh, or bite and flay it open like the fangs of a snake.

I'd definitely unleashed its fangs on Julianna's ass, but had purposely avoided breaking the skin. I didn't want her blood. I simply wanted to reacquaint her with her submission. Based on the wicked welts she was sporting; she'd wear my marks for days...maybe weeks.

The thought made my cock grow impossibly harder.

With a satisfied smile, I squared my shoulders and uncoiled the whip.

Stare locked on the colorful canvas in front of me, I rolled my wrist and landed a feather-soft kiss to Julianna's ass. Again and again, I caressed the popper over her butt, thighs, and lower back. Watching the tension melt from her body, I savored the indulgent moans spilling from her lips.

Long minutes passed before I paused and eased in behind her, grinding my throbbing erection against her hot cheeks.

Julianna jolted and gasped as I bent and murmured in her ear, "Where are you, sweet slut?"

"Where I belong, Master. Here with you, at your command," she purred.

“Good girl,” I growled, nipping her neck.

Stepping back, I wiped the sweat from my brow, peeled off my shirt, and tossed it on the table. I drew in a deep breath and blocked out everything but Julianna’s blissful moans, and the rhythmic dance of the single tail. The member’s murmurs were nothing but white noise behind me. The surrounding stations blurred in my periphery as my focus narrowed on Julianna’s succulent body slumped against the cross, and the steady, measured strokes of the whip.

When she fell silent, I knew she was gone...blissfully floating away. But I didn’t stop. I continued soaring her higher and higher. I loved spoiling Julianna with expensive gifts, but giving her something money couldn’t buy—peace and serenity—made me feel fucking invincible.

Heart swelling with pride, I lowered the whip, then strode to the cross alongside her. Lips parted and cheek pressed against the wooden frame, she looked as if she was asleep. She wasn’t. Julianna was sailing among the clouds, oblivious to my presence and those quietly watching her fly.

Tossing the whip on top of my shirt, I pressed my chest to her naked back. As our hot, sweaty flesh fused together, I sank a fist into her soft curls and tugged her head back. When her eyelids briefly fluttered open, I caught a glimpse of her glassy, unfocused gaze. Satisfaction pumping through my veins, I brushed my lips over hers.

“Where are you, pretty girl?”

Julianna didn’t answer. I honestly hadn’t expected her to. Lost in another dimension, she probably hadn’t even heard my question. If she had, the fact she couldn’t string together a response multiplied the blistering demand to take her to my

private room, drown her in aftercare, and defile her every way known to man.

Dragging my tongue down her spine, I savored the salty taste of her slick flesh before gliding over the hot, rippled welts on her ass. Julianna bucked and yelped. But when I drove two fingers into her narrow cunt and strummed her clit with my thumb, she softly purred. Her velvety walls clutched, drowning my digits in her liquid lava. My jealous cock jerked—scraping painfully against my zipper. Biting back a curse, I clenched my jaw and stroked her G-spot.

With a sensual groan, she milked my fingers and ground her hot pussy against my hand.

Though I physically ached to latch my mouth over her dripping cunt and force her to come all over my face, I'd never share her orgasm with an audience or subject her to the mortification of coming in front of everyone once she floated back to earth.

After grudgingly easing my fingers from her fluttering tunnel, I licked them clean while her frustrated whimpers filled the air. But a simple sample wasn't enough. Kneeling behind her, I gripped her thighs, then leaned in and stabbed my tongue into her flowing core. As her warm nectar lit up my tastebuds, Julianna let out an unholy cry. The muscles of her legs quivered against my palms before her knees buckled.

As she impaled herself on my face, I gripped her welted ass cheeks and spread them wide. Forcing myself to withdraw from her wicked tunnel, I slowly dragged my tongue to her puckered rim and circled the tip over her furrowed flesh. When I pierced the tight rim, Julianna mewled and arched against my tongue as quakes of pleasure rocked her body.

I growled from the lust twisting me inside out and raked my teeth down the insides of her thighs before releasing the cuffs from her ankles. Rising, I stepped behind the cross, and cradled her face in my hands before I brushed a feather-soft kiss over her lips. As I reached up to release the cuffs at her wrists, Julianna nuzzled her cheek against my chest and laved her tongue over my sweat-soaked flesh.

Bolts of lightning splintered through me. Demand stole my breath. I couldn't get the fucking cuffs off fast enough. Fumbling with the prongs, straps, and clips, I clenched my jaw and muttered a curse. After finally freeing her wrists, I snaked an arm around Julianna's waist. Like a rag doll, she melted against my chest. I massaged her hands and fingers before scooping her up in my arms, then I stormed from the dungeon and down the hall to my private room.

CHAPTER 6



JULIANNA

Languidly floating on billowing cotton clouds, I savored Mika's salty sweat lighting up my tastebuds and his familiar masculine scent surrounding me. Out of nowhere, fiery wet heat melded against my flesh. Fearing I'd sailed too close to the sun, I gasped and tried to open my eyes, but my lids were too heavy.

"Easy, love. I've got you," Mika murmured.

As his words vibrated through me, I slowly realized the fire was coming from his body, not the sun. Still, I slit my eyes open just to be sure. Though the light in the dungeon was all but blinding and everything around me moved in a blur, I knew I was no longer bound to the cross, but cradled in Mika's strong arms. As I lowered my lids, it slowly dawned on me that he was walking...taking me somewhere. Honestly, I didn't care where we were going.

I was safe.

Protected.

Loved.

I nuzzled my cheek against his wide chest and exhaled a contented sigh. The cool air of the dungeon flowed over my burning ass cheeks, but did nothing to assuage the growing

ache between my legs or the mounting demand to surrender my entire being to Mika.

To fulfill all his needs, wants, and desires.

To hand over what few fragments of power remained inside me.

To please him sexually, emotionally, and spiritually in every way possible.

To send him sailing into Dom space and drown him in the same spine-bending peace and serenity he'd given me.

I would, as soon as the deluge of endorphins bled from my system and I floated back to earth.

Until then...

I pressed my lips against Mika's neck, breathed him in, and continued soaring.

As the air grew colder and the light behind my lids dimmed, I slit my eyes open again. Mika was carrying me down the hallway. To his office or private room? It didn't matter. I was exactly where I wanted and needed to be...safely in his strong arms.

When Mika lowered me onto a cool, fluffy mattress, I shivered at the loss of his body heat, then hissed as the soft cotton sheets raked my inflamed ass like sandpaper.

"Breathe, pet," Mika murmured, gently easing me onto my side.

After propping a thick pillow between my shoulder blades to keep me from rolling onto my back, he disappeared, only to return a few seconds later, stretching out on the bed beside me. Brushing the hair from my face, he drew me to his broad chest, pressed a feather-soft kiss to my forehead, and held me.

I cuddled in close, savoring the warmth, scent, and safety of his rugged body. While the steady beat of his heart echoed in my ear—throbbing in time with my burning backside—Mika caressed his wide palm over my back.

As his whispered praise spilled over me like warm honey, I sailed toward the stars until darkness consumed me.

“You’re snoring, pet,” Mika softly chuckled, pulling me from the inky depths of sleep.

“Mmm.”

“Open,” he whispered, tapping something cold against my lips.

I dutifully opened and swallowed the cool water spilling into my mouth.

After lifting the bottle away, he whispered, “Stick out your tongue, gorgeous.”

I eagerly complied. I knew what was coming before he’d even placed the square of chocolate on my tongue. Mika was anything but predictable...until it came to aftercare. I’d never met a man as spontaneous as him, but it was one of the many reasons I loved him. At first it bewildered me when he’d stroll through the door and tell me to pack a bag before we jetted off to Hawaii, Cancun, or the Cayman Islands for a few days. I’d lost count of the number of cruises we’d taken or how many times we’d packed up the kids and flown to Jamaica to visit his father, Emile, and his slave, Sarah.

As the sweet creamy cocoa melted and coated my tastebuds, I purred.

“Thank you, Master,” I whispered, kissing his chest as the kick of sugar and caffeine slowly floated me back to earth.

“You’re welcome, girl.”

I still couldn’t muster the energy to open my eyes, but then, I didn’t need to. I could hear the smile and feel the pride in his voice. Though he’d forgiven me for my unsubmitive behavior, tendrils of guilt still swirled inside me.

“I won’t disrespect you again.”

Mika softly chuckled. “Yes, you will...eventually. Someday, someone or something will piss you off. Then, without giving a single thought about your submission, you’ll lash out, and the sweet docile kitten in my arms will turn into a hissing, spitting hellcat.”

I couldn’t argue. He was right. Still...

“Are you saying you want me to change?”

“No. Hell no. I love you just the way you are. You’re beautiful, loving, strong-willed, and have a mind of your own.” Mika cupped my chin and tilted my head back. “I could break you...turn you into a docile, compliant sub, but where’s the fun in that? I love when you’re a kitten, a hellcat, and every other facet of your personality, pet. I wouldn’t change a fucking thing about you, especially the fact you’re...*Mine*,” he growled with a wicked smile as he cupped my nape and kissed me hard.

Like the Fourth of July, fireworks exploded inside me, igniting my libido in a roll of thunder. Lips still locked with his, I climbed Mika’s body. Sinking my knees into the mattress beside his hips, I ground my needy pussy against the straining bulge inside his jeans.

With a grunt, he sank a fist in my hair, and tugged, sending sparks of pain and pleasure sputtering over my scalp. When he severed our kiss with a warning glare, I realized I’d

overstepped my boundaries...*again*. I closed my eyes and waited for another stern lecture about topping from the bottom. Instead, Mika raked his teeth down my throat, then nipped the thin flesh at my collarbone.

“Release my cock and worship it properly, sweet slut,” he instructed in a raspy voice as he released my hair and toed off his shoes.

Though I’d given him hundreds of blow jobs, every time he commanded me to please him orally, my heart leapt with joy. There was something beyond primal and arousing about the taste of his seed, and the feel of his heavy cock on my tongue.

Eagerly wiggling down his body, I released the button on his jeans. Since Mika always went commando, I gently slid my hand down his pants. Cupping his thick erection with a hungry moan, I shielded it with my palm and slowly eased the zipper down over my knuckles.

As his cock sprang free, heat rolled up my body and my mouth watered.

Yes, we’d been together for years, but each time I clapped eyes on his glorious erection felt like the first.

Swallowing the saliva pooling in my mouth, I stared at the throbbing veins and the glistening pearl of liquid poised on his broad purple crest. Eager to get this party started, I peeled his jeans down his thighs, past his knees, and off his feet before tossing them to the floor.

Mika gripped the base of his cock and held me with a carnal stare as I crawled in between his legs. I’d barely settled to my knees when he fisted my hair with his other hand and guided my mouth toward his angry cock. When I parted my

lips and offered my tongue as a pillow, a feral growl rolled from deep in his chest. He bit out a curse, then arched his hips, driving his fat crest past my lips and filling my mouth.

Like a pebble tossed into a calm lake, ripples of pleasure spread through me as his warm, salty essence slid over my tongue. Determined to bring him as much pleasure as he'd given me, I poured out my heart and soul while sucking, licking, and gently scraping my teeth over his straining flesh.

When I pulled his fat crest to the back of my throat and swallowed, Mika growled. He cinched my hair tighter, then guided my mouth up and down his thick shaft, setting the pace he craved.

Flames of need licked my spine.

“Such a sweet mouth,” he moaned. “I love fucking it almost as much as I love fucking your hot, little cunt.”

His praise warmed me all the way to my bones.

Peering up at him, I savored his taste and the pleasure playing over his chiseled face. The fire flickering in his amber eyes. And the erotic quiver of his parted lips. Every erotic thing about him made me want to please him even more.

Cupping his balls, I lightly massaged them in my palm. His hisses, curses, and guttural groans fed my submission. My heart soared. Giving him back the priceless gift he'd given me, I felt my whole world align again. I'd finally found my peace...my place.

As he continued filling my mouth with deep, measured strokes, Mika held me prisoner with a smokey stare, then lowered one hand before caressing my cheek with his thumb.

“That's it, baby. Suck it hard,” he panted.

Pulling him deep to the back of my throat, I inwardly smiled when Mika hissed.

“Mmm, good girl. Just like that. You like my fat cock filling your mouth, don’t you, pet?”

As I whimpered and nodded, Mika clenched his jaw and picked up the pace.

Raking my tongue with his shaft, he slammed his crest to the back of my throat with fast, urgent thrusts. Aching to please him more and drive him past the point of no return, I raked my fingernails over his balls and swallowed... compressing around his wide tip.

Mika growled as his cock lurched and expanded on my tongue.

Firmly holding me in place by my hair, he slammed to the back of my throat, then froze. Every muscle in his body turned to stone before he began to quake. Then, with a thunderous roar, he frantically shuttled in and out of my mouth as thick ropes of come showered my throat and tongue.

Greedily swallowing each surge, I mewled and whimpered as I drank down every drop. I’d barely milked him dry before Mika released my hair and gripped my waist. I yelped in surprise as he lifted me off my knees, slid a hungry gaze up my body, then lowered me onto his face.

With a guttural groan of delight, I gripped the headboard and peered down at him.

“You don’t have to ask permission tonight,” Mika instructed with a cocky grin.

I blinked in surprise.

Mika loved the hell out of keeping me on the cusp of release. Loved watching me struggle to hold back my orgasms. Loved hearing me endlessly beg him to let me shatter. The fact he was giving me the green light to come when I wanted felt like Christmas in July.

“Thank you, Mast—”

Mika dragged his tongue up my swollen folds, stealing the words off my lips. With a satisfied groan, he latched his mouth over my pussy and savagely sucked the slick nectar from my core. Crying out in bliss, I gripped the headboard tighter and tossed my head back.

Instead of gradually luring me up the mountain of ecstasy, Mika hurled me to oblivion in a flash of white-hot fire. He ruthlessly pinched, plucked, and tugged my nipples while he sucked, licked, and stabbed my quivering tunnel...utterly destroying me.

The tranquil endorphins still pumping through my system turned ravenous...insatiable.

My heart raced and my head swam. Demand sizzled up my spine as my keening cries melded with Mika's animalistic grunts and growls of delight.

As he scraped his teeth over my clit, I screamed and bucked against his mouth.

With a muffled, evil chuckle, he drove two fingers into my flowing pussy. Suckling my sensitive nub between his lips, he batted it with his tongue, sending demand—exquisite and hot—splintering through me like fingers of lightning.

Body humming, my keening cries echoed off the walls.

Determined to send me over the edge, Mika squeezed another digit inside my quivering cunt...stretching and filling

me completely.

As he began strumming my G-spot, flames consumed me.

My legs trembled and my muscles strained.

A wail of bliss rolled off my lips.

The orgasm he commanded swelled inside me with a beastly roar.

Lights exploded behind my eyes.

I arched my back and bore down on his masterful mouth and hand.

Clamping down around Mika's fingers, my pussy seized them like a vise.

And as the savage orgasm shrieked through me, I tossed back my head, and screamed his name.

CHAPTER 7



MIKA

Peering up at Julianna—like I’d done a hundred times before—I watched in awe as she shattered all over my face. The sound of her screams echoing in my ears, and the feel of her hot, wet velvety walls—clutching, sucking, and milking my fingers as if they were my dick—made me want to drag a million more orgasms from her.

My aching cock jerked, completely on board with the idea.

Julianna was still coming when I released her pebbled clit and dragged my fingers from her melting core. Determined to wring every ounce of pleasure from her, I strummed her swollen bud and stabbed my tongue deep inside her pussy. The taste of her warm, sweet nectar sliding over my tongue and down my throat had my cock straining toward the ceiling, and throbbing like a bitch.

I had to get inside her. *Now.*

There was just one problem. I didn’t have the willpower to pry my mouth from her flowing pussy. Not while she rocked up and down on my tongue the deeper I stabbed. It wasn’t long before Julianna’s keening cries replaced her breathless whimpers and panted moans. I knew my slave...knew she was about to surrender to another crushing orgasm bearing down on her.

Pulling my finger off her clit, I tore my tongue from her hot cunt.

“Not yet, sweet slut,” I growled.

Wrapping an arm around her waist, I reached up with my other hand and pried her fingers from the headboard before lifting her off my face.

“No,” Julianna wailed, writhing wildly as I lowered her to my chest. “Come...need to come.”

“Oh, you’re going to come all right...come all over my cock,” I assured, gazing into her glassy, lust-filled eyes.

Gripping her hips, I dragged her down my body until my blunt crest nudged her sweltering folds. When her fragile lips pulled and fluttered around my tip like feather-soft kisses, lightning streaked up my spine. What little restraint I had left dissolved.

With a raspy roar, I thrust my hips upward, driving deep inside Julianna’s blistering cunt. She whimpered and clamped down, seizing me deep inside her. Writhing and hissing, she contracted around me, struggling to accommodate my invasion. I gripped her hips tighter, then shoved through her quivering core while savoring the bliss and pain etching her face and shimmering in her green eyes.

“Relax. Breathe, and let me in, baby girl,” I murmured.

Julianna nodded and dragged in a ragged breath. The instant she started softening around me, I pulled back, then pressed inside before setting the exacting rhythm we both craved. Gliding in and out of her writhing, panting, whimpering body with deep, deliberate strokes, I watched her glassy eyes grow smoky and unfocused. Watched her heavy breasts and berry-hard nipples bounce and sway.

Lifting a hand from her hip, I cupped Julianna's nape, then lowered her to my lips before claiming her soft mouth in raw, hungry kisses. With a pitiful moan, she sucked my tongue as her pussy sucked at my cock. Drowning in her sweet nirvana, I drove deeper and faster, swallowing her needy whimpers as she met each feral thrust.

The spine-melting friction had my patience tapping out.

Releasing her lips, I eased her up off my chest, then wedged a hand between our slapping flesh. Using the exact amount of pressure and rhythm to send her over the edge, I stroked her stony clit.

A low growl rolled from the back of her throat as she placed her palms on my chest. Lifting from her knees to her toes, she squatted over me before wildly hammering her pussy up and down my cock.

Fire rolled through me.

Release thundered in my ears.

Struggling to hold back, I clenched my jaw and pinched her clit.

"Give it to me, slave. I want it...now," I snarled as my cock swelled and jerked.

Crying out, Julianna bore down on my cock.

Sinking my fingers deep into her lush hips, I pounded her pussy as I sat up and sank my teeth into her lush, bouncing breast. Julianna tossed her head back and screamed as her molten walls clamped around me.

Flames roared down my spine and coalesced in my balls. Unable to hold back any longer, I launched in and out of her clutching core with uneven strokes. Driving deep, one last

time, I surrendered. As white-hot flames of ecstasy consumed me, I roared her name, and filled her succulent cunt with my seed.

Boneless, sated, and trembling, Julianna melted against my chest. Panting in tandem, I brushed the wet hair from her face, kissed her forehead, and wrapped my arms around her. Closing my eyes, I stroked my palm over her back as potent aftershocks pinged through us both.

The temptation to toss the sheet over us and fall asleep with Julianna draped on my chest was inviting, but I didn't want us spending the night alone in the club. Though our resident PI gurus, Ian Stone and James Bartlett, had fitted Genesis with a state-of-the-art security system, I wasn't willing to risk Julianna's safety after the club closed.

Call me paranoid, but I suspected Elliott was still in the area.

A foreboding chill slid up my spine.

It was time to go home while we still had plenty of watchful eyes around.

As I repositioned Julianna and sat up, she moaned, but didn't lift her lids. Cradling her to my chest, I inched off the bed and carried her to the bathroom on the other side of the room. As I eased her to her feet and turned on the shower, she finally lifted her heavy lids.

When she peered up at me with a bleary smile, my heart swelled right along with my anxiety. The demand to get her out of the club and safely behind the heavy security gate surrounding our home pressed in all around me.

Shoving the disturbing ghosts of the past down deep, I reached up and turned off the water.

“Aren’t we going to take a shower?” she asked, brows furrowed in confusion.

“No. I want to take you home and soak in the spa tub with some lavender oil instead of grabbing a quick shower in this cramped bathroom.”

“Mmm,” she purred. “That sounds heavenly.”

“It does.” Taking her hand, I led her to the bed and quickly dragged on my jeans. “Sit tight. I’m gonna grab the toy bag, then run to my office and bring back your clothes and shoes.”

Hissing as she eased onto the mattress, Julianna nodded, then blew out a billowing breath.

“When we get home, I’ll kiss your pretty marks and make them all better.” I smirked.

When I stepped into the hallway, I nearly tripped over my toy bag and shirt sitting in front of the door.

“Thanks, Trevor,” I murmured.

After tugging on my shirt, I lifted the toy bag, then hurried up the stairs. When I stepped into my office, Dalton turned and flashed me a crooked grin. I knew the bastard had been watching me and Julianna, but I didn’t care. Only trusted members of the club could man the security monitors. Dalton was a good man, and among the few at the top of my list.

“I assume it’s safe to say Julianna found her place again.” He chuckled.

“And then some.” I nodded.

“Excellent.” He grinned, then turned his focus back on the security feeds.

“Any sign of Elliott?”

“Not that I’ve seen...yet.”

The ominous tone of the tattooed Dom’s voice only reinforced my fears. After setting the toy bag beside my desk, I strode across the room and studied the images outside the club. After killing the prick who’d nearly sent me to an early grave, I installed numerous lights in the parking lot. Though the back of the building was lit up like a Vegas casino, shadows cast by the parked cars afforded too many worrisome hiding places for desperate junkies willing to rob for their next fix, or disgruntled former club members seeking vengeance.

“He’s out there...somewhere. I can feel him.”

“Same.” Dalton grimly nodded.

“Why is my girl a magnet for every crazy fucker on the planet?” I grumbled as I stormed across the room.

Opening the safe behind my desk, I retrieved the holster containing my Glock G40. Sending up a silent prayer I wouldn’t have to fire the fucking thing, I fastened the clip to the waistband of my jeans, then gathered up Julianna’s clothes.

“You heading out, boss?” Dalton asked, glancing over his shoulder.

“After Julianna gets dressed, yeah.”

Face lined with concern, Dalton tapped the microphone of his headset, and announced, “Places, everyone. You can come and get the keys to the limo now, baby bear. Elvis is getting ready to leave the building.”

“What the hell is going on?” I asked, totally confused.

“We’re getting you and Julianna out of here safely.”

“How? And who the fuck is baby bear?”

“Trevor.”

“Who’s Elvis?”

Dalton simply smirked and arched his brows.

“Don’t tell me, *I’m* Elvis.”

“You bet your blue suede shoes you are.” Dalton chuckled.

“Why can’t I be Jimi Hendrix or Prince?”

“Because they’re both dead.”

“So is *Elvis*.”

“True, but he’ll always be the *king*. Besides, we needed a royal name to go along with the royally kick ass plan that’s in place.”

“Fine...whatever,” I snapped. Being dubbed Elvis was irritating. But I was livid my friends had to concoct a plan to keep me and Julianna safe while leaving my own fucking club. “So, what’s this royal plan? And who came up with it?”

“Ian, James, and Quinn are the masterminds. The only way you and Julianna can be seen leaving the club is via satellite. Since I doubt Elliott can even spell the word satellite, let alone build one, you two will be virtually invisible,” Dalton drawled as someone knocked on the door.

“Come in,” I growled, growing exponentially more frustrated by the second.

Trevor breathlessly rushed in and extended his hand. “May I please have your car keys, Master Mika? My job is to bring your limo to the back door.”

“My limo?”

“Your Escalade,” Dalton helpfully deciphered.

“I wanted to play the part of fairy godmother and name it a royal carriage,” Trevor continued. “But Daddy nixed the idea. He said if I accidentally called you Cinderella, you’d shove a pumpkin up my ass.”

“He’s right,” I snarled, fishing the keys from my pocket before dropping them in his waiting palm.

“Meet you out back, Sir,” Trevor announced with a dejected frown before racing out the door.

“Tell me the plan,” I demanded, turning to Dalton.

When he finished explaining the scenario Ian, James, and Quinn had devised, I scrubbed a hand over my head and sighed. “Don’t get me wrong. I truly appreciate you all going to the trouble to keep us safe, but it’s a bit overkill, don’t you think?”

“Not according to Drake. He said after nearly losing you last time, he wanted to wrap you and Julianna from head to toe in Kevlar,” Dalton grimly stated.

I couldn’t help but chuckle. “Yeah, I thought of covering her in it, too.”

“So, it’s really not overkill, is it?”

“I don’t know,” I grumbled. “All I know is I’m sick of vetting fuckers inside and out, only to learn later they’re crazier than shithouse rats. First Jordon, then Kerr and Lewis, and now Elliott.”

“Stop blaming yourself for those assholes. We’ve been in the lifestyle long enough to know kink is a beacon that calls the crazies.”

“I know, but it still pisses me off. When I quizzed Elliott about becoming a member, he gave me all the right answers,

then turned around and shit all over the Dominant code of conduct. I can deal with him being a player. What I can't deal with is not knowing if he's a harmless perv or a dangerous predator."

"None of us can. That's why you need to let us get you and Julianna out of here safely. All right?"

Grudgingly, I nodded.

"Good. Go get your girl ready to roll. We'll handle the rest."

Still clutching her dress and shoes, I crossed the room. As I reached the door, I glanced over my shoulder as Dalton tapped his headset again. "Yo, Max. You can send Samantha up to relieve me now, bro."

As I strode from my office and down the stairs, anger and guilt sluiced through my veins.

CHAPTER 8



JULIANNA

The instant Mika stepped through the door, I knew by the concern etching his face, and the tension rolling off his body, something was seriously wrong.

“What’s happened?” I asked, rising from the bed and hurrying to him.

Instead of answering my question, he thrust my clothes toward me and simply said, “Get dressed.”

“No,” I said, shoving the clothes away. “Not until you tell me what’s wrong.”

Mika arched a brow and pinned me with a warning glare. “Clearly, I didn’t punish you enough. Do I need to cuff your sassy ass to the cross again, girl?”

“No,” I replied, softening my combative tone. “I *need* to know what’s going on.”

With a scowl, he tossed my dress and shoes on the bed, then scrubbed a hand over his bald head. “Right now, Lady Ivory and submissives Dark Desire, Savannah, Mellie, and Ava are assuming temporary DM duties. Subs Leigh and Ebony are tending the bar while Samantha slides on her Domme Sammie skin again—with Max’s permission—to man the security feeds in my office.”

Though I had no idea what upheaval had prompted the subs to take on Dominant duties, it explained Mika's curt and angry tone. His love for me might supersede his love of protocol, but inside the walls of Genesis, the hierarchy was carved in stone. Dominants handled security and protection, so submissives could focus on serving the Doms.

"And Trevor," Mika continued in a tone teemed in disdain. "Is bringing our Escalade to the back door, like a fucking chauffeur."

"W-why?" I stammered.

"Why do you think, pet?"

"Elliott?"

"Yes. We're not going to be caught off-guard this time. No psycho fuck-nut seeking revenge is going to get the chance to shoot you or me again."

Guilt flooded my veins.

A foreboding chill sped up my spine.

My heart hammered against my ribs.

I pressed a palm to my swirling stomach and shook my head. "No. This can't be happening again. Please tell me Elliott isn't outside somewhere waiting for us."

"We don't know. Dalton didn't see him on any of the feeds, but..."

"But what?" My voice quivered.

Memories of Mika lying in a pool of blood seared my brain. Fear pummeled my system, and tears stung my eyes.

"We have to assume he is and proceed with caution." As if sensing my growing panic, he gathered my trembling body in

his arms and brushed a kiss over my lips. “Get dressed, love. They’re waiting for us.”

“Who is waiting?” I asked, dragging the silky fabric over my head.

“I assume pretty much everyone,” he said with a hollow chuckle.

As I stepped into my heels, someone knocked on the door.

There was no logical way Elliott could have slipped into the club, unnoticed, and be the one rapping on the door. But logic didn’t stop my heart from sputtering or quash the crushing tremor of fear quaking through me.

Mika yanked the portal open before motioning Drake into the room.

“We’re ready when you are,” the big Dom announced. When my former mentor and protector glanced at me, sympathy replaced his stoic expression. “Relax, sweetheart. We’re not gonna let anything happen to you.”

“It’s not me I’m worried about,” I replied, pinning Mika with an anxious stare.

“Nothing’s gonna happen to *either* of you. Not on my watch,” Drake vowed, opening the door for us.

As Mika escorted me from the room, the group of solemn-faced Dominants amassed in the hallway sent a rush of paranoia careening through me. Dalton may not have seen Elliott on the security feed, but clearly, someone saw something to warrant this many bodyguards. Fighting the urge to barricade myself in Mika’s private room, I dug my heels into the carpet and shook my head.

Mika snaked an arm around my waist and pulled me in close to his side. “Relax, pet.”

“Relax?” I screeched. “Are you kidding? What’s happening here?”

“Quinn, would you please explain the plan to Julianna?” Mika asked.

“I’d be happy to,” replied the agent and promoter of famous rock bands as he stepped forward. “We’re borrowing a trick Licks of Leather uses to keep the press from swarming when one of them stirs up a scandal. We’re creating a human shield around you and Mika so you can safely leave the club.”

Though I had no problem mimicking a tactic inspired by my favorite rock group, it didn’t answer the one pressing question feeding my angst.

“Elliott’s out there waiting for us, isn’t he?”

“I already told you, pet, we don’t know,” Mika repeated.

“We’re simply erring on the side of caution, Julianna,” Drake assured before darting an anxious glance at the back door. “Let’s do this. I don’t like my boy being outside alone.”

The thought of Trevor putting himself in harm’s way, for me, sent a heavier rush of guilt spilling through me. This whole mess was my fault.

Drake, Dalton, and Max—the biggest, baddest, most intimidating Doms of the club—stepped in front of me and Mika. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder, their tattooed flesh blocked my sight of the back door. As Mika pulled me in closer to his side, the other Doms surrounded us, like bees guarding their queen.

“Are we still clear, Sam?” Max asked into the microphone of his headset.

I knew he was talking to his submissive, Samantha—sitting at the bank of monitors in Mika’s office.

As we waited for her reply, tension spiked in the air, and I held my breath.

“All clear,” Max announced an instant later.

Dragging in a ragged breath, I clung to Mika and kept pace with the circle of bodies collectively striding down the hall.

“This is crazy,” I tersely whispered at Mika. “What if we’re walking straight into an ambush?”

“We’ve got a contingency plan for that,” Ian assured beside me.

“Totally,” James seconded, keeping pace alongside Mika.

In tandem, the PIs reached behind their backs and each retrieved a pistol.

“Fuck this,” I blurted, sinking my heels into the carpet again, causing the entire entourage to stop.

“Language,” Mika growled.

“I’m sorry, but this is just...no. Hell no. Call the cops,” I begged, clutching his arm. “Let them sweep the parking lot and the surrounding area. If Elliott is out there, they can arrest him for trespassing.”

“That’s not an option, and you know it, pet.” Mika stroked a knuckle down my cheek with a weak smile.

I did. Involving the police was too risky.

Among the kinky members of Genesis were several well-respected doctors, lawyers, judges, business owners,

prominent political officials, and parents. Compromising their anonymity could destroy their lives and livelihoods.

“Put those away.” Mika scowled at Ian and James.

As the pair holstered their weapons, Mika sent me a wink. I knew he was trying to help me cope, but I was beyond scared.

“Are you good now, princess?” Drake arched a brow.

“Yes,” I lied before sucking in a shallow breath.

As we made our way down the hall, Mika pulled me tighter to his side. The tension rolling off him had my anxiety pegging in the red.

Drake paused and pulled the heavy metal door open. The humid summer night air stole the air from my lungs. Bile burned the back of my throat as the rugged Doms moved in closer, pressing around me and Mika, like sardines in a can.

No one said a word as we stepped onto the wide stoop.

In the distance, a siren wailed.

A foreboding chill slid down my spine as I skimmed a wild gaze over the parking lot, homing in on the eerie shadows between the parked cars. Descending the stairs, my legs trembled so badly, I gripped the front of Mika’s shirt and held on tight as he, too, scanned the area.

The sound of crunching gravel made me jolt and freeze. Panic thundered through me, and a tiny whimper bubbled in the back of my throat.

“What’s wrong?” Mika demanded.

Pausing, he swiveled his head from side to side, looking for danger. I struggled to find my voice as Drake broke from

the pack. Gravel crumbled beneath his heavy boots as he rounded the back of the Escalade to reunite with Trevor. I then realized there was no danger...only Daddy's enormous feet.

"Nothing, Master," I whispered, shoving the self-induced panic from my system.

When Drake wrenched the driver's side door open, Trevor's high-pitched scream of terror completely drowned out the chorus of *Let's Go Crazy* blaring from inside the SUV.

Mika flashed Dalton a crooked grin and chuckled. "Elvis might be king, but Prince is the man."

"Fine," Dalton drawled, rolling his eyes. "*Prince* has left the building, y'all."

Clueless as to what they were talking about, the music suddenly cut off and Trevor leapt from the vehicle. White as a ghost, he pressed a hand to his heart, gasping for breath.

"Dammit, Daddy. Don't *ever* do that again," he shrieked. "You scared the cra—crackers out of me."

"You should have been paying attention," Drake admonished, arching a brow.

"I was."

"No, you weren't," he growled, cinching a hand in Trevor's hair. "You were wiggling your ass in the seat and singing your balls off."

As Drake hauled his hissing sub around the front of the SUV, I cringed in sympathy.

Still meshed within a wall of Doms, standing on the stairs, I slowly realized...we'd been out in the open, fiddle-farting around for several minutes, with zero sign of Elliott.

Clearly, the man was long gone.

This whole panic-inducing Dominant bodyguard shit was nothing more than an exercise of pure paranoia.

Irritation replaced my fear.

Cursing under my breath, I wiggled from Mika's grasp and hurried off the last step.

I raced straight to Trevor, who was still wincing in pain, and apologizing to Drake for what...listening to music?

"Thank you, Trev. I appreciate you, and how brave you were sitting out here all by yourself." I hugged him tightly while pinning Drake with an angry scowl.

"Seriously?" Mika barked, easing in alongside Drake.

My heart sputtered.

Though my ass was still throbbing, I was confronting a Dom and sticking up for a fellow sub...*again*.

"I-I..." My mind went blank. I could almost feel my brain cells shaking their heads and tossing up their hands before they bowed out...leaving me on my own.

"With your permission, Mika?" Drake smirked.

"Be my guest."

The evil smile tugging my Master's lips filled me with dread.

With a low growl, Drake sank his other fist into my hair and tugged my head back. I gasped as pain skittered over my scalp.

"Master, no," Trevor wailed. "It's my fault."

“Not a word, boy, or I’ll shove a ball gag in your mouth for a week,” Drake snarled, still pinning me with an angry glare. “It’s times like these I’d give anything to have you under my wing again, Julianna.”

Though I knew it was pointless, I turned a pleading glance Mika’s way. His lips pressed into a thin line. He shook his head and drew his hand back before landing a stinging slap to my throbbing welts.

Fire surged through me.

A howl of pain tore from my throat.

My knees buckled.

Tears spilled from my eyes as I lurched forward, colliding with Drake’s wide chest.

“We’ve got movement,” Max barked.

As the words left his lips, Mika slung an arm around my waist as Drake released my hair. Spinning me around, Mika pulled me to his chest. Like a herd of elephants, the other Doms rushed down the stairs.

“Which side, Sam?” Max calmly asked, bouncing his gaze off one corner of the building to the next.

Heart in my throat, I watched Ian and James draw their weapons, but quickly lost sight of the pair when Dalton, Nick, Tony, Quinn, Sam, Kellan, Joshua, Law, and Cane surrounded me and Mika.

“Talk to me, Max. Where’s our target?” Dylan asked in the same calm voice as he eased in alongside his former Marine Corps Captain.

“North side,” Max announced as he whirled around and focused on the left corner of the building.

“Go back into the club, now, boy,” Drake barked at Trevor.

“No, Daddy. I want to stay with you,” he begged.

“Get out of here, you two,” Quinn barked at Mika and me as he opened passenger’s side door.

While Drake and Trevor argued, Mika bit out a curse, then guided me toward the SUV. As I wobbled over the uneven gravel, the other Doms moved in closer, reinforcing their circle of safety.

“I said get inside, boy.”

“No. If you die, I’ll die without you.” Trevor’s voice cracked.

Trembling, I clambered into the SUV. The sight of Tristan and Emilia’s car seats sent a whole new wave of panic surging through me. Sending up a silent prayer, I sank onto the buttery-soft leather seat.

“Get down on the floorboard, pet,” Mika instructed.

When I turned to comply, Elliott rounded the corner of the building.

I wanted to scream but couldn’t. The icy hands of déjà vu had me gripped by the throat.

CHAPTER 9



MIKA

When Julianna's eyes grew wide and the color drained from her face, I knew Elliott had finally decided to show himself.

"Get down and don't move," I growled, watching tremors quake her body.

"LaBrache," Elliott barked. "I got something to say to you."

Spinning around, I wedged myself between the open door and Julianna's body as I met his angry glare.

"Then say it," I countered.

As Elliott began eating up the distance between us, I glanced back at Julianna—who'd blessedly followed my instructions. I didn't want the son of a bitch anywhere near her. Drawing his attention off the vehicle, and my girl, I stepped out from behind the door and shut it.

While Ian and James moved in close, flanking me, Drake, Dalton, and Max stood together, forming an impenetrable wall.

"That's far enough, fucker," Drake barked at Elliott.

The prick stopped, rolled his eyes, and scoffed. "Tell your guard dogs to stand down, LaBrache. I'm not here to fuck you

up the ass, though you'd probably like it. I'm here to talk.

Ignoring his insult, I arched a brow. "Then say what you need to say and get the hell off my property."

"You fucked up when you kicked me out. Fucked up bad," Elliott said with an ugly smile. "I'm gonna shut your pussy-assed club down, motherfucker."

"Is that so?" I chuckled.

"I got friends...important friends."

"Bitch, please," I drawled. "I'm not afraid of your threats."

"You should be. You fucked with the wrong Dom this time, asshole."

"You're not a Dom," I scoffed. "You're a player, a predator...a pathetic, horny little boy who pretends to be a Dom in order to get laid. Do us all a favor...hire a hooker."

As Elliott's face contorted in rage, I knew my assessment of him was balls-on accurate.

"Fuck you! You have no right to judge me," he screamed, spittle flying from his lips. "The only one who can judge me is God!"

Based on his childish temper tantrum, I knew Elliott wasn't a threat.

Anger, like a volcano, erupted inside me. I'd let the douchebag play me. Let him resurrect the fear and terror of the past to flow over me, Julianna, and the men guarding us. Seething with rage, I reached under my shirt and pulled my gun before aiming the barrel between his eyes.

"What the fuck? What are you doing, man?" Ian bit out.

Elliott's eyes grew wide and the blood drained from his face.

"Arranging his meeting with God," I quipped with a crooked grin. "Somebody's got to do it."

"No. No. P-please, d-don't shoot m-me," Elliott stammered, raising his hands in the air.

The front of his khaki-colored pants turned dark as piss splattered on the gravel at his feet. I should have climbed into the SUV and driven away, but the evil bastard inside me wanted to make the cockbag suffer a little bit longer.

"I warned you. I told you not to come back, or I'd kill you like I did the last prick who'd touched my slave."

"I-I know. B-but I thought...I thought you were bluffing," Elliott whined.

"Does it look like I'm bluffing?" I asked, trying not to laugh when Tony softly chortled behind me.

"I-I'm sorry. I-I didn't mean to offend you...or her. I won't come back. I swear. I-I won't shut down your club. Y-you'll never see me again...I promise," he begged, sinking to his knees and pressing his palms together. "Just...don't kill me. *Please, don't kill me.*"

"Aww, what a darling little sub," Drake drawled.

Elliott didn't say a word, simply lowered his chin.

While the choking tension filling the air disappeared in the wind, Drake glanced back at me and shook his head.

"Fine," I grumbled, sliding my gun into its holster. "Get the fuck out of here, and don't come back."

Nodding frantically, Elliott launched to his feet before sprinting around the building.

I closed my eyes and released a billowing breath as I mentally forced the fear and anger from my system.

“Is it over?” Julianna asked, stroking her slender hand down my back.

Jerking my head, I pinned her with a scowl. “What are you doing out of the car?”

“H-he left,” she stammered, pointing to the edge of the building. “I figured, since he’d pissed himself before dropping to his knees to submit to you, it was safe.”

“I still can’t believe he pissed his pants,” Nick drawled.

“I can’t believe he got down on his knees,” Joshua said, shaking his head.

“Both were fucking priceless.” Max grinned.

“You definitely hit the nail on the head when you called him out,” Kellan smirked, clapping me on the shoulder.

“I probably shouldn’t have tormented him like that, but—”

“Oh, yes, you should have,” Julianna interrupted vehemently. “He deserved it. He’s an ass—”

“Asshole,” I finished for her. “Yes, pet. We know.”

An impish grin tugged her lips as she eased in against my chest and cupped my face. “Thank you for not getting shot this time.”

Slinging an arm around her waist, I hugged her tightly and cupped my other hand around her nape. I studied the contours of her beautiful face and delved deep into her emerald, green eyes.

“I’ll never let anyone take you away from me, love,” I murmured, crashing my lips to hers.

As I claimed her with a raw, hungry kiss, cheers and applause went up around us.

“Should I park the Escalade so you two can go inside and get busy again?” Trevor asked with a giggle.

Tearing from Julianna’s lips, I shook my head and leveled him with a feigned scowl. “Leave it where it is, boy. I’m taking my sweet slut home.”

Trevor grinned and wrapped his arms around Drake’s waist. Then he peered up at the big man with a hopeful expression. “I’m ready to go home now, too, Daddy.”

“You’re awfully eager for your punishment.”

“P-punishment, for what?” Trevor blanched.

“For ignoring my instructions and arguing with me, boy.”

“W-with all the commotion going on, I-I sorta hoped you’d give me a pass for that, Master.”

“You hoped wrong, slut.” Drake scowled, then claimed Trevor’s mouth with a brutal kiss.

“I’m heading in to relieve Samantha,” Dalton stated, bounding up the stairs.

“Tell her I said to leave on her Domme armor.” Max grinned. “It’s been a long time since I’ve had the challenge of prying it off her.”

“I’ll be sure to let her know.” Dalton smirked as he opened the metal door.

“Hold up a minute,” I called out. “I want to thank you all for stepping in to help Julianna and me. It means the world to

me...to both of us. I appreciate you guys more than you'll ever know."

"No need to thank us. You'd do the same for us, and we know it," Tony said, clapping me on the back.

"What he said, boss." Dalton nodded before darting through the doorway.

When the collective murmurs of agreement died down, I tucked Julianna against my side before we said our goodbyes. While the others filed back inside the club, I pulled from the parking lot and headed north.

We were only a few miles from home when Julianna reclined her seat and closed her eyes.

"Don't get too comfortable, pet," I warned. "It's going to be hours before I let you sleep."

Jerking upright, she swiveled toward me. Confusion written all over her face. "How come?"

"Because when we get home, I'm taking you straight to the dungeon."

"For fun?" she asked with a hopeful gleam in her eyes.

"No. For punishment."

"B-but, you already punished me."

"Yes, and I'd foolishly thought I'd helped you find your place again. But your recalcitrant attitude toward Drake while you tried to shield Trevor proved I failed to keep you there, pet."

"That's not true," she protested, raising her seat upright again. "I know my place, Master."

“You might *know* it, but you’re definitely not embracing it.”

Julianna nibbled her lip and pondered my words. Long seconds later, she peered up at me. A blind man couldn’t miss the apprehension shimmering in her eyes. “What are you going to do to me?”

I paused and pursed my lips. Refusing to tip my hand, I chose my words carefully. “Provide you with a *lasting* reminder of the peace and serenity you’ve lost, girl.”

“Okay, but...how?”

The quiver of fear in her voice was like a knife to the heart. Due to my recent neglect, Julianna was light-years away from her submissive place.

“You’ll see,” I replied.

She didn’t say another word, simply cupped her hands in her lap and worried her thumbs together. A few minutes later, I turned into our driveway and pressed the remote to open the heavy, wrought-iron gate. After pulling down the drive, and into the garage, I helped Julianna from the SUV. Then I slid an arm around her and led her inside the house.

Pausing to reset the alarm, I noticed the living room was dark. I knew our nanny; Rhona Fergus had gone to bed.

“Go upstairs and check on the children. But don’t switch their monitors from Rhona’s room to ours yet, pet. I’ll take care of that before we go to bed,” I murmured, gazing into her troubled eyes while tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. “Then change into your robe and meet me in the dungeon.”

“Yes, Master,” she whispered.

Before she could turn away, I cupped her nape and pressed a savage kiss to her lips.

“Don’t keep me waiting, pet.”

With a nervous nod, she raced up the stairs.

Dragging in a deep breath, I strode to the dungeon and began preparing for Julianna’s arrival.

CHAPTER 10



JULIANNA

*B*y the time I reached the second floor landing, Mika's heavy footsteps—echoing against the marble entryway—had faded to silence. Winded, not from climbing the stairs but from the apprehension pinging inside me, I struggled to catch my breath while my heart thundered in my chest. I had no clue what painful punishment Mika had in store for me. All I knew was I'd somehow lost my submission, or at least, locked it away.

Truth be told, I was eager to reclaim my place as Mika's slave...just not through pain. The thought of him wielding his whip over the same throbbing welts from earlier, filled me with dread.

Don't keep me waiting, pet.

As Mika's edict rolled through my brain, I swallowed the ball of worry lodged in my throat and hurried down the hall to check on my babies.

The sight of Tristan, sound asleep on his side, clutching his favorite dinosaur, made my heart swell. It boggled my mind how quickly he was growing up. Kneeling beside his bed, I raked my fingers through his dark, curly hair and leaned in close.

“You’ll always be my baby,” I whispered, then pressed a feathery kiss to his soft, bronze-colored cheek.

Tiptoeing from his room, I strode across the hall and quietly padded inside Emilia’s room. My beautiful, rosy-cheeked princess was crashed on her back, hugging her stuffed, pink elephant. Easing to my knees beside her, I slid my pinky beneath her chubby little fingers.

When Emilia squeezed my digit, instinctively putting her faith and trust in me, tears stung my eyes. The momma lion within me roared, ready, willing, and able to protect her from any and all dangers in this world.

“Don’t worry, little one, Mommy will always keep you safe,” I murmured, lifting my other hand to caress her cheek.

As my words echoed in my ears, I paused and stared at my empty palm. Then glanced at Emilia’s pudgy little fingers still clinging to my pinky. Back and forth, I studied the unbreakable bond between mother and daughter and the golden link binding Mika and I that I had unintentionally severed.

The realization I’d not only ripped my submission from his hands but also stripped his Dominance away slammed me like a wrecking ball.

Heart shattering, I swiped at the tears streaming down my cheeks, then brushed a light kiss to Emilia’s forehead.

“Thank you for reminding me I need to let Daddy protect me, too,” I choked out softly.

Shook to the core, I launched to my feet, and hurried from her room.

I raced down the hall, then threw open the door to our master suite and rushed inside. Mika’s masculine scent—

lingering in the air—filled my lungs. The surrender and command I'd foolishly stolen from each of us ignited like a fireball.

No longer afraid of what fate Mika had in store for me, I was anxious to fall at his feet and submit to his every demand. Tearing off my clothes, I quickly tugged on my robe before sprinting through the hall, bounding down the stairs, and running to the dungeon.

As I breathlessly rounded the corner and stepped through the door, I stopped dead in my tracks.

Mika stood in the middle of the room...completely naked.

He might have been bare from head to toe, but he wore his Dominance—head high, shoulders back, legs parted, and hands tucked behind his back—like a shimmering, impenetrable suit of armor.

My nipples drew up tight and hard.

My clit throbbed.

My pussy clutched.

Biting back the needy moan vibrating the back of my throat, I drank in his rippling, bulging muscles straining beneath this toffee-colored skin. Heart racing, I dragged my stare down his sinful body before locking my gaze on his big, beautiful cock...lengthening and thickening before my eyes.

“Drop the robe, and properly present yourself, sweet slut.”

His savage tone sent shivers skittering down my spine.

Without hesitation, I sent the robe puddling to the floor, then lowered my lashes and knelt at Mika's feet. Gingerly easing my ass to the tops of my heels, I spread my legs and placed my hands—palms up—on the tops of my thighs.

“Very nice,” Mika praised, caressing a hand over the top of my head as he circled behind me. “Kneeling on the floor, like this, you present the epitome of submission, pet.”

Pride sent my heart soaring.

“Unfortunately, looks are deceiving,” he continued as I sensed him squatting behind me. “We both know your acquiescence is nothing but a well-practiced pose.”

As denial and guilt annihilated every drop of pride, he gently brushed my hair, over my shoulder.

“You’ve lost your desire to serve, Julianna,” he murmured, flipping the latch at the back of my collar.

As the shimmering band of silver metal clanged to the floor, I sucked in a gasp of disbelief.

I slapped my hands around my naked neck.

Tears instantly streamed down my face while a deafening roar of panic exploded through me.

“No, Master, no. Please don’t do this to me,” I wailed. Trembling like a leaf, I clutched my collar, then abandoned my submissive pose and turned to face him. “Please, Master. Please...put it back on.”

As I thrust my collar toward him, Mika gripped my chin and tilted my head back.

“Stop!” he barked. “Take a deep breath, and close your eyes.”

“I-I can’t,” I wailed. “Please, Master...don’t do this to me.”

“You can, and you will,” he thundered.

“No, I-I can’t. P-put the collar on...and I-I’ll do a-anything you want,” I sobbed.

“Therein lies our problem, pet.” He exhaled a heavy sigh. “Push the panic from your system, and close your eyes. Now.”

Ragged sobs spilled off my lips as I lowered my lashes.

“Take a deep breath, and relax,” Mika murmured, cupping my cheeks.

Struggling to tamp down my panic, I did as he’d instructed and focused on the heat of his hands. Though still trembling in fear, I inhaled a deep breath.

“Good girl,” he whispered. “I want you to look deep inside yourself and tell me how you feel.”

“Terrified. Naked. Stripped to the bone. Destroyed. And completely a-alone,” I sobbed.

“Excellent. That’s exactly how I want you to be.”

My eyes flashed open wide, and I peered up at him in utter confusion. “W-why?” I wailed.

“So I can build you back up, pet. Ignite the sparks of submission inside you...fan those fiery flames, and fill your heart again.” A tender smile tugged his lips.

Wrapping me in his arms, Mika sipped the tears from my cheeks.

Though consumed with the ache to feel the collar around my neck once more, I didn’t bother to beg him.

I knew I had to earn it.

“I’m sorry I failed you, Master.”

“You haven’t failed me, pet. You’ve simply lost your way. I’m as much to blame for that as you.”

“No. It’s all my fault. I’ve been so focused on taking care of the house, the chores, and the kids, I tossed on my Domme hat and put my submission on the back burner. I stopped taking care of you...stopped letting you care and protect me.”

“That’s the cause of all this?” he asked, quirking a brow. I nodded. “Then I’ll take care of it.”

“How?”

Mika scowled. “If you still trusted me, it wouldn’t matter *how*.”

Though it was like a slap to the face, I finally grasped how far I’d wandered from my submissive place.

The weight of my guilt was crushing.

As if sensing my remorse, Mika pressed a soft kiss to my lips.

“It’s going to be all right, Julianna,” he vowed, then stood and extended his hand. “Let’s find Emerald again, shall we?”

It had been ages since Mika had addressed me as Emerald—the club name I’d used when we’d first met.

As my alias rolled off his tongue, and echoed in my ears, memories pulled me back in time.

Suddenly, the ache to surrender to his command...to bask in the serenity, safety, and beauty of Emerald again, became more crucial than regaining my collar.

Dragging in a deep breath, I placed my fingers in his palm, and stood.

Mika led me across the room and paused in front of a low, thickly padded table.

“Hands and knees, pet,” he instructed.

Anxiety spiked.

The thought of him slashing my already raw skin open with the whip made my stomach swirl. When I climbed into position on the soft leather, I spied a tube of lube on the shelf beside me.

My heart sputtered.

My mouth went dry.

A tremor of delight and fear quaked through me.

I knew how Mika planned to help me rediscover my submission.

He wasn't going to do it by shredding my flesh open with the whip.

He was going to rip my soul open with his cock.

“Head down, ass up, legs apart, slave,” he growled.

I eased onto my elbows and pressed the crown of my head against the leather. Then peered between my legs, watching as Mika stepped in behind me, mercilessly fisting his thick cock.

“What are you, girl?” he barked, shoving two fingers deep inside my pussy.

“Ahh,” I cried, squeezing my eyes shut. “I am your slave.”

“Not yet, you're not,” he scoffed. “But you will be...by the time I'm through.”

His dark and evil tone raked my flesh like a blade.

“What is your purpose?”

“To please you, Master,” I resolutely replied.

“Oh, yes. You're going to please me, sweet slut. Please me with your suffering screams.”

Mika had never shown me this ruthless, barbaric side of himself before. I was surprised, and maybe a tiny bit nervous. But I couldn't lie...it turned me on. No, it turned me inside out.

As he continued fisting his cock, he drove his wicked fingers in and out of my melting core. Flames licked my spine, and streaks of lightning ricocheted through me. Whimpering and panting, I rocked against his masterful hand, dragging my hard nipples over the buttery leather.

My clit throbbed, screaming for his touch.

Delving deeper, he dragged his fingertips over my G-spot. I softly mewled and clutched around him while my walls sucked and milked his embedded fingers. Mika cursed under his breath and yanked his digits from inside me. Empty and aching, I moaned. Without warning, he slammed a wet finger through my tiny, puckered rim. Fire streaked through me. As my moan morphed into a scream, I jerked my head up.

“Submission isn't taking what you want, it's handing over your power so I can give you what you need,” Mika growled.

I knew that. I'd known it forever. But somewhere along the way, while running a household and raising children, I'd lost the strength to hand myself over to him.

Dominating someone—taking on the responsibility of keeping them happy, healthy, and safe, while supplying their needs and desires—wasn't easy. Neither was gathering up every fiber of your being—all your strengths, weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and dreams—and placing them in someone else's hands, without snatching them back.

I thought I could handle everything—the house, the kids, the errands—on my own, and had foolishly snatched my

submission away from Mika. But holding onto my own power didn't make me happy, only lost and searching for what I once had...my Master.

Mika silently eased his finger from my ass, then landed a stinging slap across my welted flesh. Fire streaked down my legs and up my back as a howl of agony tore from my throat. Trembling and panting, my tears dripped to the padded leather while the burn seeped deep into my bones.

"I know, Master, I know," I whimpered.

"I know you do," he murmured, laving his tongue over the screaming flesh of my ass.

Gasping and sobbing, I rode the waves of pain crashing through me, and focused on the soothing strokes of my Master's wet tongue.

When Mika lifted his mouth from my butt cheeks and moved in front of me, tendrils of fear wended through me. His expression was hard and unreadable, as if he was purposely blocking me out. Struggling to tamp down the new wave of panic rising inside me, I softly gasped when he cinched a fist in my hair. But instead of jerking my head back, he gently tilted my face toward his and stared into my eyes.

"I have one question to ask you. Only one," Mika reiterated. "But before you answer, I need you to take as much time as you need and look deep inside your heart. All right?"

Please don't release me. Please let me serve you and make things right. The words burned the tip of my tongue, but I swallowed them down and nodded. "Yes, Master."

"Are you ready to stop taking what you want and let me give you what you need, my beautiful...*Emerald?*"

Like a tsunami, relief crashed through me, washing all my doubts and fears away.

“Yes,” I choked out with a watery smile.

“Thank fuck,” he whispered before claiming my lips in a raw, blistering kiss.

Groans and whimpers filled the air while our tongues tangled. But all too soon, he tore from my mouth and flashed a crooked smile before striding behind me again.

“Don’t forget to breathe, pet,” Mika reminded as he squeezed a glob of lube over my asshole.

“I won’t,” I promised, voice quivering with anticipation.

He slathered the gel around my gathered rim while slowly working the tip of his thick finger inside me. As tiny explosions of bliss pulsed beneath my skin, I whimpered and moaned, and rocked against his probing digit. My clit throbbed and my pussy wept as he inched in past his knuckle.

“You’re so fucking tight,” Mika hissed, easing from my opening to add another drop of cold lube.

Wedging two fingers against my puckered entrance, he squeezed them inside, sending sparks skipping up my spine. Pleasure and pressure collided. But when he reached between my legs and dragged the fingers of his other hand between my wet folds, demand joined the fray...igniting a conflagration of need and want searing inside me.

Without thinking, I lifted my hand and dragged it toward my clit.

“Don’t do it,” Mika warned, ramming both fingers deep inside me.

“Ahh,” I cried out, quickly slapping my palm against the table. “I’m sorry, Master. It’s just...”

“What?”

“My clit. It’s screaming,” I mewled pitifully.

“Not as loud as you’ll be screaming in a minute, sweet slut.”

Dragging his fingers from my ass, he added more lube, then aligned his wide tip to my narrow ring.

“You do *not* have permission,” he sternly reminded.

“I know, Master.”

“When I want you to come, I’ll *make* you come, understood?”

“Yes, Master,” I nodded, swallowing tightly.

“Who are you, girl?”

“I am your slave.”

“Yes, you are, gorgeous,” he bit out, squeezing his fat crest through my narrow rim.

Panting wildly, I clutched the edge of the table and whimpered as he fed inch after thick, hard inch inside my ass.

“Do you willingly hand over your heart, mind, body, soul, and power to me, girl?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Do you promise to communicate open and honestly with me...to trust my ability to keep you safe...and to accept the endless, unconditional love I hold in my heart for you?”

As the walls I’d foolishly built around me crumbled, sobs of surrender tore from my throat. “Yes. Yes, Master. I give you

all of me...everything I am...everything I'll ever be, forever.”

“I fucking love you, Julianna,” Mika growled, firmly gripping my hips. “I never want to lose you like this again. You’re my reason for living, love.”

His confession ripped my heart in two and split my soul wide open. And at the same time, it wrapped around me in a blanket of promise, protection, and salvation.

Thrusting in and out of my ass unmercifully, Mika plunged a hand between my legs, and strummed my clit. My sobs turned into whimpers of bliss before quickly morphing into keening cries of demand.

“That’s it, my sweet slut...climb to the edge for me,” Mika urged, laving his tongue up my spine.

There was no climbing. I was speeding, like a bullet, and on the cusp of sailing over in a spine-bending free fall of ecstasy.

“H-help me, M-master,” I screamed. “I-I can’t hold on.”

“Come for me. Come now,” Mika roared, pummeling my narrow opening with his big cock.

I threw my head back and screamed his name as a vortex of pain and pleasure pulled me under. As bursts of light flashed behind my eyes, Mika continued frantically slamming in and out of my clutching ass.

“Mine!” he roared, driving deep one last time before singeing my walls with his scalding seed...emptying himself into my soul.

Still buried in my backside, Mika wrapped his arms around me and melded his chest to my back. Surrounded in his

blissful blanket of peace and security, aftershocks rocked our panting bodies.

“How do you feel now, pet?” he murmured against the shell of my ear as I slowly floated back to earth.

“Small and fragile,” I whispered. “But, whole...like I’m finally home again.”

Mika lifted from my back, then reached toward the shelf by the table. Watching him from the corner of my eye, my heart swelled as he clutched my collar.

“Whole enough to wear this again?” he asked, sliding the cold metal around my neck.

“Yes, yes,” I sobbed. “Whole enough to never wander from your command...ever again.”

“That’s all I’ll ever need or want, my love,” he whispered, securing the latch on my collar.



Thank you for reading *Attitude Adjustment*. I hope you enjoyed meeting Mika and Julianna. If you’d like to learn how their sizzling connection ignited and how they overcame a whole lot more than a crazed lunatic out for revenge, grab your **FREE** copy of

Awaken Me

Club Genesis – Chicago, Book One

Available Here [<https://books2read.com/u/47WvA7>]

ABOUT JENNA JACOB

USA Today Bestselling author Jenna Jacob paints a canvas of passion, romance, and humor as her alpha men and the feisty women who love them unravel their souls, heal their scars, and find a happy-ever-after kind of love. Heart-tugging, captivating, and steamy, her words will leave you breathless and craving more.

A mom of four grown children, Jenna, her husband Sean and their furry babies reside in Kansas. Though she spent over thirty years in accounting, Jenna isn't your typical bean counter. She's brassy, sassy, and loves to laugh, but is humbly thrilled to be living her dream as a full-time author. When she's not slamming coffee while pounding out emotional stories, you can find her reading, listening to music, cooking, camping, or enjoying the open road on the back of a Harley.

ALSO BY JENNA JACOB

CLUB GENESIS - CHICAGO

Awaken Me

Consume Me

Seize Me

Arouse Me

Ignite Me

Entice Me

Expose Me

Bare Me

Unravel Me

Command Me

Tame Me

Tempt Me

CLUB GENESIS - DALLAS

Forbidden Obsession

BAD BOYS OF ROCK

Rock Me

Rock Me Longer - Includes Rock Me Free

Rock Me Harder

Rock Me Slower

Rock Me Faster

Rock Me Deeper

COWBOYS OF HAVEN

The Cowboy's Second Chance At Love

The Cowboy's Thirty-Day Fling

The Cowboy's Cougar

The Cowboy's Surprise Vegas Baby.

BRIDES OF HAVEN

The Cowboy's Baby Bargain

The Cowboy's Virgin Baby Momma - Includes Baby Bargain

The Cowboy's Million Dollar Baby Bride

The Cowboy's Virgin Buckle Bunny

The Cowboy's Big Sexy Wedding

THE UNBROKEN SERIES - RAINE FALLING

The Broken

The Betrayal

The Break

The Brink

The Bond

THE UNBROKEN SERIES - HEAVENLY RISING

The Choice

The Chase

The Confession

The Commitment

STAND ALONES

Small Town Second Chance

Innocent Uncaged

AND SHE IS LUST



By

Annabel Joseph

For Brittany, Amani, and the rest of my naughty AWC friends

“A Chorus Girl” by E.E. Cummings was originally published in *Eight Harvard Poets*, New York, Laurence J. Gomme, 1917. It and the following poem are used in this work by rights of public domain.

“Adrift! A Little Boat Adrift!” by Emily Dickinson, written circa 1858, published posthumously.

CHAPTER 1



CHERE

I woke with a man's face pressed to my cheek. Through a haze of pained, hungover confusion, I realized it was not the man I'd recently married. I reached over to explore the hair tickling my neck. Long, spiral curls, somewhat tangled.

"Andrew?"

"Craig," he whispered, pulling me closer.

My head throbbed and my mouth was dry. "I'm not your fiancé," I told my best friend. Then, "Where is he?"

Andrew made a sad sound as I pushed him away. "He might be lost. Is Cray-Cray lost?" He blinked at me with sleep lines on his baby face. "We had a stag party."

"I know." It hurt to talk. "I was at your party. Are we lost?" I squinted at the window. The sun shone bright, too bright. What time was it?

Where the hell were we?

Yes, there'd been a stag party. Andrew, Craig, and a dozen of their closest friends had been invited, and we'd gone to the best bars New York City had to offer. Fun, wild, alcohol-soaked bars, none of which I could remember now.

Were we still at a bar? Had we fallen asleep? No, this was someone's apartment. I looked up at the high, white ceilings.

There was a bed nearby, but I couldn't see if anyone was sleeping on it.

Strippers. There had been shots and strippers and glitter cannons. I remembered dancing and celebrating, and drinking from a cock-shaped tumbler with a straw.

“Is Craig here?” asked Andrew softly. “Have you seen him?”

“No, I've been asleep. I fell asleep.”

“Me, too. This floor is hard.” He stretched, then groaned. “I'll look for him later. I'll find him in a little while. I love him, Chere. I love him so much that I'm going to marry him.”

“I know. We just had your stag party.”

He gripped his blond curls. “Ohh. I think I drank too much.”

“Me, too.” I was older than Andrew, heading toward my mid-30s. I shouldn't have tried to keep up with the younger guys. I heaved myself onto one elbow with effort and noticed my friend was twinkling. “Whoa. You have glitter in your hair.”

“Cause I'm getting married.”

I thought of my husband Price. We'd just recently wed, and I adored him with all my being. “You'll love being married, babes. You'll love it so much.”

“Shh. You're talking so loud.”

“I'm whispering, though.”

One of his friends appeared, holding his head the same way Andrew was holding his, which I found extremely funny.

If only it didn't hurt to laugh. He addressed the room in a ragged stage whisper.

“Hey. People. There's a very angry daddy at the door. Tall. Blond. *Very* angry. He's looking for Cher.”

Craig's soft, rueful voice began to sing from the corner. “*If I could turn back ti-ime...*”

I nudged my friend. “Andrew, I found Craig! He's in the corner.”

“Nobody puts Craig in the corner,” Andrew replied with a flash of temper.

“Where is Cher?” asked Andrew's friend in a plaintive voice.

“Oh,” I said. “Not the performer Cher. It's me.” I hauled myself to a full sit, looking around for my phone. “It's me. I'm Chere.” Shit, where was my phone? I'd suddenly realized I knew who the *very angry daddy* was, and the angry part didn't bode well for me.

“Andrew?” I poked him, but he'd curled back into a fetal ball with his hands over his head. “Help me, Andrew. What time is it? Where's my phone?”

“I'm not getting married until Saturday,” he protested, pushing my hand away.

I looked down to be sure I was dressed, and I was, although I'd gotten a stain on my wrinkled silk dress that might have been salsa, or strawberry margarita.

The man at the door gave a small, aggrieved *aghhh* as my fiancé barged past him, looking very angry indeed. His lips were set in a line and his vivid blue eyes seemed to shoot fire.

“Daddy,” I whispered admiringly. “Angry daddy.”

He moved toward me, and in spite of my burgeoning fear and head-splitting hangover, I had to admire the way his jeans fit over his lean, powerful thighs. A pale blue sweater stretched across his broad chest. It matched his eyes and looked so soft.

“What time is it?” I asked when he reached me. He was so tall. Probably because I was still sprawled out on my blanket on the floor. “I lost my phone.”

“I know. I went to where your phone was. I’ve been looking for you for hours. I had to play fucking connect-the-dots with fifty of Andrew and Craig’s drunk friends and a dozen gay-stripper agencies to figure out where you fucking ended up last night.”

“Oh.”

“Oh,” he mimicked, crouching down beside me. “You had a three a.m. curfew, which I thought was very generous. It’s eleven in the morning now.”

“I’m sorry.” I clutched my head, unable to hold eye contact. “I didn’t think I drank that much. But I did drink too much. We were drinking here, too.”

“There were strippers,” Andrew murmured beside me, still half asleep.

“There were strippers, yes. They were funny.” I tried to smile at Price, but it hurt my cheeks. “They banged on the door dressed like policemen, and I thought we were all going to get arrested for drinking and making noise, and then they were strippers. Can you believe that?”

“Yes, I can, since that’s literally what all male strippers do, Chere. One of them is still asleep out in the living room with a police badge taped to his chest. He’s the only reason I found

you, because he had the courtesy, the *thoughtfulness*, to check in with his employer before he passed out.”

The way Price emphasized *thoughtfulness*, well, I knew that was it for me. I pulled the blanket over my head in hopes he might forget I existed and go away.

“I’m sorry,” I said from behind the fabric when he didn’t leave. “I was going to call to tell you I was ready to be picked up, but I must have fallen asleep.”

“Fallen asleep, or blacked out? And it would have been hard to call me, since you left your phone behind at Slapping Cheeks Gentlemen’s Cabaret at some point.”

“Sweet slapping cheeks,” said Andrew with a sigh.

“Do you have it?” I tried again to meet his gaze. Nope, too angry. “Do you have my phone...sir?”

“Yes, I have it.” My polite *sir* didn’t seem to assuage his fury. “I scrolled through two hundred blurry photos of Andrew and Craig wearing glow necklaces and drinking from penis tumblers to try to figure out where you ended up.”

“I’m so sorry. It was a double stag party. Things got wild.”

“I’m sorry too, because I had no idea what had happened to you. I was fucking worried, Chere. You could have been dead in a gutter somewhere. Hurt. Hit by a car. Kidnapped.”

“Kidnapped, in this day and age?” I joked weakly.

He bared his teeth. “Don’t be flip, you little fuck. It’s still a fucking thing, especially for someone who’s wealthy and hot as fuck, and owns a jewelry brand with a store on Park Avenue.”

It’s true that I was a pretty notable jewelry designer. Famous even. My spare, intricately crafted Starshine Originals

had grown to be a favorite with Hollywood's glitterati. I'd crafted my own engagement ring and wedding band, and the platinum band that shone on Price's finger as he stood over me.

He held out a hand, the one with the ring. "Let's go."

I stared at that hand, just stared a moment. Once I took it, my ass was grass. This hand had tied me up, spanked me, caned me, choked me out for pleasure and punishment many times. But today, I'd be getting a punishment for sure.

"Are you sober enough to walk, or do I need to carry you?" he said when I didn't move.

"I can walk, but it might have to be slow."

I hated his anger, I feared it, but I didn't worry he would hurt me. Well, really hurt me. I still didn't look forward to the unpleasantness ahead.

I let him pull me up, then grabbed at his soft blue sweater as the room spun.

"Whoa, my brain is not okay. I'm never drinking again."

"Drinking is fine, starshine. Getting blasted is the problem."

He held me until my balance returned, then my head cleared a little and I could walk just fine. Oops, no, I couldn't. He lifted me with a muttered curse and carried me through rooms littered with booze bottles, discarded clothing, and more glitter than I remembered. Oh, there was the sleeping stripper.

"I'm sorry," I said again, burying my head against the side of his neck. He smelled wonderful, like he always did. I

probably smelled not so good. I must have said that thought aloud because he growled, “You smell like a whiskey factory.”

“Can I take a bath when I get home?”

“Sure, baby. Right after I beat your ass.”

Damn. Well, I wouldn't be able to enjoy a bath anyway, knowing a punishment was coming.

And a punishment was definitely coming. Kidnapping would have been better, now that I thought about it. Price's punishments were worse than anything a kidnapper could do.

CHAPTER 2



PRICE

I carried Chere downstairs, out to the elevator, through the building's quiet, well-appointed lobby, to my waiting car on the street. She knew better than to struggle, not when I had her in my you're-about-to-be-punished death grip. My driver looked over his shoulder as I set her down in the back seat.

"You found her. That's good."

"It's fucking great. Now comes the murder."

He barked out a laugh, making the heart tattoo on his neck beat. "Aw, you wouldn't want to do that, boss. Not to Mrs. Eriksen."

I raised a brow. "But someone else would be okay?"

"No, boss. We don't do murders, you and I, not unless people deserve it."

I pondered how many people Cliff might have murdered who *had* deserved it, before he found himself in my employ. He was wiry, tatted, and tough, with a missing front tooth he'd never bothered to replace.

I'd hired him to double as protection when we drove into the sketchier areas of town; I was one of New York's most prominent architects and Chere ran an upscale jewelry business. She regularly had consultations with clients carrying

a million dollars' worth of gold and diamonds, and scary Cliff was the only one between her and a thief.

I should have insisted she take Cliff along to Andrew's bachelor party, but she'd complained and said he wouldn't let her have fun, which was probably true. "*Please!*" she'd begged. "*I'll call every hour, and be home by three o'clock, I promise!*"

But I hadn't received any calls after midnight, and as for coming home, she hadn't accomplished that either. I looked over at her, pale and hungover on the seat. She groaned as Cliff swung into traffic and flinched as the driver behind us blared his horn.

"Price? Do you happen to have any ibuprofen with you?"

"No, and you don't get any anyway. Not until you've had the spanking you have coming to you. I want it to hurt you, one hundred percent."

"Can't you spank me tomorrow? When I feel better?"

She spoke quietly, so Cliff wouldn't hear, although I had a pretty good feeling he understood our dynamic. I spoke quietly too, to protect her feelings and her privacy.

"You're getting spanked the literal second we get home, baby. I've had eight whole hours to worry about you. No use putting it off."

"I didn't mean to worry you."

"Well, you did."

I wasn't furious anymore, like the wee hours of this morning, when I'd had to break my promise not to track her with her phone. I wasn't livid like when I'd arrived at a shuttered gay club and pounded on the door until someone let

me in. I wasn't out of my mind like when I'd found her phone abandoned on the floor beneath a velvet, alcohol-stained banquette.

Chere and I had been married nearly six months now, but we'd met long before that. We'd been through a lot of trauma and drama together. I'd lowkey stalked her for many years.

Not lowkey.

I'd really stalked her, and I'd had to learn to stop the worst of my surveilling behavior or lose her completely. It had taken a long time and a lot of work to get to a place where I could make myself let her go, let her have some freedom without me.

It's just her best friend's gay stag party. What could possibly go wrong?

I blew out a breath. I could stop worrying now. She was okay. She was sitting on the seat beside me, her pretty, expressive brown eyes closed against the sun. The rays illuminated her freckles and brought out the burnished tones in her complexion. My beautiful love. My starshine. I wanted to murder her for scaring me, but I wouldn't. She might feel murdered afterward, but she'd still be alive.

"We're here, boss," said Cliff, pulling up to our building on Bleecker Street. "Should I park, or will we be going out again soon?"

"Park it," I said, helping Chere from the car. "We're not going anywhere for the next few hours."

I ignored her soft moan of dread and guided her inside.

CHAPTER 3



CHERE

I was usually happy to come home to our beautiful apartment on Bleecker Street. Price's home—now our home—was spacious, airy, and full of light, though this lightness was balanced with dark, elegant, old-world furnishings, some pieces of which were priceless. The overall effect was intimidating yet cozy, like my husband.

Well, sometimes he was cozy. Sometimes he wrote me poetry. Sometimes he punished me and made me cry.

I deserved this, though. We had rules. One rule was to obey orders, and I'd been told to check in during the evening and to be home by three.

"Go on ahead of me," he said. "You know where we're going."

"Yes, sir."

I slunk toward our bedroom and then into the walk-in closet, where a secret door opened to a haven of sadistic delights, or masochistic shudders, depending which side of the equation you were on. In our relationship, of course, my husband was the sadist, and I was the masochist shuddering at his touch.

I shed my clothes, throwing them in the dry-cleaning basket, not that dry cleaning would necessarily erase the mysterious stain down the front of my favorite party dress. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Price appeared with a tall glass of water. “Drink this.”

I waited for painkillers to be offered, but he apparently hadn’t softened on that front.

“Drink all of it,” he said with a note of impatience.

I knew I needed hydration, but it was hard to drink with hard blue eyes staring at you and a room full of punishment equipment waiting just through the door. My legs felt steadier now, and my mouth not so dry. I wanted to suggest that sleep might be the best cure for my hangover, but I didn’t dare.

While I drank, he ran his gaze over my naked body, planning what he would do to it for my lapse in judgment. I never knew what was coming. He had never been the predictable type.

“Okay, that’s enough.” He took the glass away as I dawdled over the last few sips. “In you go.”

We stopped inside the dungeon door for him to put on my brown leather collar. He’d had it made especially for me, so it fit snugly, but not too tight. It looked plain, but what it represented was intricate and complicated. Obedience, love, ownership, submission. Poetry. There was an O-ring in the front for yanking me around or pulling me toward him for a kiss.

Today, he used it to drag me across his huge dungeon toward a low-slung spanking bench, a relatively recent addition that was also custom made for me, fitted to my dimensions. The bench’s hard, polished wood surface

supported me in a position halfway between lying flat and kneeling. Why? Because when you were straight-up kneeling over a bench for an ass-beating, you were able to squirm a bit, move forward and backward. This bench's configuration served to elevate my ass for punishment while not permitting me to brace with my knees.

As for bondage, this bench had plenty of contact points that might have been used to strap me down. Cuffs at my ankles or wrists, or a restraining belt secured across the backs of my calves, or around my thighs. A chain and clip to attach to the O-ring on my collar.

But no, *this* bench had none of that. It had only one—well, two—points of restraint.

“All the way down,” he said, when I hesitated to position myself properly. “Don't make me angrier than I already am.”

I sighed and lowered my breasts into the two curved recesses also sized precisely for me. Beneath these recesses lay a crosspiece with two silver chains screwed into it, and at the end of those short chains, two gleaming clover clamps waiting to be engaged.

This piece of equipment was christened, not fondly on my part, the Boob Bench, because the only restraint point was the excruciating clover clamps affixed to each of my nipples before I was spanked here. Affixed by me.

Price could have done it, yes, because he enjoyed causing me pain, but I was the one who was made to put the clamps on myself, because it was really fucking hard to cause that kind of pain to your own body.

“Not yet,” he said, when I reached down for them with dread.

I waited, my head lowered in penitence. If I was waiting, there was some other torment to come first. I heard one of the drawers open and lifted my head to stare forward at the dark gray wall. Another drawer. The snick of a lube bottle. The only question now was how big the ass plug would be, and how much it would hurt. Since he was pretty upset with me, the answers were: very big, and a lot.

I received no warning aside from his approach, and his big hand grasping one of my ass cheeks to pull it aside. The plug was lubed enough to go in, but not enough to make it easy. Big plugs were never easy. They hurt, and I let out a cry as he pushed it forward.

“Ow, ow, ow...”

I sighed the words, because I wasn't supposed to talk in the dungeon unless spoken to. *Owww. Please. I thought you loved me.* The ache in my head minimized as the ache in my asshole overrode it with taut, acute pain. Butt plugs started out manageable, then widened and widened and... He pushed it into me, ignoring my whining and trembling, and paused with the plug at its widest point.

“If you weren't a bad girl, Chere, I wouldn't have to do this to you.”

It took my breath away, how much it hurt my ass, and this punishment was barely started. I tried to control my breathing and the frantic tensing of my sphincter muscle.

“Do you deserve to be punished, Chere?”

“Y-yes. Yes, sir.” It was hard to get the words out when I was simultaneously holding my breath. “I'm so sorry, sir. I was bad. I-I didn't obey.”

“What were you supposed to do? What was the agreement for you attending this stag party without me?”

“Checking in. Calling you.” Oh, my asshole. *Oww*. “Being home on time...”

He finally shoved the butt plug home, so the most harrowing pain was over. Now my sphincter was clamped around the thinner base, though my ass was still stretched around the thick bulb inside me.

He walked around the dungeon for a few minutes, partly to make me lie there with my ass in the air, gripping helplessly on the butt plug, and partly to open cabinets and drawers and collect spanking implements. My eyes followed him as he tested various prospects on his palm. I wanted to know what was coming, even though I didn't want to know what was coming.

Eventually, a thin whip, a strap, and a rattan cane lay arranged before me. When he put me on this bench, he liked to use implements that swung and dropped. His arm had more range of motion, because I was lower to the ground. He'd explained the physics of it when he revealed the new bench to me, but as his torture subject I knew. I *knew*.

“It's time to put on the clamps,” he said, coming around to watch me, to be sure I put them on firmly and squarely, and didn't try to shirk any of the pain. I pressed open the first clamp, tugging at my nipple with my other hand to prepare it for the contact. A deep breath, and then...

Oh God. Oh help me. Did I mention how hard it is to put biting clover clamps on your own freaking nipples? And any movement, the slightest jerk upwards, tightened these types of clamps with agonizing results. When I could think again, I lifted the other clamp and prepped the other nipple, flicking it

to get it hard. Price watched, unmoved and unmoving. I had to place the second clamp twice to satisfy him.

“Look at me,” he said when I finished.

I did, letting the anguish show in my gaze. He lived for that. He loved it, just as I loved being hurt by him. For us, sex was punishment, and punishment was sex.

He set a timer on his phone. He never clamped my nipples for longer than ten minutes without a break. Ten minutes doesn't sound like a long time, but when your nipples are squeezed between insufferable pieces of metal and your bare, plugged ass is being attacked with horrific implements, it's a longggg time.

He started with the small whip first, to make me jump at each biting contact. I tried not to move, but the fiery flicks came at varying intervals, meant to startle me into a reaction. Each jump made my breasts jerk; each jerk tugged the clamps, evoking a burning pain. *Be still*, I told myself. *Just take it*. But he knew what he was doing. He knew all the ways to make my body react.

By the time he put down the whip, my ass hurt with a couple dozen little throbs, but my nipples hurt worse. It was almost a relief to see him pick up the strap.

But the relief lasted ten seconds at most. That was how long it took me to remember that the heavy, thick strap he'd selected really stung. I grasped at the floor beneath me. There was nothing to cling to—on purpose. He wanted me to flail, to punish my breasts as he punished my ass. I tensed my body, trying to process the strap's solid blows. The impact hurt, but the resulting sting was the worst part as the licks layered over top of one another.

I cried out, my hangover forgotten. This was so much worse than waking up in a strange room with a headache. I kicked my toes against the floor, for all the good it did. Unlike the whip, the strap's blows came one after the other, offering no respite. I finally cried, "Please, please stop!" even though I wasn't supposed to.

The only answer was the hardest blow yet, right across the plug in my ass. It vibrated inside me, reminding me just how much I was at my Master's mercy, because he was my Master in this space, wholly and completely. This space being the dungeon, my asshole, all my body, really.

When he finally put down the strap, I was crying. Not fun crying. Hard, ugly crying. I hung my head as he picked up the cane. How many minutes had passed? Not enough. The clamps were still on me and—

The first cane strike took my breath away. My ass was already sore, already scarlet and throbbing from the strap, and now it had a burning line across the center. I clenched on the plug as another stroke fell. *I can't... I can't...* Why hadn't I called as I was supposed to? Well, because I'd lost my phone. Because I was drinking too much. I should have been more careful.

Owww. Another strike, another line of fire. I couldn't stop myself from straining against the clamps. I couldn't bear it. I twisted sideways, as much as the chains would allow, but it still wasn't enough. He gave one last blow as I clenched my teeth against a howl. I knew it was the last blow because it was the hardest yet, and no one could be expected to survive it. I must have survived though, because I was still alive to feel the lingering line of brutal fire.

Price put down the cane and rubbed my ass. I expected to feel blood gushing beneath his hands, but there was nothing, just sting and ache. There was never blood, somehow, though he left me feeling gutted. How could he touch my ass cheeks right now without burning himself?

After rubbing and pinching my injured cheeks, he parted them and pulled out the plug. It was as uncomfortable coming out as it was going in, although, this time, he didn't make me wait with the widest part stretching me open.

It was his cock now, his gargantuan, rock-hard cock, that would stretch me open. He knelt in front of me and shoved the whole length of it into my mouth, or more accurately, my throat, seizing my hair in his fist when I resisted. I wasn't really resisting; I just wasn't ready. He never wanted me ready.

“Open your mouth wider, you little fuck.” His hands tightened on my hair until I cried out. This created the perfect, open throat for him to shove into. In all this time, I'd never really gotten used to his rough face-fucking. In my old life, when I was an escort, no john had ever been this rough with me. No rich, entitled customer had ever dared to go this far, not until Price. Well, I'd known him as W then, after the hotel where we met the first time.

Think about that. Think about that crazy rendezvous, and not about the fact that you're about to choke.

The alarm went off, giving me a moment's respite as he pulled from my throat and went to turn it off. He reached down and removed the clamps, none too gently. I trembled as the blood rushed back to my overworked nipples, resulting in a new layer of pain.

“Punished enough yet?” he asked, his eyes glinting.

I didn't bother to answer. I wasn't punished enough until *he* thought I was punished enough, and he didn't feel that way yet, because he slapped my face and told me to open my mouth again.

"Suck me, you little slut," he growled. "Get your mouth wet. I'm not enjoying this."

I couldn't seem to get my mouth any wetter, but I did cry harder, which I thought he might like. He slapped me again, perhaps egged on by my tears.

"Suck me better, Chere, or you'll take it in the ass instead. You'll take it hard and rough in the ass, like you deserve."

Oh God. I tried my best, but canonically, my husband was never satisfied. He pulled away a second time, cursing my fellatio skills. I was, admittedly, not on my best game at the moment.

"Keep your damned mouth open," he said, going for the lube. "I want it wide open while I fuck your asshole. If you can't suck my cock properly, you get the fucking mouth-open exercise to remind yourself you need to fucking get better at it."

"Yes, sir," I said, still crying. Still desperate to please him and make this punishment go away.

"No *Yes, sirs* right now," he barked. "Open your mouth like I told you."

I opened my mouth on nothing, grateful I wasn't having a ball-gag, or worse, a cock-gag shoved in there to ensure my compliance. He could see my face in one of the mirrors strategically placed along the dungeon's soundproofed walls, could see how hard I was trying. I, on the other hand, could see how much lube he was slathering onto his cock.

He knelt behind me, his long legs braced on either side of my bent legs. This was restraint. This was being overpowered, conquered, punished for my crimes. He pushed into my ass, his thick cock hurting even after I'd been stretched by the butt plug. He went deep, assisted by the copious lube. I pressed my lips together, gritting my teeth against a shriek.

“Open your damned mouth,” he roared, pulling out and pushing deep again.

I tried. I did my best. It hurt to have my ass fucked when it was so freshly sore, but it wasn't the first time I'd been subjected to punishment like this. I tried to be pliable and open. I'd earned this humbling discipline, and I wanted to please him by taking it like an obedient slave. But *owww*, he was pushing deep and hard, not giving me any chance to feel pleasure in this sexual act. He knew pain turned me on, yeah. He also knew the line where it stopped being fun for me, and he loved to frolic all over that damned line.

I knew he would fuck me for as long as he could, in order to punish my tender asshole the maximum amount, but he was also keyed up from hurting me, which might expedite matters. I could only ride it out, and hope...

After only a few minutes, the excruciating, rough penetration slowed. My hopes for respite were answered as he groaned, flattening his hips to my ass. One thrust, another, and he came inside me, grinding against my tender, scarlet flesh.

I gasped, clenching around his cock. It still hurt, yes, but now it was over. He ran his hands up my back in a *mine, all mine* gesture. It felt so good, but so bad.

I shuddered. I was his, for better or worse.

CHAPTER 4



PRICE

*M*y poor, wrung-out baby. I stroked her back a slow minute to feel her trembles and shudders radiating through her spine into my fingertips. My cock was still jammed in her ass. She knew not to move until I told her to.

I finally pulled out, and took another slow minute to inspect her red, striped ass cheeks. She was coming back into herself, coming down from the pain-induced mania I'd caused. It was nothing she hadn't endured before. She'd survived worse. Our dynamic was tied up in taunting and torment. And love. Of course, love.

I loved her so much. That was my mania, going on six years now.

"I hope you learned a goddamned lesson from all this," I said, guiding her from the bench to her knees.

"Yes, sir." She gave me a look. "Maybe too much of a lesson."

I lifted her to her feet and drew her against me. "Being a smart ass? Really? Already?" My hand crept to her neck and tightened there. "If needed, we can start your punishment over again."

"No, please."

She melted at my force, gazing at me in entreaty. She sometimes liked to poke to get a reaction, to be sure I'd force her back into line. She'd been poking with greater frequency since we'd married, like she was sussing out the parameters. I'd have to do something about that.

Later.

For now, she'd had enough. I could see it in her tired features, her wan expression. I could feel it in the way she sagged against me.

“Go wash yourself off,” I said, steering her back to the bedroom. “No more than twenty minutes in the shower, then go to the guest room.”

She obeyed, walking ahead of me, her gorgeous, marked ass the sole focus of my attention until she disappeared into the bathroom. While she showered, I prepared the chastity belt she typically wore after punishments, affixing a large dildo to the leather base to fill up her pussy, as well as a lubed plug to go in her ass. That done, I went to the kitchen to get her more water and her long-awaited dose of ibuprofen.

She took the medicine gratefully when we reconvened in the guest bedroom but accepted the chastity belt less gratefully. Well, rules were rules. She slept in the guest room after punishments and wore the belt of shame in her naughty little holes. I buckled the belt a little less tightly than usual, my only mercy to her in the course of this punishment.

“Just a nap,” I told her. “You can sleep for three hours, then you need to get up and eat something. Your stomach should be settled by then.”

“I hope so,” she said. “Along with my headache. And my ass-ache.”

“Your ass-ache,” I repeated, chuckling inwardly even as I frowned at her. “You brought that on yourself.”

I kissed her forehead and sent her to bed, then retreated to my home office. I felt energized, having thoroughly enjoyed the punishment session myself. The early morning’s worry and anger had faded, replaced with satisfaction at the way she’d accepted the consequences of her careless behavior. My good girl. My sweet girl. *Her heart breaks in a smile—and she is Lust...*

That was the first poetry I’d shared with her, from E. E. Cumming’s *A Chorus Girl*. It came to my mind sometimes when I least expected it, notwithstanding the baggage it carried. It was part of our history, the glorious times and the bad.

I jotted down a different poem for her, a less fraught one, to give her when she woke up, then turned on my computer. Our time in the dungeon had spawned a new idea, a kinky scene Chere would both love and hate. Mostly hate. Hmm.

It would take some planning to make it happen. Planning, and a little bit of construction. I opened my drafting software and started making notes.

CHAPTER 5



CHERE

I had to shower again when I woke from my nap, because I was sweaty and sore and icky from the chastity belt. I put my thick, curly hair up in a twist and stood under the warm water, hugging my body and brushing my hands over my still-sore ass. I felt a little aroused—how was that possible? A little aroused, but also exhausted.

When I got back to the guest room, my phone was on the bed. I picked it up and found a series of messages from Andrew.

U ok girl?

Was Price really mad?

Ugh, my head hurts. U ok?

I dried off and put on a soft linen dress with some leggings, then typed back to my friend.

Everything's fine. Price was hopping mad but over it now. I smiled to myself and added, I should be able to walk again by your wedding.

He and Craig were kinky too, so he'd get it. I closed my phone and steadied my wobbly knees. I needed food.

Price greeted me in the kitchen with the exact kind of food I needed, bland, healthy stuff. I ate a small salad and a turkey, lettuce, and tomato sandwich with some orange juice. His sandwich had bacon on it, but I didn't get any.

I got a poem instead. I saw the paper beside my plate as soon as I walked in, though I didn't read it until I had some food in me. He never rushed me with his poems. Like a kiss, or a whipping, they were meant to be savored.

If pain was the first hallmark of our relationship, poetry was the second. Pain and poetry, our recipe for success. I'd asked him the night we married if he would still write me poetry, now that he'd put a ring on it. He'd punished me for just for asking. *Of course*, he'd said, making me cry with a hard spanking over his knee. *Of course, I will.*

I opened the folded paper to see what snippet he'd come up with today. Sometimes he wrote the poems, sometimes they were written by others. I scanned the short stanza transcribed in his blocky hand.

Adrift! A little boat adrift!

And night is coming down!

Will no one guide a little boat

Unto the nearest town?

“I suppose I’m the little boat?” I managed a smile, looking up at him. “And you must be the nearest town.”

“I thought it was clever.”

“You’ve been reading Emily Dickinson again.” I wasn’t familiar with this poem, but the exclamation points were a dead giveaway. “It’s a good thing we didn’t live in the mid-1800s. You’d have left me for her in a heartbeat.”

“That would have depended on how much of a freak she was.” He shrugged. “I probably still would have chosen you. How are you feeling, starshine?”

“Better.” I hugged myself, glad my headache had finally abated. “I really have learned a lesson. Avoid gay stag parties in the future.” It had been fun—loads of fun—but not worth the aftermath. I sobered, gazing at my husband. I could see he’d lost sleep by the lines beside his eyes. “I’m sorry I drank too much and fell off the radar. I know you worried.”

“With good reason. Things happen to women in the city. You snarked at me about kidnapping, but abductions and human trafficking are a thing.”

“I was with a group. I was safe.”

“I had no way of knowing that, you little fuck. I pictured you hog-tied in a trunk with duct tape over your mouth. And not in a fun, kinky way.”

Getting kidnapped from a gay bachelor party still seemed unlikely to me, but I’d worried my husband and I shouldn’t have. He was my ruler, my sir, my Master. I touched my neck, feeling the ghost of the collar I’d recently returned to its place on his bedside table.

“I love you,” he said, leaning forward on his elbows. “I just want you to be safe.”

“I know. I messed up. I promise I’ll do better.”

“Come here.”

I pushed away from my place at the kitchen table and went into his arms, curling into his embrace. His cashmere sweater—tan this time—felt soft where I rested my cheek. He held me on his lap for a long time, stroking my hair, occasionally stroking my bruised ass through my snug-fitting leggings. No words were necessary, so he didn’t give me any. His tenderness was enough. A few tears squeezed from my closed eyes, leftover emotion from our heightened session in the dungeon. This was when our scenes ended for me...when he held me and kissed me, with both our hearts beating as one.

“I’ll always love you, little boat,” he murmured. “Even when you drift off course.”

“I know. You’re my compass. My nearest town.” I lifted my head and gazed into sky blue eyes that seared me. Love burned sometimes like the hottest fire.

“You’re going to behave at Andrew’s wedding next week,” he said. It wasn’t a question. He’d be there with me, anyway, to ward off any lost phones or alcoholic excess.

“Yes, sir,” I promised. “I will absolutely behave.”

I shifted on his lap. It always got to me when he put on his stern-daddy face. His hands roved over my lap, passing lightly between my legs.

“You’re wound up, aren’t you?” he said in a softer voice. “You’re still buzzing.”

I buried my face against his neck, embarrassed. Yes, I was buzzing. Punishments hurt, but I liked being hurt. Price never offered any kind of satisfaction when I was being disciplined. But sometimes...after...

“You need a good fucking, don’t you?” He cupped my chin, stroking fingers across my cheekbone. “I bet you’d like me to shove my cock into your tight little pussy, your buzzy little pussy. I bet you’d like to come.”

“Yes, sir. I would like that.” A whimper escaped me. I pressed my lips to the spot just beneath his chin, breathing in the smell of him, exploring the hint of stubble.

He moved then, to nudge me off his lap and turn me toward the table. “Bend over,” he ordered.

I gripped the table’s edge as he yanked down my leggings, leaving them pooled around my ankles. *Ohhhh*. He shoved a finger into my pussy from behind, then another. I was embarrassingly wet. It was the warmth of him, the closeness, and now this brusque inspection, this force.

“Please, sir...” I twitched my hips as a fingertip strayed over my clit. “Oh, pleeease.”

“Calm down. Let me fuck around with you first.” He spanked my sore ass to get me dancing, though the leggings around my ankles provided convenient bondage. He flicked one of the cane tracks, making me jump. “I love to fuck with you, you little freak.”

I whimpered again at the sound of his jeans button popping open, the swish of his sweater going over his head and hitting the floor. I couldn’t help myself, I turned to look at him. Tall, golden, muscular, a Greek god with pale blue eyes and paler

blond hair. My gaze fell to his cock, thick and long and scary-hard at this moment.

He grabbed a fistful of my hair and turned me back around. I braced my feet on the floor as he pushed my dress up farther and yanked at my bra until he freed my tits. Rough, grasping hands posed me, pinched me, restrained me. I cried out as he twisted first one nipple, then the other. If he thought I was wet before...

I straightened, arching up toward him, seeking the pressure of him against my back. He shoved me down with a stream of expletives and snaked a hand up to my neck. I felt the fingers caress, then tighten.

“Oh. No. Please, I want...”

I didn't know what I wanted or didn't want. It didn't matter anyway, because when my husband wanted to choke me out for his sadistic pleasure, he did it. His grip tightened another degree. I opened my hands against the table as he pinned me and stole my breath. The world faded to the sound of his whispers against my ear.

When I came to, he was balls deep in my pussy. My opened hands clenched into a fist at the delectable sensation of him pushing in, pulling out. I was so full of him. A moan erupted from my throat as he tugged at my hair.

Yes, I'm awake again. Please let me stay awake.

He'd let go of my neck, thank God, to grab my hips. I'd been trying to grind my clit against the edge of the table, but he wasn't having it.

“No,” he growled. “You need to wait.”

I could have come right then. I wanted to come right then. I made a whining sound, halfway between a complaint and a

please. He pulled out of me, and my whine ratcheted up in volume.

“Listen to you,” he said, taunting me. “You want it? If you want it so bad, come and get it.”

He stood behind me, his thick cock jutting out, pointed at my pussy but not in it. I pushed back against him, but he only let me have the tip.

“Please, no,” I begged. “Please just fuck me.”

“Come and get it, baby.”

He’d long since stripped away ninety-nine percent of my pride and dignity when it came to sex. The remaining one percent blushed as I was forced to fuck myself on his cock, pushing my hips back, seeking the invasion I needed to reach orgasm. If he wasn’t inside me, I wasn’t going to come. Such was the power of sexual training.

“That’s my girl,” he said, watching me with a glimmer in his gaze. “Shove your slutty wet pussy against me, you little bitch. You’d fuck yourself on anything right now. A wine bottle. A fucking cucumber.”

Yeah, I would have fucked a cucumber at this point, but I preferred fucking him. I needed to come so bad, and this rude objectification was only making me hornier. He finally took pity on me and pinned me back down on the table, driving into me with a massive thrust. It was enough to make me come, almost. My pussy squeezed around him. I was making those noises he pulled out of me, the noises I never made any other time in normal, civilized life.

“Come on then,” he said. He reached beneath me and pinched both my nipples in a brutal grip.

I cried out and slammed my hips back against his driving cock. *Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.* A harder pinch, and the wave of pleasure within me finally crested and broke, drowning me with blessed release. My pussy pulsed around his cock as he rode me to his own completion, each of his violent thrusts prolonging my orgasm's aftermath.

When he came to rest, my hands were still in fists. They opened now, resting flat on the table. I lay motionless, enjoying the lingering warmth in my pussy as he made a slow foray in and out, stretching me with his girth. No thoughts, just lust.

“Stay right there,” he said when he finally pulled away. “Don’t you move, girly. In fifteen minutes, we’re going again.”

CHAPTER 6



CHERE

Three Months Later

I TURNED from my online meeting to look out the window of my new office space. Thunder rumbled down Park Avenue as people scurried below with umbrellas. Raindrops smacked against the glass and pooled into abstract rivulets that shimmered downward out of view. Starshine Originals, Inc. was still located in Price's building, just higher up, in a larger unit with more room for the assistants and artists I'd recently hired. Even on a stormy day, the view was gorgeous...and distracting.

"I prefer the last three designs," said Vinod, reclaiming my attention. "They are your designs, no?"

"The fifth one is Courtney's," I told him. "She's new. Really good."

Engagement ring season was just around the corner. We had an entire range of spare, elegant designs ready to go out to jewelry shops, private clients, and foreign markets. Vinod was my Asian contact, a helper, boss, and mentor in one. We planned now for the following year's season, and the season after that.

“What about necklaces?” Vinod asked, looking away to leaf through some sketches. “The trend here is multiple gems.”

“Multicolored?”

He made a face. “Sometimes. I don’t like multicolor though. I love to see a cluster of rubies or emeralds, perhaps interspersed with diamonds.”

“We can design some of both. We’ll find a way to make it classy and interesting.”

“You always do.”

I didn’t tell Vinod about the new pendants I was working on, slim, metal cylinders that doubled as discreet vibrators. Now *they* were classy and interesting.

My old friend spoke in Hindi to an assistant who stopped by his desk, then turned back to me. “Happy Valentine’s Day, by the way. How will you and Mr. Eriksen celebrate?”

I tried not to blush. Our Valentine’s celebrations weren’t the type to be publicly shared. “We’re meeting for lunch in a little bit,” I said. “See my pretty dress?” I stood in front of my webcam to show off the deep red floral frock I’d worn to work that morning.

“Lunch!” He pretended outrage. “That’s not romantic.”

“It can be. We’re saving the big, fancy dinner for the weekend.”

“Ah, I see. Well, I hope you enjoy yourselves.”

I turned to my assistant and whispered, “Vinod wants us to go to Los Angeles next month to meet with some Japanese buyers.” She nodded, adding it to the meeting’s notes. I turned back to his smiling visage. “Do you celebrate Valentine’s in India?”

He spread his wizened hands. “Some do. Some don’t. Some feel it is not, culturally, an Indian holiday, and say we ought to hug cows instead.”

“Aww. Hugging cows sounds fun.”

“Chocolate and flowers sound fun, too. Perhaps I’ll hug a cow and give them flowers. Chocolate is not appropriate for cows, you know.”

“Dogs, either,” I said, nodding. “Hey, hug a whole herd of cows for me, would you, Vinod? We don’t have enough of them here in the city.”

He pulled a face. “You don’t have any cows. I know. I spend too much time in that wretched place you live. Ok. We talk again soon, yes?”

“Yes! *Phir milenge*, friend.”

He gave a delighted cluck at my awkward Hindi and disappeared from my screen. I checked the time and pushed back from my worktable.

“Lunch time?” My assistant, Monica, gave me a cheeky grin. We’d become close over the last few months, and she knew how fluttery I got—still—over my new husband.

“*Valentine’s* lunch time,” I corrected her with my own grin.

Price and I normally worked through lunch, ordering in and eating with our associates, but today he’d invited me to steal away for a romantic sandwich and beer at our favorite hole-in-the-wall pub near Times Square. I got a mirror out of my bag to touch up my lipstick, fluffed my deep brown curls, then put on the red Gianvito Rossi heels I’d kicked off under my desk soon after I’d arrived that morning.

“I’ll be back in an hour—or two,” I said, pulling on a matching wool coat.

“Take as long as you need, boss.” Monica gave me a thumbs up. “I’ve got everything here.”

I headed to the door with the familiar surge of excitement that overtook me whenever I was about to see Price.

On my way down, I texted from the elevator.

Car’s waiting out front, he texted back. I’ll be down in a sec.

I eyed the rain outside as I crossed the lobby. Fortunately, a uniformed valet was waiting by the door with an umbrella. “Mrs. Rouzier-Eriksen?” the blond man asked, slaughtering my last name’s pronunciation.

“Yes.”

“Right this way.”

He led me to the first in the line of black SUVs awaiting their clients outside the building. Having a car service was the best luxury ever in this traffic-clogged city, especially on a messy day. But the man behind the wheel wasn’t the tough, tattooed driver I was used to.

“Where’s Cliff?” I asked.

“Took the rest of the day off.”

“Oh, for Valentine’s, I guess.” I wondered if he’d made romantic plans with someone. I couldn’t picture it. “Mr. Eriksen will be down in just a minute.”

I turned as the valet climbed into the backseat beside me, folding his umbrella. The dark-haired driver put the car in gear.

“Oh. We’re waiting for one more. Mr. Eriksen is—”

The car accelerated. The locks clicked shut. It took a second for me to realize what was happening, that this was fucked up and that I should try to get out of the car, but by then, it was too late. The blond valet, who definitely wasn’t a valet, shoved me onto the floor, his long bangs obscuring his eyes. I managed one shrill scream before a piece of duct tape was pressed over my mouth.

This wasn’t our car. This wasn’t the right driver. I kicked and flailed against the arms holding me down. My mind raced as my body went into survival mode. I surged past his grabbing hands, trying to snatch the door handle, but I couldn’t reach it. I heard the engine growl as the car picked up speed.

“No,” I tried to say behind the tape. “No, no, no.” I needed to bargain, to yell, to complain, but I couldn’t talk. I fought my way back up to the seat when the car stopped at an intersection. There were people right there, wrapped in raincoats or holding umbrellas, but no one could see me through the black-tinted privacy windows. I managed to pound once before I was wrestled back to the floorboards. I felt breathless with terror, and the tape made things worse.

The driver barked something in a foreign language to the man on top of me.

He yelled back at him, then glared down at me, trying to catch my flailing arms. “Stop it. Be still,” he said in English. He had intense hazel eyes and some kind of Slavic-sounding accent.

His face wasn't hidden. He was letting me see him, memorize every twisted feature of his face. Fortyish, suntanned, rough around the eyes. The driver had tight brown curls and a shaggy goatee. If they let me see them like this, that meant they were going to kill me eventually, right? I'd watched too many crime shows. I knew how this ended.

I stopped struggling for a moment to gather my thoughts, and my faltering breath. The umbrella man scowled down at me, and I scowled back. I wasn't going to make this easy, not any of it. He wasn't going to kidnap me, rape me, or kill me without a fucking fight...

But damn it, I couldn't breathe, and I couldn't stop shaking. *Kidnapping, in this day and age?* I'd said that to Price, pure smart ass, and now I'd been fucking kidnapped off the fucking street in front of the grand granite skyscraper where I ran my multi-million-dollar international jewelry business.

The driver spoke to the man on top of me again. Russian? Greek? Portuguese? I didn't have a clue. I wished I'd studied languages the way Price had. The man answered back in a gruff voice as he pressed my face into the floor. I fought, but he was too heavy. I felt metal cuffs ratcheted onto my wrists, cold and uncomfortably tight. I squirmed and shook my head as some kind of rough cloth was bound tightly over my eyes.

This couldn't be happening. This *couldn't* be happening. I felt the car pick up speed again—heading out of the city on a freeway? I wondered if Price had come down from his office yet, and realized I wasn't there, waiting for him in the car... He would have texted up to me, maybe chatted with Cliff while they waited for me to reply. Cliff! Had he seen me get in the wrong car? Or had I been hidden too well behind the big

umbrella? Had he noticed me, or was his face buried in his phone?

Even if someone in front of the building had heard my one desperate scream and called for help, the police would need time to come, get organized, set off after me. How many black SUVs with tinted windows were driving around the greater NYC area at any given moment?

Oh God, no one was in pursuit, no one was coming to rescue me, and who knew where these assholes were taking me?

The driver said a few more sharp words to the man on top of me. I was pulled up and pushed back against the seat. I turned and tried to feel for the door handle, but he stopped me and buckled me in as I yanked at the cuffs behind my back.

I felt dizzy, carsick, because I couldn't see. We were going fast, surely out of the city by now, probably passing by the cemeteries and warehouses that surrounded it. On a bright, sunny day, maybe one of the cars around us could have seen me in there with tape over my mouth and tears streaming from under my blindfold, but I could hear the storm and rain had intensified. In the brittle silence, the windshield wipers and my sniffing were the only sound.

“Sit still,” said the man in English. “We’re going to see someone. Stop crying, girl. Everything will be okay.”

I believed that like I believed in leprechauns sliding down rainbows, but for the moment, I had to preserve my strength. I heard him rooting through my bag, holding it on the seat beside me. Was he taking my money? My phone? Maybe this was only a robbery. They could take what they wanted, as long as they let me go.

I made a pleading sound, helpless and blind. I felt a tissue wipe my face and the snot that was dribbling out of my nose. A moment later, I heard the window roll down on his side and the crack of something hitting the pavement. I was ninety-nine percent sure it was my phone.

Oh, Jesus. I had to calm down. If I got congested from crying, breathing would become too difficult. Or...maybe I should pretend I couldn't breathe, in hopes they took off the tape. Then I could scream loud enough to get someone's attention.

From a car traveling down a freeway? Really, Chere? Even if I managed a few good screams, they'd just slap on more tape again.

No, better to be quiet and still, and wait, and be ready for any opportunity to escape. I sat back as well as I could with my wrists cuffed behind me, trying to relieve the pressure on my arms. Now and again the men exchanged a few foreign words, but for a half-hour, an hour, we traveled in silence. Just road noise, the occasional blinker as the driver changed lanes.

What's going on? Where are you taking me? It was infuriating that I couldn't speak when I had more questions than I'd ever had in my life.

But do you want to know the answers to those questions?

A few more tears squeezed out, but I forced myself to stop. By now, Price would know something was wrong. They'd find my phone on the side of the road. It would give them some clue to which way we'd traveled. They hadn't drugged me—yet—which was a good thing. More chance of escape...

But how could I escape with my hands bound, wearing a blindfold?

My racing thoughts were interrupted by some gruff words. “We’re almost there.”

Where? I began to struggle again, since I couldn’t speak, but he said “Stop it” in a sharp tone and I obeyed.

The car slowed and seemed to leave the freeway. It stopped. Turned. Drove again. I tried to remember each turn, each stop, in case I was able to get away, so I could find my way back to cars and people and the freeway, because who knew where the hell I was? But I was too tired to really remember. Adrenaline and fear had worn me down. If I had any sense of direction, I might have at least known whether we were north of the city, or south, east or west, but I realized I knew nothing.

The car slowed further, crept down a road that curved often. I couldn’t tell if we were still on pavement or on some dirt road. I imagined them taking me out into the deep, rainy woods to shoot me. I pictured myself falling down in the mud with a bullet in my brain. No, no, no, this had to be a kidnapping. I had money. Price had money. They needed me alive to get that money. Didn’t they?

I thought again of my plan to pretend I couldn’t breathe, to at least get the tape off my mouth, but I heard a garage door going up and figured it would be useless to scream now. We drove in, stopped. The garage door came down again. My hearing was sharp, too sharp, without my sight. I could hear the man beside me breathing, and the driver scratching his head, or was it his scraggly goatee?

They exchanged more words I couldn’t understand. I was unbuckled and dragged from the car with a guy on each side.

“Don’t bother to struggle,” said the driver, sounding bemused. “You won’t get out of here.”

I hate you. I wished I could say it to them. *I hate you, I hate you.*

I thought of trying to kick them—my heels were sharp—or trying to pull away, but I'd probably just run straight into a wall or something. I hated this feeling of helplessness and desperation. I walked over carpet, then onto concrete...no, it was tile. A door closed, locked. The men started to talk again; their voices echoed, making me think of a cell.

While one of them held me, the other started to unbutton my dress. I did fight then. I strained my arms back and kicked. My shoes came off and I almost twisted my ankle, but I accomplished nothing aside from a few grunts on their part.

They took off the cuffs to yank my dress over my head, each of them grasping a wrist before I could rake my nails over them. I was wearing the skimpiest pink lace bra and panties underneath, dressed up for Price and our date. I needed to cover myself, to protect myself, but I couldn't. I was pushed back onto a bed. *No, no, don't...*

As I fought, my arms were pulled over my head and out, and fastened into unforgiving cuffs. They were Velcro straps, or plastic, some material that didn't give at all. I could still kick, and I did, but they backed away. One of them said something that sounded mocking, and the other one laughed, then they walked away from me, chatting in their guttural language. From a distance, I heard a door open, then close and lock.

I kicked the bed, pulling at the cuffs until my arms hurt, then I ran out of breath and lay still. I'd thought they were going to rape me. They hadn't, thank God. I still wore my bra and panties, though in my dark, mute prison, I felt naked. I

went from furious kicking to dead stillness, my ears straining to hear any sound at all.

Nothing.

No cars outside, no voices. No music, no air, no water through pipes. Was I in a prison? A basement? It was cool, but not cold. There was definitely an echo, I'd heard it when they were talking. Why was I here? Why was I bound to a bed in this silent cell?

I thought again of Price's exasperated warnings about abduction and sex trafficking the night I'd stayed out at Andrew's party. I'd never been careful enough, never had a sense of self-preservation, even when I'd worked as a fucking escort. The irony, that I'd left that risky life behind and now, *now* I'd been thrown into a car and taken away. Was Price getting a ransom note now? Or was I only here to be raped and murdered by those two guys, or some other shadowy foreign figure or figures?

Maybe both?

I racked my brain for who might be behind this. I had a lot of wealthy customers in my jewelry business, from all over the world. I remembered one politician, from Qatar, who was rumored to keep a modern-day harem. Was this sex trafficking? Was I bound for a harem? But my abductors' accent sounded Slavic.

Russian mafia? Did one of my customers have mafia ties?

Was it someone from my old escort days? I'd had customers who overstepped, Price being the worst, but there had been others who'd developed an inappropriate fascination with me. Had someone seen me in my new role as a jewelry

designer to the rich and famous? Recognized me, and decided to “reconnect” in this incredibly illegal fashion?

I heard the door unlock, the small sound seeming to resound in the silence. A quiet rasp as hinges swung open. Footsteps...one person’s footsteps...made their way across the space to the bed where I lay, mostly naked and definitely exposed. Whoever it was stood by the bed, not speaking. Staring at me? Making godawful plans?

I grimaced behind the tape, glared behind the blindfold, twisted and struggled, but then I stopped. If this was the person who’d had me kidnapped, then he—it was certainly a he—would enjoy watching me struggle. Fuck him.

I lay still, my chest rising and falling. *Fuck you, asshole. I wore this fancy pink lace bra and matching panties for Price, not you.*

As if he’d heard my thoughts, I felt the bed give, felt his hands at my waist, roughly tearing off the panties. I pressed my legs together, rebellion giving way to terror. My bra unsnapped in the front, but he mostly tore it open, not bothering with the plastic snap. My breasts popped free, exposed to my rapist’s gaze.

Because that’s what he was. I knew it was coming. I started to whimper through the tape, to tremble and cry, wishing I could be braver, but in the end, I’d been reduced to a blind, cornered animal begging a looming predator not to hurt it.

A rough hand grasped my hair, twisting it, pulling it until there was nothing but pain. My soft whimpers exploded in a cry as I tugged helplessly at the wrist cuffs. Through my panicked mewling, I heard a low sound, a grunt or growl. A hand at my cheek, then down to my neck, pressing...

And I knew that sound.

I knew the feel of that hand at my neck like I knew my face in the mirror.

Price.

You asshole. You cruel, sadistic asshole!

I cried harder because I was so fucking angry, so fucking furious. I whipped my head from side to side, trying to escape his touch. *How dare you. You monster. I thought I was about to get raped, murdered. You're having a blast, torturing your plaything...*

I tried to scream behind the tape, to let him know how much I absolutely hated him. He chuckled, confirming it was him, because that sadistic chuckle was burned in my memory too.

Let my hands go, I thought. Watch what I do to you.

But he wasn't going to let my hands go, not Price. Not for a long time. He pinched my nipples instead, tugging them until the pain made me stop whining and start gasping. I sucked air through my nose as he slapped my breasts, then my pussy, forcing my legs apart for his assault.

"Look at you," he said, low and rough. "Remember the night of Andrew's bachelor party? You didn't believe it could happen, but look at you now."

He chuckled again, but I didn't find it funny. I tried in vain to kick him. I might have come close.

"Those idiots tied you down the wrong way." His voice echoed threateningly in the still room. "I wanted you with your ass up, but we'll make do."

My kicking ankles were corralled into the crook of his arm and lifted in the air, over my head. I heard the whisper-whir of an implement being swung just before it impacted my exposed ass. I shrieked behind the tape as another blow fell. I kicked hard, trying to escape his grasp, but he was stronger. It was so painful to be spanked this way, with my legs raised. The skin of your ass was stretched tight that little bit, to make the sting worse.

He smacked me again, then again. It was a thick, whippy strap, from the horrendous feel of it. I couldn't see, but the sound and sensation were too familiar. My muffled shrieks turned to pleading moans.

“Let's talk about why,” he said, as I struggled against him. “Number one...”

Whack!

“You mocked me when I suggested you needed to care more about your personal safety. Kidnapping? *‘Oh no, that’ll never happen to me.’*”

Whack!

“But it can happen, just like this. And believe me, it could be way, way worse.”

I didn't know how it could be worse than what I was enduring right now. He was strapping my ass without mercy, hard strokes that felt like fire, and were probably raising welts. My limbs trembled; my arms strained at my bonds.

“Let's talk about basic respect, too,” he went on as I flailed against his grip.

Whack!

“The longer we’re married, the more liberties you’ve been trying to take. A little sassiness here...”

Whack!

“A little rule-breaking there...”

Whack!

“Who’s the Master in this relationship?”

Whack!

My pleas rose in volume as I tried to cross my legs.

“That’s right. It’s me. And who’s my devoted slave girl, who wears my collar and is supposed to obey me and respect me in all things?”

I was crying so hard, I had to be soaking the blindfold. It was me. *I* was his devoted slave girl, and what he said was true. Since we’d been married, I’d been pushing boundaries little by little, mainly just to figure out where they were.

Now I knew where they were.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

I was wailing so hard behind the tape, I thought his goons could probably hear it, even if they were headed back to the city by now. My wails said *I’m sorry*, and *Please! Please stop!*

I heard the strap dropped on the floor, felt him rise off the bed. I let my legs drop, gingerly. My ass burned like an inferno, so tender and wrecked that it hurt to brush it against the sheets. I curled up instead, listening to a drawer slide. Pants or jeans unbuttoned, a zipper pulled down.

He returned and grabbed my legs again, extending them upwards. The bed dipped with his weight, as rough fingers parted my ass cheeks and pushed lube into my hole.

“It would have been easier if they’d tied you face down, but I can fuck you this way, too.” He added another finger, pushing the lube deep. “I can fuck you any way and any time I want, can’t I?”

He wedged his knees beneath me as he lifted and spread me, and grasped my thighs in a commanding grip. He began pushing his cock into my clenching asshole, the lube easing his way even as my muscles resisted. He was so big, and with my body bent, my legs up in the air...

“Ow. Please! *Owww.*”

Behind the tape, my begging was nothing but a disembodied howl. He thrust deeper, taking up a punishing rhythm. The pain of his initial invasion gave way to the dull ache of being fucked hard in the ass while I was absolutely helpless to resist or squirm away.

“Do you remember now who’s in charge of you?”

I gave a muffled sob and nodded, picturing his face, although I couldn’t see it. It would be stern and composed as he pushed inside me, taking me, disciplining me. My ass was hot and sore and unbearably full.

Still, I was dripping wet from this treatment, this whole kidnapping roleplay. I knew I was wet enough for him to notice as he played with my legs, pressing them apart. His hips bucked against my ass cheeks, hurting the welts he’d left there.

I hate you. I hate you for doing this. I’m not getting turned on.

But I was. He started to toy with my breasts, which meant hurting them and scratching my nipples between pinches.

“You’re a bad girl,” he crooned, pushing into me. “Bad girls get treated this way. Bad girls get their asses fucked hard and rough, because they deserve it.”

I shook my head, but I agreed with it, every word he said. Bad girls fell in love with bad boys who did bad, bad things, like stage an actual felony crime and have foreign strangers tie them to a bed. Then they spanked them with excruciating thoroughness and fucked their asses while their legs flailed helplessly in the air.

“This is going to teach you,” he said, his words half a groan. “This is going to teach you a lesson.” He held one of my legs and leaned with the other hand to give me a stinging slap to the cheek. My pussy clenched. He knew just how I liked it.

I knew how he liked it, too. His hand dropped to my neck, fingers over my pulse, squeezing, squeezing. I blacked out and came back and his hand was still there, massaging just above my windpipe. His cock was still buried in my anal channel, impaling me. I shook my head. *Please. I can't breathe. Please. I love you.*

It was like I could feel each muscle in his fingers, each vein in his cock. He slid in deep, bucking against me, hurting me, owning me. The desire in me exploded, my juicy pussy pulsing in waves of ecstasy. I didn't think anyone in the world came like this, the way he made me come. No one else could understand that line where pain and chaos became unadulterated joy. My ass contracted, squeezing around the shaft inside it.

“You’re coming? You little—” He sounded both exasperated and proud, and let go of my neck to press rough fingers against my clit as I bucked through an orgasm that

seemed to last a minute and a half. “You nasty little slut. You dirty whore.”

His hoarse words triggered another wave of orgasm, and I cried out behind the tape. This time he came too, pushing deep inside me, abandoning my clit and lifting me so he could drive all the way into my ass. I welcomed the brutal invasion. I was so far gone I basked in it and nearly begged for more. But then I stopped myself, because I couldn't take more, and I couldn't beg anyway with tape over my fucking mouth.

Good God, I hated him so much for what he'd done to me. Hated and loved him, and loved the feel of him inside me. I shuddered through post-orgasmic pulses as my legs trembled in his grip.

He had no words for me now, no poetry to whisper in my ear, just halting breaths as both of us gasped in the aftermath of...whatever had just happened. Whatever it was, it had been wrong and fucked up. He'd had people kidnap me, terrify me, tie me up and blindfold and gag me. All of this was wrong and criminal and...

My pussy twitched, still wet and overwrought. I moaned softly as he started to withdraw from my ass. He pinched my nipples at the same time, hurting them until I tried to squirm away.

I felt him shift beside me as I lay there, empty and fucked out.

“Do you want me to let you go?” he asked in a soft voice.

I whined behind the tape, thrashing and kicking, protesting my treatment. He laughed and shoved his fingers into my pussy, pistoning them in and out of that soaking wet place. He withdrew and trailed his wet fingers across my forehead and

down my cheek, taunting me with my own perversity. “When I’m ready, little slave girl, I will.”

CHAPTER 7



PRICE

I gazed down at Chere as I fingerfucked her for another minute, enjoying the last of the black cotton blindfold and the silver tape across her lips. Her hair was a mess, her cheeks criss-crossed with tear trails, but I thought she'd never looked so beautiful.

I wished I could hold this moment forever, but I had to take that tape off her mouth so she could breathe better. I needed to take off her blindfold so I could gaze into her furious, sparking eyes. I could see the fury building back, now that her orgasm had gone and I'd withdrawn from her much-abused ass.

"Now, there. Be a good girl," I said, stroking her pussy juices onto her cheeks again. "No freaking out when I let you go. Remember what I said, what this was all about."

She held herself still, but I could see her chest rise and fall, and that's where I could read the fury. I supposed she had a right to be angry with me. This was almost as bad as the time I'd pretended to rape her when she was working as my escort. Well, maybe I'd really raped her that time. We'd never really come to a consensus on that.

Maybe this was actually worse.

“I’m going to take the blindfold off first,” I said, keeping my voice calm and level. “Then the tape.”

I turned her head to untie the clumsy knot Timu had made. Well, he and Nojus weren’t professional kidnappers. They’d done their best. I lifted the fabric away from her face, then drew in a breath as her amber-brown eyes fixed on mine.

Yes, still very angry. Also vulnerable and reprovng and tired and anxious and a thousand other things. I stroked her hair and held her tormented gaze.

Then I started to whisper kisses over her face, her cheeks, her forehead. Those eyes. I couldn’t help it. There was so much emotion in her, emotion I loved beyond bearing. Her gaze was a poem, a masterpiece, one I’d never be able to write into words, although I wished I could.

“You’re mine,” I reminded her. “Just remember...”

But how could she forget. She was still bound, still naked on my bed. Still mute by my choice. She finally looked past me, around the room, her eyes widening.

Yes, take in these new surroundings, starshine. If I get my way, we’ll be spending lots of time here.

I had, let’s say, *refurbished* a property I’d owned for some time. It was a stately, sprawling mansion in the New York suburbs, in north Westchester County, with a big lawn, bordered by wide, residential streets. Most of the place looked normal, inside and out, except for this room, where I’d knocked out walls and ceilings to make a giant echoing cell with a huge cage in the middle. We were in that cage. The bed was in the cage. Shelves and racks and evil things were in that cage. It was a sturdy, cavernous cage I’d designed and had constructed at ridiculous expense over the past three months,

by contractors who'd been paid well enough not to question me about it. I hoped she could feel at home in this cage, eventually.

See, we had a fraught history with cages. After a particularly vicious episode, I'd promised—again, with some ambiguity—never to stick her in a cage again. But this was a big, airy cage with nice wide bars, not the kennel-sized cage we used to have in our dungeon.

I watched her study the solidity of it, from the bars sunk into the stone-tiled floor to the ones that crossed over our heads, about fourteen feet above us. The bars were polished brass, not cheap aluminum, to better match the floor.

While she looked around, I pulled at the easy-release tape, freeing the corners of her mouth, then peeling the rest away.

“I hate you.” That was the first thing she said, which I expected.

“Be nice.”

“I hate you, really. Truly. You are such a fucked-up person, and I hate that I'm married to you.”

“Poor baby.”

She tugged at the cuffs. “Let go of my hands.”

“If you're going to order me around like you're the one in charge, we can start over with the training. That's what this whole place is for.”

She burst into tears. I kissed her newly freed lips, gently. I didn't think she really hated me, she was just upset with me. Poor, poor baby.

“I don't *like* you,” she said through tears.

That was softer than hate. She was coming around.

“I don’t like this.” She turned her face away as tears coursed down her cheeks. “You said no more cages.”

“You’ll get used to it. This cage is better than the old one.”

“In what way?” she said, turning back to me.

“It gives both of us more room to stretch out.” I ran my fingers over her breasts, her curving waist, her trembling thighs. She moved her legs away and tried, pitifully, to wipe her tears on the bed. I reached to brush them away with my fingers.

She shrank from me, frowning. “I want to be comforted, but not by you.”

I raised a brow. “Should I call the guys back, then?”

“No,” she said at once. “No, please.” A hint of manners returning. “Who were they? They were rough with me. They spoke Russian or something. I was afraid they were in the mafia.”

“They were only as rough as they had to be to subdue you, per my instructions. And they’re Lithuanian. I’m working with them on a build in Brooklyn.”

“And you just, what, asked them to kidnap me? You’re just including them in our kink?”

“From what I understand, they’re both profoundly kinky people. They didn’t mind.” I pulled her back toward me, holding her with my gaze. “Did they touch you in any way you found uncomfortable?”

“One of them shoved me down in the car.” Her lower lip trembled. “But I guess he was pretty careful with me, for a kidnapper. I was so scared, or I would have realized...” She

gave me a sideways, scathing glance. “I should have realized you were behind it.”

I reached to undo the plastic straps holding her to the bed. “To be fair, this is the first seriously terrible and mostly illegal thing I’ve done to you since we’ve been married.”

“*Mostly illegal?*”

Her half-hearted kick missed me as I released her other wrist. I pinned her back on the bed when she launched herself up at me.

“Don’t be a bad girl,” I warned as she struggled beneath me. “You have nowhere to run, anyway. This cage is real. It locks, and only I have the key.”

“And your henchmen,” she said. “They brought me in here.”

“They left the door open for me.”

She was calmer, perhaps, but no less furious. Well, we had plenty of time for her anger to wear off. It was easy enough to subdue her and hold her down for a kiss. I wrapped my fingers around her throat, squeezing enough to make her comply.

“No biting,” I warned. “Bad girl.”

It was too soon for more punishment, more scening, though when we were ready, this cage was packed to the hilt with every kind of implement. We had plenty of time for more sex and pain. More love. More everything. First anniversary, second, third, tenth, twentieth. I’d never get tired of tormenting her.

“*And she is Lust,*” I quoted E. E. Cummings with my fingers pressed against the delicate skin of her neck. “*Little painted poem of god.*” In Cummings’ work, he’d capitalized

the word “Lust,” as if he’d known the outsized arousal Chere would someday stir in me.

I could feel her relent in small degrees, loosening for my kisses, my stroking touch. I lowered my body against hers, holding her close. She pressed her head into my shoulder.

“Do you still love me?” I asked. “After all this?”

A moment passed before she answered.

“I’ll love you more if you never kidnap me again. Sir,” she added, looking sideways to take in the cage around us.

“No promises.” I drew her into another lingering kiss, then eased away. “Except that I’ll always love you, and I’ll always take care of you.”

Even though she could escape me now, she didn’t try. Our gazes locked, and that energy, our energy, flowed between us.

“I like the cage,” she finally admitted with a tired smile. “But it’s overkill; you don’t need it.”

I’m yours, she meant. She didn’t have to say it.

We both knew.



A Final Note From Annabel:

I must admit, I never expected to revisit Chere and Price’s world. I completed their trilogy with a poignant scene at the end of *Trust Me*, showing their strong and loving marriage some years in the future. But then I thought...wouldn’t it be

interesting to imagine a newlywed Chere and Price? What of those early days and months? Everyone says the first year of marriage is the hardest. How would Chere and Price keep their hardcore kink alive within the settled boundaries of married life? How would they negotiate their “ever after” relationship after all the ups and downs that got them there?

So, this novella was born...and it was really fun to write. I wanted to show my Rough Love fans that, while things might not always be easy for our voraciously kinky couple, their love and lust for one another was more than enough to propel them through those tough early months. Hopefully you enjoyed this fourth installment in their salacious saga. And if you haven't read the first three novels, you should! They're super fucked up, but in the best way.

I'll close with thanks for my super stalker and invaluable reader Wendy B., and thanks also to Amani and Brittany for dirty talk that turned into great ideas.

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ABOUT ANNABEL JOSEPH

About the Author

Annabel Joseph is a NYT and USA Today Bestselling BDSM romance author. She writes mainly contemporary romance, although she has been known to dabble in the medieval and Regency eras. She is known for writing emotionally intense BDSM storylines, and strives to create characters that seem real—even flawed—so readers are better able to relate to them. Annabel also writes non-BDSM romance under the pen name Molly Joseph.

You can find Annabel on Facebook (facebook.com/annabeljosephnovels), TikTok (@annabeljosephnovels), or [sign up for her mailing list at annabeljoseph.com](https://annabeljoseph.com).

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Mercy

Lucy Merritt has always defined herself by her body, whether dancing in a small avant-garde company or posing for art. But she has always felt as if something is wrong with her, as if something is missing. She has never been in love.

Suddenly, in the darkness of the theater wings, a strangely affecting man enters her life. Matthew Norris, rich, handsome patron of the dance company, has decided that he wants Lucy for his own. He makes her an offer that both frightens and compels her, and they soon begin an affair characterized by only two requirements, beauty and truth.

But how truthful are Matthew and Lucy? How much of Matthew's strenuous brand of love can Lucy endure? And how long can their rigid Dom/sub relationship stay frozen in time, never growing, never moving forward?

Club Mephisto

Molly is a 24/7 slave dedicated to serving her Master. When business calls him away on a weeklong trip, he arranges to leave her in the care of Mephisto, the owner of a thriving local BDSM club. Molly is both excited and scared to be given over to Master Mephisto. His power and mysterious intensity have long compelled her from afar.

She finds herself immersed in a world of strict commands, pervasive sex, and creative torments. Over the course of a week, Mephisto strips away privileges Molly took for granted, and forces her to understand and acknowledge the depths to which she can be made to submit. But a surprising conversation the last day threatens Molly's worldview, as does the strange closeness that develops between them. As the time of Master's return draws near, Molly finds herself deeply and inexorably changed.

BLACK COLLAR PRESS



Black Collar Press is a small publishing house started by authors Livia Grant and Jennifer Bene in late 2016. The purpose was simple - to create a place where the erotic, kinky, and exciting worlds they love to explore could thrive and be joined by other like-minded authors.

If this is something that interests you, please go to the Black Collar Press website and read through the FAQs. If your questions are not answered there, please contact us directly at: blackcollarpress@gmail.com

WHERE TO FIND BLACK COLLAR PRESS:

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- Website: <http://www.blackcollarpress.com/>
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- Black Light East and West may be fictitious, but you can now join our very real Facebook Group for Black Light Fans - [Black Light Central](#)

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Your fun doesn't need to end yet! Meet the infamous trio for the first time.

Get your copy of [Infamous Love](#) FREE today.



BLACK LIGHT SERIES



Do you like BDSM Anthologies? If yes, you should check out these award-winning Black Light: Roulette Anthologies. Over two dozen of the hottest contemporary BDSM authors have come together each Valentine's Day for THE event of the year. You don't want to miss these unique collections.

[Black Light: Valentine Roulette by Various Authors](#)

Three hours. Four hard limits. Eight sexy stories.

Are you brave enough to spin the wheel?

Get ready to explore some of your naughtiest desires while you celebrate Valentine's Day with eight kinky stories from eight USA Today and international bestselling authors! Black Light is the most exclusive BDSM club in Washington, D.C. and for one night they're changing the rules of play to entertain their members with a game of chance – Valentine Roulette. Challenge and adventure awaits as these sexy dominants spin to win their submissives, and the subs spin to choose how they will play. Their prize if they last the night? One free month at Black Light, and for some of our daring participants... even a chance at love.

Enjoy over 200,000 words of edgy, romantic stories including:

Broken by Renee Rose

Revealed by Livia Grant

Wet by Jennifer Bene

Unbroken by Maren Smith

Unraveled by Addison Cain

Unmasked by Lee Savino

Stripped by Sophie Kisker

Bared by Measha Stone

[Black Light: Roulette Redux by Various Authors](#)

Featuring:

“Brat” by Livia Grant

“Unrestrained” by Jennifer Bene

“Forced” by Renee Rose

“Edge” by Alta Hensley

“Doctored” by Sue Lyndon

“Shameless” by Maren Smith

“Confessions” by Measha Stone

“Surrender” by Maggie Ryan

“Taken” by Jane Henry

[Black Light: Celebrity Roulette by Various Authors](#)

How high would you bid for a fantasy night with your celebrity crush?

Black Light is back for the 3rd year in a row with nine *brand new* sexy stories set in their new West Coast club! This year you're invited to celebrate Valentine's Day VIP-style as Black Light combines their annual kinky game of BDSM roulette with a celebrity charity auction. Three hours of fun. Five hard limits.

[Black Light: Roulette War by Various Authors](#)

During this Roulette, only one can come out on top.

Black Light's naughty game of Valentine Roulette returns with eight brand new scorching hot stories. For the first time, Black Light East and Black Light West will compete against each other to capture the title of hottest BDSM club of the year in ***Black Light: Roulette War***.

[Black Light: Roulette Rematch by Various Authors](#)

Black Light's thrilling game of Valentine Roulette returns for the fifth year with nine very dirty — *and very hot* — NEW stories from your favorite BDSM authors.

Featuring stories from: Livia Grant, Jennifer Bene, Renee Rose, Measha Stone, Ann Mayburn, Maggie Ryan, Shane Starrett, Sinistre Ange, and Raisa Greywood!

[Black Light: Roulette Finale by Various Authors](#)

Black Light returns for a final time with a sizzling night of Valentine Roulette and twelve very naughty — and very hot — NEW stories from your favorite BDSM authors.

Dive into this tantalizing collection to find out! Featuring stories from: Jennifer Bene, Livia Grant, Measha Stone, Lila DuBois, Golden Angel, Claire Thompson, Eden Bradley, Pepper North, Becca Jameson, Stella Moore, and Kay Elle Parker.